

## Policy Literacy for Santri: A Community Service Initiative at Ihya'ul Ulum DDI Baruga, Majene

*Hendrawan<sup>a)</sup>, Muhammad Syihabuddin Taufiq, and Rahmatullah*

Political Science Study Program, Universitas Sulawesi Barat, Majene, Indonesia

<sup>a)</sup>Corresponding author: [hendrawan@unsulbar.ac.id](mailto:hendrawan@unsulbar.ac.id)

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### ABSTRACT

Santri, as future religious and community leaders, still face limitations in their literacy regarding educational and religious policies, despite their strategic role in Indonesia's civic life. This community service program, conducted at Ihya'ul Ulum DDI Baruga Islamic Boarding School, Majene Regency, aimed to strengthen santri's policy literacy through a participatory-educative approach. The program integrated socialization, training, mentoring, and evaluation, covering topics such as the relationship between politics and public policy, santri empowerment, and the relevance of policy awareness within the pesantren context. Evaluation results indicated noticeable improvement in santri's understanding of public policy concepts and their ability to connect policy issues with the pesantren environment. Teachers and students actively participated, provided constructive feedback, and showed strong enthusiasm throughout the activities. These findings highlight the potential of pesantren-based policy literacy initiatives in shaping active, critical, and informed citizens. In the long term, systematic policy support is needed to integrate policy literacy into pesantren curricula and to expand it through collaboration between pesantren, local governments, and academics.

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### ARTICLE INFO

**Article History:**

*Submitted/Received: 01 October 2025*

*First Revised: 10 October 2025*

*Accepted: 15 October 2025*

*First Available online: 31 October 2025*

*Publication Date: 31 October 2025*

**Keyword:**

Policy Literacy

Islamic Education Policy

Policy Awareness

## INTRODUCTION

There are still frequent misunderstandings in interpreting and conceptualizing the term policy. The term is often translated as wisdom, even though the two have different meanings. Wisdom refers to an individual's personal prudence, whereas policy is a written rule that arises from the formal decisions of an organization. Examples of policies include: (1) Laws, (2) Government Regulations, (3) Presidential Decrees, (4) Ministerial Decrees, (5) Regional Regulations, (6) Regent's Decrees, and (7) Director's Decrees. All of these forms of policy are binding and must be obeyed by the parties targeted by the policy. From these examples, it is also evident that policy can operate within macro, meso, and micro scopes (Nurdayati dkk, 2021)

In the context of education, educational policy in Indonesia is a set of government decisions designed to regulate and improve the quality of national education delivery (Daud, 2024). Schools then become the primary space where the educational process takes place, particularly through the interaction between teachers and students to enhance knowledge, skills, and the formation of attitudes and character. However, this entire process was once interrupted when schools were suddenly closed (Syariful Anam & Elya Umi Hanik, 2020). In response to such complexities, government institutions formulated educational policies as both normative guidelines and strategic instruments to foster ideas and alternative solutions that support the achievement of the vision of educational development. Although the outcomes achieved have not been entirely satisfactory, the ongoing dynamics of policy changes demonstrate an orientation toward improving educational quality. This effort is directed at producing graduates with high competitiveness and the ability to adapt to the demands of globalization (Tintington et al., 2023)

One of the educational institutions that also plays a role in this context is the pesantren. Pesantren is the oldest Islamic educational institution in Indonesia, which has endured to this day while undergoing transformations in line with the times. In line with these dynamics, pesantren can be categorized into three types: (1) salaf pesantren, (2) khalaf pesantren, and (3) integrated pesantren. This categorization is not intended to differentiate one pesantren from another, but rather to provide an understanding of the diversity of forms and orientations in the management of pesantren within Islamic education (Nugraha et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the emergence of various issues in the field of education cannot be separated from the influence of prevailing policies. The frequent policy changes often create new problems because previous policies remain unresolved, yet are replaced by new ones that are frequently influenced by political interests or other factors. Therefore, the study of the dynamics of educational policy development becomes important to understand the patterns of change that occur (Nadhif Muhammad Mumtaz, 2022).

In a broader framework, the existence of the Islamic education curriculum is also integrated into the national curriculum as mandated in the 1945 Constitution and Law Number 20 of 2003. Moreover, the Islamic education curriculum has been established as a compulsory subject from early childhood education through higher education (Ulya & Syafei, 2022). Ultimately, evaluation and accountability become crucial elements in improving the quality of education. Systematic evaluation can identify strengths and weaknesses, while accountability among all stakeholders ensures that policies truly have a positive impact. Therefore, the quality of education must be viewed as a complex system that requires attention and involvement from various parties (Nur Dahyanti et al., 2024). In order for the education system to remain relevant to the future challenges of the nation, its implementation must be designed based on the real needs of society. In this way, education will genuinely contribute to national

development (Istiq'faroh, 2020). Within the pesantren context, the urgency of developing a digital literacy curriculum has become increasingly evident. Such a curriculum integrates content creation skills, the internalization of Islamic digital ethics, and mental health education.

In addition, the issuance of Government Regulation No. 55 of 2007 on Religious and Islamic Education has actually strengthened the governance of religious and Islamic education. This regulation has contributed to improvements in managerial aspects, implementation, and funding, thereby enabling the Islamic education system to become more structured and effective (Oktiya Hayyu Liyandani & Nur Kolis, 2021). Thus, Islamic education requires serious attention and collaboration from various stakeholders to ensure its continuous improvement (Yudi Agung Franata et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, the implementation of education policies still faces a number of weaknesses. These shortcomings include aspects of legitimacy, formulation, and implementation within society. Among these three, formulation is the most crucial stage, as policy program failures generally stem from inaccuracies in the initial formulation (Azam Jaysurrohman et al., 2021). Moreover, the politics and dual-track education policies within the national education system still reveal contradictions, such as those related to the technical application of Graduate Competency Standards (SKL), the regulations on the distance for establishing educational institutions, and the rules on new student admissions (Khoiriyah et al., 2023).

In a more specific context, the administration of pesantren education has gained formal recognition through Law No. 18 of 2019 on Pesantren. This law affirms the function of pesantren as institutions of education, da'wah, and community empowerment. Nevertheless, its implementation continues to face various challenges, particularly in aspects of governance, infrastructure, and financing (Samudera, 2023). Therefore, before delving further into the concept of education from the perspective of madrasah, it is essential to understand the religious-cultural values envisioned by both society and the government, namely, the expectation that madrasah will be able to produce graduates of high quality in both general and religious fields in accordance with national education standards (Iskandar et al., 2019).

## **METHOD**

### **Location, Time, and Participants**

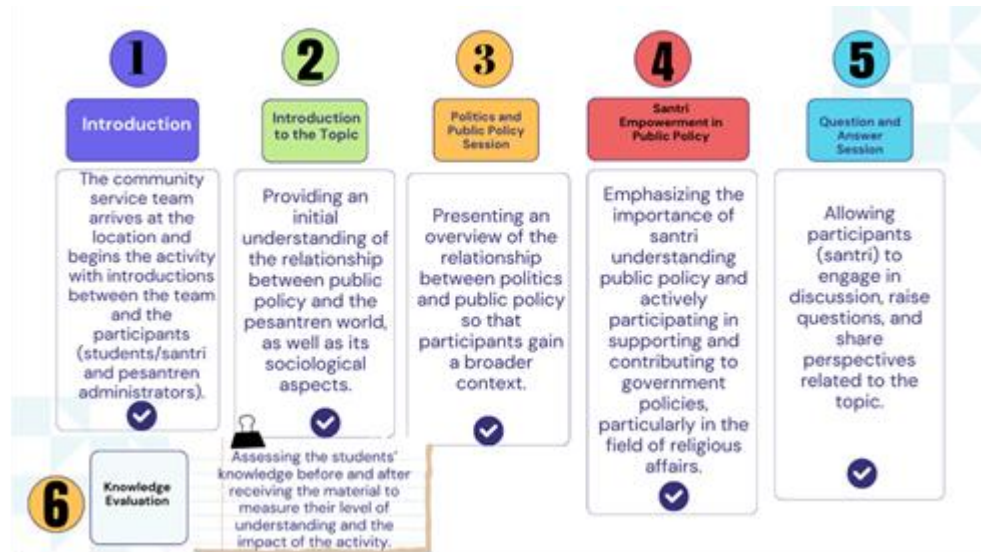
The community service activity was carried out at Pondok Pesantren Ihyaul 'Ulum DDI Baruga Majene, Banggae Timur District, Majene Regency, on Saturday, September 13, 2025.

### **Tools and Materials**

The equipment utilized consisted of a laptop, projector, and microphone as tools for delivering the material. Meanwhile, the educational media and materials used included leaflets and a list of healthy food menus. The program evaluation was carried out through a direct question-and-answer approach between the facilitator and the santri. This Q&A session functioned as a simple form of pre-test and post-test to assess their initial understanding as well as changes in knowledge after the activity. The questions covered basic concepts of public policy, the relevance of educational and religious policies to the lives of santri, and the role of pesantren in social development.

### **Method of Activity Implementation**

The implementation method of this activity refers to a participatory-educative approach that integrates elements of socialization, training, technology application, mentoring, and program sustainability. Through these stages, it is expected that the students (*santri*) will experience an increase in critical awareness regarding public policy, particularly in the fields of education and religion, which have not been widely accessed or deeply understood within the *pesantren* community.



**FIGURE 1.** Stage of Community Services

This community service activity began with a site visit by the team, followed by an introduction session between the community service team and the participants, consisting of both *santri* and *pesantren* administrators, as an initial effort to build rapport. The next stage involved the delivery of an introductory session aimed at providing a basic understanding of the relationship between public policy and the *pesantren* context, as well as its relevance from a sociological perspective. Subsequently, material on the connection between politics and public policy was presented comprehensively to ensure that participants gained a broader understanding of policy dynamics.

Furthermore, the team emphasized the importance of *santri* comprehending public policy and actively contributing to the support and success of government policies, particularly in the field of religious affairs. To strengthen this understanding, the program continued with a question-and-answer session, which provided space for *santri* to engage in discussions, raise questions, and express their critical perspectives. Finally, a knowledge evaluation was conducted to assess the participants' level of understanding before and after the material delivery, thereby allowing the effectiveness and impact of the activity to be clearly measured.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The community service program was positively received by both teachers and students (*santri*). The presence of the implementation team was welcomed with enthusiasm, which was evident from the teachers' willingness to fully support the activities as well as the active engagement of the students throughout the sessions. This enthusiasm reflects the substantial need and strong interest in the topics presented, particularly in relation to the understanding of public policy and its relevance to the *pesantren* environment. The encouragement from the teachers, combined with the constructive responses of the students, demonstrates that the program is not only relevant but also contributes

significantly to broadening their perspectives and enhancing their capacities.

### Preparation

The preparation stage of the community service activity began with an initial consultation and cordial meeting with the pesantren teachers. This step was carried out to establish good communication while also gathering information related to the needs and expectations of the pesantren regarding the planned activities. Through an open dialogue, the community service team gained insights into the condition of the pesantren, its potential, as well as the challenges it faces, particularly in understanding public policy. In addition, this stage also served as a means to agree on the technical aspects of implementation, including the schedule, the form of materials to be delivered, and the methods suited to the characteristics of the students (santri).

As a gesture of appreciation and to strengthen institutional relations, the preparation stage also included the presentation of a plaque from the community service team to the pesantren. With this process of consultation, cordial engagement, and plaque presentation, the community service activity became more focused, participatory, and aligned with the real needs of the pesantren environment. This stage was also intended to align perspectives and discuss how to build a digital ecosystem through policy. The goal was not only to enhance the students' adaptability to technology but also to foster a healthy, productive, and ethical digital character. Collaboration between pesantren leaders, government, and academics becomes the key to developing a sustainable digital education ecosystem (Sa et al., 2025).

Below is the documentation of the initial preparation before carrying out the community service, along with the plaque handover by the Community Service Team to the pesantren.



**FIGURE 2.** Discussion for Aligning Perceptions and Plaque Representation  
Source: Personal Documentation

## Introduction Material

The introduction before delivering the main material aims to provide participants with an initial understanding of the context and relevance of the community service activity. This stage is intended as a bridge to help participants become more prepared to receive the material by placing the topics to be discussed within the framework of their daily lives, particularly in the pesantren environment.



**FIGURE 3.** Introduction process of the theme  
Source: Personal Documentation

## Sociological Aspect of Public Policy

Providing an initial understanding of the relationship between public policy and the pesantren world, as well as its relevance from a sociological perspective.



**FIGURE 4.** Presentation of sociological aspects in public policy  
Source: Personal Documentation

## Political and Public Policy Session Material

The Politics and Public Policy Session plays a crucial role in providing participants, particularly the

santri, with a deeper understanding of the intricate relationship between the political sphere and the development of public policy. Through this session, participants are encouraged to recognize that policies do not emerge suddenly but rather through political processes involving various actors and interests. This understanding is crucial for enabling santri to develop a critical perspective in evaluating government policies, especially in the fields of religion and education, as well as to realize their position as part of society with the right to contribute



**FIGURE 5.** Presentation of Politics and Public Policy  
Source: Personal Documentation

### **Santri Empowerment in Public Policy Material**

This material holds significant urgency as it not only provides basic knowledge about public policy but also equips santri with a deep understanding of their strategic position in the nation-building process. Santri, who have long been recognized primarily for their religious roles, in fact possess great potential to become agents of social change. Therefore, an understanding of public policy positions santri not merely as passive recipients of policy but as actors capable of actively contributing to the support, oversight, and constructive critique of government policies.

With a solid grasp of the dynamics of policy formulation and implementation, santri will develop sharp critical thinking skills, greater social awareness, and the courage to directly engage in public spheres. This is essential to enable them to articulate the aspirations of the pesantren community and its surroundings, while also ensuring that the policies produced genuinely serve the broader public interest.



**FIGURE 6.** Presentation of Santri Empowerment in Public Policy  
Source: Personal Documentation

### **Question and Answer Session**



**FIGURE 7.** Question and Answer Session  
Source: Personal Documentation

## Knowledge Evaluation



**FIGURE 8.** Presentation Knowledge Evaluation  
Source: Personal Documentation

## Reports and Closing

The reporting and closing stage of the community service program went smoothly and left a satisfying impression on all parties involved. For the community service team, the program was considered successful as all stages were carried out according to plan, from preparation and delivery of materials to the final evaluation. Meanwhile, for the santri and teachers, the program provided new experiences and broadened their understanding of the relationship between public policy and the pesantren environment. The closing session was warm and meaningful, marked by appreciation from the pesantren for the contribution of the community service team, as well as gratitude from the santri who felt they had directly benefited from the materials presented. Thus, the reporting and closing of this activity served as an indication that the community service program was not only effectively implemented but also created a tangible positive impact for all parties involved.



**FIGURE 9.** Training Presentation Knowledge Evaluation

Source: Personal Documentation

### **Qualitative Evaluation**

To complement the evaluation, measurable indicators were applied using simple descriptive statistics. The results of the Q&A sessions showed a clear improvement in the santri's knowledge after the program. At the beginning, most participants were only able to provide general and limited answers, but after the activities, they could explain in more detail the concepts of public policy, the relevance of educational and religious policies, and the role of pesantren in social development. This improvement was reflected in the growing number of santri who were able to provide correct and well-argued answers in the final session. These findings demonstrate that the participatory–educative approach applied not only enhanced knowledge but also fostered a more critical and reflective mindset among the santri. This provides initial evidence that pesantren can play a more active role as centers of policy literacy, thereby strengthening community capacity and contributing more significantly to social development.

### **CONCLUSION**

The community service program with the theme Santri Empowerment in Public Policy Awareness successfully enhanced the students' (santri) understanding of the importance of public policy processes and their relevance to daily life in the pesantren. Through stages of socialization, discussion, and evaluation, the santri demonstrated enthusiasm and active participation in the sessions. This indicates that santri are not only policy recipients but also have great potential to become critical, active, and constructive actors in supporting government policies, particularly in the fields of education and religious affairs. The program also received positive responses from pesantren teachers, who acknowledged that knowledge of public policy could enrich the students' perspectives and strengthen the pesantren's role as an empowered part of society. Based on the outcomes of this program, it is recommended that similar activities be carried out regularly to strengthen the awareness of santri in understanding and engaging with public policy issues.

The materials should be further developed to include more diverse and contextual themes that reflect the dynamics of education, social, and religious policies. In addition, the role of pesantren teachers as facilitators needs to be enhanced so that knowledge of public policy can be sustained and integrated into daily learning processes. Collaboration between pesantren, local governments, and related institutions is also essential to expand access to policy information and encourage greater involvement of santri in supporting and contributing to the effective implementation of public policies.

### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The community service team would like to express its deepest appreciation and gratitude to the teachers of the Islamic boarding school for their full support and warm hospitality throughout the program. Sincere thanks are also extended to the students (santri) for their active participation and enthusiasm in every session of the activity. Their involvement and spirit clearly demonstrate the importance of this program in broadening their knowledge and capacity. Furthermore, we would like to acknowledge all parties who contributed to the planning and implementation of this initiative, whose

support ensured that the community service activities were successfully carried out and provided meaningful benefits.

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