

From Kiai to AI: Sanad's Sociological Dynamics and the Reconfiguration of Islamic Education Governance

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Abstract

This article examines the sociological transformation of the sanad in Indonesian Islamic education and governance adjustments following the widespread integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into madrasah and pesantren ecosystems. Traditionally, sanad functions as a social institution that establishes trust and legitimizes religious authority. However, generative AI challenges knowledge verification mechanisms based on teacher-student transmission. This study employs qualitative-descriptive library research grounded in Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of knowledge, reviewing literature on sanad, Islamic education management, and AI ethics within the maqasid syariah framework. Data are analyzed through thematic content analysis of primary and secondary sources. Findings indicate that sanad functions as a premodern peer-review mechanism that generates symbolic capital and charismatic legitimacy for kiai. AI disrupts this authority structure by enabling santri to access religious answers without accountable transmission chains. Nevertheless, AI offers opportunities for adaptive, transparent, and evidence-based governance when guided by maqasid syariah and religious authorities. The article proposes a conceptual model positioning AI as a wasilah that reinforces rather than replaces sanad's social verification function. This theoretical model requires empirical validation and structured supervision to prevent misuse as a mere instrument of religious legitimation.

Keywords

Sanad, Artificial Intelligence, Islamic Education, Maqasid Syariah, Bourdieu



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INTRODUCTION

The same place? No longer. Islamic education in Indonesia has shifted away from there. A structural shift deep enough not merely technical change, but a displacement of footing. For centuries, scholarly authority in the pesantren tradition stood upon a chain of personal transmission called sanad. Through that chain the authenticity of teachings was guarded. Through that chain, too, the legitimacy of a kiai or a santri heir to knowledge was marked. Sorogan and bandongan two classical methods that long endured placed the teacher-student relation as the primary axis of

knowledge transmission. Personal proximity. Direct supervision. Social recognition. All three became prerequisites for the formation of legitimate religious authority. Without them, the edifice of authority feels fragile. Within such a framework, the pesantren functions as a social field (field), where cultural capital and symbolic capital are converted into authority recognized by its community.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs, too, has not remained silent. A case of the same coin. It actively encourages the use of generative artificial intelligence in religious education as an answer to the demands of the age through the initiative of madrasah digitalization, among others, and through the integration of adaptive learning technology into the curriculum. Various studies show that the use of AI in Islamic religious education learning has reached diverse levels. From the personalization of Al-Qur'an and hadith materials in madrasah ibtidaiyah to data-based curriculum optimization in modern pesantren. This tendency marks a transition: from a personal-hierarchical model of scholarly authority toward a far more decentralized one. Santri may now access religious information instantly and efficiently. One thing that makes it no longer necessary for them to pass through the conventional gate of sanad verification.

So far, studies on the sanad of knowledge have been largely theological-normative in nature, centered on the validity of transmission and the continuity of sanad within the disciplines of hadith and fiqh (Cahyadi et al., 2025). On the other hand, literature on AI in Islamic education is generally technical-practical in orientation, highlighting the effectiveness of learning applications, curriculum personalization, or the digital literacy constraints of teachers (M. Yusuf, 2024). Studies that explicitly connect these two domains from the standpoint of the sociology of knowledge and the management of Islamic education governance remain relatively scarce. To the extent of the author's exploration, not many researches position sanad as a sociological institution within the framework of Bourdieu's thought while simultaneously linking it directly to the dynamics of AI-based Islamic education governance and the principles of maqasid syariah in an integrated manner. This void is what became the origin of this article's birth.

Departing from that exposition, this article is composed to answer three principal questions. First, by what means does the sanad of knowledge work as a sociological mechanism in reproducing religious authority within the environment of Islamic education? Second, to what extent does the adoption of artificial intelligence alter the dynamics of Islamic education governance, particularly in the authority relations between kiai, teachers, and santri? Third, what kind of governance

adjustment model is capable of bridging the sanad tradition with the need for an ethical and accountable AI-based Islamic education governance?

The principal contribution of this article lies in a single idea: to combine Pierre Bourdieu's framework of the sociology of knowledge particularly the concepts of cultural capital, symbolic capital, habitus, and field with the study of contemporary Islamic education management as it intersects with artificial intelligence technology. Through this approach, the article seeks to surpass merely technical-instrumental discussions of AI in Islamic education, and instead offers an analytical framework that positions technological disruption as a sociological problem a problem concerning who has the right to produce, verify, and disseminate the authority of religious knowledge. Another novelty of this article lies in its offering of a conceptual synthesis model that incorporates the principles of *maqasid syariah* into the design of AI governance for Islamic education, so that technology is positioned as *wasilah* (means) that reinforces rather than replaces the social verification function that has long been the function of sanad.

To dissect the dynamics of sanad in Islamic education, the relevant analytical apparatus is provided by Pierre Bourdieu's thought cultural capital, symbolic capital, habitus, and field. Bourdieu reads society as a series of fields or social arenas. There, various forms of capital economic, cultural, social, and symbolic are staked against one another, then converted into each other. Cultural capital, for instance, encompasses diplomas or scholarly certification, manners of speech, and competencies attained through formal as well as informal education. Its role is crucial: it determines and simultaneously reproduces a person's social standing. Symbolic capital, meanwhile, is always bound to symbolic power. Namely, power that enables a person to obtain recognition equal to that obtained through physical or economic power.

A mechanism of capital conversion. That is how sanad can be read within the *pesantren* environment. *Santri* invest physical capital energy, time, obedience (the practice of *khidmah*) which then transforms into symbolic capital: legitimacy and blessing from the *kiai*. Failure in this symbolic capital is fatal. For the traditional Muslim community customarily demands charismatic legitimacy inherited through sanad and the *kiai*'s blessing as a condition for recognizing a person's religious authority within society. Even when that person has already secured academic capital in the form of formal diplomas. Recent research on *pesantren* scholarly transmission affirms: sanad connectivity does not merely preserve the authenticity of teachings. It also grants social legitimacy to the teacher. The religious message he

conveys is likewise more readily accepted by the community. Thus, sanad functions as a social institution producing trust the most fundamental element in the formation of social capital which is subsequently converted into collectively recognized religious authority.

Contemporary Islamic education governance is increasingly demanded to integrate the principles of Total Quality Management (TQM) with the utilization of artificial intelligence. At least on the managerial aspect. In order to realize a more adaptive and data-based quality assurance system. TQM principles stakeholder orientation, continuous improvement, visionary leadership, data-based decision-making are essentially in line with Islamic values. A kind of *ishlah* (improvement). *Itqan* (precision in work) (Faramisti, 2024). The fusion of Islamic values with modern quality management frameworks of this sort is increasingly relevant when Islamic educational institutions are demanded to be more participatory, transparent, and grounded in empirical evidence (Annisa & Gyfend, 2021).

The application of AI in Islamic education management does not stop at the learning aspect. It extends into the realm of supervision, curriculum evaluation, and personalization of religious materials. Several studies indicate that the use of deep learning and AI in Islamic education enables the arrangement of Al-Qur'an and hadith materials that are more adaptive and suited to the needs of each learner. Even though its application still requires further systematic literature review regarding its effectiveness and risks (Maladi et al., 2024). At the elementary level, the utilization of AI is reported to be capable of presenting a more personal, interactive, and meaningful Islamic Religious Education learning process, though still shadowed by challenges of pedagogical and ethical value (Farhani et al., 2025). At the madrasah level, the Madrasah Digital policy rolled out by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in recent years has likewise accelerated the adoption of this technology. Even though accompanied by an urgent need. Namely, to build a more participatory and inclusive management model rather than the hierarchical top-down management pattern that has long dominated.

The framework of *maqāṣid asyārīah* provides an ethical-normative foundation. For gauging the permissibility, benefit, and risk of AI utilization in Islamic education. Within this framework, the primary aim of *syariat* is directed toward the preservation of five fundamental aspects of human life, namely *ḥifẓ al-dīn* (preserving religion), *ḥifẓ al-ʿaql* (preserving intellect), *ḥifẓ al-nafs* (preserving the soul), *ḥifẓ al-māl* (preserving wealth), and *ḥifẓ al-nasl* (preserving lineage) (Supriatin et al., 2025). When religious content produced by AI is not composed by religious

experts or does not pass through verification by competent religious authority the risk of misinformation may arise. The effort to preserve religion (*hifz al-dīn*) likewise obliges the active involvement of ulama, educators, and authoritative institutions. In safeguarding the digital Islamic curriculum.

Correspondingly, studies on AI ethics grounded in *maqasid syariah* affirm that digital innovation must be guided by the principles of truth, justice, *amanah*, and *wasatiyyah* (moderation), so that technology serves as an instrument of *maslahat*, not a producer of *mudarat* (Khasri, 2025). Such principles are crucial to ensure that AI's involvement in Islamic education does not merely follow a technocratic efficiency logic modeled on industry, but remains grounded in Islamic values that hold the formation of faith, sound reason, and noble character as the ultimate aim of education. Kindred studies in the domain of digital *fiqh* likewise affirm that AI systems, however sophisticated in their tracing and mapping of *dalil*, have not fulfilled the requirements of moral agency and legal accountability that are absolutely vested in independent religious authority (Ahmed et al., 2026). Within this framework, AI ought to be positioned as *wasilah* (means), not *ghayah* (end), so that its use is always subject to ethical and religious oversight, rather than replacing the normative authority of ulama and *kiai*.

METHODS

This article is composed using the method of library research through a qualitative-descriptive approach and the perspective of the sociology of knowledge. The library research method was chosen because it is qualitative, descriptive, and non-field in character, and places the researcher as the primary instrument in interpreting and assembling data from various written sources (Abdurrahman, 2024). This approach is considered most suitable for examining normative and conceptual issues surrounding the relation between the *sanad* tradition and the disruption of artificial intelligence, given that its object of study is abstract-conceptual in nature and demands cross-disciplinary synthesis between sociology, education management, and Islamic studies.

The data in this article were drawn from two categories of sources. Primary sources comprise studies of classical texts on *sanad* and the tradition of Islamic scholarly transmission, policy documents from the Ministry of Religious Affairs concerning the utilization of AI in religious education, and indexed journal articles that directly address AI-based Islamic education management. Secondary sources encompass books, relevant national and international scholarly journal articles, along

with studies on Bourdieu's sociology of knowledge, the ethics of technology in Islam, and educational quality governance.

Methodological transparency demands a literature search. The search was therefore conducted through the Google Scholar database, the Sinta accreditation portal, and the DOI (Crossref) indexing system. Three principal inclusion criteria were set: (1) journal articles or books that directly address one of the study's three core themes sanad and Islamic scholarly authority, technology-based Islamic education management/governance, or ethics and maqasid syariah in artificial intelligence; (2) possessing a DOI, an official publisher link, or a traceable institutional identity; and (3) published by nationally indexed journals (Sinta) as well as reputable international ones. Excluded were: undergraduate theses, sources without clear institutional affiliation. Also materials whose existence cannot be re-verified in the aforementioned databases. Source selection prioritized publications from the last five years (2020–2026) to maintain the currency of data. A number of classical conceptual references were retained as theoretical foundations including Bourdieu's foundational works and studies of maqasid al-syariah. Based on these criteria, the final bibliography of this article comprises 26 references. These references were reviewed and re-screened at the editing stage.

Data were analyzed through the technique of thematic content analysis, which proceeds through stages of establishing the study's topics, searching and selecting data sources, assessing source credibility, organizing data into principal themes, through to report writing (Abdurrahman, 2024). Data interpretation is supported by Bourdieu's framework of social reproduction and symbolic capital as the principal analytical lens, subsequently combined with the framework of maqāṣid al-syarī'ah to gauge the ethical dimension of AI adoption in Islamic education governance.

This article is confined to literature analysis, thus involving no fieldwork, interviews, or direct observation of educational practice in any particular pesantren or madrasah. Consequently, all generalizations advanced are conceptual-theoretical in nature, not empirical-statistical: claims in the Results and Discussion section stand as theoretical propositions resulting from a synthesis of literature, not observational findings, and the synthesis model offered at the close of this article still requires further empirical testing in the field.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Examined more closely, sanad is not merely a chain of textual transmission. Too simple. Sanad is also a system of knowledge verification. Its logic differs little from the peer review mechanism of the contemporary academic world. A scholarly article

must pass through peer review before it is deemed fit for publication. A scholarly riwayat in the Islamic tradition, likewise, must undergo the process of tarjih (weighting) and takhrij (source tracing). That process drives internal criticism. At once preserving the authenticity of the sanad itself. High methodological precision is demanded. For the credibility of the transmitter of riwayat and hence their legitimacy as religious authority rests greatly on the clarity and traceability of the transmission chain.

Within Bourdieu's frame, this mechanism can be read as a distinctive process of capital conversion. A santri undergoes years of study in the pesantren. He invests physical capital energy and time through the practice of khidmah (devotion). Then converts that investment into symbolic capital: the kiai's blessing and recognition. Failure to accumulate this symbolic capital carries serious consequences for the santri who will later enter society. For the traditional Muslim community tends to require charismatic legitimacy inherited through sanad as a precondition for the recognition of religious authority. However high the formal academic capital a person may hold. It is a phenomenon of this sort that explains why academic degrees alone, unaccompanied by a clear sanad network, often remain insufficient for attaining full recognition as an authoritative figure within the traditional religious community.

That capital conversion does not stop at the transactional level of blessing and service. It is embedded more deeply. As habitus. A set of practical and pre-reflective dispositions formed through years of routine sitting cross-legged in sorogan, memorizing with a particular intonation in bandongan, maintaining adab toward the kitab and the teacher. So that the santri "naturally" recognizes and submits to sanad-bearing authority. Without needing explicit explanation each time. This habitus is what makes the kiai's legitimacy feel taken for granted within the pesantren environment. Not because rational arguments are reconsidered at every moment. But because the santri's body and manner of thinking have been shaped to recognize those markers of authority (sanad ijazah, manner of speech, scholarly silsilah) as something natural and not to be questioned.

The problem is that the habitus formed within the physical field of the pesantren does not automatically remain relevant when the same santri interacts with the digital field. The digital field where generative AI operates generally does not display the markers of symbolic capital that the santri's habitus has been accustomed to recognizing in the pesantren. No isnad is visible. No gesture of respect toward the teacher. No process of blessing that can be observed. The gap between a habitus formed for the physical field and the demands of verification in the digital

field may potentially produce a kind of "habitus lag." Namely, a deferential disposition that originally functioned as a marker of epistemic caution. It may instead risk simply migrating to the digital field without equivalent markers of authority. So that AI output can be accepted with a degree of trust resembling trust in the kiai's fatwa. Whereas the two stand upon entirely different verification mechanisms. Thus, sanad is not merely a tool for textual validation. It is a sociological institution sustaining the entire architecture of traditional religious authority. A field where symbolic capital is continuously produced, staked, and reproduced across generations. At once a habitus now demanded to adapt when the field in which it holds sway likewise changes shape.

The kiai's authority within this framework reflects at least two forms of authority at once: charismatic authority growing out of scholarly capacity, and traditional authority inherited from previous generations through the sanad line. This fusion places the kiai in a position of broad authority in formulating and directing religious discourse and practice within the pesantren environment.

The emergence of artificial intelligence shakes that architecture of authority. Down to its roots. AI fundamentally alters the teacher-student relation that was previously personal and hierarchical. By virtue of its capacity to serve instant access to religious texts, to provide automatic translation, and to offer personalized learning. Santri may now obtain "answers" to religious questions within seconds through AI-based applications. Without having to undergo sorogan or bandongan. Which demand the physical presence and direct supervision of a teacher. This shift from the isnad system toward digital learning gradually propels the formation of a new mode of authority. A mode no longer entirely dependent on the chain of personal transmission.

A fundamental question arises from this shift: who bears responsibility for verifying religious content produced by AI systems? Sanad places scholarly responsibility upon particular individuals. Their intellectual trace can be followed. The output of generative AI? Probabilistic in nature. Often its authoritative source cannot be directly traced. Recent studies on AI-based religious disinformation in Indonesia even name this phenomenon the production of "sanad-less knowledge." Namely, digital artifacts that mimic the voices of ulama and sacred symbols. Without accompanying chains of scholarly accountability that can be traced. As in conventional isnad (Hidayah et al., 2026). As a theoretical proposition not a direct empirical finding, since this article involves no field observation one point may be advanced. This risk becomes crucial when AI content is not composed by competent

religious experts. Or does not pass through a process of religious authority verification. For it may potentially give rise to religious misinformation difficult for ordinary users to recognize. Especially early-age santri in madrasah ibtidaiyah. As well as learners who do not yet possess an adequate foundation in religious knowledge.

Even so, it bears noting that this disruption does not automatically dissolve the principal aim of Islamic education. Several studies affirm that AI can enrich the learning process without necessarily displacing the main orientation of Islamic education, namely the formation of faith, taqwa, and noble character (Farhani et al., 2025). What shifts is not the aim of education itself. But the mechanisms and pathways of its attainment. From what originally rested fully on the personal teacher-student relation, toward a hybrid between human interaction and technological mediation. Yet it is likewise important to raise a possibility contrary to the narrative of "AI as mere tool." In everyday practice, it is not impossible that santri instead position AI as a *de facto* authority. Not merely a *wasilah*. Precisely because of the ease and speed of its access. This possibility untested through empirical data or secondary case studies in this article needs to be affirmed as the limit of the prescriptive claims advanced. As discussed further in section 4.5. The fundamental question, too, changes. How can the *kiai*'s authority be sustained, even strengthened, amid the ease of information access that AI offers? Rather than merely attempting to stem the tide of technology that is fundamentally unavoidable.

Responding to these challenges, a number of Islamic educational institutions have begun pioneering AI-based management strategies to optimize curriculum and quality oversight. The fusion of Total Quality Management principles with the utilization of digital technology is viewed as a path toward realizing a more adaptive, participatory, and data-based quality assurance system, while remaining aligned with Islamic values such as *ishlah* and *itqan* (Faramisti, 2023). An approach of this sort opens opportunities for Islamic educational institutions. To shift from a traditional management model that is hierarchical and top-down. Toward a more participatory model. Where strategic decisions rest more heavily on learning data generated by AI systems. Without sacrificing the principle of *musyawarah* (*syura*). Which stands as a foundational value of leadership in Islam.

On the practical plane, ethical governance requires one firm position: AI is *wasilah* (means). Not *ghayah* (end). Every strategic decision in Islamic education management curriculum design, evaluation of learning outcomes, oversight of santri conduct must still involve human judgment grounded in Islamic values. AI? A

supporting instrument for decision-making. Not a replacement for the decision-making authority itself. Studies on the ethics of AI use in Islamic education affirm one thing. The active involvement of ulama and educators in overseeing every stage of the development and application of religious AI systems. That is the concrete manifestation of applying the principle of *ḥifẓ al-dīn* within the framework of *maqāṣid al-syarī'ah* (Suprihatin et al., 2025).

Another challenge no less important: the readiness of human resources. Many Islamic educational institutions especially *pesantren* and private *madrasah* still grapple with the digital competence limitations of teachers. As well as technological infrastructure adequate for running AI-based governance optimally. Studies on the integration of artificial intelligence in curriculum management reveal one thing. The success of this technology's adoption is greatly determined by institutional readiness. From teacher training, the availability of devices, to policy support from educational authorities (Hikmawati, Sufiyanto & Jamilah, 2023).

A similar tendency is likewise visible in the application of AI in education more broadly, where unequal access to technology and potential algorithmic bias risk widening, not narrowing, existing disparities (Widyasari, Murtiyasa, Supriyanto, 2024). Without such institutional capacity strengthening, AI adoption risks broadening the gulf. Between Islamic educational institutions that are financially established and those that are not. A theoretical proposition. If true, it may be read as a new form of cultural capital inequality within the *pesantren* community. Still requiring proof through field data.

Departing from the analysis in the three preceding subsections, this article offers a conceptual model. A model linking the *sanad* tradition with the needs of AI-based Islamic education governance. This model proceeds from one premise. The sociological function of *sanad* as a mechanism of verification, trust accumulation, and authority reproduction need not be dissolved by the presence of technology. It may instead be strengthened through it. Provided that the AI system is deliberately designed to sustain, not replace, the social verification function long borne by the network of *ulama* and *kiai*.

First, at the epistemic level, AI-based Islamic education governance needs to build a mechanism of "digital *sanad*." Namely, a system of marking and tracing sources. A system enabling every religious AI output to be transparently linked to the *ulama*, reference *kitab*, or authoritative institution that verifies it. This principle aligns with the notion that AI is only fit to function as a tool for tracing *dalil* (*adawat al-bahts*). Not as an authority issuing legal rulings. For it has not fulfilled the

requirements of scholarly competence, intention (qashd), and moral responsibility (taklif) as demanded within the tradition of ijihad. A conclusion likewise reinforced by studies on the limits of AI's capacity for ijihad. Those studies affirm: artificial intelligence systems are only capable of fulfilling the instrumental aspect of source tracing and dalil mapping. But cannot yet bear the burden of taklif or the legal responsibility required of independent religious authority (Ahmed et al., 2026). In other words, religious AI output always requires final verification from a mufti or competent ulama before it is fit to serve as a definitive reference.

Second, at the institutional level, this synthesis model demands the presence of an adaptive quality management system. A system that simultaneously fuses the spiritual values of the pesantren, 21st-century competencies, and the optimization of digital infrastructure. That optimization encompasses three things. Teacher training so they are capable of guiding santri in using AI critically and responsibly. The drafting of protocols for overseeing AI-based religious content by the institution's internal council of ulama. As well as algorithmic transparency enabling stakeholders to understand the basis of recommendations generated by the system. These three elements need to be managed through visionary leadership reflecting the concept of imamah in Islam. A leader who is just, amanah, and capable of formulating a long-term vision for the fusion of knowledge, spirituality, and morality.

Third, at the ethical-normative level, the entire process needs to be bound by the framework of maqāṣid al-syarī'ah as a moral compass. Every decision on AI utilization is always tested against five aspects of fundamental preservation. Namely, religion, intellect, soul, lineage, and wealth. Through this framework, AI-based Islamic education governance is not judged solely by technical efficiency or by increases in learning outcome scores. But also by its contribution to strengthening the faith, sound reason, and noble character of learners. This synthesis model in turn affirms one thing. AI and sanad are not two poles that mutually negate one another. The two can be positioned as two layers of verification that complement each other. AI presents access and efficiency. Sanad whose meaning is now expanded to encompass the network of ulama and digital authoritative institutions remains the final guarantor of the authenticity and accountability of the religious knowledge conveyed.

The three-layered synthesis model above needs to be read with awareness of its own limitations. First, this model is prescriptive-normative. It affirms how the relation between AI and sanad ought to be governed. At once untested against one possibility. In field practice as touched upon in section 4.2 santri may instead

position AI as a de facto authority, not merely a wasilah. The ease and speed of access it offers. Without empirical data or secondary case studies testing this scenario, the claim that "AI ought to be wasilah and not ghayah" remains a normative expectation. Not an analytical finding verified in the field.

Second, the "digital sanad" mechanism proposed in section 4.4 itself harbors a risk of misuse. A label or certification of "verified by ulama" on AI output may easily turn into a stamp of administrative legitimacy empty of substance. If its verification process is not accompanied by genuine and sustained oversight from competent religious authority. In other words, the formalization of sanad into a digital system potentially reproduces precisely the problem it seeks to address. Namely, authority claimed without traceable scholarly accountability. If Islamic educational institutions treat such marking as a mere formality of compliance, rather than a practice of substantive verification. Awareness of this risk is important to affirm. So that the synthesis model offered is not read as a single risk-free solution. But as a framework whose success remains dependent on institutional commitment and sustained active oversight.

CONCLUSION

As an answer to the three questions posed, this article concludes three principal points. First, the sanad of knowledge functions as a sociological institution producing trust and symbolic capital in Islamic education. It operates like a premodern peer review mechanism. Preserving the authenticity of teachings. At once reproducing the kiai's charismatic and traditional authority through the conversion of physical, cultural, and symbolic capital which in turn becomes embedded as habitus within the pesantren field. Second, the adoption of artificial intelligence presents significant disruption to knowledge verification mechanisms that have long been personal-hierarchical. Instant access to religious information through AI may potentially enable santri to obtain "answers" without traversing a transmission chain that can be held accountable. Thus giving rise to fundamental questions concerning the authority and accountability of digital religious content verification. A theoretical proposition still requiring further empirical testing. Given that the opposing possibility that AI may instead be treated as a de facto authority likewise needs to be tested in the field. Third, amid such disruption, AI in fact also opens opportunities to strengthen Islamic education governance through a more adaptive, transparent, and data-based system. Provided its integration is bound by the principles of maqāsid al-syarī'ah and remains under the active oversight of religious authority. With the

caveat that such oversight mechanisms must be substantive, not merely administrative formality. As affirmed in the model's limitations section.

The practical implications of this conclusion affirm one thing. It is important for pesantren and madrasah administrators not to view AI as a threat that must be rejected. Nor as an instant solution accepted without criticism. But as a *wasilah* whose use needs to be deliberately designed. So as to strengthen, not replace, the social verification function of *sanad*. This demands three things. Strengthening the digital capacity of teachers. The drafting of protocols for overseeing AI-based religious content by the internal council of *ulama*. As well as the development of a "digital *sanad*" mechanism guaranteeing the traceability of authoritative sources behind every religious AI output. Accompanied by periodic audits. So that such a mechanism does not cease to become a formality.

As an agenda for further research, the conceptual synthesis model offered in this article needs to be tested empirically. Through field studies in pesantren and madrasah that have adopted AI technology both in learning processes and in their governance. Subsequent research may also trace the perceptions of *kiai*, teachers, and *santri* regarding the legitimacy of religious authority in the AI era. Including testing directly whether *santri* treat AI as a *wasilah*. Or instead as a *de facto* authority. At once developing operational indicators to measure how far the application of AI in Islamic education aligns with the principles of *maqāṣid al-syarīʿah*. Measurably. And replicable across diverse institutional contexts.

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