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Kyai Authority in Nonformal Qur'anic Education: Enlivening The Qur'an, Interpretive Authority, and Religious Practice

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Abstract

This article examines kyai authority in nonformal Qur'anic education by focusing on how religious leaders obtain and exercise interpretive authority through their capacity to enliven the Qur'an according to community needs in Pelangwot Village, Lamongan, East Java. The study addresses two research questions: (1) what are the forms of kyai authority in nonformal educational contexts? (2) why do these kyai obtain authority in their community? Employing a qualitative case-study design, the research gathered data through participant observation in TPQ learning sessions and mau'izhah forums, semi-structured interviews with teachers, kyai, and students, and analysis of institutional documents and teaching references. Data were analyzed using thematic coding to identify recurring patterns. Findings reveal two key dimensions. First, the forms of kyai authority in nonformal settings are predominantly socio-cultural, rooted in teacher-student transmission chains and community recognition rather than formal institutional structures. Kyai authority operates through teacher-student knowledge transmission, tolerates interpretive differences to maintain harmony, and remains fragmented across institutions. Second, kyai obtain their authority through the continuous labor of enlivening the Qur'an—selectively mobilizing established verses and hadith including "*khairukum man ta'allam al-Qur'āna wa 'allamahu,*" QS Āli 'Imrān 3:18, QS az-Zumar 39:9, and QS al-'Alaq 96:1-5 as motivational and legitimizing devices in daily pedagogical practice. The article argues that kyai authority in nonformal settings is assembled through persistent community-building labor that translates scriptural meanings into locally relevant moral guidance. This contributes to scholarship on Islamic religious authority by demonstrating how authority emerges not from formal credentials but from the ongoing work of making sacred texts alive for community needs.

Keywords: Kyai authority, enlivening the Qur'an, nonformal Qur'anic education.

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Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji otoritas kyai dalam pendidikan Al-Qur'an nonformal dengan fokus pada bagaimana para pemimpin agama memperoleh dan menjalankan otoritas interpretatif melalui kemampuan mereka menghidupkan Al-Qur'an sesuai kebutuhan masyarakat di Desa Pelangwot, Lamongan, Jawa Timur. Studi ini menjawab dua pertanyaan penelitian: (1) bagaimana bentuk otoritas kyai dalam konteks pendidikan nonformal? (2) mengapa kyai tersebut mendapatkan otoritasnya di masyarakat? Menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif, penelitian ini mengumpulkan data melalui observasi partisipatif dalam sesi pembelajaran TPQ dan forum mau'izhah, wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan guru, kyai, dan santri, serta analisis dokumen kelembagaan dan referensi pengajaran. Data dianalisis menggunakan pengkodean tematik untuk mengidentifikasi pola-pola berulang. Temuan mengungkap dua dimensi kunci. Pertama, bentuk otoritas kyai dalam setting nonformal bersifat dominan sosio-kultural, berakar pada rantai transmisi guru-santri dan pengakuan masyarakat, bukan pada struktur institusional formal. Otoritas kyai beroperasi melalui transmisi pengetahuan guru-santri, mentoleransi perbedaan interpretasi untuk menjaga harmoni, dan tetap terfragmentasi antar lembaga. Kedua, kyai memperoleh otoritas mereka melalui kerja terus-menerus menghidupkan Al-Qur'an—memobilisasi ayat-ayat dan hadis yang sudah mapan seperti "*khairukum man ta'allam al-Qur'āna wa 'allamahu*," QS Āli 'Imrān 3:18, QS az-Zumar 39:9, dan QS al-'Alaq 96:1-5 sebagai perangkat motivasional dan legitimasi dalam praktik pedagogis sehari-hari. Artikel ini berargumen bahwa otoritas kyai dalam setting nonformal dirakit melalui kerja komunitas yang berkelanjutan yang menerjemahkan makna-makna skriptural ke dalam bimbingan moral yang relevan secara lokal. Hal ini berkontribusi pada kajian otoritas keagamaan Islam dengan menunjukkan bagaimana otoritas muncul bukan dari kredensial formal tetapi dari kerja berkelanjutan untuk membuat teks-teks suci hidup sesuai kebutuhan masyarakat.

Kata Kunci: Otoritas kyai, menghidupkan Al-Qur'an, pendidikan Al-Qur'an nonformal.

Introduction

In various rural areas of Indonesia, local kyai occupy a central position in the religious life of the community, serving not only as preachers and religious teachers but also as spiritual guides who direct the religious practices of residents in their daily lives.[1] In the context of Islamic education, local religious leaders play a key role in promoting Qur'anic education across generations.[2] However, the authority of kyai in nonformal Qur'anic education presents an unresolved academic problem. In Pelangwot Village, Lamongan, field observations have recorded at least nine active TPQs (Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an) independently managed by local ustaz and kyai, yet each operates autonomously with varying

[1] Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren: Studi Pandangan Hidup Kyai Dan Visinya Mengenai Masa Depan Indonesia.* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 2011), 34-52

[2] Mohammad Bustanol Husein and Abdul Roziq, "Peranan Kyai Sebagai Pemimpin Lokal Dalam Pelaksanaan Pembangunan Desa Larangan Luar Kabupaten Pamekasan," *REFORMASI* 11, no. 2 (2021), https://doi.org/10.33366/rfr.v11i2.2347.120-135

quality standards, learning methods, and evaluation systems.[3] The absence of standard rules regarding TPQ management has resulted in institutional fragmentation and the phenomenon of students administratively declared "graduates" without adequate Qur'an reading skills.[4] Unlike formal Islamic education where interpretation follows standardized curricula and methodological frameworks, nonformal TPQ institutions raise critical questions about how kyai obtain their interpretive authority and what forms this authority takes outside formal structures. At the local level, the legitimacy of a kyai is often built through a combination of religious knowledge considered adequate, communication skills, social influence, and community recognition, making kyai authority relational and contextual based on social trust that is continuously reproduced in daily practices. [5]

Previous studies have extensively documented kyai authority in formal *pesantren* and community religious life. Dhofier explained that kyai authority in *pesantren* derives from teacher-student transmission chains and community recognition.[6] Masfuroh and Widodo emphasized that local kyai legitimacy stems from social recognition and emotional closeness rather than formal academic expertise.[7] Studies on educational decentralization highlight policy and governance implications but separate institutional analysis from religious practices.[8] Recent works on enlivening the Qur'an in Islamic education show that interpretation develops through social practices influenced by local authoritative figures,[9] yet the relationship between these practices, kyai interpretive authority, and institutional fragmentation remains relatively neglected.[10] Thus, while extensive research exists on kyai in formal contexts, how interpretive authority is constructed, negotiated, and practiced in nonformal Qur'anic education at the village level has not been systematically addressed.

This article addresses this gap by focusing on two main research questions derived from editor guidance: (1) What are the forms of kyai authority in the nonformal Qur'anic education institutions under study? (2) Why do these kyai

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[3] Fahimah, "Observasi Lapangan," 2025.

[4] Qiyadah Robbaniyah and Roidah Lina, "Navigating Quranic Generation : Challenges And Opportunities Of Non- Formal Islamic Institutions" 17, no. 2 (2025): https://doi.org/10.20885/tarbawi.vol17.iss2.art5, 285–304,

[5] Iqri Masfuroh and Ageng Widodo, "Langgar Dan Peran Kiai Langgar Dalam Peningkatan Pendidikan Agama Islam Desa Kertanegara," *Al-Fikr: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 7, no. 2 (2021):, https://doi.org/10.32489/alfikr.v7i2.223, 88–95

[6] Azyumardi Azra, *Surau: Pendidikan Islam Tradisional Dalam Transisi Dan Modernisasi.* (Jakarta,: Logos Wacana Ilmu., 2003), 41-50

[7] Masfuroh and Widodo, "Langgar Dan Peran Kiai Langgar Dalam Peningkatan Pendidikan Agama Islam Desa Kertanegara." no. 2 (2021): 88–95

[8] Masfuroh and Widodo, 96

[9] Eni Purwati Shinta Nurani, Luthfi Maulana, "Living Qur'an as New Market Trends of Islamic Education in Indonesia," *Hayula: Indonesian Journal of Multidisciplinary Islamic Studies* 6, no. 1 (2022): 1–18.

[10] Muhammad Shaleh Assingkily, "Living Qur ' an as a Model of Islamic Basic Education in the Industrial Era 4 . 0," *Ibtida* 6 (2019): 19–36.

obtain their authority in the community? These questions are framed within the broader aim of understanding kyai authority as a living social practice rather than a formal institutional structure.

This article argues that kyai interpretive authority in nonformal Qur'anic education is predominantly socio-cultural—strong in legitimacy but flexible in procedure—and operates through teacher-student knowledge transmission and community recognition rather than methodological or institutional standardization. Through the perspective of enlivening the Qur'an, this study views the Qur'an not merely as a normative text discussed in tafsir books, but as a source of meaning that is alive in social and religious practices. This approach emphasizes how verses from the Qur'an are selected, recited,[11] and used as motivational reinforcement, moral foundation, and guidelines for action in specific contexts.[12] Unlike formal *pesantren* where authority is reinforced through structured curricula and centralized coordination, kyai authority in Pelangwot's TPQs is reproduced through daily mau'izhah (religious advice) messages citing established verses and hadith. When differences in understanding arise, they are often left unchallenged in order to maintain social harmony and the effectiveness of teaching, indicating that the authority of interpretation at the local level is fluid and pragmatic, emphasizing practice and togetherness rather than uniformity of interpretation.[13]

To prove this argument, the study employs a qualitative case study approach to examine complex social phenomena within their real-life context.[14] The research was conducted in Pelangwot Village, Laren Subdistrict, Lamongan Regency, selected for its growing number of independent nonformal Qur'anic institutions. Data were collected through participant observation in TPQ learning sessions and mau'izhah forums, semi-structured interviews with teachers, kyai, students, and village officials, and analysis of institutional documents. The qualitative approach allows exploration of social meanings, values, and actors' experiences from the perspective of field participants.[15] In Islamic anthropology, the relationship between religious knowledge and social authority is central to explaining everyday religious life, and religious practices are understood as socially constructed and negotiated systems of meaning.[16] Based on this perspective, fieldwork was conducted to capture practices of enlivening the Qur'an, including

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[11] Sahiron Syamsuddin, *Living Quran Dan Hadis* (Yogyakarta: Teras, 2007), 39

[12] Ahmad Rafiq, "Living Qur ' an : Its Texts and Practices in the Functions of the Scripture Teks Dan Praktik Dalam Fungsi Kitab Suci," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 22, no. 2 (2021):, https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.2021.2202-10. 469–484

[13] Pengamatan, Observasi Lapangan di beberapa TPQ Pelangwot (2025).

[14] Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods* (SAGE Publications, Inc, 2017), 202

[15] Cheryl N. Poth John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design Choosing Among Five Approaches*, Fifth (SAGE Publications, Inc, 2024).

[16] Dale F. Eickelman, *Knowledge and Power in Morocco: The Education of a Twentieth-Century Notable* (Princenton University Press, 1992), 190-195

mau'izhah messages, authority relations, and institutional dynamics that cannot be accessed through textual analysis alone.[17] Data were analyzed interactively through reduction, organization, and verification, supported by thematic coding to identify patterns of meaning.[18] Validity was ensured through triangulation across data sources, methods, and contexts.[19] The next section presents the mapping of institutions and dominant patterns of enlivening the Qur'an in Pelangwot.

Result and Discussion

Conceptualizing Religious Authority: A Theoretical Framework

Before examining the empirical findings from Pelangwot, it is essential to establish a robust theoretical framework for understanding religious authority. Religious authority in Islam has been theorized by several key scholars. Max Weber's concept of charismatic authority provides a foundational starting point, where legitimacy is grounded in personal trust and social recognition rather than formal institutional rules.[20] Weber identified three pure types of legitimate authority: rational-legal, traditional, and charismatic. Charismatic authority, which is most relevant to understanding kyai in nonformal settings, rests on devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism, or exemplary character of an individual person.[21] A leader becomes authoritative not simply because of personal charisma, but because they successfully articulate a vision of Islam that resonates with community needs. Beyond Weber's classic typology, Morgan Clarke has proposed the concept of "epistemic authority" to capture how religious leaders claim legitimacy through specialized knowledge and its vernacular application in everyday contexts[22]

Dale F. Eickelman's study of knowledge and power in Morocco demonstrated that local religious authorities derive legitimacy from personal learning lineages and community recognition rather than from formal credentials. Eickelman showed that religious authority is not merely a function of textual knowledge but is performatively enacted through social relationships and the demonstration of embodied piety.[23]

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[17] Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography Principles in Practice*, 3rd Editio (London: Routledge, 2007), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203944769. 201

[18] Norman K. Denzin, *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods*, 1st Editio, 2017; h.101. Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, *Analisis Data Kualitatif Buku Sumber Tentang Metode-Metode Baru (Terjemahan)*, *Penerbit Universitas Indonesia*, 2007. 55

[19] Denzin, *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods*.45

[20] Max Weber, *The Theory Of Economic And Social Organization, Trans. AM Henderson and Talcott Parsons. New York:*, 1947. 302

[21] Weber. 305

[22] Ali-reza Bhojani and Morgan Clarke, "Religious Authority beyond Domination and Discipline : Epistemic Authority and Its Vernacular Uses in the Shi ' i Diaspora," 2023, 272–95, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417522000470.

[23] Eickelman, *Knowledge and Power in Morocco: The Education of a Twentieth-Century Notable*. 202

More recently, Ismail Fajrie Alatas's study, What Is Religious Authority? Cultivating Islamic Communities in Indonesia, provides a compelling reconceptualization of religious authority. Moving beyond conventional understandings that treat authority as emanating from the charismatic aura of a single leader, Alatas demonstrates that authority is "assembled through the persistent labor of community building" and "constituted through the sustained work of translation, mobilization, collaboration, and competition.[24] Drawing on insights from post-structuralist Marxism, actor-network theory, and Hannah Arendt's philosophy, Alatas shows how Muslim saints and scholars opened new channels for the transmission of Islamic teachings through concrete and sustained labors of community cultivation.[25] Alatas's key insight is that religious authority is not a property but a relation—it emerges from ongoing interactions between religious leaders and their communities. A leader becomes authoritative not simply because of personal charisma or inherited status, but because they successfully articulate a vision of Islam that resonates with community needs and mobilize resources to sustain that vision over time. This "articulatory labor" involves (1) imagining, recovering, and reconstructing a vanished Prophetic past informed by present needs and challenges, and (2) representing and conveying that past to others as models for present action.[26]

This understanding is reinforced by the comparative perspective offered by Daphna Ephrat and Meir Hatina, whose edited volume examines how religious authority and charisma operate across Islamic and Jewish traditions, highlighting common patterns of knowledge transmission and community cultivation.[27] A recent review of Alatas's work by Luigi Sausa further emphasizes the significance of articulatory labor for understanding religious authority beyond the Indonesian context.[28]

In the context of Indonesian Islamic education, Azyumardi Azra has documented how Islamic educational institutions have historically developed through community initiatives rather than state-driven structures, creating diverse institutional forms from semi-formal to those fully dependent on personal authority.[29] Robert W. Hefner similarly observed that Islamic education in Indonesia has been characterized by institutional differentiation without systemic integration, resulting in remarkable diversity of religious practices at the local

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[24] Ismail Fajrie Alatas, *What Is Religious Authority? Cultivating Islamic Communities in Indonesia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021). 54

[25] Alatas. 18

[26] Alatas. 19

[27] Eds. Daphna Ephrat and Meir Hatina, *Religious Knowledge, Authority, and Charisma: Islamic and Jewish Perspectives* ((Salt Lake City: : University of Utah Press, 2021). 150

[28] Ismail Fajrie Alatas, "What Is Religious Authority? Cultivating Islamic Communities in Indonesia," vol. 23, 2024, 351–53, https://doi.org/10.1163/15700615-02303005.

[29] Azyumardi Azra, *Pendidikan Islam: Tradisi Dan Modernisasi Menuju Milenium Baru* (Jakarta,: Logos Wacana Ilmu., n.d.); 45. Azra, *Surau: Pendidikan Islam Tradisional Dalam Transisi Dan Modernisasi*. 123

level.[30] More recent scholarship on *pesantren*-based Sharia cooperatives demonstrates how intergenerational collaboration and digital transformation are reshaping traditional authority structures, with senior kyai delegating operational responsibilities while retaining theological guidance.[31] Studies on the kyai-santri relationship reveal complex dynamics of hierarchy, negotiation, and even resistance, suggesting that authority is neither static nor uncontested.[32] This theoretical framework provides the analytical tools for examining kyai authority in Pelangwot.

Forms of Kyai Authority

This study finds that interpretive authority in non-formal Qur'anic education in Pelangwot is rooted not in formal academic structures but in socially embedded and genealogical knowledge transmission. Kyai and ustaz thus act not only as recitation teachers but as authorities of meaning who shape how verses and hadith are understood and practiced. Mukhid, a senior teacher, observed that this authority is exercised daily without formal institutional backing.[33]

In interviews, the ustaz emphasized that their explanations of verses and hadiths were based on their previous learning experiences with teachers and kyai, as well as references to classical texts. Kyai Sanusi stated: "Pengambilan penjelasan dari kitab turats, seperti tafsir Jalalain dan Tafsir Ibn Kathir, dan dari pendapat para ulama dan guru-guru kami. Saya tidak pernah mengajarkan sesuatu yang tidak diajarkan guruku." Ustadz Mukhid explained: "Kita kembalikan pada pendapat yang sahih dan populer, tentunya juga mengikuti guru-guru kami. Kalau ada yang berbeda, kita biarkan saja karena yang penting santri belajar Al-Qur'an."[34] These statements show that interpretive authority is built on two foundations: the authority of classical texts and the authority of teacher-student transmission, as noted in Dhofier's analysis.[35]

This pattern of role differentiation between kyai and ustaz, where kyai retain ultimate authority while ustaz handle daily operations, has been observed in other Indonesian nonformal educational contexts as well. Choeroni's study of rumah tahfizh (Qur'an memorization houses) identifies a similar polarization: kyai function as central authorities while ustaz serve as implementing agents.[36]

This transmission pattern positions the kyai as the key epistemic authority at the local level, grounded in knowledge, learning lineage, and community

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[30] Robert w.Hefner, "How Indonesia Became a Word Leader in Islamic Education: A Historical Sociology of a Graet Transformation," *Muslim Education Review* 1, no. 1 (2022). 78

[31] Balya Ziaulhaq Achmadin and Ahmad Barizi, "Dismantling the Relationship between Kiai and Santri : A Critical Review of the Social and Cultural Dynamics of Pesantren in East Java" 7, no. 2 (2024): 153–85.

[32] Achmadin and Barizi. .65

[33] Mukhid, "Metode TPQ," 2025.

[34] Sanusi, "Wawancara Dengan Salah Satu Pengelola TPQ," 2025.

[35] Zamakhsyari Zofier, *Tradisi Pesantren: Studi Tentang Pandangan Hidup Kyai Dan Visinya Mengenai Masa Depan Indonesia* (Jakarta,: LP3ES, 1994). 98

[36] Supian Sauri Choeroni, Nur'l Yakin Mch, "Polarisasi Peran Kyai Dan Ustadz Dalam Manajemen Rumah Tahfizh," 2019, 311–20.

recognition. From a Weberian perspective, this authority corresponds primarily to charismatic authority, where legitimacy is grounded in personal trust and social recognition rather than formal institutional rules.[37]

Interpretive authority in Pelangwot is also characterized by flexibility toward differences in understanding. Two concrete examples document this phenomenon. First, interpretation of QS al-'Alaq 96:1-5 varies. Ustadz Fithriyah (TPQ Manarul Ilmi) interprets iqra' as primarily reciting the Qur'an with correct tajwid. She explained: "Bagi saya, iqra' di sini artinya membaca Al-Qur'an dengan benar, karena ini adalah ayat pertama yang turun." Ustadz Muamali (TPQ Hidayatul Muttaqin) extends the meaning to include any knowledge-seeking activity: "Menurut saya, iqra' itu tidak hanya membaca Al-Qur'an, tetapi juga membaca buku pelajaran sekolah." When asked about this difference, Ustadz Fithriyah responded: "Kami tahu ada yang berbeda, tapi tidak perlu diperdebatkan. Masing-masing punya guru yang berbeda."[38]

Second, interpretation of the hadith khayrukum man ta'allama al-Qur'āna wa 'allamahu also varies. Ustadz Basyar (TPQ Darul Fallah) limits it to teaching Qur'anic recitation: "Hadits ini khusus untuk orang yang belajar dan mengajarkan baca Al-Qur'an." Kyai Sanusi (TPQ Nuril Huda) includes broader religious literacy: "Menurut guru saya, maksud hadits ini luas. Siapa saja yang mengajarkan Al-Qur'an, baik bacaannya, artinya, atau ajarannya, termasuk yang dimuliakan." Kyai Sanusi added that he knows some colleagues disagree but he "does not want to argue because the goal is the same: encouraging children to learn."

These examples demonstrate that competing interpretations are accommodated to maintain social harmony and pedagogical focus. As Khaled Abou El Fadl observed in his study of interpretive authority in Islam, decentralized systems often tolerate plurality of interpretation as long as no single authority claims exclusive correctness.[39] This tolerance reflects the pragmatic orientation of nonformal education, where priority is maintaining effective learning environments rather than doctrinal uniformity**.**

Reviving The Qur'an: The Establishment of The Authority of Kyai

The practice of enlivening the Qur'an in Pelangwot occurs through religious messages (mau'izhah) delivered by ustaz or kyai. One consistent space is brief advice after learning activities before santri go home, as well as mau'izhah forums held at the TPQ or mushollah. Pengamatan observed that in this space, the Qur'an and hadith appear as living texts, used directly to frame students' attitudes and motivations.[40]

[37] Weber, *The Theory Of Economic And Social Organization*. 198

[38] Muamali, "Kondisi TPQ Desa," 2025.

[39] Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2001). 89

[40] Pengamatan, Observasi Lapangan di beberapa TPQ Pelangwot, Agustus.

The verses and hadiths conveyed are well established in the Islamic educational tradition. One frequently referenced hadith is the saying of the Prophet ﷺ:

خَيْرُكُمْ مَنْ تَعَلَّمَ الْقُرْآنَ وَعَلَّمَهُ

Recorded in Sahih al-Bukhari,[41] this hadith is understood as affirming that learning and teaching the Qur'an are the most important acts of worship, encouraging students to interpret their TPQ presence as religious virtue practice.[42] Verses emphasizing knowledge and scholars' status also appear frequently. QS Āli 'Imrān [3]:18 states:

شَهِدَ اللَّهُ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ وَأُولُو الْعِلْمِ قَائِمًا بِالْقِسْطِ

Ibn Kathīr explains that mentioning ulū al-'ilm alongside Allah and angels elevates scholars' status.[43] Al-Ṭabarī emphasized that knowledgeable people are mentioned because knowledge is the basis for valid testimony.[44] QS az-Zumar [39]:9 asks: "Are those who know equal to those who do not know?" Ibn Kathīr interprets this as affirming that human excellence lies in knowledge guiding to obedience.[45] QS al-'Alaq [96]:1-5, the first revelation, commands reading and learning. Al-Ṭabarī understood these verses as confirming reading and learning as Islam's foundation.[46]

This practice of enlivening the Qur'an shows that kyai authority is not merely asserted but performed. Each time a kyai recites a verse and applies it to students' immediate circumstances, he demonstrates his capacity to make ancient scripture speak to present needs. This is precisely what Alatas identifies as "articulatory labor": the work of (1) imagining, recovering, and reconstructing a vanished Prophetic past informed by present needs, and (2) representing and conveying that past to others as models for present action.[47]

The practice of enlivening the Qur'an in nonformal settings extends beyond TPQs to include family-based Qur'anic literacy and majelis taklim (religious study circles). Research on informal religious governance in rural Muslim communities demonstrates that such practices constitute a distinct mode of religious authority that operates outside formal state or institutional structures. Similarly, studies of Al-Qur'an instruction within out-of-school majelis taklim settings confirm that the integration of structured pedagogical models with local religious leadership

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[41] Muhammad Fu'ad Abdul Baqi, *Lu'lu' Wal Marjan Shahih Bukhori* (Jakarta: PT Elex M edia Kom putindo Kom pas - G ram e d ia, A n ggo ta IKAPI, Jakarta, 2017). 124

[42] Muamali, "Kondisi TPQ Desa."

[43] ʿUmar ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qurʾān Al-ʿAẓīm* (Beirut: Dār al-Fīkr al-Arabī, Beirut, 1970). 127

[44] Muḥammad ibn Jarīr Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ Al-Bayān ʿan Taʾwīl Āy Al-Qurʾān* (Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyah (Beirut), 1997). 200

[45] Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qurʾān Al-ʿAẓīm*. 128

[46] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ Al-Bayān ʿan Taʾwīl Āy Al-Qurʾān*. 202

[47] Alatas, *What Is Religious Authority? Cultivating Islamic Communities in Indonesia*, 2021. 23

enhances learning outcomes while maintaining community trust in kyai authority.[48]

The transmission and transformation of these verses further illuminates this process. William A. Graham argued that Qur'anic transmission cannot be separated from oral performance, where the recited text carries authority through chains of transmission (isnād).[49] Classical exegetes like al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr interpreted these verses within their historical contexts, devoting pages to linguistic analysis. In Pelangwot today, transformation has occurred: from extended commentary to compressed moral citation; from theological elaboration to practical pedagogy; from scholarly ḥalaqah to nonformal TPQ. Kyai Sanusi explained he teaches the same way he learned from his teacher. As Hirschkind argued, oral performance of religious texts in everyday settings transforms reception without necessarily altering authoritative core.[50]

The concept of enlivening the Qur'an thus involves both transmission (preserving the chain of learning from past teachers) and transformation (adapting the message to present community needs). A kyai becomes authoritative because he successfully bridges past and present, sacred text and everyday life, universal Islamic teachings and local community needs. This labor is ongoing and never complete—authority must be continuously reproduced through daily pedagogical interactions**.**

Authority on Interpretation and Transmission of Knowledge: How Kyai Obtain and Exercise Interpretive Authority

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[48] Luluk Asmawati Asmawati Maisaroh, Ima, Nanah Sujanah, "Implementing the Dick and Carey Model in Al-Qur'an Instruction within Out-of-School Majelis Taklim Settings," *International Journal of Nusantara Islam* 14, no. 1 (2026): 133–46.

[49] William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). 35

[50] Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006). 67

[51] Mukhid, "Metode TPQ."

Kalau ada yang berbeda, kita biarkan saja karena yang penting santri belajar Al-Qur'an.[52] These statements show that interpretive authority is built on two foundations: the authority of classical texts and the authority of teacher-student transmission, as noted in Dhofier's analysis.[53]

This transmission pattern positions the kyai as the key epistemic authority at the local level, grounded in knowledge, learning lineage, and community recognition. From a Weberian perspective, this authority corresponds primarily to charismatic authority, where legitimacy is grounded in personal trust and social recognition rather than formal institutional rules.[54]

Interpretive authority in Pelangwot is also characterized by flexibility toward differences in understanding. Two concrete examples document this phenomenon. First, interpretation of QS al-'Alaq 96:1-5 varies. Ustadz Fithriyah (TPQ Manarul Ilmi) interprets iqra' as primarily reciting the Qur'an with correct tajwid. Ustadz Muamali (TPQ Hidayatul Muttaqin) extends the meaning to include any knowledge-seeking activity. Second, interpretation of the hadith khayrukum man ta'allama al-Qur'āna wa 'allamahu also varies. Ustadz Basyar (TPQ Darul Fallah) limits it to teaching Qur'anic recitation. Kyai Sanusi (TPQ Nuril Huda) includes broader religious literacy. Both interpretations coexist without debate. Kyai Sanusi stated he "does not want to argue because the goal is the same: encouraging children to learn."

These examples demonstrate that competing interpretations are accommodated to maintain social harmony and pedagogical focus. As Khaled Abou El Fadl observed in his study of interpretive authority in Islam, decentralized systems often tolerate plurality of interpretation as long as no single authority claims exclusive correctness.[55] This tolerance reflects the pragmatic orientation of nonformal education, where the priority is maintaining effective learning environments and community trust rather than achieving doctrinal uniformity.

Reproducing Religious Authority through Everyday Qur'anic Pedagogy

Religious authority in Pelangwot's nonformal Qur'anic education is sustained through the interplay of inherited tradition and everyday pedagogical practice. Rather than deriving legitimacy from formal qualifications, institutional appointment, or standardized religious training, kyai establish their authority through teacher–student lineages (*sanad*), long-standing relationships with the local community, and the continuous practice of making the Qur'an meaningful in everyday life. These dimensions reinforce one another. Sanad connects present-day kyai to earlier generations of teachers, community recognition transforms inherited knowledge into socially accepted leadership, and the repeated interpretation of Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions continually reaffirms the

[52] Sanusi, "Wawancara Dengan Salah Satu Pengelola TPQ."

[53] Zofier, *Tradisi Pesantren: Studi Tentang Pandangan Hidup Kyai Dan Visinya Mengenai Masa Depan Indonesia*. 56

[54] Max Weber, *The Theory of Economic and Social Organization*, Trans. A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons* (New York: Free Press, 1947). 56

[55] Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women*. 90

kyai's position as a legitimate religious guide. Authority, therefore, is not simply inherited from the past or granted by institutions; it is continuously cultivated through interaction between textual tradition, local trust, and pedagogical engagement.

This relational character of authority helps explain why religious leadership in Pelangwot differs from more formal models of Islamic education. Across the TPQs observed in this study, neither academic credentials nor institutional certification emerged as the principal source of legitimacy. Instead, community members consistently associated religious authority with the credibility of a kyai's learning lineage and the quality of his social relationships with students and their families. Knowing who taught the kyai and witnessing his sustained involvement in community life carried greater weight than knowledge of his formal educational background. Religious authority, in other words, is embedded within social relationships before it is recognized through institutional categories.

The same relational foundation also shapes the way Qur'anic interpretation is practiced within the village. Although differences exist in the interpretation of passages such as QS al-'Alaq (96:1–5) and the hadith *khayrukum man ta'allama al-Qur'āna wa 'allamahu*, these variations rarely become sources of contestation. Interpretive diversity is accommodated because preserving social harmony and ensuring effective religious instruction are valued more highly than enforcing methodological uniformity. Rather than producing competing claims to religious truth, different interpretive emphases coexist across TPQs without undermining the legitimacy of individual kyai. Each institution gradually develops its own interpretive tradition, reflecting the pedagogical priorities and religious experience of its teacher. This autonomy enables Qur'anic education to remain responsive to local needs, while simultaneously contributing to a fragmented landscape of religious authority in which multiple centers of legitimacy coexist without overarching institutional coordination.

Authority, however, is sustained not only through inherited legitimacy but also through continual performance. The observations presented in this study indicate that kyai reaffirm their authority each time they connect scripture with the moral concerns of everyday life. Familiar texts—including the hadith *khayrukum man ta'allama al-Qur'āna wa 'allamahu*, QS Āli 'Imrān (3:18), QS az-Zumar (39:9), and QS al-'Alaq (96:1–5)—are repeatedly invoked, not merely as devotional references, but as interpretive resources through which students are encouraged to understand their responsibilities, shape their conduct, and appreciate the value of learning the Qur'an. The authority of the kyai therefore lies not simply in citing scripture but in demonstrating its continuing relevance to the lived realities of the community.

Seen in this light, the everyday work of teaching the Qur'an closely reflects what Alatas describes as *articulatory labor*. Religious authority is reproduced through the ongoing effort of selecting particular scriptural passages, interpreting

them within specific social contexts, and translating their meanings into practical moral guidance. This process involves both continuity and adaptation. On the one hand, kyai preserve the interpretive inheritance received from their own teachers, thereby maintaining the integrity of existing learning traditions. On the other hand, they continually reshape those inherited meanings in response to the changing circumstances of students and the wider community. Authority is therefore neither static nor self-sustaining. It depends upon the continuous ability of kyai to bridge inherited textual knowledge with contemporary social realities, allowing the Qur'an to remain a living source of moral orientation rather than a body of teachings confined to the classroom.

Understanding authority as an ongoing social accomplishment also helps situate the Pelangwot case within broader debates on Islamic religious authority. Rather than challenging existing scholarship outright, the findings reveal how familiar mechanisms of legitimacy operate differently when they are embedded in decentralized, community-based educational settings. The authority of kyai continues to depend on inherited transmission, social recognition, and oral pedagogy, yet each of these mechanisms assumes a distinctive form outside the institutional environment of the *pesantren*.

The continuing importance of *sanad* strongly echoes Dhofier's influential account of kyai authority. Learning lineages remain central to establishing religious credibility, as kyai consistently trace their knowledge back to respected teachers and present themselves as part of an ongoing chain of transmission. What differs is not the mechanism itself but the institutional ecology within which it operates. In *pesantren*, *sanad* is embedded within a relatively integrated educational structure, allowing the authority of a senior kyai to organize the institution as a whole. In Pelangwot, however, transmission unfolds across multiple autonomous TPQs that function independently of one another. The same learning lineage therefore produces a very different organizational outcome: rather than consolidating authority within a single institutional hierarchy, it gives rise to multiple localized centers of religious legitimacy. The findings thus suggest that *sanad* alone does not determine the structure of religious authority; its institutional consequences depend upon the organizational setting in which transmission occurs. [56]

A similar pattern appears in relation to social legitimacy. Previous studies by Masfuroh and Widodo rightly emphasize that local kyai derive authority primarily from community trust rather than formal educational qualifications. The Pelangwot case confirms this observation but also demonstrates that community recognition performs a broader function than simply identifying who is entitled to lead religious life. Because legitimacy is socially negotiated rather than bureaucratically regulated, it also shapes the boundaries of acceptable interpretation. Variations in explaining Qur'anic verses or prophetic traditions are rarely treated as threats to religious orthodoxy so long as the kyai continues to

[56] Zofier, *Tradisi Pesantren: Studi Tentang Pandangan Hidup Kyai Dan Visinya Mengenai Masa Depan Indonesia*, 88

command public confidence. Interpretive flexibility, therefore, is not merely an educational preference; it emerges as a social consequence of authority grounded in communal trust. Community recognition legitimizes not only the religious leader but also the diversity of interpretive practices that accompany decentralized religious education. [57]

This dynamic becomes even clearer when viewed alongside Hirschkind's analysis of Islamic cassette sermons in Egypt. Hirschkind argues that oral religious performance cultivates ethical dispositions while simultaneously opening a space for public engagement with religious discourse. Oral transmission in Pelangwot serves a markedly different purpose. Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions are delivered primarily to reinforce moral instruction and strengthen the pedagogical relationship between kyai and students rather than to invite public deliberation over competing interpretations. The absence of sustained interpretive contestation should not be understood as a deficiency of oral pedagogy. Instead, it reflects a different configuration of religious authority in which the legitimacy of the interpreter is already socially established before the act of interpretation takes place. The social effects of oral religious performance, therefore, cannot be attributed to the medium alone but emerge from the interaction between pedagogical goals, local institutional arrangements, and existing patterns of authority. [58]

The Pelangwot case also invites a reconsideration of Weber's account of charismatic authority. Weber argues that charisma is inherently unstable and tends to become routinized through traditional or rational-legal institutions.[59] Such a trajectory, however, is not evident in Pelangwot. Although authority is transmitted across generations, it remains attached to individual kyai rather than being incorporated into a unified institutional structure. The coexistence of multiple autonomous TPQs prevents the emergence of a centralized authority capable of routinizing charisma. Institutional fragmentation, therefore, does not erode charismatic authority; instead, it provides the conditions for its continual reproduction in localized settings. [60]

This finding contributes to broader debates on Islamic religious authority by highlighting the importance of institutional context. Transmission through *sanad*, community recognition, and the everyday practice of interpreting the Qur'an each play an important role in sustaining kyai authority, yet none of these mechanisms operates independently. Their significance emerges through their

[57] Shinta Nurani, Luthfi Maulana, "Living Qur'an as New Market Trends of Islamic Education in Indonesia." 126

[58] Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics*, 57

[59] Weber, Economy and Society, 246-254; Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, 363-373

[60] Mukhammad Hubbab Nauval, "The Authority and Domination of Kyai in Forming Religious Discourse and Practice in Islamic Boarding Schools," *Indev: Literasi Media Dakwah Dan Pengembangan Masyarakat* 3, no. 1 (2024): 1, https://doi.org/10.31958/indev.v3i1.12471; Eickelman, *Knowledge and Power in Morocco: The Education of a Twentieth-Century Notable*, 98

interaction within decentralized educational settings, where authority is continually negotiated through social relationships and pedagogical practice rather than secured by formal institutions. Religious authority thus appears less as a fixed status than as an ongoing social process. [61]

Seen from this perspective, the Pelangwot case does not overturn existing theories of Islamic authority. Instead, it refines them by showing that similar mechanisms of legitimacy may produce different forms of authority under different institutional conditions. This observation resonates with Bowen's argument that Islamic authority in Indonesia is shaped through the dynamic interaction of scripture, local tradition, and social organization, resisting simple categorization within universal sociological models. Recent work by Arifin and colleagues further reinforces this interpretation by demonstrating that the vitality of nonformal Qur'anic education depends on kyai who continually translate scriptural teachings into locally meaningful moral guidance. The findings of this study suggest that it is precisely this ongoing interpretive work that enables religious authority to endure across generations despite the absence of formal institutional integration. [62]

Conclusion

Kyai authority in nonformal Qur'anic education is continuously reproduced through the interaction of sanad, community recognition, and the everyday practice of enlivening the Qur'an. Rather than relying on formal qualifications or institutional structures, religious legitimacy is sustained through teacher–student transmission, locally embedded social trust, and the ongoing articulation of Qur'anic teachings within everyday pedagogical practice. In this decentralized setting, the coexistence of multiple autonomous TPQs allows interpretive diversity to flourish without undermining religious authority, demonstrating that authority is maintained as a relational and performative process rather than as a fixed institutional status.

These findings refine existing understandings of Islamic religious authority by showing that the same mechanisms of legitimacy may produce different forms of authority depending on their institutional context. Institutional fragmentation, instead of weakening charismatic authority, can sustain its continuity by preventing its consolidation into a centralized structure. More broadly, the Pelangwot case highlights that the endurance of religious authority depends not only on inherited tradition but also on the continuous work of translating Qur'anic teachings into socially meaningful guidance. Understanding authority as an ongoing process of transmission, recognition, and interpretation offers a more

[61] John R. Bowen, *Islam, Law, and Equality in Indonesia: An Anthropology of Public Reasoning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 203

[62] Mohammad Hasan Bisyri Mamdukh Budiman Zainal Arifin, Sholihul Huda, "The Strategic Role of Kiai in Embedding Qur'anic Educational Values within Rural Communities," *EDUKASIA ISLAMIKA Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* Vol. 10 No (2025): 17–34, https://doi.org/10.28918/jei.v10i1.10759.

dynamic perspective on how Qur'anic education remains relevant across generations.

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