

The History and Dynamics of Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor: From Tradition to A Modern Islamic Educational Institution in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study critically and historically examines the development of Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor (PMDG), from its traditional roots in the eighteenth-century Tegalsari pesantren to its transformation into an influential modern Islamic educational institution in Indonesia. This inquiry is important because Gontor is frequently cited as a model of pesantren modernization, yet studies of its institutional dynamics, encompassing its history, educational philosophy, curriculum, and waqf-based governance, remain fragmented and have rarely been synthesized within a single analytical framework. This study employs a qualitative library-research design using a historical, descriptive, and analytical approach. It draws on primary sources in the form of institutional documents and secondary sources including accredited journal articles and reference books on Gontor. The findings show that Gontor's transformation from a traditional pesantren into a modern Islamic educational institution rests on four main pillars: first, the integration of religious and general sciences through the Kulliyatul Mu'allimin al-Islamiyah (KMI) curriculum; second, the internalization of the Panca Jiwa philosophy (sincerity, simplicity, self-reliance, Islamic brotherhood, and freedom) as a value foundation that preserves the pesantren's character amid modernization; third, innovation in institutional governance through the endowment (waqf) of the pesantren to the Muslim community in 1958, which safeguards institutional continuity across generations; and fourth, an emphasis on leadership development and an alumni network (IKPM) that has extended Gontor's influence throughout Indonesia and abroad. This study argues that the modernization initiated by Gontor's three founders did not constitute a break with tradition; rather, it represented a creative reformulation of pesantren tradition to meet contemporary challenges without losing its Islamic identity. The study recommends further comparative research to examine the replicability of the Gontor model in other pesantren across Indonesia.

Keywords: Pondok Modern Gontor, Pesantren Modernization, Islamic Education, Educational Waqf.

I. Introduction

Islamic education in Indonesia has deep and diverse historical roots, one of which is represented by the pesantren, an institution that has developed since the pre-colonial period. Pesantren were initially known as traditional educational institutions focused on the teaching of Islamic sciences through the sorogan and bandongan systems, with the kiai serving as the central figure of scholarly authority (Dhofier, 2011). Over time,



however, changes in society, the challenges of modernity, and demands for the integration of religious and general knowledge prompted a number of pesantren to undertake institutional transformation in order to remain relevant without losing their Islamic identity. One of the most prominent examples of this transformation is Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor (PMDG) in Ponorogo, East Java. Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor occupies a distinctive position in the history of Islamic education in Indonesia. On the one hand, it inherited a pesantren tradition rooted in Pesantren Tegalsari, founded by Kiai Ageng Hasan Besari in the eighteenth century (Wikipedia, 2026). On the other hand, since its establishment on September 20, 1926, by three brothers known collectively as the Trimurti, KH. Ahmad Sahal, KH. Zainuddin Fananie, and KH. Imam Zarkasyi, Gontor has introduced a series of reforms that distinguish it from many other pesantren (Alhamuddin, 2007). These reforms encompass the curriculum, foreign-language teaching methods, institutional management, and a distinctive educational philosophy.

This phenomenon warrants scholarly attention because Gontor is frequently used as a reference and even a role model by hundreds of alumni-founded pesantren throughout Indonesia that have established similar institutions by adapting Gontor's educational model (Ismail, 2011). This indicates that Gontor is not merely a local educational institution but also a nationally influential movement for the reform of Islamic education. Nevertheless, academic studies that comprehensively explain how this transformation unfolded, from its historical roots and philosophical foundations to its curriculum, institutional governance, and contemporary dynamics and challenges, remain scattered across separate bodies of literature and have rarely been synthesized within a comprehensive and argumentative analytical framework. Several previous studies have examined particular aspects of Gontor. Alhamuddin (2007) explored the Trimurti's conception of modern Islamic education and emphasized the Panca Jiwa values as the philosophical foundation of education at Gontor. Hardoyo (2009) identified a hidden curriculum that shapes students' discipline and character beyond the formal classroom curriculum. Ismail (2011) examined Gontor's modern pesantren education system as a case study in the integration of tradition and modernity. Research on quality management in Islamic education at Gontor has also discussed the professional management of the institution (At-Ta'dib, 2015). Romdoni and Malihah (2020) focused on character formation through the Panca Jiwa philosophy, while Yasin (2019) linked the implementation of wasathiyatul Islam in Gontor's curriculum to the thought of KH. Imam Zarkasyi. More recently, Hajar, Maskuri, and Anwar (2025) explored Gontor's transformational leadership cadre-development model as part of multicultural educational innovation.

Nevertheless, most of these studies are partial, focusing on specific aspects such as curriculum, leadership, or value philosophy without presenting a coherent historical narrative and an argumentative analysis of how these dimensions interact to form an integrated process of institutional transformation. This is where the novelty of the present study lies: it develops a comprehensive synthesis of PMDG's historical dynamics through a narrative-argumentative approach that connects history, philosophy, curriculum, waqf governance, and contemporary challenges within a coherent analytical framework. Based on the foregoing discussion, this study addresses the following research questions. First, what are the historical roots of Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, and how did it develop from the Tegalsari pesantren tradition into a modern Islamic educational institution? Second, what are the main pillars underlying Gontor's institutional transformation from a traditional pesantren into a modern educational institution? Third, what dynamics and challenges does Gontor face in maintaining its relevance amid contemporary change?

Accordingly, this study aims to describe chronologically the establishment and development of Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor; analyze the principal pillars underlying its transformation from a traditional institution into a modern Islamic educational institution; and identify the contemporary dynamics and challenges it faces in maintaining its existence and relevance. The study is expected to contribute academically by offering an analytical framework for examining the modernization of other pesantren in Indonesia, and practically by providing insights for managers of Islamic educational institutions seeking to formulate modernization strategies that remain rooted in tradition.

II. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Pesantren and the Modernization of Islamic Education

Pesantren represents one of the oldest and most influential forms of Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia. Historically, pesantren developed as community-based institutions centered on the authority of the *kiai*, residential education, religious instruction, and the study of classical Islamic texts. Traditional learning commonly relied on methods such as *sorogan* and *bandongan*, through which students studied religious knowledge under the direct guidance of a *kiai* (Dhofier, 2011). This educational model contributed significantly to the preservation and transmission of Islamic knowledge, religious values, and social traditions across generations. However, social, political, and intellectual changes gradually created new demands for Islamic educational institutions. The expansion of modern schooling, developments in science and technology, and the increasing need for broader academic and professional competencies encouraged many pesantren to reconsider their educational systems. Modernization therefore emerged as an important discourse in Indonesian Islamic education. Rather than simply replacing traditional practices with modern educational structures, modernization in the pesantren context generally involves efforts to integrate religious values with new curricula, teaching methods, institutional management, and forms of educational organization.

Azra (2002) views the relationship between Islamic educational traditions and modernization as a continuing process of adaptation. Islamic educational institutions are required to respond to contemporary developments while simultaneously maintaining the religious foundations that constitute their institutional identity. Consequently, modernization cannot be understood merely as the adoption of modern administrative or curricular practices. It also involves negotiation between continuity and change. Heriyudanta (2022) similarly explains that the modernization of Islamic education in Indonesia is characterized by efforts to combine traditional Islamic scholarship with contemporary educational demands. Such modernization may be reflected in curriculum integration, institutional professionalization, foreign-language instruction, and the adoption of more systematic educational management. Within this broader development, Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor occupies an important position because its transformation demonstrates how a pesantren can adopt elements of modern education without completely abandoning its traditional Islamic identity.

2.2. The Gontor Model of Modern Islamic Education

Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor has frequently been discussed as an important model of pesantren modernization in Indonesia. Its educational transformation is closely associated with the ideas and initiatives of its three founders, KH. Ahmad Sahal, KH. Zainuddin Fananie, and KH. Imam Zarkasyi, collectively known as the *Trimurti*. Alhamuddin (2007) examined the modern Islamic educational thought developed by the Trimurti and emphasized that Gontor's educational system was constructed through a synthesis of Islamic traditions and modern educational practices. The modernization introduced by Gontor was not limited to classroom instruction. It also involved the organization of student life, leadership education, language development, discipline, and institutional management. The integration of these elements created an educational environment in which formal learning and character formation operated simultaneously.

Ismail (2011), through a study of the educational system of Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, further demonstrates that Gontor developed a distinctive model by combining traditional pesantren characteristics with a structured modern educational system. This integration is particularly visible in its boarding-school environment, curriculum organization, student activities, and emphasis on Arabic and English. The pesantren therefore functions not merely as a place for transferring religious knowledge but as a comprehensive educational environment designed to develop intellectual, linguistic, social, moral, and leadership competencies. The Gontor model illustrates that modernization does not necessarily imply the

elimination of pesantren traditions. Instead, institutional modernization can occur through the reinterpretation and reorganization of traditional values. The persistence of religious discipline, residential education, close interaction between teachers and students, and strong communal values demonstrates continuity with classical pesantren traditions, while structured curricula, foreign-language instruction, organizational management, and systematic evaluation represent elements of educational modernization.

2.3. Kulliyatul Mu'allimin al-Islamiyah and Curriculum Integration

One of the most important components of Gontor's educational modernization is the establishment of Kulliyatul Mu'allimin al-Islamiyah (KMI). KMI represents the institutional expression of Gontor's attempt to integrate Islamic sciences and general knowledge within a unified educational structure. Unlike traditional pesantren education, which historically concentrated primarily on the study of classical Islamic texts, the KMI system combines Islamic studies with general subjects and gives particular importance to Arabic and English. Alhamuddin (2007) identifies curriculum integration as an essential feature of Gontor's educational reform. Through this approach, religious and general sciences are not positioned as opposing categories but as complementary forms of knowledge required for the development of Muslim individuals capable of participating in modern society.

The emphasis on Arabic and English is another distinctive characteristic of the Gontor educational system. Arabic functions not merely as a subject of study but as an instrument for accessing Islamic intellectual traditions, while English provides students with broader access to international knowledge and communication. The direct method of language teaching reinforces active language acquisition through everyday practice rather than relying exclusively on grammatical instruction. Another important dimension of Gontor's educational system is what Hardoyo (2009) conceptualizes as the *hidden curriculum*. This curriculum operates beyond formal classroom instruction and includes discipline, organizational responsibilities, leadership assignments, dormitory life, extracurricular activities, and patterns of everyday interaction. These practices contribute to the formation of students' character, independence, responsibility, and leadership abilities. The interaction between the formal KMI curriculum and the hidden curriculum therefore represents an important dimension of Gontor's educational philosophy. Academic knowledge is complemented by experiential learning within the boarding-school environment. This combination allows education to operate continuously across classroom, dormitory, organizational, and social settings.

2.4. Panca Jiwa as the Philosophical Foundation of Education

Institutional and curricular modernization at Gontor is inseparable from its philosophical foundation known as *Panca Jiwa*. The concept consists of five fundamental values: sincerity, simplicity, self-reliance, Islamic brotherhood, and freedom. These values serve as normative principles governing educational activities and relationships within the pesantren. Alhamuddin (2007) highlights *Panca Jiwa* as a central element of the educational philosophy developed by the Trimurti. Rather than treating education merely as the transmission of knowledge, Gontor emphasizes the formation of attitudes, character, and moral orientation. In this framework, educational success is determined not only by academic achievement but also by the internalization of values that guide students in social and religious life.

Romdoni and Malihah (2020) further demonstrate the significance of *Panca Jiwa* in character education. The five values provide a framework for shaping students' personal and social development. Sincerity encourages individuals to perform their responsibilities without excessive material orientation. Simplicity promotes proportionality and resilience. Self-reliance develops independence and responsibility. Islamic brotherhood strengthens social solidarity, while freedom encourages students to develop independent thinking and determine their future within the boundaries of Islamic principles. The philosophical significance of *Panca Jiwa* becomes particularly important when examined in relation to educational modernization. Modernization frequently raises concerns that educational institutions may

become excessively oriented toward academic achievement, economic competition, or institutional expansion. In the Gontor context, *Panca Jiwa* functions as a value system that maintains the religious and moral orientation of institutional development. Accordingly, the relationship between KMI and *Panca Jiwa* can be understood as a relationship between structure and values. KMI provides the curricular and organizational structure of modern education, while *Panca Jiwa* provides the philosophical foundation that determines its direction. The coexistence of these two dimensions enables Gontor to adopt modern educational practices while maintaining continuity with pesantren traditions.

2.5. Waqf-Based Institutional Governance and Sustainability

Another important dimension of Gontor's modernization concerns institutional governance. Traditional pesantren leadership has often been associated with charismatic authority centered on a *kiai* and, in many cases, leadership succession based on family relationships. Such a system can provide strong personal leadership but may also create institutional vulnerability when leadership regeneration is unsuccessful. Gontor introduced an important institutional innovation through the endowment of the pesantren to the Muslim community in 1958. Through this process, institutional ownership was separated from the private ownership of the founders' family and transferred to a waqf-based institutional structure. The establishment of the Badan Wakaf created a formal mechanism through which institutional continuity could be maintained beyond biological succession.

The study on Islamic education quality management at Gontor published in *At-Ta'dib* (2015) indicates that professional institutional governance is an important factor in maintaining the quality and sustainability of the pesantren. Gontor's organizational structure enables different institutional functions, including education, student development, economic activities, infrastructure, and social services, to be managed through specialized units. The waqf system therefore represents more than an economic or legal arrangement. It constitutes an institutional strategy for ensuring organizational sustainability. By transforming the pesantren from family property into an institution belonging to the Muslim community, Gontor developed a governance model that reduced dependence on hereditary leadership. This governance innovation is particularly significant in understanding Gontor's long-term institutional development. Curriculum modernization alone would not guarantee sustainability without an organizational mechanism capable of preserving institutional principles across generations. The waqf structure provides this mechanism by institutionalizing leadership succession, organizational responsibility, and accountability.

2.6. Leadership Formation and Alumni Networks

Leadership education constitutes another major component of the Gontor educational model. The boarding-school environment provides students with opportunities to participate in organizational activities and assume various responsibilities related to dormitory management, student organizations, discipline, and extracurricular programs. The concept of leadership formation is closely related to Gontor's orientation toward producing cadres capable of contributing to society. Leadership is therefore developed through practice rather than classroom theory alone. Students are expected to experience responsibility, decision-making, cooperation, and organizational discipline as part of their educational process. More recent research by Hajar, Maskuri, and Anwar (2025) discusses transformational leadership and cadre formation at Gontor in relation to multicultural Islamic education. Their study indicates that leadership development constitutes an integral component of Gontor's broader educational innovation. Through systematic cadre formation, educational values can be transmitted across generations while students are prepared to assume leadership roles in various social contexts.

The influence of this cadre system extends beyond the pesantren through the Ikatan Keluarga Pondok Modern (IKPM), which connects alumni across regions and generations. Alumni networks provide not only social connections but also channels through which Gontor's educational philosophy and institutional

model are disseminated. The establishment of pesantren inspired by or affiliated with Gontor further demonstrates the broader influence of this network. Educational values, curriculum practices, language programs, organizational structures, and *Panca Jiwa* have been adapted by various Islamic educational institutions. Therefore, the influence of Gontor should not be measured only by the development of its central institution and branches, but also by the diffusion of its educational model through alumni and affiliated pesantren.

2.7. Contemporary Challenges of the Gontor Educational Model

Although previous studies generally emphasize Gontor's contributions to Islamic educational modernization, the sustainability of its model also depends on its capacity to respond to contemporary challenges. Institutional expansion, technological change, the digitalization of education, quality assurance, student protection, and changing social expectations require continuous institutional adaptation. One of the challenges concerns curriculum relevance in the digital era. Heriyudanta (2022) emphasizes that Islamic education must continue adapting to developments in modern knowledge and technology. Gontor's historical emphasis on language competence and integrated knowledge remains relevant, but contemporary educational institutions are increasingly expected to incorporate digital literacy and technological competencies.

Another challenge concerns maintaining educational quality across expanding institutions and networks. As an educational model becomes larger and increasingly replicated, maintaining consistent standards of instruction, student development, leadership formation, and institutional values becomes more complex. Expansion therefore requires effective quality-control mechanisms and adequate human resources. The pesantren boarding environment also requires continuous evaluation of student supervision and disciplinary practices. While discipline and senior-student leadership constitute important aspects of Gontor's hidden curriculum, their implementation requires institutional oversight to ensure that character and leadership education remain consistent with educational and ethical principles. Furthermore, contemporary Indonesian society increasingly emphasizes religious moderation, multiculturalism, and constructive interaction across social differences. Research by Hajar, Maskuri, and Anwar (2025) illustrates the relevance of multicultural education and transformational leadership within the Gontor context. This indicates that the pesantren's capacity to maintain its Islamic identity while responding to changing social conditions constitutes an important dimension of its continuing modernization.

III. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using library research. A qualitative approach was selected because the study seeks to understand in depth the historical processes and meanings underlying institutional transformation, which cannot be reduced to quantitative data alone. Library research is appropriate because the objects of analysis are historical events and institutional dynamics documented in archives, institutional records, journal articles, and reference books rather than field data requiring direct observation. The study applies a historical, descriptive, and analytical approach. The historical approach is used to reconstruct the chronology of events from the Tegalsari pesantren period to the contemporary development of PMDG, while the descriptive-analytical approach is used to interpret the historical evidence within an argumentative framework concerning the main pillars of institutional transformation.

The data sources are divided into two categories. Primary sources consist of official institutional documents from Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, including information published on the official gontor.ac.id website regarding the institution's history and *Panca Jiwa* philosophy. Secondary sources comprise nationally accredited scholarly journal articles addressing various aspects of Gontor, including *At-Ta'dib: Journal of Pesantren Education*, *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam Al-Thariqah*, and *Southeast Asian Journal of Islamic Education Management*, as well as reference books on the history of pesantren and Islamic

education in Indonesia by Zamakhsyari Dhofier and Azyumardi Azra. Data were collected through document analysis, involving the identification, collection, and organization of information from written sources relevant to the research topic. The collected data were then classified into five major themes: (1) historical roots and establishment, (2) curriculum and institutional system, (3) educational philosophy and values, (4) waqf governance, and (5) contemporary dynamics.

The data were analyzed using content analysis through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing commonly applied in qualitative research. Data reduction involved selecting relevant and credible information from multiple sources; data display involved organizing the evidence into chronological and thematic narratives; and conclusions were drawn by interpreting the evidence in relation to the research questions. To enhance credibility, source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from official institutional documents with findings reported in peer-reviewed scholarly journal articles.

IV. Result and Discussion

4.1. Historical Roots: From Pesantren Tegalsari to Old Gontor

The historical roots of Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor are inseparable from Pesantren Tegalsari, founded in 1742 by Kiai Ageng Muhammad Besari, also known as Kiai Ageng Hasan Besari, in Tegalsari Village, approximately 10 kilometers south of central Ponorogo (Wikipedia, 2026; Iskandar & Zai, n.d.). At its height, the pesantren was regarded as one of Java's respected centers of Islamic scholarship, attracting thousands of students from across the Indonesian archipelago. Tegalsari's leadership continued for six generations, and the pesantren produced numerous kiai, ulama, and community figures who contributed to the nation's history. Tegalsari's historical legitimacy is also reflected in traditional accounts of its relationship with the Kartasura Kingdom. It is narrated that during the Chinese rebellion of 1742, Sunan Paku Buwono II temporarily fled and sought refuge in Tegalsari under the guidance of Kiai Hasan Besari before eventually regaining his throne (Kompas.com, 2022). In return, Tegalsari was granted *perdikan* status, exempting its land from taxation to the kingdom. This privilege strengthened the pesantren's autonomy and authority in the eyes of both the community and political rulers.

By the mid-nineteenth century, when Tegalsari was under the leadership of Kiai Hasan Khalifah, the pesantren began to decline. Yet this period also marked the emergence of Gontor's earliest foundations. A student named Sulaiman Djamaluddin, a descendant of the Kasepuhan Cirebon royal family, married Kiai Hasan Khalifah's youngest daughter and was entrusted with establishing a new pesantren while continuing the renewal of Tegalsari. Supported by approximately 40 students from Tegalsari, Kiai Sulaiman Djamaluddin and his wife founded what later became known as Pondok Gontor Lama, located around 3 kilometers east of Tegalsari (Wikipedia, 2026). This event marked an important transition, as the center of learning that had been rooted in Tegalsari was continued in Gontor. Pondok Gontor Lama was subsequently led by the next generation, Kiai Archam Anom Besari, under whom the pesantren developed rapidly and attracted students from various parts of Java, including the Pasundan region (Kompas.com, 2022). After Kiai Archam's death, leadership passed to Kiai Santoso Anom Besari as the third generation, during whose tenure the pesantren again experienced significant decline. When Kiai Santoso Anom Besari died without a male sibling to continue the leadership, his wife and their seven children resolved to revive the former prominence of the pesantren inherited from their ancestors.

These cycles of growth and decline are important as a structural background to the founders' awareness of the need to reform the pesantren's institutional system. The traditional pesantren leadership model, which depended heavily on the personal authority of an individual kiai, proved vulnerable when leadership succession did not proceed smoothly. This argument is central to understanding why the Trimurti later chose to endow Gontor to the Muslim community rather than pass it down hereditarily within the family, a decision discussed further in the section on institutional governance.

4.2. The Rise of the Trimurti and the Establishment of Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor (1926)

Three of Kiai Santoso Anom Besari's seven children subsequently pursued education at various traditional pesantren and modern educational institutions in Java and Sumatra to deepen their Islamic knowledge while broadening their understanding of nationalism and general sciences. They were KH. Ahmad Sahal (1901-1977), KH. Zainuddin Fananie (1905-1967), and KH. Imam Zarkasyi (1910-1985), who later became widely known as the Trimurti founders of Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor (Alhamuddin, 2007). Their intellectual journeys through both salaf pesantren and modern schools developing in the Dutch East Indies shaped a new vision of how Islamic education should be managed to respond to the challenges of the time. The culmination of this intellectual development occurred on September 20, 1926, corresponding to 12 Rabiul Awwal 1345 AH, during the commemoration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday. On that day, the three brothers formally declared the establishment of Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor (Liputan6.com, 2022; Wikipedia, 2026). Choosing the Prophet's birthday as the institution's founding date carried symbolic significance: it affirmed that the spirit of educational reform would remain grounded in the example of the Prophet Muhammad as its primary source of inspiration while expressing the aspiration to produce future educators and leaders of the Muslim community.

A key argument is that PMDG was not established from scratch; rather, it represented the revitalization and reformulation of foundations inherited from Pesantren Tegalsari and Pondok Gontor Lama. The Trimurti did not reject tradition. Instead, they sought to preserve and renew it by placing it within a more modern and sustainable institutional framework. This position differed fundamentally from some Islamic reform movements of the period that tended to be more confrontational toward pesantren traditions. Gontor chose a synthetic path: preserving the noble values of the pesantren tradition while adopting relevant elements of modernity, including a graded classroom system, foreign-language mastery, and more systematic organizational management. To strengthen its institutional educational foundation, Kuliyatul Mu'allimin al-Islamiyah (KMI) was established on December 19, 1936, in conjunction with the tenth anniversary of PMDG. KMI was designed as a six-year secondary education program integrating religious and general curricula (Liputan6.com, 2022). Its establishment marked an important milestone in the transition from an ungraded traditional pesantren teaching system to a structured classroom-based educational system with a standardized curriculum, grade levels, and systematic learning assessment.

4.3. Institutional Transformation: KMI and the Modern Education System

Kuliyatul Mu'allimin al-Islamiyah (KMI) lies at the core of Gontor's institutional innovation and can be regarded as the principal instrument through which the Trimurti operationalized their vision of modern Islamic education. Unlike salaf pesantren, which generally emphasize the study of classical Islamic texts through *bandongan* and *sorogan* methods, KMI combines two broad orientations of knowledge: Islamic studies (*dirasah Islamiyah*) and general sciences, with particular emphasis on mastery of Arabic and English as gateways to wider bodies of both religious and general knowledge (Alhamuddin, 2007). One of its most prominent methodological innovations is the use of *thariqah al-mubasyarah*, or the direct method, in Arabic-language instruction. This approach requires students to use the language actively in daily communication rather than merely studying grammatical rules passively (Tidarislam, 2023). It represented a significant departure from conventional Arabic teaching in traditional pesantren, which tended to emphasize deductive instruction in *nahwu* and *sharaf* without comparable attention to active communicative competence.

Beyond the formal classroom curriculum, Gontor also developed what Hardoyo (2009) describes as a hidden curriculum: a set of disciplinary routines, organizational activities, and boarding-school practices that implicitly shape students' character outside formal class hours. This hidden curriculum is reflected in the tightly regulated boarding environment, leadership responsibilities assigned to fifth-year senior students in managing dormitory units or *rayon* (Al-Liqo, 2025), participation in student organizations such as the Organisasi Pelajar Pondok Modern (OPPM), and scouting activities. This educational model reflects the

integration of the three centers of education: family, school, and community, within a single residential environment (Alhamuddin, 2007). Gontor's comparative strength relative to other modern pesantren may therefore lie in its balance between formal cognitive education in the classroom and informal non-cognitive education through the hidden curriculum of residential life. Some modern pesantren that adopt classroom-based systems risk losing the character-building dimension that historically constituted a major strength of traditional pesantren. Gontor bridges these two orientations by treating the dormitory not merely as a place of residence but as an educational arena for character formation and leadership development that is as important as classroom learning.

Gontor's institutional development did not stop at the secondary level. On November 17, 1963, Perguruan Tinggi Darussalam (PTD) was established. It was subsequently renamed Institut Pendidikan Darussalam (IPD) and then Institut Studi Islam Darussalam (ISID), before eventually developing into Universitas Darussalam (UNIDA), with seven faculties offering undergraduate, master's, and doctoral programs (Tempo.co, 2022; Liputan6.com, 2022). The establishment of higher education reinforces the progressive and continuous nature of Gontor's educational vision, which extends beyond secondary education and aims to produce Muslim intellectuals capable of contributing at advanced academic levels.

4.4. The Panca Jiwa Philosophy as the Foundation of Educational Values

If KMI represents the structural expression of Gontor's modernization, Panca Jiwa constitutes the philosophical foundation that prevents the modernization process from becoming detached from its spiritual roots and pesantren character. Panca Jiwa consists of five core values: sincerity, simplicity, self-reliance or independence, Islamic brotherhood (*ukhuwah Islamiyah*), and freedom (Gontor.ac.id, n.d.; Romdoni & Malihah, 2020). The spirit of sincerity means that all educational activities in the pesantren, whether carried out by kiai, ustaz, or students, are grounded in the intention of worship rather than material gain (Gontor.ac.id, n.d.). This value fosters a harmonious relationship between respected kiai and disciplined students while functioning as a social mechanism that maintains community solidarity despite limited resources. The spirit of simplicity, meanwhile, should not be understood as resignation or poverty, but as a proportionate attitude toward meeting life's needs, one that cultivates mental strength and resilience in the face of hardship.

The spirit of independence or self-reliance is embodied in the *zelfbedruiping* system, under which the pesantren seeks to meet its operational needs, from teaching to physical development, through the collective efforts of its kiai and students without dependence on external assistance (Panduanterbaik.id, 2025). Historically, this principle was reflected in the establishment of the 'Anshar Gontor' group during the institution's tenth year, which raised development funds across Java, while students themselves participated in making red bricks for classroom construction (Kompas.com, 2022). The spirit of *ukhuwah Islamiyah* emphasizes a strong sense of brotherhood among students from different regions and backgrounds, described by Gontor.ac.id (n.d.) as a bond that should not be divided by differences of any kind. This value provides important social capital for the development of Gontor's strong alumni network (IKPM) at both national and international levels. The spirit of freedom refers to freedom in thought, action, and determining one's future, as well as freedom from harmful external influences. Importantly, however, such freedom must remain within the boundaries of discipline and Islamic values so that it does not become directionless liberty (Gontor.ac.id, n.d.).

From the perspective of Islamic educational philosophy, Panca Jiwa may be analyzed through Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas's concept of *ta'dib*, which emphasizes moral formation as central to the optimization of all dimensions of education (Trilogi, 2025). Panca Jiwa can thus be understood as a counterbalance to the risks of secularization or academically materialistic orientations that often accompany educational modernization. In other words, while KMI responds to modernization at the level of curriculum structure, Panca Jiwa addresses modernization at the level of value substance, making Gontor's transformation a form of rooted modernization rather than modernization detached from tradition.

4.5. Waqf as a Governance Model and a Guarantee of Institutional Sustainability (1958)

One of the most strategic and transformative decisions in PMDG's history was the Trimurti's decision to dedicate all of the pesantren's assets and the institution itself as waqf for the Muslim community on October 12, 1958 (28 Rabi'ul Awwal 1378 AH) (Wikipedia, 2026; Liputan6.com, 2022). The waqf mandate was received by 15 representatives of Gontor alumni affiliated with the Ikatan Keluarga Pondok Modern (IKPM), who subsequently formed the PMDG Waqf Board as the highest body in the pesantren's governance structure, responsible for overall educational governance, including its implementation and development (Wikipedia, 2026). This decision represented an uncommon institutional breakthrough among Indonesian pesantren at the time, most of which followed hereditary patterns of ownership and leadership within a kiai's family line. Endowing Gontor to the Muslim community fundamentally transformed the institution's ownership status from the private property of the founders' family into the collective property of the Muslim community. Consequently, future leadership would no longer be determined by biological lineage but by capacity, competence, and legitimacy conferred through the Waqf Board.

From the perspective of institutional management, the waqf decision may be understood as a structural solution to the vulnerability discussed in the historical section: the tendency of traditional pesantren to decline when leadership depends excessively on a single charismatic individual and hereditary succession. Waqf status helps safeguard Gontor's continuity across generations because leadership no longer depends on whether a competent descendant of the kiai is available, but on an institutional mechanism formally established through the Waqf Board (Managemen Mutu Pendidikan Islam di Pesantren, At-Ta'dib, 2015). This argument is consistent with research on quality management in Islamic education at pesantren, which identifies the professionalization of institutional governance as one of the key factors enabling Gontor to maintain educational quality consistently for nearly a century (At-Ta'dib, 2015). Following the waqf, PMDG's institutional structure became increasingly complex and included autonomous bodies such as Pengasuhan Santri, Yayasan Pemeliharaan dan Perluasan Wakaf Pondok Modern (PPWPM), Bagian Pembangunan Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor (BPPMDG), Koperasi Pondok Pesantren (Kopontren) 'La Tansa,' and Balai Kesehatan Santri dan Masyarakat (BKSM) (Gontor.ac.id, n.d.). This institutional diversification demonstrates that Gontor transformed not only educationally but also organizationally, moving toward a modern management model resembling a professional nonprofit organization with clearly differentiated functions in education, economics, health, and physical development.

4.6. Expansion and Diversification: Branch Campuses, Gontor Putri, and UNIDA

The success of Gontor's educational and governance model encouraged significant institutional expansion. To accommodate increasing student numbers, particularly female students, Gontor established a Kulliyatul Mu'allimat al-Islamiyah (KMI) branch for women in Mantingan, Ngawi, pursuant to a decision of the PMDG Waqf Board on 7 Rabiul Awwal 1411 AH (Wikipedia, 2026). Expansion continued with the establishment of Pondok Modern Gontor Putri 3 in Karangbanyu Village, Widodaren District, Ngawi Regency, inaugurated on December 25, 2002, to accommodate the increasing number of female students at the first women's campus. In addition to expanding its women's campuses, a number of Gontor alumni established similar pesantren in various regions of Indonesia by adapting Gontor's curriculum and Panca Jiwa philosophy, as illustrated by studies of Gontor's educational values in affiliated institutions such as Pesantren Darussalam Rajapolah in Tasikmalaya (Santri: Journal of Pesantren and Fiqh Sosial, 2023). The replication of the Gontor model by its alumni is internally associated with the 'Pancajangka' movement, a long-term development strategy that extends beyond a single institution and has contributed to the formation of an educational network spanning multiple provinces.

At the higher-education level, Universitas Darussalam (UNIDA) Gontor has continued to develop by increasing the number of faculties and degree programs at various levels, including master's and doctoral programs (Liputan6.com, 2022). This expansion confirms Gontor's ambition not only to serve as a leading

secondary educational institution but also to become a center for advanced Islamic studies capable of producing graduates with strong academic competence. In terms of international cooperation, PMDG has developed strategic partnerships with a number of leading Islamic educational institutions worldwide, including Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Aligarh Muslim University in India, educational institutions in Chinguetti, Mauritania, and Santiniketan in India (Wikipedia, 2026). These partnerships facilitate opportunities for Gontor graduates to pursue further study abroad while strengthening Gontor's scholarly legitimacy within the international Muslim world.

The expansion suggests that the success of Gontor's modernization extends beyond a single institution and has developed into what may be described as an educational social movement, in which Gontor's values and educational model are independently replicated by alumni in different regions without requiring strict centralized control from the main campus. This pattern of diffusion indicates that Gontor's strength lies not only in its physical institutions but also in the power of its educational ideas and philosophy, which can be adapted to diverse local contexts.

4.7. Contemporary Dynamics and Challenges

Although Gontor is widely recognized as a successful model of pesantren modernization, its long history as an educational institution serving thousands of students from diverse backgrounds has also involved contemporary dynamics and challenges that require balanced and critical examination. One major issue that has emerged in recent years concerns student supervision and discipline in a densely populated residential environment. While residential discipline is one of Gontor's strengths in character education, inadequate supervision may create risks of violence among students, including abuses associated with seniority. A reported case of alleged violence that resulted in the death of a student in 2022, for example, drew significant public and national media attention (Tempo.co, 2022). This incident underscores the need for stronger supervision and evaluation mechanisms within a hidden-curriculum system that assigns leadership roles to senior students. Although such a system is philosophically intended to develop leadership character, it must be carefully governed to prevent misuse.

A second challenge concerns maintaining a balance between large-scale institutional expansion and consistent educational quality across branch campuses and affiliated pesantren. Gontor's expansion into multiple campuses and the replication of its model by alumni in various regions create the logical challenge of standardizing the quality of teaching and student supervision, particularly because the availability and capacity of human resources, including teachers and supervisors, are not necessarily equivalent across locations. A third challenge concerns curriculum relevance amid the demands of the digital era and the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The KMI curriculum, originally designed in the 1930s with an emphasis on mastery of Arabic and English through the direct method, requires continuing renewal and integration with digital competencies and technological literacy so that Gontor graduates remain competitive in both the labor market and contemporary academia (Heriyudanta, 2022).

A fourth challenge relates to religious moderation amid Indonesia's contemporary sociopolitical dynamics. As an institution that has historically emphasized its independence from specific political affiliations and mass organizations (Wikipedia, 2026), Gontor faces the challenge of maintaining this neutral and moderate position while remaining responsive to contemporary Muslim concerns, including religious moderation and multiculturalism, as discussed in studies of the internalization of moderation values at Gontor (Hajar, Maskuri, & Anwar, 2025). In responding to these challenges, the future sustainability of the Gontor model depends greatly on the institution's capacity for adaptive renewal without compromising the Panca Jiwa philosophy that constitutes its core identity. Modernization is not a one-time process completed in 1926 or 1958; rather, it is an ongoing process that requires continuous evaluation and adjustment in response to changing historical contexts.

4.8. Gontor's Contribution to National Islamic Education and Its Alumni Network

Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor's contribution to national Islamic education can be viewed from several dimensions. First, in terms of leadership development for the Muslim community, Gontor alumni have occupied strategic positions in government, Islamic organizations, and Indonesia's intellectual sphere, including an alumnus who served as Chair of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) from 2004 to 2009 (Wikipedia, 2026). This demonstrates that the Trimurti's vision of producing broadly educated Muslim leaders has yielded tangible results at the national level. Second, in terms of alumni networking, the Ikatan Keluarga Pondok Modern (IKPM) functions as a social infrastructure connecting Gontor alumni across generations and regions, both domestically and internationally. The network serves not only as a forum for maintaining social ties but also as a mechanism for alumni representation and oversight in the management of the PMDG Waqf Board, thereby supporting institutional accountability through direct alumni involvement (Wikipedia, 2026).

Third, in terms of its educational model, Gontor's KMI system and Panca Jiwa philosophy have been widely adopted and used as reference models by hundreds of other modern pesantren in Indonesia, as emphasized in studies of Islamic educational modernization (Heriyudanta, 2022; Ismail, 2011). Gontor has therefore become an important 'laboratory' for the development of discourse on pesantren modernization in Indonesia, where models developed at Gontor continue to be studied and adaptively replicated by other Islamic educational institutions. Fourth, in terms of representing Indonesian Islamic education internationally, Gontor's partnerships with leading Islamic educational institutions around the world have strengthened the image of Indonesian Islamic education as a model that is moderate and open to general knowledge while remaining firmly grounded in traditional Islamic values (Wikipedia, 2026; Hajar, Maskuri, & Anwar, 2025). Synthesizing these four dimensions, Gontor can be understood not merely as a single educational institution but as a central node within the broader ecosystem of Islamic education in Indonesia, linking classical pesantren traditions with the demands of modernity, connecting alumni across generations through a strong social network, and connecting Indonesian Islamic education with global Islamic educational discourse.

4.9. Analytical Synthesis: From Tradition to Rooted Modernity

Based on the findings presented above, this study argues that the transformation of Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor from the Tegalsari pesantren tradition into a modern Islamic educational institution was neither a linear nor a singular process. Rather, it was an ongoing dialectic between the preservation of tradition and the adoption of modernity. As discussed, four main pillars underpin the success of this transformation. First is curricular integration through KMI, which combines religious and general sciences while emphasizing foreign-language mastery. Second is the Panca Jiwa philosophy, which functions as a value anchor that prevents modernization from turning into secularization. Third is innovation in institutional governance through the endowment of the pesantren to the Muslim community, thereby safeguarding institutional sustainability across generations. Fourth is an orientation toward leadership development and alumni networking that has expanded Gontor's influence far beyond the boundaries of a single institution.

These four pillars are functionally interconnected. KMI would not be effective without the value foundation of Panca Jiwa to guide the direction and purpose of education; Panca Jiwa would not be sustainable without the institutional continuity guaranteed by waqf status; and waqf status would have limited significance without a loyal alumni network actively involved in institutional governance through the Waqf Board. Together, these four pillars form a coherent and mutually reinforcing system. The central argument of this study is that the modernization undertaken by Gontor's Trimurti founders was fundamentally a creative reformulation of tradition rather than a rejection of it. This perspective challenges the common tendency to rigidly dichotomize 'traditional pesantren' and 'modern pesantren' as if they existed in binary opposition. The Gontor case instead demonstrates that the most sustainable form of modernization is one built upon a strong traditional foundation rather than one that severs ties with its historical roots. This study refers to this process as 'rooted modernization': a model of institutional transformation that organically and

continuously integrates inherited traditions with the demands of the times rather than replacing them abruptly.

This finding has important theoretical implications for the sociology of Islamic education in Indonesia. The successful modernization of religious educational institutions is determined not only by the extent to which they adopt elements of modernity, such as general curricula, foreign languages, and professional management, but also by their capacity to maintain coherence between the modern elements they adopt and the traditional values that constitute their institutional identity.

V. Conclusion

This study concludes that Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor is the outcome of a long process of transformation rooted in the eighteenth-century tradition of Pesantren Tegalsari and Pondok Gontor Lama, before being revitalized by the Trimurti, KH. Ahmad Sahal, KH. Zainuddin Fananie, and KH. Imam Zarkasyi, as Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor in 1926. This institutional transformation was supported by four mutually integrated pillars: curricular integration through Kuliyatul Mu'allimin al-Islamiyah (KMI), which combines religious and general sciences; the Panca Jiwa philosophy as a value foundation that preserves the pesantren's character; governance innovation through the endowment of the pesantren to the Muslim community in 1958, which safeguards institutional sustainability across generations; and an emphasis on leadership development and the alumni network (IKPM), which has extended Gontor's influence throughout Indonesia and abroad.

This study emphasizes that Gontor's modernization is 'rooted modernization,' namely a process of institutional renewal firmly grounded in pesantren traditions rather than a form of modernization detached from its historical and spiritual roots. This model has enabled the institution to sustain itself for nearly a century and has inspired hundreds of affiliated pesantren in different regions of Indonesia. Nevertheless, the study also identifies several contemporary challenges facing Gontor, including supervision of discipline in the residential environment, consistency of educational quality amid large-scale institutional expansion, curriculum relevance in the digital era, and the demands of religious moderation amid contemporary sociopolitical dynamics. These challenges confirm that Gontor's modernization is not a completed process but an ongoing one requiring continuous evaluation and renewal. This study is limited by its library-research design, which relies on secondary sources and official institutional documents without primary data from in-depth interviews with stakeholders within Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor. Future research should therefore undertake field studies to verify and enrich the findings presented here and conduct comparative studies to examine the extent to which Gontor's transformation model can be effectively replicated in other pesantren operating within different sociocultural contexts in Indonesia

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