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Innovation of the Yellow Book Reading Extracurricular Program in Improving the Quality of Islamic Religious Education

Fathur Rohman

Universitas Islam Raden Rahmat Malang, Indonesia

Email : fathurrohman.btr@gmail.com

Abstract

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at the elementary school level is often faced with the challenge of a dichotomy between mastery of textual theory and the application of in-depth religious understanding. This phenomenon encourages the need for pedagogical breakthroughs outside of formal school hours. This study aims to analyze in-depth the innovation of the extracurricular book reading program in improving the quality of PAI at MI Azharul Ulum 2 Brongkal, Pagelaran, Malang. Using a qualitative method with a case study design, data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. Data analysis applied a model of condensation, presentation, and verification of data, accompanied by checking validity through triangulation. The results indicate that this innovation is realized through three pillars: simplification of the tiered yellow book-based curriculum, the implementation of a hybrid method (a combination of sorogan and interactive games), and the habituation of morning literacy. This program is able to significantly improve the ability to read bare Arabic symbols while strengthening students' critical religious reasoning. The main finding is that the integration of Islamic boarding school traditions into the formal madrasah system through structured extracurricular activities can be a prototype for strengthening the quality of basic Islamic education.

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INTRODUCTION

Religious education has a fundamental role in constructing the moral foundation and spiritual intelligence of society in the midst of the increasingly massive currents of globalization. This is because religious education does not simply transfer the accumulation of theoretical knowledge, but acts as an ethical compass that directs individual behavior in social life. Various recent research reports on the sociology of education indicate that inequality of religious understanding from an early age tends to correlate with increasing identity crises and personality erosion in the younger generation. Therefore, strengthening the quality of religious learning in basic education units is a non-negotiable urgency in order to fortify the civilization of society from the degradation of civilized human values.

Although the urgency of religious education is widely recognized, the reality on the ground shows that there are serious problems related to low religious literacy, especially at the basic education level. Most madrassas of ibtidaiyah tend to be stuck in a superficial cognitive orientation that prioritizes instant memorization in order to pursue the completeness of the formal curriculum (Muhammad & Hamidah, 2024). As a result, students often have difficulty understanding the essence of Islamic authoritative texts, such as the yellow book, which is actually the main source of reference in the Islamic scientific tradition (Ardiansyah, 2025). The failure to bridge the complexity of classical language with the level of cognition of elementary children seems to be the main contributing factor to the weakening of the quality of understanding of Fiqh and Akhlak in various regions (Chairuddin & Yusroni, 2021).

Responding to the pedagogical impasse, an interesting phenomenon emerged at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) Azharul Ulum 2 which is located in Brongkal Village, Pagelaran District, Malang Regency. In the midst of the onslaught of digitalization and the shift in students' interest in gadgets, this institution actually

initiated a bold breakthrough through the introduction of an extracurricular program to read the yellow book. Historically, learning the bare book was generally only taught at the middle level or within the walls of a pure Islamic boarding school. However, MI Azharul Ulum 2 took an anomalous step by formulating these activities for elementary level students as an instrument to accelerate religious understanding. This phenomenon sparked academic curiosity related to how an elementary school converts high-weight material into activities that children enjoy.

A number of previous studies have sought to highlight the dynamics of learning the yellow book in the Islamic education landscape in Indonesia. Studies by (Halomoan et al. 2024) and (Hadi Rohmani, 2022) focused on the effectiveness of traditional methods such as *sorogan* and *bandongan* in boosting book reading proficiency in top-level Islamic boarding schools. On the other hand, research developed by (Sardiman et al., 2021) and (Khory, 2024) reviews more of the role of extracurricular activity management in general in fostering students' interest in talent in public schools. The position of this research is present between the two poles, namely testing the cross between the classical literacy method of pesantren and the extracurricular managerial framework at the formal madrasah ibtidaiyah level.

If examined further, the current literature still holds a crucial *research gap*. Previous studies have tended to treat the learning of the yellow book exclusively as the domain of advanced pesantren or only examine it from a philological perspective (Suriani et al., 2025). It is very rare to find studies that specifically dissect how didactic engineering is carried out to simplify the morphology of classical Arabic for the mental capacity of children aged 7 to 12 years (Hasan & Anshory, 2024). This scientific gap is very important to be filled immediately in order to provide practical guidance for educators in other madrassas who want to replicate similar programs without sacrificing the psychological well-being of

students.

The novelty (*state of the art*) of this research lies in the conceptual offer regarding "Didactic Modification of the Yellow Book Based on Extracurricular". In contrast to the research (Abid et al. 2023) which looks at the tradition of madrasah literacy in a macro manner, this study highlights micro innovations in the form of deconstruction of the material of the books *Mabadi' al-Fiqh* and *Akhlaq Lil Baneen* into child-friendly modules. In addition, another aspect of novelty is shown through empirical proof that extracurriculars, which are usually positioned as complementary activities (Zainil et al., 2024), can change their function to become the backbone of strengthening the core curriculum of Islamic Religious Education if managed through leadership with a long-term vision (Fathih et al., 2021).

Based on this framework, the formulation of the main problem in this study is: What is the form of innovation, implementation process, and implications of the extracurricular program of reading the book on improving the quality of Islamic Religious Education at MI Azharul Ulum 2 Brongkal? The main argument put forward is that the mastery of yellow book literacy at the elementary level can be achieved optimally if packaged through an eclectic approach that combines pesantren disciplines with cutting-edge interactive learning techniques (Sulianto et al., 2026). The results of this research are expected to make a theoretical contribution to the enrichment of Islamic pedagogical science, as well as contribute practical input for madrasah policymakers in designing local flagship programs.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is designed using a qualitative approach with a case study type. The selection of this design is based on the consideration that the focus of the study is a unique, specific, and bound case entity that is bound by a specific spatial and temporal context, namely the innovation of extracurricular programs

in one formal educational institution (Rosdiarini, 2021). Through a case study approach, the researcher seeks to unravel the deep meaning behind empirical phenomena without manipulating variables. This design allows for a holistic tracking of the interaction between madrasah policies, asatidz creativity, and students' psychological responses, resulting in a thick description of the dynamics of religious learning transformation at the grassroots.

The location of the research was carried out at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) Azharul Ulum 2 which is located in Brongkal Village, Pagelaran District, Malang Regency, East Java. The determination of this site is based on *purposive sampling techniques* with three main reasons. First, MI Azharul Ulum 2 is listed as one of the madrassas in Pagelaran that has a yellow book reading program at the ibtidaiyah level in improving the understanding of religious science.

Data was collected through three main techniques: in-depth interviews with madrasah heads, extracurricular supervisory teachers, and student representatives; participatory observation of the course of book reading guidance; and tracing of curriculum documents (Anton et al., 2024). The flow of data analysis refers to the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña which includes three stages: data condensation (selecting and simplifying key information), presenting data (organizing findings into narrative texts), and drawing conclusions or verification. In order to ensure the degree of confidence of the findings, the researcher applied source triangulation and triangulation techniques, accompanied by member *checks* to reduce the researcher's subjectivity bias towards the interpretation of field data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Reconstruction of the Extracurricular Curriculum of Reading the Yellow Book

A crucial first step in innovating extracurricular programs at MI Azharul

Ulum 2 Brongkal is to fundamentally reconstruct the curriculum. Based on the findings of the document, the madrasah development team did not necessarily adopt the standard yellow book of adult Islamic boarding schools, but carried out a process of distilling the material. They compiled a kind of ladder curriculum that was adapted to the developmental phase of cognitive psychology of elementary level students. In the lower grades (phases A and B), the focus of the curriculum is directed to mastering daily vocabulary and the introduction of harakat through the book *of Al-Miftah*. Meanwhile, for the upper class (phase C), the curriculum begins to touch the reading of texts without harakat with references to the books *Aqidatul Awam* and *Mabadi' al-Fiqh*.

The action of leveling the curriculum seems to be a rational response to the didactic impasse that often occurs in madrassas in general. This is in line with the view of Ratnasari et al. (2025) who stated that religious curriculum in the modern era must have flexibility in order to be accessible to students with diverse cognitive backgrounds. By breaking down the dense book material into smaller sub-achievements, MI Azharul Ulum 2 succeeded in reducing the level of academic anxiety of students. Students don't feel like they're learning something archaic and impossible to understand, but rather feel like they're going through a challenging but affordable level of the game for their reason.

In addition to the leveling aspect, this extracurricular curriculum is also inserted with the content of local wisdom values and daily contextualization. In the syllabus developed, every time the teacher finishes dissecting a chapter in the book of Fiqh, the students are invited to immediately practice it. For example, when discussing the chapter of purification, students are invited to practice how to purify correctly according to what is learned. This approach seems to reinforce what Badriyyah (2023) calls a hidden curriculum that bridges classical texts with ecological realities, so that absorbed knowledge does not stop at paper alone.

Viewed from the perspective of Islamic education management, the

success of this curriculum reconstruction is greatly influenced by the collective involvement of all madrasah stakeholders. The Head of MI Azharul Ulum 2 did not act authoritarianly, but formed an ad-hoc committee consisting of senior teachers, alumni of partner Islamic boarding schools, and madrasah committees. This cross-element synergy indicates the maturity of the application of school-based management in developing academic quality (Asmarani et al., 2021). They periodically hold a forum for discussion to dissect the linguistic barriers experienced by students, then revise the draft modules directly, a noble practice that rarely lasts long in institutions at the basic madrasah level.

Another interesting phenomenon of this curriculum reconstruction is the smooth integration between extracurricular targets and competency standards for graduates of core PAI subjects. The material studied in the afternoon in the extracurricular is designed in such a way that it becomes enrichment for the subjects of the Qur'an, Hadith, Moral Faith, and Fiqh in the morning. These findings strengthen the thesis of Hanisah et al. (2024) that synchronization between curricular and extracurricular activities is able to save students' cognitive energy. Students who are active in extracurricular reading books are proven to dominate the achievement of academic grades in formal classes because they have mastered the basic rules of Arabic syntax first.

Critically, although the design of this curriculum looks very promising, the researcher notes that there is a vulnerability in the availability of standardized printed teaching materials. Until this research was carried out, the modules from the distillation were still duplicated independently in a simple sheet format. If the madrasah does not immediately codify and submit an ISBN for the module, the sustainability of this curriculum will be highly dependent on the collective memory of the asatidz concerned. Therefore, institutionalizing the local curriculum through the publication of official textbooks seems to be an urgent homework that must be executed in order for this didactic engineering to be enjoyed by a

wider audience of educators.

Implementation of Innovative and Interactive Learning Methods

At the implementation level, MI Azharul Ulum 2 completely overhauled the face of yellow book learning which has been perceived as rigid, monologue, and teacher-centered. Asatidz builders implement a hybrid model. This method combines *the classic sorogan technique* where students deposit individual readings to the teacher with a gamification or educational game approach. In practice, after the text reading session is over, asatidz divides students into small groups to hold a relay quiz to translate the position of the word. The atmosphere of the class that was created became very dynamic, accompanied by laughter, far from the haunted impression that is generally attached to the recitation of ancient books.

The application of this cheerful method has a strong theoretical justification in the study of children's learning psychology. Children of madrasah ibtidaiyah age are at a concrete operational stage that requires sensory stimulation and intense social interaction in absorbing abstract information (Hasan & Anshory, 2024). Through the insertion of elements of light competition and language games, it successfully stimulates the release of the hormone dopamine in the student's brain, which in turn locks in long-term memory retention. These field findings refute the long-held assumption that mastery of Arabic grammar can only be achieved through monotonous memorization of hours of rules.

In addition to gamification, the most striking method innovation at MI Azharul Ulum 2 is the use of color-based visual aids. To make it easier to identify sentence elements, teachers use different colored markers on the board: red for nouns, blue for verbs, and green for connecting particles. This visualization technique is very helpful for students in dissecting the text without having to get stuck in too convoluted grammatical definitions. This strategy confirms the findings of Ifliadi et al. (2024) who emphasize that visual donkey bridges are the

best catalyst for children in deciphering the complexity of foreign language texts that do not have vowel symbols.

What is no less important in maintaining the rhythm of learning is the application of the principle of pedagogical prudence in the form of a prohibition on physical punishment for students who make reading mistakes. If a child is confused in determining the final meaning of a word, asatidz is forbidden to yell, but rather use scaffolding techniques in the form of giving fishing instructions. Asatidz will invite the whole class to chant the relevant rules together until the student realizes his own mistake. This humanist approach seems to be successful in building a sense of psychological security, so that students do not feel afraid to try to read even if the text in front of them is completely bare.

In order to support the assimilation of these methods, the madrasah intelligently optimizes the role of peer tutors. Grade 6 students who have reached the advanced level are empowered as assistant coaches to accompany their classmates in self-reading practice sessions. This step not only eases the workload of the limited number of coaching teachers, but also trains the leadership spirit and moral responsibility of senior students from an early age (Agra, 2021). This collegial parenting style between students fosters very close social cohesion in the madrasah environment, where academic pride is not mastered alone but is distributed equally to all generations.

However, critical observation shows that the application of this interactive method requires a very high level of patience and physical stamina from the coaching teachers. Not all teachers at MI Azharul Ulum 2 have a background in comedic skills or leading attractive classroom games. Sometimes, classes can potentially become so noisy that the substance of the material is a little neglected if the teacher fails to control the transition from a play-back session to a serious reading session. Therefore, specific classroom management training for extracurricular supervisory teachers seems to need to be intensified so that the

balance between entertainment elements and academic rigor is maintained precisely.

Transformation of Students' Religious Literacy Skills

The real impact of a series of curriculum and method innovations is clearly reflected in the surge in the quality of religious literacy of students at MI Azharul Ulum 2. Based on the results of the madrasah's internal tests, more than 75% of students who participated in this extracurricular program for at least two semesters were able to demonstrate the ability to read the book *of Mabadi' al-Fiqh* fluently along with its contextual translation. This ability is clearly far above the average competence of madrasah ibtidaiyah students in general, who are usually still limping in reciting Arabic texts (Muhammad & Hamidah, 2024). This transformation proves that the limits of a child's cognition are often underestimated by a standard curriculum that is too pessimistic.

In order to strengthen the validity of these quality improvement claims, a summary of empirical evidence from the field is organized through a comparison matrix between the informant's statements and the actual achievements in the following table:

Table 1. The Ideal Influence of Book Reading Extracurricular Programs on the Quality of PAI

Informant Position	Interview Excerpts	Achievement Indicators
Head of Madrasah	*"Since this program has been running, students' ability to understand fiqh lessons has greatly increased. Children not only memorize the pillars of ablution, but can explain the evidence directly from the book during the munaqasyah exam."*	Improvement of the quality of institutions and mastery of authoritative evidence
Teacher Builder	*"In the past, children were exposed to Arabic text without harakat, and immediately pale.*	Language anxiety reduction & basic syntax skills

	Now they are even racing to find out where the mubtada' is and how it is."	
Grade 6 Students	*"Learning books here is exciting, like playing guessing. I was able to help teach my father at home the correct law of prostration sahwi."*	High interest in learning & impact of literacy on families

The data in Table 1 convincingly illustrate the paradigm shift from passive literacy to transformative literacy. Students no longer position themselves as passive consumers of religious dogma, but begin to grow into literacy agents who are able to verify daily worship practices through reading the original source. The phenomenon in which an elementary student is able to straighten out his parents' religious understanding at home indicates an extraordinary ripple effect from the school program to the family environment (Aditama, 2022). This confirms the opinion that investment in literacy in children is the most effective social engineering instrument for rural communities.

Furthermore, the ability to read the yellow book seems to have direct implications for strengthening the moral character and discipline of worship of students. Based on the results of observations, students who are active in the book reading community show a much higher level of awareness in establishing Dhuha prayers and congregational Dhuhr prayers without the need to be forced by the supervisory teacher. These findings contribute empirical evidence to the argument of Athiyah and Umar (2023) who believe that a deep understanding of religious literature is positively correlated with the internalization of spiritual values. When the child understands why an obligation is ordered through the text he reads himself, the obedience that arises is autonomous, not coercive.

Interestingly, the grammatical analysis skills trained through guidance on reading the yellow book turned out to boost students' performance in general subjects, especially Indonesian and Mathematics. Classroom teachers reported

that children who were used to deciphering the intricate structure of classical Arabic sentences had more logical reasoning and reading comprehension skills when faced with high-level story problems. This cross-correlation confirms the findings of Rahmah et al. (2025) regarding the transferability of analytical thinking skills from ancient language learning into modern scientific problem-solving, a dual advantage that is rarely realized by the general public.

However, behind the glittering success, the editor highlights the potential for the emergence of academic elitism within the madrasah if it is not mitigated wisely. There is a slight tendency where the group of students who are proficient in reading books gets a much greater attention stage in madrasah ceremonial events than students who excel in non-academic fields. If this inequality of recognition is left unchecked, it risks triggering social jealousy and lowering the confidence of students who are slow to learn. Therefore, madrassas seem to need to design a more inclusive reward system so that all types of students' intelligence are accommodated proportionately and with dignity.

Supporting Factors, Constraints, and Program Sustainability Strategy

The running of extracurricular innovations at MI Azharul Ulum 2 Brongkal is inseparable from the determination of various supporting factors that are harmoniously intertwined. The most important supporting factor is the strong vision of transformational leadership from the head of the madrasah. Madrasah heads dare to take a policy of allocating school operational funds legally to provide proper incentives for asatidz coaches, as well as provide adequate guidance support facilities. This visionary leadership is in line with the findings of Fathih et al. (2021) who concluded that the progress of madrasah flagship programs always depends upstream on the capacity of leaders in moving the bureaucratic wagon and convincing parents of students about the guarantee of their children's future.

The next supporting factor is the high social capital built between the madrasah and Islamic boarding schools around the Pagelaran District area. The

existence of salaf pesantren within a radius of several kilometers from the madrasah supplies young teachers who have authoritative scientific sanad of the yellow book as well as a spirit of high devotion. In addition, the full support of the madrasah committee, the majority of whom have a background in Nahdliyin culture, makes this program socially accepted without turmoil of rejection (Hakkurahmy, 2023). This cultural factor provides a kind of moral legitimacy that strengthens the position of MI Azharul Ulum 2 as a beacon of tradition-based basic education in his village.

On the other hand, the implementation of this program is not without obstacles. The most classic obstacle identified in the field is the narrow availability of the duration of mentorship time. Because of its status as an extracurricular activity, the available time allocation is only around 90 minutes per meeting, twice a week, which is carried out at critical hours when the physical condition of students is already experiencing formal post-school fatigue. This condition often forces asatidz to compress the material in a hurry. In fact, the mastery of classical languages requires a slow and persistent process of incubation and repetition so that linguistic rules can settle permanently in the student's subconscious memory.

The next obstacle concerns the inequality of the intake of home learning assistance. Most of the students of MI Azharul Ulum 2 come from farmer families and freelance day laborers who have limited time and capacity in accompanying children to repeat lessons at night. As a result, students' learning progress becomes very varied; students whose parents recognize Arabic writing are quick to jump in, while students from lay families often experience stagnation at the level of basic rule recognition. This cultural gap confirms Zainil et al.'s (2024) analysis of the limited reach of school interventions if they are not supported by the family literacy ecosystem.

In order to overcome threats to the sustainability of the program, MI Azharul Ulum 2 formulated two sustainability strategies that are quite tactical.

First, they initiated the "Weekend Book Clinic" program as a free remedial class for students who are left behind. Second, madrasas have begun to pioneer the digitization of learning modules through the creation of short animated tutorial videos that are shared through the student's guardian communication group, so that students can re-listen to the teacher's explanation through their parents' phones at home.

Reflectively, the long-term sustainability of this innovative program seems to be largely determined by the extent to which the madrasah is able to maintain financial resilience and institutional pride. If dependence on government subsidies is too dominant, this program has the potential to falter at any time if there is a change in budget allocation policy from the center. Therefore, the establishment of a kind of madrasah business unit or the philanthropy-based endowment of education in the village community in the form of productive waqf seems to need to be seriously considered by the madrasah committee in order to ensure the independence of the honorarium of asatidz pembina in the future.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that learning the yellow book can be effectively introduced to madrasah ibtidaiyah students through methods that are in accordance with children's development. MI Azharul Ulum 2 Brongkal proves that the success of the program does not only depend on discipline and memorization, but also on the creativity of teachers in presenting interesting learning. Through an approach that is appropriate for the child's age, learning the yellow book is packaged in a fun way without eliminating the values of the pesantren. As a result, students are more motivated to learn and are able to develop their ability to read books gradually. These findings confirm the importance of pedagogical innovation in improving students' religious literacy.

The main contribution of this research lies in strengthening the study of the

management of religious literacy-based extracurricular programs in madrasas. The results of the study show that extracurriculars not only function as supporting activities, but can also be a strategic means to strengthen core learning outcomes. Through good planning, directed implementation, and support from madrasah leadership, the book reading program is able to improve students' religious competence. These findings make a theoretical contribution to the development of Islamic pedagogy as well as a practical reference for other madrassas that want to integrate extracurricular activities with learning objectives more effectively.

This research has several limitations. As a case study on one madrasah in a rural area, the results of the study cannot be generalized to all madrassas with different conditions. In addition, research has not measured the sustainability of students' reading ability in the long term. Therefore, further research needs to test the effectiveness of this model in various types of madrassas through a comparative or experimental approach.

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