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Study Visit as Institutional Capacity Strengthening and Pesantren Scholarly Tradition Enhancement: Experience of Ma'had Aly Sunan Drajat to Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho Malang

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Abstract

ABSTRACT
This community service activity reports on a study visit conducted by Ma'had Aly Sunan Drajat to Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho Malang on June 4, 2026, as a strategic effort to strengthen institutional capacity and enhance pesantren-based scholarly traditions. Ma'had Aly as a pesantren-based higher education institution faces significant challenges in maintaining academic quality and scholarly identity amidst the pressures of modernization, globalization, and rapid social change. This activity aimed to broaden students' insights regarding Ma'had Aly management, build academic networks between institutions, exchange experiences and best practices in organizing pesantren-based higher education, foster collaborative spirit in developing relevant Islamic scholarship, and strengthen understanding of Islamic history and civilization in the Indonesian Archipelago. The activity employed a combination of community education, consultation, and advocacy methods, involving the academic community and students of Ma'had Aly Sunan Drajat. The series of activities included institutional dialogue and academic visits to Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho Malang, an educational and cultural visit to Kampoeng Heritage Malang, and a historical pilgrimage to the Tomb of Sunan Ampel. Data collection was conducted through participatory observation, documentation, and structured discussions, with qualitative-descriptive analysis applied to interpret the findings. The results demonstrated that the study visit successfully facilitated meaningful exchange of insights regarding learning systems, curriculum development, institutional governance, teaching staff classification systems, and student development programs. Participants gained new perspectives on Islamic education development and strengthening of pesantren scholarly traditions, while the visits to historical and cultural sites enriched their understanding of pesantren's role in Indonesian Islamic civilization. The activity also successfully established closer academic networks and collaboration opportunities between both institutions. It is concluded that study visits prove effective as a means of institutional capacity development and strengthening ukhuwah (brotherhood) between Islamic educational institutions. Recommendations for future activities include the need for more structured follow-up cooperation and the development of more comprehensive study visit programs covering broader aspects of institutional development and involving more participants.

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INTRODUCTION

Pesantren-based higher education, known as Ma'had Aly, represents one of the distinctive features of the educational system in Indonesia that combines classical Islamic scholarly traditions

with modern academic approaches. Ma'had Aly emerged as a response to the need for higher education that not only prioritizes intellectual aspects but also pays attention to character and morality formation in accordance with Islamic values (Arroisi et al., 2025). In this context, Ma'had Aly serves as a strategic institution for producing a generation of scholars and Muslim intellectuals capable of responding to the challenges of the times without losing the roots of pesantren scholarly traditions (Hanafiah, 2024).

The challenges faced by Ma'had Aly in the contemporary era are increasingly complex. Globalization, the development of information technology, and rapid social changes demand that pesantren-based higher education institutions continuously adapt and innovate (Hannan et al., 2022). On the other hand, the demand to maintain the authenticity of pesantren scholarly traditions remains a top priority. The gap between modernization needs and tradition preservation constitutes a serious challenge that must be addressed through various comprehensive institutional capacity development efforts (Madjid, 1998).

Ma'had Aly Sunan Drajat, located in Lamongan, East Java, is one of the pesantren-based higher education institutions committed to developing Islamic scholarly traditions while responding to the dynamics of modernity. As a relatively new institution in the pesantren higher education landscape, Ma'had Aly Sunan Drajat recognizes the need for institutional capacity strengthening through various strategies, one of which is through study visits to similar institutions that are more established in their management and development (Sirojudin, 2023).

Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho Malang serves as one of the strategic destinations for this study visit. This institution has been established since 1979 under the auspices of the An-Nur II Al-Murtadho Islamic Boarding School Foundation led by KH. Fathul Bari. Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 has obtained operational permission from the Ministry of Religious Affairs with decree number SK 2892 dated May 23, 2019. With its experience and proven institutional capacity, Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho becomes an ideal partner for exchanging experiences and best practices in organizing pesantren-based higher education (Tarida et al., 2025).

Study visits between Islamic educational institutions are not a new phenomenon in the tradition of pesantren scholarship. Study visits have become an important part of the learning process that is not only oriented toward theoretical mastery but also toward enriching experience and direct exchange of insights (Zainuddin, 2013). This practice aligns with the principle in pesantren tradition that seeking knowledge is not only done through the study of classical texts and classroom learning but also through intellectual journeys, dialogue, and interaction with fellow knowledge seekers from various backgrounds (Syafe'i, 2017).

Although various studies have discussed the importance of integration between higher education and pesantren (Arroisi et al., 2025; Hannan et al., 2022), there remains limited research that specifically documents and analyzes the practice of study visits as a strategy for strengthening the institutional capacity of Ma'had Aly. The novelty of this community service activity lies in the effort to systematically document and analyze the process and results of the study visit conducted by Ma'had Aly Sunan Drajat to Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho Malang, as well as to analyze its implications for institutional development and strengthening of pesantren scholarly traditions.

This study visit activity was carried out with the objectives of broadening students' insights regarding the management and development of Ma'had Aly institutions, building academic networks and closer communication among students and the academic community, exchanging experiences, ideas, and best practices in organizing pesantren-based higher education, fostering a spirit of collaboration in the development of Islamic scholarship relevant to contemporary needs, and strengthening understanding of the history, culture, and Islamic civilization in the Indonesian Archipelago. The urgency of this activity lies in the need to build an Islamic education ecosystem that mutually reinforces each other, where the exchange of experiences and best practices between institutions becomes the key to improving the quality of education and community service (Nurmalasari et al., 2025).

PROBLEMS

The partner in this community service activity is Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho Malang, a pesantren-based higher education institution that has extensive experience in organizing Islamic higher education. Although Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho has a relatively established educational system, this institution still faces various challenges and development needs that are of mutual concern.

One of the main challenges faced by Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho is how to maintain the quality of education amidst the demands to continuously innovate and adapt to contemporary developments (Hannan et al., 2022). As a pesantren-based higher education institution, Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho is required to be able to integrate the traditional pesantren curriculum with modern academic approaches. This integration involves not only curriculum aspects but also includes learning methods, evaluation systems, and overall institutional governance (Arroisi et al., 2025).

Another challenge faced relates to human resource development, both in terms of teaching staff and students. The availability of qualified teaching staff who are competent in Islamic scholarship while possessing academic competencies that meet higher education standards is an urgent need. Likewise, students need to be equipped with critical, analytical, and adaptive thinking abilities to face the challenges of the times without losing their Islamic identity (Syafe'i, 2017).

From the institutional perspective, Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho also faces challenges in terms of administrative management, facility development, and expansion of cooperation networks with various parties. Professional and transparent management is key to increasing public and stakeholder trust in the quality of education provided (Nurmalasari et al., 2025).

Meanwhile, Ma'had Aly Sunan Drajat as a newer institution also faces similar challenges, albeit with different scales and levels of readiness. The need to learn from the experience of a more established institution is one of the main drivers for conducting this study visit. Through the exchange of experiences and best practices, both institutions are expected to mutually strengthen each other and together face the challenges of developing pesantren-based higher education.

IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

This community service activity was conducted in the form of a study visit involving the academic community and students of Ma'had Aly Sunan Drajat. The method used in this activity is a combination of several approaches, namely community education, consultation, and advocacy.

First, the community education method was used in this activity through a series of learning and discussion activities that took place during the visit. This method was applied to increase participants' understanding and awareness of the educational system, institutional governance, and various programs developed by Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho Malang (Rohman et al., 2025). The activities included institutional dialogue sessions, discussions on learning systems and curricula, and exchange of information on student activities and various development programs implemented by each institution.

Second, the consultation method was applied in this activity through discussion forums and dialogue between the two institutions. This method was used to solve problems or fulfill institutional needs through synergy between pesantren-based higher education institutions. In this forum, both parties exchanged experiences, ideas, and best practices in organizing pesantren-based higher education, and discussed various challenges and opportunities for institutional development in the future.

Third, the advocacy method was applied in this activity through sustainable institutional assistance and capacity strengthening. This method was realized through efforts to build academic

networks and closer communication between the two institutions, as well as formulating follow-up plans for future institutional development (Rohman et al., 2025).

This study visit activity was conducted on Thursday, June 4, 2026. The activity locations included three main places: Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho Malang as the main visit location, Kampoeng Heritage Malang as an educational and cultural visit location, and the Tomb of Sunan Ampel as a pilgrimage and historical reflection location.

The series of activities began with a visit to Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho Malang. In this session, the Ma'had Aly Sunan Drajat group was welcomed by the leadership and academic community of Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho. The activity continued with an academic friendship session and institutional dialogue discussing various aspects of Ma'had Aly management and development. This discussion forum became a forum for exchanging information on learning systems, curricula, student activities, and various development programs implemented by each institution (Massolihin & Khareng, 2026).

After the activity at Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho, the group continued the visit to Kampoeng Heritage Malang. This visit aimed to introduce participants to the historical and cultural richness that forms an important part of Indonesian identity. Through direct observation of various preserved heritage and cultural remains, participants were expected to understand the importance of preserving historical values as part of character and civilization formation.

The series of activities concluded with a visit to the Tomb of Sunan Ampel, one of the historical centers of Islamic propagation in the Archipelago. This visit served as a means of reflection and learning about the struggles of earlier scholars in spreading Islamic teachings with wise, courteous, and full of wisdom approaches (Nurjanah & Muhamad, 2026).

Data collection techniques in this activity employed several approaches. Participatory observation was conducted during the visit to directly observe the educational system, institutional governance, and academic culture at Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho Malang. Documentation was carried out through photography and recording of various important information during the activity. In addition, discussions and informal interviews were also conducted with the management and academic community of Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho to explore more in-depth information about best practices that have been implemented.

Data analysis was conducted descriptively-qualitatively by organizing and interpreting various information obtained during the activity. Findings from observation, documentation, and discussion were analyzed to identify best practices that can be adopted and further developed by Ma'had Aly Sunan Drajat (Afkar et al., 2026).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of the Study Visit Activity

The study visit of Ma'had Aly Sunan Drajat to Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho Malang proceeded smoothly on Thursday, June 4, 2026. The group consisting of the academic community and students of Ma'had Aly Sunan Drajat was warmly welcomed by the management of Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho Malang. The atmosphere of friendship and kinship that was established from the beginning of the visit became a strong foundation for productive dialogue and exchange of experiences between the two institutions.

The main visit to Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho Malang was filled with a series of activities designed to maximize the benefits of the study visit. The activity began with welcoming remarks from the leaders of both institutions, followed by presentations of profiles and flagship programs of each Ma'had Aly. In this session, Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho presented in detail about the history of establishment, vision and mission, organizational structure, learning system, curriculum, and various student activities that characterize their institution.

One important finding from the institutional dialogue session was how Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho integrated the traditional pesantren education system with modern academic

approaches. As explained in various studies on the integration of higher education and pesantren, this integration model represents an effort to combine the advantages of both educational systems (Arroisi et al., 2025). Higher education has advantages in terms of rationality and experimentation, while pesantren excels in character and morality formation (Madjid, 1998). Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho succeeded in finding an integration formula that synergistically combines both.

The learning system at Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho implements an approach that combines evening and daytime learning activities. This approach allows students to receive intensive and continuous learning, so that the material delivered can be more in-depth and easily understood. The curriculum applied is also designed to integrate classical Islamic courses with contemporary approaches relevant to current needs.

The discussion forum also highlighted the importance of human resource development in Ma'had Aly management. Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho has classified teaching staff into several levels, which allows for a structured mentoring and career development system (Hannan et al., 2022). This system is one of the best practices that can be adopted by Ma'had Aly Sunan Drajat to improve the quality of teaching staff and ensure the sustainability of institutional development.

In addition to institutional discussions, the activity also included visits to various facilities owned by Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho. The group had the opportunity to directly see the facilities and infrastructure supporting teaching and learning activities, such as classrooms, libraries, student dormitories, mosques, and other supporting facilities. This visit provided a concrete picture of how facility management is carried out professionally and integrated with educational programs.

Educational and Cultural Visits

In addition to academic activities at Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho, the study visit series also included a visit to Kampoeng Heritage Malang. This visit became an important part of the activity because it provided an educational and cultural dimension that complemented the participants' learning experience. Kampoeng Heritage Malang presented the historical and cultural richness that forms part of Indonesian identity. Through direct observation of various preserved heritage and cultural remains, participants could understand the importance of preserving historical values as part of character and civilization formation (Khuluqi & Saadah, 2026).

The visit to Kampoeng Heritage Malang also served as a means to strengthen understanding of Islamic history and culture in the Archipelago. Many historical relics in this area have close connections with the development of Islam and pesantren education in East Java. This understanding is important for students of Ma'had Aly Sunan Drajat to appreciate the struggles of their predecessors in spreading and developing Islamic teachings in Indonesia.

The visit to the Tomb of Sunan Ampel became the culmination of the study visit series, rich in historical and spiritual values. Sunan Ampel is one of the important figures in the history of Islamic propagation in the Archipelago, particularly in the East Java region. As part of the Walisongo (Nine Saints), Sunan Ampel played a strategic role in developing Islamic education and da'wah with a wise and full-of-wisdom approach.

The visit to the Tomb of Sunan Ampel served as a means of reflection for participants to understand the struggles of earlier scholars in spreading Islamic teachings. The spirit of da'wah, patience, and wisdom demonstrated by Sunan Ampel and other scholars became inspiration for students of Ma'had Aly Sunan Drajat to continue the struggle in developing Islamic scholarly traditions and contributing to societal progress.

This pilgrimage experience aligns with practices also conducted by various other Islamic educational institutions during study visits. For example, the Postgraduate Program of STAI Ma'had Aly Al-Hikam Malang also conducted a pilgrimage to the muassis (founders) of the pesantren as part of their study visit activities to STKQ Al-Hikam Depok. This practice shows that pilgrimage to the graves of founders and scholars is an integral part of the pesantren scholarly

tradition aimed at drawing inspiration and values of struggle.

Implications for Institutional Development

The results of this study visit have strategic implications for the development of Ma'had Aly Sunan Drajat as a pesantren-based higher education institution. First, the exchange of insights regarding learning systems and curriculum becomes important capital for conducting evaluation and development of educational programs at Ma'had Aly Sunan Drajat. Best practices implemented at Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho, such as integration of pesantren curriculum with modern academic approaches and a structured teaching staff development system, can serve as references for further development.

Second, this study visit opened opportunities to build closer academic networks between Ma'had Aly Sunan Drajat and Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho. This network can be utilized for various forms of cooperation, such as lecturer and student exchanges, joint research, curriculum development, and various other academic activities. As suggested in various studies, collaboration between Islamic educational institutions is key to facing increasingly complex educational challenges (Nurmalasari et al., 2025).

Third, the experience of this study visit strengthened students' understanding of the importance of integration between higher education and pesantren traditions. This understanding becomes important capital for them to become a generation of scholars and Muslim intellectuals capable of maintaining the balance between mastery of modern knowledge and deep Islamic understanding (Arroisi et al., 2025).

Fourth, the visits to Kampoeng Heritage Malang and the Tomb of Sunan Ampel provided historical and cultural dimensions that enriched participants' insights into the role of pesantren in the history of Islamic civilization in Indonesia. This understanding becomes an important foundation for building awareness of pesantren's contribution in shaping Indonesian Islamic and national identity.

Challenges and Development Opportunities

Based on the results of the study visit and discussions that took place, several challenges and opportunities for Ma'had Aly development were identified. The first challenge is maintaining the quality of education amidst demands to continuously adapt to contemporary developments. Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho demonstrated that the key to facing this challenge is to continue innovating without abandoning the roots of pesantren scholarly traditions (Hannan et al., 2022).

The second challenge is the development of quality human resources, both in terms of teaching staff and students. Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho has implemented a teaching staff classification system that allows for structured mentoring and career development. This system can serve as a model for Ma'had Aly Sunan Drajat to develop the capacity of its teaching staff.

The development opportunity that is open is the increasing public interest in pesantren-based higher education. This phenomenon shows that the public is increasingly aware of the importance of education that not only prioritizes intellectual aspects but also pays attention to character and morality formation (Syafe'i, 2017). Ma'had Aly Sunan Drajat has the opportunity to become one of the main choices for the public seeking quality pesantren-based higher education.

Another opportunity is the development of cooperation between Ma'had Aly institutions in various fields, such as lecturer and student exchanges, joint research, and curriculum development. This cooperation will strengthen the pesantren-based higher education ecosystem and improve overall education quality (Nurmalasari et al., 2025).

Activity Documentation and Evaluation

This study visit activity was systematically documented through photography and recording of various important information during the activity. This documentation serves as evaluation material to measure the level of achievement of activity objectives and formulate

recommendations for the development of similar activities in the future.

Evaluation of activity implementation showed that this study visit successfully achieved the established objectives. Participants gained new insights into Ma'had Aly management and development, built academic networks with Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho, and enriched their understanding of Islamic history and culture in the Archipelago. Participants' enthusiasm during the activity showed high motivation to learn and develop institutional capacity.

The success of this activity was also inseparable from the support of various parties, including the leadership and academic community of Ma'had Aly Sunan Drajat as well as the leadership and management of Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho Malang who welcomed warmly and openly. Good cooperation between the two institutions became the key to the successful implementation of this study visit activity.



Figure 1. Documentation of the study visit activities.

CONCLUSION

The study visit of Ma'had Aly Sunan Drajat to Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho Malang conducted on June 4, 2026, successfully achieved the established objectives. This activity proved effective as a means of institutional capacity development and strengthening ukhuwah (brotherhood) between Islamic educational institutions. Through the exchange of insights regarding learning systems, curriculum, and institutional governance, participants gained new perspectives on Islamic education development and strengthening of pesantren scholarly traditions. In addition, the visits to Kampoeng Heritage Malang and the Tomb of Sunan Ampel provided historical and cultural dimensions that enriched participants' insights into the role of pesantren in the history of Islamic civilization in Indonesia.

Recommendations for future community service activities include the need for follow-up in the form of more structured cooperation between the two institutions, as well as the development of more comprehensive study visit programs involving more participants and covering broader aspects of institutional development.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

IF Contributed to the conceptualization of the study visit, development of the activity framework, and formulation of the research objectives. IF was involved in the preparation and implementation of the study visit program, particularly in coordinating academic activities and documenting institutional experiences. IF also contributed to the original draft preparation, data organization, and manuscript review and editing.

KN Contributed to the development of the activity methodology, particularly in organizing educational and participatory approaches during the study visit. KN participated in the investigation and documentation of institutional practices at Ma'had Aly An-Nur 2 Al-Murtadho Malang, focusing on academic activities, student engagement, and the exchange of institutional experiences. KN also contributed to data analysis, manuscript preparation, and review and editing.

MSA Contributed to the conceptualization and implementation of the study visit, particularly in examining institutional capacity strengthening and the development of pesantren-based higher education. MSA was involved in institutional discussions, observation, and documentation of academic governance, curriculum management, and the pesantren scholarly tradition. MSA also contributed to the interpretation of findings, preparation of the original draft, and critical revision of the manuscript.

IM Contributed to the conceptualization and supervision of the study visit, with particular attention to institutional governance, academic development, and the preservation of pesantren scholarly traditions. IM provided academic direction throughout the activity, participated in institutional observations and discussions, and contributed to the analysis of the relationship between institutional capacity strengthening and the development of pesantren-based higher education. IM also participated in manuscript review and editing to ensure the academic quality and coherence of the article.

All authors contributed to the development of this article, critically reviewed the manuscript, approved the final version for publication, and agreed to be accountable for the integrity and accuracy of the work.

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