At-Ta'dib. Vol. 21. No. 2, December 2026
ISSN: 0216-9142
DOI: https://doi.org/10.21111/at-tadib.v21i2.173
Available online at:
https://tadib.journal.unida.gontor.ac.id/index.php/tadib/index
e-ISSN: 2503-3514

Reconstructing Islamic Learning Strategies through al-Attas Philosophy of Education: An Adab-Centered Approach in Pesantren

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Received September 21, 2026, Accepted November 18, 2026

Abstract

This study examines the relevance of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas' philosophy of education, particularly his reformulation of ta'dib as the comprehensive concept of Islamic education, for the renewal of learning practices in pesantren. Although tarbiyah and ta'lim remain dominant terms in contemporary Islamic pedagogy, al-Attas locates education more fundamentally in adab, understood as the disciplined recognition and acknowledgment of the proper place of things within the hierarchy of being. This study aims to reconstruct al-Attas' concept of ta'dib into concrete learning strategies that remain compatible with the pesantren tradition. Using qualitative library research with a descriptive-analytical and hermeneutic approach, the study analyzes al-Attas' primary writings and relevant scholarship on ta'dib, adab, and pesantren pedagogy. The findings indicate that pesantren already embody several practices compatible with this framework, including exemplary teacher authority (*uswah hasanah*), habituation (*ta'wid/riyadhah*), sanad-based knowledge transmission, and communal hidden curricula. The study therefore proposes four strategies: adab-oriented curriculum sequencing, teacher exemplification, habituation through communal life, and evaluation of justice of the self (*'adl*) alongside cognitive mastery. The study concludes that ta'dib provides a

conceptual framework for renewing pesantren education without severing its traditional formative purposes.
Keywords: *Naquib al-Attas; ta'dib; pesantren; Islamic philosophy; learning strategy.*
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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Islamic education faces a persistent conceptual confusion between the terms most commonly used to describe it: *tarbiyah*, *ta'lim*, and *ta'dib*. Each carries a different theological and pedagogical emphasis, yet in Indonesian educational discourse including within pesantren, which remain the oldest and most enduring institution of Islamic learning in the archipelago the three are frequently used interchangeably, with tarbiyah functioning as the default umbrella term. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas rejected this conflation[1]. In The Concept of Education in Islam, he argued that tarbiyah, understood etymologically and in early Islamic usage as nurturing or fostering growth, is too broad and too naturalistic a term to capture what is distinctively Islamic about Islamic education; it applies equally to the rearing of plants and animals and says nothing about knowledge, values, or the recognition of proper order[2].

For al-Attas, the correct and comprehensive term is ta'dib, derived from the same root as adab. He reconstructs adab not as mere courtesy or etiquette but as the disciplined recognition and acknowledgment of the proper place of everything in the ontological order of creation, expressed correctly through the discipline of body, mind, and soul[3]. Education, on this reading, is inseparable from ethics: to know is already to be obligated to act justly toward what one knows, and justice ('adl) is precisely the placing of things in their right place. Al-Attas therefore defines the aim of Islamic education not as producing a good citizen or a skilled worker, but as producing a good human being al-insan al-kamil whose intellectual formation and moral formation are a single, undivided process[4]. Reading and understanding information is a Muslim obligation, this translates into the ability to read, understand, and process information critically to avoid misleading or false.[5]

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[1] Muhammad Azrul Amirullah Muhammad Ridwan Mubarok, dan Maulana At-Tsani, 'Pembentukan Tradisi Ilmiah Dalam Islam Dan Hubungannya Dengan Worldview Islam Dalam Pandangan Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas', *JOURNAL OF ISLAMIC STUDIES* 5, no. 1 (2026): 10, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.63398/1cthwg70.

[2] Syed Muhammad Naquib Al Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC Press, 1995), 75.

[3] Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas: An Exposition of the Original Concept of Islamization* (Malaysia: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 1998), 57.

[4] La Ode Amir Ifan et al., 'Strategic Model for Enhancing the Quality of Islamic Education in the Context of Contemporary Globalization', *Urwatul Wutsqo: Jurnal Studi Kependidikan Dan Keislaman* 15, no. 01 (April 2026): 472, https://doi.org/10.54437/urwatulwutsqo.v15i01.2936.

[5] Arizqi Ihsan Pratama et al., 'The Role of Islamic Boarding Schools in Digital Literacy: Strategies to Shape a Critical and Productive Muslim Generation', Articles, *At-Ta'dib* 20, no. 1 (May 2026): 117, https://doi.org/10.21111/at-tadib.v20i1.33.

This conception of education becomes particularly significant in contemporary educational contexts, where educational achievement is increasingly articulated through measurable competencies, standardized learning outcomes, and institutional accountability[6]. Such mechanisms may contribute to educational quality, but they do not by themselves answer the more fundamental question of what knowledge is for and what kind of human being education seeks to form. From an al-Attasian perspective, knowledge cannot be separated from the ethical formation of the knower, since the proper acquisition of knowledge entails recognition of its place within a broader order of truth and responsibility[7].

This reformulation carries direct implications for pesantren. Long before al-Attas articulated ta'dib as a formal philosophical category, pesantren pedagogy already embodied several of its structural features: the centrality of the kiai as a moral and intellectual exemplar, the chain of transmission (sanad) that authenticates knowledge, the habituation of worship and communal discipline, and the treatment of adab as a precondition for, rather than a supplement to, the pursuit of 'ilm[8]. These features are particularly important because the educational process in *pesantren* extends beyond formal classroom instruction. The formation of the *santri* takes place within an immersive institutional environment in which learning is intertwined with worship, discipline, social interaction, service, and daily routines. Recent scholarship describes this dimension in terms of a *hidden curriculum*, through which values are cultivated not only by explicit teaching but also through role modelling, habituation, institutional culture, and the everyday environment of the pesantren[9].

Yet these practices are rarely theorized using al-Attas' own vocabulary, and as pesantren increasingly adapt to national curriculum standards, accreditation regimes, and outcome-based assessment, the adab-first logic that historically organized their pedagogy risks being displaced by an ta'lim-only, skill- and competency-oriented model. The development of formal curricula and contemporary educational management does not necessarily entail a rejection of the traditional educational ethos of pesantren. Rather, studies of pesantren modernization indicate that institutions have sought to adapt curriculum, learning methods, and management practices to contemporary demands while maintaining their distinctive institutional vision and

[6] Zeynep Teke, Özen Yıldırım, and Zeliha Selçuk, 'From Measurement to Meaning: Reconsidering Test-Based Accountability and Educational Quality', *International Journal of Assessment Tools in Education* 13, no. 1 (January 2026): 218, https://doi.org/10.21449/ijate.1661896.

[7] Muhammad Shobrun Jamil and Fahreza Ahmad Fadhilah, 'Konsep Etika Dalam Perspektif Ta'dib Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas', *Halaqa: Journal of Islamic Education* 1, no. 2 (August 2025): 269, https://doi.org/10.61630/hjie.v1i2.31.

[8] Michael Reskiantio Pabubung, 'EPISTEMOLOGI KECERDASAN BUATAN (AI) DAN PENTINGNYA ILMU ETIKA DALAM PENDIDIKAN INTERDISIPLINER', *Jurnal Filsafat Indonesia* 4, no. 2 (September 2021): 156, https://doi.org/10.23887/jfi.v4i2.34734.

[9] Muhammad Anas Ma'arif and Muhamad Arif, 'Sustaining Character Education in Pesantren: A Holistic and Culturally Embedded Learning Ecosystem', *Jurnal Cakrawala Pendidikan* 45, no. 2 (June 2026): 270, https://doi.org/10.21831/cp.v45i2.94968.

religious orientation[10]. The more pressing question, therefore, is how the normative principles underlying *pesantren* education can be made explicit and conceptually articulated within these changing educational structures. According to Abdullah Syukri Zarkasyi, the holistic nature of Gontor's as representation of pesntren modern curriculum is rooted in its ultimate goal, which reflects the founding vision of the pesantren to produce "intellectual ulama, not merely intellectuals who know religion."[11]

The problem this article addresses is therefore twofold: first, a conceptual gap, in that al-Attas' philosophy of education has been extensively discussed in relation to the Islamization of knowledge and higher education, but has been comparatively underexplored as a framework for reconstructing pesantren-level learning strategies; and second, a practical gap, in that pesantren possess adab-rich practices without a systematic pedagogical language to defend, evaluate, or transmit them in the face of modernization pressures. This practical gap becomes increasingly significant when practices that have traditionally been transmitted through exemplary conduct, habituation, communal discipline, and institutional culture encounter educational frameworks that require objectives, learning processes, and outcomes to be explicitly formulated[12]. Without a corresponding pedagogical language, the educational significance of such practices may remain largely implicit, making it more difficult to evaluate how they contribute to the formation of learners and how they can be intentionally sustained amid institutional change.

Table 1. Tadib and relation with education in pesantren

Existing Approach	**Primary Focus & Limitation**	**How Your Al-Attas *Ta'dib* Framework Differs**
General Character Education	Focuses on secular civic values, behavioral habits, and social compliance. Often lacks a metaphysical or spiritual anchor.	Grounds character in metaphysics and worldview (*ru'yat al-Islam lil-wujud*), viewing virtue not just as social etiquette, but as recognizing one's proper place before God.
Holistic Education	Aims to balance cognitive, emotional, physical, and spiritual domains, usually drawing from Western humanist or pluralist traditions.	Centers on the Islamization of knowledge and hierarchy of knowledge (*fard 'ayn* vs. *fard kifayah*), uniting spiritual and intellectual realms under *tawhid* rather than treating spirituality as one equal slice among many.

[10] Taqiyuddin Taqiyuddin, Iwan Iwan, and Ade Aspandi, 'THE TRANSFORMATION OF TRADITIONAL ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOLS INTO INTEGRATED PESANTREN: CURRICULUM, GOVERNANCE, AND TECHNOLOGICAL ADAPTATION', *PEDAGOGIK: Jurnal Pendidikan* 12, no. 1 (August 2025): 165, https://doi.org/10.33650/pjp.v12i1.10408.

[11] Musthofa Ali Mahfud, Aria Nur Kamal, and Dicky Wahyudi, 'The Holistic Gontor Curriculum Model for National Education Reform toward Indonesia's Golden Generation 2045', Artikel, *Tawazun: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 19, no. 1 (April 2026): 7, https://doi.org/10.32832/tawazun.v19i1.21848.

[12] Faidhur Rohim Muhamad Jamaludin, and Moh. Rian Hidayat, 'Reconstructing Pesantren Curriculum in the Digital Era: Integrating Islamic Values and Modern Knowledge', *Sunan Kalijaga International Journal on Islamic Educational Research* 10, no. 1 (2026): 18, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.14421/skijier.2026.101.01.

General Studies on *Adab*	Often treats *adab* broadly as moral manners (*akhlaq*), cultural politeness, or classical ethical texts without an operational classroom model.	Operationalizes *adab* specifically through Al-Attas' epistemological lens (discipline of body, mind, and soul) into an actionable pedagogical framework for modern pesantren

This study asks: how can al-Attas' concept of ta'dib be reconstructed into a coherent, adab-centered learning strategy for pesantren, and how does this strategy relate to existing pesantren pedagogical practice? By addressing these questions, the article aims to contribute a systematic, philosophically grounded model that pesantren, madrasah diniyah, and Islamic higher education institutions can draw upon in designing curricula that are simultaneously traditional in ethos and articulate in contemporary pedagogical terms[13].

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative library research design with a descriptive-analytical and hermeneutic approach, appropriate for research that seeks to reconstruct a philosophical concept into an applied model rather than to test an empirical hypothesis[14]. The unit of analysis is textual: primary and secondary sources on al-Attas' philosophy of education, cross-read against contemporary studies of pesantren pedagogy and adab-based character education.

Primary sources consist of al-Attas' own writings, principally The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education, supplemented by secondary expositions authored or authorized by his closest interpreter, whose work systematizes al-Attas' scattered arguments into the coherent concept of ta'dib as "true and comprehensive education." Secondary sources include peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2017 and 2026 that engage critically with al-Attas' educational thought and empirical or conceptual studies of pesantren pedagogy, character education, and adab practice in Indonesia.

Comparative Analysis of Pesantren Practices: In the second stage, findings from previous studies on pesantren were synthesized and compared against Al-Attas' philosophical framework. Using thematic coding, existing pesantren practices—such as sorogan, bandongan, and halaqah—were evaluated to identify areas of philosophical alignment (e.g., emphasis on moral etiquette) as well as pedagogical gaps (e.g., over-reliance on rote memorization or fragmented curriculum integration).

Pedagogical Reconstruction: In the final stage, insights from the first two stages were synthesized to construct the proposed learning strategies. Rather than merely

[13] University Putra Malaysia et al., 'Divine Objectives and Decentralized Power: Islamic Thought, Postmodernism, and the Future of Global Ethics', *South Asian Journal of Religion and Philosophy* 6, no. 1 (June 2025): 68, https://doi.org/10.58932/MULF0042.

[14] Fazari Zulhasmi Kanggas, *Metodologi Penelitian Hukum Dan Hukum Islam* (Ponorogo: UNIDA Gontor Press, 2025), 89.

critiquing existing models, this stage involved conceptual reconstruction—adapting Al-Attas' abstract epistemological principles into actionable classroom methods, curriculum structures, and teacher roles suitable for contemporary pesantren environments.

Data collection followed a purposive documentation technique: sources were selected for direct relevance to ta'dib, adab, and pesantren learning strategy, then read, coded, and organized thematically. Analysis proceeded in three stages consistent with qualitative content analysis[15]. First, conceptual extraction isolated al-Attas' core categories adab, ta'dib, 'adl, and al-insan al-kamil and their definitional relationships. Second, comparative mapping placed these categories alongside documented pesantren practices (uswah hasanah, habituation, sanad, hidden curriculum) to identify points of convergence and divergence. Third, reconstructive synthesis translated the converging elements into a structured, four-component learning strategy, using al-Attas' own hierarchy discipline of body, mind, and soul as the organizing logic. Credibility was supported through source triangulation across primary, interpretive, and applied literature, and through consistent cross-checking of terminology against al-Attas' original definitions to avoid the terminological conflation the study itself identifies as a problem[16].

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Ta'dib as the Correct Locus of Islamic Education

Al-Attas' central philosophical move is definitional: he distinguishes tarbiyah, ta'lim, and ta'dib not as synonyms but as concepts of unequal scope and depth. Tarbiyah, he argues, is derived from a root associated with growth, nurture, and increase, and can properly describe the rearing of any living thing; it therefore lacks the specifically epistemic and ethical content required of Islamic education[17]. Ta'lim, denoting instruction or the transmission of knowledge, captures the cognitive dimension but not the disciplining of character that knowledge is meant to produce. Ta'dib, by contrast, is built on the same root as adab, and for al-Attas it already contains both dimensions: it is instruction (ta'lim) that inculcates adab, and adab is the recognition and acknowledgment, progressively instilled, of the right and proper place of everything within the created order[18].

[15] Mesi Rawanita and Warul Walidin, 'Kerangka Dasar Pemikiran Pendidikan Naquib Al-Attas: Rekonstruksi Konseptual Dalam Filsafat Pendidikan', *Jurnal Staika: Jurnal Penelitian Dan Pendidikan* 8, no. 2 (June 2025): 92, https://doi.org/10.62750/866ran10.

[16] Rawanita and Walidin, 95.

[17] Ida Mariana, Purniadi Putra, and Jaelani, 'Konsep Ta'dib Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas Dan Relevansinya Dengan Pendidikan Karakter', *PIJAR: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pengajaran* 1, no. 2 (March 2023): 168, https://doi.org/10.58540/pijar.v1i2.170.

[18] Purniadi Putra, Mawazi Mawazi, and Hifza Hifza, 'Analysis of Adab Education According to Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas', *International Research-Based Education Journal* 5, no. 1 (January 2023): 140, https://doi.org/10.17977/um043v5i1p140-148.

This distinction is important because it establishes *ta'dib* not simply as another term for education, but as the concept that gives education its proper direction. Whereas *tarbiyah* emphasizes the process of growth and *ta'lim* emphasizes the acquisition of knowledge, *ta'dib* brings growth and knowledge under an ethical and epistemological orientation[19]. The learner is therefore formed not only to know, but also to recognize how knowledge ought to shape one's understanding and conduct.

This definition of adab as an ontological rather than merely social category is what most sharply distinguishes al-Attas from conventional usages of the term, where adab is often reduced to manners, courtesy, or literary refinement. For al-Attas, correct adab toward God, toward knowledge, toward other human beings, and toward oneself is a single continuous discipline, because a person who fails to recognize the proper place of one relationship is liable to misplace the others as well. Education aimed at ta'dib is therefore inseparable from justice (‘adl), understood precisely as placing things including one's own faculties, desires, and claims to knowledge in their right place (Wan Daud, 1998). The aim of such education, al-Attas insists, is not the production of a good citizen or a skilled professional, both of which are instrumental and outward-facing goals, but the formation of al-insan al-kamil, the good human being whose intellectual attainment and moral character develop as one undivided process[20].

Accordingly, the distinctive contribution of *ta'dib* lies in its integration of knowledge and ethical formation. Knowledge is not treated as an end detached from the formation of the knower; rather, its acquisition is expected to contribute to the development of a person who recognizes the proper order of reality and acts accordingly. In this sense, *ta'dib* provides the conceptual locus in which the epistemic and ethical purposes of Islamic education meet[21].

Thus, the preference for *ta'dib* is ultimately grounded in the comprehensive meaning that it assigns to education. It preserves the instructional dimension represented by *ta'lim* and the developmental dimension associated with *tarbiyah*, while placing both within the framework of *adab*[22]. Islamic education, from this perspective, is therefore concerned not merely with transmitting knowledge or nurturing individual capacities, but with forming the learner through the proper relationship between knowledge, character, and the order of existence.

Convergences with Existing Pesantren Practice

[19] Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas: An Exposition of the Original Concept of Islamization*, 137.

[20] Risza Vilianita, Muh. Nur Rochim Maksum, and Mohammad Ali Ma'arif, 'The Relevance of Education Based on Adab According to the Thoughts of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al Attas with the Current State of the Community':, paper presented at International Conference on Islamic and Muhammadiyah Studies (ICIMS 2022), 2022, https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.220708.033.

[21] Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas: An Exposition of the Original Concept of Islamization*, 135.

[22] Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 1999), 25.

Read against the pesantren literature, al-Attas' framework is less a foreign import than an articulation of a logic pesantren already practice, even where they do not name it in his terms. Four convergences stand out. First, exemplary teacher authority: contemporary studies of pesantren character education consistently identify uswah hasanah the kiai or ustadz as a living model of adab as the primary mechanism of moral transmission, more decisive than formal classroom instruction. This mirrors al-Attas' insistence that ta'dib is transmitted through disciplined relationship, not information delivery alone, and that the teacher's authority is a pedagogical necessity rather than an authoritarian residue.

Second, habituation (ta'wid or riyadhah al-nafs): pesantren organize daily life communal prayer, fixed schedules, dormitory discipline as a deliberate mechanism for instilling adab through repetition rather than explanation alone, a practice consistent with al-Attas' view that adab must be "instilled gradually," addressing body and soul together, not transmitted as propositional content to the intellect in isolation. Third, sanad-based transmission: the chain of authorization that pesantren maintain in transmitting religious texts functions simultaneously as an epistemic safeguard and a moral one, since receiving knowledge through a verified chain implicitly requires the student to acknowledge the proper place of the teacher and the textual tradition an enactment, in practice, of adab toward knowledge itself[23].

Fourth, the hidden curriculum of communal life: research on inclusive and holistic pesantren models shows that character formation is not confined to scheduled lessons but is diffused across the pesantren's culture the kiai's leadership style, social interaction among santri, and the rhythms of boarding-school life together constitute an informal but highly structured curriculum of adab[24]. This diffusion is precisely what al-Attas' holistic definition of ta'dib anticipates: because adab concerns the disciplining of the whole person, it cannot be confined to a single subject or classroom hour.

The Gap: Vocabulary, Sequencing, and Vulnerability to Erosion

Despite these convergences, the literature also reveals a persistent gap. Pesantren practices are rarely described using al-Attas' precise conceptual vocabulary; adab is treated as one educational output among others — alongside religious knowledge, language competence, and increasingly, national examination performance rather than as the ontological precondition that al-Attas argues it must be[25]. Several studies of adab-based character education explicitly note that as pesantren integrate national

[23] Saiful Nasution, 'PENDAMPINGAN BELAJAR AL QURAN SISWA DENGAN METODE IQRO DI TPA JANNATUL FIRDAUS SIMAN PONOROGO', *Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat* 9, no. 2 (2025), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.32696/ajpkm.v9i2.5242.

[24] Miftahul Huda, Nurwadjah Ahmad, and Andewi Suhartini, 'KONSEP MAQASHID SYARI'AH DAN IMPLIKASINYA PADA PENDIDIKAN ISLAM', *Tarbawi : Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 19, no. 1 (June 2023): 154, https://doi.org/10.34001/tarbawi.v19i1.2138.

[25] Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education*, 17.

curricula, accreditation requirements, and skill-oriented programs, the sequencing that traditionally placed moral discipline before advanced instruction is under strain, with academic and competency targets increasingly setting the pace of the curriculum instead[26].

This is significant because, for al-Attas, sequencing is not incidental but constitutive of ta'dib: knowledge given to a soul not yet disciplined in adab risks being misused, since the recipient has not yet learned to place that knowledge and the power it confers in its right place[27]. Without an explicit theoretical anchor, pesantren risk retaining the outward form of adab-rich practice (habituation, exemplification, hidden curriculum) while losing its underlying logic, reducing rich traditions to compliance rituals rather than sustaining them as a coherent philosophy of education. This is the specific problem an al-Attas-grounded reconstruction can address.

The contemporary development of pesantren makes this gap particularly relevant. Recent research shows that pesantren increasingly negotiate between religious traditions, character formation, national educational standards, and competency-oriented programmes. While such integration does not necessarily displace traditional forms of Islamic education, it can produce different curricular priorities across institutions[28]. At the same time, recent scholarship continues to identify *role modelling*, habituation, curriculum integration, and pesantren culture as major mechanisms of character formation[29]. The persistence of these practices suggests that the issue is not simply whether adab remains present, but whether its underlying conceptual function remains sufficiently articulated.

The gap, therefore, concerns not the absence of adab-oriented practices but the lack of an explicit framework explaining their proper relationship to knowledge and education. Existing studies have provided valuable accounts of character formation, curriculum integration, and pesantren culture, but these dimensions are often examined as separate educational mechanisms. An al-Attasian perspective allows them to be reconsidered through a single conceptual framework in which adab provides the orientation through which knowledge, discipline, and character formation are ordered[30]. This makes *ta'dib* relevant not as a replacement for established

[26] Eko Sumadi and Mualimul Huda, 'Curriculum Management and Implementation of Integrative Learning in Islamic-Based Madrasas in Central Java', *QUALITY* 13, no. 1 (July 2025): 75, https://doi.org/10.21043/quality.v13i1.31380.

[27] Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education*, 32.

[28] Muhammad Ishomudin M. Ainur Rifqi, Ayu Wulandari, 'Convergent Visions, Divergent Practices: Managing Pesantren and National Curriculum Integration in Indonesian Islamic Boarding Schools', *AR-ROSIKHUN: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam* 5, no. 2 (2026): 352, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.18860/rosikhun.v5i2.44950.

[29] Muhammad Anas Ma'arif and Muhamad Arif, 'Sustaining Character Education in Pesantren: A Holistic and Culturally Embedded Learning Ecosystem', *Jurnal Cakrawala Pendidikan* 45, no. 2 (June 2026), https://doi.org/10.21831/cp.v45i2.94968.

[30] Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas: An Exposition of the Original Concept of Islamization*, 139.

pesantren practices, but as a theoretical framework for clarifying the educational logic that connects them.

Reconstructed Adab Centered Learning Strategy

Building on the preceding analysis, this study proposes a four-component learning strategy that translates al-Attas' philosophy into an applied pesantren model, organized around his own tripartite discipline of body, mind, and soul.

First, adab-oriented curriculum sequencing. Consistent with al-Attas' claim that ta'dib must precede and frame ta'lim, curriculum design should place foundational adab instruction correct comportment toward teachers, texts, peers, and one's own intention in seeking knowledge (*adab al-ʻalim wa al-mutaʻallim*) at the entry point of pesantren education, functioning as a gate rather than a parallel subject. Advanced instrumental knowledge language mastery, jurisprudential detail, or modern sciences is then sequenced as an extension of, not a substitute for, this foundation.

Second, teacher-centered exemplification as the primary pedagogical medium. Because al-Attas holds that adab is instilled through disciplined relationship rather than instruction alone, teacher training within pesantren should explicitly cultivate the kiai's and ustadz's role as a deliberate object of emulation, formalizing what is already practiced informally as uswah hasanah into a recognized pedagogical method with corresponding expectations of consistency between a teacher's conduct and their teaching[31].

Third, habituation and communal life as an extended curriculum. The dormitory schedule, communal worship, and peer accountability structures that already exist in pesantren should be formally recognized within the curriculum document itself not merely as institutional culture but as a scheduled, evaluated component of ta'dib so that habituation is sustained deliberately rather than left to informal continuity, which studies show is vulnerable to erosion under external pressures such as social media and outside peer influence[32].

Fourth, an evaluation framework that assesses justice of the self (*ʻadl*) alongside cognitive mastery. Since al-Attas defines adab as the correct placing of things, evaluation should move beyond test scores to include structured observation of a santri's conduct toward knowledge, teachers, and peers for example, through teacher-recorded adab logs, sanad-based oral examination that requires demonstrated respect for the transmission chain, and periodic self-reflective accounting (*muhasabah*) so that a santri's overall standing reflects the undivided intellectual-moral formation al-Attas identifies as the goal of ta'dib, rather than academic performance alone.

[31] Rini Syevyilni Wisda, 'Pemberdayaan Taman Pendidikan Alqur'an (TPA) Dalam Meningkatkan Motivasi Belajar Alqur'an Di Desa Koto Teluk', *Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat Radisi* 5, no. 3 (2025): 74, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.55266/pkmradisi.v5i3.

[32] May Shinta Retnowati, 'PENDAMPINGAN MANAJEMEN METODE PEMBELAJARAN DI TPA AS- SIROJ BERBASIS KLASIFIKASI TINGKAT', *Martabe: Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat* 9, no. 5 (n.d.), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.31604/jpm.v9i5.%25p.

Table 2. Conceptual Matrix: Pesantren Practices in Al-Attas' Framework

Pesantren Practice	**Core Mechanism**	**Connection to *Adab* (Recognition of Proper Place)**	**Connection to *Ta'dib* (Discipline of Soul & Intellect)**	**Connection to *'Adl* (Justice & Harmony)**
1. *Uswah Hasanah* (Exemplary Modeling)	Embodied ethical action by the *kiai* and senior *ustadz*.	Makes metaphysical hierarchy visible by showing how a scholar aligns with divine truth.	Cultivates the soul through visual and spiritual emulation rather than abstract theory alone.	Establishes an internal moral compass so the student treats others and themselves with due right.
2. Habituation (*Ta'wid* / *Riyadhah*)	Repeated spiritual, ritual, and daily disciplined routines.	Trains the physical body and lower soul (*nafs*) to recognize their subordinate place to the intellect (*'aql*).	Subdues disordered desires and aligns outward behavior with inward spiritual refinement.	Restores inner equilibrium by preventing the lower appetites from usurping the rule of reason.
3. *Sanad*-Based Transmission	Unbroken chains of scholarly authorization and lineage.	Anchors knowledge in authentic authority and prevents intellectual arrogance or relativism.	Disciplines the intellect to receive truth with humility, verification, and responsibility.	Preserves the rightful place of teachers, texts, and sacred knowledge across generations.
4. Hidden Curriculum	Communal ethos, spatial order, and unspoken institutional norms.	Embeds a lived cosmology where time, space, and social roles reflect sacred order.	Shapes subconscious dispositions (*malakah*) through continuous immersion in an ethical ecology.	Fosters social harmony (*'adl* in community) where individual autonomy serves collective good.

Uswah Hasanah

In al-Attas' philosophy, *adab* is the recognition and acknowledgment of the reality that knowledge and being are ordered hierarchically. Within the pesantren, *uswah hasanah* translates this abstract metaphysics into a living reality. Through the daily conduct of the *kiai*, students witness how a person of knowledge places God, sacred texts, elders, and peers in their rightful stations.

This embodied modeling operationalizes *ta'dib* by shifting education from passive cognitive transfer to active moral formation. When students emulate the *kiai*, they align their own faculties with an established standard of spiritual integrity. Consequently, *uswah hasanah* lays the foundation for *'adl* (justice), which al-Attas defines as a condition where everything is in its rightful place, starting within the individual soul.

Habituation (*Ta'wid* and *Riyadhah*)

Al-Attas emphasizes that *ta'dib* requires the instillation of discipline in both the physical and spiritual dimensions of the human being. In the pesantren, *ta'wid* (habituation) and *riyadhah* (spiritual exercise) serve as the primary pedagogical tools for this internal ordering.

Philosophically, these practices address the tension between the rational soul (*al-nafs al-natiqah*) and the animalistic soul (*al-nafs al-hayawaniyyah*). By regulating sleep, prayer, study, and service, habituation trains the body to submit to the intellect and spirit. This hierarchical ordering of human faculties is the essence of *adab* toward oneself. When the lower desires no longer dominate the intellect, the student achieves inner *'adl*, a state of spiritual equilibrium necessary for receiving true knowledge.

***Sanad* Based Knowledge Transmission**

The *sanad* tradition is not merely a historical method of verifying texts; it is an epistemological safeguard rooted in *adab*. Al-Attas argues that the loss of *adab* leads to confusion in knowledge and the rise of false leaders who lack legitimate authority. *Sanad* directly counters this crisis by binding knowledge to an unbroken chain of moral and intellectual accountability.

Through *sanad*, *ta'dib* disciplines the student's intellect against hubris and detached individualism. Knowledge is approached as a sacred trust (*amanah*) rather than a mere commodity. This structure upholds *'adl* in the intellectual sphere by ensuring that scholars, traditions, and divine revelation receive their due respect, preserving the integrity of Islamic scholarship across generations.

Hidden Curriculum

The hidden curriculum of the pesantren manifested in spatial arrangements, communal living, respect for elders, and simple living (*zuhud*) operates as an immersive architecture of *adab*. Rather than relying solely on explicit rules, the pesantren environment continuously cues students to recognize proper boundaries, duties, and mutual obligations.

This institutional ethos reinforces *ta'dib* by forming deeply ingrained dispositions (*malakah*) that persist outside the classroom. By integrating worship, social service, and study into a single holistic rhythm, the hidden curriculum manifests *'adl* at the communal level. It harmonizes individual spiritual growth with collective responsibility, demonstrating how an *adab*-centered educational ecosystem produces balanced individuals (*insan adabi*)

Discussion

Taken together, these four components do not ask pesantren to adopt a foreign pedagogy but to make explicit, systematize, and defend a logic many already practice.

This distinguishes the proposed reconstruction from generic character-education frameworks imported from secular pedagogy, which typically treat character as one competency domain among several rather than as the organizing principle of the entire curriculum. It also addresses a limitation noted in prior scholarship: that al-Attas' philosophy, developed primarily in dialogue with university-level Islamization of knowledge, has offered limited operational guidance at the level of basic and secondary pesantren instruction[33]. By anchoring the reconstruction in documented pesantren practice rather than proposing an abstract ideal, the model presented here aims to be both philosophically faithful to al-Attas and practically legible to pesantren administrators and teachers[34].

The significance of this reconstruction, however, lies precisely in its character as renewal rather than replacement. The four components are not introduced as an external pedagogical package but as a way of bringing greater conceptual clarity and coherence to educational practices already embedded within pesantren. In this sense, renewal can occur through the explicit articulation and systematization of an existing educational ethos rather than through a break with institutional tradition. Such an approach allows the pesantren to respond to contemporary educational conditions while retaining the formative purposes that have historically distinguished its educational practice[35]. This is particularly relevant because recent scholarship continues to identify habituation, role modelling, institutional culture, and curriculum integration as important mechanisms of character formation in pesantren, even as these institutions negotiate broader curricular and competency demands.

The distinction between renewal and rupture is also important for understanding the relationship between tradition and contemporary educational development. The present reconstruction does not assume that inherited practices should remain unchanged, nor does it assume that modernization necessarily requires their displacement. Rather, it proposes that the educational rationale underlying such practices can be made more explicit so that adaptation does not result in the loss of their formative meaning[36]. From this perspective, continuity is maintained at the level of educational purpose, while renewal takes place through conceptual articulation, curricular organization, and institutional reflection.

Two limitations should be acknowledged. First, because this study relies on library research rather than field data, the four-component model remains a conceptual proposal whose implementation, costs, and institutional resistance require empirical testing through case studies or action research in specific pesantren. Second, al-Attas'

[33] Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education*, 74.

[34] Sofwan Manaf et al., 'Strategic Integration of General and Religious Education in Indonesian Pesantren: Building Holistic Character for National Resilience', *Edcomtech: Jurnal Kajian Teknologi Pendidikan* 10, no. 2 (November 2025): 138, https://doi.org/10.17977/um039v10i22025p133-146.

[35] Ma'arif and Arif, 'Sustaining Character Education in Pesantren', June 2026.

[36] Syed Muhammad Naquib Al Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia, 1978), 44.

emphasis on hierarchical, teacher-centered authority raises legitimate questions already present in the wider literature — about how such a model accommodates critical thinking and pedagogical dialogue, questions this study does not resolve but flags for further inquiry[37].

While grounding educational reform in the classical Islamic paradigm of *adab* (moral, spiritual, and intellectual discipline) offers a compelling holistic vision, translating this philosophical ideal into contemporary *pesantren* practice presents significant pedagogical and structural challenges. Moving from conceptual elegance to sustainable execution requires confronting three interrelated tensions, alongside the diverse institutional realities of Islamic boarding schools.

The Dichotomy of Moral Formation and Intellectual Inquiry

A foundational maxim in Islamic educational thought—most notably articulated by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas holds that *adab* must precede *'ilm* (knowledge), as knowledge without moral grounding risks misapplication. However, operationalizing this sequence rigidly within modern curricula risks creating an artificial bifurcation between character development and cognitive growth.

Sequential vs. Iterative Growth, Treating moral readiness as a static prerequisite to rigorous inquiry overlooks how ethical judgment is often forged *through* intellectual struggle, ambiguity, and problem-solving. Compliance vs. Internalization, When institutional culture over-indexes on behavioral etiquette early in a student's trajectory, *adab* can inadvertently be reduced to outward conformity and docility. This dynamic risks stifling intellectual curiosity, leading *santri* (students) to avoid complex or sensitive questions out of fear of breaching social norms.

Navigating Epistemic Authority and Student Autonomy

The traditional *pesantren* ecosystem is anchored by the charismatic and moral authority of the *kyai* and *ustadz*, fostered through deep reverence (*ta'zim*) and spiritual mentorship. While this relational trust provides strong ethical anchoring, it exists in inherent tension with contemporary pedagogical goals that prioritize critical thinking, dialogic learning, and learner autonomy.

The Risk of Epistemic Passivity: In environments where deference is absolute, students may hesitate to interrogate texts, debate interpretations, or propose novel solutions, conflating intellectual disagreement with personal disrespect. Cultivating Principled Critique: Sustainable implementation requires moving beyond a zero sum view of authority and autonomy. Rather than dismantling traditional respect, educators must model *adab al-ikhtilaf* (the ethics of disagreement) framing rigorous, evidence-based questioning as an expression of intellectual honesty and reverence for truth rather than rebellion.

[37] Sumadi and Huda, 'Curriculum Management and Implementation of Integrative Learning in Islamic-Based Madrasas in Central Java'.

Balancing Traditional Heritage with Contemporary Demands

Pesantren today operate at the intersection of centuries-old scholarly traditions and the pressing demands of national education standards, globalized labor markets, and rapid technological change.

Curricular Congestion and Fragmentation: Attempting to layer modern STEM subjects, digital literacy, and national exam preparation onto dense classical *kitab kuning* (yellow book) studies frequently leads to curricular overload. Without genuine epistemological integration, institutions risk producing a fragmented learning experience where religious ethics and modern sciences remain siloed.

Institutional Heterogeneity: *Pesantren* do not represent a uniform educational model; they span a wide spectrum from strictly traditional *salaf* institutions to highly modernized *khalaf* and integrated boarding schools (*pesantren modern*). A standardized framework risks failing if it ignores disparities in financial resources, pedagogical infrastructure, and teacher qualifications across urban and rural contexts.

External Accountability Pressures: Standardized assessments, university entrance metrics, and parental expectations for socioeconomic mobility heavily incentivize quantifiable academic outputs. These external pressures often marginalize the slow, relational, and unquantifiable processes required for genuine *adab* cultivation.

Contextual Conditions for Effective Implementation

Ultimately, the viability of an *adab*-first framework depends less on theoretical soundness than on local institutional readiness. Successful adoption requires three enabling conditions: targeted professional development to equip *ustadz* with facilitative, dialogic teaching methods; integrated curriculum design that embeds ethical reflection within secular subjects rather than isolating it in religious instruction; and flexible, context-sensitive adaptation that honors each *pesantren*'s distinct cultural identity and resource capacity.

These limitations do not undermine the principle of renewal without rupture, but they clarify the scope of the present study. The proposed reconstruction is not presented as a universally applicable institutional formula, but as a conceptual framework that requires further examination within the diverse realities of pesantren. Its contribution lies in showing how renewal can proceed without severing the connection between contemporary educational needs and the inherited formative purposes of pesantren[38]. In this respect, ta'dib provides a conceptual language through which existing practices can be critically sustained, rather than simply preserved or replaced.

The central implication, therefore, is that educational renewal in pesantren need not be framed as a choice between preserving tradition and embracing modernity. The

[38] Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas: An Exposition of the Original Concept of Islamization*, 130.

more productive possibility is a renewal that distinguishes between the enduring principles of the tradition and the historical forms through which those principles have been expressed[39]. From this perspective, ta'dib provides a conceptual language for preserving the formative core of pesantren while enabling its educational practices to respond consciously to changing curricular, institutional, and social conditions. Renewal becomes not a rupture with the past, but a disciplined rearticulation of its educational purpose.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to reconstruct al-Attas' philosophy of education, centered on the concept of ta'dib, into a coherent learning strategy for pesantren. The analysis shows that al-Attas' redefinition of adab as the ontological recognition and acknowledgment of the proper place of things offers a more precise and demanding standard for Islamic education than the loosely interchangeable terms tarbiyah and ta'lim commonly used in practice. Cross reading al-Attas' framework against the pesantren literature reveals substantial convergence: pesantren already operationalize exemplary teacher authority, habituation, sanad-based transmission, and a hidden curriculum of communal life in ways consistent with ta'dib, even without naming them as such. The absence of an explicit theoretical vocabulary, however, leaves these practices vulnerable to displacement by outcome-based and skill-oriented curricular pressures.

The four-component adab-centered strategy proposed here sequencing adab before advanced instruction, formalizing teacher exemplification, embedding habituation within the curriculum, and evaluating justice of the self alongside cognitive mastery offers pesantren a way to renew their pedagogical identity in explicit, defensible terms without abandoning the tradition from which their practices arise. For the broader field of Islamic educational philosophy, the study contributes a systematic bridge between al-Attas' largely university-oriented theory and the lived pedagogy of pesantren, and it opens an agenda for future empirical research including case studies, action research, and comparative work across pesantren of differing orientation to test, refine, and contextualize the model proposed.this four-component strategy extends previous studies on *ta'dib*, *adab*, and *pesantren* education in four distinct ways:

Anchoring Character in Metaphysics rather than Secular Compliance: Unlike mainstream *pendidikan karakter* (character education), which often emphasizes secular civic habits and outward social conformity, this framework grounds moral formation in the Islamic worldview (*ru'yat al-Islam lil-wujud*), guiding *santri* to recognize their proper place before God, self, and society, Unifying Knowledge under *Tawhid* rather than Pluralist Holism: Whereas Western-derived holistic education treats spirituality as one separate domain alongside cognitive and physical development, this strategy

[39] Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education*, 22.

operationalizes Al-Attas' hierarchy of knowledge (*fard 'ayn* and *fard kifayah*), integrating intellectual inquiry and spiritual discipline under a unified *tawhidic* epistemology, Moving *Adab* from Ethical Discourse to Classroom Pedagogy: While general studies on *adab* often focus on cultural politeness (*akhlaq*) or classical ethical texts without clear instructional steps, this model operationalizes *adab* defined as the discipline of body, mind, and soul into observable teaching and learning practices, Translating *Ta'dib* from Higher Education to Grassroots *Pesantren*: Existing literature on Al-Attas' *ta'dib* has remained largely philosophical or focused on tertiary institutions (such as ISTAC). This study adapts those high-level concepts to the lived relational ecosystem of *kyai*, *ustadz*, and *santri*, offering a practical bridge between traditional *kitab kuning* heritage and modern educational demands.

Ultimately, this research demonstrates that *pesantren* do not need to sacrifice their metaphysical foundations to achieve modern pedagogical effectiveness. By adopting a systematic *ta'dib*-based learning strategy, Islamic boarding schools can cultivate graduates who embody both intellectual rigor and deeply internalized spiritual wisdom. Future research should pursue empirical classroom trials and longitudinal evaluations across diverse *salaf* and *khalaf pesantren* to measure the framework's impact on student outcomes and refine its implementation across varying institutional contexts.

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