

Between Standardization and Teacher Autonomy: Managing Arabic Language Learning Methods in Islamic Boarding Schools

Hanik Shofa Mardiyah

Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam KH Muhammad Ali Shodiq, Indonesia

e-mail, hansho110790@gmail.com

ABSTRACT. This study examines how an Islamic boarding school manages the tension between standardized Arabic language learning methods and teachers' pedagogical autonomy. This issue is important because standardization is necessary to maintain consistency in learning materials, instructional stages, learning targets, and assessment, yet excessive uniformity may limit teachers' capacity to respond to students' diverse learning needs. This study aims to analyze how this tension is managed at Pondok Pesantren Karang Jati, Pamekasan. A qualitative case study design was employed. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving seven informants: one pesantren leader, one Arabic language coordinator, and five Arabic language teachers. The findings reveal that standardization is not implemented as absolute uniformity. Learning materials, instructional stages, targets, and assessment constitute relatively fixed components, whereas teachers retain discretion in explanations, examples, repetition, exercises, and instructional pacing. The study identifies bounded pedagogical autonomy, in which teacher autonomy operates within institutional boundaries and requires coordination when adaptations affect core instructional components. This finding contributes a perspective that standardization can not only constrain teacher autonomy but also define the organizational space within which professional pedagogical discretion can be exercised.

Keywords Educational standardization; pedagogical autonomy; instructional management; Islamic boarding schools; bounded pedagogical autonomy.

Abstrak. Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana pesantren mengelola ketegangan antara standarisasi metode pembelajaran bahasa Arab dan otonomi pedagogis guru. Persoalan ini penting karena standarisasi diperlukan untuk menjaga konsistensi materi, tahapan pembelajaran, target, dan evaluasi, tetapi penerapannya secara seragam berpotensi membatasi kemampuan guru dalam merespons keragaman peserta didik. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis pengelolaan ketegangan tersebut di Pondok Pesantren Karang Jati, Pamekasan. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Data diperoleh melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur, observasi pembelajaran, dan analisis dokumen, dengan melibatkan tujuh informan yang terdiri atas satu pimpinan pesantren, satu koordinator bahasa Arab, dan lima guru bahasa Arab. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pesantren tidak menerapkan standarisasi sebagai keseragaman mutlak. Materi, tahapan, target, dan evaluasi menjadi komponen yang relatif tetap, sedangkan cara menjelaskan, pemberian contoh, pengulangan, latihan, dan pengaturan tempo pembelajaran dapat disesuaikan guru. Temuan utama memperlihatkan terbentuknya *bounded pedagogical autonomy*, yaitu otonomi guru yang berlangsung dalam batas institusional dan memerlukan koordinasi ketika menyentuh komponen inti pembelajaran. Temuan ini memberikan perspektif baru bahwa standarisasi tidak hanya membatasi otonomi, tetapi juga dapat menjadi kerangka yang mendefinisikan ruang diskresi profesional guru.

Kata Kunci: *Standardisasi Pendidikan; Otonomi Pedagogis; Manajemen pembelajaran; Pendidikan pesantren; Otonomi Pedagogis Terbatas.*

Introduction

The teaching of Arabic in Islamic boarding schools requires a balance between institutional standardisation and teachers' pedagogical autonomy. Standardisation serves to maintain consistency in teaching by setting the curriculum, teaching stages, learning objectives and assessment. Meanwhile, pedagogical autonomy enables teachers to adapt their teaching practices to pupils' proficiency levels and needs (Hendriksen dkk., 2024; Lin & Gao, 2023a). Teachers' autonomy does not necessarily mean freedom from institutional structures, but rather professional authority exercised within the bounds of organisational policies and support (Nguyen dkk., 2021). Thus, the managerial challenge is not a choice between standardisation and autonomy, but rather determining a division of authority that allows programme consistency and responsiveness in teaching to coexist.

This issue is relevant to the management of Arabic language learning at the Karang Jati Islamic Boarding School in Pamekasan, Madura. Initial observations indicate that teaching adheres to institutional guidelines regarding teaching materials, instructional stages, learning objectives and assessment. At the same time, differences in pupils' abilities and learning speeds require teachers to adapt how they explain the material, set exercises, review lessons and manage the pace of instruction. This situation raises questions regarding the limits of teachers' authority to adapt teaching without altering the programme's core provisions. If all implementation must be uniform, teachers may face limitations in responding to students' needs. Conversely, if adjustments are made without clear limits and coordination, programme consistency and institutional oversight may be compromised. Therefore, this issue needs to be examined as part of the management of authority and coordination within pesantren learning management.

Previous research has addressed curriculum management in pesantren, including planning, implementation, evaluation, and curriculum adaptation based on the institutional context (Mustari dkk., 2025; Rodliyah dkk., 2024). Meanwhile, studies on teacher autonomy highlight the importance of organisational support and professional judgement in responding to learning needs (Hendriksen dkk., 2024). Although these two areas of research provide an important foundation, the relationship between institutional standards and the limits of teachers' pedagogical authority still needs to be explained in a more contextualised manner within the management of Arabic language learning in Islamic boarding schools. In particular, it is necessary to understand how teaching standards are established, how teachers exercise professional discretion in the delivery of learning, and how adjustments that go beyond teachers' authority are coordinated with programme managers. This

focus shifts attention from the mere application of teaching methods towards managerial mechanisms that link institutional standards, professional discretion and supervision.

In light of these issues, this study aims to analyse how the Karang Jati Islamic Boarding School in Pamekasan manages the relationship between the standardisation of Arabic language learning and teachers' pedagogical autonomy. This study focuses on the setting of learning standards, the scope of teachers' decision-making, and the roles of leaders and coordinators in regulating adjustments to teaching. The study's contribution lies in the formulation of the concept of *bounded pedagogical autonomy*, namely pedagogical autonomy that allows teachers to adapt the delivery of learning within the bounds of institutional standards and prevailing coordination mechanisms. This concept is expected to enrich the field of Islamic Education Management by explaining how teachers' professional authority can be managed without compromising programme consistency. In practical terms, the research findings can serve as a basis for consideration by Islamic boarding school leaders and Arabic language programme managers in defining the limits of authority, coordination patterns, and mechanisms for monitoring learning.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design to examine the management of the relationship between the standardisation of Arabic language learning and teachers' pedagogical autonomy at the Karang Jati Islamic Boarding School, Pamekasan, Madura, East Java. This design was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of institutional practices, focusing on learning standards, teachers' scope of authority, and coordination mechanisms in maintaining consistency in learning (Moleong & Surjaman, 2014).

There were seven research informants selected through purposive sampling, comprising one boarding school head (P1), one Arabic language coordinator (K1), and five Arabic language teachers (G1–G5). The selection of informants was based on their involvement and knowledge of policies, programme management, and the implementation of Arabic language learning at the boarding school.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and document analysis. The interviews addressed learning standards, teachers' authority, methodological adaptations and coordination mechanisms. Observations focused on the delivery of lessons and teachers' responses to differences in students' abilities. The documents analysed included programme guidelines, teaching materials, timetables, assessment instruments, regulations and available supervision records. The researcher acted as the primary instrument, aided by guidelines for interviews, observations and document analysis. Interviews were recorded with the informants' consent and transcribed, whilst observational data were recorded in field notes.

Data analysis drew upon the interactive model proposed by (Miles dkk., 2014), which encompasses data condensation, data presentation, and the drawing and verification of conclusions. Data from interviews, observations and documents were coded according to the themes of standardisation, pedagogical authority, learning adaptation, supervision and coordination. Subsequently, the data were organised into a matrix to compare the informants' perspectives and evidence from various sources. The analysis aimed to identify the limits of adjustments that teachers could make independently, as well as changes requiring coordination with the Arabic language coordinator. From this process, the concept of *limited pedagogical autonomy* was developed based on the relationship between institutional standards and teachers' scope of discretion.

Data reliability was ensured through source triangulation, methodological triangulation, *member checking* and *audit trails* (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation was carried out by comparing information across informants and cross-referencing interview results with observational data and documents. *Member checking* was carried out by confirming specific interpretations with the relevant informants, whilst an *audit trail* was used to document the processes of data collection, coding and analysis. Informant confidentiality was maintained through the use of the codes P1, K1 and G1–G5, and data collection was carried out with the informants' consent.

Research Findings and Discussion

Finding

The research findings indicate that the Karang Jati Islamic Boarding School in Pamekasan manages the relationship between the standardisation of Arabic language teaching and teachers' pedagogical autonomy through the application of institutional standards accompanied by limited discretion in the delivery of lessons. These standards cover the curriculum, learning stages, learning outcomes and assessment. Meanwhile, teachers have scope to adapt their teaching methods based on the students' abilities and classroom conditions, provided they adhere to the core provisions set by the boarding school.

Interviews with the boarding school's leadership revealed that standardisation serves as a shared guideline for the delivery of Arabic language teaching. The boarding school's leadership explained that teachers do not have complete freedom to determine all components of the learning process independently.

“At the boarding school, there are actually existing provisions that serve as a shared guideline for Arabic language teaching. Teachers are not free to determine everything themselves. There is material that must be covered, learning stages that must be followed, targets that must be achieved, and assessments that must be carried out. The aim is to ensure that learning across classes maintains the same direction. Teachers then

Between Standardization and Teacher Autonomy: Managing Arabic Language Learning Methods in Islamic Boarding Schools
implement these guidelines in accordance with the classes they teach. Thus, what is standardised is the framework and the learning targets, whilst the implementation is still adapted to classroom conditions.” (P1)

This statement indicates that standardisation encompasses four main components: content, learning stages, learning targets and assessment. These four components form a shared framework to ensure consistency in the direction of learning across classes. However, a shared framework does not mean that all teaching practices must be identical, as teachers can still adapt their implementation to suit the conditions of their class.

This scope for pedagogical adaptation is explained by G1, who states that teachers can adjust the way they deliver the material when pupils’ abilities vary.

“Teachers still have scope to adapt how they present the material. For example, if pupils’ abilities within a class vary, teachers can provide more examples, repeat the material, give additional exercises, or slow down the pace of delivery. The learning outcomes and core content remain in line with the programme, but the way the material is explained and the approach to pupils need not be exactly the same. Teachers have a better understanding of their pupils’ circumstances because they interact directly with them every day.” (G1)

Explanation G1 indicates that teachers’ discretion lies primarily at the level of lesson delivery. Teachers can add examples, repeat the material, provide additional exercises, and adjust the pace of delivery without altering the core material or the established learning targets. Thus, pedagogical adaptation serves as the means by which teachers respond to students’ needs whilst maintaining alignment with the institutional curriculum.

A tension between standardisation and pedagogical autonomy arises when pupils’ abilities do not align with the pace or learning targets. G3 explains that such circumstances require teachers to consider both pupils’ needs and programme outcomes simultaneously.

“Problems usually arise when pupils’ abilities do not match the predetermined pace or targets. Some classes grasp the material quickly, whilst others require repetition. If teachers adhere too strictly to the targets, some students may fall behind. However, if they make too many adjustments, the programme’s targets may not be met. We generally do not deviate from the prescribed methods. We continue to follow the curriculum and its targets, but we adapt our teaching methods. If there is a significant problem, we discuss it with the coordinator.” (G3)

This statement highlights the dilemma faced by teachers in maintaining a balance between achieving targets and meeting the students’ learning needs. Teachers continue to follow the curriculum and programme targets, but adapt their delivery methods when students require additional time or repetition. Should any issues arise that exceed the teacher’s authority, coordination with the coordinator serves as the mechanism for addressing such problems.

The limits of a teacher's authority are clarified by K1, the Arabic language coordinator. He explained that adjustments to the delivery of lessons are acceptable as long as they do not alter the core standards that have been set.

"We do not want teachers to deviate from the established system, but we also understand that conditions in each class are not always the same. Therefore, supervision is focused more on whether the targets and core requirements are still being met. If a teacher makes adjustments to the way they deliver the material, provided the aim is to help the students and does not alter the core standards, this is still acceptable. If there are adjustments relating to changes in the material, targets or core procedures, the teacher must coordinate with the coordinator first."

(K1)

Explanation K1 highlights the distinction between adjustments that teachers may make independently and changes that require coordination. Adjustments to the method of delivering the material are permitted provided they do not alter the core standards, whilst changes to the material, targets or key procedures must be communicated in advance. Thus, the pesantren allows scope for teachers' professional judgement whilst maintaining institutional authority over the core components of learning.

Overall, the interview findings reveal a division of authority between the boarding school management, coordinators and teachers in the management of Arabic language learning. The boarding school establishes the core learning framework; teachers adapt its implementation to classroom conditions; whilst coordinators play a role in overseeing the application of standards and handling changes that require coordination. This pattern suggests that standardisation is not applied as absolute uniformity, but as a framework that both limits and guides the scope for teacher adaptation.

This pattern can be understood as limited pedagogical autonomy, namely the professional discretion of teachers to adapt the delivery of learning without altering the core components established by the institution. In the case of the Karang Jati Islamic Boarding School, the relationship between standardisation and autonomy is managed through the division of authority and coordination mechanisms. These findings indicate that teachers do not have unlimited freedom to teach, but can still exercise pedagogical judgement within the framework of institutional standards.

Discussion

Managing Standardization and Teacher Autonomy in Arabic Language Learning

The findings of this study reveal that Pondok Pesantren Karang Jati, Pamekasan, manages the tension between standardized Arabic language learning methods and teachers' pedagogical autonomy by establishing institutional standards while allowing teachers a bounded space for instructional adaptation. The pesantren standardizes several core elements of Arabic language

learning, including learning materials, instructional stages, learning targets, and assessment. Teachers, however, retain discretion in determining how these elements are implemented in particular classrooms. This arrangement is significant because it suggests that institutional standardization does not necessarily eliminate teacher autonomy (Ghani, 2025; Ismail & Azizah, 2023). Rather, the relationship between the two is regulated by distinguishing between aspects of learning that require institutional consistency and aspects that require professional judgment. The central finding of this study is therefore not simply that standardization and autonomy coexist, but that the organization manages their relationship by establishing boundaries around teacher discretion.

This finding can be understood through the concept of teacher autonomy, which refers not merely to teachers' freedom to make individual choices but to their capacity to exercise professional judgment within particular institutional and organizational conditions. (Azhar dkk., 2024). Teacher autonomy is shaped by the policies, structures, leadership practices, professional expectations, and organizational cultures in which teachers work. Recent research on teacher autonomy in Islamic educational contexts similarly indicates that teacher autonomy is often conditional rather than absolute. Teachers may have opportunities to adapt instructional content, methods, and assessment, while remaining subject to institutional policies, supervision, and broader educational values (Lin & Gao, 2023). The Karang Jati finding is consistent with this perspective but extends it by identifying the organizational mechanism through which conditional autonomy is maintained. The institution does not simply grant or restrict autonomy; it establishes a boundary within which teachers can exercise pedagogical judgment.

The distinction between institutional standards and classroom implementation provides an important explanation of this mechanism. The pesantren leader identified materials, instructional stages, learning targets, and assessment as elements that teachers are expected to follow (Muntaha & Asyhari, 2025). These elements function as institutional anchors that maintain a common direction across Arabic language classes. At the same time, the leader acknowledged that implementation should be adjusted to classroom conditions. This distinction is important because standardization can operate at different levels. An institution may standardize objectives, content, procedures, and assessment without requiring teachers to use identical explanations, examples, pacing, or classroom interactions. In this sense, standardization provides organizational coherence, while professional discretion provides contextual responsiveness.

This interpretation is consistent with studies of curriculum implementation that distinguish between curriculum prescription and curriculum enactment. Curriculum policies and institutional programs establish expectations, but teachers interpret and enact these expectations in concrete classroom situations (Penney & Alfrey, 2022). Teacher agency emerges precisely at the point where

formal requirements encounter the complexity of classroom practice. Teachers must determine how to explain material, respond to students' difficulties, regulate instructional pace, and provide additional learning opportunities. The findings at Karang Jati demonstrate this process clearly. Teachers do not reject the institutional framework when students experience difficulties. Instead, they modify the implementation while maintaining the core learning materials and targets. The finding therefore positions teachers as active interpreters of institutional standards rather than passive recipients of organizational directives.

The role of student diversity is particularly important in explaining why teacher autonomy becomes necessary. The data indicate that students do not always progress at the same pace (Aprilia, 2024). Some students can understand the material relatively quickly, while others require repetition, additional examples, exercises, or more time. A standardized instructional pace may provide an efficient organizational schedule, but it cannot fully anticipate the variation that emerges in individual classrooms (Tran, 2023). This creates a practical tension between institutional efficiency and pedagogical responsiveness. The teacher is therefore placed in a mediating position between what the institution expects and what students require. Teacher autonomy becomes functional in this context because it enables institutional standards to be translated into practices that remain responsive to classroom realities.

This finding also contributes to the literature on educational standardization. Standardization is commonly associated with consistency, accountability, comparability, and quality assurance. From an organizational perspective, common standards are particularly important when an institution manages several classes or teachers because they establish shared expectations and facilitate monitoring (Sisouvong & Pasanchay, 2024). In the context of Arabic language learning at Karang Jati, standardization ensures that teachers work toward common materials, stages, targets, and assessment expectations. Without such a framework, differences in teachers' individual practices could potentially produce substantial variation across classes. Standardization therefore performs an important coordination function. However, the findings also indicate that standardization becomes problematic when it is interpreted as requiring complete uniformity of classroom practice. The institution addresses this potential problem by allowing teachers to adapt instructional delivery without changing the core program.

The tension identified in this study can consequently be interpreted as a form of organizational balancing rather than a conflict that must be eliminated. account illustrates this tension particularly clearly. Excessive adherence to institutional targets may cause some students to fall behind, whereas excessive adaptation may threaten the achievement of program targets. The teacher therefore has to negotiate between two legitimate organizational demands: maintaining program consistency and responding to student needs (Chemagosi, 2024). This finding is important

because it challenges a binary understanding of standardization and autonomy. The relevant question is not whether teachers should be controlled or liberated, but how organizational authority should be distributed so that institutional consistency and professional responsiveness can operate simultaneously.

The role of the Arabic language coordinator further demonstrates that this balance is managed organizationally rather than left entirely to individual teachers. The coordinator's account indicates that teachers may adapt the way they deliver material as long as they do not alter the main standards of the program. However, changes involving materials, targets, or major procedures require further coordination. This creates a distinction between routine pedagogical discretion and structural instructional decisions. Routine adaptations can be made by teachers because they concern immediate classroom needs, whereas structural changes require organizational consideration because they may affect the consistency of the broader program. Such differentiation provides a mechanism for controlling the potential consequences of teacher autonomy without eliminating professional judgment.

From the perspective of educational leadership, this finding suggests that effective leadership does not necessarily depend on maximizing control over teachers' instructional practices. Instead, leadership can operate by establishing clear boundaries of responsibility and decision-making. The pesantren leader establishes the core expectations, the coordinator translates these expectations into operational supervision, and teachers exercise professional judgment in classroom implementation (Fazira dkk., 2026; Muntaha & Asyhari, 2025). This arrangement creates a layered distribution of authority. Such distribution is particularly relevant in pesantren organizations, where institutional leadership, program coordination, and teacher practice are connected through relatively strong organizational structures. Teacher autonomy in this context is therefore relational: its scope is determined partly by the authority structure and organizational expectations established by the pesantren.

The finding also extends previous studies of Arabic language curriculum management in Islamic boarding schools. Earlier research has generally examined curriculum planning, implementation, evaluation, teacher preparation, and program management as important components of successful Arabic education. These studies have provided valuable descriptions of how Arabic programs are organized within pesantren settings. However, less attention has been given to the question of how instructional authority is negotiated when standardized curriculum expectations meet teachers' professional judgment. The present study addresses this issue by shifting the analytical focus from whether an Arabic learning program is standardized to how standardization is managed in relation to the teachers responsible for implementing it. This shift

places teacher autonomy within the broader field of organizational behavior and educational leadership.

The finding is also relevant to organizational culture. When teachers understand which aspects of the Arabic program are non-negotiable and which aspects may be adapted, the organization develops an implicit norm concerning appropriate professional behavior. Teachers are expected to respect institutional standards while also demonstrating sensitivity to student needs (Hasan, 2025). Adaptation is therefore not necessarily interpreted as disobedience to organizational rules. It becomes legitimate when it remains directed toward the institutional purpose of Arabic language learning and does not undermine core standards. This organizational culture can reduce the potential conflict between compliance and professional judgment because teachers are provided with an understood boundary for making instructional decisions.

Building on these findings, this study proposes *bounded pedagogical autonomy* as an analytical concept for explaining how teachers exercise professional judgment within institutionally defined limits. The concept does not imply that teacher autonomy is simply restricted or that standardization is inherently desirable. Rather, it identifies an organizational arrangement in which teachers possess discretion over instructional implementation while remaining accountable for core requirements established by the institution. Its contribution lies in specifying how autonomy and standardization are connected through the allocation of decision-making authority.

Three interrelated dimensions can be derived from the empirical pattern. The first is the scope of discretion, which concerns the decisions teachers can make independently. In the Karang Jati case, the reported discretion concerns instructional delivery, including explanations, examples, exercises, and pacing. The second is the boundary of institutional authority, which concerns the requirements teachers are expected to preserve. The interview accounts identify core materials, learning targets, instructional stages, and assessment as institutional reference points. The third is the mechanism of accountability and escalation, which concerns the circumstances in which teachers must communicate with the coordinator or seek further organizational consideration. These dimensions distinguish bounded pedagogical autonomy from both unrestricted independence and rigid instructional uniformity.

The concept is analytically useful because it explains more than the coexistence of institutional standards and teacher discretion. It identifies the mechanism connecting them: authority is differentiated according to the type and organizational implications of a pedagogical decision. Teachers retain discretion when adjustments concern classroom implementation, while decisions affecting core program requirements fall within a more centralized area of authority (McLaughlin dkk., 2026). The coordinator's role is consequently important because the boundary between routine adaptation and changes requiring coordination must be interpreted and

maintained in practice. Bounded pedagogical autonomy thus describes a relationship between professional discretion, institutional expectations, and organizational accountability rather than an individual characteristic of teachers alone.

This interpretation develops the broader literature on teacher autonomy by emphasizing the organizational conditions that determine how professional judgment is exercised. Previous research has highlighted the importance of institutional structures and curriculum conditions in shaping teacher agency (Lin & Gao, 2023; Penney & Alfrey, 2022). The present study specifies one possible arrangement through which these conditions operate in a pesantren: core instructional requirements remain institutionally governed, while classroom-level decisions are delegated to teachers within an identifiable boundary. The concept should therefore be understood as an empirically grounded analytical proposition emerging from this case, rather than a universally applicable model already established across educational settings. Its broader applicability requires examination in other pesantren and educational institutions with different governance arrangements.

This finding has practical implications for Islamic boarding schools seeking to strengthen Arabic language programs. Establishing a standardized Arabic learning program remains important for maintaining common objectives, learning progression, and quality assurance (Nurbayan dkk., 2021; Rekan dkk., 2025; Ulfa dkk., 2026). However, standards should not prescribe every aspect of classroom practice. Institutional leaders may instead identify core elements that must remain consistent while explicitly defining areas in which teachers can exercise professional discretion. Such an arrangement can provide teachers with clearer decision-making authority while maintaining institutional accountability. Regular coordination between teachers and program managers is also important when classroom adaptations have implications for learning targets, materials, or major instructional procedures.

Overall, the findings indicate that Pondok Pesantren Karang Jati does not manage the relationship between standardization and teacher autonomy by prioritizing one and eliminating the other. The institution establishes a common instructional framework, while teachers retain professional discretion in adapting its implementation to students' learning conditions. The Arabic language coordinator functions as an important organizational link between institutional expectations and classroom practice by monitoring standards and regulating adaptations that extend beyond teachers' ordinary discretion. The study therefore argues that the management of Arabic language learning in a pesantren context is not only a matter of selecting and implementing instructional methods. It is also a matter of organizing authority, defining professional boundaries, and creating institutional conditions in which standardization and teacher autonomy can operate simultaneously.

Conclusion

This study shows that the Karang Jati Islamic Boarding School manages the relationship between the standardisation of Arabic language learning and teachers' pedagogical autonomy through a differentiated division of authority. The boarding school sets standards for teaching materials, learning stages, objectives and assessment, whilst teachers have the freedom to adapt explanations, examples, repetition, exercises and the pace of learning according to classroom conditions. Adjustments affecting the core components of the programme must be coordinated with the Arabic language coordinator. This pattern demonstrates that standardisation and teacher autonomy can coexist through clear boundaries of authority and coordination mechanisms.

This study proposes the concept of *bounded pedagogical autonomy* as an analytical perspective for understanding the management of teachers' authority within the framework of institutional standards. This concept emphasises that teachers can still exercise professional judgement in the delivery of learning, but changes to the core components of the programme remain within the remit of the institution. This contribution is limited to the context of the case studied and cannot yet be considered universally applicable.

This study has limitations as it was conducted at a single pesantren involving seven informants. Future research could compare several pesantrens with different organisational structures and Arabic language programmes to examine variations in the boundaries of pedagogical autonomy. A comparative approach or mixed-methods design could also be used to examine the relationship between the standardisation of learning, teachers' decision-making, and students' learning outcomes.

References

- Aprilia, P. (2024). Cara Penanganan Siswa Berkemampuan di Atas Rata-Rata Sedang dan Rendah. *Journal of Knowledge and Collaboration*, 1(7), 311–323. <https://doi.org/10.59613/6q3akf79>
- Azhar, K., Ali, M., Ropo, E., Wahyudin, D., & Hadiapurwa, A. (2024). Balancing control and freedom: Conditional autonomy in curriculum management in an Islamic Private School in Indonesia. *Inovasi Kurikulum*, 21(4). <https://doi.org/10.17509/jik.v21i4.75491>
- Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. K. (1997). *Qualitative research for education* (Vol. 368). Allyn & Bacon Boston, MA.
- Chemagosi, M. J. (2024). Student Well-Being in Higher Education Institutions: Academic Pressures. Dalam *Student Well-Being in Higher Education Institutions* (hlm. 81–106). IGI Global Scientific Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-4417-0.ch004>

- Fazira, B. N., Suyanto, A., & Ianatullah, A. G. (2026). Transformational Leadership of Headteachers in Facilitating the Transformation of Pesantren-Based Schools. *At Tadbir: Islamic Education Management Journal*, 4(1), 42–54. <https://doi.org/10.54437/attadbir.v4i1.3094>
- Ghani, A. (2025). Autonomy and Standardization of National Education: Towards a Balance Between Freedom and Quality. *Journal of Education and Learning Sciences*, 5(2), 77–94. <https://doi.org/10.56404/jels.v5i2.125>
- Hasan, Moh. F. (2025). Educational authority and regulatory legitimacy: Comparing normative systems in pesantren and public schools in Indonesia. *Legal Pluralism and Critical Social Analysis*, 57(2–3), 182–206. <https://doi.org/10.1080/27706869.2025.2556586>
- Hendriksen, N., Logtenberg, A., Westbroek, H., & Janssen, F. (2024). Exploring teachers' agency in inclusive education: Secondary education teachers navigating their projects in responding to the diversity in students' sociocultural backgrounds. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 149, 104731. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2024.104731>
- Ismail, M., & Azizah, M. (2023). Manajemen Kurikulum Muatan Lokal Keagamaan Dalam Meningkatkan Pendidikan Dakwah Di SMP Negeri 2 Wonosalam Jombang. *At Tadbir: Islamic Education Management Journal*, 1(1), 63–74. <https://doi.org/10.54437/attadbir.v1i1.1218>
- Lin, Q., & Gao, X. (2023a). Exploring the predictors of teachers' teaching autonomy: A three-level international study. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 135, 104338. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2023.104338>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. sage.
- McLaughlin, A., Walls, J. H., & Kruse, S. (2026). Principal discipline decision-making: Choices and challenges. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 54(4), 1389–1407. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17411432251330958>
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative Data Analysis*. SAGE.
- Moleong, L. J., & Surjaman, T. (2014). *Metodologi penelitian kualitatif*.
- Muntaha, A., & Asyhari, A. (2025). Kepemimpinan Kiai dalam Manajemen Sekolah Berbasis Pesantren. *At Tadbir: Islamic Education Management Journal*, 3(1), 17–26. <https://doi.org/10.54437/attadbir.v3i1.1880>
- Mustari, M., Hakim, M. N., Munir, N., & Masrufa, B. (2025). Model Strategic Adaptive Management dalam Pengembangan Kurikulum Pondok Pesantren. *At Tadbir: Islamic Education Management Journal*, 3(2), 98–110. <https://doi.org/10.54437/attadbir.v3i2.2496>

- Nguyen, D., Pietsch, M., & Gümüş, S. (2021). Collective teacher innovativeness in 48 countries: Effects of teacher autonomy, collaborative culture, and professional learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 106, 103463. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103463>
- Nurbayan, Y., Sauri, S., & Sanusi, A. (2021). Developing an International Standardized Arabic Language Education Curriculum: Introducing a Conception-Focused Design and Outcome. *Al-Ta'rib : Jurnal Ilmiah Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Arab UIN Palangka Raya*, 9(2), 155–172. <https://doi.org/10.23971/altarib.v9i2.3264>
- Penney, D., & Alfrey, L. (2022a). Reading curriculum policy and (re)shaping practices: The possibilities and limits of enactment. *Curriculum Studies in Health and Physical Education*, 13(3). <https://doi.org/10.1080/25742981.2022.2126793>
- Rekan, A. A., Howell, H. R., Salleh, M. N. M., Rosin, N., Za, T., Ma'arif, M. A., & Adnan, M. A. M. (2025). Arabic Language Curriculum as a Foundation for Strengthening Religious Education in Public Higher Education. *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 22(1), 97–121. <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpai.v22i1.11340>
- Rodliyah, St., Khusnuridlo, Moh., Fauzi, I., & Baharun, H. (2024). Optimizing the quality of Islamic Senior High School graduates through curriculum management of vocational programs based on pesantrens in East Java, Indonesia. *Cogent Education*, 11(1), 2423437. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2024.2423437>
- Sisouvong, V., & Pasanchay, K. (2024). Modern Educational Institution Management Strategies. *Journal of Education and Learning Reviews*, 1(6), 23–36. <https://doi.org/10.60027/jelr.2024.799>
- Tran, T. T. (2023). Teacher Agency in Implementing the Getting-to-Know-English for Grade 1 and Grade 2: How Teachers Enacted. *International Journal of Educational Reform*, 32(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/10567879221145900>
- Ulfa, M., Rosikh, F., Muad, N., Ma'arif, A. S., & Mustofa, M. A. (2026). Management of Arabic Language Learning in Islamic Education: A Communicative Approach, Evaluation, and Quality Development in Islamic Education. *Mudir: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan*, 8(2), 674–686. <https://doi.org/10.55352/mudir.v8i2.2950>