

# The Implementation of the Sorogan Method in improving the Ability to Read Yellow Books: A Study at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Hidayah Pusat, Sadeng, Leuwisadeng, Bogor

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## Abstract

This study aims to examine the implementation, effectiveness, and challenges of the sorogan method in teaching classical Islamic texts (kitab kuning) at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Hidayah Al-Khidmah. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation. The findings reveal that the *sorogan* method is structured into two instructional levels: the basic level for children and the advanced level for adult learners. At the basic level, students rely on teacher guidance, while at the advanced level, learners demonstrate autonomy in reading and translating unvowelled classical texts. The method has proven effective in enhancing students' reading skills through personalized instruction and direct teacher-student interaction. However, several challenges persist, including limited instructional time, inconsistent teacher commitment, and insufficient Qur'anic literacy among novice students. To address these issues, the pesantren has introduced Qur'anic literacy programs and strengthened dormitory-based instructional supervision. The key contribution of this study lies in reaffirming the pedagogical relevance of the traditional *sorogan* method within the framework of modern, learner-centered education. The results are expected to inform educators, pesantren administrators, and policymakers in designing more adaptive, effective, and sustainable strategies for teaching classical Islamic texts in contemporary educational settings.

**Keywords:** Sorogan Method, Classical Islamic Texts, Islamic Education

## Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji implementasi, efektivitas, serta tantangan yang dihadapi dalam penerapan metode sorogan pada pembelajaran kitab kuning di Pondok Pesantren Nurul Hidayah Al-Khidmah. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik pengumpulan data berupa wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa metode sorogan dilaksanakan dalam dua tingkat pembelajaran: tingkat dasar bagi anak-anak dan tingkat lanjut bagi santri dewasa. Pembelajaran pada tingkat dasar bersifat bergantung pada guru, sementara pada tingkat lanjut santri menunjukkan kemandirian dalam membaca dan menerjemahkan teks klasik yang tidak berharakat. Metode sorogan terbukti efektif dalam meningkatkan kemampuan membaca kitab kuning secara mendalam melalui pendekatan pembelajaran individual dan interaksi langsung dengan guru. Namun demikian, terdapat sejumlah kendala seperti keterbatasan waktu, rendahnya kedisiplinan sebagian pengajar, dan kurangnya kemampuan membaca Al-Qur'an pada santri pemula. Untuk

mengatasi hal tersebut, pesantren menginisiasi program literasi Al-Qur'an serta pengawasan berkelanjutan di lingkungan asrama. Kontribusi utama penelitian ini terletak pada penegasan relevansi metode tradisional sorogan dalam paradigma pendidikan modern yang berorientasi pada kebutuhan individual peserta didik. Hasil studi ini diharapkan dapat menjadi acuan bagi pendidik, pengelola pesantren, dan perumus kebijakan dalam merancang strategi pembelajaran kitab kuning yang lebih adaptif, efektif, dan berkelanjutan di era pendidikan kontemporer.

**Kata kunci:** Metode Sorogan, Kitab Kuning, Pendidikan Islam

## INTRODUCTION

Arabic constitutes an integral component of Islamic education in Indonesia, serving not only as a medium of communication but also as the primary means for understanding Islamic teachings through classical texts, commonly referred to as *kitab kuning*. In the *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) context, Arabic language instruction particularly with unvowelized texts (*kitab gundul*) requires advanced competencies in reading and comprehending complex linguistic structures. This process poses significant challenges, especially for novice students (*santri*) who are not yet familiar with the syntactic patterns and classical Arabic vocabulary. Consequently, there is a critical need for instructional methods that not only enhance linguistic proficiency but also foster learning discipline and cultivate emotional closeness between teachers and students. In line with this, Tamam (2015) emphasizes that there is a positive relationship between the study of *kitab kuning* and the development of students' ability to understand both spoken and written Arabic. This highlights the dual function of *kitab kuning* learning not merely as religious instruction but also as a tool to solidify overall Arabic language acquisition, thus reinforcing the importance of well-structured and contextually appropriate pedagogical approaches.

One of the traditional instructional methods that remains in practice today is the *sorogan* method an individualized learning approach characterized by direct interaction between a student (*santri*) and a teacher (*ustadz* or *kyai*). In this method, the student recites passages from classical Islamic texts (*kitab*) to the teacher, who provides immediate correction and guidance. Several studies have confirmed that the *sorogan* method is effective in enhancing students' comprehension and reading proficiency of *kitab kuning* texts (Ulhaaq et al., 2024; Asyiah & Sari, 2025). Unlike conventional classroom methods, *sorogan* is considered more contextual and adaptive as it allows for personalized instruction that accommodates each student's level of ability. This adaptability is one of its core strengths, making it particularly suitable for students with varying levels of Arabic proficiency and learning pace. As highlighted by Aris & Sukron (2020), the *sorogan* method fosters a close and harmonious relationship between teacher and student, which is rarely achieved in traditional class-based approaches. This one-on-one format enables the teacher to provide focused guidance, monitor individual progress, and evaluate each student's mastery of Arabic in a detailed and consistent manner.

Furthermore, the direct engagement between student and teacher eliminates guesswork in interpreting classical texts, as students can immediately seek clarification and engage in meaningful question-and-answer exchanges. The real-time correction and explanation offered during *sorogan* sessions help prevent the development of misconceptions, which often go unaddressed in larger, lecture-style classes. Teachers are also better positioned to assess each student's competence with precision and adapt instruction accordingly. Moreover, students with higher intellectual capacity (*IQ*) can progress faster, as the personalized nature of *sorogan*

allows them to advance through the material at a pace that suits their capability and motivation. Thus, the method not only supports differentiated learning but also cultivates a more meaningful and responsive educational experience tailored to the specific needs of each santri.

Although the *sorogan* method offers several advantages, its implementation is not without challenges that may hinder the overall effectiveness of the learning process. One of the primary limitations lies in the constraints of instructional time, particularly when the number of students is high. In such cases, the *sorogan* approach requires a relatively long duration and considerable instructional effort, as each student must receive individualized attention and guidance (Oktaviani, 2022). Moreover, the low level of self-directed learning motivation among students presents an additional obstacle, given that this method demands a high degree of learner autonomy and readiness. Another significant issue is the lack of discipline among some instructors in managing time and ensuring consistency in the implementation of the *sorogan* model, which can ultimately affect the quality and outcomes of the learning. This condition is also confirmed by the author's observations during the teaching experience at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Hidayah Pusat, Bogor. The identified issues have led to low student participation in the *sorogan* process, despite its substantial potential in supporting the learning objectives of *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic texts). In response, the pesantren administration has undertaken several alternative measures, such as clearing the schedules of teachers during *sorogan* sessions, conducting dormitory inspections during study hours, and implementing a placement system that channels students who are not yet fluent in reading Arabic into *sorogan* classes focused on Qur'anic reading as a preparatory stage.

Through problem mapping and direct observation, the author deems it essential to systematically examine how the *sorogan* method is implemented in the learning of *kitab kuning* at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Hidayah, as well as to assess its effectiveness in enhancing students' reading abilities, particularly within the context of the challenges encountered and the solutions applied. This study aims to describe the implementation of the *sorogan* method, evaluate its impact on students' competence in reading classical Islamic texts, and identify the strategies adopted by the pesantren to address existing obstacles. The findings of this research are expected to provide conceptual contributions to the development of learning strategies for *kitab kuning* in Islamic boarding schools and serve as a practical reference for educators in selecting effective and contextually relevant instructional methods.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative approach with a naturalistic case study design to explore the implementation of the *sorogan* method in teaching *kitab kuning* at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Hidayah Pusat, located in Sadeng, Leuwisadeng, Bogor. As Creswell (2014) states, qualitative research is used to explore and understand the meanings individuals or groups ascribe to social or human issues, emphasizing a holistic picture constructed through words and conducted in natural settings. In line with this, data were collected through direct observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving students (S1-S3), teachers (P1-P3), and institutional records. The researcher served as the primary instrument, supported by tools such as field notes and voice recorders, with data analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model (2014) data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Triangulation across sources, methods, and theories was applied to ensure credibility, enabling a comprehensive

understanding of how the *sorogan* method enhances students' ability to read *kitab kuning*, including the challenges and adaptive strategies used by the pesantren.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents a collection of interview quotes gathered from five research participants, consisting of three teachers (coded as P1, P2, and P3), one additional supporting teacher (P4), and two student representatives (coded as S1, S2, and S3). These quotes were categorized thematically into three main areas: the implementation of the *sorogan* method, its effectiveness in improving students' ability to read *kitab kuning*, and the challenges encountered along with the solutions adopted by the pesantren. Each quote illustrates the participant's firsthand experiences and perspectives regarding the *sorogan* practice at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Hidayah Pusat, providing rich, contextual data for qualitative analysis.

**Tabel 1.** Interview Results

Themes	Quote
Implementation <i>Sorogan</i>	<p>The <i>sorogan</i> sessions for studying the <i>kitab kuning</i> are held after the <i>Dhuhr</i> prayer in the form of a <i>halaqah</i> (study circle). These sessions are differentiated based on age and level of understanding, with separate arrangements for children and adult learners (P1)</p> <p>The implementation is divided into two levels: children follow the teacher's reading during the session, while adult learners are required to present the passages they have studied independently (P2)</p> <p>At the children's level, students follow the teacher's recitation and are subsequently tested individually by the <i>ustadz</i> or <i>ustadzah</i>. (S1)</p> <p>At the adult level, students submit the passages they have previously studied, and the <i>ustadz</i> or <i>ustadzah</i> provides corrections in case of any errors. (S2)</p> <p>At the adult level, students demonstrate independent proficiency in reading and translating unvowelled classical texts (<i>kitab gundul</i>). (S3)</p>
Effectiveness in Reading <i>Kitab Kuning</i>	<p>The <i>sorogan</i> method resembles a private tutoring approach, with its individual focus enabling students to develop their understanding more rapidly. (P3)</p> <p>The <i>sorogan</i> method is highly effective due to the direct face-to-face interaction with the <i>ustadz</i>. (P2)</p> <p>The <i>sorogan</i> method is very helpful because regular classroom instruction is insufficient for mastering unvowelled classical texts (<i>kitab gundul</i>). (S2)</p> <p>This method fosters motivation, enhances perseverance, and facilitates a better understanding of the <i>kitab kuning</i>. (P4)</p>
Challenges and Solutions	<p>The challenges include limited time, students taking breaks during <i>sorogan</i> sessions, and a lack of discipline among some teachers. (P3)</p> <p>Encourage <i>ustadz</i> and <i>ustadzah</i> to be actively present in the classroom and to supervise the dormitories (<i>kobong</i>) (P1)</p>

Themes	Quote
	sorogan Although they are engaged in various <i>khidmah</i> (service) duties, <i>ustadz</i> and <i>ustadzah</i> are still expected to remain actively involved during <i>sorogan</i> sessions. (P2)
	One of the challenges is that some students are not yet fluent in reading Arabic, as they have not yet mastered reading the Qur'an(P2)
	As an effort to address this, students are first placed in <i>sorogan</i> classes for Qur'anic reading before proceeding to <i>sorogan</i> sessions for classical texts. (P3)

*Processed by Researchers, 2025*

The findings reveal that the implementation of the *sorogan* method at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Hidayah is organized into two instructional levels: beginner (children) and advanced (adults). This differentiation in levels significantly influences the instructional strategies employed. The distinction is aligned with the cognitive development stages and learning styles specific to each level. At the beginner level, children's learning is highly dependent on direct guidance from the teacher, whereas at the advanced level, learners demonstrate greater independence in their study.

The advantages of the *sorogan* method lie primarily in its personalized approach, allowing students to learn at their own pace and based on their individual needs, without being burdened by the progress of others. This approach enables deeper mastery of materials, especially when dealing with complex or classical texts that require intensive comprehension (Mataram et al., 2022). Furthermore, the *sorogan* method emphasizes not only individualized pacing but also meaningful understanding and active interaction between teacher and student, creating a dynamic learning atmosphere that fosters clarity and engagement (Jabir & Wahyu, 2020). These attributes resonate strongly with the principles of Differentiated Instruction (DI), an educational model designed to accommodate learner differences in readiness, interest, and learning profiles. DI maximizes student potential by adapting instructional content, processes, and outcomes to suit individual learning pathways (Defitriani, 2018). In this regard, the *sorogan* method, as practiced in traditional Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), embodies a learner-centered philosophy that prioritizes deep understanding through personal interaction and tailored instruction.

#### 1. The Effectiveness of *Sorogan* in Enhancing Reading Skills of *Kitab Kuning*

Based on the interview findings, the *sorogan* method employed at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Hidayah has proven to be an effective approach in enhancing students' proficiency in reading classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*). The effectiveness of this method lies in its individualized, one-on-one instructional approach, which allows for more focused learning and accelerates students' comprehension.

Therefore, despite being a traditional one-on-one teaching approach, the *sorogan* method remains widely preserved in pesantren education even amid the proliferation of modern instructional methodologies (Somali et al., 2023). Its endurance is largely due to its proven efficacy in cultivating students' proficiency in reading and interpreting classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*) (Ulhaq et al., 2024). Recent findings by Maula & Nurdin, (2024) reinforce this effectiveness, showing that *sorogan*-based instruction significantly

improves students' reading fluency, depth of content comprehension, and skills in explaining the material. Beyond these literacy gains, the *sorogan* approach also yields broader educational benefits: it fosters critical thinking, enhances practical religious knowledge through direct engagement with foundational texts, and strengthens students' religious identity and confidence as learners. Collectively, these outcomes underscore the *sorogan* method's vital role in pesantren education and explain why educators advocate for its continued preservation and adaptation even in contemporary educational setting.

## 2. Challenges and solutions

Although the effectiveness of the *sorogan* method has been well established in the context of Islamic education, particularly in pesantren traditions, its implementation in real settings is not without significant challenges. Based on interview findings at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Hidayah Pusat, several key obstacles were identified, including limited instructional time, issues of teacher discipline, and students' inadequate fluency in reading the Qur'an. These findings are consistent with research conducted by Najah & Bashri (2023), which reported that some teachers failed to attend *sorogan* sessions or demonstrated inconsistent commitment, thereby hampering the method's effectiveness and efficiency. This reinforces the notion that even a proven pedagogical approach can fall short of its potential if not supported by adequate discipline and commitment from both educators and learners.

In addition to teacher-related challenges, the limited Arabic literacy of many students has also emerged as a significant barrier. According to Harahap (2023), students who are unable to read Arabic or the Qur'an will face considerable difficulty when engaging in *sorogan*-based learning, as the method demands a high degree of learner autonomy and prior readiness. The *sorogan* method, by design, is a one-on-one instructional system where the student recites the text in front of the kyai, translates it literally, and receives immediate correction only when errors occur. The passive role of the kyai in this process means that students are expected to actively prepare and internalize the material beforehand. Therefore, lack of foundational skills in Arabic reading can significantly hinder participation and comprehension.

Recognizing these multifaceted challenges, Pondok Pesantren Nurul Hidayah has implemented a number of remedial measures. These include offering Qur'anic literacy programs for students who are not yet fluent in Arabic before assigning them to *sorogan* sessions involving *kitab kuning*. Furthermore, ustadz and ustadzah are now formally tasked not only with teaching in structured classrooms but also with continuing instruction within the dormitories (*kobong*), ensuring continuous learning support and closer supervision. These efforts aim to strengthen the implementation of the *sorogan* method by ensuring student preparedness, enhancing instructional consistency, and mitigating the limitations posed by time constraints and literacy gaps.

Thus, the findings of this study affirm that the *sorogan* method is not merely a part of pesantren educational tradition, but also holds strong relevance to modern learner-centered pedagogical approaches. This method has proven effective in providing students with the opportunity to deepen their reading and comprehension of classical texts through personalized and interactive guidance. The integration of local educational wisdom with contemporary pedagogical principles positions *sorogan* as an adaptive and impactful instructional model within the context of Islamic education today. It is hoped that this study may serve as a

reference for the future development of more effective strategies for teaching classical Islamic texts.

## CONCLUSION

This study confirms the effectiveness of the *sorogan* method in improving students' ability to read and understand unvowelled classical Islamic texts, while also fostering critical thinking and religious confidence. Despite its benefits, implementation challenges such as limited time, teacher inconsistency, and low literacy among beginners remain. Addressing these issues requires institutional support and preparatory programs. The findings highlight the relevance of traditional pedagogies in modern education and recommend further research on integrating *sorogan* with digital tools to enhance its scalability and impact.

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