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INTEGRATING ECONOMIC SELF-RELIANCE INTO ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT

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Abstract:

This research was conducted to analyze the influence of integrating economic independence into education management within the pesantren (Islamic boarding school) environment as an effort to strengthen its functions as an institution for education, da'wah, and community empowerment. Amidst the challenges of globalization, pesantrens are required not only to serve as centers for religious knowledge transmission (tafakkuh fiddin) but also to be adaptive to contemporary developments by transforming into social entities that drive a self-reliant Sharia economic movement. This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with library research method to examine the positive impacts and dissect the strategies for merging entrepreneurship curricula with productive business units. The results indicate that the integration of economic independence is implemented through three main pillars: the optimization of pesantren assets via business units (such as Kopontren/cooperatives, agriculture, livestock, services, and MSMEs), the development of an entrepreneurial spirit (santripreneur), and the utilization of digital technology within the pesantren financial ecosystem. The conclusion asserts that economic independence, when effectively integrated with pesantren education management, can reduce institutional reliance on external aid, enhance the quality of core educational facilities, and produce graduates who are economically independent without abandoning spiritual values.

Keywords: *Pesantren, Economic Independence, Santripreneur, Sharia Economics, Community Empowerment.*

INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools, commonly known as *pesantren*, represent the oldest and most distinctive Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia (Abdurrahman, 2025). Long before the country's independence, pesantren had established themselves as centers of Islamic learning, primarily dedicated to the study and transmission of religious knowledge (*tafaqquh fiddin*) (Sudarwan, 2025). Throughout history, these institutions have played a significant role in shaping the religious, moral, and social character of Indonesian Muslim communities. Beyond their educational function, pesantren have also served as centers of community development, social transformation, and cultural preservation. In the contemporary era, however, rapid globalization, technological advancement, and increasing economic complexity have created new challenges that require pesantren to expand their institutional capacity while maintaining their spiritual identity and educational mission (Sa'diyah et al., 2025).

The large number of students (*santri*) enrolled in pesantren across Indonesia constitutes a substantial social and economic resource that can contribute significantly to community empowerment (Rahman & Hasanah, 2025). Rather than functioning solely as recipients of religious education, santri possess considerable potential to become productive human capital capable of driving local economic development. This perspective aligns with the growing recognition that educational institutions should not only produce graduates with strong religious values but also equip them with practical competencies necessary for addressing contemporary socio-economic challenges. Consequently, pesantren have increasingly been encouraged to integrate economic empowerment into their educational systems without compromising their fundamental religious values (Khofsah, 2026).

Historically, economic self-reliance was not foreign to pesantren. Many *kyai* (Islamic scholars) and santri traditionally sustained their institutions through agricultural activities, livestock farming, handicrafts, and small-scale trading. These economic activities reflected the Islamic values of independence, hard work, and mutual cooperation while simultaneously supporting the operational sustainability of the institutions (Zain, 2026). Nevertheless, over time a dichotomous perception gradually emerged, separating religious education from economic activities. As a result, many pesantren became increasingly dependent on students' tuition fees, charitable donations, or government assistance to finance their educational operations. Such financial dependency often restricts institutional flexibility in determining educational policies, limits innovation, and reduces the autonomy necessary for sustainable institutional development (Novita, 2025).

The challenges facing pesantren have become more pronounced in the modern educational environment. Rising operational costs, increasing expectations for educational quality, infrastructure development, digital transformation, and technological integration require pesantren to secure more sustainable and diversified financial resources. Maintaining high educational standards while preserving affordable access for students presents a considerable financial challenge (Ni'am, 2025). Therefore, developing economically productive business units has emerged as a strategic approach for strengthening institutional resilience. Economic independence should not be interpreted as transforming pesantren into purely commercial organizations. Instead, it represents an effort to establish a stable financial foundation that enables pesantren to fulfill their educational, religious, and social missions more effectively and sustainably.

The integration of economic activities into pesantren management also offers important educational benefits (Sain, 2026). Business units established within pesantren function as "living laboratories" where santri can directly experience entrepreneurial practices, financial management, production processes, marketing strategies, and organizational leadership. Through experiential learning, students develop practical skills that complement their religious education and prepare them to contribute meaningfully to society after graduation. Entrepreneurship education within pesantren is therefore not merely oriented toward profit generation but also emphasizes ethical business conduct, social responsibility, Islamic values, and community welfare. Such an approach reflects the broader objectives of Islamic education, which seek to balance spiritual development with socio-economic empowerment.

This transformation is further supported by national policies promoting economic empowerment within Islamic educational institutions (Kamil, 2025)The Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs has introduced various initiatives encouraging pesantren to establish productive business enterprises as instruments for institutional sustainability and community development. These initiatives recognize pesantren as strategic partners in promoting inclusive economic growth, reducing poverty, strengthening local economies, and developing entrepreneurial competencies among Muslim youth. Consequently, pesantren are increasingly viewed not only as educational institutions but also as community-based economic actors capable of generating broader social and economic impacts. Despite the growing implementation of economic initiatives in many pesantren, previous studies have generally examined either educational management or entrepreneurial development separately (Abdullah, 2025). Limited scholarly attention has been devoted to understanding how economic independence can be systematically integrated into pesantren management as an inseparable component of the educational process. Existing research often focuses on the financial performance of business units or the effectiveness of entrepreneurship programs without comprehensively examining their contribution to institutional governance, educational quality, and long-term sustainability. This gap indicates the need for a more holistic framework that conceptualizes economic activities as strategic elements supporting both educational excellence and institutional resilience.

The novelty of this study lies in proposing an integrative model that systematically combines economic independence with pesantren educational management. Rather than viewing business units merely as supplementary income-generating activities, this model positions them as strategic educational instruments embedded within the institutional management system. By integrating entrepreneurial practices into the learning environment, pesantren can simultaneously strengthen financial sustainability, enhance students' competencies, and preserve their core religious mission. Such an integrative perspective contributes to the growing discourse on sustainable educational management within Islamic institutions while responding to contemporary economic realities (Hasanah, 2026). Therefore, this study aims to formulate an integrative model of economic independence within pesantren management and to analyze its implications for institutional sustainability without disrupting the primary religious curriculum. The findings are expected to provide both theoretical contributions to the literature on Islamic educational management and practical recommendations for policymakers, pesantren leaders, and other stakeholders seeking to strengthen the financial resilience and educational effectiveness of pesantren in the face of evolving socio-economic challenges.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach using a library research method. The focus of the study was on collecting digital-based information and data, such as review articles, scientific journals, and theses. The data sources used were secondary data, categorized into two categories: (1) Primary data sources, consisting of books and theses resulting from original research relevant to the topic of integrating economic independence in Islamic boarding school management. (2) Secondary data sources, consisting of review articles and other supporting published reports. Data collection techniques were conducted through digital documentation using the academic search engine Google Scholar and scientific journal databases. The researcher applied screening over the past five years to maintain the freshness of the information and strictly selected literature directly related to the focus problem. Data analysis techniques were carried out through data reduction stages to sort primary information, systematic extraction (data display), and logical conclusions to formulate a model of economic integration in Islamic boarding schools (Holidi et al., 2026).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to official data from the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag) regarding the implementation of the Islamic Boarding School Independence Roadmap, the number of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) entering the economic independence ecosystem has experienced a massive periodic surge through the Business Incubation Program. The government has allocated a total budget of IDR 499.55 billion for the 2021–2024 period to fund Islamic boarding schools. This program has successfully given birth to thousands of Islamic Boarding School-Owned Enterprises (BUMP) and Islamic boarding school cooperatives (Kopontren), as mapped in the following table.

Tahun	Jumlah Pesantren Baru	Akumulasi Pesantren Mandiri	Catatan Strategis & Alokasi Anggaran
2021	105 Pesantren	105 Pesantren	Tahap rintisan (pilot project) awal. Anggaran Rp37,45 miliar.
2022	504 Pesantren	609 Pesantren	Perluasan skema bantuan komitmen kemandirian. Tambahan dana Rp46 miliar.
2023	1.470 Pesantren	2.079 Pesantren	Akselerasi program secara masif nasional. Lonjakan anggaran Rp245,55 miliar.
2024	1.521 Pesantren	3.600 Pesantren	Target perluasan penguatan unit bisnis menembus milestone 3.600 pesantren.
2025-2026	586 Pesantren	4.186 Pesantren	Perluasan kuota berkala dengan 1.000+ unit berbadan hukum BUMP.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the integration of economic independence into pesantren educational management can be effectively implemented by positioning business units as an integral organizational subsystem rather than as separate commercial entities. This integrative model enables pesantren to strengthen institutional financial sustainability while preserving their primary mission as centers of Islamic education. Instead of reducing the compulsory hours allocated for religious instruction, the model incorporates entrepreneurial learning through co-curricular activities, extracurricular embedding, and the utilization of pesantren business units as living laboratories. Consequently, economic activities become complementary components of the educational process, allowing students (santri) to acquire practical competencies without compromising the quality of religious education.

The co-curricular approach integrates entrepreneurship education into learning activities that support the formal curriculum. Students are introduced to business ethics, financial literacy, organizational management, and leadership principles that are closely aligned with Islamic teachings. These competencies are reinforced through extracurricular programs, where santri participate in various entrepreneurial projects, cooperative management, and community service initiatives. Such an approach enables students to internalize entrepreneurial values while simultaneously strengthening their religious identity. Rather than treating entrepreneurship as an independent discipline, pesantren embed economic values within the broader framework of Islamic character education, emphasizing honesty (sidq), trustworthiness (amanah), discipline, responsibility, and social justice.

One of the most significant findings is the role of pesantren business units as living laboratories for experiential learning. Unlike conventional classroom instruction, these business units provide authentic environments where students directly apply theoretical knowledge to practical situations. Santri actively participate in managing retail stores, agricultural enterprises, food production, livestock businesses, digital services, and other productive economic activities operated by the pesantren. Through these experiences, students gain practical knowledge of business planning, financial management, inventory control, customer service, marketing strategies, and operational decision-making. More importantly, entrepreneurial activities are consistently guided by Islamic ethical principles, ensuring that commercial success remains inseparable from moral responsibility.

The living laboratory model also contributes to the development of soft skills that are increasingly required in contemporary society (Novita, 2026). Students learn teamwork, communication, problem-solving, innovation, leadership, adaptability, and strategic thinking through real organizational experiences. These competencies complement religious knowledge and enhance graduates' readiness to contribute to various sectors of society after completing their education. Consequently, pesantren become institutions that not only produce religious scholars but also cultivate socially responsible entrepreneurs capable of addressing economic challenges within their communities.

Another important finding concerns the adoption of digital technology as a strategic component of pesantren economic management. The rapid digital transformation affecting various economic sectors requires educational institutions to prepare students for an increasingly technology-driven environment (Rofik & Mudarris, 2024). Therefore, modern pesantren have begun integrating digital platforms into their business operations through electronic commerce, digital marketing, online financial administration, inventory management systems, and cashless payment mechanisms using student identification cards. These technological innovations improve operational efficiency while familiarizing students with digital business ecosystems that dominate contemporary markets.

The introduction of cyber literacy and digital entrepreneurship training further strengthens students' competitiveness in the digital economy. Cyber santri programs equip students with competencies in digital communication, cybersecurity awareness, content creation, online marketing, and information technology utilization. Such initiatives demonstrate that pesantren are capable of adapting to technological advancement without abandoning their religious values. Instead, technology is viewed as an instrument that supports educational quality, institutional transparency, and economic productivity while remaining consistent with Islamic ethical principles (Khomairotusshiyamah, 2026).

From a managerial perspective, the study reveals that successful implementation of economic independence depends heavily on the application of the classical management framework consisting of Planning, Organizing, Actuating, and Controlling (POAC). During the planning stage, pesantren conduct comprehensive assessments of local economic potential, institutional resources, community needs, and market opportunities before establishing business units. Strategic planning also includes feasibility studies, financial projections, human resource development, and risk assessment to ensure long-term sustainability (Saputra et al., 2026). This systematic planning process minimizes uncertainty and aligns business activities with the educational objectives of the institution.

The organizing function focuses on establishing clear organizational structures and governance mechanisms. Rather than assigning business management solely to religious leaders, operational responsibilities are delegated to professional managers, experienced alumni, or qualified personnel possessing relevant managerial expertise. This delegation promotes accountability, operational efficiency, and professional governance while allowing the kyai to maintain primary responsibility for spiritual leadership and institutional direction. Such separation of managerial and spiritual functions prevents conflicts of interest and ensures that economic activities remain subordinate to the pesantren's educational mission.

The actuating stage emphasizes leadership, motivation, coordination, and active participation among all institutional stakeholders (Razaq, 2026). Teachers, students, alumni, administrators, and surrounding communities collaborate in managing business activities according to their respective competencies. Student participation is carefully supervised to ensure that entrepreneurial involvement complements rather than interferes with academic responsibilities. This participatory management model strengthens institutional commitment, enhances organizational learning, and promotes collective ownership of pesantren development.

The controlling function constitutes another critical component of the management model. Regular financial reporting, internal audits, performance evaluations, and operational monitoring are conducted to ensure transparency and accountability. Financial statements are periodically reviewed to evaluate profitability, operational efficiency, and compliance with institutional objectives. Continuous evaluation also enables pesantren to identify potential business risks, respond to changing market conditions, and implement corrective actions before significant financial problems arise. Effective supervision therefore contributes substantially to institutional resilience and long-term economic sustainability.

The implementation of this integrative model generates substantial institutional impacts. The most significant transformation is the gradual shift from external funding dependency toward internal resource mobilization. Instead of relying primarily on student tuition, charitable donations, or government subsidies, pesantren increasingly generate independent financial resources through productive business activities. This transition enhances institutional autonomy by providing greater flexibility in determining educational priorities, infrastructure development, curriculum innovation, and strategic planning without excessive dependence on external stakeholders.

Financial independence also enables pesantren to improve educational quality while maintaining affordability for students. Revenue generated through business units supports teacher salaries, facility maintenance, utility expenses, technological infrastructure, scholarship programs, library development, laboratory equipment, and student welfare services. Consequently, pesantren can provide higher-quality educational facilities without imposing excessive financial burdens on students and their families. This achievement reflects the broader objective of sustainable educational management, in which economic productivity directly supports educational excellence rather than replacing it.

Beyond institutional sustainability, the model contributes significantly to community empowerment (Munif et al., 2021). Business units frequently establish partnerships with local farmers, micro-enterprises, cooperatives, and surrounding communities, creating broader economic networks that stimulate regional development. Alumni who acquire entrepreneurial competencies often establish independent businesses after graduation, thereby generating employment opportunities and strengthening local economies. The multiplier effect extends beyond the pesantren itself, demonstrating that economically independent educational institutions can function as catalysts for inclusive community development.

The study ultimately identifies three interrelated pillars underpinning the success of pesantren economic independence: the Business Pillar, the Santripreneur Pillar, and the Synergy Pillar. The Business Pillar focuses on developing productive enterprises capable of generating sustainable institutional income. The Santripreneur Pillar emphasizes entrepreneurship education that integrates practical skills with Islamic ethical values. The Synergy Pillar strengthens collaboration among pesantren leaders, students, alumni, government institutions, private sectors, and local communities to support sustainable development. The interaction among these three pillars gives rise to the concept of the Santri Tetrapreneur, representing graduates who possess balanced competencies in religious scholarship, entrepreneurial capability, ethical leadership, and social responsibility (Zamroni et al., 2022). Such graduates are expected not only to become knowledgeable Islamic scholars (alim) but also economically independent individuals (amil) capable of contributing to both religious development and national economic progress. This integrative framework therefore demonstrates that economic independence is not merely a financial strategy but a comprehensive educational transformation that reinforces the long-term sustainability, relevance, and societal contribution of pesantren in the twenty-first century.

CONCLUSION

The integrative model of economic independence in Islamic boarding school education management is a crucial strategy that successfully combines traditional Islamic boarding school values with modern business governance. This model demonstrates that achieving financial autonomy does not have to sacrifice the spiritual quality of students. Utilizing business units as "living laboratories" does not burden the main curriculum but rather enriches students' life skills without losing their Islamic boarding school identity. Professionally managed integration has proven effective in reducing the institution's dependence on external aid, ensuring the sustainability of educational funding, and making a tangible contribution to strengthening the economy of the surrounding community. The success of this integration model deserves optimization through internal, government, and community collaboration to become an effective blueprint for developing an Islamic boarding school-based sharia economy in Indonesia.

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