



Malay-Islamic Pondok Studies as Platforms for Developing Human Potential: A Qualitative Document Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Background: The establishment of pondok education in the Malay world coincides with the emergence of Malay-Islamic kingdoms, rendering the pondok a central educational platform for the Malay community. Its education system emphasizes the Arabic language, with Jawi texts produced to meet local needs. In addition to imparting knowledge, pondok education plays a key role in developing students' skills. **Objective:** The purpose of this study is to examine the role and contribution of pondok education in the development of human potential, specifically in terms of cognitive thinking and behavioral patterns. **Method:** The methodology employed is document analysis, utilizing a qualitative approach for data collection, screening, analysis, and conclusion. **Result:** The study found that the study and life routines in pondok schools are highly effective in skill development, even though the facilities provided are not comparable to those in full boarding schools or universities. **Conclusion:** The study concludes that pondok education makes a significant contribution to the development of human potential by strengthening religious values and enhancing life skills. **Contribution:** This research contributes to a deeper understanding of pondok education and its relevance in modern educational contexts.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Pondok studies are among the earliest forms of education established in the Malay world, rooted in the development of Malay-Islamic education. This educational system was likely introduced by Arab missionaries or Malays who had studied in Arabia. However, the system is distinctive because its educational philosophy aligns with the needs and values of the Malay-Muslim community in the region (Chowdhury et al., 2024). For instance, the creation and use of educational texts known as "yellow books" is primarily dominated by works written in Jawi-Malay, alongside Arabic texts (Smith & Woodward, 2013).

The term "pondok" derives from the Arabic word 'funduqun', meaning a boarding house or lodging place for travelers. In the context of Islamic education, it refers to small dwellings set up as student accommodations, typically located near suraus or madrasahs, and teachers' houses within a designated area (Ghani et al., 2015). In Malaya, particularly in regions like Pattani, Kelantan, Trengganu, Kedah, Penang, and Perak, pondok-based schools are often named after their founders or the locations where they were established. For example, Pondok Tok Kenali in Kelantan is named after its founder, Tok Kenali. At the same time, Pondok Gajah Mati refers to the pondok founded by Pak Chu Him in Gajah Mati, Pendang, Kedah.

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This ancient educational institution inherited the education system practiced in Makkah and Madinah, where the role of the teacher is crucial to the survival of a pondok (Hashim et al., 2011). The reputation of a pondok largely depends on the authority of its founder, who typically received education in either Makkah or Medina. The overall curriculum aims to provide Muslims with religious knowledge in the form of fardhu ain and fardhu kifayah, as well as to shape the personality and skills of Malay children. In essence, the pondok's purpose is to disseminate religious knowledge, strengthen Islamic beliefs and values, and preserve the conservative cultural traditions of the Malay community (Ramli & Ali, 2015).

While the pondok curriculum focuses more on Islamic education than on modern schooling, its effectiveness in shaping students' character has been widely recognized (Mujahid, 2021). The key factor is the atmosphere and educational system, which is based on teaching models that prioritize the well-being and happiness of both this world and the hereafter. This approach forms the foundation for students' thoughts and behaviors, emphasizing the development of character rather than solely focusing on academic achievement. Education derived from the Quran and Sunnah plays a central role in cultivating personality, developing self-skills, and serving as a model for appreciating the Islamic way of life (Jaafar et al., 2017).

The emergence of pondok studies has significantly transformed the culture of thought and societal awareness regarding the importance of knowledge. The establishment of pondok institutions has played a crucial role in eradicating ignorance, fostering a knowledgeable society, and promoting noble values. It has contributed to the spiritual and physical development of the Muslim community, creating a strong and unified ummah that adheres to the obedience of Allah SWT. The pondok education system aims to cultivate individuals who can practice the Islamic way of life, at least at the level of fardhu ain. Additionally, the knowledge-centered culture in pondok institutions has nurtured a caring and tolerant society, as the pondok system teaches students to be independent and supportive of one another (Mustaffa et al., 2017).

This study investigates the role of Malay-Islamic pondok schools in the development of human potential, particularly through their unique educational approach. Rooted in the Malay-Islamic tradition, these schools emphasize the Arabic language and address the local community's educational needs by incorporating texts written in Jawi. Although the facilities at pondok schools may not be as advanced as those in larger institutions, the educational and life routines they offer foster significant skill development in students. Using a qualitative document analysis approach, this research examines various writings related to the pondok education system, highlighting its contribution to both personal and intellectual growth. The findings suggest that, despite their simpler settings, pondok schools provide an effective platform for cultivating academic knowledge and practical skills, making them a valuable institution in the Malay world.

This study aims to analyze the role and contribution of Malay-Islamic pondok studies in the development of human potential, with a focus on the evolution of human thought and behavior. This research will explore how pondok studies can enhance human psychology from a positive perspective, examining their impact on personal growth, moral development, and the formation of a balanced character in the context of social and spiritual life.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design, specifically utilizing document analysis. This approach is suitable because the research aims to explore and interpret existing texts and writings related to pondok studies, focusing on their role in human potential development. The qualitative design enables a comprehensive and descriptive understanding of the subject matter without relying on statistical formulas or equations.

2.2 Research Object

The subjects of this study are the various writings, texts, and documents related to pondok education in the Malay world. These documents include historical records, educational texts, and other relevant materials that provide insight into the development, role, and contributions of pondok studies in human potential development.

2.3 Data Collection

The data collection process involves gathering documents and textual materials that discuss pondok schools, their educational methods, and their impact on students' skills, thinking, and behavior. These materials are selected based on their relevance to the study's themes, which focus on education, human potential, and the psychology of students. Document analysis will be used to extract and organize the data in a systematic manner.

2.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis will be carried out using a qualitative approach, where the collected documents will be examined for recurring themes and patterns. The analysis will focus on identifying the role and contributions of pondok education in shaping human potential, particularly in the areas of psychological development, cognitive skills, and behavior. Through document analysis, key insights will be drawn to understand how pondok studies serve as a platform for personal growth and skill development.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Result

The pondok education system is divided into two categories: *umumi* and *nizami*. The *umumi* system is not tied to a specific syllabus, allowing flexibility in the subjects taught, whereas the *nizami* system follows a structured, gradual progression for students. The *umumi* system is more commonly practiced in pondok studies, as the administration and scheduling, including the selection of study texts, is determined by the teacher. However, many pondok schools integrate both systems to provide the local community with the opportunity to participate in general studies. The *Nizami* system, on the other hand, is reserved for students living in the pondok (Abdullah, 1989).

In the *Nizami* system, the education process is managed by an administrative board. In addition to the master teacher, other instructors teach specific subjects based on level, time, and class. In contrast, the general education system typically takes place in the pondok's *surau* or in the teacher's own home. The teaching schedule is divided into three parts: morning, evening, and night, corresponding to the times after dawn, dusk, and *isya* prayers. In the *Nizami* system, however, teaching typically occurs in the morning and at noon, aligning with the *dhuha* and post-noon prayer times (Abdullah, 1989).

The subjects are scheduled based on the time of day to best suit the students' cognitive abilities. For example, subjects requiring memorization are taught in the morning when students' minds are fresher and more receptive. The *surau* and the teacher's house serve as the primary venues for teaching and learning. In the *surau*, students also participate in practical activities, such as prayers and remembrance. Core subjects include the Quran, Hadith, Tauhid, Fiqh, Tasawuf, Nahwu, and Sorof, which are taught using both Jawi-Malay and Arabic texts (Kim, 2001, pp. 125-156).

3.1.1 Life

The teacher's house and *surau* in the pondok are typically surrounded by student huts, known as *Pondok Luar* and *Pondok Dalam*. *Pondok Luar* refers to the accommodations for unmarried male students, while *Pondok Dalam* is designated for married students as well as unmarried female students. In terms of infrastructure, *Pondok Luar* is simpler and more temporary than *Pondok Dalam* (Madmarn, 2002: 59).

After the dawn prayers, classes usually last for about two hours. Following this, students return to their respective huts to prepare and eat their own cooked breakfast. After the break, new students will read certain books to senior students or teacher assistants who have received permission from the master teacher to instruct (Madmarn, 2002, pp. 62-65).

Classes resume after the *Zuhr* and *Asr* prayers, with a rest period in between. After the *Maghrib* prayers, students continue their studies. If classes are not resumed after the *Isyak* prayer, students will either review the lessons or memorize material related to various subjects, including Fiqh, *Usul Fiqh*, Hadith, Tafsir, Kalam, Akhlak, Nahwu, Sorof, and *Balaghah* (Madmarn, 2002, pp. 65-67).

There are no specific entry requirements to join the pondok. Education is open to individuals of all ages. As long as a person has basic knowledge of reciting the Quran, can read and write in Jawi, and has the financial means, they are welcome to study at the pondok (Hashim, 2004, p. 25).

The funding for the pondok comes from public donations, contributions, and *zakat*. Teachers do not receive salaries but dedicate themselves to teaching selflessly. They live modestly and focus entirely on their teaching responsibilities. Their income depends on the contributions they receive (Hashim, 2004, p. 25).

For schools managed by a governing board, a portion of their income is derived from agricultural activities such as paddy fields, rubber plantations, or coconut plantations that have been endowed. Similarly, *zakat* from crops or livestock is handed over to the school to support the needs of the teachers (Madmarn, 2002: 67).

Some pondok schools also offer life skills training, such as rice cultivation, sauce and soy sauce production, and soap making. In this way, both teachers and students can sustain themselves while learning (Kim, 2001, p. 137).

3.1.2 Teaching and Learning Methods

Before beginning the study session, students gather around the teacher's seat, sitting cross-legged and preparing their respective books. The teacher then takes a seat and ensures all students are present before starting (Abdullah, 1989).

The teacher begins by reciting a specific prayer, followed by reading passages from the book. Each passage is repeated several times to ensure clarity. The teacher then explains the meaning and purpose of the text in concise terms, providing explanations for each word, especially since the texts used are typically in Arabic. At this point, students take notes on the meanings provided by the teacher (Abdullah, 1989).

Once the meaning is explained, the teacher elaborates on the text, discussing the meaning and the rules derived from it, while also explaining how to use pronouns (dhamir) in Arabic properly. During this process, students take notes on the explanations of grammar and pronunciation. This teaching and learning routine continues until students are proficient and fully master Arabic grammar (Abdullah, 1989).

The entire study text is read from beginning to end. After completing the reading, the teacher holds a prayer to ask for blessings on all the material learned so that it can be applied in life. If necessary, the text is revisited to reinforce learning. The aim is for students to become proficient and capable of teaching others. If the material is mastered, the teacher selects more advanced texts to reflect the students' growing abilities (Abdullah, 1989).

As mentioned earlier, teachers have assistants, typically senior students known as heads of mutalaah. Their role is similar to that of university tutors, helping newer students or those struggling with lessons to understand the study texts. These assistants usually provide guidance in their respective huts (Abdullah, 1989).

Teacher assistants also lead munazarah and mujadalah classes. The munazarah method trains students in debate and expressing their views. This approach is important because it develops students' public speaking and communication skills, which are essential when they later enter the community to share their knowledge (Azizan et al., 2021).

The mujadalah method emphasizes question-and-answer sessions, particularly on current issues. Through guidance from teacher assistants, students learn to analyze problems and formulate solutions based on the knowledge they have memorized from authoritative study texts. Both methods enable students to speak with authority during lectures, as they are trained to debate and articulate their ideas fluently (Azizan et al., 2021).

Memorization is the core method in pondok studies, with students memorizing not only the Quran and Hadith but also materials in various fields such as Fiqh, Tajwid, Tauhid, and Tasawuf. This approach enables students to engage in discussions, express their opinions, and reference topics without relying on written materials (Ishak et al., 2019).

3.2. Discussion

3.2.1 Physical Self-Concept

The concept of the physical self is foundational to the lives of residents in the pondok, playing a crucial role in their physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional development. Life in a pondok differs significantly from life in a boarding school or university, as everything in the pondok must be managed independently (Rochmat et al., 2022). This includes building and maintaining one's hut, securing food and drink, and managing personal sustenance. In contrast, in a school or university dormitory, living arrangements, food, and sometimes even allowances or scholarships are provided.

Although the teaching and learning conditions in pondok schools may appear underdeveloped and less advanced compared to the infrastructure in boarding schools or universities, the potential for personal development in the pondok is far more advanced. The physical self-concept cultivated through the daily routines in the pondok shapes an optimistic attitude, resilience, and a strong determination to succeed in life (Kamsani, 2014).

From a psychological perspective, the physical self-concept has a positive impact on health in several ways: it helps prevent disease, enhances physical capabilities, reduces anxiety, and fosters happiness (Vaquero-Solís et al., 2021). Additionally, this concept contributes to life satisfaction and motivates one to keep moving forward. These factors are crucial for achieving self-actualization, which involves an individual attaining a high level of awareness and feeling valued and appreciated (Kim & Ahn, 2021). This sense of being valued arises when the external community recognizes the authority of the pondok residents and appreciates their contributions. In turn, the recognition is reciprocated with gratitude, which is expressed through the sharing of knowledge within the community.

The concept of physical self also plays a significant role in enhancing the quality of life and improving character. The daily routines tied to the physical self-concept foster several key traits, including (Kim & Ahn, 2021): 1) Flexi-

bility (Tolerance), Life in the pondok necessitates cooperation, mutual care, and consensus among its residents, promoting the development of flexibility and tolerance in managing daily activities; 2) Competence, The pondok environment encourages healthy competition, whether it is in gaining knowledge, acquiring practical life skills, maintaining cleanliness, or serving teachers in hopes of receiving blessings. This drives the residents to improve themselves continuously; 3) Resilience, Every aspect of life in the pondok is managed independently, which cultivates resilience. Residents are trained to work hard, be patient, trustworthy, content, and optimistic, all of which strengthen their ability to face life's challenges; 4) Socialization, Religious practices in the pondok require consensus and the sharing of knowledge. This fosters a strong sense of community, where residents often work together to succeed in communal programs, particularly those related to religious events.

3.2.2 The Concept of Self-Acceptance

The concept of self-acceptance is reflected in the attitudes of the pondok residents, which include curiosity, openness, acceptance, and love. This concept, as developed within the pondok community, is considered more valuable and significant than self-esteem because it integrates emotions and behaviors more effectively and precisely, particularly in relation to the physical self-concept.

The outcomes of self-acceptance are seen in the following personality traits (Ackerman, 2021): 1) High Confidence in Doing Good, Pondok residents possess the confidence to do good for others without expecting anything in return, driven by the belief that Allah SWT will reward every act of kindness; 2) Optimism, They exhibit a strong awareness and commitment to being optimistic in life, eliminating negative traits such as laziness, procrastination, time-wasting, bad thoughts, jealousy, envy, and lack of discipline; 3) Sense of Equality and Humanity, They hold a sense of equality and humanity, recognizing that there is always room for growth and the correction of mistakes. Apologizing and forgiving others are seen as honorable acts, not disgraceful ones.

3.2.3 The Concept of Self-Organization

The daily routines of study and life in the pondok significantly shape self-organization, producing positive traits that balance both cognitive and emotional aspects (Izard et al., 2000). These traits include: 1) Competent Self-Appearance, Pondok residents develop a competent self-image due to the strict self-discipline they are taught to uphold; 2) High Understanding and Recognition, They possess a deep understanding and recognition of knowledge, having been trained to reference more authoritative sources and individuals constantly; 3) Analytical Ability, Pondok students develop strong analytical skills, as they are taught to resolve issues or problems through research and consensus-building; 4) Confidence to Express Opinions, Through regular question-and-answer sessions and discussions, students gain the confidence to express their opinions clearly and effectively; 5) Ability to Integrate Life Skills, Students gain the strength to integrate their life in the pondok with real-world realities, constantly enhancing their skills to support their lives. In the pondok, they are taught to live independently, without relying on others.

One of the key strengths of this study is its in-depth exploration of the role of Malay-Islamic pondok education in developing human potential, particularly within the context of a system rooted in Malay-Islamic traditions. A significant finding of this research is how pondok schools, despite having limited facilities, provide a highly effective environment for students' skill development. The learning process, which emphasizes not only academic knowledge but also the cultivation of character and life skills such as self-discipline and independence, demonstrates that pondok education has a significant impact on shaping intellectually capable students, as well as emotionally and spiritually resilient. This study highlights the strength of the pondok education system, which integrates knowledge, moral, and spiritual values through daily routines.

Another strength of this research is the methodology used, document analysis, which allows the researcher to delve into the history and practices of pondok education through relevant texts. With a qualitative approach, this study effectively filters data related to the influence of pondok education on human potential development across various aspects, including cognitive, social, and emotional domains. The findings not only contribute to a deeper understanding of the importance of pondok in traditional education but also open the door to developing more inclusive and holistic educational systems within modern contexts, focusing on the comprehensive development of human potential.

4. IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

4.1 Research Implications

The findings of this study have significant implications for the development of human potential within traditional educational frameworks, specifically in the context of pondok schools. Understanding the role of pondok education in shaping students' cognitive, psychological, and behavioral growth provides valuable insights into how educational systems rooted in cultural and religious traditions can contribute to the holistic development of individuals. These findings can inform policymakers, educators, and stakeholders in enhancing the educational practices within pondok schools, ensuring that the integration of religious teachings and life skills training continues to foster personal development, resilience, and self-reliance in students. Additionally, this study highlights the importance of preserving and promoting such educational systems as they offer a unique and practical approach to building human potential.

4.1 Research Contributions

This study contributes to the academic discourse on the role of traditional Islamic educational institutions, particularly pondok schools, in developing human potential. By offering an in-depth qualitative analysis of the pondok system's impact on students, this research expands our understanding of how such schools shape not only religious knowledge but also personal qualities such as resilience, social cooperation, and independence. Furthermore, this study highlights the importance of integrating cultural values and spiritual development into modern educational practices, demonstrating that despite limited physical infrastructure, pondok schools offer an effective platform for fostering human potential. The research's contributions provide a model for integrating traditional educational principles into contemporary settings, promoting a well-rounded approach to personal and intellectual development.

5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

4.1 Research Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be taken into consideration. One limitation is the focus on document analysis related to pondok education, which may not fully encompass all aspects of pondok education, such as the direct experiences of students or interviews with pondok administrators. Additionally, this study only focuses on pondok in the Malay region, so the findings may not be entirely applicable to pondok schools in other regions or to other types of traditional schools. Another limitation is the reliance on the availability of relevant and accurate documents, which could affect the depth of analysis conducted.

5.1 Recommendation for Future Research Direction

Future research is recommended to broaden its scope by incorporating other qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews with students, teachers, and pondok administrators, to gain a more holistic understanding of their direct experiences and perceptions of how pondok education influences human potential development. Furthermore, future studies could compare pondok education with other modern educational systems in terms of developing students' social, psychological, and cognitive skills. Expanding the research to include pondok schools in different regions and examining their impact on the broader community in terms of social and economic contexts would also be valuable for providing a more comprehensive understanding of the role of pondok education.

6. CONCLUSION

Although pondok schools may not have the same facilities as boarding schools or universities, their contribution to developing human potential is undeniable. The routines and study systems in place, which are not tied to traditional examination structures, do not imply that graduates lack intellectual ability or critical thinking. In fact, the cognitive development of pondok students often surpasses that of students from formal educational streams. This is due to the study routines, which are centered around memorization, cross-referencing scientific knowledge, and engaging in constructive discussions that promote critical thinking and inquiry.

From a life skills perspective, pondok students are more independent than their peers in full boarding schools or universities. In the pondok, everything must be managed by the students themselves, including their accommodation and daily necessities. While dormitory students have their meals provided and focus solely on academics, pondok students are responsible for preparing their own food and ensuring their daily survival. This constant need

for self-sufficiency enables pondok students to acquire practical life skills, unlike dormitory students who rely on financial aid or scholarships for their living expenses.

The uniqueness of pondok students lies in their mental and spiritual development, as their lives are enriched with acts of worship and the cultivation of good manners in their interactions with fellow students and teachers. These practices foster a sense of well-being and happiness that cannot be measured in material terms but is reflected in the blessings they receive in life.

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Author Contribution Statement

The author declares that the entire research and writing process for this article was conducted independently. The author assumes full responsibility for all data associated with this research. No other individual contributed as a co-author or made any significant contribution to the content of this work.

Declaration of Generative AI (GenAI) Usage in Scientific Writing

The authors declare that Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) tools were employed in the drafting and revision of this manuscript to check spelling and grammar, identify typos, grammatical errors, suggest paraphrases, reduce passive voice, and eliminate repeated words, sentences, and unnecessary adverbs. The suggestions provided by GenAI were critically evaluated and modified to ensure that the final draft remains representative of the authors' own work. All instances of Generative AI usage in this article were conducted by the authors in accordance with the [IJRIS GenAI Tool Usage Policy](#), with the authors assuming full responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and integrity of the work."

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this study. The research was conducted independently, and no financial, personal, or professional relationships have influenced the outcomes or interpretations presented in this study. The author has no affiliations or involvement with any organization or entity that could be perceived as a conflict of interest.

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