

Ulama Cadre Formation in the Digital Era: Development of Ma'had Aly Curriculum Based on Knowledge and Social Context

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Received:; Revised:; Accepted:

Abstract:

This research examines the development of the Ma'had Aly curriculum for ulama cadre formation in the digital era, focusing on integrating classical Islamic knowledge with contemporary societal demands. The study is driven by the rapid digital transformation and the growing need for Islamic scholars who can address both traditional religious teachings and modern challenges. As an Islamic higher education institution, Ma'had Aly plays a crucial role in producing competent ulama equipped for both religious guidance and engagement with current issues. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis involving administrators, lecturers, kyai, alumni, and stakeholders. The findings show that Ma'had Aly continually updates its curriculum by blending classical texts with contemporary knowledge, emphasizing digital literacy and social engagement. The application of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) and Constructive Alignment ensures that graduates acquire both theoretical understanding and practical skills necessary in today's society. Active stakeholder involvement especially kyai, lecturers, and external religious bodies plays a vital role in shaping the curriculum to meet the expectations of both religious and public spheres. Additionally, integrating digital tools into the curriculum is highlighted as essential for preparing graduates for the demands of the digital age. This study offers valuable insights into curriculum development at Ma'had Aly, contributing recommendations to ensure its continued relevance and leadership in Islamic higher education amidst ongoing societal changes.

Keywords: Ulama Cadre Formation, Ma'had Aly Curriculum, Digital Era

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengkaji pengembangan kurikulum Ma'had Aly dalam pembentukan kader ulama di era digital, dengan menekankan integrasi antara khazanah keilmuan Islam klasik dan tuntutan masyarakat kontemporer. Studi ini dilatarbelakangi oleh transformasi digital yang pesat dan meningkatnya kebutuhan akan ulama yang mampu menjembatani ajaran agama tradisional dengan tantangan zaman modern. Sebagai institusi pendidikan tinggi Islam, Ma'had Aly memegang peranan penting dalam mencetak ulama yang kompeten dalam memberikan bimbingan keagamaan sekaligus mampu merespons isu-isu aktual. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif studi kasus, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis dokumen yang melibatkan pengelola, dosen, kyai, alumni, dan pemangku kepentingan lainnya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Ma'had Aly secara berkelanjutan memperbarui kurikulumnya melalui perpaduan teks klasik dan pengetahuan kontemporer, dengan penekanan pada literasi digital dan keterlibatan sosial. Penerapan prinsip Outcome-Based Education (OBE) dan Constructive Alignment memastikan lulusan memiliki pemahaman teoritis sekaligus keterampilan praktis yang dibutuhkan di era kini. Keterlibatan aktif pemangku kepentingan, khususnya kyai, dosen, dan lembaga keagamaan eksternal, berperan penting dalam merumuskan kurikulum yang relevan bagi komunitas keagamaan maupun masyarakat umum. Selain itu, integrasi teknologi digital dalam kurikulum menjadi kunci untuk mempersiapkan lulusan menghadapi tantangan era digital. Penelitian ini memberikan wawasan penting serta rekomendasi untuk memastikan Ma'had Aly tetap relevan dan unggul dalam pendidikan tinggi Islam di tengah dinamika perubahan masyarakat.

Kata kunci: Pembentukan Kader Ulama, Kurikulum Ma'had Aly, Era Digital

How to Cite: Moch. Subhan Yahya, Moh Padil, Indah Aminatuz Zuhriyah, Zainuddin. (2025). Ulama Cadre Formation in the Digital Era: Development of Ma'had Aly Curriculum Based on Knowledge and Social Context. *Bahtsuna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, Vol 7(Issue 1), 28-35. <https://doi.org/10.21067/jpi.vxix.xxxxx>

Introduction

The introduction section must contain (in sequence) a general background, a previous literature study (state-of-the-art) as a basis for the statement of scientific novelty of the article, a statement of scientific novelty of science, and a research problem or hypothesis. At the end of the introduction, the purpose of the article should be clearly written. In the scientific article format, it is not permissible to review the literature as in the research report, but it is manifested in the form of a previous study review (state-of-the-art) to demonstrate the scientific novelty of the article.

Islamic scholar education in Indonesia has long been a cornerstone in preserving Islamic knowledge and addressing the challenges of modern society. For centuries, pesantren has served as a central institution for Islamic education, producing scholars who are well-versed in Islamic teachings and committed to community service.(Hakim, 2021) Among the Islamic higher education institutions focusing on scholar cadre formation is Ma'had Aly, which aims to produce scholars who specialize in various Islamic disciplines.(Azra, 2019)

As Islamic scholar education faces challenges in the digital era, curriculum innovation is crucial. Digital transformation has changed how society accesses and understands Islamic knowledge, requiring scholars to not only master classical texts but also engage with contemporary issues and utilize technology in knowledge dissemination.(Diana et al., 2024) Therefore, the curriculum development at Ma'had Aly must blend classical knowledge with skills that are relevant to the digital era.

The process of scholar cadre formation at Ma'had Aly involves multiple stakeholders, including kyai (Islamic leaders), academics, government bodies, and the broader community. Their participation in curriculum planning, implementation, and evaluation is essential to ensure the relevance and adaptability of Ma'had Aly's educational offerings.(Pratama & Fauzi, 2024) Outcome-Based Education (OBE) and Constructive Alignment are key approaches to ensure that Ma'had Aly graduates not only have strong theoretical foundations but also the pedagogical and professional competencies required by society.(Husein et al., 2022)

Previous studies indicate that OBE-based curricula and approaches driven by stakeholder needs enhance graduates' capabilities to address real-world issues.(Fiandi, 2023) In the context of Ma'had Aly, this is realized through the implementation of an OBE ecosystem curriculum that aligns graduate learning outcomes with the needs of employers such as KBIH, BAZNAS, KUA, and bahtsul masail institutions.(Fatmawati, 2015) As a result, Ma'had Aly graduates are not only experts in Islamic knowledge but also equipped with the necessary skills to address social challenges in today's digitalized world.

This study, therefore, aims to explore the development of Ma'had Aly's curriculum in the context of scholar cadre formation in the digital era. Specifically, it focuses on curriculum development principles, stakeholder involvement, and expected educational outcomes, with case studies at Ma'had Aly Nurul Qadim and Ma'had Aly Zainul Hasan Genggong. The research seeks to identify a curriculum development model that integrates classical knowledge while also addressing contemporary challenges and societal needs.

Method

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a case study design to examine the curriculum development at Ma'had Aly, focusing on scholar cadre formation in the digital era. Case studies are particularly useful for exploring a specific phenomenon within its real-world context, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of how curriculum development principles are applied at Ma'had Aly. (Wahidmurni, 2017)

The study involves Ma'had Aly administrators, kyai, lecturers, and other relevant stakeholders in curriculum planning, implementation, and evaluation. Data collection methods include in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis to provide a holistic view of the Ma'had Aly curriculum. (Rai & Thapa, 2015) In-depth interviews are used to gather stakeholder perspectives on curriculum development and scholar cadre formation, while participatory observations are conducted during academic activities at Ma'had Aly to observe the implementation of the curriculum. Document analysis is performed to review curriculum guidelines, syllabi, and related academic documents. (Manzilati, 2017)

The data collected is analyzed using thematic analysis, which helps identify recurring patterns and themes in the curriculum development process. Data analysis involves reducing, categorizing, and interpreting the findings in light of curriculum development theories and educational management principles. The validity of the findings is ensured through source triangulation, comparing data from interviews, observations, and document analysis. (Rai & Thapa, 2015)

Results and Discussion

1. Integration of Technology in Ma'had Aly Learning

In today's rapidly evolving digital landscape, the integration of technology into educational frameworks has become essential for fostering more accessible and effective learning environments. (Thelma et al., 2024) Ma'had Aly has embraced this change by incorporating technology into its teaching methodologies, particularly to provide students with easier access to religious knowledge and connect them with wider sources of learning. (Suradi, 2018) Based on interview with Ma'had Aly Genggong Leader, Mr. Muzakky, he said:

"Platforms like online lectures, virtual discussions, and e-books are increasingly being utilized in Ma'had Aly to enhance the learning experience, especially for contemporary fiqh and tafsir courses. These digital tools allow for greater accessibility and flexibility, enabling students to engage with course materials anytime and anywhere."

Interviews with Ma'had Aly Leader highlighted that platforms such as online lectures, virtual discussions, and e-books are being utilized, particularly for contemporary fiqh and tafsir courses. However, the application of technology is still somewhat restricted to certain subjects, with traditional face-to-face methods dominating other areas of the curriculum.

Despite the initial successes, there are notable challenges regarding the preparedness of the infrastructure and faculty's technological proficiency. As noted in curriculum management theory, effectively applying technology in education requires thorough technical and pedagogical training for the instructors. (Akram et al., 2022) During observations in online courses, it was evident that the successful implementation of technology relies heavily on the instructor's ability to maintain student engagement and manage class interactions effectively. (Hanaysha et al., 2023) This highlights the need for both hardware resources and continuous faculty development to utilize technology for optimizing the educational process.

Furthermore, Ma'had Aly's integration of technology is informed by the institution's educational philosophy, which emphasizes a balance between modern teaching tools and traditional

methods.(Riyadi, 2016) The pesantren, known for its reliance on classical texts such as *kitab kuning*, strives to incorporate digital resources that enhance students' understanding of these traditional subjects.(Saifannur, 2022) Digital tools are being integrated in ways that support, rather than replace, the core Islamic studies curriculum. Technology is seen as an enhancer of the traditional approach, helping students access up-to-date resources and participate in a broader academic dialogue within the field of religious studies.(Diana et al., 2024)

In interviews with teachers and administrators of Ma'had Aly, Mr. Roviudin, he said:

"During the interview, there was consensus that technology should be seen as a complementary element within the broader educational philosophy, rather than as a stand-alone solution, emphasizing that its role is to enhance traditional learning methods and support the integration of modern tools into the curriculum without replacing the core values of Islamic education."

Based on the interview, there was consensus that technology should be seen as a complementary element within the broader educational philosophy, rather than as a stand-alone solution. Many expressed that the greatest benefit of integrating technology lies in fostering a dynamic learning environment that mirrors the realities of today's digital world. Therefore, Ma'had Aly plans to continue expanding its use of digital tools, with a focus on fostering competency in the digital world, particularly for students pursuing careers as ulama, who must be equipped to engage with both traditional knowledge and modern challenges.

Additionally, the institution is aware of the need for ongoing professional development. According to organizational change theory, transformative processes in institutions like Ma'had Aly occur gradually, requiring a continual commitment to staff training and professional growth.(Asiah & others, 2024).

2. Curriculum Development Principles at Ma'had Aly

Curriculum development at Ma'had Aly follows principles of relevance, flexibility, continuity, effectiveness, efficiency, and orientation.(Sukmadinata, 2020) These principles align closely with the framework set out by Omar Hamalik in his curriculum management theory, which stresses the importance of involving all stakeholders such as administrators, faculty, students, and alumni in the process of curriculum design.(Maulida, 2022) Interviews with administrators revealed that Ma'had Aly regularly seeks feedback from key stakeholders to ensure the curriculum remains responsive to both educational needs and societal demands.(Freeman, 2010)

The flexibility of the Ma'had Aly curriculum allows instructors to adapt teaching methods according to the diverse needs and backgrounds of students.(Alfaeni et al., 2023) This flexibility is essential in creating a learning environment that accommodates the varying paces at which students learn. Observations in classroom settings confirmed that this flexible approach enables teachers to tailor their lessons to the specific needs of students, thus improving the learning experience. Faculty members also noted that flexibility in curriculum planning enhances their ability to integrate new pedagogical approaches, such as flipped classrooms and collaborative learning, into their teaching.(Oktapiani, 2019)

Despite this flexibility, the curriculum must continue evolving to meet global standards of competency in religious education. As the demands of the modern world change, so too must the curriculum to ensure that graduates are equipped with the knowledge and skills to address both local and global challenges.(Majewska, 2023) In this regard, Ma'had Aly incorporates feedback from external stakeholders, including alumni and institutions that hire graduates, to ensure that the curriculum aligns with industry expectations and societal needs.(Bulkini, 2022) This feedback loop is crucial for ensuring that the curriculum remains dynamic and adaptable, aligning with the needs of the wider community and the global context in which the institution operates.

The concept of efficiency is also a cornerstone of curriculum design at Ma'had Aly 31. The school strives to maximize the use of available resources time, teaching materials, and faculty expertise so that students are exposed to a comprehensive yet manageable curriculum. (Crepeau et al., 2022) For instance, the time allocation between theoretical and practical components of courses in fiqh, tafsir, and hadith is carefully balanced to ensure that students receive a well-rounded education. Additionally, efficiency is enhanced through the use of online learning platforms that allow students to access supplementary materials and interact with peers and faculty outside of class time.

Evaluating the curriculum continuously is another key principle emphasized by Ma'had Aly. As outlined in Scriven's curriculum evaluation theory, regular evaluations help ensure that the curriculum is both effective and relevant. (Husein et al., 2022) Ma'had Aly's evaluation process involves all stakeholders students, faculty, alumni, and employers so that their collective input can inform improvements. This ongoing feedback mechanism allows the institution to keep the curriculum aligned with both educational goals and the evolving needs of the community, ensuring that graduates are prepared for the complexities of modern religious practice.

3. Stakeholder Involvement in Curriculum Planning

Stakeholder involvement in curriculum planning at Ma'had Aly plays a crucial role in ensuring the curriculum meets both educational and societal needs. Key stakeholders include the kyai (Islamic scholars), faculty members, alumni, and institutions that employ graduates. According to Michael Fullan's theory of stakeholder engagement, involving stakeholders at every stage of the curriculum planning process fosters ownership and relevance. (Fullan & Quinn, 2023) Interviews the Ma'had Aly Nurul Qadim leader revealed that alumni are particularly valuable in providing insights into how the curriculum can better prepare students for real world challenges in religious practice and social service. As per the interview results, the following is stated:

"alumni (former students) play an important role in offering feedback and perspectives on how the curriculum can be improved. They can provide valuable insights based on their experiences after graduation, showing how well the curriculum prepared them for real-world challenges, especially in areas such as religious practice and social service."

Stakeholder engagement is particularly evident in the application of backward design, a method that starts by defining the desired outcomes of education competencies necessary for ulama to thrive in a modern, digital society. (Davis & Autin, 2020) Based on these defined outcomes, Ma'had Aly designs its courses and learning activities. (Muqit, 2018) Observations in the classroom showed that courses focus not only on religious theory but also on practical applications such as issuing fatwas, leading congregations, and managing religious organizations 45. This practical focus is a direct result of ongoing conversations with key stakeholders, including external religious institutions, that help shape the curriculum. (Freeman, 2010)

Additionally, stakeholder involvement extends beyond alumni to include external religious organizations and governmental bodies, which help Ma'had Aly stay abreast of industry trends and the evolving needs of the religious workforce. Interviews with employers of Ma'had Aly graduates, Ust Syafii, revealed that they highly value the institution's emphasis on producing graduates who are able to tackle contemporary issues in fiqh and tafsir. As one alumnus explained Ust. Rovi, the curriculum's focus on real-world issues enables graduates to be effective in roles such as religious advisors, community leaders, and educators. As per the interview results, the following is stated:

"alumni deeply appreciate the institution's focus on preparing graduates to address modern challenges in Islamic law (fiqh) and exegesis (tafsir). One alumnus, Ust. Rovi, emphasized that the curriculum's emphasis on practical, real-world issues equips graduates with the skills necessary to perform effectively in key roles like religious advisors, community leaders, and educators. Essentially, this approach makes the

graduates well-prepared to meet the needs of the community by applying their knowledge to contemporary situations."

Incorporating diverse perspectives from a broad range of stakeholders ensures that the curriculum remains dynamic and adaptable. (Law, 2022) For instance, one interview with a kyai highlighted the importance of maintaining traditional texts like *kitab kuning*, while also integrating modern concerns such as gender, ethics, and digital media. Such discussions enrich the curriculum planning process, allowing Ma'had Aly to create a curriculum that is both rooted in tradition and responsive to contemporary challenges. (Al-Haroki, 2019) Moreover, stakeholder involvement in the curriculum planning process fosters a sense of community and shared responsibility. Teachers, alumni, and administrators collaborate regularly to review course content, teaching methods, and assessment strategies.

4. Implementation of the *Kitab Kuning*-Based Curriculum and Outcome-Based Education (OBE)

Ma'had Aly's curriculum combines classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*) with Outcome-Based Education (OBE), aiming to produce graduates with both traditional religious knowledge and modern professional skills. (Husein et al., 2022) This dual approach aligns with the theory of OBE, which emphasizes defining desired learning outcomes before determining teaching methods and assessments. (Reynolds & Kearns, 2017) Interviews with Ma'had Aly lecturer, Ust Yazid, confirmed that the institution has adopted OBE to ensure that each course contributes meaningfully to achieving the competencies expected from graduates, particularly in the fields of fiqh, tafsir, and hadith. As per the interview results, the following is stated:

"Ma'had aly institution has implemented Outcome-Based Education (OBE) as a framework to ensure that every course is designed to help students develop the specific skills and knowledge required to meet the expected competencies for graduates. This approach particularly focuses on disciplines like fiqh (Islamic law), tafsir (Quranic exegesis), and hadith (Prophetic sayings), ensuring that students are equipped with the necessary expertise to succeed in these areas upon graduation."

The implementation of *kitab kuning* as a central part of the curriculum serves as a bridge between traditional Islamic scholarship and contemporary religious practice. (Aena, 2021) In line with contextual learning theory, which emphasizes that education should be connected to real-world applications, Ma'had Aly teaches students to apply the classical texts to current social and religious issues. (Muqit, 2018) For example, in tafsir and hadith classes, students learn not only to interpret classical texts but also to contextualize them in today's society, where new ethical and social dilemmas are constantly emerging.

OBE allows for measurable assessments based on student outcomes, ensuring that learners achieve specific competencies by the end of the course. (Fiandi, 2023) During classroom observations, it was noted that Ma'had Aly uses a combination of theoretical examinations, practical projects, and peer assessments to evaluate students' understanding and application of religious knowledge. (Husein et al., 2022) This approach enables instructors to track student progress more effectively and provides students with clear expectations of what they need to achieve.

Furthermore, the integration of OBE in Ma'had Aly's curriculum helps align the educational process with the needs of the workforce. By focusing on outcome-based assessments, Ma'had Aly ensures that students are not only knowledgeable in traditional Islamic scholarship but also equipped with the skills needed to excel in a variety of religious roles. One administrator mentioned that the curriculum emphasizes practical experiences, such as internships in religious organizations, which help students transition from the academic environment to the professional world.

Conclusion

This study reveals that the formation of scholar cadres in the digital era requires a curriculum development approach that integrates both traditional Islamic knowledge, such as *kitab kuning*, and skills necessary for addressing contemporary challenges. In light of digital advancements, Ma'had Aly plays an essential role in producing scholars who are prepared to face the challenges of the modern world. By combining classical knowledge with modern pedagogical strategies, including Outcome-Based Education (OBE) and Constructive Alignment, Ma'had Aly ensures that its graduates possess both academic expertise and practical competencies to meet societal needs.

The active involvement of stakeholders kyai, academics, government bodies, and the broader community in all stages of curriculum development ensures that Ma'had Aly's educational offerings remain relevant and adaptable. Moreover, the integration of digital tools alongside traditional teaching methods strengthens the curriculum, enabling graduates to address the challenges of today's world effectively. Ultimately, Ma'had Aly graduates emerge as scholars ready to serve in various fields, particularly in addressing modern religious and social issues.

Acknowledgment (Optional)

Titles for acknowledgments and references are not numbered. This part presents the acknowledgment when it is required. It should not be numbered.

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