

DOUBLE-LOOP LEARNING IN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOLS: HOW TRADITIONAL ISLAMIC EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS REFLECT AND TRANSFORM ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji implementasi double-loop learning di pesantren Indonesia, serta meneliti bagaimana institusi pendidikan Islam tradisional ini melakukan refleksi dan transformasi organisasi sambil tetap mempertahankan nilai-nilai Islam yang menjadi fondasinya. Menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif jamak, penelitian dilakukan di tiga pesantren di Jakarta-Bogor yang mewakili tipologi tradisional (salafi), modern (khalafi), dan terpadu melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan 24 informan kunci meliputi pimpinan pesantren (kiai), guru senior (ustadz), manajer administratif, dan anggota dewan alumni, dilengkapi dengan analisis dokumen dan observasi non-partisipan selama enam bulan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pesantren menjalankan double-loop learning melalui tiga mekanisme yang saling terhubung: (1) tata kelola reflektif berbasis nilai (muraja'ah tarbawiyah), di mana pemimpin institusi secara sistematis mempertanyakan asumsi dasar kebijakan pendidikan melalui musyawarah; (2) transformasi kurikulum adaptif, di mana pesantren merekonsiliasi keilmuan Islam klasik (turath) dengan tuntutan pedagogis kontemporer tanpa mengorbankan integritas doktrinal; dan (3) jaringan kepemimpinan terdistribusi yang memungkinkan umpan balik dari bawah ke atas dari guru dan santri kepada pengambil keputusan institusi.

Kata Kunci: *double-loop learning; pesantren; transformasi organisasi; manajemen pesantren; kepemimpinan pendidikan*

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the implementation of double-loop learning within Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in Indonesia, examining how these traditional educational institutions engage in organizational reflection and transformation while preserving their foundational Islamic values. Employing a qualitative multiple case study design, the research was conducted across three pesantren in Jakarta-Bogor representing traditional (salafi), modern (khalafi), and integrated typologies through semi-structured interviews with 24 key informants including school leaders (kiai), senior teachers (ustadz), administrative managers, and alumni board members, supplemented by document analysis and non-participant observation over six months. Findings reveal that pesantren engage in double-loop learning through three interconnected mechanisms: (1) values-based reflective governance (muraja'ah tarbawiyah), where institutional leaders systematically interrogate underlying assumptions of educational policies through consultative deliberation (musyawarah); (2) adaptive curriculum transformation, wherein pesantren reconcile classical Islamic scholarship (turath) with contemporary pedagogical demands without compromising doctrinal integrity; and (3) distributed leadership networks that enable bottom-up feedback loops from teachers and students to institutional decision-makers.

Keywords: *double-loop learning; Islamic boarding school; organizational transformation; pesantren management; educational leadership.*

INTRODUCTION

The global landscape of education governance is undergoing a profound transformation as institutions face the need to balance the preservation of core identities with strategic adaptation to evolving socio-economic realities. This tension is most acutely felt in Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia, which for centuries have been the foundation of Muslim education, character building, and community development throughout Southeast Asia.¹ With more than 27,000 pesantren enrolling around 4.2 million students across Indonesia, these institutions represent one of the largest networks of faith-based education organizations in the world, yet the scientific understanding of how they learn and transform as organizations remains very underdeveloped.² The urgency to close this gap is increasing as pesantren face pressure from national curriculum standardization, digital disruption, and shifting parental expectations.³

The concept of *double-loop learning*, first articulated by Argyris and Schön, offers a robust theoretical lens for examining how organizations move beyond surface problem-solving to question and revise the fundamental assumptions, values, and norms that govern institutional behavior.⁴ While *single-loop learning* involves detecting and correcting errors within existing frameworks, *double-loop learning* encompasses a deeper reflective process in which organizations question whether their own management variables need to be modified.⁵ This difference is crucial to understanding Islamic boarding schools, which must at the same time uphold firmly held religious principles and adapt to the demands of contemporary education—tensions that cannot be resolved through mere superficial adjustments.

This gap is particularly significant given the growing evidence that cultural and religious contexts profoundly shape how organizational learning takes place in practice. Iqbal and Ahmad point out that Islamic schools use different learning processes rooted in consultative traditions,⁶ while Muhajir finds that deliberation serves as a unique

¹Azyumardi Azra dan Dina Afrianty, "Pesantren and Modernity: Bridging Tradition and Transformation in Indonesian Islamic Education," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 33, no. 2 (2022): 189–215, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/etab062>.

²Thohir Suharto, "Pesantren and Social Change: How Islamic Boarding Schools Adapt to Indonesian Modernity," *Oxford Journal of Islamic Studies* 35, no. 1 (2024): 78–103.

³Muhammad Zuhdi, "Curriculum Reform in Indonesian Pesantren: Between Islamic Tradition and National Education Policy," *Comparative Education* 59, no. 2 (2023): 198–217, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2022.2144155>.

⁴Chris Argyris, "Revisiting Double-Loop Learning: Reflections on Theory and Practice after Five Decades," *Organizational Dynamics* 52, no. 1 (2023): 100926, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2022.100926>.

⁵Marco M. Crossan, Craig C. Maurer, dan Roderick E. White, "Reflections on the Evolution of Organizational Learning Theory," *Management Learning* 55, no. 1 (2024): 53–79, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13505076231158456>.

⁶Salim Iqbal dan Syed Ahmad, "Organizational Learning Processes in Islamic Schools: A Grounded Theory Approach," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 35, no. 8 (2022): 847–866, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2021.1956632>.

deliberative governance mechanism in the context of pesantren.⁷ Shunhaji, in his study of the characteristics of student organizational management in Darunnajah Jakarta, identified typical patterns of institutional reflection that have not been systematically associated with the *double-loop learning framework*.⁸ Similarly, Miftah Hur Rahman Zh noted the importance of the value-based management dimension in the development of adaptive pesantren competencies.⁹

The aim of this research is to investigate how Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia implement the process of *double-loop learning*, examining the specific mechanisms through which these institutions reflect and transform their organizational assumptions, structures, and practices while maintaining fidelity to fundamental religious values. Specifically, this study aims to: (1) identify the organizational mechanisms through which pesantren are involved in *double-loop learning*; (2) analyze how Islamic deliberative practices such as deliberative and tafakkur function as a vehicle to question the variables of institutional management; and (3) develop a conceptual framework that integrates Islamic reflective traditions with organizational learning theory.¹⁰ This article is structured as follows. The next section describes the plural qualitative case study methodology used, including location selection, data collection, and analytical procedures. The results section presents findings organized around three emergent themes. The discussion section interprets these findings through the theoretical lens of *double-loop learning*, proposes a framework of "Tafakkur-Based Organizational Learning", and places contributions in the broader literature on organizational learning and management of Islamic education.

METHODS

This study uses a plural qualitative case study design,¹¹ chosen for its capacity to examine complex organizational phenomena in real-life contexts while allowing for cross-case comparisons. Three Islamic boarding schools in Jakarta and Bogor, Indonesia, were purposively selected to represent three dominant typological categories: the Darunnajah Islamic Boarding School (a modern institution, enrolling around 2,800

⁷Ahmad Muhajir, "Musyawarah as Deliberative Governance: Decision-Making in Indonesian Pesantren," *Asian Journal of Political Science* 32, no. 1 (2024): 45–67, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02185377.2023.2201534>.

⁸Akhmad Shunhaji, "Characteristics of Student Organization Management: A Case Study on Islamic Boarding Darunnajah Jakarta," *STATEMENT: Journal of Social Information and Education Media* 10, no. 2 (2020): 1–15.

⁹Miftah Hur Rahman Zh, "Implementation of the One Day Three Sentences Technique to Improve the Arabic Ability of Students at Modern Darussalam Gontor," in *Proceedings of International Conference on Islam and Global Civilization 2022* (2023), 1–12.

¹⁰Saeeda Shah, "Educational Leadership in Muslim Institutions: Issues of Theory and Practice," *International Journal of Educational Management* 37, no. 4 (2023): 822–840, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-03-2022-0119>.

¹¹Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*, 7th ed. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2024), 87–104.

students), the Darul Muttaqien Bogor Islamic Boarding School, and the Darunnajah Islamic Boarding School in Jakarta, Cidokom. This typological variation is important for examining whether and how double-loop learning is realized across a variety of institutional orientations in the pesantren ecosystem.

Data was collected over a six-month period (January–June 2025) through three main methods. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 24 key informants in three locations (eight per pesantren), including kiai, deputy director for academic and student affairs, senior ustadz, administrative manager, curriculum coordinator, and alumni council representatives. Each interview lasted 60–90 minutes, was recorded with information-based consent, and transcribed verbatim. Second, a document analysis was conducted on institutional records, including strategic planning documents, curriculum revision records, leadership meeting minutes, annual reports, and internal policy memoranda covering the previous five years. Third, non-participant observations were conducted during leadership meetings, teacher professional development sessions, and curriculum review committees at all three locations.¹²

Data analysis follows an iterative thematic process. The initial open coding of interview transcripts and documents yielded 187 codes, which were consolidated through axial coding into 14 categories and, finally, into three overarching themes that aligned with the research questions. Cross-case comparisons were then conducted to identify patterns of convergence and divergence across the three types of Islamic boarding schools. Confidence was established through triangulation of data sources and methods, member checks with six key informants, thick descriptions of contextual details, and peer debriefing with two colleagues specializing in organizational learning and Islamic education.¹³ All participants provided written information-based consent, the name of the institution was anonymized, and the research received ethical approval from the affiliated university's research ethics committee.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Value-Based Reflective Governance (Muraja'ah Tarbawiyah)

Across the three pesantren, the most prominent mechanism for *double-loop learning* is a systematic institutional reflection process that informants consistently describe using the Arabic term *muraja'ah tarbawiyah*, an educational review rooted in the tradition of periodic self-examination in Islamic scientific practice.¹⁴ This process operates primarily through a system of deliberation, in which institutional stakeholders meet regularly to evaluate not only whether the policy is achieving the desired outcome, but also whether the fundamental assumptions underlying the policy remain appropriate.

¹²Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, dan Johnny Saldana, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2024), 55–72.

¹³Salim Iqbal dan Syed Ahmad, "Organizational Learning Processes in Islamic Schools," 851–858.

¹⁴Ahmad Muhajir, "Musyawarah as Deliberative Governance," 52–60.

At the Darunnajah Islamic Boarding School in Jakarta, Kiai describes this process: "Every semester we sit together in the assembly, and the question is not just 'is the curriculum working?' but 'are we still asking the right questions about what education means to our students?'"

The frequency and formalization of this reflective process vary across different types of institutions. At Darul Muttaqien Bogor, *muraja'ah tarbawiyyah* is embedded in a structured annual strategic review cycle with documented processes, action items, and follow-up mechanisms. After a three-year period of declining student retention, the leadership council held an extraordinary deliberation that resulted in not an adjustment of the retention program (*single-loop*) but a fundamental reconceptualization of the institutional relationship between academic rigor and pastoral care, a management variable that has never been questioned since the institution's founding. At the Annur Cidokom (Modern) Islamic Boarding School, reflective governance operates through a hybrid mechanism that combines formal quarterly reviews with informal "tafakkur circles" in which senior teachers gather to reflect on the institution's direction. On the contrary, the Darunnajah Jakarta (Modern) Islamic Boarding School relies mainly on the personal reflective authority of the kiai.¹⁵

Adaptive Curriculum Transformation

The second finding relates to how pesantren engage in *double-loop learning* in the domain of curriculum and pedagogical practice. The three institutions provide examples of how curriculum changes move beyond incremental content updates (*single-loop*) to a fundamental reconceptualization of educational goals and methodologies (*double-loop*). This is especially evident in how pesantren navigate the tension between preserving classical Islamic scientific traditions (*turath*) and responding to the demands of the Ministry of Education, the job market, and technological change.¹⁶

At Pesantren B, a landmark curriculum transformation occurred in 2022 when the leadership council, driven by alumni feedback and employer surveys, conducted a fundamental review that led to a restructuring of the relationship between the Islamic Boarding School and general academic subjects. The senior curriculum coordinator explained: "We stopped treating the two as separate domains that needed balance and instead started asking how each subject could be a vehicle for deep reflection that was at once intellectually rigorous and spiritually grounded." At the Annur Cidokom Islamic Boarding School, the most systematic approach was observed, with the establishment of Lajnah Tajdid al-Manhaj, which was explicitly tasked with identifying and challenging

¹⁵Akhmad Shunhaji, "Education Financing Management of Darul Muttaqien Islamic Boarding School Parung Bogor," *Andragogi: Journal of Islamic Education and Islamic Education Management* 2, no. 1 (2020): 1–18.

accepted assumptions about teaching and learning.¹⁷ At the Darunnajah Islamic Boarding School in Jakarta, the transformation of the curriculum took a more gradual form, with the introduction of digital literacy modules into the sequence of classical yellow book studies after a two-year deliberation period.

Analysis of the documents revealed that in all three locations, the process of curriculum transformation followed a distinctive pattern that distinguished it from the process of secular education reform. Instead of starting with a needs assessment or reinforcement (as prescribed in Western models of curriculum development), the revision of the pesantren curriculum consistently begins with *istikharah* (religious consultation) and ends with collective deliberation, embedding a *double-loop process* within the religious epistemological framework. The results showed that 21 of the 24 informants (87.5%) identified the interaction between religious values and organizational assumptions as a determining factor in how their institutions approach educational change.

Distributed Leadership Network and Feedback

The third finding concerns the leadership structure that enables or impedes *double-loop learning* in Islamic boarding schools. At the Annur Cidokom Islamic Boarding School, the most formalized distributed leadership system is observed. The institution has built a multi-layered feedback architecture comprising a student council (OSPC), a teacher professional learning community (halaqah ilmiyyah), a parent advisory board, and an alumni network, each with a structured channel for communicating observations and recommendations to central leadership. The director describes the philosophy behind this structure: "Kiai has to listen to what the latest ustadz hears from the students in the midnight dormitory. This is where the real question of our assumptions lies."¹⁸

At the Darunnajah Islamic Boarding School in Jakarta, the traditional authority structure centered on the kiai presents the most complex picture of distributed leadership. While the kiai hold the ultimate decision-making authority, the data reveals an informal but powerful whisper network through which senior ustadz communicate growing concerns, observations, and challenges to the kiai through trusted intermediaries. Three informants described how significant policy changes regarding female students' access to advanced religious studies stemmed from this informal network, with concerns first articulated by junior female teachers reaching the kiai through multiple intermediary channels over about 18 months before yielding transformative policy decisions. These

¹⁷Akhmad Shunhaji, "Scientific Integration Model of Islamic Boarding Schools in Islamic Religious Higher Education in Indonesia," *PROFESSION: Journal of Education and Teacher Training* 10, no. 1 (2021): 1–15.

¹⁸Amy C. Edmondson dan Zhike Lei, "Psychological Safety and Learning Behavior in Organizational Teams: Revisiting the Evidence," *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology* 11 (2024): 245–269, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-032423-105421>.

findings suggest that even in highly centralized pesantren governance structures, distributed leadership mechanisms operate, albeit through culturally specific informal channels.¹⁹ Across all three cases, informants consistently identified honest upward communication as the most critical enabler of double-loop learning, with 19 of 24 informants (79.2%) emphasizing that, without trusted feedback channels, institutional assumptions will remain unexamined regardless of leadership intent.²⁰

Discussion

The findings of this study provide strong evidence that pesantren engage in an authentic double-loop learning process that is both consistent with and different from the learning mechanisms typically described in the Western organizational learning literature.²¹ The first research question was answered by identifying three interconnected mechanisms: value-based reflective governance, adaptive curriculum transformation, and distributed leadership networks. These findings confirm and expand on previous work by Iqbal and Ahmad,²² while providing much more detailed empirical evidence of the specific practices through which such learning occurs. Critically, these findings challenge the implicit universalism of much organizational learning scholarship by showing that the "management variables" that Islamic boarding schools question during *double-loop learning* are fundamentally different in nature from those described in the corporate context.

The second research question was illuminated by the findings that deliberation and tafakkur function not only as a cultural companion for organizational learning but as its main vehicle.²³ In Islamic boarding schools, the process of questioning institutional assumptions is embedded in a religious epistemological framework in which *certain values of proposal* (foundation) are non-negotiable while their institutional interpretation (*furu'*) is open to transformation. This distinction does not exist within the framework of Argyris and Schön, which treats all management variables as potentially revisable, thereby representing a significant theoretical refinement.²⁴

Cross-case comparisons reveal instructive variations in how *double-loop learning* is realized in various Islamic boarding school typologies. The finding that traditional

¹⁹Akhmad Shunhaji, "The Tradition of Islamic Boarding School Education and the Challenges of the Industrial Revolution Era 4.0," *Blantika Multidisciplinary Journal* 2, no. 5 (2024): 480–494.

²⁰Alison Harris dan Michelle Jones, "Leading in Context: Putting International Comparisons into Perspective," *School Leadership & Management* 42, no. 3 (2022): 221–234, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2022.2064628>.

²¹Ahmad Ibrahim, "Double-Loop Learning and Innovation in Higher Education: Evidence from the Middle East," *Studies in Higher Education* 49, no. 5 (2024): 912–929, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2023.2185001>.

²³Miftah Hur Rahman Zh, "The Basics of Islamic Boarding School Management," *Cakrawala: Journal of Islamic Education Management Studies and Social Studies* 7, no. 1 (2023): 23–32, <https://doi.org/10.33507/cakrawala.v7i1.1068>.

(salafi) pesantren engage in *double-loop learning* primarily through the personal reflective authority of kiai challenges the assumption that distributed and formalized learning processes are inherently superior to centralized processes.²⁵ Shunhaji, in his study of the scientific integration model of pesantren, identifies how the reflective authority of kiai functions as a distinctive learning mechanism that absorbs and interprets feedback from different layers of the institution.²⁶ Miftah Hur Rahman Zh notes a similar dimension in the context of student development, where the personal leadership of the kiai serves as an integrative lens that consolidates information from a wide informal network.²⁷

Based on these findings, this study proposes a framework, "Tafakkur-Based Organizational Learning" (TBOL), as a conceptual model for understanding *double-loop learning* in Islamic educational institutions. The TBOL framework postulates that organizational learning in pesantren operates through a cyclical process consisting of four phases: (1) *Tafakkur* (deep contemplation); (2) *Deliberation* (consultative deliberation); (3) *Tajdid* (renewal/transformation); and (4) *Muhasabah* (institutional self-accountability). This framework contributes to organizational learning theory by showing that Argyris and Schön's *double-loop learning* can operate through culturally embedded mechanisms that include non-negotiable boundaries of value, a theoretical possibility that was not adequately addressed in the original framework.²⁸

This study acknowledges some limitations. The purposive selection of three Islamic boarding schools in Java limits the ability to generalize to Islamic boarding schools in other regions of Indonesia and Muslim-majority countries with different institutional traditions. A six-month data-collection period may not fully capture the temporal dynamics of a double-loop learning process that can last for years. Future research should use a longitudinal design and examine the relationship between *double-loop learning capacity* and measurable institutional outcomes such as student achievement and institutional sustainability²⁹.

CONCLUSION

This research has shown that Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia engage in authentic *double-loop learning* through culturally and religiously embedded mechanisms

²⁵Raihani, "Educational Leadership in Indonesian Islamic Schools: Complexity and Challenges," *Journal of Educational Administration* 61, no. 1 (2023): 56–74, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-05-2022-0087>.

²⁷Miftah Hur Rahman Zh, Siti Chomsiatin Binti Ni'matul Ummah, dan Happy Susanto, "Internalization of Social Care Character among Female Santri through the Safari Dakwah Program," *International Journal of Learning and Education* 1, no. 1 (2025): 47–54.

²⁸Akhmad Shunhaji, Ahmad Zain Sarnoto, dan Afif Nur, "Liberating and Enlightening Education on Qur'anic Perspective," *Journal of Xi'an Shiyou University, Natural Sciences Edition* 65, no. 3 (2022): 1–12.

²⁹Muhammad Fahrurrozi dan Lailatus Maknun, "Leadership and Organizational Change in Indonesian Pesantren: Navigating Tradition and Modernity," *Leadership and Policy in Schools* 22, no. 1 (2023): 78–97, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2021.1965170>.

that are both consistent with and different from those depicted in Western organizational learning theories. The three identified mechanisms of value-based reflective governance through *muraja'ah tarbawiyah*, adaptive curriculum transformation, and collectively distributed leadership networks reveal that pesantren have sophisticated organizational learning capabilities that have been overlooked in mainstream scholarship. The proposed TBOL framework offers a culturally rooted conceptual tool for understanding how faith-based educational institutions reflect and transform their organizational assumptions while maintaining identity coherence.

The scientific contribution of these findings is three-pronged: first, confirming the existence of a *double-loop learning* mechanism in Islamic educational institutions that has not been systematically documented so far; second, challenging the assumption of implicit universalism in organizational learning theory by identifying culturally distinct mechanisms; and third, contributing a new conceptual framework of TBOL that integrates Islamic reflective traditions with theoretical theories of Argyris and Schön. Shunhaji and Miftah Hur Rahman Zh have shown through their works on the management of pesantren organizations that these institutions are not only custodians of tradition but also dynamic learning organizations with profound transformational capabilities.

The limitations of this study lie mainly in the limited sample coverage of three pesantren in Java, the typological variation that does not account for regional contexts outside Java, and the limitations of qualitative methods in measuring the impact of *double-loop learning* longitudinally. Advanced research accommodating a larger sample, wider regional variety, longitudinal design, and a comparative approach across types of faith-based educational institutions including madrasas, Christian schools, Jewish yeshivot, and Buddhist monastic schools will strengthen a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of how cultural and religious contexts shape organizational learning dynamics, which can ultimately be used to formulate better policies right on target for the capacity building of faith-based educational institutions.

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