



## ***Kitab kuning's* existence in the history of Islamic education and its relevance to modern Islamic society in Aceh**

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**Abstract:** This study aims to explain the role of *kitab kuning* (classic Islamic books) in the treasures of Islamic religious education in Indonesia, so that it can be seen as one of the many influential aspects in the formation of educational discourse in Indonesia. It is carried out in a qualitative descriptive method that is directed to see the scientific discourse of Islamic education and the history of education. Data collections were carried out through literature studies employing historical approach to understand the historical context, changes, or evolution of thoughts or concepts as well as a comparative observation. The data obtained formed an analysis of traditional education discourse, its relevance in history and how the position of *kitab kuning* in modern education these days. The result of study shows that modern Islamic education today seems unable to abandon *kitab kuning* as a basic methodology in understanding Islam. There is a phenomenon of increasingly inclusive study of the new format of digitized *kitab kuning*, not only in *pesantren* but also in universities. This leads to the synthesis that *kitab kuning* is potential to be a general learning particularly with the increasingly open dissemination of Islamic literacy. The results of the present study are expected to be able to contribute to the education and teaching system.

**Keywords:** Aceh; history; Islamic education; *kitab kuning*.

### **A. Introduction**

Islam, which spread to the archipelago since the 7<sup>th</sup> century, did not only affect the religiosity but also had a real impact on education ([Shabri, 2003](#)). The current developing Islamic education is a form of a long process occurring in the world of Islamic boarding school (here forward referred to *pesantren*). Ideally, Islamic education is a tool to guide students towards a civil order that originates from an Islamic religious approach. Learning

resources from Islamic education cannot be separated from the holy books of the Quran, hadith, and *kitab kuning*.

When talking about *pesantren* and traditional Islamic education, *kitab kuning* is one of the fore most discussion. In traditional societies that bond themselves to Islamic learning such as students studying in Islamic boarding schools (known as *langgar/pondok* in Java, *surau* in West Sumatra, *dayah* in Aceh), *kitab kuning* is a mandatory guide (Dhofier, 1982). The distinctive feature of *kitab kuning* is that it is written in bare Arabic or Malay with Arabic script. The *kitab kuning*, which is in bare Arabic, generally comes from writers/ulama from the Middle East that discuss about Islamic jurisprudence, monotheism, logic, and linguistics (Azra, 1999). Meanwhile, the ones in Arabic Malay (Arabic *Jawi/Pegon*) were written by scholars from the Archipelago (Baso, 2018). In the history of Islamic education in the archipelago, *kitab kuning* has a strategic place that did not only serve as a compulsory learning book, but also as a form of solemnity for a learner in carrying out his teacher's mandate. Therefore, *kitab kuning* is not merely a book, but it is culturally embedded in the tradition of Islamic education.

As a cultural part of Islamic education studies, *kitab kuning* also stands as a determinant of the students' level of study. *Kitab kuning* is considered to have a certain level. There are some for basic learners and several which are only allowed for students who have been equipped with advanced reading materials (Mirsal, 2020). In the term of evaluation and mastery of the book, students involved in *kitab kuning* reading tradition do not only know the content of the book but also practice it in everyday life. Even though nowadays there are many modern *pesantren* with an integrated curriculum, the position of *kitab kuning* that is always attached to *pesantren* cannot be separated.

*Pesantren* currently has various forms of teaching methods. It continues to adapt, offering more inclusive and modern Islamic education. However, *pesantren* still cannot abandon the tradition of reading *kitab kuning*. It is a typical characteristic attached to *pesantren* and a distinctive feature of intellectuality. The image of *pesantren* in society is its tradition of reading Kitab Kuning. It is because *pesantren* does not only take on the role of educational institutions but also as social and cultural institutions, even political institutions (emerging at the early confrontation between *pesantren* and the Dutch East Indies government). This happened because of the resilient literacy tradition of *kitab*

*kuning* in *pesantren*. It also illustrates that *pesantren* with its character and format is the most contextual educational institution in the history of Indonesia by having *kitab kuning* to raise awareness and frame the discourse (Azra, 1999). *Pesantren* and *kitab kuning* have an inseparable relationship, the relationship between the two provides a positive image for the development of Islamic narratives in the eyes of society. It is common for researchers of Islamic studies focusing on *pesantren* to look at the relationship between *kitab kuning* and *pesantren* as the two elements shaping and influencing the future style of Islamic education in Indonesia.

*Pesantren* in Indonesia is adaptive. It is because it comes from a historical background in which it was formed and developed by the community (Jamal, 2015). Thus, it has a strong support from the community. For this reason students *pesantren* are expected to be able to provide direction and guidance in religious, social, and political matters for the society. *Pesantren* also equips themselves with *kitab kuning* as a form of literacy that instigates from society (literate society). It has made *pesantren* able to last longer than other educational institutions in Indonesia. *Kitab Kuning* is the base in administering the learning in *pesantren*. Without *kitab kuning*, *pesantren* cannot take on the role of forming cultural discourse and literacy for society.

*Kitab kuning* has a unique system in educational institutions. It contains basic things such as a study of *tasamuh* traditions (respecting and respecting other human beings), *tawassuth* (moderate), and *tawazun* (living in a balanced, fairness) (Mas'udi, 1985). Besides, *pesantren* have a scientific spirit that originates from Islamic treasures, namely the student-teacher relationship which is referred to as a *sanad*. *Sanad* is something that emerges from the traditions of Islamic society. In terms of scholarship, historically, Islamic societies have indeed adopted many sciences from Greek, Persian, and Yemeni civilizations, but what originally emerged from Islamic scientific disciplines was *sanad* (Rahman, 1979). *Sanad* is used in Islam as a method of seeing the validity of science. A student in *pesantren*, in reading *Kitab Kuning*, learns from a teacher and makes the teacher's name as the benchmark from which he learns the *kitab kuning*.

In the tradition of Islamic scholarship in Indonesia, *kitab kuning* contains various disciplines. In Aceh, *kitab kuning* serves as the foundation of thought that determines the direction of scholarship of a *pesantren/dayah*. Many Islamic scholars from Aceh have

written books in Arabic and Malay (Shabri, 2003). Their role in shaping Islamic discourse and education in Aceh cannot simply be dismissed in. The discussion on *kitab kuning* in Aceh is indeed facing the changing times. This is because academic appreciation toward classic works in Kitab kuning by Acehnese scholars, at this time, has begun to be formed exclusively in line with narrower understandings of religion. Also, that Islamic scholarships can be obtained instantly in the digital space has put *kitab kuning* in a storefront room that seems untouched. In *pesantren* in Aceh tradition in the past, Zulfikar (2022) mentioned *kitab kuning* is not only an academic foundation in the world of *pesantren*, but it is also a form of ulama's responses to social, cultural, and political issues. The books written by Acehnese scholars are the result of ideas originating from critical questions about existing phenomena (Azra, 2006). Accordingly, Acehnese scholars who teach *kitab kuning* can also use it as a referral source in studying social, cultural, and political issues in everyday life. Initially, *kitab kuning* in the history of Islamic education in the *dayah* in Aceh was a *manhaj* (method) to answer all the people's needs.

In the present era, according to Nurainiah, although *kitab kuning* in Aceh remains as the main basis of *dayah*, there are very few attempts of intellectual tradition that originate from *dayah* and *kitab kuning* (Nurainiah, 2021). Many religious leaders who eventually become popular, in fact, do not understand how to read the *kitab kuning*, a method that is recognized by scholars as a prerequisite for becoming a religious leader (Ridwan, 2010). As a result, religious leaders only answered questions through rhetorical answers which were not based on basic Islamic scholarship contained in *kitab kuning*. This problem became serious when *kitab kuning* began to be removed from the public sphere. *Kitab kuning* is glorified, defended, and maintained in *dayah*, but not in the public sphere. It now looks like a fossil that is seen and studied by those who have the opportunity to study it. However, like fossils, *kitab kuning* has lost its function as a method of Islamic education that can be consumed by or benefited the public.

This problem emerged as a form of marginalized literacy culture in Aceh. The current study tries to explain the methods of *dayah* as an Islamic educational institution to reproduce Islamic intellectuals through the dissemination of Islamic knowledge from the tradition of *kitab kuning* reading. It also analyzes the position and bargaining power of *dayah* in terms of Islamic education through the literacy movement in the tradition of

reading *kitab kuning* which has been passed down from generation to generation. Additionally, the study is also interested in synthesis formation regarding the history of *kitab kuning* development in the modern era along with the increasing number of discourses and various educational methods.

This study aims to describe the cultural history and traditions of Islamic education in Aceh in terms of the contribution to the advancement of Islamic education through the tradition of reading classical Islamic literacy at the *dayah*. Furthermore, this study intends to explore the role and function *kitab kuning* in Islamic education in Aceh in the era of methodological and information advancement in education. With that in mind, this historical study *kitab kuning* tries to provide analytical analysis of the methods and strategies that have been and should be adopted by Islamic educational institutions in advancing literacy and education. The critical reading in this study wants to see the weaknesses and potentials of tical, hoping that it will serve as a considerant in the academic world and policy making in advancing Islamic education in Aceh.

## **B. Method**

This study originates from library research relying on conceptual observation-analysis with descriptive explanations (Zed, 2004). The type of literature study used is a historical literature study specifically focus on identifying, sorting and collecting literature, evaluating, analyzing, and synergizing the findings of previous studies (Titscher, 2009). Therefore, in the current study of *kitab kuning*, a genealogical study was carried out to trace the nomenclature foundations comprehensively. Genealogy in a broader sense is a study of history in the form of periodic slow changes (evolution) and does not rule out the possibility of seeing the historical discourse contained therein (Asad, 1993).

There are two main sources where data were obtained, primary and secondary sources. The primary source of data is previous works on general discourse of *kitab kuning* in Indonesia in , such as a book by Azyumardy Azra, entitled "*Pendidikan Islam: Tradisi dan Modernisasi Menuju Millenium Baru*" (1999) which discusses the entire tradition of Islamic education including *kitab kuning*. More specifically, data regarding kitab kuning were obtained through studies of Martin Van Bruinessen (1990) and Mas'udi (1985). The

secondary data collected by the author comes from research related to Islamic education traditions in Acehnese *dayah*, such as [Zainuddin & Zamzami \(2016\)](#), "*Modernization of Dayah in Aceh*," and [Nurdin \(2021\)](#), "*Modernization of Islamic "Higher Education in Indonesia at A Glance: Barriers and Opportunities."*

As research that is based on a historical narrative, the current study can be viewed as an attempt to reconstruct the existing historical structure related to discussions about the *kitab kuning* by tracing its genealogy to the influence of a particular culture, politics, and society. The study consisted of several stages. *First*, evaluating and analyzing related data using narrative analysis ([Titscher, 2009](#)). *Second*, interpreting the results of the narrative analysis by making concrete arguments based on the findings obtained. *Third*, preparing a systematic and structured report about the results of the analysis and interpretation carried out. *Fourth*, critically reviewing the report of the study to seek feedback and historical conformity. The use of genealogy to examine the history and role of *kitab kuning* in Aceh to prove the construction and transformation of the nomenclature of *kitab kuning* in Aceh.

### **C. Result and Discussion**

*Pesantren/dayah/pondok*, educational institutions, in the archipelago have existed since the 15th century. However, in some other observations, the genealogy of *pesantren* indicated that it has been in existence since Islam entered the archipelago in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The presence of *pesantren* for centuries has offered contextual education that originates from understanding of Islam through basic guidelines (Quran and hadith) and various literatures written by Islamic scholars both from inside and outside Indonesia. As a surviving indigenous educational institution to these days, *pesantren* have made a broad contribution to literacy. Indeed, the main goal of the establishment of a *pesantren* is eradicate illiteracy and add to understanding of Islamic cultures. Initially, *pesantren* movement focused on two goals; literacy and cultural aspect which included understanding of politics, society, and religion (Islam).

*Pesantren* has a fairly broad interpretation, Dhofier stated that *Pesantren* have religious-oriented goals ([Dhofier, 1982](#)). ). This orientation is proven by students active involvement to build good communication with the local community. In Aceh, *Pesantren*



students always take part in local traditions such as weddings, circumcisions, festivities, and so on (Thahiry, 2007). In this way, *pesantren* plays a role in laying the foundations of education among the society. It also meets the demands put on *pesantren* students in which they must have social responsibility. Faith education according to Idi Warsah has a significant impact on students' intelligence. Therefore, students studying in *pesantren* through teachers who read various kitab can instill religious knowledge properly (Warsah, 2018). Of course, to instill the principles of religion in society requires a deep understanding of Islamic treasures. Due to this rationale *pesantren* is very keen on teaching literacy to the community through the teaching reading the Quran and understanding *kitab kuning* to understand the Quran.

Learning to read the Quran is carried out for all people in general. However, for *kitab kuning* understanding, *pesantren* teaches it to students. The discussion on *kitab kuning* revolves around things to understand the Islamic religion in the form of methods, laws, logic, and so on. Martin van Bruinessen revealed that the first teaching carried out by *pesantren* was learning about the elements of monotheism (Bruinessen, 1990). Tauhid can indeed be found in the Quran, and understanding monotheism in depth requires supporting literature because the explanation of monotheism in the Quran requires explanations from scholars of interpretation, scholars of logic, and scholars of the language. That's where *kitab kuning* takes a role.

In History, the people of the Archipelago initially adhered to Hindu-Buddhist and Animist religions. It creates a belief in mythical things in the community (Pohan, 2021). *Pesantren* have a role to fortify the community in these matters, so learning monotheism is necessary to maintain the faith of the local community. *kitab kuning* has a fairly broad influence on the direction of the development of local people's thinking.

Historically, the establishment of Islamic boarding schools in the archipelago began with the discovery of inscriptions from Fatimah Binti Maimun, a female scholar from Leran Manyar, Gresik. Fatimah Binti Maimun was allegedly a scholar who taught Islam in the archipelago. Furthermore, Syekh Syamsuddin Wasil from Kediri for the Javanese community is the root of the formation of the *pesantren* community by the Book of Muyassar (Herman, 2013). In Aceh, several ulama are the founders of the *pesantren* tradition, namely Sultan Malik As-shalih, Hamzah Fansuri, Ali Fansuri, and Syekh

Abdurrauf As-singkily. Sultan Malik as-Salih in Samudra Pasai in the 13<sup>th</sup> century brought a massive flow of Islamization which had an impact on the implementation of the bases of Islamic education (Hadi, 2017). Hamzah Fansuri and Ali Fansuri brought Islamic education as the forerunner of *dayah* in Aceh from Barus to Aceh areas, such as in Fold Kajang, Lamreh, and other areas in Aceh in the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Pohan, 2021).

The flow of Islamization always coincides with the discourse of Islamic education. Literacy is mandatory as part of education in Islamic educational institutions. It is also undeniable that the scholars carrying the flow of Islamization and Islamic education are also scholars who are keen on writing various books, starting from the books of Sufism, monotheism, fiqh, and siyasa. In Aceh, many scholars are the authors of books, such as Hamzah Fansuri, Abdurrauf As-Singkili, and Nuruddin ar-Raniry who wrote books that have become international studies.

In general, the emergence of *pesantren* is marked by motives of changes in society regarding the way of worship, ways of socializing, and politics. *Pesantren* in Aceh initially experienced various difficult obstacles, there were political feuds, economic turmoil, and so on. However, in its movement, the *pesantren* continues to move, and in these obstacles, various books are born. For example, the discourse that emerged from the emergence of the heretical assumption of *wahdah al-wujūd* theology gave birth to various works (*kitab kuning*). From the political problems of the kingdom was born the book *Bustan al-Salātin*, and from the Islamic intellectual upheaval emerged the book of interpretation *Tarjuman al-Mustafid*, and many books that were born from various offensive characteristics of traditional Islamic academics (Shabri, 2003).

Eventually, with the rise of various books and different perspectives from scholars in *pesantren*, deviations in Aceh can be minimized. *Pesantren* in Aceh do face various trials and obstacles, but instead of marginalizing the role of *pesantren*, these actually strengthens *pesantren* to be more established educational institutions. This establishment results from the present of literacy tradition in *pesantren* along with the availability of various books studied by the scholars which make them knowledgeable of history and perceptive in planning for the future.

### **1. *Kitab kuning*: Pesantren intellectual tradition**



The term '*kitab kuning*' which is commonly referred to the books of classical Islamic scholars has yet to be determined. *Kitab kuning* is a symbolic word which actually means the old book used by traditionalist Islamic societies whereas other old books that are written in English or Latin are not considered as *kitab kuning*.

In Aceh, *pesantren* and *dayah* have variety of *kitab kuning* reading treasure. *Kitab kuning* in Aceh gave birth to a group of students who have strong solidarity with their fellow students, tightly hold the authority formula of their teacher, and own high enthusiasm in carrying out da'wah. This group of intellectuals from *Pesantren* in Aceh is based on the same circle of literacy, where they read together and critically examine the readings.

In the history of traditional Islamic education, especially in *pesantren/dayah* in Aceh, *kitab kuning* that were learned from generation to generation, from ancient times to the present, are generally the same. In common, there are two types of *kitab kuning* that are learned in *pesantren*. First, the original *kitab kuning* focusing on the teaching of interpretation, *syarah*, monotheism, and the like which cover the basic doctrines in Islam. Second, methodological *kitab kuning* which discuss the theorem in making laws, managing mindsets, and *mustalāh al-hadīs* (Zainuddin & Zamzami, 2016). The type of *kitab kuning* that is often held as the number one guideline or as the truth that cannot be contested is the second type, *kitab kuning* which talks about a 'definite narrative' in Islam.

*Kitab kuning* literacy tradition in *pesantren/dayah* in Aceh generally has several levels ranging from basic to advanced. At the basic level, students read the books of *Matan*, *Nahwu*, *Sharaf*, and *Tajweed*. At this level, the students are also taught to understand written Islamic texts. At the next level, the middle level, students begin to learn books of *Al-Qawā'id al-Fiqhiyyah*, *Al-Muqaddimah al-Hadīs*, and *Al-Usūl* and *Tafsīr*. At a higher level, there are classic *Kitab Kuning* comprising *Al-Muwatha'*, *Al-Umm*, *Al-Minhaj*, authentic Muslim and Bukhari (*muttafaq 'alaih*) traditions, and *Al-Risalah al-Qusairiyah*. At the advanced level, the students learn topics that prioritizes logic, philosophy, and theology such as the classic books written by Imam al-Ghazali, Abu Hasan al-'Asyari, and so on.

In *Dayah*, the two patterns of *kitab kuning* above are derived from various books. In terms of the method of implementing the law, the most famous in *pesantren* is the book by Imam Syafi'i, namely the book *Al-Risālah*. In the field of Sufism, the book popularly used is

*Ihyā Ulūm al-Dīn* by Imam al-Ghazali. Meanwhile, for grammatical Arabic, the *kitab kuning* used is that by Sibawaihi and Ibn Aqil (*Alfiyyah*). In terms of syarah of Islamic sciences, *Fath al-Bārī* by Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani is used. There is also the book *Ulūm al-Qur'ān* and *Mi'yār al-Ilmi* by Imam al-Ghazali, the most popular book of logic for some Acehnese who claim to be *Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* (Hadi, 2017; Zainuddin & Zamzami, 2016).

The links between one *kitab kuning* and another are often at odds, for example, the book of logic written by Imam al-Ghazali and the book of logic by Imam Ibn Taymiyya have a very different orientation to the way of thinking. It is also the case of the books of sufism, fiqh, monotheism, and so forth. With the thesis and antithesis accompanying the issue, various responses from *dayah* which look at the discourse of *kitab kuning* from the past and present in several readings appear. *First*, rejection of other books because they are considered irrelevant. One of these examples is debates by scholars regarding ideological principles such as the writing of Muhammad Abduh which ridiculed traditionalist Islam and considered them old-fashioned, thus the traditionalist muslims do not study Muhammad Abduh's writings in *pesantren* although there is no prohibition for that (Bruinessen, 1990). This has also happened in the history of Islamic education in Aceh with the rejection of Hamza Fansuri's books being studied at the Islamic boarding school until now (Pohan, 2021). The polemic arose from various roasting and accusations of heresy against the followers of Hamza Fansuri who were seen as adherents of Hulul theology like Mansur al-Hallaj who was beheaded.

*Second*, accepting the book that has been agreed upon by the scholars because it legitimizes and is in accordance with the schools of thought adhered to in a certain environment. In Aceh, this happened with the acceptance of the books of Imam ash-Shafi'i (*fiqh* and *Ush al-fiqh*), the books of Abu Hasan al-Asy'ari (theology), and the books of Imam al-Ghazali (sufism). In fact, following these books, *pesantren* students in Aceh define themselves to belong to *Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* (Meriza et al., 2022).

*Third*, accepting the previous studies. The response level of *dayah* scholars regarding *kitab kuning* is not all between rejection and acceptance. There are al Books that are currently spread among the people of Aceh such as the books of *fiqh* of Ibn Rushd, books of logic other than those of Imam al-Ghazali and others that have begun to be distributed so books that are reviewed first then were allowed to be studied with a critical approach.

Books that are currently spread among the people of Aceh such as the books of *fiqh* of Ibn Rushd, books of logic other than those of Imam al-Ghazali and others famous scholars have started to be given a place as a critical study in *dayah*. That is how the *dayah* clerics in Aceh responded to the entry of *kitab kuning* into *dayah* environment. Indeed, not all *dayahs* are able to give various readings of *kitab kuning*. However, the stagnant reading of *kitab kuning* from the past days until now has actually given birth to Islamic scholars who later became academics in Aceh. Nevertheless, one point to note is that they are the students who still read various Kitab Kuning even after they left the *pesantren/dayah*.

## **2. Kitab kuning in Aceh and literacy education tradition**

For some students in Aceh, *kitab kuning* is something unnegotiable. It is generally considered sacred and serves as a guide in resolving questions regarding religious matters. This is surely not expected to exist in the discourse of Islamic education in *pesantren* because fanaticism in *kitab kuning* actually creates stagnation in knowledge development. Although it is very unfortunate, it often happens to students studying in *pesantren*. Even though *kitab kuning* is the foundation of every student in traditional Islamic educational institutions, it should not mean that *kitab kuning* is the essential truth of every science. Although normatively Kitab Kuning has had a positive impact on literacy education discourse in *pesantren*, it does not mean that there are no other effects brought by the strong entrenched of this tradition.

*Kitab kuning* in *pesantren* generally includes various forms of delivery and direction. *First*, it is intended to deepen Islamic sciences such as the knowledge of the Quran (Quranic law and interpretation), hadith, *fiqh* (Islamic law), and various other aspects which lead to strengthening the methodology in the Islamic scientific paradigm. *Second*, it offers chances for discussion in teaching by opening up space to discuss verses, hadiths, laws or language rules which allow students to grasp learning material more easily (Meriza et al., 2022). *Third*, *kitab kuning* reading comprehension known as *qirā'at al-kutub* leads to Arabic language proficiency. Fourth, the emphasis on the morals of sufism. By studying *kitab kuning*, students are required to practice it in daily life in the form of ethics to teachers, friends, seniors, and their surroundings. Lastly, it builds the foundation on the importance of authority in explaining religious values. The reading of the *kitab kuning* is guided by a teacher/*ulama* who understands its content, method, and modes of delivery.

Thus, *kitab kuning* reading requires continuity of knowledge that is unique to Islam, namely *sanad*. It is something that is strongly held in *kitab kuning*. For *pesantren* students, *kitab kuning* is the main media to disseminate Islamic knowledge (Mas'udi, 1985). It also means the authority.

Authority in traditional Islam was born from the importance of scientific *sanad* and the level of *kitab kuning* reading. The higher and the more complex the reading of *kitab kuning*, the more teachers will be involved in teaching it, and the stronger the authority is. *Kitab kuning* is always associated with the formation of intellectual *santri* circles. In fact, the standard for most people is that the *ulama* must be able to read *kitab kuning* well (Dhofier, 1982). At present, *kitab kuning* is not limitedly mastered by *santri*, many non-*santri* are starting to read *kitab kuning* to support their Islamic knowledge. Hence, even though nowadays there are many popular religious leaders appear on television and the internet not knowing how to read *kitab kuning*, still, *kitab kuning* is the standard used to determine whether a religious leader deserves to be called a religious leader, or just a popular preacher.

In fact, due to the importance of *kitab kuning* reading tradition, Nahdlatul Ulama' has a tradition of developing books called *bahtsul masail*. *Bahtsul matsail* is a tradition of NU deliberations which turn *kitab* reading as the basis in determining NU's point of view in national, religious and cultural narratives (Bruinessen, 1990). NU, the traditional *santri*, has several categories of *kitab kuning* used as a guide called *al-Kutub al-Mu'tabarah*.

*Al-Kutub al-Mu'tabarah* in the classic Islamic tradition is, indeed, different in each group. There are numerous classic books written by *salaf* and *khalaf* scholars. However, those taught to students at *pesantren* are surely the ones that teachers considered as proper references for a particular environment. Yet, this does not mean that other books are forbidden to read. This cultural attitude of literacy is deeply rooted within the body of *pesantren*. There are various books written by scholars who are quite controversial and are not taught in Islamic boarding schools, but there is no prohibition against reading them.

As there are numerous *kitab kuning* studied in every *pesantren* in Indonesia, there 8 types of materials included as mandatory in the curriculum of *kitab kuning* study, namely: 1) the science of *kalam* which discusses the study of theology in the Islamic world, matters

relating to *firqah* (classes) and other related explanations of the subject; 2) interpretation of the Quran; 3) hadith; a collection of hadith books from various scholars; 4) *ush al-fiqh* or the study of law making in Islam (jurisprudence); 5) *fiqh*, Islamic laws from various aspects; 6) Arabic linguistics, learning about *nahwu* (syntax) and *sharf* (morphology); 7) sufism morals; 8) history which focuses on explaining the *sirah nabawiyah*, Islamic civilization, and other related historical studies (Mirsal, 2020).

Although there are a variety types of *kitab kuning* studied in the *pesantren*, they still have a tendency to depart from *kitab kuning* of certain themes. The dominant themes of *kitab kuning* studied in most of *pesantren* in Indonesia are *fiqh* (Islamic laws) and Arabic linguistics (*nahwu-syarf*) (Satria, 2019). Even though every *pesantren* has its own characteristics in kitab reading and legal decision making, *fiqh* remains the prima donna of *kitab kuning* theme in Indonesia. In general, *kitab kuning* studied in *pesantren* in Indonesia is *Al-Khulasa al-Alfiyyah* is (Arabic linguistics book) written by Al-'Allamah Abu 'Abdillah Muhammad Jamaluddin ibn Malik at-Thai or better known by his abbreviated names as Ibn Malik and *Matan al- Ghayah wa at-Taqrīb* by al-Qadhi Abu Syuja' (Zainuddin & Zamzami, 2016).

Currently, along with other development, the reading of *kitab kuning* in *pesantren* is experiencing a lot of holistic changes. Nowadays, *Pesantren* is emphasizing aspect of general education, so *Kitab kuning* reading is drawn to remain relevant by studying general science. Additionally, the mode of reading is being integrated with technology. For example, several *pesantrens* have started to read *kitab kuning* through digital applications, featured with readily *syarah* (Meriza et al., 2022). This can have a positive effect as long as the *santri* continues to have a relationship with the teacher at *pesantren* where he is studying. As a result, there are many students who become open to various independent and critical thoughts, which can be considered as an advancement in the context of *pesantren* (Amiruddin, 2008). *Kitab kuning* is often ridiculed as a form of orthodoxy. In fact, in knowledge openness and globalization these days, *pesantrens* are continuously improving themselves. *Kitab kuning* reading can still be made relevant by instilling critical attitude and moral care. Although knowledge taught *pesantren* has now lead to the application of computer, entrepreneurship, economics, and other general subjects, *kitab kuning* remains as the main reference for literacy.

### **3. The history and the future of *kitab kuning***

To this date, it is unclear when *kitab kuning* was firstly studied in Indonesia. However, the dissemination of *kitab kuning* through *pesantren/dayah* is astonishing, bringing numerous changes in the field of Islamic education. As the foundation of literacy in Islamic education, *kitab kuning* is based on Islamic sciences, hence it plays an important role in the paradigm of Islamic education.

Although there have been many classical books that are no longer yellow, the classic books which are republished in Bahasa Indonesia completed with the *syarah* from ulama that is translated into Bahasa Indonesia, does not make *kitab kuning* abandoned. Being continuously studied as part of *dayah* tradition indicates that *kitab kuning* does not only serve as a literary basis but also a cultural foundation that lies behind the growth and development of Islamic education in Indonesia (Zainuddin & Zamzami, 2016).

*Kitab kuning* is no longer limited to a normative study, but it has turned into a source of reference that gives birth to various historical, educational, social, cultural and theological points of view. Therefore, the studies of *kitab kuning* in educational environment in Aceh is increasingly encouraged by presenting it within the perspective of interdisciplinary, contextual, philological, and traditional thought studies that are relevant with the contemporary Islamic scholarship (Nurdin, 2021).

If further analyzed, it is apparent that the future or the transformation of *kitab kuning* in Aceh revolves around the development of Islamic education and the community's needs for educational output. The transformation of *kitab kuning* includes six points as follows:

a. *Kitab kuning* digitalization

*Kitab kuning* book is no longer limited to physical print. This makes it easier for many parties outside *pesantren/dayah* to access them. In the past, when *dayah* was the only Islamic educational institution, *kitab kuning* is only limited to physical copies. Nowadays, it can be found in various forms of digital and physical print that are easily available (Badi'ah et al., 2021). As a result, mass reading of *kitab kuning* these days are more interactive (Mardiana & Anggraini, 2019). At present, *kitab kuning* studies are widely spread on online social media with huge support.

b. *Kitab kuning* adoption into formal education



Currently, there have been an increasing number of modern educational institutions that study *kitab kuning*. This, according to [Tolchah & Mu'ammam \(2019\)](#) shows a possibility of implementing the study of *kitab kuning* in formal education as a form of appreciation for classical Islamic manuscripts, so that fundamental Islamic religious knowledge (first source) through the treasures of classical texts can be understood by the students ([Loonam et al., 2018](#)). It is true that there is a significant different between how *dayah* in Aceh and Aceh people read *kitab kuning* in this modern time. In the past, *kitab kuning* was only limited to Islamic education in *pesantren/dayah*. Now, the tradition of reading *kitab kuning* or *Qiraal al-Kutub* can be found at conferences, learning communities, universities, and has become part of religious studies ([Meriza et al., 2022](#)).

c. Advancement of Islamic education methods

Islamic education, these days, has adopted various reading methodologies such as special method for classical manuscripts reading (philology), semantics, semiotics, hermeneutics, etc ([Nuridin, 2021](#)). This has had a positive impact on the development of *kitab kuning* study resulting in various approaches. *Kitab kuning* has turned into an interdisciplinary study which makes it more accessible to be learned.

d. Advancement of *dayah* discourse

Currently, *dayah* is inseparable from the history and future of Aceh. They are having full support, in which they receive social, cultural, intellectual, and financial assistance from various parties. Consequently, *kitab kuning* reading tradition in *dayah* is becoming more encouraged, and it's position has a stronger bargaining power ([Tolchah & Mu'ammam, 2019](#)). [Meriza et al. \(2022\)](#) explains that this phenomenon creates an increasingly inclusive image for *kitab kuning* reading. It is no longer viewed as a burdensome task, instead studying *kitab kuning* at *dayah* is considered a privilege. Students who are able to read *kitab kuning* at various levels become individuals who are increasingly respected.

e. Advancement of Islamic literacy in globalization era

With the current easy access to information, Islamic classical literatures are also increasingly accessible. This accessibility has led to a wide dissemination of the *kitab kuning* ([Badi'ah et al., 2021](#)). Many students have highlighted various classic books by

national and international scholar easily. *Kitab kuning* is becoming more and more widespread, and its reading is increasing more varied in methods.

The people of Aceh, which are currently turning into an open and modern society, have indeed found new ways of finding religious leaders through YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and other popular media. This phenomenon is something that cannot be avoided, and as a result, *dayah* no longer serves as the dominant authority in determining religious matters and discourse in the society. Simultaneously, *kitab kuning* studied by students in *dayah* in Aceh encounters new challenges. Only two choices left, to adapt or to keep studying *kitab kuning* in traditional methods.

Nevertheless, in Aceh, *kitab kuning* seems to survive the flow of modernization. *Santri* in *dayah* apparently choose to continue studying *kitab kuning* in the way they did in the past, the most traditional ways. Even though there have been many religious leaders on social media like YouTube who regularly read *kitab kuning*, it is very rare in Aceh to see regular recitation of *kitab kuning* broadcasted on popular digital media. Yet, it is not to say that *kitab kuning* is losing its popularity. In another side, Islamic education teachers find new ways to teach Islamic knowledge to the students, and implement online literacy learning (zoom) (Warsah, 2021).

In Aceh, *kitab kuning*, that discusses Islamic knowledge thoroughly, remains to be filled with materials typical of *dayah* that are generally traditional or *salafiyah* in nature. The recitation of *kitab kuning* held at *dayah* has a stagnant schedule. The teacher teaches and topic is usually read gradually from sheet to sheet. In this way, *kitab kuning* is kept recited and stays as part of the frame of Islamic education in Aceh.

In the era of industrial revolution 5.0, the existence of *kitab kuning* opens new potentialities to Islamic education. Predictively, it does not show fossilization (the assumption that *kitab kuning* is an ancient scientific source). It is, in fact, shows to obtain a wider space. *Kitab kuning* digitalization has become a new trend in Islamic education. It is now can be accessed in an online form using an application. Furthermore, through *kitab kuning* digitalization, the content is also being adapted which eventually turns *kitab kuning* becomes more interesting and more easily comprehended. Of course, the stream of *kitab kuning* digitalization and adaptation has its own space. Currently, there have been many digital platforms which facilitate Islamic scholars with open platforms attended by

millennials audience. This increasing trend has turned awareness of basic religious knowledge originating from classic books as a global trend that is enjoyed not only as an obligation but also as a culture.

The ability to read *kitab kuning* for *pesantren/dayah* students has a significant impact on their way of reasoning, life, responding to religious issues. *Dayah* students are proficient in reading and explaining kitab with scientific *sanad* held by the teachers who are believed to have an accountable scientific *sanad* (Mirsal, 2020). Eventhough modernization seems very worrying for traditional muslims in Aceh, mastering *kitab kuning* remains as a non-negotiable scientific standard.

## **D. Conclusion**

*Kitab kuning* in the tradition of Islamic education in Indonesia plays a significant role in literacy. This eventually turns *kitab kuning* to be not only the foundation for literacy but also part of cultural aspect within Islamic community. In *dayah*, *kitab kuning* is a tradition and public decency for students studying Islamic sciences. Without *kitab kuning*, *dayah* in Aceh do not have the tools to study Islam from its main sources, the Quran and hadith. It has inscribed a significant history in the discourse of Islamic education in Aceh by becoming the forerunner in establishing its discourse. Literacy tradition through *kitab kuning* study in Aceh has given birth to many *dayah* intellectuals who are competent in Islamic sciences. Even so, *kitab kuning* also faces challenges that cannot be avoided. Currently, advancement in methodology, technology, and educational information has made Kitab Kuning to be like an obsolete fossil.

However, according to some researchers, advances in methodology, technology and information in education have actually strengthened the position of *kitab kuning*. This is because *kitab kuning* now has a wider media. It has become an inclusive study, digitalized, and employed varied methodology. Many *dayah* in Aceh, these days, have access to various classic Islamic texts due to information dan technology advancement. In the field of education, *kitab kuning* remains to be studied in many modern Islamic educational institutions from elementary to tertiary levels. This means that it is not unlikely that *kitab kuning* becomes part of general education. Even though modernization is causing many changes in cultural, religious, and social aspects of Acehnese society, *kitab kuning* still

occupies a strategic position as a pillar of Islamic scholarship and a standard for the level of education in dayah.

The current study has relative limitations on each of its variable as some data were obtained from previous studies with limited scope. It departs from reading historical phenomena and speculating on the synthesis that will occur in the future. Thus, there can potentially be another detail explanation about the development of Kitab Kuning existence in the future. Future studies have a quite large space to explore Kitab Kuning with different variables and phenomena.

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