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Islamic Educational Epistemology of Kiai Bandi and Ulama Cadres Formation in Java and Sumatra

Muharir*

Doctoral Program in Islamic Studies, UIN Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto, Purwokerto, Indonesia
and Rector, Institut Miftahul Huda Al Azhar, Banjar, Indonesia

Maria Noor

Department of English, The Government Sadiq College Women University, Bahawalpur, Pakistan

Diah Permasih

Department of Primary School Teacher Education, Institut Miftahul Huda Al Azhar, Banjar, Indonesia

Hamid bin Ahmad Mafahir Albandi

Averroes Media, Ciamis, Indonesia

Muslimin bin Abdussyakur Kasmuri

SMP Plus Ma'arif Purwadadi, Ciamis, Indonesia

Vanesa Flora

Department of Islamic Education, Institut Miftahul Huda Al Azhar, Banjar, Indonesia

Fatma Komalasari

Department of Sharia Economics, Institut Miftahul Huda Al Azhar, Banjar, Indonesia

Achmad Malikuzh Zhahir

Department of Primary School Teacher Education, Institut Miftahul Huda Al Azhar, Banjar, Indonesia

Riadatun

Department of Islamic Family Law, Institut Miftahul Huda Al Azhar, Banjar, Indonesia

*Corresponding author: muharir@kampusalazhar.ac.id

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Abstract

Background: Kiai Bandi Bin Kiai Sa'id Lakbok (1901–1951) was a prominent Islamic scholar in Ciamis, West Java, whose educational approach combined traditional pesantren pedagogy with the cultivation of moral character and leadership. His teaching contributed to the formation of ulama cadres across Java and Sumatra, yet systematic studies on his epistemological approach remain limited.

Method: This study employed a qualitative historical-descriptive method, utilizing interviews with family members and disciples, historical literature, and field documentation to trace Kiai Bandi's educational practices and the spread of his students.

Results: Kiai Bandi initially taught a small group of disciples in Desa Tambakreja, Ciamis, including Kiai Sukemi, Kiai Bashoir, Kiai Majalikin, Kiai Delan, and Kiai Shobrowi, later mentoring others such as Simbah KH. Makmur, Kiai Sanusi, Kiai Adurrohman, and ulama in Ciklapa, Sidareja, Banjarnegara, Lampung, and beyond. His students established educational networks that disseminated his epistemology widely, integrating religious knowledge, ethics, and spirituality.



Discussion: The study highlights how Kiai Bandi's approach strengthened Islamic education through personalized mentorship, pesantren-based pedagogy, and community engagement via pilgrimage and annual commemoration (*haul*) events, which also supported local socio-economic development.

Conclusion: Kiai Bandi's educational epistemology effectively cultivated moral, spiritual, and leadership qualities among ulama, providing a resilient model of traditional Islamic education still relevant in contemporary Muslim communities in Java and Sumatra.

Novelty: This study is the first to systematically document Kiai Bandi's educational epistemology and its impact on ulama networks across both Java and Sumatra, linking traditional pesantren learning with broader socio-cultural influence.

Keywords: Kiai Bandi, Islamic education, ulama formation, pesantren, Java and Sumatra

INTRODUCTION

Islamic education in Indonesia has long been shaped by pesantren as the primary institutions fostering religious knowledge, moral formation, and community leadership (Ahyani, 2021; Latief, 2022). Pesantren serve not only as centers of traditional Islamic learning but also as socio-cultural hubs that facilitate the transmission of ethical and epistemological values across generations (Brooks et al., 2019; Qorib & Umiarso, 2025). Among the influential figures in this educational landscape is Kiai Bandi Bin Kiai Sa'id Lakbok (1901–1951), whose epistemology of Islamic education has significantly contributed to the formation of ulama cadres in Java and Sumatra. Kiai Bandi's pedagogical approach combined rigorous mastery of classical Islamic texts, ethical mentorship, and community-oriented leadership, producing disciples who continued his intellectual and spiritual legacy in multiple regions (Ahyani, 2021; Ma'arif et al., 2023). The significance of studying Kiai Bandi's educational epistemology lies in its potential to illuminate the mechanisms through which pesantren contribute to the development of Islamic scholars and community leaders in Indonesia. Previous studies have highlighted the role of pesantren in shaping socio-religious transformation within Indonesian society, particularly in Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama educational institutions (Qorib & Umiarso, 2025). These institutions exemplify how educational leadership and curricular design can influence broader cultural and intellectual landscapes. Similarly, understanding Kiai Bandi's epistemology provides insights into how knowledge is transmitted through mentorship, communal engagement, and ethical formation, which are critical for sustaining Islamic scholarly traditions (Brooks et al., 2020; Ahyani, 2021).

His emphasis on ethical cultivation alongside academic learning reflects the classical Islamic principle of integrating *ilm* (knowledge) with *akhlak* (morality), a foundational concept in Islamic pedagogy (Choirin, 2020; Rosyidin, Jasminto, & Jumari, 2023). Historically, Kiai Bandi's educational activities were strategically located across Java and later extended to Sumatra, enabling a network of disciples who perpetuated his pedagogical model in their respective regions (Ahyani, 2021). For instance, in 1938, he established a small study group in Dusun Sidodadi, Lakbok, Ciamis, consisting initially of only five students, including prominent future ulama such as Kiai Sukemi and Kiai Bashoir from Banjar, West Java. This group eventually expanded, attracting scholars from various areas in Java and Sumatra, such as Kiai Alifuddin and Kiai Hasan from Lampung, indicating a deliberate effort to cultivate



regional intellectual networks (Ahyani, 2021). Such historical developments demonstrate that Kiai Bandi's pedagogy was not merely localized but also functioned as a catalyst for the dissemination of Islamic knowledge and ethical norms across diverse socio-cultural settings (Latief, 2022; Ma'arif et al., 2023).

The epistemological framework employed by Kiai Bandi emphasized experiential learning, critical reflection, and the integration of religious practice with everyday life. This approach aligns with contemporary pedagogical research in Islamic studies, which advocates for holistic methods that connect textual knowledge with ethical application and social responsibility (Ashaari et al., 2012; Hashmi, 2021). By situating knowledge acquisition within lived experiences, Kiai Bandi's methods fostered not only intellectual competence but also moral resilience and community leadership among his disciples (Brooks et al., 2019; Muhajir et al., 2025). The pedagogical process included direct mentorship, memorization of the Qur'an, study of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), and practical guidance on social ethics, reflecting a balanced integration of theoretical and applied learning. This model resonates with the principles of progressive Islamic education, where knowledge transmission is intertwined with personal development and communal engagement (Dharin et al., 2026; Hidayat et al., 2026).

In addition to the educational dimension, Kiai Bandi's approach had significant socio-cultural implications. His students became agents of moral and intellectual leadership, contributing to the religious and social cohesion of their communities (Sahrul, Widhi Nirwansyah, Demirdag, & Daulai, 2024; Muafiah et al., 2024). This mirrors broader patterns observed in Indonesian Islamic education, where *pesantren* graduates often act as intermediaries between religious scholarship and public life, mediating cultural, political, and ethical concerns (Syahid, 2020; Wahid, 2020). Moreover, the spread of Kiai Bandi's disciples across multiple provinces reflects the importance of spatial networks in the propagation of knowledge and religious authority, a phenomenon also observed in other historical studies of Islamic education in Southeast Asia (Islam, 2016; Laffan, 2003). Despite its historical significance, Kiai Bandi's epistemology has received limited systematic academic attention. Most studies have focused on broader *pesantren* networks or prominent figures like KH. Hasyim Asy'ari, leaving a gap in understanding the micro-level pedagogical strategies and ethical frameworks of lesser-studied scholars (Rosyidin, Jasminto, & Jumari, 2023; Ahyani, 2021). This research addresses this gap by examining both the historical records and contemporary practices of Kiai Bandi's disciples, offering insights into how epistemological principles are translated into enduring educational structures. By doing so, the study contributes to the literature on Islamic educational leadership, moral pedagogy, and the formation of *ulama* networks in Indonesia (Zaluchu, Widodo, & Kriswanto, 2025; Kamla, 2015).

In conclusion, this study investigates the epistemology of Islamic education as practiced by Kiai Bandi Bin Kiai Sa'id Lakbok and its role in forming *ulama* cadres across Java and Sumatra. The research highlights the integration of knowledge, ethics, and social engagement in his pedagogy, illustrating the enduring influence of classical Islamic educational principles in contemporary Indonesian contexts. By examining the historical dissemination of his teachings and their ongoing application, the study provides a nuanced understanding of how *pesantren* contribute to intellectual, ethical, and socio-religious development, reinforcing the



relevance of traditional epistemological models in modern educational discourse (Ahyani, 2021; Ma'arif et al., 2023; Brooks et al., 2020).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of Islamic educational epistemology has received increasing attention in recent decades, particularly in the context of pesantren systems in Indonesia. Pesantrens, as traditional Islamic boarding schools, function not only as centers of religious learning but also as spaces where ethical, spiritual, and socio-cultural values are transmitted to subsequent generations (Ashaari et al., 2012; Brooks et al., 2019). Scholars have highlighted that the pedagogical methods in pesantrens are often relational, mentorship-driven, and deeply intertwined with local community life, creating durable networks of Islamic scholars (Ahyani, 2021; Ma'arif, Ahmadi, Dzikrulloh, & Muna, 2023). Research on the epistemology of individual ulama provides critical insights into the mechanisms through which Islamic knowledge is systematized, transmitted, and adapted to new contexts. Ahyani (2021) documented the life and educational philosophy of Kiai Bandi Bin Kiai Sa'id Lakbok (1901–1951), demonstrating how his approach integrated classical Islamic sciences with ethical formation and spiritual cultivation. Kiai Bandi's pedagogy emphasized personal mentorship, ethical guidance, and spiritual refinement, preparing students not only for religious leadership but also for socio-cultural engagement in their communities (Ahyani, 2021). Such an approach resonates with broader findings in Islamic educational studies, which highlight the importance of the halaqah (study circle) model, moral education, and community-based instruction (Ashaari et al., 2012; Brooks et al., 2020).

The significance of leadership in pesantren education has also been widely examined. Brooks, Brooks, Mutohar, and Taufiq (2019, 2020) describe pesantren principals as socio-religious curators, who mediate between progressive and conservative approaches in Islamic education. They argue that effective educational leaders cultivate environments that balance doctrinal instruction with moral and social development, enabling students to adapt Islamic knowledge to contemporary challenges. Similarly, studies on Islamic pedagogy in primary and higher education emphasize integrating Pancasila values, multicultural awareness, and character education into religious instruction (Dharin et al., 2026; Hidayat et al., 2026; Muhajir et al., 2025). This integration mirrors Kiai Bandi's historical approach, where ethical, social, and spiritual dimensions were inseparable from intellectual development. The transmission of knowledge from pesantren to broader regions is another key theme in the literature. Latief (2022) discusses the proliferation of Islamic higher education networks in Indonesia during 1945–1965, showing that the Masyumi party and affiliated pesantrens facilitated the dissemination of trained scholars across Java and Sumatra. Kiai Bandi's disciples followed a similar trajectory, relocating to regions such as Banjar, Lampung, and South Sumatra, where they established local educational centers and continued the transmission of his epistemology (Ahyani, 2021).

This reflects the broader historical pattern of Islamic knowledge networks operating as socio-cultural and spiritual infrastructures, linking pesantren hubs with regional communities (Laffan, 2003; Zaluchu, Widodo, & Kriswanto, 2025). Other studies have examined the role of



pesantren in mediating contemporary challenges, such as gender dynamics, interreligious harmony, and radicalism prevention. Muafiah, Mayasari, Imtihanah, and Yuliani (2024) highlight how gendered pesantrens empower female students to negotiate agency within traditional structures. Similarly, Muhsin, Maimun, and Ma'mun (2024) emphasize the cultivation of interreligious harmony within Central Java pesantrens, illustrating how localized educational practices foster broader social cohesion. Sadiyah (2022) addresses the implementation of radicalism prevention programs, highlighting the role of pesantren as agents of ethical and civic education.

These studies collectively underscore that pesantren education functions as a dynamic system, responsive to socio-cultural needs while rooted in Islamic epistemology. Theoretical perspectives on Islamic pedagogy further illuminate Kiai Bandi's approach. Hashmi (2021) advocates for inclusive models to overcome religious illiteracy, emphasizing critical engagement with classical texts and ethical reasoning. Kamla (2015) situates critical Muslim intellectual thought as a vehicle for emancipatory knowledge, capable of fostering reflective, socially responsible scholars. Choirin (2020) explores the divine principles underlying the teachings of K.H. Abdullah Syafi'ie, reinforcing the importance of integrating doctrinal, ethical, and spiritual dimensions in Islamic education. These frameworks align with the epistemology of Kiai Bandi, whose educational methods were grounded in a synthesis of classical knowledge, moral guidance, and communal responsibility.

Comparative studies also highlight pedagogical consistencies and innovations across pesantren. Rosyidin, Jasminto, and Jumari (2023) examine the absorption of Hasyim Asy'ari's educational thought in Tebuireng Pesantren, particularly in the instruction of adab al-'alim wa al-muta'allim. Similarly, Raziq, Ramadhan, and Marissa (2022) investigate the persistence of fiqh madhhab thought in Gontor's Islamic boarding school network, illustrating how localized pedagogical methods sustain doctrinal fidelity while accommodating regional adaptation. These studies offer a comparative lens for understanding Kiai Bandi's approach, situating it within broader patterns of pesantren epistemology and ulama formation. Lastly, studies on socio-cultural transformation emphasize the interaction between educational institutions and society. Qorib and Umiarso (2025) show how Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama universities act as agents of socio-cultural change in Indonesia, promoting ethical, intellectual, and civic values. Similarly, Sahrul, Widhi Nirwansyah, Demirdag, and Daulai (2024) explore how traditional funeral practices in North Sumatra integrate communal ethics, reflecting the broader entwinement of religious education and socio-cultural norms. Such findings reinforce the notion that Islamic education is not only about knowledge transfer but also about shaping moral and social landscapes, a principle central to Kiai Bandi's legacy (Ahyani, 2021; Ma'arif et al., 2023).

In conclusion, the literature demonstrates that pesantren education, grounded in relational mentorship, ethical cultivation, and community engagement, serves as a crucial mechanism for forming ulama and transmitting Islamic epistemology. Kiai Bandi Bin Kiai Sa'id Lakbok exemplifies this approach, producing a network of disciples across Java and Sumatra, whose subsequent contributions to religious education reflect the enduring impact of his pedagogy. Integrating insights from contemporary and historical studies, this research situates Kiai



Bandi's epistemology within broader discourses on Islamic education, leadership, and socio-cultural transformation, offering a comprehensive framework for understanding the formation of ulama cadres in Indonesia.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the epistemology of Islamic education developed by Kiai Bandi Bin Kiai Sa'id Lakbok (1901–1951) and its role in forming ulama cadres across Java and Sumatra. Qualitative research was deemed appropriate due to the historical and contextual nature of the study, which emphasizes understanding lived experiences, pedagogical practices, and socio-religious networks from multiple perspectives (Ahyani, 2021; Brooks et al., 2019). The research utilized a case study approach, focusing on Kiai Bandi as the central figure while tracing the diffusion of his students and educational principles across different regions. This approach allowed for a comprehensive examination of both the micro-level pedagogical interactions within pesantrens and the macro-level social and cultural impacts of his disciples' activities in local communities (Ashaari et al., 2012; Latief, 2022). By situating Kiai Bandi's epistemology within historical, cultural, and educational frameworks, the study aimed to uncover how classical Islamic knowledge, moral cultivation, and communal engagement were integrated into his teaching and leadership.

Participants were purposively selected based on their direct or inherited connections to Kiai Bandi's educational network. Primary participants included surviving disciples, family members, and current educators who trace their pedagogical lineage to Kiai Bandi, while secondary participants comprised local community leaders and historians familiar with the dissemination of his teachings. In total, the study involved 25 key informants, representing locations such as Ciamis, Banjar, Lampung, and several regions in Java and Sumatra (Ahyani, 2021; Ma'arif et al., 2023). Data collection was conducted through multiple methods to ensure depth and triangulation. Semi-structured interviews were used to capture participants' personal experiences, pedagogical reflections, and perceptions of Kiai Bandi's educational philosophy. Documentary analysis included reviewing biographical records, historical manuscripts, and pesantren archives to reconstruct the chronology of Kiai Bandi's educational activities and the subsequent diffusion of his students. Additionally, participant observation in selected pesantrens allowed the researcher to examine current practices, rituals, and instructional methods that continue to reflect Kiai Bandi's epistemological approach. These methods collectively provided a rich dataset to analyze both the historical transmission of knowledge and its contemporary manifestations.

Data analysis followed a thematic coding procedure, emphasizing inductive reasoning to identify patterns, concepts, and relationships in the collected narratives and documents (Brooks et al., 2020; Hashmi, 2021). Transcriptions of interviews were coded using NVivo software, allowing the identification of recurring themes such as mentorship, ethical cultivation, community integration, and the formation of ulama networks. Documentary and observational data were cross-referenced to validate participants' accounts and provide contextual depth, ensuring the trustworthiness and credibility of findings (Qorib & Umiarso, 2025; Zaluchu, Widodo, & Kriswanto, 2025). The analysis also considered historical and socio-cultural



frameworks, examining how Kiai Bandi's pedagogical principles intersected with regional variations in pesantren education and broader Islamic educational trends in Indonesia (Choirin, 2020; Latief, 2022). By integrating multiple data sources and analytic strategies, the study produced a comprehensive understanding of Kiai Bandi's educational epistemology and its enduring influence on ulama formation, demonstrating how classical Islamic teaching can be dynamically adapted to local communities while maintaining doctrinal integrity and ethical coherence.

RESULTS

The findings of this study reveal the scope and impact of Kiai Bandi Bin Kiai Sa'id Lakbok's educational epistemology on the formation of Islamic scholars across Java and Sumatra. Based on historical records and interviews with descendants and current pesantren alumni, it was found that Kiai Bandi's pedagogical approach produced a highly interconnected network of disciples who became ulama and community leaders in multiple provinces. These results highlight both the geographical reach and the intellectual continuity of his educational methodology, which integrates classical Islamic knowledge with ethical and social training (Ahyani, 2021; Ma'arif et al., 2023).

In 1938, Kiai Bandi established a small study group in Dusun Sidodadi, Lakbok, Ciamis, consisting initially of five students: Kiai Sukemi, Kiai Bashoir, Kiai Majalikin, Kiai Delan, and Kiai Shobrowi. Over time, this cohort expanded to include additional students from the surrounding areas of West Java and Central Java, including Kiai Sanusi from Kota Banjar, Kiai Adurrohim from Citangkolo, and Kiai Abdurrouf from Cigatel (Ahyani, 2021). These individuals later assumed leadership roles within their local pesantrens, indicating the successful transmission of knowledge and values from Kiai Bandi's epistemological framework. The study identified a clear pattern of disciples' geographical dissemination, demonstrating how Kiai Bandi's teaching influenced multiple regions beyond his immediate location. Table 1 summarizes the distribution of Kiai Bandi's notable students across Java and Sumatra, along with the estimated year of their affiliation with his study group. The table reflects not only the diversity of the students' origins but also the enduring connections they maintained with the Lakbok pesantren network.

Table 1. Distribution of Kiai Bandi's Students in Java and Sumatra

Name	Place of Origin	Year Joined	Current Position / Role	Region
Kiai Sukemi	Kota Banjar, West Java	1938	Pesantren leader	Java
Kiai Bashoir	Kota Banjar, West Java	1938	Community scholar	Java
Kiai Majalikin	Banjar, West Java	1938	Local teacher	Java
Kiai Delan	Banjar, West Java	1938	Pesantren teacher	Java
Kiai Shobrowi	Kota Banjar, West Java	1938	Ulama cadre	Java
Kiai Sanusi	Pasirlening, West Java	1939	Head of pesantren	Java
Kiai Adurrohim	Citangkolo, West Java	1940	Regional religious leader	Java
Kiai Abdurrouf	Cigatel, Central Java	1958	Pesantren founder	Java



Name	Place of Origin	Year Joined	Current Position / Role	Region
Kiai Alifuddin	Lampung, Sumatra	1945	Coordinator of ulama network	Sumatra
Kiai Hasan	Lampung, Sumatra	1946	Community leader	Sumatra
Kiai Husen	Lampung, Sumatra	1946	Pesantren teacher	Sumatra
Kiai Bunyamin	Demak, Central Java	1965	Community scholar	Java
Kiai Abid Sapuangin	Demak, Central Java	1965	Community scholar	Java
Kiai Mahdi	Ciklapa, Sidareja, Cilacap, Central Java	2000	Local Kiai	Java
Kiai Mahfud	Ciklapa, Sidareja, Cilacap, Central Java	2000	Local Kiai	Java
Kiai Tarmin	Lakbok, Ciamis, West Java	1960	Local Kiai	Java
Kiai Miji	Lakbok, Ciamis, West Java	1960	Local Kiai	Java
Kiai Dasir	Lakbok, Ciamis, West Java	1960	Local Kiai	Java
Kiai Zenal Abidin	Lakbok, Ciamis, West Java	1960	Local Kiai	Java
Kiai Abu Khaeri	Lakbok, Ciamis, West Java	1960	Local Kiai	Java
Kiai Mardi	Lakbok, Ciamis, West Java	1960	Local Kiai	Java
Kiyai Salamun Al Hafidz	Karangkoobar, Banjarnegara, Central Java	1968	Pesantren teacher	Java
Kiyai Muslimin	Purwadadi, Ciamis, West Java	1970	Local teacher	Java
Kiyai Hafidz	Pangandaran, and Tasikmalaya, West Java	1966	Pesantren & campus leader	Java

Source: Field data 2025, results of interviews with the caretaker of Pondok Pesantren Nurul Huda, Tambakreja, Lakbok, Ciamis.

Analysis of the table reveals that the majority of Kiai Bandi's early disciples originated from West Java, reflecting the initial regional focus of his pedagogical activities. However, subsequent recruitment and mentorship extended to Central Java and Sumatra, illustrating the expansion of his educational network over time. The presence of Lampung-based disciples indicates the strategic dissemination of knowledge across islands, supporting the formation of an inter-island ulama network that facilitated religious and social cohesion (Latief, 2022; Qorib & Umiarso, 2025). Kiai Bandi's pedagogical methods emphasized close mentorship, memorization of classical texts, and practical ethical training. Interview data suggest that this method was instrumental in producing disciples who not only mastered religious knowledge but also exhibited leadership and moral integrity within their communities. For instance, disciples like Kiai Alifuddin and Kiai Hasan from Lampung reported that their training involved daily guidance on ethical conduct, Qur'anic recitation, and the application of *fiqh* in real-life scenarios, reflecting the integration of theory and practice (Ahyani, 2021; Brooks et al., 2019).

The results also indicate a generational impact of Kiai Bandi's epistemology. Many of his students went on to establish or lead pesantrens in their respective regions, effectively reproducing his teaching model. This finding corroborates prior studies emphasizing the role of pesantren leaders as socio-religious curators, where educational leadership serves as both a conduit for knowledge transmission and a mechanism for community development (Brooks et al., 2020; Muhajir et al., 2025). The disciples' ability to maintain pedagogical consistency while adapting to local socio-cultural contexts highlights the flexibility and resilience of Kiai



Bandi's epistemological framework. A thematic analysis of student outcomes further reveals three major areas influenced by Kiai Bandi's teachings: scholarly competence, ethical leadership, and community engagement. Scholarly competence was manifested in mastery of the Qur'an, *fiqh*, and classical Arabic texts, while ethical leadership emphasized moral responsibility, humility, and guidance for local communities. Community engagement involved organizing religious activities, mediating disputes, and establishing educational institutions, indicating the holistic approach of Kiai Bandi's pedagogy (Ahyani, 2021; Ma'arif et al., 2023). The study found that alumni of Kiai Bandi's teaching network often formed cross-regional collaborations, particularly between Java and Sumatra. These collaborations included joint religious events, inter-pesantren seminars, and community development initiatives. This networking demonstrates the sustained influence of Kiai Bandi's educational philosophy, where knowledge transfer is intertwined with social responsibility and regional cohesion (Sahrul, Widhi Nirwansyah, Demirdag, & Daulai, 2024; Muafiah et al., 2024). Data on student mobility also show that Kiai Bandi actively encouraged his disciples to spread knowledge to underdeveloped or underserved regions. This strategy reflects an intentional design to expand the reach of Islamic education, promote religious literacy, and cultivate leadership in areas beyond the immediate vicinity of Lakbok (Ahyani, 2021; Latief, 2022). By sending students to Lampung and other parts of Sumatra, Kiai Bandi ensured the replication of his pedagogical approach while fostering localized adaptations that addressed specific community needs.

In addition, historical narratives highlight that Kiai Bandi's network contributed to the resilience of Islamic scholarship during periods of social and political change. His disciples were observed to maintain educational continuity during the Japanese occupation and post-independence Indonesia, suggesting that the epistemological principles instilled by Kiai Bandi enabled adaptability and institutional sustainability (Ahyani, 2021; Latief, 2022). The relational mapping of disciples further indicates a mentorship hierarchy, where senior students guided junior students in replicating the teaching model. This hierarchy was crucial for maintaining quality control of knowledge transmission and ethical standards across dispersed pesantren (Brooks et al., 2019; Ma'arif et al., 2023). Such a structured mentoring system ensured that Kiai Bandi's educational values were preserved even in regions far from Lakbok, including parts of Sumatra and Central Java. Finally, the study identifies that Kiai Bandi's educational approach created a ripple effect extending beyond immediate religious training. His disciples not only became teachers but also community activists, mediators, and social reformers. This outcome underscores the holistic vision of Kiai Bandi's epistemology, integrating intellectual, moral, and social dimensions of Islamic education to generate enduring impact across multiple generations and geographical regions (Ahyani, 2021; Brooks et al., 2020; Ma'arif et al., 2023).

DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal the extensive reach and influence of Kiai Bandi's educational epistemology, spanning multiple regions of Java and Sumatra, and producing a substantial number of ulama cadres who continue to shape Islamic education and socio-religious life in Indonesia. The findings illustrate not only the geographical diffusion of Kiai Bandi's students but also the diverse roles they assumed in their respective communities. These results align



with previous studies highlighting the pivotal role of pesantren in shaping religious authority and leadership within Indonesian society (Ahyani, 2021; Latief, 2022). By systematically documenting the distribution of his students, this study provides empirical support to the claim that a single influential teacher can significantly impact regional religious education networks, confirming patterns noted in the Masyumi networks' expansion of Islamic higher education in post-independence Indonesia (Latief, 2022). The diversity of the students' subsequent roles—from local Kiai to pesantren founders and teachers—reflects the adaptability of Kiai Bandi's epistemological approach. Unlike standardized curricula in modern educational institutions, the pesantren system emphasizes personalized guidance, practical religious instruction, and community integration (Ashaari et al., 2012). This individualized approach allowed students such as Bunyamin from Demak and Kiai Hafidin from Pangandaran to develop skills aligned with local needs, demonstrating the flexibility and enduring relevance of traditional Islamic pedagogy. Such findings corroborate Brooks et al. (2019), who emphasize that principals and teachers in Islamic schools act as socio-religious curators, mediating between progressive and conservative educational expectations while preserving the authenticity of local religious traditions.

A notable pattern emerging from the data is the temporal and generational continuity of Kiai Bandi's educational network. Students who joined as early as 1938 remained influential across decades, while later generations, such as Kiai Mahdi and Kiai Mahfud (2000), continued the legacy in new social contexts. This longitudinal perspective suggests that the epistemology cultivated by Kiai Bandi was not merely doctrinal but also adaptive, capable of producing leadership that resonates with changing societal conditions. This adaptability is consistent with the arguments of Qorib and Umiarso (2025), who discuss socio-cultural transformations within Indonesian academics and the enduring significance of personalized mentorship in sustaining religious leadership. The findings also underscore the importance of place-based learning in Islamic education. Many of Kiai Bandi's students returned to their hometowns or nearby regions to assume leadership roles, embedding their learning within local communities. This phenomenon mirrors the observations of Syahid (2020) and Mahfud (2018), who note that religious education in Indonesia is inherently intertwined with local cultural and social contexts. By situating religious knowledge within familiar social environments, students could both maintain the integrity of Islamic teachings and respond effectively to community needs, highlighting the practical relevance of epistemological transmission in pesantren. A potential visual illustration here could map the geographic distribution of Kiai Bandi's students across Java and Sumatra, emphasizing the density of influence in particular regions.

Another implication of this study concerns the integration of ethical, social, and practical knowledge in pesantren pedagogy. Students trained under Kiai Bandi's guidance often assumed roles that required balancing religious authority with community service. For instance, Bunyamin, Kiai Hafidin, and others who established pesantren or campuses were not merely educators but also socio-religious leaders facilitating local development. This multidimensional approach resonates with the findings of Hashmi (2021), who argues for inclusive and context-sensitive approaches in Islamic ethics and education, where scholars must navigate complex social and moral landscapes while remaining grounded in doctrinal principles. Comparing these results with other studies on pesantren networks reveals both



similarities and unique characteristics. While the expansion of Islamic education in Indonesia has been documented in networks such as Gontor and Tebuireng (Rosyidin et al., 2023; Raziq et al., 2022), Kiai Bandi's network demonstrates an unusually high retention of students within proximate communities, suggesting a localized, relational approach to knowledge dissemination. This localized retention enhances the social cohesion of religious communities and ensures that educational principles are tailored to regional needs, reflecting the "habitus" of interreligious and socio-cultural integration described by Muhsin et al. (2024). A comparative diagram here could illustrate different pesantren networks' retention rates versus Kiai Bandi's network.

The study also highlights the role of gender and inclusivity within pesantren systems, albeit indirectly. While the current dataset primarily documents male students, literature on contemporary pesantren education suggests evolving dynamics that integrate female agency and broader societal participation (Muafiah et al., 2024). Kiai Bandi's epistemology, with its emphasis on adaptability and community integration, provides a theoretical foundation for expanding these practices, enabling pesantren to nurture inclusive educational environments in line with modern social expectations (Dharin et al., 2026). A further point of discussion concerns the theoretical contributions of this study. By linking empirical data with established theories of Islamic pedagogy, leadership, and socio-cultural integration, the study strengthens the conceptual framework for understanding how individual educators can influence multi-generational networks of religious learning. The findings align with Kamla's (2015) notion of critical Muslim intellectuals who mediate between tradition and reform, suggesting that Kiai Bandi's epistemology functioned as a practical model for balancing doctrinal fidelity with societal relevance.

Finally, the implications for future policy and educational practice are substantial. Recognizing the role of locally rooted yet adaptive Islamic pedagogy can inform contemporary curriculum development, teacher training, and leadership preparation in pesantren and broader Islamic education systems. This study highlights that mentorship, localized teaching, and flexible epistemology are not relics of the past but vital tools for sustaining religious authority and community development in the 21st century. The integration of historical data, comparative analysis, and pedagogical theory thus provides a blueprint for educators seeking to cultivate resilient, socially engaged, and doctrinally grounded ulama cadres.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored the Islamic educational epistemology of Kiai Bandi Bin Kiai Sa'id Lakbok and its role in the formation of ulama cadres across Java and Sumatra. The findings demonstrate that Kiai Bandi's approach to teaching was deeply rooted in experiential learning, mentorship, and moral development, blending classical pesantren pedagogy with practical life guidance. His educational philosophy emphasized both intellectual mastery and ethical cultivation, preparing students to not only understand Islamic teachings but also embody principles of leadership, social responsibility, and community service. The pedagogical methods he employed—such as personalized mentoring, small group study, and practical



engagement in community affairs—were instrumental in shaping students into holistic religious leaders who could adapt to various socio-cultural contexts.

The field data and interviews reveal the lasting impact of Kiai Bandi's educational model on generations of students. Alumni such as Bunyamin Abid Sapuanguin, Kiai Mahdi, Kiai Mahfud, Kiai Tarmin, Kiai Miji, Kiai Dasir, and Kiai Hafidin illustrate how his teachings were disseminated across regions and decades. Many of these students became local religious authorities and established their own pesantrens, perpetuating Kiai Bandi's pedagogical principles and forming a network of Islamic scholars that extends across Java and Sumatra. This demonstrates that his educational approach did not merely produce knowledge-based scholars but also fostered leaders capable of mobilizing and nurturing their communities. The results indicate that mentorship and the cultivation of moral character are as crucial as academic learning in the formation of effective ulama. The implications of this study are significant for contemporary Islamic education. Kiai Bandi's model highlights the importance of integrating intellectual, ethical, and social dimensions in curricula to produce well-rounded religious leaders. His emphasis on personal mentorship and community engagement provides a framework for developing students who are not only knowledgeable in religious sciences but also socially responsible, adaptable, and capable of contributing to societal well-being. This approach can serve as a model for pesantrens and Islamic schools seeking to enhance both educational quality and community impact, demonstrating that education rooted in ethical and experiential principles can produce transformative outcomes for students and society alike.

Despite its contributions, this research has limitations. The study primarily relies on interviews and historical documentation, which may not fully capture the diversity of experiences among all alumni of Kiai Bandi. Additionally, while field data were collected from multiple regions, some areas influenced by Kiai Bandi's students were not included, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings. Future studies could employ broader surveys, longitudinal designs, or comparative approaches with other influential ulama to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the long-term impacts of his educational philosophy. Furthermore, exploring quantitative measures of alumni influence and the effectiveness of their educational practices could complement the qualitative insights provided in this study, enriching both academic and practical perspectives on Islamic education.

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