

Curriculum Management Based on Religious and Cultural Integration to Foster Santri Independence

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ABSTRACT

This study reconstructs a religion- and culture-integrated model of curriculum management at Al-Ishlahuddiny Islamic Boarding School in West Lombok, where Islamic values and reconstructed Sasak culture are managed as one educational system rather than as separate programs. The research used a qualitative intrinsic case study within a constructivist and interpretive paradigm. Data came from *pesantren* leaders, principals, teachers, dormitory supervisors, *santri*, alumni, parents, and community figures through in-depth interviews, participant observation, document analysis, and focus group discussions. Analysis followed the interactive model of open, axial, and selective coding, and trustworthiness was maintained through triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, reflexivity, and audit trails. The findings yielded three connected constructs. The Integrated Religious-Cultural Curriculum System functions as the value foundation, the Integrated Religious-Cultural Curriculum Management Cycle operates as a collaborative and adaptive management process, and the Integrated Religious-Cultural Transformation Outcomes place independent *santri* as the core result that links graduate quality, community trust, and institutional sustainability. Their synthesis forms the RICIS model, which treats curriculum as a living educational ecosystem. The model implies that Islamic institutions can modernize curriculum management and strengthen *santri* independence without eroding religious identity or local culture.

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INTRODUCTION

Pesantren occupy a strategic place in Indonesia's education system because they carry academic, religious, social, and cultural functions at once (Assa'idi, 2021). Education there does not happen only in classrooms. It runs through residential life, the example set by *keiai* and *ustaz*, the habituation of worship, *santri* organizations, and constant social interaction, so that the curriculum works as lived experience rather than a printed syllabus (Mujahid, 2021). Yet the same institutions now face globalization, digitalization, and sharpening educational competition, all of which demand stronger academic capacity, life skills, and adaptability without loosening religious identity or local culture (Hanafi et al., 2021). This is the tension the present study takes as its starting point: how a *pesantren* can modernize its curriculum management while keeping its value foundation intact. UNESCO (2021) frames the future of education around adaptation, sustainability, and shared identity, which makes the question timely well beyond the Indonesian case.

Recent scholarship on *pesantren* has converged on one insight: that value formation in these schools is environmental rather than instructional. Studies of character education

increasingly describe the *pesantren* not as a set of programs but as an ecology, and Ma'arif and Arif (2026) make this explicit by extending the learning-ecosystems framework and treating *pesantren* culture as a latent regenerative mechanism that sustains character over time. Nashuddin (2020) grounds the same idea in the Sasak context of Lombok, showing that Islamic values and local tradition are integrated through staged character formation rather than kept apart. Muhajir (2022) reaches a compatible conclusion from a different angle, showing that pluralism-oriented character education produces religiosity, independence, integrity, cooperation, and nationalism through the modern boarding-school curriculum rather than through isolated lessons. Ju'subaidi et al. (2024) push the argument toward transformation, finding that reflective engagement in *pesantren* life reshapes *santri* into more independent and responsible persons, while Assa'idi (2021) widens the lens by linking *pesantren* development to the social standing and role of *santri* in society. Read together, these works establish that culture, character, and institutional life are deeply entangled in the *pesantren*.

The entanglement, however, is where the literature stops. Existing studies treat cultural integration, character formation, entrepreneurship, or life skills largely as separate dimensions (Hanif et al., 2023), and even the strongest ecosystem-oriented and transformation-oriented work anchors itself in character outcomes rather than in the management process that produces them (Ma'arif & Arif, 2026; Ju'subaidi et al., 2024). What remains unexamined is how Islamic values and reconstructed local culture are governed together as one curriculum-management system, and how that system connects to the multidimensional independence of *santri* and, beyond the individual, to institutional sustainability. The gap is therefore not a shortage of studies on *pesantren* character, which are abundant, but the absence of a model that binds value foundation, management cycle, living curriculum, and transformation outcomes into a single explanatory chain. This study addresses that gap by reconstructing such a model from a single information-rich case.

The purpose of this research is threefold. It analyzes the concept of curriculum management built on religious and cultural integration at Al-Ishlahuddiny Islamic Boarding School in West Lombok, examines how the management functions are carried out in practice, and traces the implications of that process for *santri* independence and institutional sustainability. In doing so, the study extends the ecosystem perspective from character formation toward curriculum management, and it moves the concept of *santri* independence beyond its usual confinement to life skills or economic self-reliance. The relevance is both academic and practical. Academically, it offers a management-level theory of value-integrated curriculum; practically, it gives *pesantren* and comparable Islamic institutions a workable way to modernize without eroding identity.

The central argument examined here is that the systematic integration of Islamic values and reconstructed Sasak culture, governed through a collaborative management cycle and enacted as a living curriculum, generates holistic *santri* independence, which in turn strengthens graduate quality, community trust, and institutional continuity. Rather than test this claim statistically, the study explores it in depth, seeking to understand the mechanisms through which values move from documents into daily conduct and, ultimately, into institutional outcomes. Al-Ishlahuddiny was chosen because it operates a 24-hour educational environment that fuses formal and *diniyah* learning, worship, residence, organization, entrepreneurship, and Sasak cultural practice, which makes the integration visible in a way few sites allow. The section that follows sets out the qualitative case-study method used to investigate it.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach within a constructivist-interpretive paradigm using an intrinsic case-study design (Stake, 1995; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This design was chosen because the research sought an in-depth understanding of the distinctive

way Al-Ishlahuddiny Islamic Boarding School integrates Islamic values and local Sasak culture into curriculum management, rather than statistical generalization (Yin, 2018). The study took place in a natural setting, with no manipulation of educational activities. The researcher acted as the human instrument in an observer-as-participant role, present to observe, interview, interpret, and verify data without taking part in *pesantren* managerial decisions. Fieldwork ran across five stages: pre-field preparation, orientation, data collection, verification, and withdrawal. Informants were selected purposively and then expanded through snowball sampling (Campbell et al., 2020), and they included the *pesantren* caretaker, institutional leaders, school principals, vice principals for curriculum, teachers, *ustaz*, *musyrif*, *santri* organization administrators, *santri*, alumni, parents, and community figures.

Data were gathered through four complementary techniques so that findings could be cross-checked rather than rest on a single source. Primary data came from semi-structured in-depth interviews, participant observation, field notes, and focus group discussions (FGDs), while secondary data were drawn from curriculum documents, vision and mission statements, organizational structures, academic guidelines, standard operating procedures, work programs, evaluation reports, meeting minutes, supervision documents, institutional archives, alumni records, photographs, and activity documentation. Interviews used probing questions to deepen informants' experiences and perspectives; observation covered formal and *diniyah* learning, residential life, religious activities, Qur'an memorization, *santri* organizations, entrepreneurship, supervision, evaluation, and cultural interaction within the *pesantren* environment; document analysis examined the consistency between written policy and actual practice; and FGDs served as a confirmation technique for shared perceptions about religious-cultural integration, the implementation of curriculum management, enabling and constraining factors, and implications for *santri* independence. Informant selection followed the three research focuses, with managerial informants informing the concept and implementation, and *santri*, alumni, parents, and community figures informing the impacts and dimensions of independence, as mapped in Table 1. Data collection proceeded cyclically until saturation and information redundancy were reached (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

Table 1. Mapping of Informants and Data Sources to the Research Focuses

Research Focus	Primary Informants	Main Data Techniques	Supporting Documents
Concept of religious-cultural integrated curriculum management (IRCCS)	<i>Pesantren</i> caretaker, institutional leaders, vice principals for curriculum	In-depth interviews, FGD	Curriculum documents, vision and mission statements, academic guidelines
Implementation of curriculum-management functions (IRCCMC)	School principals, teachers, <i>ustaz</i> , <i>musyrif</i> , <i>santri</i> organization administrators	Participant observation, interviews, document analysis	Work programs, SOPs, meeting minutes, supervision and evaluation reports
Implications for <i>santri</i> independence and institutional sustainability (IRCTO)	<i>Santri</i> , alumni, parents, community figures	Interviews, FGD, observation	Alumni records, institutional archives, activity and community-service documentation

Data analysis followed the interactive framework of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, moving through data collection, open coding, axial coding, selective coding, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing with verification (Miles et al., 2020). Analysis was conducted both within each research focus and across focuses, so that relationships among categories could be developed into substantive propositions and, ultimately, a conceptual model, a process aided by iterative reflection on the coded material (Dahal, 2025). Trustworthiness was maintained against the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Ahmed, 2024) through triangulation of source, technique, and time, together with member checking, prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer debriefing, audit trails, and a reflexive

journal, as summarized in Table 2. Member checking in particular returned interpretations to informants for confirmation and refinement (Kullman et al., 2025). Bias arising from the researcher's proximity to the institution was managed through bracketing, neutral interview questions, the separation of personal opinion from empirical evidence, and verification of interpretations with informants.

Table 2. Trustworthiness Criteria and Techniques

Criterion	Techniques Applied
Credibility	Source, technique, and time triangulation; member checking; prolonged engagement; persistent observation; peer debriefing
Transferability	Thick description of the <i>pesantren</i> context and educational practices
Dependability	Audit trail of the research process and coding decisions
Confirmability	Reflexive journal; bracketing; verification of interpretations with informants

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

The Integrated Religious-Cultural Curriculum System as the Value Foundation of the Curriculum

At Al-Ishlahuddiny, the curriculum is not treated as an administrative document that lists subjects and hours. It operates as a value system that shapes every educational decision, from what is taught in the classroom to how *santri* live, worship, and relate to one another in the dormitory. This distinction matters because it repositions the curriculum from a technical artifact into the interpretive foundation of the whole institution. The findings show that this foundation rests on the integration of *pesantren* educational philosophy, Islamic values, reconstructed local Sasak culture, a living curriculum, and an explicit orientation toward independent *santri*. Islamic values supply the normative core, among them *tawhid*, *amanah*, *shura*, *ta'awun*, *ukhuwah*, *ihsan*, *istiqamah*, and *ikhlas*. These values are not delivered as abstract doctrine but internalized through classroom learning, daily habituation, the exemplary conduct of *kiai* and *ustaz*, residential life, *santri* organizations, and community service, so that the same values recur across every setting a *santri* passes through in a day.

What distinguishes this case is how local Sasak culture enters this system. Culture is neither rejected as un-Islamic nor absorbed uncritically as inherited tradition; instead, it is filtered. The findings reveal a consistent mechanism of selection, reinterpretation, reconstruction, and internalization, applied according to compatibility with Islamic law. The *besiru* tradition of collective labor is reconstructed as a lived practice of *ta'awun* and shared responsibility; *reme* is read as a form of deliberation; *sama-sama* is strengthened into an idiom of *ukhuwah* and solidarity; and *rudat* is retained as a medium of Islamic propagation and cultural identity. Each surviving practice earns its place by carrying an Islamic meaning that the institution can defend. This is the crux of the integration: religion sets the boundaries and the direction, while culture supplies the familiar social forms through which those boundaries become livable and concrete rather than imported and strange.

Read together, these patterns constitute the first construct, the Integrated Religious-Cultural Curriculum System (IRCCS). Five components hold it together: a Philosophical Foundation, Islamic Core Values, Reconstructed Sasak Cultural Values, an Integrated Living Curriculum, and an Independent *Santri* Orientation. IRCCS is best understood as the layer beneath everything else, the logic that governs planning, governance, implementation, evaluation, and development alike. Its significance is that religious-cultural integration ceases to be a matter of adding a few culturally themed lessons to a standard syllabus. Integration becomes the underlying grammar of *pesantren* education itself, present before any single program is designed and carried through into how each program is later judged.

The Integrated Religious-Cultural Curriculum Management Cycle as the Management Process

If IRCCS explains the values that anchor the curriculum, the second focus reveals how those values are actually managed, and the finding here is that management works as a cycle rather than a straight line. Planning does not begin with a document handed down from above. It begins with deliberation, drawing in the *pesantren* leadership, the foundation, school principals, teachers, dormitory supervisors, *santri* organizations, and other stakeholders, and it weighs academic requirements alongside the institutional vision, Islamic values, Sasak culture, the needs of *santri*, and the expectations of the surrounding community. Organization then follows through the allocation of tasks and coordination across units, deliberately arranged so that formal schooling, *diniyah* education, residential programs, organizations, and *santri* development efforts pull toward shared objectives instead of running as parallel and disconnected tracks.

The center of gravity in this cycle is the living curriculum, and it is what gives the case its distinctive character. Implementation unfolds as a continuous 24-hour experience in which formal and *diniyah* learning are inseparable from the habituation of worship, residential life, participation in *santri* organizations, leadership roles, entrepreneurship, and community service. In this arrangement, a value such as *amanah* or *ta'awun* is not merely explained in a lesson and then set aside. It is practiced in the dormitory, tested in organizational work, and re-encountered in service to the community, so that the boundary between "learning a value" and "living it" effectively dissolves. Monitoring and evaluation extend this same logic. Supervision integrates the academic and the *pesantren* dimensions, and evaluation meetings, program reflection, discipline reviews, and follow-up actions reach well beyond examination results. The indicators that count include spiritual, moral, social, cultural, leadership, and life-skills development, which means the institution measures the very qualities its value foundation claims to cultivate.

These interlocking practices form the second construct, the Integrated Religious-Cultural Curriculum Management Cycle (IRCCMC), which is composed of Collaborative Curriculum Planning, Integrated Curriculum Governance, Integrated Living Curriculum Implementation, Integrated Academic and *Pesantren* Supervision, Continuous Curriculum Improvement, and Adaptive Curriculum Strengthening Strategy. What binds these six elements is feedback. Evaluation does not close a process; it opens the next one, feeding into program adjustment, capacity building, and further curriculum development in the following cycle. The management process is therefore self-renewing by design, and it is this recursive quality, rather than any single planning step, that allows the value foundation set out in IRCCS to be sustained and continually re-enacted rather than stated once and left to erode.

Transformation Outcomes and the Centrality of Santri Independence

The third focus turns to what the process produces, and the core outcome is *santri* independence, understood here not as a single trait but as a set of capacities that develop across several dimensions at once. Independence appears in spiritual, intellectual-academic, emotional-social, cultural, economic and life-skills, and leadership-organizational forms, and the findings show each taking shape through a different part of the *pesantren* experience. Spiritual independence surfaces as the capacity to manage one's own worship, sustain discipline, carry moral responsibility, and make decisions grounded in values. Intellectual independence shows in the ability to learn, reason critically, solve problems, and connect knowledge to life. Emotional and social independence is forged in the friction and cooperation of collective living, through habituation, empathy, deliberation, and the everyday work of resolving conflict. Economic and leadership independence grows out of skills programs, entrepreneurship, the running of organizations, and direct experience of leading activities. The pattern is cumulative: no single subject produces an independent *santri*; independence is the sediment left by an integrated body of experience.

The findings then show that this transformation does not stop at the individual level. Evidence drawn from alumni records, new student enrollment, partnerships, accreditation

documents, and community-service activity indicates that the formation of independent *santri* is bound up with three institutional-level outcomes: Graduate Quality, Community Trust, and Institutional Sustainability. Graduate quality is read broadly, as the fusion of academic and religious competence with character, leadership, life skills, and adaptability. When graduates prove able to contribute to the life of their communities, the confidence of parents, alumni, and the wider public in the *pesantren* deepens, and that trust in turn underwrites partnerships, innovation, organizational stability, and the institution's capacity to endure. A chain thus runs from the individual *santri* outward to the standing and survival of the institution itself.

Taken together, these findings form the third construct, the Integrated Religious-Cultural Transformation Outcomes (IRCTO), which set Independent *Santri*, Graduate Quality, Community Trust, and Institutional Sustainability within one connected sequence. The wider implication is a reframing of what it means for a curriculum to succeed. Success cannot be captured by academic scores or the completion of prescribed content alone. It has to be judged by the transformation of the learner and by the social and institutional effects that follow from it. IRCTO makes that shift explicit, and in doing so it links the value foundation of IRCCS and the management process of IRCCMC to a demonstrable outcome, closing the loop between what the *pesantren* believes, how it operates, and what it ultimately produces.

Table 3. Synthesis of Findings toward the RICIS Model

Focus	Construct	Function	Main Findings
Concept	IRCCS	Foundation system	Islamic core values, reconstructed Sasak culture, a living curriculum, and an orientation toward independent <i>santri</i> .
Implementation	IRCCMC	Management process	Collaborative planning, integrated governance, living curriculum implementation, integrated supervision, continuous improvement, and adaptive strengthening.
Implications	IRCTO	Transformation outcomes	Independent <i>santri</i> , graduate quality, community trust, and institutional sustainability.

Discussion

The first research focus reframes curriculum management from an administrative activity into a value system. Curriculum is classically understood as the interrelation of objectives, content, learning experiences, organization, and evaluation (Beauchamp, 1981). The Al-Ishlahuddiny case shows that these components do not arrange themselves; they are governed by a religious-cultural foundation that functions as a value architecture. This supports the argument of Schein and Schein (2021) that basic underlying assumptions shape organizational culture and behavior, but it also pushes that idea further, because at Al-Ishlahuddiny values are not merely an implicit cultural residue. They are made explicit and deliberately installed as the design logic of the curriculum itself, much as the example set by respected figures gives value orientation a concrete form that learners can follow (Zubaidi & Zerrouki, 2024). Fatahillah et al. (2023) identified a synergy among *pesantren*, local wisdom, and Islamic values in strengthening identity; this study advances that observation by reconstructing the synergy as IRCCS, a foundation system that governs the entire curriculum-management cycle rather than a supporting influence on identity alone (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018).

The way Sasak culture is handled shows that integration here is not syncretism. Cultural practices are retained only insofar as they can be reinterpreted and directed toward Islamic values, which means tradition is admitted through a normative filter rather than accepted wholesale (Nashuddin, 2020). This intersects with culturally responsive education, which treats learners' cultural contexts as legitimate sources of educational meaning (Gay, 2018), yet it adds a distinctly Islamic dimension through a process of cultural selection that culturally responsive theory does not itself specify. Mujahid (2021) describes a comparable

logic, where good tradition is preserved and better alternatives are adopted so that local practice is disciplined by orthodox teaching. Muhajir (2022) found that pluralism-oriented character education in *pesantren* encompasses religiosity, independence, integrity, mutual cooperation, and nationalism, while Kejora et al. (2025) showed that local wisdom can interact with Islamic values within an eco-*pesantren* model. The present findings confirm the value of local culture but relocate it, moving it out of discrete character or environmental programs and into a value architecture that steers objectives, governance, learning, habituation, and evaluation together.

The second focus demonstrates that curriculum management operates as a cycle, not a linear sequence. Collaborative planning draws on deliberation and stakeholder participation to align institutional vision, *santri* needs, community needs, and religious-cultural values, and integrated governance then keeps formal learning, *diniyah* education, residential guidance, *santri* organizations, and development programs from running as separate silos. This is consistent with the view that educational quality in *pesantren* depends on flexible change management and institutional coordination (Arif et al., 2024), and it extends Hanif et al. (2023), who showed that comprehensive management functions can support *pesantren* social entrepreneurship. It also aligns with Fauzi and Sudin (2025), who found that character-oriented curricula work best when religious and general systems are integrated rather than kept parallel. Where their work ties management to a particular program, this study shows management functions binding the entire curriculum ecosystem together through IRCCMC, so that coordination is not a feature of one initiative but the operating principle of the institution as a whole.

Within that cycle, the living curriculum is the mechanism that carries values from documents into conduct. Formal and *diniyah* learning at Al-Ishlahuddiny never stand alone, because they are immediately extended by residential experience, the habituation of worship, social interaction, organizational work, entrepreneurship, and community service, producing continuous and authentic learning situations. This holistic patterning of experience echoes Puspitarini et al. (2023), who characterize the *pesantren* as a humanistic environment that forms character across the whole of institutional life. Kusumawati (2024) stresses integrating the *pesantren* curriculum with the national curriculum, and Achmad et al. (2025) demonstrate the effectiveness of *pesantren*-based programs in building life skills; this study extends both by treating integration as a 24-hour institutional experience rather than a curricular alignment or a bounded program. Monitoring and evaluation acquire a correspondingly broader meaning, reaching beyond content mastery to spiritual, moral, social, cultural, leadership, and life-skills indicators, and feeding back into continuous improvement and adaptive strengthening. This resonates with continuous improvement and the learning organization, and with UNESCO's (2021) placing of adaptation and lifelong learning at the center of the future of education, yet the case adds a crucial qualification: adaptation does not dilute identity, because curriculum renewal remains governed by the value foundation, allowing the institution to absorb change in technology, knowledge, and community needs without eroding its character (Hanafi et al., 2021).

The third focus broadens the concept of *santri* independence from its usual anchoring in life skills or economic self-reliance into a multidimensional construct. Raharjo (2024) linked life-skills education to *santri* independence and adaptability, and Achmad et al. (2025) reported strengthened discipline and leadership through *pesantren* programs; this study confirms both while extending independence across spiritual, intellectual-academic, emotional-social, cultural, economic, and leadership-organizational dimensions, none of which is the product of a single subject. Independence, on this reading, is the accumulated effect of an integrated body of experience, which is why Independent *Santri* is better understood as a transformational outcome of the curriculum ecosystem than as the output of any one program. Ju'subaidi et al. (2024) support this reading, finding that reflective engagement across *pesantren* life transforms *santri* into more independent and responsible persons rather than merely transferring doctrinal knowledge. The chain does not stop at the

individual. Assa'idi (2021) connects *pesantren* development with the social role of *santri*, and Budiharso et al. (2023) show how the *pesantren* system has repeatedly transformed itself to sustain that social role across historical periods; here *santri* independence is linked to Graduate Quality, which strengthens Community Trust and, in turn, underwrites Institutional Sustainability. Documentary evidence on alumni, enrollment, partnerships, accreditation, and community service shows a consistent pattern, so that IRCTO extends outcome-based education beyond individual competence toward social and institutional impact.

The synthesis of IRCCS, IRCCMC, and IRCTO produces the RICIS Model, and the specific contribution of this study lies precisely in that synthesis rather than in any of its parts. The model operates through an Input–Process–Output–Outcome framework with a feedback loop and continuous improvement: IRCCS supplies the philosophical and value foundation, IRCCMC translates that foundation into management processes, the living curriculum serves as the central internalization mechanism, and IRCTO describes transformation at the individual, social, and institutional levels. The contribution is therefore theoretical and practical at once. Theoretically, RICIS reconstructs Islamic curriculum management, moving it from an administrative orientation toward an integrative and transformational one in which curriculum is a living educational ecosystem governed by religious and cultural values rather than a document to be delivered. This is the study's strongest and most distinctive claim to novelty, and it is a firmer footing than a generic appeal to transformational learning, because the transformation demonstrated here is systemic and institutional, not only a change in individual perspective (Ju'subaidi et al., 2024). Practically, the model is most relevant to *pesantren*, residential madrasas, integrated Islamic schools, and community-based institutions whose educational ecosystems extend beyond the classroom, and its transferability is conceptual rather than mechanical: the core components can be retained while local cultural forms, programs, governance structures, and indicators of independence are adapted to each institution, provided that technology is positioned as a support for relationships, habituation, and exemplary conduct rather than a substitute for them (Sutiah & Nasir, 2025; Sutiah, 2025). The interrelation among these constructs is presented as a synthesis of the study's findings in Figure 1.

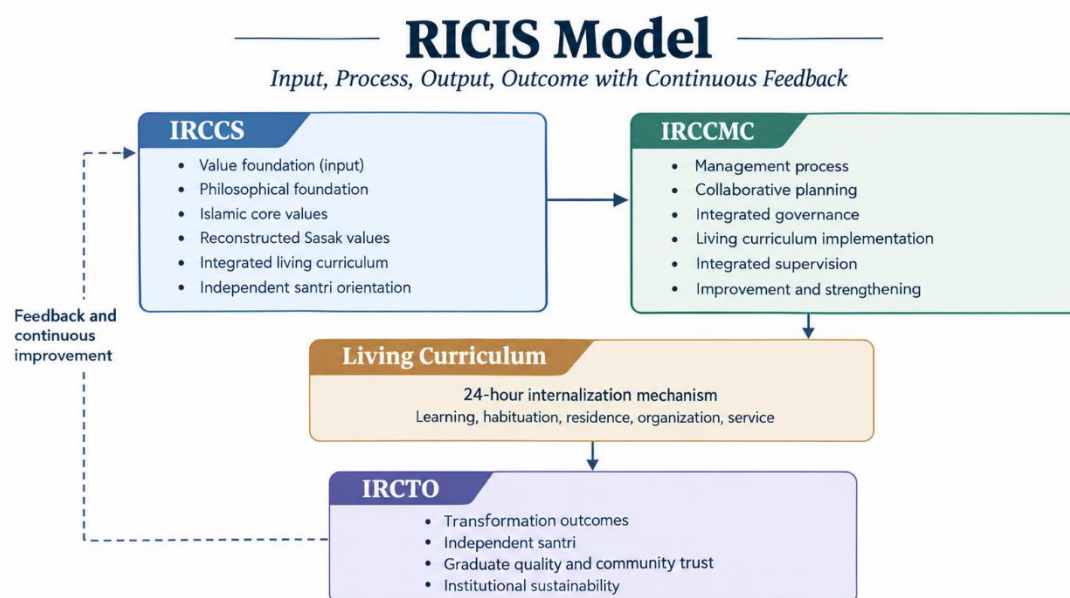


Figure 1. The RICIS Model: A Religious-Cultural Integrated Curriculum System as a Living Educational Ecosystem.

CONCLUSION

This study reconstructed a religion and culture integrated model of curriculum

management at Al-Ishlahuddiny Islamic Boarding School, yet its conclusions should be read against several limitations. The design rests on a single intrinsic case, so the findings describe one information-rich institution rather than a pattern that can be generalized statistically to other *pesantren*. The researcher's proximity to the setting, though managed through bracketing, triangulation, and member checking, remains a source of interpretive bias that no qualitative safeguard fully removes. The account also draws on data gathered within one fieldwork period, which captures the curriculum as a living process at a particular moment rather than across its longer development. Future research could test the transferability of the RICIS model through multi-site or comparative case studies across *pesantren* with different cultural bases, and could complement it with longitudinal work that follows *santri* and alumni over time. Mixed-methods or quantitative designs would also help examine the empirical strength of the relationships among the value foundation, the management cycle, and the transformation outcomes proposed here.

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