



IMPROVING GRADUATE QUALITY THROUGH BOARDING SCHOOL PROGRAMS FOR SIXTH-GRADE STUDENTS AT PAS BAITUL QUR'AN GONTOR

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how a sixth-grade boarding school program at Madrasah Ibtida'iyah Pesantren Anak Sholeh (PAS) Baitul Qur'an Gontor contributes to improving graduate quality in the dimensions of academic achievement, religious character, and social managerial skills. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, using observations, semi-structured interviews with teachers and administrators, and documentation analysis during the 1446/2025 academic year. Data credibility was ensured through triangulation. The findings show that the boarding system strengthens (1) academic performance, indicated by improved examination scores, consistent study habits, and mastery of core subjects; (2) religious character, reflected in disciplined congregational prayer, Qur'anic memorization, and observable moral conduct; and (3) social managerial competencies, demonstrated through leadership roles, task responsibility, independence, and peer collaboration. The structured 24-hour environment minimizes external distractions and enables continuous supervision, facilitating value internalization and academic reinforcement. Rather than claiming broad generalizability, this study provides context-specific empirical evidence on how elementary-level boarding education particularly at the transitional sixth-grade stage can systematically integrate academic, religious, and residential programs to enhance graduate readiness for secondary education. The findings offer a practical reference for Islamic elementary institutions seeking structured models to improve holistic graduate outcomes.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Basic education plays a fundamental role in laying the foundation for the development of academic competencies, the formation of religious character, and the social behavior of students (Husin et al., 2023). In the context of Islamic education in Indonesia, especially that based on Islamic boarding schools, boarding school programs have become a significant distinguishing feature (Abdullah & Maali, 2025). These programs not only provide formal instruction in the classroom, but also offer structured supervision, intensive religious training, and the cultivation of crucial life skills, which collectively contribute to the holistic development of students (Rianawaty et al., 2021). As society's demands for graduates who are not only cognitively superior but also have strong character increase, many educational institutions are now considering the boarding school model as an effective strategy to achieve these dual goals (Nabila, Yasin, et al., 2025).

At the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah level, "graduate quality" must align with the Graduate Competency Standards of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which encompass three core dimensions: attitudes (religious character and integrity), knowledge (curricular mastery), and skills (independence and basic managerial competence) (Abuddar et al., 2024). While formal schooling primarily addresses knowledge acquisition, the cultivation of discipline, leadership, and responsibility requires sustained and immersive processes (Bhanu & Rahman, 2023; Yusuf & Hasyim, 2021). In this regard, the 24-hour boarding model provides an extended educational ecosystem in which academic routines, communal worship, and social interaction function as integrated instruments of character formation (Yolanda et al., 2025).

Table 1. Quality Requirements for *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* Graduates

Quality Dimension	Graduate Competency Standards	Key Indicators Measured at PAS Baitul Qur'an	Relevant Boarding Mechanisms
Attitude/Character (Religious)	Good character, integrity, responsibility	Discipline in worship (congregational prayer), manners, brotherhood, and the application of sincerity	Hidden Curriculum (communal worship routines), Habituation
Knowledge	Mastery of material in accordance with the local curriculum	Academic achievement, critical thinking skills, language proficiency, memorization of the Qur'an	Structured learning hours, distraction-free environment, consistent supervision
Skills (Social/Managerial)	Managerial skills, independence, initiative, life skills	Leadership training, organizational skills, simplicity	24-hour training, structured extracurricular

The urgency of such integration becomes particularly evident in the sixth grade, a transitional phase before entry into secondary education. Students aged 11-12 are situated at a critical developmental stage, characterized by the shift toward abstract reasoning and moral orientation that is still strongly influenced by external authority (Wulandari & Windarto, 2023). At this stage, consistent supervision and structured regulation are essential for transforming rule-based compliance into internalized values (Khairudina & Ritonga, 2025). Day-school systems often struggle to maintain such consistency due to limited instructional hours and exposure to uncontrolled external distractions, including excessive gadget use and unsupervised peer environments (Mastiaroh & Imam Mashud, 2021).

Boarding education addresses these limitations by minimizing external distractions and embedding students within a controlled social and spiritual environment (Sari et al., 2025). Through structured study hours, communal worship routines, leadership training, and daily responsibility systems, students experience not only academic reinforcement but also habituation of discipline and independence (Haryanto, 2022; Shiddiq et al., 2024). These processes operate both through formal curricula and through the hidden curriculum embedded in everyday pesantren life.

Despite extensive studies on pesantren and secondary level boarding schools, empirical research focusing specifically on boarding programs at the elementary (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah) level particularly in the final transitional year remains limited. Most existing research emphasizes adolescent or senior high school contexts, leaving a gap in understanding how early residential education shapes foundational academic and character competencies (Muflihah & Nasution, 2025).

This study addresses that gap by examining the boarding school program for sixth-grade students at PAS Baitul Qur'an Gontor during the 1446/2025 academic year. The institution represents a relevant case due to its explicit integration of Qur'anic education, leadership formation, and pesantren values within elementary schooling. The research aims to analyze how the boarding system contributes to improving graduate quality across academic, religious, and social managerial dimensions (Noor Affifah Afiyanti et al., 2022).

By situating boarding education within the framework of graduate competency standards and developmental psychology, this study offers a focused analysis of how elementary level residential programs can function as structured mechanisms for holistic graduate preparation. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically by refining the discourse on Islamic elementary boarding education and practically by providing a contextual model for institutions seeking to enhance graduate readiness for secondary education.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to examine the implementation of boarding school programs for sixth-grade students at Madrasah Ibtida'iyah Pesantren Anak Sholeh (PAS) Baitul Qur'an Gontor. A qualitative approach was selected to capture the social, academic, and religious dynamics of the boarding school environment in depth (John W. Creswell & J. David Creswell, 2018).

Data were collected through observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Observations focused on classroom learning, boarding routines, and students' participation in academic, religious, and social activities. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected teachers, administrators, and sixth-grade students who were directly involved in the boarding program. Participants were purposively selected based on their roles and experiences in program implementation to ensure relevant and credible insights. Institutional documents, including school policies, curriculum guidelines, and activity records, were also analyzed to support the empirical data.

Data collection was carried out during field visits throughout the 1446/2025 academic year. The use of multiple data sources enabled methodological triangulation, which enhances the credibility of qualitative research.

Data analysis followed the thematic analysis framework proposed by Miles and Huberman. Data from observations, interviews, and documentation were coded and categorized into several analytical themes, including academic outcomes, religious character formation, social and life skills development, and program challenges. These themes were interpreted in relation to the study objectives and compared with findings from previous research (Matthew B. Miles & A. Michael Huberman, 1994).

To ensure research trustworthiness, several validation strategies were applied, including data triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Member checking was conducted by confirming interview interpretations with participants, while peer discussions with academic supervisors were used to review analytical interpretations and strengthen the validity of the findings (Sugiyono, 2009).

Through this methodological framework, the study provides a systematic understanding of how boarding school programs contribute to improving graduate quality at the Islamic elementary education level.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Academic Outcomes

The findings of this study indicate that the boarding school program implemented for sixth grade students at PAS Baitul Qur'an Gontor contributes to improving graduate quality across three main dimensions: academic achievement, religious character formation, and social managerial skills. By integrating learning, worship, and communal living within a structured residential environment, the program creates a holistic educational system that supports students' cognitive, spiritual, and social development (Khatter et al., 2024).

These results should also be understood within the broader context of Islamic education challenges. Global reports indicate persistent educational disparities in Muslim

communities, while national indicators such as the Islamic Education Development Index still show the need for quality improvement in elementary Islamic education (Hasan, 2024). Within this context, boarding school models provide a strategic mechanism for addressing both academic and character development simultaneously.

However, the present study extends these findings to the elementary education level, which has received limited scholarly attention (Zainal Muttaqin et al., 2022). Unlike day schools, where learning interactions are limited to classroom hours, boarding schools create continuous academic engagement through evening study sessions and structured learning routines. This sustained academic exposure strengthens mastery of curriculum standards and promotes the development of disciplined learning habits.

In addition to reinforcing previous studies, the results of this research provide a deeper understanding of why boarding schools are particularly effective at the elementary level. The structured environment inherent in residential education minimizes external distractions, promotes regularity in study habits, and ensures that learning is continuously monitored by teachers and mentors. Unlike day schools, where learning often ends with the formal class schedule, boarding schools extend academic engagement into evening study sessions and supervised learning activities. This continuous academic exposure provides students with greater opportunities to review lessons, seek clarification, and practice essential skills, leading to more consistent achievement of curriculum standards (Nabila, Setiyadi, et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the emphasis on discipline within the boarding context creates a learning culture where academic responsibilities are viewed as part of daily life rather than isolated classroom tasks. This approach not only improves immediate academic outcomes but also fosters long-term habits of responsibility and perseverance. By combining structured routines with strong teacher oversight, boarding schools establish a holistic educational environment that is difficult to replicate in non-boarding institutions (Fitriani et al., 2024). Thus, the present study underscores the importance of considering boarding programs as a strategic model for enhancing academic quality, particularly in Islamic elementary schools where both knowledge and values must be cultivated simultaneously (Amira et al., 2024).

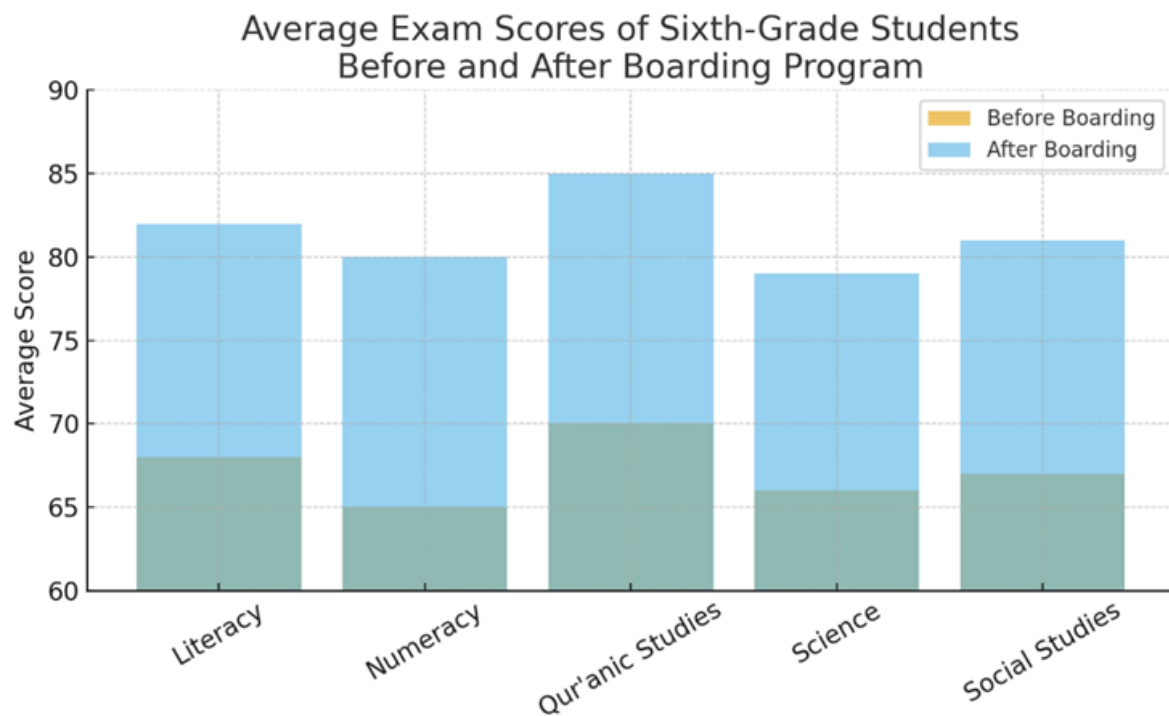


Figure 1. Average Exam Scores of Sixth-Grade Students

Character and Religious Formation

The findings also indicate that the boarding school program significantly contributes to students' religious character formation. Daily practices such as congregational prayer, Qur'anic recitation, and memorization activities created consistent opportunities for students to internalize religious values. Teachers observed improvements in students' discipline, manners, and respect toward peers and teachers.

This pattern reflects the principle of Islamic character education, where values are not only taught but practiced repeatedly in daily life. The boarding environment enables the integration of knowledge, practice, and moral formation through routines that reinforce spiritual awareness and ethical conduct.

These results are consistent with Salam's article, who found that immersion in religious routines strengthens students' spiritual awareness (Salam et al., 2023). However, this study highlights that such processes can also be effectively implemented at the elementary level. Early exposure to structured religious practices appears to facilitate the internalization of moral discipline during a critical stage of developmental formation.

Thus, the boarding school program at PAS Baitul Qur'an Gontor can be seen as an effective strategy for cultivating religious character and spiritual consciousness in young learners. The structured environment not only reinforces religious practices but also nurtures moral discipline and respectful behavior, which are critical elements of graduate quality. By combining academic learning with continuous spiritual training, boarding schools provide a holistic model of Islamic education that prepares students to succeed both in higher education and in their personal lives (Budiman et al., 2025).

Social and Life Skills Development

Beyond academic and religious outcomes, the boarding school program also strengthened students' social competence and life skills. Living in a communal environment required students to manage daily responsibilities, cooperate with peers, and participate in collective activities (Ashari et al., 2022). As a result, students demonstrated greater independence, accountability, and leadership potential.

These findings align with the concept of experiential learning, where students acquire knowledge and skills through real-life experience rather than formal instruction alone. Within the boarding environment, leadership, responsibility, and cooperation are practiced continuously through daily routines and peer interactions (Fauzi et al., 2025).

Previous studies have also shown that residential education environments facilitate the development of collaboration and leadership skills. However, most research has focused on adolescents in secondary-level boarding schools. The present findings suggest that similar benefits can emerge even among younger learners when structured guidance and supervision are provided.

In summary, the social and life skill outcomes observed at PAS Baitul Qur'an Gontor highlight the broader value of boarding education. By nurturing independence, responsibility, cooperation, leadership, and communication, the program equips students with the competencies needed to succeed in future academic settings and in wider society. These skills complement academic and religious formation, reflecting the holistic mission of Islamic education to produce graduates who are knowledgeable, ethical, and socially responsible.

Challenges and Limitations

Despite its overall effectiveness, several challenges were identified in the implementation of the boarding program. The most prominent issues included limited physical facilities, student adaptation difficulties, and time management challenges.

Limited dormitory space and learning facilities occasionally restricted certain group activities. In addition, some students initially experienced homesickness and emotional adjustment difficulties when transitioning to the boarding environment. Managing academic responsibilities alongside religious activities and daily duties also required students to develop effective time management skills.

These challenges are consistent with findings from other pesantren studies, which highlight adaptation and infrastructural limitations as common issues in residential education settings (Yasin & Ramadhan, 2025). However, PAS Baitul Qur'an implemented several mitigation strategies, including orientation sessions for new students, mentoring systems involving senior students, and teacher counseling. The institution also optimized existing facilities through rotational scheduling and improved activity planning (Kurnia Yahya et al., 2020).

To address the issue of limited facilities, the school maximized the use of available spaces by rotating schedules and diversifying learning activities. In addition, administrators began to prioritize infrastructural improvements in long-term planning, recognizing that

investment in physical resources was essential for sustaining program effectiveness. With respect to time management, the institution implemented balanced scheduling that allowed sufficient time for both academic and non-academic activities. Teachers also encouraged students to develop personal routines that complemented the institutional schedule, helping them build stronger habits of organization and prioritization.

The challenges and solutions identified in this study can be summarized in the following table:

Table 2. Challenges and Solutions in the Boarding School Program at PAS Baitul Qur’an Gontor

Challenge	Impact	Solution/Strategy
<i>Limited facilities</i>	Restricted study and activity spaces	Rotational use of space, prioritizing infrastructural planning
<i>Student adaptation difficulties</i>	Homesickness, stress, adjustment fatigue	Orientation sessions, mentoring system, teacher counseling
<i>Time management issues</i>	Difficulty balancing academic, religious, and personal duties	Balanced scheduling, teacher guidance, habit formation support

These strategies demonstrate that effective boarding programs require not only structured discipline but also supportive environments that address students’ psychological and developmental needs.

Integrative Discussion

Overall, the findings confirm that boarding school education can function as an integrated system for improving graduate quality at the elementary level. The structured environment strengthens academic discipline, facilitates consistent religious practice, and provides opportunities for developing social and leadership skills.

Compared with previous research focusing primarily on secondary-level pesantren, this study demonstrates that similar educational benefits can be achieved earlier in students’ developmental stages. The sixth-grade boarding program at PAS Baitul Qur’an illustrates how residential education can serve as a preparatory mechanism for students transitioning to secondary education.

Rather than presenting boarding education as a universally superior model, the findings suggest that its effectiveness depends on the integration of structured routines, teacher supervision, and institutional support systems. When these elements function together, boarding programs can provide a holistic framework for developing balanced graduates who possess academic competence, religious integrity, and social responsibility.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the boarding school program for sixth-grade students at PAS Baitul Qur'an Gontor contributes to improving graduate quality through the integration of academic learning, religious practice, and structured residential life. The program strengthens students' academic discipline and examination performance while simultaneously fostering consistent religious observance and the development of social and managerial skills such as independence, cooperation, and leadership.

Although several challenges were identified, including limited facilities, student adaptation difficulties, and time management issues, institutional strategies such as orientation programs, mentoring systems, and balanced scheduling helped mitigate these constraints. These findings highlight that the effectiveness of elementary boarding education depends not only on structured discipline but also on supportive institutional practices.

The study contributes to the literature on Islamic education by providing empirical evidence on boarding school implementation at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah level, particularly during the sixth-grade transition stage. By illustrating how residential programs can systematically integrate academic supervision, religious habituation, and social skill development, the findings offer a contextual model for strengthening holistic graduate preparation in Islamic elementary schools.

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