

Regeneration of Young Ulama in Pesantren-Based Higher Education: A Case Study of Ma'had Aly Sunan Drajat Lamongan

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ABSTRACT

Ma'had A'ly is a form of pesantren-based higher education designed to develop future Islamic scholars through in-depth study of classical Islamic texts (kitab turats) and the strengthening of pesantren scholarly traditions. Its establishment responds to the need for regenerating scholars who possess deep religious knowledge, moral integrity, and the ability to address contemporary socio-religious issues contextually. This study aims to analyze the contribution of Ma'had A'ly Sunan Drajat Lamongan in producing young Islamic scholars, focusing on the educational system, curriculum implementation, learning processes, and the development of scholarly character. This research employs a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with administrators, lecturers, and students, participatory observation, and documentation studies. Data analysis used an interactive model. The findings show that Ma'had A'ly significantly contributes to shaping young scholars through advanced studies in fiqh and usul al-fiqh, mastery of classical texts, the practice of bahtsul masail, and the cultivation of moral values and scholarly ethos. This is reflected in graduates' roles in education, fatwa institutions, and Islamic legal development.

Keywords: Ma'had A'ly, Pesantren Education, Scholar Regeneration, Young Islamic Scholars

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) are among the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia and have long played a crucial role in preserving Islamic scholarly traditions while producing generations of *ulama*. Since their early development, *pesantren* have functioned not only as centers for transmitting Islamic knowledge but also as institutions for shaping character, ethics, and moral values within Muslim society. In the Indonesian context, *pesantren* have significantly contributed to the emergence of scholars who serve as educators, preachers, muftis, and socio-religious leaders with strong intellectual and cultural authority (Assegaf, 2020; Ridwan, 2020). One of the defining features of *pesantren* lies in the integration between their educational system, social structure, and scholarly orientation, all of which are deeply rooted in classical Islamic traditions. The *kiai* holds a central role, acting simultaneously as a teacher, spiritual mentor, and moral role model. The relationship between *kiai* and *santri* is personal, hierarchical, and continuous, allowing for deep internalization of Islamic values and ethics. Through this process, *pesantren* do not merely transfer knowledge but also cultivate a scholarly habitus that emphasizes *adab*, integrity, and social responsibility (Jasminto & Rofi'ah, 2025).

However, modern social dynamics marked by globalization, modernization, and rapid technological advancement have significantly influenced educational and religious orientations. The rise of educational pragmatism, which prioritizes practical skills and labor market demands, has gradually reduced younger generations' interest in pursuing intensive studies of classical Islamic sciences. As a result, disciplines such as *fiqh* and *usul al-fiqh*, which traditionally form the foundation of religious authority, are experiencing declining attention (Bakar & Sahman, 2024). This shift raises concerns about a potential crisis in the regeneration of qualified *ulama*—those who not only possess deep intellectual mastery but also demonstrate moral integrity and contextual awareness in addressing contemporary issues. In Islamic tradition, scholars are expected to master *istinbāt al-aḥkām* and apply legal reasoning in response to evolving social realities. Without this strong foundation, religious authority risks becoming fragmented and losing legitimacy within society (Rachman et al., 2025).

The situation is further complicated by the limited number of scholars capable of systematically transmitting the classical Islamic intellectual heritage (*turāts*). Mastery of *turāts* involves not only the ability to read Arabic texts but also an understanding of classical reasoning patterns, *madhhab*-based argumentation, and legal methodologies. Without a structured regeneration system, the continuity of Islamic scholarship faces the risk of declining both in quality and relevance (Miah, 2024). In response, the Indonesian government through the Ministry of

Religious Affairs, in collaboration with pesantren, established Ma'had A'ly as a pesantren-based higher education institution. It is specifically designed to support the regeneration of *ulama* through a structured, tiered, and research-oriented system while maintaining the moral and spiritual foundations of pesantren. This initiative represents a strategic effort to bridge classical Islamic scholarship with contemporary academic and societal demands (Hanif et al., 2024)

Within this context, Ma'had A'ly Sunan Drajat Lamongan, under the auspices of Pondok Pesantren Sunan Drajat, stands as an institution consistently committed to the regeneration of Islamic scholars. With a primary focus on *fiqh* and *usul al-fiqh*, it develops a learning system centered on the mastery of classical texts (*kitab turāts*), intensive methodological training in *istinbāt*, and the strengthening of scholarly traditions such as *baḥṡ al-masā'il* and thematic Islamic studies. This approach reinforces its role as a vital space for sustaining and reproducing pesantren-based scholarly authority (Sofi et al., 2025). Over more than sixteen years, Ma'had A'ly Sunan Drajat has produced graduates who contribute to various Islamic sectors, including education, fatwa institutions, and legal research. However, its role in shaping young scholars remains insufficiently explored in academic studies, resulting in limited documentation of its strategic contribution within Islamic education. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the forms, strategies, and contributions of Ma'had A'ly Sunan Drajat Lamongan in regenerating young Islamic scholars in Indonesia. It is expected to provide both theoretical insights for pesantren studies and practical contributions to strengthening pesantren-based higher education oriented toward sustaining Islamic scholarly traditions (Ali & Halim, 2023; Sumadi et al., 2025).

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical research design to examine the process of regenerating young Islamic scholars within the context of pesantren-based higher education. The qualitative approach is selected because it enables an in-depth exploration of socio-religious phenomena, particularly the meanings, patterns, and dynamics embedded in the educational practices of Ma'had A'ly Sunan Drajat Lamongan. Through this approach, the research seeks to understand how scholarly traditions are formed, maintained, and transformed within the institutional setting (Sugiono, 2025). The research was conducted at Ma'had A'ly Sunan Drajat Lamongan, which operates under the auspices of Pondok Pesantren Sunan Drajat. The selection of this site is based on academic considerations, as the institution consistently implements pesantren-based higher education with a concentration on *fiqh* and *usul al-fiqh*, and has played an active role in the regeneration of Islamic scholars for more than a

decade (Sofi et al., 2025). Its strong emphasis on classical Islamic scholarship and methodological training makes it a relevant locus for this study.

The research subjects were determined using purposive sampling, consisting of the leadership of Ma'had A'ly, members of the *dewan masyāyikh*, lecturers, students, and alumni. These informants were selected based on their level of involvement, experience, and knowledge related to the research focus. The leadership and *dewan masyāyikh* provide insights into institutional policies and vision, lecturers explain the learning processes and curriculum implementation, students reflect on their educational experiences, and alumni offer perspectives on the outcomes and social contributions of the institution (Sugiono, 2025). Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted to capture informants' perspectives, experiences, and interpretations regarding the process of scholar regeneration. Participatory observation allowed the researcher to directly examine learning activities, academic traditions, and socio-religious interactions within the Ma'had A'ly environment. Documentation was used to analyze institutional records such as curricula, syllabi, academic reports, and other relevant archives.

Data analysis was carried out using the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involves selecting and focusing relevant data, while data display is presented in descriptive narratives and thematic categories to facilitate interpretation. Conclusions are drawn systematically and continuously verified throughout the research process to ensure consistency and accuracy (Qomaruddin & Sa'diyah, 2024). To ensure data validity, triangulation techniques were applied, including source triangulation and method triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from different informants, while method triangulation involved cross-checking findings from interviews, observations, and documentation. These strategies strengthen the credibility, reliability, and overall trustworthiness of the research findings (Nyirenda et al., 2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Ma'had A'ly Sunan Drajat Lamongan implements a pesantren-based higher education system oriented toward the in-depth study of *fiqh* and *usul al-fiqh* as its core disciplines. This system is designed to prepare prospective young Islamic scholars who possess strong intellectual capacity, methodological rigor, and moral integrity grounded in pesantren traditions. The emphasis on these disciplines reflects its commitment to producing scholars with authoritative competence in Islamic law (Johansen, 2023; Sofi et al., 2025). The curriculum is structured in a tiered and systematic manner. The initial stage focuses on strengthening auxiliary

sciences (*'ulūm al-ālah*), such as *nahwu*, *ṣarf*, *balāghah*, and *manṭiq*. Mastery of these disciplines serves as a fundamental prerequisite for understanding classical Islamic texts (*kitab turāts*) comprehensively and critically. Through this stage, students develop the ability to read, analyze, and interpret classical texts accurately, including understanding linguistic structures and patterns of argumentation used by classical scholars (Mustofa, 2024).

At the intermediate and advanced stages, learning is directed toward the study of authoritative *fiqh* texts from various *madhāhib* alongside *usul al-fiqh*. This phase emphasizes not only mastery of legal content but also methodological training in *istinbāṭ al-aḥkām*. Students are trained to examine differences of opinion, evaluate legal arguments, and construct systematic reasoning in deriving Islamic legal rulings.

"Pembelajaran di Ma'had A'ly tidak hanya menghafal kitab, tetapi bagaimana santri mampu memahami metode istinbāṭ dan mempertanggungjawabkan pendapatnya secara ilmiah." ((Interview with Fathur Rohman, Lecturer at Ma'had Aly Sunan Drajat, January 2026))

In addition to text-based learning, the institution actively promotes scholarly traditions such as *baḥts al-masā'il*, academic presentations, and thematic discussions. These forums function as spaces for intellectual exercise, enabling students to connect classical texts with contemporary socio-religious issues.

"Melalui baḥts al-masā'il, kami dilatih untuk mengaitkan persoalan masyarakat dengan rujukan kitab, jadi tidak hanya teori tapi juga praktik." (Interview with, 2026 (Interview with Irfan Muhammad, Student at Ma'had Aly Sunan Drajat, January 2026))

Table 1. Structure of the Educational System at Ma'had A'ly Sunan Drajat

Stage	Focus of Study	Main Competencies
Basic Stage	<i>'Ulūm al-ālah</i> (<i>nahwu</i> , <i>ṣarf</i> , <i>balāghah</i> , <i>manṭiq</i>)	Ability to read and understand classical texts
Intermediate Stage	<i>Fiqh</i> across <i>madhāhib</i>	Understanding legal diversity and textual interpretation
Advanced Stage	<i>Usul al-fiqh</i> & <i>istinbāṭ</i>	Legal reasoning and derivation of rulings
Academic Tradition	<i>Baḥts al-masā'il</i> , discussions	Contextual analysis and problem-solving

The educational system is further supported by structured evaluation mechanisms, including oral examinations, written tests, and assessments of academic participation. These evaluations aim to measure both intellectual competence and students' discipline and responsibility. All components are integrated within pesantren culture, which emphasizes *adab*, discipline, and spirituality as the foundation of scholarly character (Sugiono, 2025).

Overall, this tiered, *turāts*-based system demonstrates that Ma'had A'ly Sunan Drajat not only preserves classical Islamic scholarship but also adapts it to contemporary needs. It shows that pesantren-based higher education remains highly relevant in sustaining and developing Islamic scholarly traditions (Sofi et al., 2025; Sumadi et al., 2025).

Learning Process and Scholarly Traditions

The learning process at *Ma'had A'ly Sunan Drajat Lamongan* integrates classical pesantren methods with modern academic approaches in order to maintain the continuity of Islamic scholarly traditions while enhancing the intellectual quality of students. Classical methods such as *bandongan*, *sorogan*, and *musyawarah* are preserved as distinctive features of pesantren education that emphasize deep textual understanding and the cultivation of scholarly ethics (*adab*). The integration of these methods demonstrates the pedagogical flexibility of pesantren traditions in adapting to the demands of higher education (Manaf et al., 2025). The *bandongan* method is employed in the study of classical Islamic texts (*kitab turāts*) to transmit comprehensive understanding from the *masyāyikh* to students. In this method, lecturers or *kiai* read and explain the text, while students listen attentively, take notes, and annotate the material. *Bandongan* serves to introduce the argumentative structure of classical scholars and to build a systematic foundational understanding of specific disciplines (Jannah et al., 2025; Salam et al., 2025).

Meanwhile, the *sorogan* method is applied to assess students' individual comprehension of the studied texts. In *sorogan*, students read and explain the content of the text directly before the lecturer or *masyāyikh*. This method requires intellectual preparedness and learning discipline, while also training precision in reading and textual interpretation. Consequently, *sorogan* plays a crucial role in fostering intellectual independence and academic responsibility among prospective scholars (Mustofa, 2024). In addition, the tradition of *musyawarah* constitutes an integral part of the learning process at *Ma'had A'ly Sunan Drajat*. Through *musyawarah*, students are trained to engage in discussion, present arguments, and respect differing opinions. This tradition not only strengthens critical thinking skills but also instills ethical dialogue and humility (*tawāḍu'*) in scholarly practice. *Musyawarah* reflects classical scholarly practices that uphold discourse and collectivity in the pursuit of truth (Putri et al., 2025; Tenrileleang et al., 2026).

The *baḥts al-masā'il* forum represents the culmination of the integration between classical methods and modern academic approaches. This forum serves as an essential platform for training analytical skills in Islamic legal reasoning and collective legal decision-making. In *baḥts al-masā'il*, students confront contemporary issues that are analyzed by referring to classical texts and principles

of *usul al-fiqh*. This process develops methodological competence in *istinbāt al-ahkām* while simultaneously enhancing sensitivity to social contexts (Yaqin et al., 2026). By integrating classical pesantren methods with modern academic approaches, *Ma'had A'ly Sunan Drajat* has successfully established a strong and dynamic scholarly tradition. Such a learning process not only produces graduates with mastery of Islamic texts but also equips them with analytical, dialogical, and collective capacities to address contemporary socio-religious challenges.

Moral Development and the Scholarly Ethos

In addition to scholarly aspects, *Ma'had A'ly Sunan Drajat Lamongan* places moral development and the cultivation of a scholarly ethos as central pillars of its educational system. Moral formation is understood as the foundation for producing scholars who not only possess deep intellectual competence but also uphold moral integrity and social responsibility. Within the pesantren tradition, knowledge and morality are inseparable, as scholarly authority is measured not merely by the breadth of knowledge but also by the nobility of character (Budiman et al., 2025). Residential life serves as a strategic medium for moral development at *Ma'had A'ly Sunan Drajat*. The collective living environment of the pesantren trains students to develop discipline, responsibility, and social awareness. Intensive interactions between students, *masyāyikh*, and fellow students create an effective non-formal learning space for instilling Islamic values and social ethics. Through residential life, the educational process unfolds holistically and continuously over a twenty-four-hour cycle (Utami & Efianingrum, 2025).

Discipline in religious observance also functions as an important instrument in cultivating the scholarly ethos. Obligatory congregational prayers, regular devotional practices (*wirid*), and other spiritual activities aim to foster religious consciousness and spiritual closeness to Allah. These practices not only strengthen the spiritual dimension but also cultivate consistency and sincerity in fulfilling scholarly responsibilities. From the pesantren perspective, strong spirituality is a fundamental prerequisite for scholars in maintaining moral integrity and ethical steadfastness (Sumadi et al., 2025). The exemplary role of the *masyāyikh* occupies a central position in moral development and the formation of scholarly ethos. The *masyāyikh* function not only as educators but also as moral exemplars (*uswah hasanah*) for students. Their humility (*tawāḍu'*), simplicity of life, and commitment to knowledge and social service provide concrete models for students to emulate. Such exemplarity reinforces the internalization of scholarly values that cannot be achieved through theoretical instruction alone (Pratama, 2026).

Through the integration of residential life, disciplined religious practice, and the exemplary conduct of the *masyāyikh*, *Ma'had A'ly Sunan Drajat* cultivates a scholarly ethos that emphasizes balance between knowledge, morality, and service. This ethos becomes an essential asset for graduates in carrying out socio-

religious roles within society. Thus, moral development is not merely a complementary aspect of education but constitutes the core of the process of regenerating young Islamic scholars (Sofi et al., 2025).

Contribution to the Regeneration of Young Islamic Scholars

The contribution of *Ma'had A'ly Sunan Drajat Lamongan* to the regeneration of young Islamic scholars can be observed through the active roles of its graduates in various religious and social fields. Graduates of *Ma'had A'ly* are not only absorbed into academic settings as educators of Islamic sciences but are also involved as experts in fatwa institutions, research assistants in Islamic legal studies, and religious actors who contribute directly within society. This indicates that *Ma'had A'ly* functions as a strategic institution in preparing scholars who possess both strong scholarly competence and tangible social roles (Taufiq, 2024). As educators, graduates of *Ma'had A'ly Sunan Drajat* play an important role in transmitting pesantren scholarly traditions to subsequent generations, whether in pesantren, madrasahs, or Islamic higher education institutions. Their mastery of classical Islamic texts (*kitab turāts*), *fiqh*, and *usul al-fiqh* acquired during their education enables them to teach Islamic sciences in a profound and methodologically sound manner. This role is crucial in maintaining the continuity of pesantren-based scholarly traditions amid shifting orientations in religious education (Nyirenda et al., 2020; Sumadi et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the involvement of graduates as experts in fatwa institutions reflects recognition of their scholarly authority. Their analytical capacity in Islamic legal reasoning and mastery of *istinbāt al-aḥkām* methodologies enable them to contribute to the formulation of fatwas and the resolution of contemporary religious issues. In this context, *Ma'had A'ly* serves as a formative space for scholars who not only understand normative texts but are also capable of responding responsibly to evolving socio-religious dynamics. Another significant contribution is the involvement of *Ma'had A'ly* graduates as research assistants and facilitators in Islamic legal studies. Through research activities, graduates contribute to the development of Islamic intellectual discourse grounded in classical texts while remaining responsive to societal needs. This involvement demonstrates that *Ma'had A'ly* education extends beyond knowledge transmission to encourage the production of Islamic scholarship relevant to contemporary challenges.

Overall, the contribution of *Ma'had A'ly Sunan Drajat* to the regeneration of young Islamic scholars shows that the institution does not merely produce academic graduates, but also forms individuals who take on meaningful and strategic roles in religious life. Its graduates are actively engaged as educators, contributors in fatwa institutions, and researchers in Islamic legal studies, reflecting their ability to apply knowledge in real socio-religious contexts.

This active involvement indicates that Ma'had A'ly has succeeded in carrying out its role as a pesantren-based higher education institution that is not only academically oriented but also committed to sustaining Islamic scholarly traditions. In this sense, Ma'had A'ly Sunan Drajat demonstrates its relevance in bridging classical Islamic scholarship with contemporary societal needs.

CONCLUSION

Ma'had A'ly Sunan Drajat Lamongan demonstrates a meaningful contribution to the regeneration of young Islamic scholars through an integrated pesantren-based higher education system. This system combines intellectual depth, moral formation, and the strengthening of scholarly traditions in a balanced manner. Such integration is reflected in its curriculum, which emphasizes *fiqh wa uşūlihi*, the study of *kitab turāts*, and the habituation of academic traditions such as *baḥts al-masā'il*. Through this approach, students are equipped not only with solid methodological competence but also with strong moral integrity as future scholars. The formation of character is further reinforced through the pesantren environment, including disciplined religious practices and the exemplary role of the *masyāyikh*. As a result, graduates are not only academically capable but also possess moral and social legitimacy in carrying out their roles within society. In this regard, Ma'had A'ly Sunan Drajat can be regarded as a relevant model of pesantren-based higher education that supports the sustainability of Islamic scholarly traditions. Nevertheless, its contribution still requires further strengthening, particularly in academic documentation and the formulation of a more systematic model of scholar regeneration. The limited number of scholarly publications and conceptual frameworks may constrain wider dissemination and replication. Therefore, strengthening institutional research, increasing scholarly publications, and developing academic networks are essential steps to enhance its contribution, both in practical implementation and in the broader development of Islamic education discourse in Indonesia.

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