

The Intellectual Legacy of *Kitab Kuning* and Its Relevance to Contemporary Islamic Education

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ABSTRACT: The *kitab kuning* represents the intellectual heritage of Indonesian *pesantren*, playing a pivotal role in shaping the identity and ethos of Islamic education. However, ongoing educational transformations and the rise of digitalization pose challenges to the accessibility and methodological relevance of these texts. This study aims to explore the position, function, and contemporary relevance of the *kitab kuning* within Islamic education, while formulating a model of critical appreciation that integrates tradition with pedagogical innovation. The research employs a library study. Search strategies encompassed databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, SINTA, and university repositories, using keywords including *kitab kuning*, *pesantren*, digitalization of *kitab kuning*, and Islamic education, covering the period 1980–2024. The sources analyzed consist of classical texts (primary) and scholarly literature (secondary). Findings indicate that the *kitab kuning* continues to hold epistemological and pedagogical significance, yet requires methodological reinterpretation and contextual integration to contribute effectively to modern Islamic education curricula. The novelty of this research lies in the formulation of a framework for critical appreciation that combines hermeneutical analysis with modernization theory as a foundation for the renewal of the *pesantren* curriculum.

KEYWORDS: kitab kuning; pesantren; Islamic education; library study; critical appreciation

I. INTRODUCTION

Pesantren, as the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, play a central role in preserving Islam's classical intellectual tradition. One of their defining characteristics is their function as centers for the study of *kitab kuning*—classical Arabic-Islamic texts that serve as primary sources for religious sciences such as *fiqh*, *tafsir*, *hadith*, ethics (*akhlaq*), and *tasawwuf*. According to Dhofier, the *kitab kuning* is not merely a pedagogical instrument but also an epistemological identity that distinguishes *pesantren* from other educational systems [1]. Nata further emphasizes that the *kitab kuning*-based educational system cultivates a distinctive scholarly character, namely the integration of knowledge and morality [2].

Data from the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs indicate that there are more than 27,722 *pesantren* across Indonesia, with approximately 60% still relying on *kitab kuning*-based learning [3]. Qomar notes that the *kitab kuning* constitutes the intellectual foundation shaping the scholarly authority of Nusantara *ulama* while simultaneously reinforcing the identity of traditional Islamic education in Indonesia [4].

Nevertheless, the currents of educational modernization and the globalization of knowledge present new challenges to the existence of the *kitab kuning*. Within the framework of national education, *pesantren* are now required to adapt to integrative policies under Law No. 18 of 2019 on *Pesantren*, which demands compatibility between classical traditions and modern curricula. Van Bruinessen highlighted the epistemological tension between traditional text-based teaching systems and modern competency-based education [5]. Azra added that educational modernization often creates a gap between younger generations and classical texts due to limited proficiency in Arabic and shifting patterns of critical thinking [6]. In the context of digitalization, Utomo et al. observed that although many *pesantren* have begun using technology, most have not yet succeeded in transforming the *kitab kuning* into accessible, contextually relevant digital formats [7]. This situation reveals a digital divide between *pesantren* and general educational institutions, which tend to adapt more rapidly to technological innovations.

Academically, research on the *kitab kuning* has been extensive, particularly in areas of history, teaching methodology, and knowledge transmission. For instance, Sari & Fikriyah examined the *bandongan* and *sorogan* methods as distinctive features of *kitab kuning* learning in traditional *pesantren* [8]. Taufiq discussed the dynamics of integrating *kitab kuning* into modern *pesantren* curricula [9], while Inayatillah explored integrative learning models that combine classical texts with digital resources [10]. However, most of these studies remain descriptive and have not addressed the dimension of critical appreciation of the *kitab*

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kuning as a source of pedagogical and epistemological innovation in contemporary Islamic education. Azzami et al. underscores a research gap in understanding how reinterpretation of classical texts can generate conceptual renewal for curriculum development and Islamic educational methods [11].

Although previous studies have examined the *kitab kuning* from historical and methodological perspectives, epistemological and conceptual gaps remain. Most earlier works have focused on teaching and text transmission rather than on the reflective meaning of these texts for the development of Islamic educational paradigms in the digital era. Furthermore, few studies have integrated hermeneutical approaches and modernization theory in analyzing the pedagogical relevance of the *kitab kuning*. This study, therefore, seeks to address these gaps through a critical appreciation approach that positions the *kitab kuning* as a source of values and inspiration for progressive Islamic education.

Accordingly, this research not only reconstructs the position of the *kitab kuning* within the Islamic educational system but also develops a new conceptual framework for understanding the relationship between classical scholarly traditions and the needs of modern Islamic education. The subsequent analysis will be elaborated through a literature review and a relevant theoretical framework.

Based on this background, the study formulates three central research questions: 1) What is the position of the *kitab kuning* within the intellectual heritage of Islamic education in Indonesia? 2) How have interpretations and critiques of the *kitab kuning* evolved in the contemporary era? And 3) In what ways can critical appreciation of the *kitab kuning* support the renewal of Islamic religious education?

These research questions guide the study in examining the *kitab kuning* not merely as a historical artifact but also as an epistemological source relevant to addressing the challenges of modern times.

The objectives of this research are: 1) To describe the position of the *kitab kuning* within both classical and contemporary Islamic educational systems. 2) To analyze the dynamics of interpretation, critique, and revitalization of the *kitab kuning* in the modern era. 3) To formulate a model of critical appreciation of the *kitab kuning* as an effort to renew the Islamic education curriculum.

This study endeavors to present a new perspective on the *kitab kuning*—not solely as an intellectual legacy but as a conceptual foundation for shaping a progressive paradigm of Islamic education rooted in tradition.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept and History of Kitab Kuning

The *kitab kuning* represents the classical intellectual heritage of Islam and constitutes a defining feature of the *pesantren* educational system in Indonesia. Historically, the term *kitab kuning* refers to classical Arabic-Islamic literature printed on yellowish paper without diacritical marks, requiring advanced linguistic and grammatical proficiency [1]. These texts encompass disciplines such as *fiqh*, *ushul fiqh*, *tafsir*, *tauhid*, *tasawwuf*, and *nahwu-sharaf*. Within the *pesantren* tradition, the *kitab kuning* functions not only as a source of religious knowledge but also as a medium of scholarly transmission and the cultivation of *adab* [5].

Azra explains that the tradition of teaching the *kitab kuning* represents a continuity of the medieval Islamic madrasah system, transmitted to the Nusantara by scholars. This tradition developed within *pesantren* that uphold *ta'dib* (ethical learning) and *talaqqi* (knowledge transfer through scholarly chains of transmission). The primary methods of *kitab kuning* instruction in *pesantren* are *bandongan* (collective teaching with direct explanation by the kiai) and *sorogan* (individual learning in which students read before the kiai) [12]. As Dhofier notes, these methods shape educational interactions that emphasize *adab*, obedience, and depth of understanding rather than rote memorization. Consequently, the *kitab kuning* not only imparts religious knowledge but also fosters the distinctive intellectual habitus of *pesantren* [1].

Kitab Kuning in the Perspective of Islamic Education

From the perspective of Islamic education, the *kitab kuning* plays a central role in shaping Islamic character and epistemology. Langguglung argues that Islamic education aims to form the *insan kamil* (complete human being) by integrating knowledge, faith, and practice. This principle is reflected in *kitab kuning* learning, which not only transfers knowledge but also instills moral, spiritual, and social values [13]. Al-Attas asserts that the purpose of Islamic education is the process of *ta'dib*, namely the inculcation of proper conduct derived from actual knowledge of God, the self, and the cosmos [14]. Similarly, Al-Nahlawi emphasizes that Islamic education requires integrating cognitive and affective dimensions in understanding religious texts [15].

From this standpoint, the *kitab kuning* is not merely an academic text but also a spiritual medium that shapes Islamic thought and behavior. Izmi found that *pesantrens* that maintain in-depth instruction in *kitab kuning* produce graduates with strong religious character and analytical thinking skills for engaging with social realities [16]. Thus, *kitab kuning* learning not only preserves the classical intellectual heritage of Islam but also contributes to national moral development amid modern ethical crises.

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Critiques and Renewal of the Kitab Kuning Tradition

Despite its historical and moral significance, the *kitab kuning* tradition has not been immune to critique. Wahid highlighted the tendency of *pesantren* to become trapped in textual formalism, failing to foster critical thinking. He argued that the *kitab kuning* must be read hermeneutically to remain relevant to contemporary social issues [17]. This perspective aligns with Hanafi and Sofiandi, who emphasize the importance of contextual reinterpretation of religious texts to build a rational Islam open to change [18]. Yugo further suggested that *pesantren* education should be transformed to strengthen literacy and critical thinking skills without diminishing its spiritual values [19].

In recent decades, several *pesantren* have innovated in *kitab kuning* instruction by integrating formal education and digital technology. Inayatillah demonstrated that the use of e-learning and the digitalization of classical texts expand students' access to the *kitab kuning* without reducing its authenticity [10]. Utomo et al. also found that digitalization of the *kitab kuning* has the potential to strengthen connectivity learning between *pesantren* and the wider community [7]. However, the most significant challenge remains balancing the preservation of scholarly tradition with methodological innovation so that the *kitab kuning* continues to serve as a living epistemological source in the modern era.

Recent studies indicate new directions in the renewal of *kitab kuning*. For example, Ni'mah and Rahmawati emphasized the importance of integrating *kitab kuning* learning with digital humanities to expand the epistemological reach of *pesantren* [20]. Meanwhile, Setiawan et al., in the Indonesian Journal of Interdisciplinary Islamic Studies, demonstrated that reinterpretation of classical texts through critical theory can enhance students' reflective capacity regarding contemporary social values [21]. These findings reinforce the urgency of adopting a critical appreciation approach that is not only textual but also transformative in Islamic education.

Theoretical Framework

To understand the dynamics and relevance of the *kitab kuning* in contemporary Islamic education, this study employs three major theories as its conceptual foundation:

1. Tradition vs. Modernization Theory. This theory explains how traditional societies adapt to modernization through social reflexivity. In the *pesantren* context, modernization of education does not mean replacing tradition but renegotiating classical values to align with contemporary demands. Giddens describes this process as reflexive modernization, a transformation grounded in awareness of enduring values [22]. Through this lens, the *kitab kuning* can be understood as a dynamic cultural adaptation rather than a static legacy.
2. Classical Islamic Educational Theory. This theory emphasizes that the purpose of Islamic education is to form knowledgeable and virtuous individuals. Al-Ghazali, in *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, situates religious knowledge as a means of purifying the heart and enlightening the intellect [23]. Al-Attas adds that actual knowledge must lead to wisdom (*hikmah*) [24]. Thus, the *kitab kuning* can be viewed as a concrete representation of classical Islamic educational ideals that integrate knowledge, faith, and practice.
3. Hermeneutical Theory. Gadamer emphasizes that understanding texts requires dialogue between tradition and modern context. In relation to the *kitab kuning*, Gadamer's hermeneutics enables the reinterpretation of classical texts without losing their original value. This process, known as the fusion of horizons, involves the meeting of past meanings with contemporary interpretations [25]. This theory provides the epistemological foundation for the critical appreciation model proposed in this study (Figure 1).

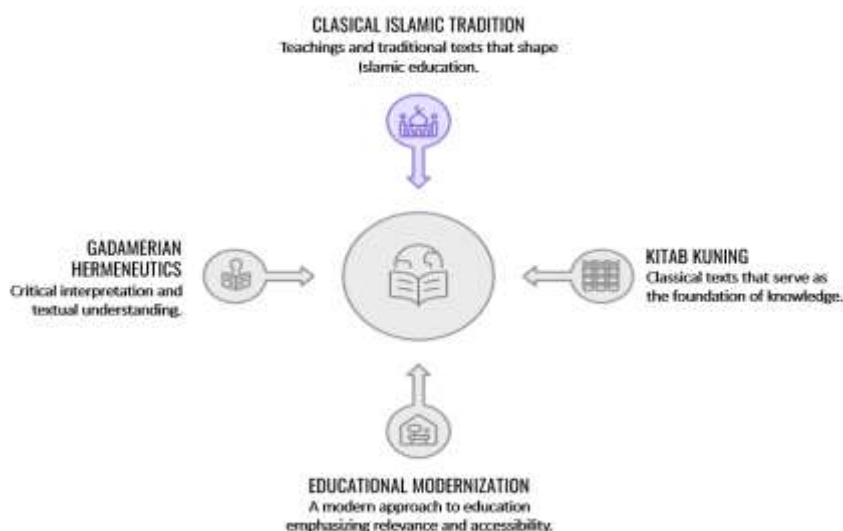


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

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Conceptually, these three theories complement one another. Giddens' modernization theory explains the social context of Islamic educational change; al-Ghazali and Al-Attas provide ethical and spiritual foundations, while Gadamer's hermeneutics bridges the two through dialogue between tradition and modernity. Together, they form a conceptual framework for critical appreciation that is reflective, integrative, and contextual in its approach to the role of the *kitab kuning* in contemporary Islamic education.

Accordingly, this study positions the *kitab kuning* as a living epistemological entity—texts that are not only read but also reinterpreted through modern educational and hermeneutical perspectives. The findings are expected to yield a conceptual model of *kitab kuning* learning that remains relevant for strengthening Islamic education in the present era.

III. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach, with a library study as its primary focus, examining classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*) and modern scholarly literature relevant to contemporary Islamic education. As emphasized by Bogdan and Biklen, qualitative research seeks to understand phenomena within their natural contexts through interpretive analysis of textual data [26]. Accordingly, this study does not aim to test hypotheses but rather to reinterpret the values, functions, and relevance of the *kitab kuning* from both theoretical and empirical perspectives.

The library research approach enables an in-depth exploration of both primary and secondary sources to uncover conceptual linkages between classical scholarly traditions and modern Islamic education. Zed highlights that library research relies on textual and documentary materials as its principal data sources [27]. In this study, classical works such as *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, *Fath al-Qarib*, and *Tafsir Jalalain* are analyzed alongside modern literature on pesantren transformation, including works by Dhofier [1], Nata [2], Qomar [3], as well as contemporary articles from SINTA-indexed journals.

Data Sources

The data consist of classical texts as primary sources and scholarly works as secondary sources. Classical texts—such as al-Zarnuji's *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, al-Ghazali's *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, Ibn Qasim al-Ghazi's *Fath al-Qarib*, and the *Tafsir Jalalain* by al-Mahalli and al-Suyuthi—serve as key references for understanding the ethics of learning, the integration of knowledge and morality, and pedagogical methods in fiqh and tafsir. Secondary sources include works by Dhofier [1], Azra [6], Qomar [4], Inayatillah [10], Taufiq [9], and Azzami et al. [11], which reinforce the conceptual analysis of the relevance of *kitab kuning* in contemporary Islamic education.

Units of Analysis and Focus

The units of analysis comprise ideas, values, and principles of Islamic education embedded in classical texts and modern literature. The study focuses on epistemological (concepts of knowledge and learning), pedagogical (teaching methods and educational values), and hermeneutical (interpretation of classical texts in contemporary contexts) aspects. This framework enables the reinterpretation of the *kitab kuning* as a source of conceptual renewal for Islamic education.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through documentation, including systematic reading, note-taking, and the selection and categorization of information from various sources. Creswell identifies documentation as a primary method in qualitative text-based research [28]. Two techniques were employed: a) Close Reading, applied to classical texts to capture implicit meanings within their historical, theological, and epistemological contexts, enables hermeneutical interpretation of educational values. b) Content analysis is used to identify recurring themes such as the functions of *kitab kuning*, Islamic educational values, critiques of tradition, and relevance to modernization. As Krippendorff notes, qualitative content analysis interprets meaning beyond frequency counts, situating themes within cultural and social contexts [29].

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles et al., comprising three cyclical stages: 1) Data condensation: selecting, simplifying, and organizing raw data to highlight relevant ideas and arguments, such as the role of *kitab kuning* in Islamic education and its renewal; 2) Data display: arranging reduced data into thematic categories, including (a) Islamic educational values in the *kitab kuning*, (b) modern critiques of traditional methods, and (c) critical appreciation of the *kitab kuning*. Conceptual matrices and thematic charts were used to map relationships among concepts; and 3) Conclusion drawing and verification: deriving thematic conclusions from the interpretation of primary and secondary sources, then verifying them by comparing classical and modern perspectives to ensure a comprehensive understanding. This interactive process is cyclical, meaning reduction, display, and conclusion drawing co-occur throughout the research, ensuring dynamic, reflective, and contextual analysis [30].

Data Validity

To ensure the credibility of findings, several strategies were employed: a) Source triangulation: comparing classical texts (e.g., *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*) with modern studies (e.g., Qomar; Rahmawati) to identify continuity and divergence in interpretation; b)

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Internal and external criticism: internal criticism assessed logical consistency and textual coherence, while external criticism evaluated authenticity, authority, and historical context of sources; and c) Audit trail and peer review: maintaining analytical records and consulting experts in Islamic education and *pesantren* philology to validate interpretations.

These strategies align with Lincoln and Guba's principles of trustworthiness, ensuring that the findings are academically accountable and reflect high conceptual validity within the context of library-based research [31].

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Historical Position of Kitab Kuning in the Islamic Scholarly Tradition

The *kitab kuning* occupies a fundamental position within the Islamic scholarly tradition, particularly in the *pesantren* milieu. The term refers to classical Arabic texts printed without diacritical marks, serving as primary sources in traditional Islamic education [1]. Historically, these works originated in the intellectual heritage of classical Islam, which flourished in centers of civilization such as Baghdad, Damascus, and Cairo, before being disseminated throughout the Eastern Islamic world, including the Nusantara.

Texts such as al-Zarnuji's *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* and al-Ghazali's *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* provided the foundation for spiritual values, ethics, and learning methodologies within *pesantren*. *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* explicitly teaches the ethics and purpose of knowledge, while *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* integrates knowledge, practice, and spirituality [23], [32]. This tradition positioned the *kitab kuning* not merely as reading material but as an instrument of scholarly transmission, linking teacher and student through the *bandongan* and *sorogan* methods [12].

As emphasized in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, "Whoever seeks knowledge without a proper intention, his knowledge will not bring benefit" [32]. This quotation illustrates that learning in the *kitab kuning* tradition is not solely focused on knowledge transfer but also on cultivating morality and spirituality. In this sense, the *kitab kuning* functions as a medium of integration between knowledge and ethics—a concept now being revisited in modern character education paradigms.

According to Van Bruinessen [5], the *kitab kuning* serves as a mechanism for conserving the authority of the *ulama*. Through the system of scholarly chains (*sanad*), its teaching becomes a means of legitimizing religious knowledge. In Indonesia, this tradition took root in the 17th century alongside the arrival of scholars who had studied in the Haramain. Classical *pesantren* such as Tegalsari, Termas, and Lirboyo became centers of *kitab kuning* instruction, eventually producing networks of Nusantara scholars.

Within Islamic education, the *kitab kuning* plays an epistemological role by shaping a balanced system of thought that integrates *naqliyah* (revelation-based) and *'aqliyah* (reason-based) approaches [2]. These values render the *kitab kuning* not only a symbol of tradition but also a medium for preserving Islam's intellectual identity in the Nusantara. Qomar [4] affirms that the existence of the *kitab kuning* demonstrates continuity between classical scholarship and the moral-spiritual formation of students within *pesantren* education.

Dynamics and Critiques of the Kitab Kuning Tradition

Despite its significance, the *kitab kuning* tradition has not been immune to challenges and critiques in the modern era. The modernization of Islamic education, globalization, and integration into the national curriculum have generated diverse responses to its position. Based on the literature review, four typologies emerge in approaching the *kitab kuning*: traditionalist, reformist, modernist, and compromise-oriented.

1. Traditionalists preserve the classical learning system in its entirety, rejecting national curriculum penetration and upholding the authority of the *kiai*. For this group, the authenticity of the *kitab kuning* must be safeguarded without compromise.
2. Reformists, such as Wahid [17] and Nurcholish Madjid [18], argue that the *kitab kuning* must be revitalized to remain relevant to contemporary developments. They emphasize the importance of *ijtihad* and rationality in interpreting classical texts.
3. Modernists tend to replace *kitab kuning* instruction with modern academic literature deemed more suitable for contemporary social needs, often adopting social research methods and Western pedagogical models.
4. Compromise-oriented groups seek to harmonize tradition and modernity by leveraging digital technology, national curricula, and competency-based learning while retaining the values of the *kitab kuning* [18], [32].

Critiques of the *kitab kuning* often target its teaching methodology. The *bandongan* system is considered passive and insufficient in fostering critical thinking among students. Additionally, the absence of diacritical marks in Arabic texts makes them difficult for younger generations to access. Nevertheless, the strength of the *kitab kuning* lies in its spiritual depth and the integrity of moral values it instills.

Within Giddens' modernization framework, these dynamics reflect a shift from tradition to reflexive systems, in which educational institutions must adapt to social change without losing the legitimacy of their values [22]. In the *pesantren* context, modernizing the *kitab kuning* does not imply erasing tradition but rather reinterpreting its fundamental values to align with contemporary demands.

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Based on the review of classical and modern sources, critiques of the *kitab kuning* should not be understood as attempts at deconstruction but as epistemological reflections aimed at revitalizing the Islamic scholarly tradition in ways relevant to the present. This process may be termed hermeneutical revitalization—re-reading classical texts with renewed awareness while preserving their spiritual authority. Such an approach characterizes this study, which positions the *kitab kuning* as a dynamic entity rather than a static document.

Critical Appreciation of Kitab Kuning

A critical appreciation approach to the *kitab kuning* requires a balance between respect for tradition and openness to renewal. Gadamer, through his hermeneutical theory, emphasizes the importance of the fusion of horizons—a dialogue between the horizon of the past (tradition) and that of the present (modernity) [24]. In the context of the *kitab kuning*, this approach enables the reinterpretation of classical values without losing their spiritual essence.

The concept of *ta'dib* articulated by Al-Attas [24] and the idea of *tarbiyah Islamiyah* advanced by Hasan Langgulung [13] further reinforce this critical appreciation. Both view education as a process of self-perfection and the cultivation of *adab* through the internalization of Islamic values. Thus, reading the *kitab kuning* critically means interpreting its teachings so they remain relevant to modern social realities while preserving their depth of meaning.

An example of critical appreciation can be found in the reinterpretation of al-Ghazali's *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, particularly the concept of *muraqabah* (self-awareness before God), which has been adapted as a foundation for character education rooted in spirituality. In modern Islamic education, *muraqabah* can be translated into practices of self-reflection, enabling students to develop moral awareness in their actions. It demonstrates that the *kitab kuning* is not merely a religious text but also a pedagogical resource adaptable to contemporary contexts.

Findings from this study indicate that many *pesantren* have begun applying critical readings of the *kitab kuning*. Examples include contextualizing discussions of *fiqh* to address modern social issues or reinterpreting *tasawwuf* teachings within the framework of professional ethics and leadership [12]. It signals the emergence of a new paradigm: integrative-reflective, which preserves traditional values while opening space for contextualization in Islamic education.

This integrative model of thought is supported by Giddens' theory of reflexive modernity [22] and the epistemological perspectives of al-Ghazali [23] and Al-Attas [24], who regard knowledge as a means toward wisdom (*hikmah*) and spiritual balance. Such an approach affirms that the *kitab kuning* can serve as a methodological inspiration for Islamic education rather than merely a static symbol of tradition.

The Relevance of Kitab Kuning to Contemporary Islamic Education

The *kitab kuning* remains highly relevant in contemporary Islamic education, particularly in shaping students' character and morality. Values embedded within it—such as *adab*, *ta'dib*, and *hikmah*—can be integrated into formal education systems aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum.

Within the Merdeka Curriculum, learning orientation emphasizes the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila*, which envisions students as virtuous, independent, and critically minded. These values resonate with the principles of classical Islamic education as taught in the *kitab kuning*. For instance, al-Zarnuji's *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* underscores the importance of intention, diligence, and respect for teachers—values highly relevant to modern character education [32].

Integration of *kitab kuning* values into formal education can be pursued through three strategies:

1. Internalization of *adab* and morality, for example, through project-based learning in Islamic Religious Education (PAI).
2. Integration of *tasawwuf* and social *fiqh* materials into ethics and civics courses, as proposed by Qomar [4].
3. Utilization of digital technology, such as digitizing the *kitab kuning* via applications like *Maktabah Syamilah*, online *pesantren* platforms, and *tafsir*-based e-learning.

Several modern *pesantren*, including Gontor, Sidogiri, and Tebuireng, have initiated digitalization of the *kitab kuning* as part of their adaptation to the 4.0 era. This innovation expands access and increases youth interest in classical literature [10]. Thus, the *kitab kuning* functions not only as an intellectual legacy but also as an innovative medium for Islamic education, contextual and adaptable to technological developments.

Conceptually, integrating the *kitab kuning* into contemporary education can serve as the foundation for an Islamic knowledge system with dual characteristics: preserving the originality of classical sources while remaining open to technological innovation. Future development may be realized through curricula based on digital *fiqh* literacy and adaptive learning via *e-pesantren* platforms. In this way, the *kitab kuning* has the potential to become a digital epistemological source for 21st-century Islamic education.

Synthesis and Conceptual Model

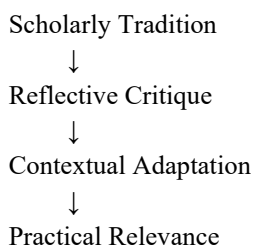
The synthesis of the discussion can be summarized in the following Conceptual Model of Critical Appreciation of *Kitab Kuning* in Contemporary Islamic Education:

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1. Scholarly Tradition: the classical Islamic intellectual heritage (*kitab kuning*), which forms the epistemological foundation of *pesantren* and shapes students' moral character.
2. Reflective Critique: assessment of methodological limitations and accessibility challenges of the *kitab kuning* in modern contexts.
3. Contextual Adaptation: efforts to reinterpret and integrate *kitab kuning* values into modern education systems.
4. Practical Relevance: Implementation of *kitab kuning* values in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and *pesantren* curricula through digitalization and character education.

The interrelation of these components is developed through a synthesis of theories by Giddens, al-Ghazali, and Gadamer, integrated with findings from classical and contemporary literature. This model contributes a new paradigm to Islamic education by presenting a critical appreciation framework. This reflective approach combines tradition with modern adaptation to strengthen the relevance of Islamic education in the digital era.

The model can be visualized as follows:



This model represents an integrative framework bridging Islamic scholarly tradition with educational modernization. Its theoretical implication is the reinforcement of critical appreciation paradigms in Islamic studies. In contrast, its practical implication is the formulation of recommendations for *pesantren* and Islamic educational institutions to develop curricula rooted in classical values yet adaptable to contemporary change.

The limitation of this study lies in its reliance on literature-based data without empirical fieldwork in *pesantren*. Future research is recommended to explore the practical application of this critical appreciation model through educational ethnography or classroom action research within *pesantren* contexts.

V. CONCLUSIONS

This study affirms that the *kitab kuning* holds a highly significant epistemological position within the Islamic educational system, particularly in the *pesantren* context. As part of the classical scholarly legacy, the *kitab kuning* serves not only as a source of religious teachings but also as a medium for shaping students' character, morality, and spirituality. Through the traditions of *bandongan* and *sorogan*, the *kitab kuning* has served as a vehicle for the transmission of knowledge and the preservation of *ulama* authority, ensuring the continuity of Islamic scholarship in the Nusantara.

Nevertheless, the modernization of education and the globalization of knowledge present new challenges to this tradition. The national curriculum, digitalization of learning, and shifting mindsets among younger generations have created cultural distance from classical texts. Therefore, a critical appreciation approach is required—one that not only preserves traditional values but also contextualizes them to remain relevant to contemporary needs. Gadamer's hermeneutical framework opens space for dialogue between the horizons of tradition and modernity, enabling the reading of the *kitab kuning* to move beyond static conservatism toward reflective and productive engagement.

The main findings of this study indicate that the relevance of the *kitab kuning* to contemporary Islamic education lies in the integration of values such as *adab*, *hikmah*, and *ta'dib* into modern learning systems. Classical Islamic educational principles, as articulated by al-Ghazali, Al-Attas, and Hasan Langgulung, can be incorporated into the *Merdeka* Curriculum through approaches that emphasize character, spirituality, and social ethics. In this way, the *kitab kuning* is not merely preserved as a symbol of intellectual heritage but becomes a source of values and methodological inspiration for progressive Islamic education.

Thus, the renewal of the *kitab kuning* does not necessitate replacing tradition with an entirely new system; instead, it involves reinterpreting its fundamental values to align with social, technological, and epistemological changes in modern education. This study demonstrates that preserving the *kitab kuning* tradition can, in fact, strengthen the competitiveness of Islamic education when developed through integrative, reflective, and contextual approaches.

The findings of this study provide new directions for the development of *pesantren* curricula and Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in schools. Values contained in the *kitab kuning*—such as *adab*, *ta'dib*, and *hikmah*—can serve as indicators of learning outcomes in spiritual and moral character education. For *pesantrens*, this study recommends implementing digital *kitab* learning to transform pedagogy without diminishing the authenticity of classical texts.

This study remains limited to literature-based analysis. Future research should expand toward empirical approaches, such as ethnographic studies of *pesantren* or classroom action research centered on the *kitab kuning*. Such approaches allow the

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effectiveness of the critical appreciation model to be tested directly within learning processes, thereby offering more concrete contributions to the development of both theory and practice in Islamic education.

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