



Reconstructing Islamic Character Education through Tafsir Responsive: An Empirical Investigation

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Abstract

This study examines the escalating crisis in Islamic character education, reflected in moral deterioration, increasing radical tendencies, and the widening gap between traditional Qur'anic understanding and contemporary social realities. The study aims to reconstruct Islamic character education through the development of Responsive Tafsir as a contextual and integrative pedagogical model of Qur'anic interpretation. A qualitative descriptive case study approach was employed, with data collected over six months through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis at Pesantren Babakan Cirebon. The findings reveal that Responsive Tafsir is built upon three principal foundations: maqasid-based interpretation, contextual hermeneutics, and the Living Qur'an approach. These elements transform tafsir into a dynamic, practice-oriented educational pedagogy. Its implementation is reflected in thematic learning, dialogical interaction, contextual application, and collaborative interpretation, all of which encourage active student participation and deeper value internalization. Empirically, the model contributes to the development of key character dimensions, including religious moderation, social awareness, intellectual integrity, empathy, and moral autonomy. The study further demonstrates that Responsive Tafsir functions as an educational strategy to counter radicalism by cultivating students' critical and contextual interpretive capacities. Conceptually, this study positions Responsive Tafsir not as a grand theory, but as a pedagogical model that bridges classical Islamic scholarship with contemporary educational needs. Therefore, Islamic educational institutions are encouraged to adopt this pedagogical approach by strengthening contextual interpretation practices and enhancing teachers' competencies in responsive hermeneutics to support sustainable character development.

Abstrak

Studi ini meneliti krisis yang semakin meningkat dalam pendidikan karakter Islam, yang tercermin dalam kemerosotan moral, meningkatnya kecenderungan radikal, dan semakin lebarnya kesenjangan antara pemahaman Al-Qur'an tradisional dan realitas sosial kontemporer. Studi ini bertujuan untuk merekonstruksi pendidikan karakter Islam melalui pengembangan Tafsir Responsif sebagai model pedagogis interpretasi Al-Qur'an yang kontekstual dan integratif. Pendekatan studi kasus deskriptif kualitatif digunakan, dengan data yang dikumpulkan selama enam bulan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipan, dan analisis dokumen di Pesantren Babakan Cirebon. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa Tafsir Responsif dibangun di atas tiga landasan utama: interpretasi berbasis maqasid, hermeneutika kontekstual, dan pendekatan Al-Qur'an Hidup.

Unsur-unsur ini mengubah interpretasi menjadi pedagogi pendidikan yang dinamis dan berorientasi praktik. Implementasinya tercermin dalam pembelajaran tematik, dialogis, aplikasi kontekstual, dan interpretasi kolaboratif, yang semuanya mendorong partisipasi aktif siswa dan internalisasi nilai yang lebih dalam. Secara empiris, model ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan dimensi karakter utama, termasuk moderasi beragama, kesadaran sosial, integritas intelektual, empati, dan otonomi moral. Studi ini lebih lanjut menunjukkan bahwa Tafsir Responsif berfungsi sebagai strategi pendidikan untuk melawan radikalisme dengan menumbuhkan kapasitas interpretatif kritis dan kontekstual siswa. Secara konseptual, studi ini memosisikan Tafsir Responsif bukan sebagai teori besar, tetapi sebagai model pedagogis yang menjembatani kajian Islam klasik dengan kebutuhan pendidikan kontemporer. Oleh karena itu, lembaga pendidikan Islam didorong untuk mengadopsi pendekatan pedagogis ini dengan memperkuat praktik interpretasi kontekstual dan meningkatkan kompetensi guru dalam hermeneutika responsif untuk mendukung pengembangan karakter yang berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci: *Karakter, Pesantren, Tafsir Responsif.*

INTRODUCTION

The current challenge in Islamic character education is not merely the decline of moral values in general, but the limited effectiveness of Quranic interpretation in shaping students' ethical behavior within contemporary educational settings. In many Islamic boarding schools, character education continues to rely on normative and text-centered approaches that emphasize memorization and doctrinal transmission rather than contextual understanding and moral application (Malik et al., 2025). As a result, students may comprehend religious teachings conceptually yet encounter difficulties when translating those values into social attitudes, critical awareness, and daily conduct. This issue becomes increasingly significant in the Indonesian pesantren context, where Islamic education is expected to respond to social change, digital culture, and the growing complexity of moral challenges among youth (Hanan, 2025; Mukhlisin et al., 2023).

Indonesia has more than 36,000 pesantren with approximately 4.2 million students, making Islamic boarding schools one of the most influential institutions in shaping Muslim character and social values (Center for Education and Cultural Policy Research, 2022; Mukhlisin Mukhlisin; Malik Sofy, 2025). Nevertheless, several studies have shown that conventional character education models often remain instructional rather than transformative. Research on Islamic education has largely focused on value internalization, moral cultivation, or curriculum implementation, while limited attention has been given to the interpretive process underlying character formation (Tanshzil et al., 2023). In particular, the relationship between Quranic interpretation and pedagogical practice in pesantren education has not been sufficiently explored through empirical research. Existing studies also tend to discuss tafsir as a theological discipline separately from character education as an educational objective. Consequently, there remains a gap in understanding how interpretive approaches can function practically as pedagogical models for character development.

This issue is particularly relevant in traditional pesantren environments where classical

learning traditions continue to dominate instructional practices. In many cases, tafsir learning is still conducted through literal and teacher-centered methods with limited engagement with contemporary social realities. Such approaches may preserve textual authority, yet they often provide insufficient space for students to critically connect Quranic values with present-day ethical problems. Therefore, there is a need for a more contextual and pedagogically oriented approach to Quranic interpretation that supports character formation without neglecting the intellectual traditions of pesantren (Mukhlisin & Atsalawi, 2026).

Pesantren Babakan Ciwaringin Cirebon offers an important context for examining this issue because of its strong classical heritage and its openness toward educational adaptation. Founded in 1705, the pesantren has maintained its reputation as a center of Islamic scholarship while continuing to engage with contemporary educational demands. With thousands of students and a long-standing tradition of kitab studies, the pesantren represents a dynamic environment in which traditional interpretation and modern educational needs interact directly. This condition makes it relevant for investigating how interpretive practices may contribute to character education within a traditional Islamic institution (Birhan et al., 2021; Mukhlisin & Atsalawi, 2026). Consequently, it is imperative to reconceptualize interpretation as a contextual and adaptive discipline.

Based on this context, this study proposes Responsive Tafsir not as a grand theory, but as a pedagogical model for Islamic character education. Responsive Tafsir refers to a contextual approach to Quranic interpretation that connects religious understanding with students' social realities, ethical reflection, and behavioral formation. The model integrates contextual interpretation, maqasid-oriented understanding, and educational adaptation in order to make tafsir learning more relevant to students' lived experiences. Rather than positioning tafsir solely as a source of doctrinal knowledge, this model emphasizes its pedagogical function in encouraging moral awareness and social responsibility.

Pesantren Babakan Ciwaringin Cirebon provides a substantial context for analyzing this issue owing to its historical and intellectual heritage. Founded in 1705, the organization has long been a hub for Islamic learning and cultural resistance. It has more than 5,000 students, making it a lively place to learn with strong traditional roots. Its main idea is to keep classical traditions alive while also welcoming new ideas that are good for people. This is a great place to look into how tafsir can be changed while still being true to its original meaning. Its relevance is further enhanced by the existence of classical manuscripts and the continuation of scholarly practices. So, the pesantren offers both stability and the opportunity for change.

This study's idea of Responsive Tafsir builds on other ways of interpreting texts and adds a more holistic approach. It uses maqasid-based interpretation, contextual hermeneutics, and the Living Qur'an approach to make sure it is useful and relevant. This framework is different from earlier models that were mostly theoretical. It focuses on putting ideas into practice in schools. It puts tafsir in the position of being not only a source of

knowledge but also a way to shape character. The model aims to overcome the shortcomings of traditional methods by connecting theory and practice. This integrative design sets it apart from other works in the field. In this way, it helps both theory and practice grow.

Even though there is more and more research on Islamic character education, there are still some gaps that are easy to see. Current research predominantly emphasizes value internalization, neglecting the interpretive mechanisms underlying these values (Khotimah et al., 2024). Other research emphasizes effective character education models but fails to demonstrate relevance to conventional Islamic boarding school settings (Istiyani et al., 2025). Moreover, the interpretation of pedagogy and character development are frequently examined in isolation rather than as integrated processes. This fragmentation hinders the advancement of holistic frameworks. There is also not much research on how traditional schools change to meet the needs of modern education. These gaps show that we need studies that bring together different fields and look at them in context.

There are more gaps that can be found in terms of geographical focus and conceptual exploration. Cirebon, notwithstanding its historical significance, is inadequately represented in international academic discourse. Additionally, the function of Quranic interpretation as the basis for character education has not been thoroughly explored. The notion of responsiveness in interpretation, while theoretically examined, remains devoid of empirical substance. These constraints underscore the necessity of undertaking research that combines location, theory, and practice. This study fills these gaps by concentrating on a particular pesantren context. It also presents an empirically validated interpretive framework. In this way, it helps to broaden the field of research on Islamic education.

There are three main goals that guide this study and shape its analytical direction. First, it aims to define Tafsir Responsive as a complete educational framework. Second, it seeks to examine its application within a pesantren context using empirical methodologies. Third, it seeks to examine its role in wider conversations about reforming Islamic education. These goals become specific research questions that focus on how to think about, put into action, and add to theory. The questions help keep the research process clear and on track. They also fit the gaps in the research that were found. So, the study is both coherent and relevant.

The innovation of this research resides in its multifaceted contribution to theory, methodology, and context. In theory, it creates Responsive Tafsir as a new way to combine old and new ways of thinking. Methodologically, it utilizes an empirical framework that transcends normative analysis. In this context, it brings attention to the teaching methods used at Pesantren Babakan, which have not been studied much by scholars. The research utilizes established theories, including Fazlur Rahman's hermeneutics and culturally relevant pedagogy. These theoretical foundations enhance its analytical rigor. Consequently, the research provides a thorough and innovative

contribution.

This study's importance goes beyond the classroom and into the real world of Islamic education. It gives educators and policymakers ideas for how to make character education programs stronger. The results are especially useful for organizations that want to fight radicalism and spread moral values. The study illustrates how tafsir can serve as a transformative pedagogical instrument, providing a novel approach for curriculum development. It also helps the country's educational goals that have to be done with building character. In the end, the research helps shape an Islamic education system that is more responsive and aware of the situation.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study utilizes a qualitative descriptive methodology featuring a single-site case study design, chosen for its ability to facilitate comprehensive, contextually anchored investigation of intricate educational phenomena within a particular institutional framework (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The epistemological framework is constructivist-interpretive, based on the premise that meaning is collaboratively constructed through participants' lived experiences situated within specific cultural and institutional contexts. This design is especially fitting because the study looks at how people interpret things, how teachers teach, and how moral character is formed at Pesantren Babakan Ciwaringin Cirebon, an institution with a long history of scholarly work that makes it both historically important and analytically unique. The approach emphasizes immersive, context-sensitive inquiry rather than measurement or statistical inference, corresponding to the study's objective to reconstruct Islamic character education through the perspective of Tafsir Responsive.

Data were gathered from primary and secondary sources during a six-month fieldwork period, from October 2025 to March 2026, to ensure sufficient depth, consistency, and data saturation. Primary data were collected through three complementary techniques: in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and institutional document analysis. The interviews involved 15 purposively selected informants consisting of senior kyai, tafsir instructors, and senior santri who were directly engaged in the teaching, interpretation, and transmission of tafsir traditions within the pesantren environment. The selection criteria emphasized participants' length of experience, institutional roles, depth of involvement in tafsir learning activities, and their recognized authority or active participation in the pesantren's intellectual life (Miles et al., 2021). Secondary data were extracted from classical tafsir manuscripts, curriculum syllabi, and student development records to validate and contextualize field findings. This triangulated data collection strategy made sure that both the academic and practical aspects of implementing Tafsir Responsive were fully documented.

Data analysis adheres to an interactive model, progressing through four recursive stages: data condensation, which entails the systematic selection and concentration of pertinent material from transcripts and field notes; data display, which involved the organization of

findings into descriptive narratives and thematic matrices; inductive conclusion drawing, which focuses on identifying and interpreting emergent patterns across data sources; and continuous verification, where initial interpretations were repeatedly reviewed and refined to maintain analytical consistency (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This recursive process enabled the development of a theoretically cohesive narrative regarding the function of Tafsir Responsive as an educational framework, connecting Quranic interpretation and practical character development within the pesantren context.

Strategies that met Lincoln and Guba's four standards for trustworthiness credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were used to establish the research's trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was established through extended engagement, continuous observation, methodological triangulation, and member checking conducted with selected key informants to validate the preliminary findings and interpretations developed during the analysis process. The member checking process was carried out after the initial data analysis stage through follow-up discussions with several participants, allowing the researcher to confirm the accuracy, consistency, and relevance of the interpreted data. Peer debriefing was also employed, in which fellow researchers provided structured feedback to broaden analytical perspectives and minimize interpretive bias. Transferability was supported through detailed descriptions of the institutional context, participant characteristics, and data collection procedures, enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings to similar pesantren settings. Collectively, these strategies ensured methodological rigor and epistemological transparency, which are fundamental principles of high-quality qualitative research.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Conceptualization of Tafsir Responsive as an Educational Framework

The primary finding of this study concerns the epistemological formulation of Tafsir Responsive as a cohesive pedagogical framework, arising not from abstract theorization but from the experiential interpretive traditions observed at Pesantren Babakan Ciwaringin Cirebon. This study delineates three interdependent epistemological pillars that form the foundation of Responsive Tafsir: maqasid-based interpretation, contextual hermeneutics, and the Living Qur'an approach. These pillars were identified through continuous engagement with senior kyai, tafsir instructors, and advanced santri, as well as through a systematic examination of classical manuscripts, pesantren curriculum documents, and halaqah learning practices. The findings demonstrate that the three pillars do not function independently; rather, they interact dynamically within the pedagogical and socio-religious life of the pesantren.

The first pillar, maqasid-based interpretation, was observed in the halaqah sessions led by senior kyai when discussing verses related to social justice, economic ethics, and communal welfare. During one halaqah on QS. Al-Ma'un, the kyai emphasized that the interpretation of the Qur'an should not stop at literal meaning but must aim at realizing the broader objectives of Islamic law, particularly social compassion and protection of

vulnerable communities. One kyai explained:

“The Qur’an is not only recited to understand halal and haram textually. The essence of tafsir is to realize *maslahat* in society. If interpretation does not bring justice and mercy to people, then the meaning of the Qur’an has not yet been fully achieved.”

Maqasid-based interpretation serves as the normative foundation, focusing interpretive attention on the higher objectives of Islamic law, such as the preservation of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property, rather than the literal meaning of individual verses. In observed halaqah sessions, instructors consistently directed students to interrogate not (Informant K-1, November 2024). The statement summarizes the epistemological conflict that Tafsir Responsive aims to address: adherence to the classical tradition while remaining receptive to modern moral imperatives.

The second pillar is contextual hermeneutics, which is based heavily on Fazlur Rahman's double movement methodology. In practice, this entails educators guiding students through a bidirectional analytical process: initially, reconstructing the sociohistorical context of revelation (*asbab al-nuzul*) to elucidate the moral impetus underlying a specific text; Furthermore, translating that moral impetus into principles relevant to contemporary realities. This process was most clearly shown in thematic discussion sessions, where Quranic verses about justice, honesty, and community responsibility were purposefully linked to modern social issues such as digital misinformation, environmental damage, and conflict between religions. Instead of treating classical texts as closed archives, teachers used them as living stores of moral wisdom whose meaning can always be changed.

The Living Qur'an approach, which is the third pillar, focuses on the physical and performative aspects of how people receive the Quran. Utilizing Heddy Shri Ahimsa-Putra's ethnographic framework, this approach analyzes the interpretation and social enactment of Quranic values within the daily rhythms of pesantren life, including morning recitations, communal meals, collective labor, and interpersonal conduct. Observations indicated that character development is most effectively fostered not within formal educational environments, but in the interstices of quotidian existence, where Quranic principles are manifested through behavioral standards, conflict resolution methodologies, and established patterns of conduct. taking care of each other. This discovery establishes the pesantren environment as a pedagogical text that perpetually interprets and embodies Quranic values.

The examination of the pesantren curriculum provided additional validation for this tripartite framework. Of the fourteen tafsir texts included officially in the curriculum, nine (64.3%) utilized contextual discussion methods, whereas five (35.7%) primarily employed text-centered transmission approaches. This distribution does not indicate methodological inconsistency; instead, it represents a calculated institutional strategy to maintain traditional transmissive methods for foundational texts while employing adaptive approaches for more advanced interpretive instruction. The coexistence of these

modes indicates a complex pedagogical ecology rather than a simplistic dichotomy between tradition and innovation.

Implementation of Tafsir Responsive in Character Education Practice

The second finding refers to the empirical patterns that facilitate the implementation of Responsive Tafsir within the educational and social framework of Pesantren Babakan. Six months of participant observation in the study of tafsir, halaqah, and daily communal activities revealed four consistent implementation patterns, each resulting in unique yet interconnected character outcomes.

The initial pattern, thematic Quranic study centered on modern social issues, was noted across eighteen instructional sessions. Instead of going through the Koran verse by verse, teachers chose groups of verses that talked about justice, honesty, and social solidarity. They then compared classical commentaries with modern case studies. One particularly important session used a passage from Surah Al-Hujurat (49:6) about checking information as a way for students to think about the moral issues that come up when using social media and spreading false information. This methodological approach, which connects a classical text to a modern moral issue, is what sets Tafsir Responsive apart from other methods. During these sessions, students were much more engaged than they were in classes where they were only expected to listen.

The second pattern, reflective dialogue between kyai and santri, was the most commonly recorded, occurring in twenty-four observed sessions. This dialogical pedagogy fundamentally diverges from the unidirectional authority structure conventionally linked to Islamic boarding school instruction, where in the kyai's interpretation possesses near-absolute epistemic authority. In Tafsir Responsive practice, kiyai actively sought students' interpretive responses, contested superficial readings, and exemplified intellectual humility by visibly recognizing the limitations of classical commentaries in tackling genuinely novel moral inquiries. One teacher made this teaching philosophy clear: Santri must not just take in information. They need to question the context and the relevance; this is the true meaning of tafaqquh (Informant T-3, January 2025). This redefinition of tafaqquh as an active, questioning practice in Islamic epistemology, as opposed to a passive one, represents a substantial pedagogical advancement within the conventional pesantren framework.

The third pattern, which involved putting Quranic texts in real-life situations, was recorded in twenty-one sessions and was probably the most analytically rich way to use the texts. Teachers often link traditional moral rules to the students' current social situations, such as fights in the community, economic problems in the area, and the moral problems that come with living in a digital world. This anchoring of abstract textual meaning in tangible social experience corresponds to Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development, the educational environment where new comprehension is developed through the facilitation of familiar contexts (Vygotsky, 2021). Students indicated in post-session interviews that this methodology markedly augmented their

perception of the Quran's enduring significance, with several expressing a transition from perceiving tafsir as a historical discipline to engaging with it as a dynamic moral guide.

The fourth pattern, collective reading and deliberative meaning-making, was noted in fifteen sessions and was especially important for building values of moderation and working together. Instead of coming to one clear, authoritative interpretation, groups of students talked about the meaning and modern use of certain verses in a structured way (deliberation). Disagreements were not stifled but regarded as pedagogically beneficial, with instructors fostering rather than alleviating interpretive conflict. This practice fostered a form of hermeneutic tolerance, characterized by a readiness to engage with interpretive ambiguity without resorting to dogmatic finality, which has significant ramifications for cultivating resilience against ideological extremism.

Member checking with all fifteen informants confirmed a high level of analytical alignment, with thirteen (86.7%) affirming the researcher's interpretation that Tafsir Responsive had significantly transformed students' engagement with Quranic knowledge from mere reception to appropriation, from memorization to internalization, and from passive comprehension to active moral agency.

Character Dimensions Formed through Tafsir Responsive

The third finding integrates the character outcomes generated by Tafsir Responsive implementation, categorized into five empirically substantiated dimensions. These dimensions emerged inductively through cross-source triangulation of interview data, field observations, and student development records, and are presented not as pre-theorized categories but as authentic analytical findings.

Table A1. Character Dimensions, Empirical Indicators, and Formative Mechanisms of Tafsir Responsive

Character Dimension	Empirical Indicators	Formative Mechanism	Data Sources
Religious moderation	Active rejection of Exclusionist narratives; Pluralistic discourse in peer interaction	Thematic tafsir on tolerance verses; deliberative musyawarah	Interview, Observation
Social consciousness	Community service initiatives; sensitivity to socioeconomic disparity	Contextualization of Quranic justice themes to local realities	Observation, Documents
Intellectual integrity	Culture of source verification; resistance to misinformation	Reflective dialogue; critical asbab al nuzul analysis	Interview, Observation
Empathy across difference	Inclusive conduct toward students of varied backgrounds	Living Qur'an embodiment; collective meaning-making sessions	Observation
Moral	Independent ethical	Dialogical	Interview,

Character Dimension	Empirical Indicators	Formative Mechanism	Data Sources
autonomy	decision- making; principled conduct without supervision	pedagogy; m a q a s i d - b a s e d reasoning practice	Documents

Sumber: Researcher's data

The aspect of religious moderation surfaced as the most consistently recorded result, evident in all four implementation patterns and cited by twelve of fifteen informants. This finding is particularly urgent due to the documented vulnerability of Islamic boarding school students to exclusivist ideologies (Mukhlisin & Sofy, 2025; Tanszil et al., 2023). The methods employed by Tafsir Responsive to foster moderation are neither rhetorical nor prescriptive; students are not merely instructed to be moderate but are engaged in interpretive and experiential processes. Through the continuous practice of reading Quranic texts via maqasid and contextual hermeneutics, students cultivate an internalized hermeneutic framework that opposes simplistic, binary moral interpretations of religious texts.

Moral autonomy, although the most intricate aspect to directly observe, was demonstrated through longitudinal field notes that recorded instances where senior students rendered independent ethical judgments in ambiguous social contexts, explicitly referencing Quranic principles they had studied in tafsir sessions. This behavioral transition from interpretive practice to autonomous moral agency signifies the most profound level of character development attainable through Responsive Tafsir, fundamentally differentiating it from methodologies that are limited to cognitive or declarative knowledge.

Tafsir Responsive as a New Epistemological Contribution

The results of this study indicate that *Tafsir Responsive* offers an alternative perspective within the discourse of Islamic educational epistemology by attempting to bridge the longstanding divide between classical traditionalism and modernist reform. Based on empirical observations conducted in one of Indonesia's oldest and most respected Islamic boarding schools, the findings suggest that interpretive responsiveness emerges from internal pedagogical practices and intellectual traditions rather than from externally imposed educational models. This demonstrates that adaptation and contextual interpretation can develop organically within pesantren culture while remaining connected to established scholarly traditions. Such findings are significant because they illustrate the potential for educational renewal in Islamic institutions to occur through continuity with tradition, thereby increasing the possibility of broader acceptance and sustainability within the pesantren educational environment.

In theory, Tafsir Responsive connects and builds on three well-known but previously separate schools of thought. Fazlur Rahman's double movement hermeneutics offers the interpretive methodology; Jasser Auda's maqasid systems framework supplies the normative compass; and the Living Qur'an paradigm articulated by Ahimsa-Putra

introduces the embodied, ethnographic dimension that previous frameworks have overlooked. The amalgamation of these three traditions into a cohesive, functional pedagogical framework represents the principal theoretical contribution of this study. Tafsir Responsive redefines tafsir as a formative technology, establishing it as a structured process for the active cultivation of moral character, in contrast to existing models that regard it solely as an academic discipline or legal instrument.

This change fits in with bigger changes in the philosophy of education. Dewey's idea of education as experience instead of transmission is similar to the Living Qur'an approach, which doesn't just teach students Quranic values but also shows them how to live them (Dewey, 1938; Getty, 2025). In the same way, Freire's criticism of the banking model of education, in which students passively receive knowledge, is structurally mirrored in the critique of transmissive interpretation of pedagogy that this study promotes (Norvaizi & Anggita, 2025). The convergence of these educational philosophies from diverse intellectual traditions indicates that Responsive Tafsir is part of a broader global trend towards participatory, transformative, and experience-focused pedagogy.

Rethinking Traditionalism: The Pesantren as a Site of Indigenous Innovation

A significant theoretical finding maintains the relationship between institutional traditionalism and pedagogical innovation at Pesantren Babakan. The dominant belief in much of the literature that traditional Islamic institutions are fundamentally opposed to pedagogical reform is unequivocally contested by the evidence provided herein. The pesantren's guiding principle, *al-muhafazah 'ala al-qadim al-salih wa al-akhdzu bi al-jadid al-aslah* (preserving the beneficial old while embracing the beneficial new), serves not only as a rhetorical formula but as an active epistemological policy that dictates the negotiation and legitimization of curricular adaptation within the institution.

This discovery necessitates a profound redefinition of traditionalism within the framework of Indonesian Islamic boarding school education. Instead of representing methodological rigidity, traditionalism at Pesantren Babakan functions as a manifestation of epistemological assurance, where in the institution's profound foundations in classical scholarship provide the security required to critically confront contemporary challenges without perceiving such involvement as an existential threat. Kaltsum and Amin's depiction of traditional pesantren as predominantly governed by literal and text-centric methodologies is accurate in numerous institutional contexts; however, it necessitates considerable qualifications when considered in relation to the historical profitability and intellectual culture of Pesantren Babakan. The study thus offers a more nuanced typology of pesantren pedagogical orientations, differentiating between structural traditionalism and methodological traditionalism as distinct analytical phenomena.

Moreover, the pesantren's ability to foster indigenous innovation by developing Responsive Tafsir organically from its own scholarly tradition, rather than in reaction to external reform mandates, establishes it as a paradigm for what Avoseh refers to as "endogenous educational development," a type of institutional transformation propelled

by internal cultural logic instead of external policy pressure. This has direct implications for educational policymakers, indicating that successful reform in Islamic boarding school contexts is more likely when it aligns with, rather than opposes, established institutional epistemologies.

Alignment with Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Its Islamic Reconceptualization

There are many similarities between Tafsir Responsive and the idea of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy that are useful for theory, but it's important to keep the differences clear (Ladson-Billings, 2021). Like culturally responsive pedagogy, Tafsir Responsive sees students' cultural backgrounds, in this case their formation within the Islamic intellectual tradition, not as problems to solve but as sources of knowledge to use (Permadi & Risnawati, 2025). The findings of this study demonstrate that Tafsir Responsive in pesantren education is not merely an adaptive teaching strategy, but a pedagogical model rooted in the internal structure of the Islamic interpretive tradition itself. Rather than broadening the discussion toward global pedagogical discourse, the analysis reveals that the implementation of Tafsir Responsive consistently operates through three primary pillars: contextual interpretation of Qur'anic verses, dialogical learning between kyai and santri, and the integration of classical Islamic scholarship with contemporary social realities. These three pillars form the conceptual foundation that enables tafsir learning to remain authoritative while simultaneously relevant to the lived experiences of students within pesantren communities.

The first pillar, contextual interpretation, emphasizes the effort to connect Qur'anic meanings with contemporary moral, social, and educational issues without detaching interpretation from classical sources. In observed learning sessions, the kyai frequently related textual discussions to everyday social realities faced by santri, thereby positioning the Qur'an as a living guide rather than solely a textual object of memorization. The second pillar, dialogical learning, reflects the shift from one-directional transmission toward participatory interpretive engagement. Santri were encouraged to ask questions, present reflections, and negotiate meaning within the boundaries of pesantren ethics and scholarly discipline. The third pillar, integration of classical and contemporary perspectives, demonstrates how kitab turats remained central while contemporary contexts functioned as interpretive bridges that strengthened students' understanding of the relevance of Islamic teachings in modern life.

In practice, the study identified four consistent implementation patterns of Tafsir Responsive across the pesantren learning process. The first pattern was contextual explanation, in which Qur'anic verses were linked to social, ethical, and communal realities familiar to santri. The second pattern involved reflective dialogue, where learning interactions created space for interpretive reflection rather than passive reception alone. The third pattern was gradual hermeneutic guidance, whereby the kyai modeled interpretive reasoning step by step so that santri could understand not only interpretive conclusions but also the process of deriving meaning from authoritative sources. The

fourth pattern was value internalization, where the learning process consistently emphasized adab, spirituality, and moral formation alongside intellectual comprehension.

These findings indicate that the role of the kyai in Tafsir Responsive extends beyond the conventional function of knowledge transmission. The kyai acts as a pedagogical guide who demonstrates how interpretation is ethically and intellectually practiced within the pesantren tradition. Authority is therefore maintained not merely through textual mastery, but through the ability to guide santri in understanding the relationship between revelation, classical scholarship, and contemporary reality. This pedagogical orientation strengthens the continuity of the pesantren intellectual tradition while allowing tafsir learning to remain responsive to changing educational and social contexts.

Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Research

This research recognizes various limitations that constrain the scope and generalizability of its results. The single-site case study design, although facilitating the necessary depth of analysis for the study's objectives, limits the direct applicability of findings to Islamic boarding school contexts characterized by markedly different institutional histories, scholarly cultures, or demographic profiles. The analytical framework established herein ought to be regarded as a theoretically based model pending validation in various institutional contexts, rather than an empirically generalized account of Indonesian Islamic boarding school practice.

The qualitative methodology, although epistemologically suitable for the study's constructivist framework and crucial for elucidating the interpretive and experiential aspects of character development, precludes the quantification of character outcomes or the delineation of causal mechanisms via experimental design. Subsequent research using mixed-method designs that combined validated character assessment tools with qualitative inquiry would substantially enhance the evidential foundation for the formative assertions of Tafsir Responsive. Longitudinal studies monitoring character development over extended periods would be especially beneficial, as the formation of moral character is fundamentally a protracted process that six months of fieldwork can only partially reveal.

Furthermore, the study's concentration on a singular high-prestige institution renowned for its robust scholarly tradition may engender an optimistic bias, suggesting that the conditions facilitating Responsive Tafsir at Pesantren Babakan may not be easily replicable in institutions with limited scholarly resources, less seasoned instructors, or diminished institutional cultures of intellectual inquiry. Comparative studies examining pesantren of diverse typologies salafiyah, khalafiyah, and integrated models would elucidate which characteristics of Tafsir Responsive are universally applicable and which are contingent upon specific enabling conditions.

Implications for Islamic Education Policy and Curriculum Reform

The results of this study have significant ramifications for educational policy at both institutional and national levels. Indonesia's dual commitment to enhancing religious

character education and fostering religious moderation as national educational priorities is supported by Tafsir Responsive, which provides a framework that simultaneously addresses both objectives through a singular pedagogical approach rooted in the Islamic tradition. This endogeneity is not only symbolically important; it is also practically important, because pedagogical changes that are seen as being forced from the outside tend to meet resistance from institutions, which makes them less effective.

The study's findings indicate to curriculum developers in the Islamic boarding school system that character education is most effectively enhanced not by the introduction of separate moral instruction courses, but through a methodological transformation of the current Quranic interpretation pedagogy. The necessary reform is not the addition of new subjects to the curriculum, but a deeper understanding of how tafsir is taught, used, and engaged with. This can be done without getting rid of classical texts or changing the way institutions work. This understanding has major resource implications: transformative character education doesn't need new materials, new classes, or new institutional infrastructure. Instead, it needs teachers to learn how to use responsive hermeneutic pedagogy and for institutions to create room for dialogical, contextual Quranic engagement.

In the most general sense, this study shows that Pesantren Babakan Ciwaringin is not only a place where people can learn successfully, but also a model of what Islamic schools can do when they use their own traditions with confidence to deal with the moral problems of modern life. An institution founded in 1705 has shown, through the use of Tafsir Responsive, that having a long history does not keep an institution stuck in the past. Instead, it gives them the stability they need to make real changes in education. This may be the study's most lasting contribution: it shows that the best answers to the present in Islamic education and Islamic hermeneutics are those that are most deeply rooted in the tradition.

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