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## When the vision of Islamic boarding school decreases: education and scarcity of Ulemas

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**Abstract.** The decrease in the vision of islamic boarding school has indirectly led to a scarcity of ulemas. The learning process which leads students to insights about ulemas is no longer achieved. This study aims to analyze the effect of changes in the vision of Islamic boarding school on the scarcity of ulemas. A total of 30 students were randomly selected in this study. The data were collected by interview. The participants were asked about their interest in becoming ulemas. Most of the participants answered that they were not interested in becoming ulemas, less than half said they were not interested and a few were unsure. The results of the study show that reducing the vision of the islamic boarding school has the potential to increase the scarcity of ulemas. This study is limited to students and has not involved teachers and institutions. It is expected that there will be a study that summarizes these three factors so that the results obtained are more comprehensive.

**Keywords.** decrease in the vision of islamic boarding, schools scarcity of ulemas, education, tahfiz, teachers' competency

### 1. Introduction

Many ulemas died during the Covid-19 pandemic had caused public concern. From February 2020 to January 2021, 333 ulemas died [1] The very fast process of the death of ulemas has increased the scarcity of ulemas [2]. The function of islamic boarding schools as an important factor in overcoming the scarcity of ulemas cannot run quickly because the process of recruiting ulemas is not balanced with their deaths [3]. In addition to the difficulty of the process, the scarcity of ulemas is also caused by the declining function of islamic boarding school in producing cadres of ulema.

The study about relationship between islamic boarding school and ulemas has developed from an initial study that raised the issue of the dependence of ulemas on islamic boarding school, switch to study, where islamic boarding school [5] prepares multi-talented alumni. Initially, islamic boarding schools were institutions which focused on preparing cadres of ulemas then alumni switch to pursue other tasks [6], besides becoming leaders, [7], politicians,

and bureaucrats.[8] According to the existing studies, it seems that pesantren which are positioned as an objective force have a special attraction for the community to prepare cadres of ulemas. However, the subject's perspective in responding to this idea and the difficulties and abilities to reach that goal are not well mapped.

This paper is a response to the limitation of previous study which specifically showed the subjective dimensions of students from various developing tendencies. In addition to identifying various trends, this paper also shows the strategies adopted to address concerns about the scarcity of ulemas. Concerns about the scarcity of ulemas who are not a concern of students require separate attention, to motivate students to be interested in becoming ulemas. This paper aims to test that behind the hustle and bustle of the profession that tempts students, how far students have a sense of belonging to the issue of clergy.

This paper is based on the argument which stated that Islamic boarding school, besides being a very important institution in preparing cadres of ulemas [9], had succeeded in providing the best guidance for the community prosperity, since colonial era[11]. But lately it seems that the task of Islamic boarding school to produce ulemas is not going well[11]. Islamic boarding school as a factor and process needs completeness of requirements and facilities so that it can function optimally for the birth of Islamic ulemas[13]. Therefore today's Islamic boarding school demands an adaptation by optimizing the seriousness of students as well as the support of parents and institution.

## **2. Literature Review**

The existing studies showed that Islamic boarding schools had played an important role in producing Islamic ulemas[14]. The success of Islamic boarding schools in producing ulemas have benefits because they have an important key in forming a cadre of ulemas, namely the mastery of Arabic grammar[15]. However, in the last ten years, Islamic boarding schools have been very slow to produce high-quality ulemas. In various studies, at least three factors have been found to be the subject of discussion, namely the decline in the function of Islamic boarding schools, the weakness of teacher competence and the emphasis on memorization.

### **2.1 Vision of Islamic Boarding School,**

Islamic boarding schools which had the vision of producing a cadre of ulemas before 1945 decreased after independence [16]. Before independence, the Islamic boarding schools had succeeded in educating most of the students to become ulemas[17]. After independence, the quality of Islamic boarding schools seemed to have declined sharply, although the quantity had increased. In Payakumbuh, since 2010, 8 Islamic boarding schools had been constructed at almost the same time, (Gustina, 42 years old). This increase was not accompanied by the quality needed to educate ulemas[4]. The parents' motivation to send their children to Islamic boarding schools to become ulemas[18], changed to career achievement. Apart from the problem of ulemas, careers that support life's journey cannot be ignored.

The key to the success of Islamic boarding schools in producing ulemas lies in mastering the yellow book. Now the recitation of the yellow book (the Arabic vowel/punctuation book) is given less attention because it is seen as less strategic[19]. In addition, the decline in the vision of Islamic boarding schools is influenced by global challenges that divert students' attention to careers. Although Islamic boarding schools still play an important role in instilling moral values, the quality of the learning process for the birth of Islamic ulemas has decreased due to the impact of inevitable socio-cultural changes. [5].

## 2.2 Scarcity of Ulemas

According to society, ulemas are figures who have in-depth knowledge of Islam [20]. According to the Qur'an, (Quran Chapter 28) ulemas are not figures who only have Islamic knowledge[18], but biologists and mathematicians are also called ulemas. Professors of fiqh, kalam, tasawwuf, and astronomy are all ulemas[21]. Apart from these differences, there are three indicators of ulemas as the basis of this study, namely mastering the Qur'an and Sunnah, (mastering the yellow book) being recognized by the community for their knowledge, being able to solve problems that occur in society (Syahril, 72 years old).

The death of some ulema caused anxiety for people. During the Covid-19 pandemic, from March 2020 to June 2021, 541 clerics died (Times Indonesia, 4 July 2021). A month later Indonesian Vice President, Ma'ruf Amin revealed that the death rate for ulemas had reached 605 people (Kompas, 2 August 2021). One month after that came even more shocking news from the MUI (Ulema Council of Indonesia), the number of ulemas who died during the pandemic reached 900 people, (CNN Indonesia, 3 August 2021), counting for 15 months, not including those whose deaths were not recorded (Kompas, 11 May 2021).

In contrast to the death of the general public, the death of ulemas has an impact on the uprooting of knowledge in society [20]. Ma'ruf Amin, by quoting the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, the history of Al-Tabrani likened the death of a scholar to the extinction of a star (CNN Indonesia, Tuesday 3 August 2021). The hadith states "*Inna Allaha la yaqbidhu al- 'ilma inza'an yantazi'hu min al- 'ibad, wa lakin yaqbidh il- 'ilma biqabdhi al- 'ulama' hatta iza lam yabqi 'alimun, ittakhaza al-nasu ru`usan juhhalan, fa su`ilu fa aftu bi ghari 'ilmin fa dallu wa adallu*" (<https://muslim.or.id/34692-ilmu-dicabut-dengan-wafatnya-ulama.html>). Verily, Allah does not take away knowledge by removing it from His servant once, but He raises knowledge by leaving ulemas. If there are no ulemas, the people will ask stupid people. The stupid people are asked, then they gave a fatwa, then whoever asked to them became astray [23]. The scarcity of ulemas has resulted in people increasingly losing references to solving problems that occur in their lives[4], [13], [24].

## 2.3 Decrease in Teachers' Competencies

Teachers are required to have three competencies, namely pedagogic competency, social competency and integrated professional competency [25]. S. Nursiti added that teachers must have four competencies, namely cognitive competency [26]. The combination of these four competencies greatly influences the quality of students' learning process, including educating the cadetes of ulemas [25]. The absence of teachers' efforts to improve their competency can result in the task being achieved is not optimal.

For Islamic boarding schools which are oriented towards producing Islamic ulemas, the competency required by teachers is Arabic grammar competency. In the last decade, the competence of Arabic grammar among Islamic boarding school teachers had declined. In 1970, those who taught at Islamic boarding schools were selected teachers who had strong competence in mastering Arabic. The result is that the competency in mastering Arabic grammar leads students to mastering religious knowledge appropriately [27]. Now the mastery of Arabic grammar for teachers in Islamic boarding schools is only limited to the ability to translate texts (Rinjani, 82 years old). The decline in teacher competence results in a decrease in the quality of the expected scholars.

The decline in teachers' competencies seems to have an effect on output [28], [29]. The evidence is obtained based on the senior teachers' assessment when they will continue learning in the following semester (Amrialis, 76 years old). The evaluation is conducted by

giving questions to students one by one. All students present were unable to answer the questions (Amrialis, 76 years old). The experience of one local student who was unable to answer questions shows that the problem lies not with the students, but with the teacher. Student failure is caused by the decrease in teachers' competency.

### **3. Methodology of Research**

#### **3.1 Type and Scope of Research**

The research on scarcity of ulemas is qualitative which is based on data by online news. Online news was randomly selected based on news themes that met the research focus criteria, namely concerning the interest of Islamic boarding school students to become ulemas. Student problems include constraints on learning administration, the learning process, and the support of parents and teachers. In addition to being grouped based on relevant themes, the selected news includes students' motivation, parents' expectations and cases that reflect the influence that overshadows students and parents. So the problems covered in this study include personal, imprastructural and structural.

#### **3.2 Research Participant**

The data obtained from the online news mapping were confirmed to a group of students as participants in the research. Participants were limited to students at the Tsanawiyah and Aliyah level (junior and senior high school level) based on considerations of variations in islamic boarding schools. They are surely familiar with the duties of ulemas but with limited literacy. At the same time this student group is facing the shadow of pursuing a career in the midst of a difficult job market.

Thirty students were selected for in-depth interviews. The selection of students pays attention to gender balance and variations in Islamic boarding schools at the Tsanawiyah level and Aliyah level (junior and senior high school level). Islamic boarding schools are selected by taking into account the traditional and modern categories which are relevant to the duties of ulemas. Students from various categories of Islamic boarding schools come from three regions with different characteristics from the western region, the central region and the eastern region which represent Indonesia.

#### **3.3 Research Instrument**

In the data collection process, an interview guide was used as the basis for the formulation of the questions. Open-ended questions cover five data fields. First, data on students' interests is important for preparing to become ulemas. Second, learning priorities are indicators of the ability to become a scholar. Third, parental support places the ulema position as a noble task. Forth is teachers' motivations in encouraging students to study religion. Fifth is education system and institutional support in the learning process and solving problems in learning.

#### **3.4 Research Procedure**

This research took place during June and July 2022 after the death of ulemas due to covid-19. At that time, various statements from the islamic boarding school residents and the community seemed to show sadness. Students (community) who became participants in this study were interviewed on their awareness and willingness. The questions are asked one by one openly in class for students and teachers. Most of the interviews were conducted by telephone. Students and teachers were asked to share their interests and views on ulemas. At

the same time, probing was carried out in a way of exploring the answers shown by Singarimbun and Effendi (2000).

### 3.5 Data Analysis

The online mapping data and interview data are classified thematically to highlight the institutional difficulties in educating cadres of ulemas. The classification of data is conducted not only on the basis of themes, but also by considering the aspects covered. The context of different experiences is analyzed for significance based on the applicable parameters such as islamic boarding school categories, institutional motives, and teachers' competency.

The data obtained were analyzed through three stages, namely data statement, data description and data interpretation. The data restatement was carried out by referring to interview excerpts based on the student's point of view. The description of the data was carried out by showing patterns or tendencies in the data regarding the typology of willingness and reluctance to pursue tasks. The process of interpreting data was carried out by showing the individual, social and institutional contexts which are the factors and tendencies of students. The three data analyzes became the basis for drawing conclusions. The data sourced from students serve as a comparison and mutually reinforces data sourced from online news.

## 4. Result of Reserch

Carrying out the duties of ulemas is responded differently by each student. Many students are reluctant to carry out the duties of ulemas. This lack of interest was found in terms of the duties of ulemas, the decline in the vision of the institution, and the emphasis on memorization. These three factors are discussed below.

### 4.1 Duties of Ulemas

Students' responses related to the implementation of the duties of ulemas apply the conception difficulty variable of learning. The various responses cannot be separated from their perceptions of the difficulty of learning in addition to their own limitations in studying religion. Various forms of reluctance have wider consequences.

Table 1. Students' Responses about the Duties of Ulemas

Code	Indicator of Response	Amount	Percentage (%)
Interested	I have a desire to become a muslim ulema because it is a noble task.	9 people	30
Not Interested	I can't be a muslim ulema because my brain can't carry out that task.	17 people	56,7
Uncertain	I have an intention to become a muslim ulema but my knowledge is limited about religious knowledge	4 people	13,3

The data shows respondents gave 3 answers. Most of them were not interested in becoming a muslim ulema 56,7 %, less than half of them were interested 30 %, and a small number were still uncertain 13,3 %. So the students' responses to the questions given seem to illustrate a very low tendency to become ulemas.

### Level of Interest of Student to Become Ulema

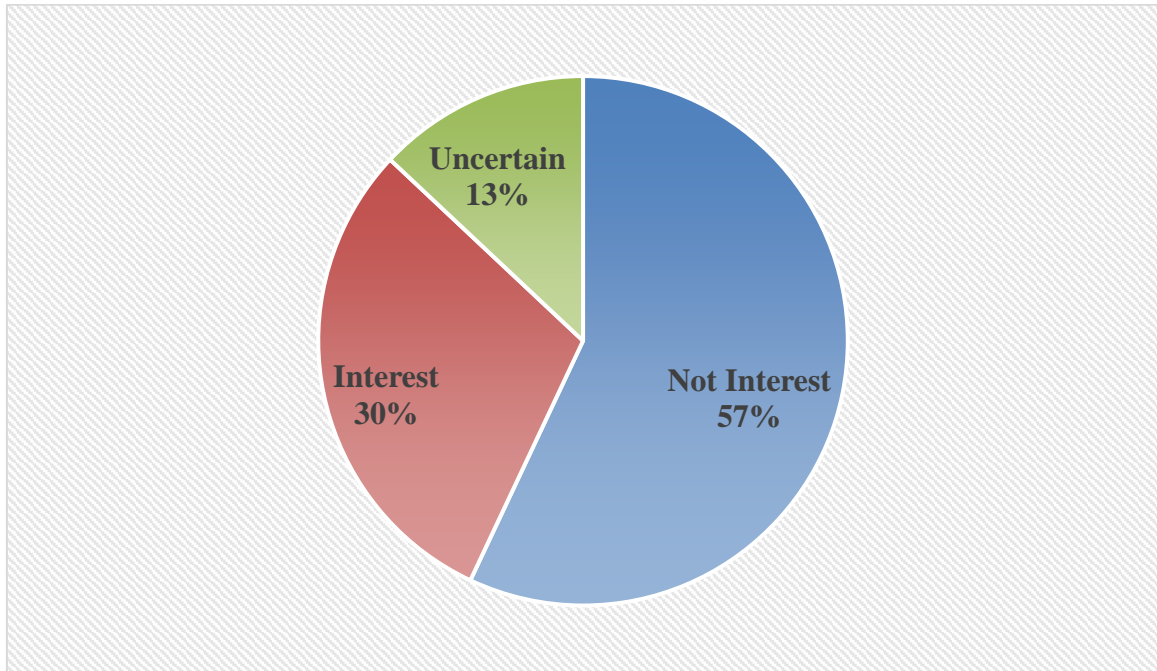


Figure: Students' Responses in Become Ulema

The view of student who is interested in becoming a muslim ulema says "I want to be a muslim ulema, so that people who do not know Islam will know more. After graduating from school, I want to be a useful person" (R8, 15 years old, Ibrahim Harun Islamic boarding school).

The views of students refusing to become scholars manifested in a student saying: *indak minat menjadi ulama do pak, dek kemampuan utak awak indak sampai sinan do pak, utak awak singkeknyo pak*, (I am not interested in becoming a muslim ulema because my brain is weak), (R7, 16 years old, MTI Pakansinayan).

The doubts about being a muslim ulema were revealed by a student saying, "*untuk jadi ulama kayaknya buliah juo pak, tapi manengok kemampuan ragu ambo pak, sebab ilmu agama ambo masih seketeknyo pak, inginnya jadi guru aja pak*, (To become a muslim ulema seems exciting, but I am uncertain with my ability, because my knowledge is limited), (R6, 15 years old, MTI Kotopanjang).

Besides viewing at the duties of ulemas, the respondents also viewed at economic factors. The lack of students' interest in becoming ulemas, aside from being caused by a lack of knowledge, the position of ulemas is perceived as having no economic value, but social value. Various forms of obstacles cannot be separated from the necessities of life.

#### 4.2 Decrease in the Vision of Institution

Recently there has been a decline in the vision of islamic boarding schools. On May 5, 1928, Sheikh Sulaiman Arrasuli, made a vision "creating *tafaqquh fi al-Din* ulemas"[30]. In 2022 (Novi Zuria, 42 years old), creates the vision of Islamic boarding schools which states "forming Muslim generations who are imamate, quranic, genetically intelligent and achievers". Harweli from the Al-Kausar Islamic Boarding School created a vision "excellent in knowledge,

skilled in charity, and noble in morals" (Defri Harweli, 2022 old). Both Zuria and Harweli made the vision of islamic boarding schools not to lead to efforts to produce ulemas, but only to be limited to the ability to become prayer leaders. So the vision of the islamic boarding schools, which used to focus on producing ulemas, have changed and adapted to the current conditions of society.

The changes which happen from two different forms of vision show that there has been a decline in the vision of islamic boarding schools. This decline in the vision has weakened students' achievement targets in learning. Targets achieved by students lead to a decline in the quality of Islamic boarding schools. Students spoiled with mild learning have an impact on decreasing the quality of Islamic boarding schools.

### **4.3 Priority of Memorization**

Since 2010, islamic boarding schools have emerged with the characteristics of tahfiz (Tolinggi, 2020) as the core subject (Zamrodah, 2016; Assingkily, 2019; Islam et al., 2021;). The intensive socialization of tahfiz and the spread of news everywhere have made many people more interested in sending their children to Islamic boarding schools (Desriwita, 38 years old). Thus memorizing the Qur'an, which is currently a trend, takes precedence over mastery of Islamic knowledge.

Tahfiz, which is trending as an attraction for students and parents, has beaten the position of deepening religious knowledge as an important indicator for ulemas. The importance of learning tahfiz has increased memorization activities while reducing attention to islamic learning. The reduction in the learning of the clerical basis opens up opportunities for a significant reduction in the ability of ulemas.

## **5. Discussion**

This study shows that differences in students' perceptions about ulemas have become a significant factor in addressing the duties of clerics. Most Islamic boarding school students predict that they will not be able to become ulemas because of the limited knowledge they experience. The large number of students who are reluctant to become ulemas runs the risk of having less and less figures of future ulemas.

The weakness of students mastering religious knowledge reflects a reluctance to become ulemas and has consequences for society. The experience of islamic boarding school students with various types of difficulties is an important statement about the difficulties of fulfilling the mission of ulemas for all. Islamic boarding school education with conditions like this can be a factor that weakens the responsibility of ulemas.

The results of the study show that students' reluctance is possible because of the heavy duties of ulemas while the support from various parties is not optimal. Islamic boarding schools do not have sufficient readiness to transform the minimum limits of Islamic knowledge. At the same time, islamic boarding schools as institutions which are the basis for the birth of ulemas experienced a shift in vision from preparing ulemas to preparing leaders in taking a prayer.

Research on the education of ulema cadres has shown various types of difficulties, in addition to the progress achieved so far. However, the existing studies are lacking in analyzing the long-term implications and difficulties faced by students today. This research shows a serious threat to islamic boarding schools which results in a scarcity of ulemas. Islamic boarding schools education will experience a more serious decline due to the negligence of the islamic boarding schools members themselves.



Based on the results of research showing the threat of scarcity of ulemas in the future, institutional responsibility is needed to avoid a serious crisis of religious knowledge for the public. Attention and support by the state is needed in preparing the cadres of ulemas.

## 6. Conclusion

It turns out that islamic boarding schools, which have been considered successful in preparing cadres of ulemas, have failed to achieve their targets. The findings of this study (in contrast to the previous ones) indicate that the problem in forming a cadre of ulemas stems from the institutional structuring factor.

The concept of the islamic boarding schools used in this research has made it possible to find an explanation of how pesantren have emphasized tahfiz but also neglected the quality of Islamic knowledge. The ideology for all of that will not happen because the islamic boarding school has lowered its achievement targets. When learning takes place, education also strengthens institutional weaknesses.

This study is limited to the perspective of students and has not integrated the perspectives of teachers and institution. The role of teachers and schools is very central in Islamic education. Integrating the perspective of teachers in institutions (along with the perspectives of students and parents) allows for a comprehensive understanding. In this way, it is possible to find a solution to accelerate the continuity of the existence of ulemas in society. In line with that, it is needed a further research that shows the three perspectives by accommodating the experiences and problems faced by schools and teachers in implementing education in Islamic boarding schools. Through this way, a comprehensive troubleshooting is possible to find.

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