

Madam Kitchens Feeding with Iman

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Abstract

The *Pondok* system represents a unique model of Islamic education that seamlessly integrates academics, spirituality, and communal living. This traditional yet dynamic approach fosters intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth within a shared environment, where students and teachers live and learn together. At its core, the *Pondok* emphasizes discipline, collaboration, and the development of Islamic values such as *ta'awun* (cooperation) and *ukhuwwah* (brotherhood). A structured daily routine includes Quranic memorization, traditional Islamic sciences, and character-building activities, balanced with physical recreation and community service. The *katibah* system instills leadership and accountability through night patrols, while the meal preparation system, managed by Madams, Kitchen Managers, and student helpers, serves as a practical training ground in entrepreneurship, logistics, and teamwork. Weekly coordination meetings further reinforce operational excellence, sustainability, and entrepreneurial innovation to meet the needs of students in a resource-conscious system. This case study explores how the *Pondok* system creates a nurturing and resilient educational community, instilling lifelong values and preparing students for meaningful contributions to society.

Keywords: *Pondok* education, Islamic values, holistic learning

Introduction

The *Pondok* system represents a holistic and immersive approach to Islamic education, deeply rooted in tradition and faith. Far more than a conventional schooling system, it serves as a comprehensive living, learning, and spiritual community. Within this environment, teachers (*ustaz* and *ustazah*) and students coexist, sharing both physical spaces and a unified purpose. This unique model emphasizes academic excellence, moral character development, spiritual discipline, and the cultivation of communal values, creating a nurturing space for holistic growth.

A Unique Living and Learning Environment

At the heart of the *Pondok* system lies its distinct communal living arrangement. Students reside together in small houses or *pondok*, fostering a sense of responsibility, cooperation, and mutual respect. A single house, initially designed for three beds, often accommodates up to ten students, encouraging shared responsibilities and close-knit interactions. Teachers, too, live within the *Pondok* grounds, often with their families. This proximity allows for continuous mentorship and the fostering of familial bonds between educators and learners.

This shared living environment ensures that education extends beyond the classroom walls. Daily routines, casual interactions, and shared meals are infused with lessons in character building and mutual respect. The close-knit nature of the community reinforces a culture of learning, support, and spiritual growth, turning every moment into an opportunity for personal and collective betterment.

A Day in the Life of a *Pondok* Student

Life at a *Pondok* is structured and disciplined, with a rigorous schedule designed to maximize learning and spiritual devotion. The day begins well before dawn at 4:00 AM, with students waking for *Tahajjud* prayers, a voluntary act of worship that instills humility and connection with Allah. This is followed by *Solat Subuh* (Fajr prayer) at 6:00 AM. After prayer, students engage in Quranic memorization, a cornerstone of Islamic education, deepening their understanding and mastery of the Quran.

By 7:00 AM, students gather for breakfast before assembling at 7:30 AM for a morning briefing. The assembly often includes motivational talks, reminders of Islamic values, and updates on the day's activities. Formal classes commence at 8:00 AM, focusing on core Islamic disciplines such as *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *Hadith* (Prophetic traditions), and *Tafsir* (Quranic exegesis). These classes are intensive and require active participation.

After a short mid-morning break, students return to their studies until lunchtime at 12:30 PM, which is followed by a break for *Zuhur* prayers. Afternoon classes, beginning at 2:00 PM, shift to the study of *Turath*, or classical Islamic texts. These sessions are dedicated to the deep exploration of works by early Islamic scholars, fostering intellectual rigor and a connection to Islamic heritage.

Recreation follows *Asar* prayers, offering students an opportunity to engage in sports and other physical activities. This time helps balance the demanding academic schedule and promotes physical well-being. Afterward, students freshen up and prepare for dinner, which is typically served after *Maghrib* prayers. During fasting days, such as Mondays, Thursdays, and the three white days each month, dinner coincides with iftar, the breaking of the fast.

The evening concludes with *Isyak* prayers, followed by a general *tausiah* session where teachers provide moral guidance and spiritual reminders. The day ends with housekeeping briefings, allowing students to prepare for the next day, and lights out at 10:00 PM.

The *Pondok* system instills a deep sense of discipline and spirituality in its students. The structured schedule, which integrates prayers, Quranic studies, and recreational

activities, teaches students to value time and live purposefully. Regular acts of worship, such as *Tahajjud*, daily prayers, and fasting, help students cultivate a profound connection with Allah and develop self-discipline. The emphasis on continuous learning ensures that students grow intellectually, while the spiritual focus nurtures their faith and moral character.

Key Features of the *Pondok* System

The success of the *Pondok* system lies in its multifaceted approach to education and character development. Firstly, its holistic curriculum blends traditional Islamic sciences (*ulum al-din*) with character-building activities, producing well-rounded individuals. Secondly, the close proximity of teachers and students fosters a unique mentor-mentee relationship, where educators act as role models, guiding students through both academic and personal challenges.

Community living is another cornerstone of the *Pondok* system. The shared responsibilities of daily life encourage students to develop leadership skills, cooperation, and a sense of accountability. Lastly, the system's unwavering spiritual focus, reinforced through regular prayers, Quranic memorization, and *tausiah* sessions, instills a lifelong commitment to Islamic values and principles.

***Pondok Katibah* system**

In the tranquil yet disciplined environment of the *Pondok* system, not every student rests during the quiet hours of the night. A select group of students, known as the *katibah* or sentry patrol, take on the critical responsibility of maintaining security and order within the *Pondok* grounds. The *katibah* system, rooted in the values of vigilance, accountability, and community service, reflects the holistic approach of Islamic education, where practical responsibilities intertwine with spiritual and academic pursuits.

The *katibah* duty begins at 11:00 PM, just as most students prepare for sleep after a long day of study and worship. These sentries, often rotating among senior students, stay awake to patrol the *Pondok* premises until 4:00 AM. Their duty encompasses monitoring the living quarters, classrooms, and teachers' housing areas to ensure a safe and disciplined environment for everyone.

Clad in modest yet practical attire suitable for their role, the *katibah* carry flashlights and maintain notebooks to record their observations. Their tasks are not merely about physical security but also about upholding the sanctity and decorum of the *Pondok*. The patrol creates an atmosphere of mutual care and vigilance, reinforcing the communal values central to *Pondok* life.

Patrolling the *Pondok* Grounds

The *katibah* patrol begins with the living quarters. Walking quietly among the rows of *pondok* houses, the sentries check that the students inside are adhering to the bedtime schedule. They ensure that no unauthorized activities occur and remind those who might still be awake to prepare for rest. This task instills discipline among the younger students, who look up to the *katibah* as examples of responsibility and maturity.

Next, the *katibah* move to the classrooms, ensuring that the study spaces remain clean and undisturbed. These patrols often uncover forgotten books, misplaced items, or

minor maintenance issues that are logged and reported to the administration the next day. By maintaining the orderliness of the classrooms, the *katibah* contribute to a productive learning environment for the coming day.

The final area of their patrol is the teachers' housing. Here, the *katibah* tread lightly, respecting the privacy of the teachers and their families while ensuring that the surroundings remain secure. Teachers, who often work late into the night preparing lessons or engaging in spiritual practices, appreciate the quiet guardianship provided by the *katibah*.

Beyond its practical aspects, the *katibah* system has a profound spiritual significance. While patrolling the *Pondok* grounds, the sentries engage in quiet dhikr (remembrance of Allah) or recitation of short supplications. The stillness of the night provides a unique opportunity for reflection and personal growth, as the *katibah* balance their duties with moments of spiritual devotion.

For many students, *katibah* duty is seen as an honor and a test of endurance and dedication. It teaches them the value of sacrifice, as they forego their sleep for the benefit of the community. The role also fosters a heightened sense of vigilance and responsibility, preparing them for future leadership roles both within and beyond the *Pondok* system.

While the *katibah* system is a valuable component of the *Pondok* experience, it is not without its challenges. Staying awake during the early hours of the morning can be physically demanding, especially for students who have already endured a full day of rigorous study and activities. Fatigue sometimes sets in, testing their resilience and commitment.

Weather conditions also add to the challenge. On rainy nights, the *katibah* must brave the elements, navigating muddy paths and ensuring their patrol remains thorough. During colder seasons, the chill of the night air makes the task even more arduous. Despite these challenges, the *katibah* perform their duties with unwavering dedication, driven by the understanding that their efforts contribute to the collective well-being of the *Pondok* community.

The *katibah* system is more than a security measure; it is a practical training ground for leadership and accountability. Students who serve as *katibah* develop critical life skills, including time management, decision-making, and teamwork. They learn to prioritize communal needs over personal comfort, embodying the principles of service and selflessness central to Islamic teachings.

Moreover, the role of the *katibah* cultivates a sense of ownership and belonging within the *Pondok*. By actively contributing to the safety and order of their environment, students feel more connected to the community and invested in its success. This sense of belonging often translates into a deeper commitment to their studies and spiritual growth.

Meal system at *Pondok*

In the traditional *Pondok* system, the preparation of meals reflects both its communal values and the need for practicality. Historically, each house within the *Pondok* grounds

would independently prepare meals for its residents, fostering a sense of self-reliance and shared responsibility among the students. However, as the daily schedules of students and teachers became increasingly rigorous, this traditional approach was adjusted to accommodate the community's evolving needs. Today, the meal system has been streamlined, with the responsibility of food preparation largely delegated to the wives of the teachers, known respectfully as "Madams."

The Madams are central figures in the *Pondok*'s meal system, seamlessly blending their roles as educators' wives and community caretakers. Using the kitchens in their homes, each Madam is tasked with preparing breakfast, lunch, and dinner for a designated number of students. This allocation ensures an equitable distribution of workload and allows the Madams to focus on creating nourishing and wholesome meals aligned with the Islamic principles of *halalan toyyiban*.

To support the Madams, the *Pondok* management assigns student helpers to each kitchen. These helpers assist with tasks such as ingredient preparation, cleaning, and serving. This system not only alleviates the burden on the Madams but also provides students with valuable lessons in responsibility, teamwork, and time management. Table 1 shows the 15 kitchens with the kitchen owners and number of student helpers for each kitchen.

Table 1: Kitchens, Kitchen Owners and Student Helpers

Kitchen	Kitchen Owner	To serve Students	Student Helpers
Kitchen 1	Madam A	110	5
Kitchen 2	Madam B	90	5
Kitchen 3	Madam C	80	5
Kitchen 4	Madam D	80	5
Kitchen 5	Madam E	85	5
Kitchen 6	Madam F	75	5
Kitchen 7	Madam G	85	5
Kitchen 8	Madam H	85	5
Kitchen 9	Madam I	60	5
Kitchen 10	Madam J	60	5
Kitchen 11	Madam K	60	5
Kitchen 12	Madam L	60	5
Kitchen 13	Madam M	55	5
Kitchen 14	Madam N	60	5
Kitchen 15	Madam Z	299	8

Each kitchen operates under the supervision of a student-appointed Kitchen Manager, who serves as a critical link between the Madams, the students, and the *Pondok* administration. The Kitchen Manager's responsibilities are multifaceted and include:

- a) Inventory Management: Ensuring that the kitchen is well-stocked with essential ingredients, utensils, and cooking equipment.
- b) Procurement and Sourcing: Coordinating with students to source raw materials for cooking, either through direct purchases or donations.

- c) Funding and Budgeting: Managing the finances of the kitchen, which includes sourcing funds, monitoring expenses, and maintaining a transparent accounting system.
- d) Collection of Payments: Collecting contributions from students to cover the costs of meal preparation, ensuring timely and fair participation from all.

By delegating these administrative tasks to a Kitchen Manager, the system allows the Madams to focus solely on cooking, ensuring that the quality and timeliness of meals are maintained.

Meal Planning and Raw Material Procurement

The meal plan for the *Pondok* is centrally decided by the management, ensuring uniformity and adherence to nutritional and religious standards. The management takes into account the dietary needs of the students and the principles of simplicity and moderation. This centralized planning eliminates the need for each kitchen to design its own menu, streamlining operations and reducing the potential for discrepancies.

Raw materials for the meals are provided by the students themselves. This practice not only fosters a sense of contribution but also ensures that students remain connected to the process of meal preparation. Whether sourcing vegetables, rice, or meat, students play an active role in maintaining the kitchen's functionality. This collaborative approach reflects the *Pondok*'s emphasis on community involvement and shared responsibility. Table 2 shows the total cost in IDR or Rupiah Indonesia per month.

Table 2: Costing for each kitchen

Kitchen	Students	Total Cost (IDR) per month
Kitchen 1	110	2,674,100
Kitchen 2	90	2,187,900
Kitchen 3	80	1,944,800
Kitchen 4	80	1,944,800
Kitchen 5	85	2,066,350
Kitchen 6	75	1,823,250
Kitchen 7	85	206,6350
Kitchen 8	85	206,6350
Kitchen 9	60	145,8600
Kitchen 10	60	145,8600
Kitchen 11	60	145,8600
Kitchen 12	60	145,8600
Kitchen 13	55	133,7050
Kitchen 14	60	145,8600
Kitchen 15	299	726,8690

The meal system at the *Pondok* is more than just a logistical operation; it is a living example of collaboration, discipline, and mutual care. The Madams' role as cooks is supported by the collective efforts of the student helpers and Kitchen Managers, creating a harmonious balance between service and learning. Through their involvement, students gain practical life skills, such as budgeting, teamwork, and problem-solving, which complement their academic and spiritual education.

The system also serves as a reminder of the Islamic value of *barakah* (blessings) in shared meals. Students not only eat together but also contribute to the preparation process, fostering a sense of gratitude and appreciation for the efforts of others. The communal dining experience becomes an act of worship and reflection, reinforcing the *Pondok*'s spiritual teachings.

Despite its many strengths, the meal system at the *Pondok* faces certain challenges. Managing the procurement of raw materials can be complex, particularly during periods of financial strain or resource shortages. The reliance on student contributions requires effective communication and organization to ensure fairness and consistency. Additionally, the Madams must balance their responsibilities in the kitchen with their familial and community roles, which can be demanding.

To address these challenges, some *Pondoks* have introduced innovative solutions, such as pooling resources from multiple kitchens or seeking external sponsorships to subsidize costs. The appointment of capable Kitchen Managers also ensures that administrative burdens are shared, allowing the Madams to focus on cooking and maintaining the quality of meals.

Kitchen Operations

The dining hall of Kitchen 15 was alive with the familiar hum of preparation as Madam Z convened her team for their daily briefing. The task at hand was monumental: serving 299 students a hearty dinner of *Nasi Goreng Jawa*, a favorite among the students. As she stood at the center of her bustling kitchen, her voice carried a calm authority that brought focus to the room. "Alright, everyone," she began, addressing her team of student helpers and the Kitchen Manager, Musa. "Tonight's service is critical. We need to stay on schedule, but before we dive into the tasks, let's take a moment to address some ongoing challenges."

Musa nodded in agreement, his clipboard in hand. "Madam Z, I've observed some inconsistencies among the student helpers. While they're eager to contribute, their portioning skills and hygiene practices vary significantly. This impacts both our efficiency and the quality of service."

Madam Z leaned forward; her expression thoughtful. "You're absolutely right, Musa. I have shared the same thought with the Ustaz. This high turnover every semester makes it difficult to ensure consistency. Perhaps it's time to implement a structured onboarding program for our helpers. It would standardize training and set clear expectations from the start."

One of the student helpers chimed in hesitantly, "Madam, would it also be possible to recognize our efforts in some way? Even small rewards or acknowledgments could motivate us to do better."

Madam Z smiled warmly. "That's an excellent idea. Recognition doesn't have to be elaborate—it could be as simple as a thank-you note or a small token. I'll discuss this with the Kitchen Managers across all kitchens."

Every week, the Madams, Kitchen Managers, and Kitchen Helpers convene with the management of the *Pondok* for a critical meeting. This gathering is not merely a routine briefing but an essential platform for planning, problem-solving, and entrepreneurial collaboration. The unique structure of the *Pondok* system, as reflected in the allocation of responsibilities to the 15 kitchens and their respective teams, necessitates effective communication and coordination to ensure smooth operations and sustainability.

One of the primary purposes of the weekly meeting is to ensure that the food preparation and delivery processes are running seamlessly. With each Madam responsible for cooking for a specific number of students and supported by Kitchen Managers and Helpers, coordination is key. For example, Madam Z in Kitchen 15 oversees meals for 299 students with the help of eight student helpers, while Madam A in Kitchen 1 manages meals for 110 students with five helpers. These differences in scale require tailored solutions, which are discussed during the meetings.

The *Pondok* management emphasizes punctual meal delivery as a top priority. Any delays in serving breakfast, lunch, or dinner disrupt the students' tightly packed schedules of study and worship. During the meetings, each kitchen team reviews its performance, discusses challenges such as inventory shortages or timing issues, and brainstorms solutions to improve efficiency. These discussions also provide an opportunity to revise the meal plan, ensuring that it meets the nutritional needs and preferences of the students.

The minimal fees charged to students—IDR 10,000 daily for food and IDR 200,000 for other expenses—cover only basic costs. To bridge the financial gap and sustain the *Pondok* system, the kitchens engage in entrepreneurial activities, an aspect that is also addressed in the weekly meetings. Each kitchen is required to cook beyond the three daily meals, preparing snacks, drinks, and other food items to be sold at the general kiosks. These kiosks serve both the *Pondok* community and visitors, generating additional income.

During the meeting, the management provides guidance on sourcing ingredients at the best prices, preparing popular snack items, and marketing these products effectively. Kitchen Managers share insights on trends in kiosk sales, identifying which items are most profitable. For example, some kitchens might find success with traditional snacks like *pisang goreng* (fried bananas) or *onde-onde* (sweet glutinous rice balls), while others focus on beverages like herbal teas or fruit juices.

Another critical component of the weekly meeting is fundraising. Since the *Pondok* operates on a tight budget, the team brainstorms ways to secure additional funding. Kitchen Managers are encouraged to seek sponsorships, organize community events, or reach out to alumni for donations. These entrepreneurial activities not only support the kitchens financially but also instill valuable skills in the students, such as budgeting, networking, and resource management.

The management also highlights the importance of fostering a spirit of collaboration. For instance, kitchens that manage to secure surplus ingredients or funding are encouraged to share with others facing shortages. This approach reinforces the values of *ta'awun* (cooperation) and *ukhuwwah* (brotherhood) that are central to the *Pondok* system.

For the Kitchen Managers and Helpers, these weekly meetings are also an opportunity for personal and professional growth. They learn to manage inventory, handle finances, and coordinate with multiple stakeholders, skills that are transferable to other areas of life. The Madams, in turn, develop leadership and organizational abilities, as they must balance their roles as cooks, mentors, and community members.

By involving all levels of the kitchen team in the decision-making process, the *Pondok* fosters a sense of ownership and accountability. This participatory approach ensures that everyone feels valued and motivated to contribute to the success of the system.

Ultimately, the weekly meetings are more than just operational reviews—they are a platform for building community. The discussions go beyond logistics to include reflections on shared goals and values. The entrepreneurial focus not only supports the financial needs of the *Pondok* but also teaches students and staff the importance of hard work, innovation, and collaboration.

Through these meetings, the Madams, Kitchen Managers, and Helpers ensure that the meal system not only meets the physical nourishment needs of the students but also contributes to the sustainability and growth of the *Pondok*. This collective effort, grounded in Islamic principles, creates a dynamic and resilient community that serves as a model of self-reliance and mutual support.

Strategic Action

Later that evening, Madam A, who led Kitchen 1, visited Madam Z for tea. The two women often exchanged ideas to address shared challenges. “Madam A,” began Madam Z, “how do you keep your team aligned with the vision of ‘feeding with iman’? It’s not just about food—it’s about nurturing a community.”

Madam A sipped her tea thoughtfully. “It’s a combination of constant reminders and inclusivity. I ensure that everyone understands the core values of *ta’awun* (cooperation) and *ukhuwwah* (brotherhood). For instance, I involve my team in decisions about menu changes and inventory planning. When they feel included, they take ownership.”

Madam Z nodded. “That’s insightful. We’ve been struggling with fluctuating student numbers and budget constraints, especially in Kitchen 15. Balancing these operational demands with the principles of *halalan toyyiban* isn’t easy.”

“It’s always a balancing act,” replied Madam A. “For us, the strategy is simple: optimize resources, ensure halal compliance at every step, and foster a spirit of collaboration. When the team understands the ‘why,’ they become part of the solution.”

Operational Excellence

The next morning, Kitchen 5 buzzed with activity as Madam E prepared her team for breakfast service. “Yesterday’s lunch was delayed,” she began, addressing her helpers. “We can’t afford equipment failures like that again. What do you suggest?”

Siti, one of the helpers, raised her hand. “Madam, maybe we could implement regular equipment checks. That way, we’ll catch any issues before they disrupt service.”

Madam E nodded approvingly. “Excellent suggestion, Siti. Farah, can you create a maintenance checklist for us?”

“Of course, Madam,” Farah replied. “But we also need to address the frequent supply chain disruptions. When ingredients don’t arrive on time, it throws everything off schedule.”

Madam E sighed, acknowledging the challenge. “Let’s look into forming partnerships with local halal-certified suppliers. Reliable, nearby sources could reduce delays and keep our operations running smoothly.”

In Kitchen 8, Madam H held a feedback session with her team. “We’ve been testing a digital tool for inventory tracking,” she began. “What are your thoughts so far?”

Ali, a student helper, spoke up. “The tool is helpful, Madam, but I think we need more training to use it properly.”

Madam H turned to her Kitchen Manager. “Let’s arrange a workshop for the team. If we address these gaps early, we’ll save ourselves a lot of trouble later.”

Another helper added, “Madam, could we make these feedback sessions a regular thing? It makes us feel heard and allows us to contribute ideas.”

Madam H smiled. “Absolutely. Regular feedback fosters a stronger team. Change is always easier when everyone feels included.”

As the semester unfolded, the kitchens continued to serve thousands of meals daily, overcoming challenges through a shared sense of purpose. During a reflective team meeting, Madam Z addressed her helpers “Despite the hurdles—whether it’s training gaps, inventory issues, or change management—we’ve upheld our mission. By feeding students with iman, we’re not just addressing hunger but building a community rooted in values.”

Musa added, “Our work may seem routine, but it leaves a lasting impact. Every meal we prepare, every student we serve—it’s all part of a bigger picture.”

Way Forward

The *Pondok* system, while deeply rooted in tradition, has the potential to evolve further in response to modern challenges. Incorporating digital tools for inventory management, student tracking, and resource allocation can enhance operational efficiency. Offering targeted leadership training programs for *katibah* and Kitchen Managers can foster critical decision-making and management skills. To address financial constraints, the *Pondok* can expand its entrepreneurial activities by marketing traditional snacks and drinks to external audiences or organizing community crowdfunding initiatives. Additionally, creating partnerships with alumni, local businesses, and halal-certified suppliers can ensure a steady flow of resources while reinforcing community ties. Finally, introducing forums for students to share feedback and co-develop solutions will strengthen their sense of ownership and further enrich the holistic learning experience.

Conclusion

The *Pondok* system is a remarkable embodiment of holistic Islamic education, seamlessly integrating academic rigor, spiritual devotion, and communal responsibility. Through its structured daily schedule, students cultivate discipline, gratitude, and leadership. Systems like the *katibah* and meal preparation are not just operational necessities but opportunities for skill-building and personal growth. Despite challenges such as resource limitations and logistical complexities, the *Pondok* thrives through collaboration, innovation, and adherence to Islamic values. It nurtures individuals who are not only knowledgeable but also morally upright and community-oriented. As it adapts to contemporary needs, the *Pondok* remains a timeless model of education, offering lessons in faith, resilience, and selflessness that extend far beyond its physical boundaries.

Discussion Questions

1. How does the *Pondok* system balance rigorous schedules with communal responsibilities such as meal preparation and the *Katibah* system?
2. What role do the Madams, Kitchen Managers, and Helpers play in ensuring the sustainability of the *Pondok* meal system, and how can their responsibilities be optimized?
3. How does the *Katibah* system contribute to the spiritual and character development of *Pondok* students, and what challenges does it present?
4. What entrepreneurial strategies can be employed by the *Pondok* community to address financial challenges, such as funding and inventory management?
5. How does the *Pondok* system's holistic approach to education integrate Islamic values into daily operations, and what lessons can be applied to modern educational institutions?