Challenges and Pedagogical Strategies in Arabic Pegon Learning for Modern Pesantren Alumni at Islamic Universities

[1]Alfina Habibatur Rahmah, [2]Ahmad Maghfurin, [3]Naifah
[4]Nasikhin, [5]Ahmad Mutohar

[1,2,3,4&5]Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo Semarang, Indonesia
[1]alfinahabibaturr@gmail.com, [2]ahmad_maghfurin@walisongo.ac.id,
[3]naifah@walisongo.ac.id, [4]nasikhin@walisongo.ac.id, [5]ahmad.muthohar@walisongo.ac.id

Abstract*. This study analyzes the challenges faced by alumni of modern pesantren in understanding classical Islamic texts (Kitab Kuning) through Arab Pegon learning at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah, UIN Walisongo. Utilizing a qualitative case study design, data was collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis, with validation achieved through source and method triangulation. The results indicate that Arab Pegon is systematically taught through the reading and explanation of Kitab Kuning, guided sessions with ustadz, and weekly muhadasah classes to enhance communication skills. However, alumni encounter several obstacles, such as unfamiliarity with Pegon script, which is not commonly taught in modern pesantren, difficulties in understanding its structural differences compared to formal Arabic grammar, and low motivation due to perceived irrelevance to their academic objectives. Additionally, traditional methods such as bandongan and sorogan pose challenges for students accustomed to modern educational systems. To comprehend these dynamics, this study employs an integrative pedagogical approach combining traditional and modern methods alongside sociolinguistic perspectives. To address these challenges, the strategies for teaching Arab Pegon include a gradual introduction to Pegon script, reading-writing practices with the guidance of teachers, and vocabulary memorization. This study contributes to the pedagogical integration of traditional and modern education methods while proposing a model for Arab Pegon instruction that is responsive to the diverse educational backgrounds of students.*
Keywords. *Arabic Pegon; Kitab Kuning; Modern Pesantren*

Abstrak. Penelitian ini menganalisis tantangan yang dihadapi oleh alumni pesantren modern dalam memahami teks-teks Islam klasik (kitab kuning) melalui pembelajaran Arab Pegon di Ma'had Al-Jami'ah, UIN Walisongo. Dengan menggunakan desain studi kasus-kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis dokumen, serta divalidasi melalui triangulasi sumber dan metode. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Arab Pegon diajarkan secara sistematis melalui pembacaan dan penjelasan kitab kuning, sesi bimbingan bersama ustadz, dan kelas *muhadasah* mingguan untuk meningkatkan keterampilan komunikasi. Namun, alumni menghadapi beberapa hambatan, seperti ketidakbiasaan dengan huruf Pegon yang tidak umum diajarkan di pesantren modern; kesulitan memahami perbedaan strukturalnya dibandingkan dengan tata bahasa Arab formal; serta motivasi belajar yang rendah karena dianggap tidak relevan dengan tujuan akademik mereka. Selain itu, metode tradisional seperti *bandongan* dan *sorogan* menjadi tantangan bagi mahasiswa yang terbiasa dengan sistem pembelajaran modern. Guna memahami dinamika ini, penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan pedagogis integratif antara tradisional dan modern serta perspektif sosiolinguistik. Untuk mengatasi tantangan tersebut, strategi pembelajaran Arab Pegon

meliputi pengenalan aksara pegon secara bertahap, latihan membaca-menulis dengan bimbingan pengajar, dan hafalan kosakata. Studi ini memberikan berkontribusi terhadap integrasi pedagogis metode pendidikan tradisional dan modern, serta menawarkan model pengajaran Arab Pegon yang responsif terhadap keragaman latar belakang pendidikan mahasiswa.

Kata kunci. Arab Pegon; Kitab Kuning; Pesantren Modern

A. INTRODUCTION.

Modern pesantren alumni often struggle to understand *kitab kuning* due to limited exposure to Arab Pegon, the traditional script used in classical Islamic studies. According to research, out of 36,600 pesantren in Indonesia, traditional pesantren dominate with 8,905 institutions (63.30%), while modern pesantren account for only 878 (6.24%), and combination pesantren represent 4,284 (30.45%) (Nafi' et al., 2024). Modern pesantren tend to prioritize formal education employing contemporary methodologies that emphasize Standard Arabic (*fusha*) and other foreign languages. In contrast, traditional pesantren uphold the tradition of learning through *Kitab Kuning,* utilizing methods such as *sorogan* and *bandongan*, with Arab Pegon serving as the primary medium for interpreting classical Islamic texts (Ikhsanuddin et al., n.d.2023).

This divergence has resulted in modern pesantren alumni encountering difficulties in reading and interpreting the *Kitab Kuning* when transitioning to traditional pesantren, primarily due to their unfamiliarity with the Arab Pegon script. thereby facilitating their comprehension of intricate Islamic concepts, For example, in the discussion of light impurities (*najis mukhaffafah*), which may be unfamiliar to beginner students, a Pegon text might explain: *"If a young boy under the age of four urinates, it is sufficient to rinse the affected area with water once."* This sentence simplifies and contextualizes classical Islamic legal rulings using language that is familiar to the students. Such adjustments help learners grasp the content of classical texts without requiring full mastery of standard Arabic (Giafaglione et al., 2023). However, students from modern pesantren, who have not been trained in this method, frequently experience linguistic discontinuity, particularly in interpreting texts that not only utilize Arabic but also the unique grammatical structures characteristic of Nusantara scholars, Pegon employs Arabic script to represent local vernaculars, with grammatical structures that align more closely with regional language patterns than with standard Arabic syntax (Sirad et al., 2023).

The Arabic Pegon method has long been used in salafiyah pesantren and is considered effective in enhancing students' comprehension of classical Islamic texts (Afifah & Sirojudin, 2022). Its effectiveness is largely attributed to the role of Nusantara scholars who localized Arabic texts for regional understanding. (Wahyuni & Ibrahim, 2017) emphasize the need for deeper investigation into the pedagogical function of this method. However, the benefits of Arabic Pegon are not fully experienced by graduates of modern pesantren. (Ridlowi, 2018) highlights the difficulties they face due to differences in educational background, while (Miftachul Ulum, 2018) note the challenges of integrating traditional methods into the digital era. These findings suggest the need for a renewed approach that bridges tradition and modernity in the teaching of *kitab kuning*. Alumni of modern Islamic boarding schools who are more accustomed to the Arabic *fusha*-based method face difficulties in understanding *kitab kuning* through the Arabic Pegon approach, which is the traditional method of salafiyah Islamic boarding schools. No prior research has specifically compared the effectiveness of

Arabic Pegon and *fusha*-based instruction among modern pesantren alumni within Islamic higher education contexts.

This study aims to examine the implementation of Arabic Pegon instruction in salafiyah pesantren, identify the challenges faced by graduates of modern pesantren in understanding *kitab kuning,* and analyze the pedagogical strategies used to address these challenges. The primary focus is to explore the implementation of Arabic language education using the Pegon method at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah of UIN Walisongo, identify the challenges that modern pesantren alumni experience while engaging with the *"kitab kuning"* through this method, and analyze the teaching strategies employed in this educational process. The significance of this study arises, from the reality that modern pesantren graduates are generally more accustomed to learning based on *Fusha* Arabic, whereas the Arabic Pegon method is predominantly utilized in traditional pesantren. This divergence often leads to obstacles in fully grasping the *"kitab kuning,"* particularly for those lacking a solid foundation in reading and writing Arabic Pegon. Ma'had Al-Jami'ah at UIN Walisongo was selected as the research site because its students come from diverse pesantren backgrounds, including both modern and salafiyah traditions. This diversity makes the institution a strategic setting to examine the inclusive implementation of the Arabic Pegon learning method and how emerging challenges are addressed within a higher education context (Siti Fatimah, 2022).

B. RESEARCH METHODS

This study aims to examine the challenges faced by graduates of modern pesantren in understanding *kitab kuning* through the learning of Arabic Pegon. A qualitative approach with a case study design was employed to allow for an in-depth exploration of individual experiences within a specific context. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with six female students of Ma'had Al-Jami'ah at UIN Walisongo Semarang, all of whom had previously studied in modern pesantren. Respondents were purposively selected based on the relevance of their experiences. All interviews were carried out between December 1, 2024, and January 30, 2025. The focus on female respondents was chosen because they represented the majority of those actively participating in Arabic Pegon instruction. In addition to their availability and engagement, this selection also considered the potential influence of gender on access, experiences, and perceptions of the learning method. Observation was conducted to directly observe participants' interaction with the Arabic Pegon method in the context of *kitab kuning* instruction, to assess how effectively the method was applied in an academic setting. Document analysis was used to review instructional materials, syllabi, and reference texts employed in the learning process. Ethical considerations were observed by obtaining informed consent from all participants, maintaining the confidentiality of their identities, and ensuring that their participation was voluntary. These findings align with existing literature highlighting the challenges of integrating traditional educational materials with modern pedagogical approaches (Ningrum & Suryani, 2022). Furthermore, the need for innovative management practices and curriculum reform is also emphasized as essential for modern pesantren to adapt effectively while maintaining their core values and teachings (Safitri et al., 2023).

This study employs data validation techniques that encompass member checking and triangulation to ensure the authenticity of the information obtained. Member checking was conducted by requesting the six female alumni of modern pesantren currently studying at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah" would suffice, UIN Walisongo Semarang to review the data collected. This process allows them to either confirm or correct the

interview outcomes gathered from December 1, 2024, to January 30, 2025. Furthermore, triangulation enhances the credibility of the research by comparing data derived from various sources, including interviews, observations, and document studies.

The data analysis employs the Miles and Huberman model, which consists of three principal steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. This model is strategically selected for its ability to facilitate a systematic analysis of the challenges faced by modern pesantren alumni in deciphering *"kitab kuning"* (traditional Islamic texts) through Arab Pegon learning. Data reduction involves filtering relevant information, isolating key findings, and grouping data according to emergent themes from interviews and observations. Data presentation occurs in descriptive narratives, tables, and direct quotations from participants to vividly illustrate the realities encountered. The final step, conclusion drawing, aims to identify patterns, meanings, and research implications, providing valuable insights into the academic and cultural challenges students face in comprehending traditional Islamic texts in higher Islamic education environments. Specifically, member checking, as described in qualitative research by (Thomas et al., 2016) and Birt et al. (Hagger et al., 2016) serves as a critical validation technique, while triangulation, discussed by Lloyd et al.(Rosch, 2024) helps reinforce reliability through diverse data sources. The analytical framework (Monegaglia et al., n.d.).

The study involved six female students aged 20 to 23. Three were actively engaged in student leadership roles *(pengurus),* while the other three were regular students *(santri).* All participants had prior experience in modern pesantren and were currently pursuing their studies at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah, UIN Walisongo.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
1. Research result
   a. Implementation of Arabic language learning using the Arabic *Pegon* method

This study found that the implementation of Arabic language learning using the Arabic Pegon method at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah UIN Walisongo was carried out through several main stages. The teacher reads and explains the yellow book using Arabic Pegon, while the students listen and note the meaning and explanation given. This method helps students understand the text more deeply with direct guidance from the teacher. There is a program to recite the yellow book using Arabic Pegon which is directly accompanied by a *ustadz* or *ustadzah.* This program provides an opportunity for students to deepen their understanding of the *kitab kuning* in a more intensive and interactive learning atmosphere. Third, Ma'had Al-Jami'ah also organizes a *muhadasah* program or language class which is held every week. This program is designed to improve students' Arabic language skills in everyday communication, so that they can be more fluent in understanding and applying Arabic in various contexts, including in reading and understanding the *kitab kuning.* The combination of these three methods shows that learning *kitab kuning* with the Arabic Pegon method at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah does not only focus on understanding the text, but also on strengthening Arabic language skills as a whole, so that students can be better prepared to face academic challenges at Islamic universities.

The instruction of *kitab kuning* using the Arab Pegon method at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah, UIN Walisongo is carried out in a systematic and structured manner. The process begins with the teacher reading and explaining the classical texts, followed by students writing down the meanings. An intensive *kitab* recitation

program serves as a core component, enabling deeper comprehension of Arabic grammar and the content of classical Islamic texts. Observations indicate that the classroom atmosphere is both conducive and interactive, with students actively participating in discussions and listening sessions. Teachers also encourage students who have grasped certain sections to explain them to their peers, fostering collaborative learning and enhancing student confidence in independently interpreting classical texts.

Writing practice in the Arab Pegon script is also an integral aspect of learning. Students are trained to transcribe and explain texts using the Pegon script in their local language, which enhances both writing skills and comprehension of meaning and sentence structure. These assignments assist students in composing *makna gandul* and clarifying syntactic patterns in classical texts. Written work is reviewed regularly to provide constructive feedback. This practice instills discipline and strengthens the connection between oral understanding and written expression, while also reinforcing the pesantren's unique literacy tradition.

A supportive learning environment at the Ma'had plays a crucial role in the success of this method. A disciplined academic atmosphere, the availability of facilities such as study spaces, and the involvement of senior student mentors all contribute to a positive and productive learning setting. Students feel comfortable and motivated, receiving both academic and social support. Informal activities like evening study groups and discussions further enrich the learning experience. This environment fosters student autonomy and builds a collaborative learning community.

Despite the effectiveness of the learning process, challenges remain particularly in the initial adaptation to the Arab Pegon script, especially among students unfamiliar with it. Difficulties arise from phonetic and orthographic differences compared to standard Arabic writing. To address these issues, teachers provide gradual introduction, regular practice, and supplemental learning materials to facilitate adaptation. Group-based learning and mentoring from senior students also support the adjustment process. Regular formative evaluations help monitor student progress and allow for instructional adjustments. With consistent guidance, practice, and strong learning motivation, these obstacles can be overcome progressively.

Figure A.1: *Kitab kuning Study Program Accompanied Directly by Ustadz*

Kitab kuning Study Program Accompanied Directly by Ustadz

b. Challenges for alumni of modern Islamic boarding schools in participating in Pegon Arabic learning

The results of this study found that alumni of modern Islamic boarding schools face several challenges in following Arabic Pegon learning in Islamic universities, especially in Ma'had Al-Jami'ah. The first challenge is the lack of familiarity with the Pegon script, because most modern Islamic boarding schools emphasize the use of standard Arabic in learning *kitab kuning* without using the Pegon script as a medium of understanding. As a result, many students have difficulty reading and writing Arabic Pegon texts, which have distinctive phonetic characteristics and require special skills in identifying their meaning. The second challenge is the difficulty in understanding the meaning of the text using the Arabic Pegon method, because this method is different from the approach they learned in modern Islamic boarding schools, such as the grammatical method or direct translation. The sentence structure and understanding in Arabic Pegon are often confusing, requiring extra effort in understanding the contents of the *kitab kuning.* The next challenge is the lack of motivation or interest in studying the yellow book using the Arabic Pegon method. Some students feel that this method is less relevant to their academic needs in college, especially for those who are more accustomed to modern technology-based, learning approaches or references to standard Arabic books. Finally, the adaptation period to the learning system at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah is also an obstacle. Unlike the learning system in modern Islamic boarding schools which are more structured and based on a formal curriculum, the yellow book learning method at Ma'had often uses traditional approaches such as *bandongan* and *sorogan,* so students need time to adapt to the new learning pattern.

In addition, the learning method implemented at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah presents its own set of challenges. The Arab Pegon method differs significantly from the grammatical approach commonly used in modern pesantren. Although students are often able to understand individual word meanings, they frequently struggle to construct coherent overall meanings due to differences in language structure. Adapting to this method requires time, intensive practice, and additional guidance from instructors to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the texts. This indicates that the Arab Pegon method remains a significant challenge for many students from modern pesantren backgrounds, both in terms of reading the script and grasping the linguistic structures used.

On December 14, 2024, observations were conducted in the Hall of Building 1B of Ma'had Al-Jami'ah UIN Walisongo on 2nd semester students who were attending a yellow book learning session using the Arabic Pegon method. The atmosphere in the hall seemed serious, but some students looked confused when understanding the yellow book given by the teacher. Some of them seemed to pause, frown, and occasionally flip through the pages of their books as if looking for other references. During the *ngaji* session, some students seemed to be taking notes hesitantly, while others repeatedly looked at the Pegon text in their books with calculating expressions. Some students were seen trying to match the meaning of the Pegon text with their understanding of standard Arabic, but often had difficulty constructing appropriate sentences. Some of them seemed to whisper to each other, discussing informally to understand the meaning of the text they were reading. When the teacher gave additional explanations, some students nodded their heads in understanding, while others still seemed

confused, indicating that their understanding of this method was not yet even. There are also those who continuously record every word spoken by the teacher, trying to capture the meaning in written form so that it is easier to understand in the future. This situation shows that some students are starting to adapt, there is still their understanding of the Arabic Pegon text. More guidance and intensive practice are needed so that they can understand the yellow book better.

The limited flexibility of teaching methods also presents a challenge in understanding *kitab kuning* through the Arab Pegon approach. Students feel that the learning process remains heavily reliant on conventional methods, without significant innovation in content delivery. There is a growing demand for more varied methods, such as group discussions or hands-on practice, in response to the need for a more dynamic learning environment. This highlights the importance of developing more adaptive teaching strategies that accommodate diverse student learning styles. In addition, intensive practice in reading and writing the Arab Pegon script has not yet become a primary focus of the learning process. Students who lack regular practice tend to struggle with mastering the script. Although instructors have encouraged students to increase their practice, the availability of dedicated and systematic programs for reading and writing Pegon remains limited.

Figure A.2: *Kitab kuning* Studied by Students

Kitab kuning Studied by Students

c. Pegon Arabic teaching strategies to overcome the challenges of modern Islamic boarding school alumni

This study found that the Pegon Arabic teaching strategy at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah was designed to address the challenges faced by modern Islamic boarding school alumni in understanding this method. One of the main strategies is to facilitate basic learning about Pegon Arabic, including the introduction of its script, punctuation, and phonetic system. In the initial session, students are introduced to the signs or *"pentolan"* in Pegon Arabic to help them recognize the writing structure and reading patterns that are different from standard Arabic script. This process is carried out gradually through reading and writing exercises so that students become familiar with the Pegon script before delving into more complex *kitab kuning* texts. In addition, to strengthen the understanding of Arabic which is the main basis for reading yellow books,

Ma'had Al-Jami'ah implements a weekly memorization program. This program aims to enrich students' vocabulary so that they can more easily understand the contents of the books studied using the Pegon Arabic method. Every week, students are given a list of vocabulary that must be memorized and their understanding is tested periodically, both orally and in writing. The last strategy implemented is a program of studying the Koran using the Pegon Arabic method which is carried out every day. This program aims to accustom students to reading books using the Pegon system directly under the guidance of teachers. Through this program, students can practice reading fluency, understand sentence structures, and get direct guidance in understanding the meaning of the text. With this combination of strategies, Pegon Arabic learning at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah is expected to be more effective in helping students adapt and understand us.

On December 14, 2024, observations were conducted in the Hall of Building 1B of Ma'had Al-Jami'ah UIN Walisongo on 2nd semester students who were taking Arabic Pegon lessons. The classroom atmosphere looked full of concentration, with students seemingly trying to understand the material being taught. At the beginning of the session, the teacher explained the basics of the Pegon script, including letter shapes, punctuation, and how to read correctly. Several students were seen taking notes on important points, while others repeatedly tried to write the Pegon script in their notebooks. The learning process took place in stages, starting with letter recognition exercises, then continuing with reading simple texts. Although some students seemed to have difficulty, they still tried to follow the teacher's instructions. Some of them were seen discussing with their deskmates to ensure better understanding. In addition, some also asked questions to clarify parts that were still confusing. During the reading practice session, some students still stuttered in pronouncing the Pegon text, but over time, they began to get used to it. Several students who understood more quickly were seen helping their friends who were still having difficulties. Overall, the teaching strategies implemented, including direct guidance and gradual practice, began to show positive results. Students who initially had difficulty reading Pegon script slowly began to show an increase in understanding. This observation confirms that the learning methods implemented at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah are quite effective in helping students overcome challenges in understanding Pegon Arabic.

To strengthen students' mastery of Arabic which serves as the fundamental basis for understanding *kitab kuning* Ma'had Al-Jami'ah implements a weekly vocabulary memorization program. The selected vocabulary is tailored to the content of the texts being studied, ensuring its relevance to the learning material. This strategy not only helps students memorize word meanings but also enables them to grasp the proper contextual usage. As a result, students develop a stronger linguistic foundation and feel more confident when reading Arab Pegon texts, as the vocabulary is already familiar to them.

In addition to vocabulary reinforcement, Ma'had Al-Jami'ah conducts daily *ngaji* (recitation) sessions using the Arab Pegon method. These sessions are designed to familiarize students with reading and interpreting *kitab kuning* written in Pegon script through continuous guided practice. Supervised by instructors, these sessions provide structured opportunities for students to gradually develop fluency. The consistent exposure enhances their reading

ability and also offers space for clarifying difficult sections through direct interaction with the teachers.

Overall, the Arab Pegon teaching strategies at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah consist of diverse and adaptive approaches aimed at addressing the needs of students, particularly those from modern pesantren backgrounds. These methods are regularly evaluated and refined to ensure their effectiveness. The varied instructional techniques allow students to engage with the learning process in ways that best suit their individual learning styles, contributing to the improvement of their ability to interpret classical texts.

In addition to the instructional strategies, a supportive learning environment plays a crucial role in enhancing students' comprehension of the Arab Pegon method. Ma'had Al-Jami'ah fosters an academic atmosphere that encourages active student participation, peer discussion, and collaborative learning. This positive setting has been shown to increase students' motivation and facilitate their adaptation to the Pegon method. A conducive learning environment not only helps in mastering complex materials but also boosts students' confidence in facing academic challenges related to *kitab kuning* studies.

Figure A.3: Book Concerning Signs Or *"Pentolan"* In Arabic Pegon
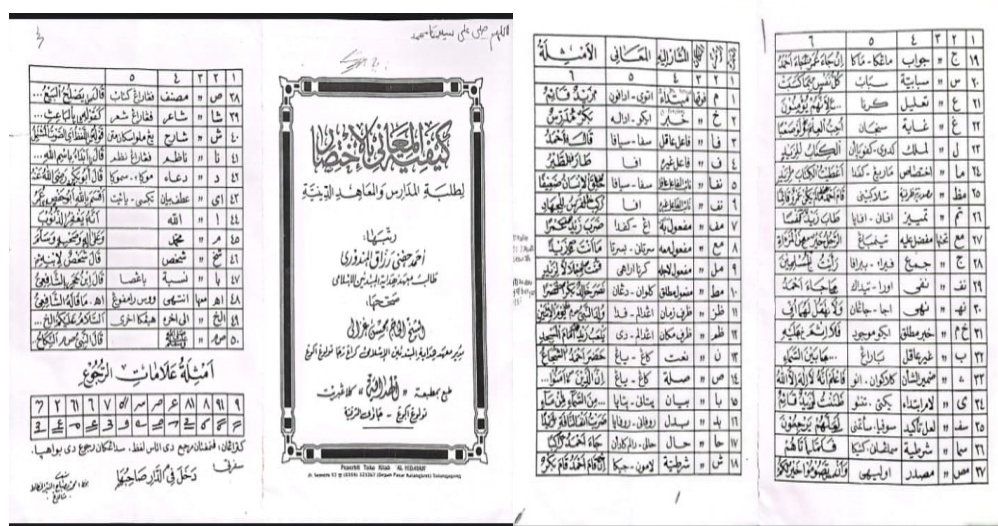
Book Concerning Signs Or *"Pentolan"* In Arabic *Pegon*

2. Discussion Results

This study reveals that the implementation of Arabic language learning using the Arabic Pegon method at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah UIN Walisongo is conducted systematically through three main stages. First, the instructor reads and explains the content of classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*) using the Pegon script. Second, students participate in daily reading sessions of the texts under the guidance of *ustadz* or *ustadzah*. Third, there are weekly conversation classes (*muhadathah*) aimed at enhancing students' Arabic communication skills. This approach focuses not only on mastering textual content but also on developing comprehensive Arabic language proficiency.

Despite its structured design, the Pegon method presents various challenges for students who graduated from modern Islamic boarding schools. One of the main challenges is unfamiliarity with the Pegon script, which is rarely taught in such institutions. This unfamiliarity results in a low initial ability to read and

comprehend Pegon texts, which differ significantly from the grammatical methods they are accustomed to(Hasnil Oktavera, 2019). The challenge is not only technical but also conceptual, as students lack the cognitive schema needed to accommodate this new form of Arabic language representation. Another emerging issue is the low motivation among students to engage with the Pegon method. This is due to a perception that the Pegon approach lacks relevance to their academic and professional needs in higher education (Munir & Fauzi, 2023). Students tend to be more attracted to technology-based learning approaches or methods that are more interactive and practical. In this context, the perceived irrelevance of the method to current demands becomes a psychological barrier that affects interest and active participation in the learning process.

In addition to pedagogical factors, students also face challenges in adapting to traditional learning models such as *bandongan* and *sorogan*, which differ from the formal education systems they previously experienced (Azizah & Mardiana, 2024). Here, the role of cultural literacy becomes crucial namely, understanding the pesantren tradition, local scripts (like Pegon), and distinctive Indonesian learning practices. Cultural literacy not only supports linguistic competence but also helps students build historical connections and academic identity rooted in local wisdom. However, a lack of understanding of these cultural values makes the Pegon method feel unfamiliar and meaningless to some students.

In response to these challenges, Ma'had Al-Jami'ah has implemented several instructional strategies. These include the gradual introduction of the Pegon script through reading and writing exercises, vocabulary memorization programs to strengthen Arabic comprehension, and daily *ngaji kitab* sessions guided directly by instructors (Hidayat et al., 2023). These strategies reflect a scaffolding approach in constructivist learning theory, where students are gradually guided until they are able to learn independently. This approach also reinforces Pegon position as a part of cultural heritage that should be understood not only as a reading tool but as a medium for comprehending and transmitting classical Islamic knowledge.

The findings of this study can be critically examined through the lens of constructivist learning theory as articulated by Jean Piaget, who posits that knowledge is constructed incrementally through active engagement with one's environment. In the case of modern pesantren graduates, their prior exposure to Standard Arabic-oriented instruction may hinder their ability to internalize Arabic Pegon, due to the absence of established cognitive frameworks suited to its orthographic and semantic structure. Thus, comprehension of Arabic Pegon extends beyond linguistic proficiency and is significantly influenced by learners' educational backgrounds. Students with early exposure to traditional Islamic pedagogy or Pegon script demonstrate greater adaptability compared to peers without such foundational experiences (Erawati & Adnyana, 2024).

From a sociocultural perspective, Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) offers further insight into these learning challenges. Vygotsky maintains that learners achieve optimal development when scaffolded by more capable individuals, particularly when encountering unfamiliar content The persistent difficulties faced by modern pesantren alumni in decoding and utilizing Arabic Pegon suggest that many operate beyond their current ZPD. This underscores the necessity for structured pedagogical interventions, including gradual training modules and sustained mentorship (Journal et al., 2024). Learner adaptation in this context is also mediated by variables such as prior exposure,

metacognitive skills, and intrinsic motivation to engage with classical Islamic texts (Nabila et al., 2025).

In addition, the motivational dimension can be interpreted through Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes that learner engagement is enhanced when instructional content aligns with their personal needs, goals, and interests, while also fulfilling psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Arabic Pegon, perceived by many modern pesantren graduates as peripheral to their academic trajectories, may thus evoke diminished motivation. A lack of perceived relevance, coupled with reduced confidence in navigating an unfamiliar writing system, may further hinder their willingness to invest cognitively and affectively in learning Pegon (LIANG, 2021).

The constructivist theories proposed by Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky provide a relevant theoretical foundation for analyzing the institutional learning strategies employed in teaching Arabic through the Arab Pegon method at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah UIN Walisongo. Rather than reiterating theoretical definitions, this perspective emphasizes the role of scaffolding a structured support system in guiding students through a progressive learning process shaped by social and cognitive interaction. In practice, scaffolding is implemented through strategies such as the gradual introduction of the Pegon script, guided *ngaji kitab* sessions, and structured vocabulary memorization programs. For instance, during *bandongan* sessions, instructors read aloud and interpret Pegon texts while providing direct word-for-word explanations, whereas in *sorogan* sessions, students practice reading independently and receive feedback from either instructors or more knowledgeable peers. These activities exemplify how external guidance is gradually withdrawn as learners build autonomy, aligning with Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (Sharkins et al., 2017). Piaget's notions of assimilation and accommodation are also evident when students attempt to integrate the unfamiliar Pegon script into their pre-existing understanding of Standard Arabic (Budiyanti et al., 2023). This cognitive restructuring highlights the importance of linking new knowledge with prior learning experiences in order to foster deeper comprehension.

Moreover, (Kassem, 2018) found that learning becomes more effective when students are given opportunities for active exploration and reflection, particularly in text-based educational settings. This aligns with observations at Ma'had, where interactive classroom engagement and direct exposure to Pegon texts allow students to construct meaning within real linguistic and cultural contexts. Similarly, (Martin & Bolliger, 2022) emphasizes the significance of phased instructional design when introducing learners to new symbolic systems such as traditional scripts or localized orthographies. This perspective reinforces the need for instructional approaches that are sensitive to students' cognitive readiness and prior exposure factors that are crucial in the context of Pegon-based Arabic learning.

Several prior studies have addressed the challenges associated with learning Arabic in the context of pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) and higher education institutions. emphasized that modern pesantren Arabic learning predominantly focuses on grammatical and communicative methods, which results in graduates facing difficulties when engaging with classical texts referred to as *"kitab kuning."* This observation is complemented by research conducted by (Prasetiyo et al., 2025) which explored the effectiveness of various Arabic learning curricula in pesantren, suggesting that while these curricula have positive aspects, gaps remain in developing comprehensive listening skills that are crucial for understanding

traditional texts. Complementing these findings, (Pokhrel, 2024) found that the success of Arabic language learning ties closely to the educational background provided by pesantren, indicating that a mismatch between students' prior knowledge and the methods employed, such as the Pegon script, can diminish motivation and hinder the adaptation to diverse Arabic learning strategies. The novelty of this study lies in the integration of constructivist theories (Piaget and Vygotsky) and Self-Determination Theory to explain both cognitive and motivational barriers in Pegon-based Arabic learning. Specifically, the study applies the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) to design a phased scaffolding strategy tailored to the linguistic and cultural challenges of Pegon instruction. The proposed pedagogical model takes into account not only students' cognitive readiness and educational background, but also their psychological needs for autonomy and competence.

In response to the findings of this study, strategic steps must be taken to address the challenges faced by graduates of modern Islamic boarding schools in learning Arabic through the Arabic Pegon method. One key recommendation is the implementation of an initial orientation program for students unfamiliar with the Pegon script, designed to help them develop new cognitive frameworks before entering more advanced stages of learning. This program could involve gradual and interactive Pegon script literacy training. Additionally, intensive mentoring by *ustadz* or peer tutors during *bandongan* and *sorogan* sessions should be strengthened to establish an optimal Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), as theorized by Vygotsky.

Equally important is the need to improve students' learning motivation by clarifying the academic and professional relevance of the Pegon method. This aligns with Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes autonomy, competence, and relatedness as key drivers of intrinsic motivation. For instance, demonstrating how Pegon literacy can deepen access to classical Islamic literature may help students appreciate its broader academic significance. These efforts are consistent with the educational mission of Ma'had Al-Jami'ah, which seeks to integrate traditional Islamic scholarship with the demands of higher education.

In today's digital era, incorporating technology into Pegon instruction is increasingly relevant. Digital tools, educational apps, and online dictionaries can serve as effective aids for learning Pegon vocabulary and text structure. However, such initiatives must consider the institutional capacity and infrastructure available at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah. Partnerships with ed-tech institutions or support from the university's central administration may be necessary to ensure implementation. Moreover, these approaches resonate with broader educational reform efforts in Indonesian Islamic education, which emphasize pedagogical innovation rooted in local traditions but responsive to global challenges. Further research is essential to evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies and identify new challenges that may emerge.

D. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the implementation of the Arabic Pegon method at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah, although systematically structured through activities such as reading classical Islamic texts *(kitab kuning),* guided recitation sessions with instructors, and weekly *muhadathah* classes, still poses major challenges for graduates of modern pesantren particularly due to their unfamiliarity with the Pegon, The primary obstacles include limited familiarity with the Pegon script, difficulty in understanding text

structures that differ from standard grammatical approaches, and a lack of motivation, as the method is often perceived as less relevant to their academic needs. Furthermore, adapting to traditional learning methods such as *bandongan* and *sorogan* proves difficult for students accustomed to formal education systems. Interestingly, the adaptation strategies employed to address these issues include a gradual introduction to the Pegon script through reading and writing exercises, vocabulary memorization programs to enhance Arabic comprehension, and daily Qur'an study sessions that help students become more familiar with the Pegon method under intensive guidance. While these challenges initially appeared to be major obstacles, the study demonstrates that, with appropriate strategies, students are able to adapt and effectively utilize the method to improve their Arabic language skills. This is particularly noteworthy, as it highlights the potential for traditional methods to be successfully integrated into modern educational contexts albeit requiring additional time and effort to achieve optimal outcomes.

This study offers a theoretical contribution by not only providing an in-depth account of the implementation of the Arabic Pegon method as a systematic approach to Arabic language instruction at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah UIN Walisongo, but also by expanding the understanding of second language acquisition theories within the context of religious education. Specifically, the findings highlight how traditional methods such as Arabic Pegon previously considered outdated or irrelevant can, in fact, serve as effective tools for developing language competence through a phased scaffolding approach, in line with Vygotsky's sociocultural constructivist framework. These findings enrich the literature on Arabic language instruction by highlighting the integration of traditional methods such as *bandongan* and *sorogan* with modern strategies like reading and writing exercises and vocabulary memorization. This hybrid model aligns with constructivist and sociocultural learning frameworks, where pesantren traditions provide social interaction and scaffolding, while modern approaches promote greater cognitive engagement and learner autonomy thus fostering a more holistic language acquisition process within religious educational settings.

The study also highlights challenges encountered by alumni of modern Islamic boarding schools, including limited familiarity with the Pegon script and the disconnect between traditional instructional methods and formal grammatical approaches. These issues underscore the need to develop a more inclusive Arabic language learning model. However, the study has certain limitations, particularly regarding the scope of its data, as it only involved female students at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah. As a result, This study is limited by its exclusive focus on female students at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah, making the findings less representative of the broader student population, including male students and those from non-pesantren educational backgrounds. Differences in gender, exposure to traditional methods, and academic motivation may influence students' adaptation and perceptions toward Arabic Pegon learning. To address this limitation, future research could broaden the sample to include students of diverse genders, academic backgrounds, and institutions that utilize similar methods. Further studies could also explore the relevance of the Pegon Arabic method to students' academic and professional needs, as well as examine the potential of digital technologies in supporting Pegon script learning. Such efforts would lead to more comprehensive findings and contribute to the design of a more adaptive and relevant Arabic language learning model for diverse learners.

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