



## **INITIATING VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN PESANTREN: EFFORTS TO IMPROVE STUDENT COMPETENCIES TO FACE THE CHALLENGES OF GLOBALIZATION**

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### **Abstract:**

This article discusses how pesantren can develop the vocational skills of students through curriculum adaptation based on community needs, technology, and the job market. With the legal foundation of Law Number 18 of 2019 concerning Islamic Boarding Schools, these institutions can independently develop curricula that emphasize life skills, including technology, agribusiness, and entrepreneurship, without losing their Islamic identity. This research uses a qualitative method based on literature review, with relevant literature analysis. The research results show that pesantren are capable of creating outstanding students through the integration of religious and vocational education, thereby empowering the community, reducing unemployment, and improving the quality of life for the students. This research emphasizes the importance of collaboration between pesantren, vocational schools, and universities to strengthen the role of pesantren as centers of Islamic life skills-based education.

**Keywords:** *Pesantren, Vocational Education, Santri Competence*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Facing the globalization bomb that is occurring, all educational institutions must respond and adapt in responding to the challenges of globalization. This reality also requires every person to have an independent personality and be able to survive and compete in life. The results of research by the Central Statistics Agency in 2024 showed that the open unemployment rate in Indonesia was 4.82 percent (Central Statistics Agency, 2024). If we look at the number of people, of course the data above is not just a figment of the imagination, around 7.2 million people are still unemployed.

Additionally, the unemployment rate among Gen Z is concerning because, despite their reputation for innovation and technological adaptability, data shows that their TPT is higher than the national average, at 9.37%, or about 4.84 million people. The majority of unemployed Gen Z men are high school or trade school graduates who have a skills gap relative to industry demands. About 3.04% of Gen Z members are in the NEET category, which puts them in danger of being excluded from the labor market even if the majority of them are engaged in productive activities (Hanri & Sholihah, 2024).

Basically, someone with formal or informal education must already have an independent personality and the ability to compete in the workplace. However, the reality is different, because many school graduates are unemployed or have not found work. The surge in education graduates from all levels is the cause of high unemployment rates, even though job vacancies are relatively few and competition is tight (Rasyid et al., 2005). The lack of adequate graduate skills credentials is another factor (Anwar, 2016). This is due to the fact that educational institutions do not provide vocational skills training to graduates.

As traditional Islamic educational institutions that are deeply rooted in rural communities, Islamic boarding schools have an important role in shaping the character

and competence of students. An account of how Islamic boarding schools contribute to the economic development of rural communities through their agricultural model was given by Widodo (Widodo & Nugroho, 2014). To overcome the problem of unemployment in rural areas, it is believed that Islamic boarding schools will be able to produce students who are ready to start their own businesses. Dudi Badruzaman also provided an illustration that the boarding-based boarding school education system (dormitory/boarding) has great potential to be developed as a leader school as well as an entrepreneur school (Badruzaman, 2019).

Vocational education and training (Vocational Education and Training-VET) is a general term for vocational education. Bennett defines vocational education as all technical education programs offered by various government and private educational institutions, both in formal and informal settings, with the aim of assisting individuals in obtaining training and education based on the concept of lifelong learning (Hanafi, 2019).

From the explanation above, several Islamic boarding schools have begun to adapt to the current global discourse. This is part of the Islamic boarding school's efforts to address community needs regarding the quality of Islamic boarding school education graduates. In fact, it is not uncommon to find students when they graduate from Islamic boarding school education, they feel less creative and confused about what to do in the midst of social life, this is certainly a life problem that is not felt.

Of course, with problems that do not only focus on Islamic boarding school institutions, Islamic boarding schools are also always adaptive in selecting lessons for students regarding life skills, especially vocational skills. Of course, Islamic boarding schools know that the learning output at Islamic boarding schools does not only focus on the field of religion, but also on surviving the life as the students' bargaining power in social life (Saleh et al., 2024). Islamic boarding schools continually improve teaching and learning strategies, incorporate new techniques and technologies, and continue to maintain the good old traditions of keeping up with the progress of society.

This article will review how vocational education in Islamic boarding schools can create superior and Islamic students. Of course, this step is a strategy to prepare cadres who are competent, adaptive, and ready to face the challenges of the modern world of work, while still maintaining the noble values of Islamic boarding schools.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This research is qualitative research based on library research. An interpretive approach was taken in this research, with the aim of identifying explanations using material from the literature. Books, journals and scientific publications serve as sources of research data. To collect data, various literature related to the research topic was collected. In addition, the researcher surveyed the literature in line with the research theme before conducting the review to find out what was new in this research. The final step is to organize the data according to research systematics (Hamzah, 2019). Three steps were taken in the data analysis process. Data reduction is the first. To simplify and provide a clear picture when processing data, data reduction is carried out by summarizing, selecting the most important information, and looking for themes and patterns. Data presentation comes second. Third, verify the data.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Portrait of Islamic Boarding School Education after the enactment of Law Number 18 of 2019**

The unique (indigenous) Islamic educational institution in Indonesia is the Islamic boarding school. According to some scholars, Islamic boarding schools are simply Hindu-Buddhist educational institutions (padepokan) with an Islamic touch. The results of this transformation are not uniform but vary greatly in each part of the archipelago because they are the result of discussions with local customs. The Surau traditions in Sumatra and Dayah in Aceh, for example, deviate somewhat from the Javanese Langgar santri system (van Bruinessen, 1995).

This Islamic boarding school institution plays an increasingly large role in both the socio-political and educational fields as a result of the rapid growth of Islam in Indonesia. From the monarchy era to the struggle for independence, Islamic

boarding schools and figures in the early spread of Islam in Indonesia's provinces provided the impetus for social change and political opposition to colonial rule. Just a few examples of the important role played by Islamic boarding schools in the formation of the state and state are the struggle of Prince Diponegoro, the Banten peasant revolution, and the jihad resolution of November 1945.

The Islamic boarding school's achievement in making Islam the majority religion in the archipelago is the most interesting aspect of its role. It is widely acknowledged that this achievement is the result of a highly innovative Islamic approach combined with adherence to regional customs. Wayang and gending are examples of Wali Songo cultural efforts to spread Islam, which resulted in an Islam based on local or Muslim rather than local Islamic customs. Therefore, Islam is widely recognized throughout the archipelago.

After Islamic boarding schools experienced the commotion of their time, for centuries Islamic boarding schools have been recognized in the state consensus based on the presence of Law Number 18 of 2019 concerning Islamic Boarding Schools. Of course, the presence of this recognition brings fresh air to the Islamic boarding school in making improvements, from institutions to education. However, the presence of this Law does not eliminate the unique characteristics of Islamic boarding schools in relation to the Islamic boarding school's independence from external parties.

In the implementation of Islamic boarding school education, the Islamic Boarding School Law functions to serve the purposes of community empowerment, education and da'wah. Islamic boarding schools must also play a role in maintaining traditions, beliefs and customs, values and norms in the Republic of Indonesia, which are upheld by the management of educators and other education personnel as well as a quality control system. Islamic boarding schools are defined as educational institutions founded by individuals, foundations, Islamic community groups, and/or the community in accordance with Article 1 Paragraph (1) of the Islamic Boarding School Law. Through education, Islamic da'wah, exemplary behavior, and community empowerment within the framework of the Republic of Indonesia, Islamic boarding schools were established with the aim of cultivating noble morals and upholding the Islamic teachings of rahmatan lil'lamīn, which are reflected in attitudes of humility, tolerance, balance, moderation, and values. other nobles of the Indonesian nation (President of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019).

In article 1 paragraph 2, Islamic boarding school education is allowed to develop a curriculum in accordance with the characteristics of the Islamic boarding school which is based on the Yellow Book or Dirosah Islamiyah with a Muslim education pattern. In article 5 paragraph 1, it is clearly stated that Islamic boarding school institutions have 2 typologies. First, Islamic boarding schools that provide Islamic boarding school education in the form of studying the Yellow Book can be called Salafiah Islamic boarding schools. Second, Islamic boarding schools that provide Islamic boarding school education in an Islamic form with a Muslim education pattern can be called modern Islamic boarding schools or Islamic boarding schools. In article 27, proving that Islamic boarding schools are said to have their own characteristics is the existence of provisions regarding the Masyayikh Council in quality assurance. It is felt that the provisions of the articles governing the implementation of Islamic boarding school education as mentioned above bring benefits and benefits to the sustainability of Islamic boarding schools.

The state's recognition of Islamic boarding schools as legitimate national educational institutions is equal to other educational institutions, which is a challenge for Islamic boarding schools to compete with other educational institutions in producing a superior generation, according to Anam. This is one of the three advantages of regulations for the implementation of Islamic boarding school education. According to the Islamic Boarding School Law, one of the most important functions of Islamic boarding schools that has been carried out so far is community empowerment. Islamic boarding schools are centers for moderate Islamic preaching

(tawassuth), respecting local customs and fostering a sense of love for the Indonesian homeland (Anam, 2019).

With the enactment of the Islamic Boarding School Law, there are a number of benefits from its implementation, such as: 1) state recognition of Islamic boarding school graduates; 2) guarantee the uniqueness of Islamic boarding schools in creating da'wah to disseminate the teachings of the Islamic religion; and 3) opening up many opportunities for Islamic boarding schools to empower the community. Apart from the advantages, there are potential challenges in enforcing this Islamic boarding school law, which could cause the loss of the characteristics of Islamic boarding schools.

The above clearly explains that Islamic boarding schools are independently able to develop their learning curriculum without any intervention from the government. On the other hand, Islamic boarding schools have educational goals as stated in the 2003 National Education System Law and PMA No. 13 of 2014. In this case, Islamic boarding schools have a role in that not only religious education must be provided to their students, but lifelong education must also be provided as mandated in the National Education System Law. In the end, Islamic boarding schools will become educational institutions that integrate religious and general learning. In it, students not only learn the yellow book, but also various skills that can be applied in everyday life.

## **2. Vocational Education and Islamic Boarding Schools**

Studies regarding Islamic boarding schools and their relationship with vocational education can be grouped into at least 2 studies: first, vocational education efforts in Islamic boarding schools through vocational schools as the main object (A'isyah, 2017); second, the role of Islamic boarding schools in social/community empowerment (Fathoni & Rohim, 2019). From the two tendencies above, this article participates in the second group, namely an effort to empower the social community.

Islamic Boarding School Law No.18/2019, is a sign of increasing state support for Islamic boarding school institutions. According to Ghofarrizin, legal recognition of Islamic boarding schools and their roles can be interpreted as follows: (1) providing recognition, affirmation and assistance based on their uniqueness; (2) allowing Islamic boarding school graduates to pursue bachelor's degrees in various majors and have easy access to jobs like others; and (3) giving Islamic boarding schools a greater role in development in the fields of religion, education and community empowerment (Ghofarrozin & Janah, 2021).

Second, initiatives to improve the quality of students. In the perspective of recognizing the intellectual traditions of Islamic boarding schools, improving the quality of students is increasingly becoming stronger. Third, preserving characteristics rather than consistency. Fourth, preserving independence, not intervention. Law no. 18/2019 prohibits interference in Islamic boarding schools, including their governance and financial management, but does not reduce the autonomous nature of Islamic boarding schools. Fifth, preserving national commitment. Law No.18/2019 prohibits the rejection of national consensus in the name of religion, the indoctrination of terrorism, and the growth of intolerance in Islamic boarding schools.

Improving Islamic boarding school life skills is one way to help people achieve their full potential. To clarify the concept, vocational competence is a special type of skill that allows someone to work or realize a work. Slamet explained that there are at least four dimensions of vocational education, (1) cultivating human qualities, such as cognitive, physical and emotional abilities; (2) cultivating instrumental or functional qualities, such as proficiency in science, technology, arts, and sports; (3) strengthening national identity as an Indonesian nation; and (4) preserving global survival and progress (PH, 2012).

At least, the competencies targeted by Islamic boarding school educational institutions have three main characteristics, namely: pious personality, mastery of the yellow book, practical skills (language, being able to use technology, agriculture, plantations, animal husbandry and others). In Murtadlo's research, it was explained

that there are four types, namely: first, Islamic boarding schools which only focus on child piety; second, Islamic boarding schools which emphasize the two characters of piety and mastery of the book/reading the yellow book; third, Islamic boarding schools that produce piety and mastery of practical skills; fourth, students who have succeeded in mastering the three main characteristics of truth, book mastery, and practical skills (Murtadlo, 2020). In this discussion we will limit it to developing practical (read: vocational) skills only.

One of the interesting facts about the growth of vocational education in Islamic boarding schools is the opening of vocational education services or SMK in Islamic boarding schools, which is based on data on educational services provided at Islamic boarding schools. According to data, up to 19.53% of Islamic boarding schools offer vocational education services. This proportion is greater than the 16.14% of Islamic boarding schools that offer high school services (Mohsen et al., 2022). The results of a collaboration survey between Islamic boarding schools and vocational schools/MAK/universities in developing vocational education in Islamic boarding schools in relation to the economic empowerment of Islamic boarding schools and vocational development of students were 764 (11.36%) Islamic boarding schools reported that they had collaborated with universities or vocational schools. However, the majority of 5961 (88.78%) Islamic boarding schools said they had not responded to the question of whether they had collaborated with universities or vocational schools.

Kholilur Rahman explained that there are 4 advantages of vocational schools under Islamic boarding schools. The first is superior communication between government and society. Second, Kiai can provide opinions on teacher recruitment requirements, such as the requirement that they have experience with Islamic Boarding School and Nahdlatul Ulama organizations, with the exception of roles that are prohibited for Islamic Boarding School and NU human resources. Third, the diverse network of kiai in social life, which includes administrators of educational institutions, legislators and business owners. Fourth, social capital is a measure of everyday public trust (Rahman, 2018).

Is Islamic boarding school vocational education considered effective? Because Islamic boarding school graduates usually have good qualities such as independence (Murtadlo & Azizah, 2020), politeness, and solih, it can be claimed that they are successful to some extent, especially in soft skills. However, more testing is needed for practical skills, especially those related to economic endeavors. The creation of competent human resources with both hard and soft skills is the result of vocational education itself in the context of the fourth industrial revolution and Society 5.0. The advantages of the second revolution include digitalization, manufacturing optimization and customization, automation and adaptability, human-machine interaction, value-added services and business, independent data exchange and communication.

Islamic boarding school residents effectively map their daily food needs, which include rice, side dishes including tempeh, tofu, fish and chicken, as well as drinking water (glasses) and liters. Regarding food, the most important requirements that can be met by those developing vocational education, including Islamic boarding schools, are as follows: First, increasing relations and collaboration between the industrial sector and Islamic boarding schools. Second, compliance with and use of national education standards as procedural guidelines ensures the quality of vocational school teaching in Islamic boarding schools. Third, teachers at Islamic boarding schools must be proficient and understand the idea of vocational pedagogy.

### **3. Life Skills Education in Islamic Boarding Schools: Efforts to Build the Quality of Graduates**

So far, in the field of Islamic boarding school education, emphasis has been placed on the tafaquh fiddin aspect, and not mixing it with the needs of the future. The government's acceptance and support for Islamic boarding schools is demonstrated by Law no. 18 of 2019 concerning the confirmation of Islamic boarding schools. In areas such as recognition of the independence of Islamic boarding school

implementation, variations in the characteristics and implementation models of Islamic boarding schools, fulfillment of Islamic boarding school elements (arkanul ma'had) and recognition of Islamic boarding schools (ruhul ma'had) as conditions for establishment, and Islamic boarding school education as part of the implementation of national education, the law -Islamic boarding school laws are anticipated to meet the development, aspirations and legal needs of society (Ghofarrozin & Janah, 2021).

Furthermore, it is hoped that this law will become a legal basis to emphasize guarantees of the quality level of graduates, equal access to education for graduates, and equality in employment opportunities. In Islamic boarding school education, this also requires recognition of the credentials, skills and professionalism of teachers and other education personnel. In fact, the presence of this law aims to create a financial mechanism to ensure the availability and adequacy of budgets in establishing Islamic boarding schools, which is an effort to facilitate equal education (Mohsen et al., 2022).

The idea of life skills education in Islamic boarding schools is very important because it gives students the various abilities they need to face future needs. There are several key elements emphasized in the idea of life skills education in Islamic boarding schools. In Gustriani's research, it is explained that the output of Islamic boarding school graduates has self-awareness, self-esteem and self-actualization. Next, regarding the social skills aspect. Likewise with academic skills, they must be aware of critical thinking and able to solve problems. Lastly, students have vocational skills to prepare for the future (Gustriani et al., 2024).

The success of this life skills program is influenced by several supporting and inhibiting factors. Raharjo explained that the supporting factors that must be had are the high interest of students, adequate facilities, and the economy for implementing life skills education in Islamic boarding schools. On the contrary, there is still a lack of expert educators, a lack of interest, and a lack of recognition from society (Raharjo, 2024).

On the other hand, there are several Islamic boarding schools that can be said to have succeeded in translating life skills education into shaping the output of Islamic boarding school education graduates. For example, al-Muhajirin Islamic Boarding School 1 Bahrul Ulum Tambakberas Jombang (Hasab et al., 2023), Darul Hikam Islamic Boarding School Banjaran Bandung (Saepudin, 2016), Mamba'ul Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School Denanyar Jombang (Waslah & Sari, 2022), Tahfizh Wadil Quran Islamic Boarding School Tangerang (Amaliyah & Merdeka, 2024), and of course other Islamic boarding schools that integrate their learning with life skills education.

From the explanation above, it is clear that Islamic boarding schools have great potential in improving vocational skills. Of course, this is the unique thing about Islamic boarding schools being able to survive for centuries to use their own life values by adapting to the needs of the times and not only focusing on the institution but also empowering the quality of the santri graduates as much as possible.

It is clear from what has been said that Islamic boarding schools are experiencing a transition, especially with regard to the formation of value systems within them. Compared to the slow changes that Islamic boarding schools have experienced in the past, these developments and the difficulties they are currently facing are more intense. As a result, it can be claimed that Islamic boarding schools are currently at a very important turning point in their own history. Islamic boarding schools are faced with a number of choices, not all of which are positive. Islamic boarding schools must also experience significant qualitative changes, especially in their outlook on life. In fact, much progress has been made, especially as the main Islamic boarding schools are now working to achieve a balance between the values they have upheld and the new values that have greatly affected them due to the changes in political power that have occurred since the 1971 general election.

The capacity of Islamic boarding schools to preserve their subcultural identity is being tested (Wahid, 2001). Its ability to adapt to cultural shifts that are and will occur in society, at least without losing the values it has to date, remains a significant question. Of course it would be tragic if Islamic boarding schools had to experience a reversal of the values they have until now, considering the societal climate where the terms honesty, seriousness, obedience and simplicity experience a cynical reversal of interpretation.

## CONCLUSION

Islamic boarding schools have a strategic role in responding to the challenges of globalization, especially in empowering students through vocational education that is relevant to the needs of society and the modern world of work. Islamic Boarding School Law Number 18 of 2019 has provided a strong legal basis for Islamic boarding schools to develop education that integrates religious values and practical skills. Islamic boarding schools are now able to produce graduates who not only have pious personalities and mastery of the Yellow Book but also competitive vocational competencies, such as technology, agriculture and entrepreneurship.

Through vocational education, Islamic boarding schools contribute significantly to social empowerment, improving the quality of life, and preserving local traditions within the Indonesian framework. The life skills-based approach applied not only prepares students to face global challenges, but also strengthens national identity and life sustainability. However, Islamic boarding schools still face challenges in maintaining their institutional characteristics and independence, especially in the governance and management of education.

Collaboration between Islamic boarding schools and vocational education institutions, such as vocational schools and universities, is a strategic step that needs to be strengthened to maximize the potential of Islamic boarding schools as adaptive and inclusive education centers. In this way, Islamic boarding schools can continue to develop as educational institutions that not only produce an Islamic generation but are also independent, competent and ready to contribute to nation building.

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