

# The Relevance of Classical Islamic Education in the Modern Era: A Case Study of Kuttab Islamic Schools

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**Abstract:** Classical Islamic education has a long history in shaping Islamic civilisation, with a model that combines scientific and moral aspects. In the fast-paced and dynamic modern era, the relevance of this education is often questioned when facing the challenges of the times. This article explores the relevance of classical Islamic education in the modern era through the case study of Kuttab Al-Kahfi. This educational institution carries a traditional approach with the motto "Giving birth to a Divine and Noble Generation in Youth". Kuttab Al-Kahfi has succeeded in integrating classical Islamic values with the needs of modern education through a comprehensive curriculum, which includes learning the Qur'an and adab. This article highlights how Kuttab Al-Kahfi faces the challenges of globalisation and technology while maintaining the basic principles of Islamic education, as well as the impact of this educational method on the formation of the character and intellect of the younger generation. The study results show that an educational approach rooted in classical tradition remains relevant in forming a generation with noble character and high competence in the modern era.


## 1 INTRODUCTION

Islam is a comprehensive religion that explains various aspects of human life, including education. Education plays a very important role in the discourse of Islamic studies and is one of the factors that will help develop civil society. Therefore, the discussion of Islamic education remains relevant to understanding the use and application of existing relevant Islamic education models in this modern era. These models play a significant role in preserving the classical model of Islamic education while meeting the contemporary demands of Muslim societies.

One classical Islamic education model remains relevant even in the contemporary era, with various variants and models developed related to Islamic education. The educational model in question is the Kuttab model of Islamic education. Kuttab, as a model of Islamic education, has a very long history and can even be associated with the history of Islamic education in the early days of Islam's development. Researchers attribute it to the early Islamic education

period where the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) began teaching Islam with various fundamental knowledge such as reading and writing the Quran. Researchers also associate this Kuttab with pre-Islamic history, as indicated by the meaning of the kuttab as an educational institution to teach reading and writing among members of the Arab community in the pre-Islamic (Bialfino, Masyitoh, and Suryadi 2023; Ifendi 2021).

The history of Islamic education in the classical or early era dates back to the early Islamic period, specifically from the 7th to the 9th centuries AD. During this time, Islamic education primarily focused on learning the Qur'an and Hadith. As Muslim society evolved, between the 9th and 13th centuries, Islamic education expanded to include Islamic sciences and integrated subjects such as logic, mathematics, and astronomy. This enriched the educational process by fostering critical thinking and analytical skills (Amri 2023; Ismail 2024; Nurdiyanto et al. 2024)

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In Indonesia, the development of Islamic education is closely linked to the spread of Islamic da'wah. One of the country's most prominent Islamic educational institutions is the Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*), which adapts classical education methods to local contexts. In the contemporary era, Islamic education in Indonesia has also seen a rise in classical Islamic educational institutions that meet modern needs. One notable example is the Kuttab model of Islamic education. Unlike many modern Islamic educational institutions, Kuttab emphasizes teaching the Qur'an, mainly through memorization and character development among students. This approach highlights the importance of Kuttab in contemporary Indonesia, where it continues to promote and familiarize students with Islamic education and culture despite strong globalization influences (Nurdiyanto et al. 2024; Sofanudin et al. 2022).

Kuttab serves as a response to the increasing demand for literacy and Islamic values in education for Muslims. Initially, Kuttab developed in Medina during the time of the Prophet Muhammad Shallallahu Alaihi Wasallam, when Muslim children learned to read and write knowledge related to Islam (Bialfino, Masyitoh, and Suryadi 2023; Ifendi 2021). The Kuttab curriculum focuses more on studying the Quran, Arabic, and basic calculations. This Kuttab education model then developed with the development of the Islamic communities in Medina, Mecca and various other regions where Islam is Islam (Bialfino, Masyitoh, and Suryadi 2023; Hasanah and Suseno 2020; Ifendi 2021).

Indonesia, one of the countries with the largest Muslim population in the world, became one of the places where this Kuttab education model developed. However, the development of the fixed model in Indonesia occurred for quite a long time compared to the early Islamic region. Some indications illustrate that this educational model, such as Kuttab, had been practised before the Indonesian independence period. However, the development of Kuttab in Indonesia has only been seen significantly and formally since 2012, when it was reintroduced and recognised as a model of Islamic education in Indonesia. The establishment of the Kuttab institution is also intended to find solutions to the shortcomings in the current education system by integrating Islamic education with basic literacy and numeracy skills. This was marked by the establishment of Kuttab Al-Fatih in Depok (Bialfino, Masyitoh, and Suryadi 2023; Hasanah and Suseno 2020).

In its subsequent development, the Kuttab educational institution has operated in Indonesia as a

non-formal educational institution. It is an alternative model of Islamic education that offers uniqueness and relevance in this contemporary era. In general, Kuttab education focuses on teaching the young generation of Islam about Islamic values and education taught together with basic academic skills. This is believed to be the knowledge, principles, and fundamentals that need to be mastered by the young generation of Islam in the golden age of their educational development. Furthermore, this Kuttab education model can be accepted more widely in Indonesia with indications that the development of Kuttab educational institutions can be seen in various regions in Indonesia in a relatively short period of time. This illustrates that there is a high level of interest from the Muslim community in Indonesia, especially parents who want their children to get Islamic religious education and also academic development as a provision for the young generation of Islam (Bialfino, Masyitoh, and Suryadi 2023).

One of the characteristics of this Kuttab learning model is that it focuses on students at a young age at the same level as elementary school. This educational model also combines traditional Islamic teaching methods with modern educational practices. This is undoubtedly one of the attractions owned by this Kuttab educational institution. This approach is believed to be successful in educating the younger generation with Islamic Knowledge and, very importantly, instilling moral values from a young age (Bialfino, Masyitoh, and Suryadi 2023; Hasanah and Suseno 2020). The development of the Kuttab model education system illustrates the significance and relevance of Islamic religious teachings, especially in education, which developed in the early days of Islam and is still relevant in this contemporary era, especially in Indonesia. Therefore, studying how the Kuttab education model is still relevant in the modern context is essential to understand and know.

## 2 METHODS

This study uses the library research method to examine the concept and implementation of the Kuttab education model in Indonesia in depth based on literature that has been published in various academic journals. This research was carried out by collecting and analysing various relevant secondary data sources, scientific articles, and information from school websites that can be accessed online. In general, the source of this research was chosen by using the keyword "Kuttab" or "kutab," a unique keyword that can help direct the literature to reliable

sources. Through this method, the research is expected to produce a clear and in-depth picture of the Kutab Islamic education model without going directly into the field so that it is conceptual and theoretical. Meanwhile, the analysis is carried out using descriptive-analytical techniques, namely, by systematically describing and explaining the content of the literature sources. This approach aims to comprehensively understand Indonesia's classical Ilam education model known as Kuttab (Connaway and Powell 2017; Mahanum 2021).

### 3 FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data found online through journal analysis and also information related to Kuttab as an educational institution with classical characteristics as well as offering a curriculum that studies Islam for the younger generation, which now is still relevant and even in demand by the Muslim community in various regions in Indonesia, several points can be found that can explain the relevance of this Kuttab Islamic education model in the contemporary era. The kuttab developed in Indonesia is characterised by various unique and distinctive characteristics and describes the merger between the principles of classical Islamic education developed in the early days of Islam and modern pedagogy practices and techniques.

#### 3.1 Faith-Based Curriculum

Kuttab is an Islamic educational institution emphasising the classical Islamic curriculum model, which has a very long history that developed in the early days of Islam. Therefore, the curriculum description also strongly indicates the existence of significant subjects in Islam that will be the basis for the younger generation in their early education. The curriculum developed in the Kuttab classical Islamic educational institution, known as the faith-based curriculum, is one of the characteristics of the Kuttab educational institution. Clearly, the curriculum taught in the Kuttab educational institution focuses on faith and learning the Quran. In the aspect of faith, students are taught to understand the aqidah and also belief systems in the teachings of Islam as the essential capital of the life of the Muslim community. Then, from the aspect of learning the Quran, this Kuttab educational institution emphasises the aspects of memorisation and understanding of the Quran. In the view of the management of Kuttab educational institutions, these two aspects, namely aqidah and

also the Qur'an, are very central educational frameworks, and students need this to develop an understanding of Islam both from theological and practical aspects that have strong roots in the sources of Islamic religious teachings (Chapman et al. 2014; Sofanudin et al. 2022; Yayasan Al-Fatihah 2024).

The curriculum implemented in Kuttab is not only about Islam but also *murofaqot*, an additional lesson whose portion is not larger than the two main curricula, namely Faith and the Quran. In practice, *murofaqot* can consist of mathematics and natural sciences. This is intended so that students in Kuttab can continue their education at a higher level. Interestingly, Kuttab then adopted natural science materials with an Islamic understanding related to the interpretation of the Qur'an and the meaning of the hadith of the Prophet PBUH.

#### 3.2 Student Level Management

Classroom management in the Kuttab model education system is carried out very simply, where, in general, the student management structure is divided into two primary levels, namely the initial kuttab and the Kuttab Qanuni. The initial kuttab level is designed to provide students with basic knowledge of Islamic teachings, which can gradually increase in complexity over time. In comparison, the Kuttab Qanuni level is designed as a follow-up to the initial Kuttab level where at this Kuttab Qanuni level, Islamic education instruction has become more advanced, and there are also materials based on a broader range of disciplines (Sofanudin et al. 2022; Yayasan Al-Fatihah 2024).

The learning atmosphere and classrooms in the modern Islamic educational institution Kuttab also support the relevance of this institution in the modern era. Learning space is one of the essential factors that the managers of educational institutions realise. This educational institution usually consists of small classrooms that allow for good attention from teachers to students. Small spaces also allow for good communication between students, fellow students, and educators. With this good communication, the Kuttab educational institution seeks to determine that the role of teachers becomes more essential or prioritised than luxurious and extensive physical infrastructure. In the Kuttab, interpersonal connections and mentorship, the education system is considered more important and more substantial than building facilities. It is also reminiscent of the learning practices of the early Islamic period, which were proven to produce successful individuals becoming Kaffah Muslim

individuals and future leaders (Hasanah and Suseno 2020; Sofanudin et al. 2022).

### 3.3 Adab Before Science Teaching Methods

Islam has three main foundations, namely Sharia and morals. The three components support each other in forming a Kaffah Muslim person. This has been described by the Prophet PBUH from the beginning of learning Islam. Through this Kuttab model, Islamic educational institutions, These three things get a significant portion of attention. In the aspect of Aqidah, Material is the primary material given to students who are the younger generation of Islam as a provision for practising Islamic religious teachings, which are given structurally from an early age. Then, the practice of cleanliness as a form of implementation of Sharia is also carried out in daily learning activities at Kuttab educational institutions. Then, what is no less critical is related to morals or manners. Manners are a component that cannot be separated from the reason why classical educational institutions such as Kuttab are still relevant in the modern era. There is even a priority over academic ability. Manners that can be understood as good behaviour and habits are prioritised over intelligence in the aspect of knowledge. In the practice of learning at Kuttab educational institutions, students are given ethical learning and respect for others in accordance with the teachings and values of Islam (Sofanudin et al. 2022).

On one occasion, the researcher found a significant change in the manners of the students who had joined Kuttab. This can be seen as a positive change from those who previously tended to be students with emotional problems and became good students after joining Kuttab.

### 3.4 Parental Involvement

Islam places parents as the first educators for children and the younger generation. This is also still seen as one of the characteristics of the Kuttab Islamic educational institution. So, parental involvement is highly appreciated and assessed. Even educational programs are specifically designed to adopt parents' participation in becoming a holistic learning system that supports understanding and practising Islamic religious teachings for the young generation of Muslims (Hasanah and Suseno 2020; Sofanudin et al. 2022). This can be one of the critical breakthroughs and a significant feature and also explains why

educational institutions that implement the classic model, such as Kuttab, are still relevant and get attention from the Muslim community. Especially considering the debt that focuses on students at the elementary school level, the involvement of parents in the learning process and a system that recognises and adopts the role of parents in supporting the education system will certainly be something that is very much liked by parents who are very concerned about religious education and also basic skills and ethics for their children (Avvisati, Besbas, and Guyon 2010).

### 3.5 Learning Environment: Activities and Practices

The Kuttab model Islamic educational institution also integrates diverse practices in the learning process, such as implementing fadhu (compulsory) prayers and reciting the Quran. This further shows that there is an integration of various elements such as faith-based curriculum, student level management, emphasis on learning and practice of manners rather than academic achievement alone, as well as parental involvement Can create a comprehensive learning environment so that this institution can provide a learning experience that can grow intellectual and spiritual potential (Sofanudin et al. 2022; Yayasan Al-Fatihah 2024).

Considering the above, Kuttab pointed out that this educational institution is based on classical Islamic traditions that combine knowledge and character development in the learning process. The learning environment at Kuttab school is designed to form an Islamic character by integrating academic activities and daily worship practices. This is one of the unique educational practice in the contemporary era.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

Although the Kuttab Islamic educational institution is inspired by the classical Islamic education model applied during the time of the Prophet PBUH, it turns out that in practice in Indonesia in this modern era, it recognises progress in the existing educational aspects and the demand of the society regarding educating the children to have abilities in the fields of science and mathematics. Based on various studies, it has studied in detail the growth and development of Kuttab educational institutions in Indonesia. This institution has shown the integration between traditional Islamic values, such as the importance of



aspects of faith, learning the Quran, and the practice of adab, with the needs and developments in contemporary society. This can be seen, for example, from the adaptation of the role of parents in the learning process, which creates a holistic system to adapt and answer modern challenges such as the formation of good character amid the challenges of globalisation and the digital era.

Among the advantages of this Kuttab educational institution is the use of a faith-based curriculum that characterises the practice of classical Islamic education during the time of the Prophet PBUH, student management that uses small classes that allow communication and also learning that is more focused on students, the application of the principle of adab is more important than academic knowledge, the involvement of parents as a symbol of the system in the learning process, As well as the existence of a learning environment that allows the practice of Islamic teachings and values that form a kaffah Islamic generation.

One of the things that should be appreciated from this Kuttab educational institution is that the integration carried out only sometimes sacrifices the essence of Islamic spiritual values. This educational model provides an essential alternative for Muslim families who still want fundamental provisions in the form of Islamic religious values and manners for their children while not needing to be too far behind the benefits of learning that uses and applies contemporary educational models. Therefore, this educational model is acceptable and still relevant in this modern era. Modern education can inspire the development of Islamic education in various contexts to develop the young generation who practice Islam in Kaffah.

There is a possibility that in the future, Kuttab will continue to develop, for example, by adopting modern needs such as mastery of English but still with adoption following Islamic religious teachings based on the Qur'an and hadith. This can then make Kuttab still accepted and in demand by modern society in Indonesia.

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