

Islamic Boarding Schools and the Transformation of Religious Education Quality in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT: *Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) have historically served as the cornerstone of religious education in Indonesia, yet their capacity to enhance educational quality amid globalization and technological advancement remains insufficiently examined. This study investigates the role of pesantren in improving the quality of religious education through the lens of Islamic education transformation. Employing a qualitative approach with a multiple case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 24 informants (six kiai/pesantren leaders, six senior ustadz, six curriculum coordinators, and six senior santri), participatory observation, and document analysis across six pesantren in Java and Sumatra representing traditional (salafiyah), modern (khalafiyah), and integrated typologies. The findings reveal three principal dimensions of transformation: first, curriculum integration that harmonizes classical Islamic texts (kitab kuning) with contemporary scientific and vocational competencies; second, pedagogical modernization through the adoption of student-centered learning methods and digital technology while preserving the core values of character formation (tarbiyah); and third, institutional governance reform characterized by strategic leadership of kiai, quality assurance mechanisms, and community-based partnerships. The study concludes that pesantren that successfully balance the preservation of traditional religious identity with adaptive innovation (al-muhafazhah 'ala al-qadim al-shalih wa al-akhdu bi al-jadid al-ashlah) are associated, in informants' accounts, with enhanced educational outcomes. These findings contribute to the theoretical discourse on Islamic education management by proposing a triadic transformation model and offer practical implications for policymakers and pesantren administrators seeking to strengthen religious education quality in Indonesia.*

Keywords: *Islamic boarding school; pesantren transformation; religious education quality; Islamic education management; curriculum integration*

ABSTRAK: Pondok pesantren secara historis telah menjadi pilar utama pendidikan agama di Indonesia, namun kapasitasnya dalam meningkatkan mutu pendidikan di tengah globalisasi dan kemajuan teknologi belum dikaji secara memadai. Penelitian ini mengkaji peran pesantren dalam meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan agama melalui perspektif transformasi pendidikan Islam. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus ganda, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan 24 informan, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis dokumen di enam pesantren di Jawa dan Sumatera yang mewakili tipologi tradisional (salafiyah), modern

(khalafiyah), dan terintegrasi. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan tiga dimensi utama transformasi: pertama, integrasi kurikulum yang mengharmonisasikan kitab kuning dengan kompetensi ilmiah dan vokasional kontemporer; kedua, modernisasi pedagogis melalui adopsi metode pembelajaran berpusat pada santri dan teknologi digital dengan tetap menjaga nilai-nilai inti pembentukan karakter (tarbiyah); dan ketiga, reformasi tata kelola kelembagaan yang ditandai oleh kepemimpinan strategis kiai, mekanisme penjaminan mutu, dan kemitraan berbasis masyarakat. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa pesantren yang berhasil menyeimbangkan pelestarian identitas keagamaan tradisional dengan inovasi adaptif menunjukkan peningkatan hasil pendidikan secara signifikan. Temuan ini berkontribusi pada diskursus teoretis manajemen pendidikan Islam dengan mengusulkan model transformasi triadik dan menawarkan implikasi praktis bagi pemangku kebijakan dan pengelola pesantren.

Keywords: Islamic boarding school; pesantren transformation; religious education quality; Islamic education management; curriculum integration

I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, home to approximately 242–245 million Muslims constituting roughly 87% of the national population (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2024), possesses the largest Muslim community globally. Within this vast Islamic landscape, pesantren Islamic boarding schools—occupy a uniquely pivotal position as institutions that have shaped the nation’s religious, moral, and intellectual fabric for centuries. According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs (2024), Indonesia currently hosts over 26,000 pesantren educating approximately 4.08 million santri (students) across the archipelago. These institutions serve not merely as centers of religious instruction but as comprehensive ecosystems for character formation (tarbiyah), community empowerment, and cultural preservation (Isbah, 2020; Sulhan & Hakim, 2023). However, the accelerating forces of globalization, the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and the post-pandemic educational paradigm shift have posed unprecedented challenges to the quality and relevance of religious education delivered within pesantren settings (Wasehudin et al., 2023; Suwahyu, 2024). The tension between preserving authentic Islamic educational traditions and responding to contemporary demands for competency-based, technology-enhanced learning has become a critical issue warranting rigorous scholarly examination.

Existing scholarship on pesantren transformation has grown substantially over the past decade. Research by Hadi (2022) documented the formalization challenges facing traditional pesantren systems when confronting national education standards. Similarly, studies by Muhammad Hifdil Islam and Aziz (2020) explored the preservation of good character through pesantren transformation, while Wasehudin et al. (2023) investigated the integration of the Merdeka Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) within pesantren contexts. A systematic literature network analysis by Mulyana (2025) examining Scopus-indexed publications from 2007 to 2025 confirmed a significant surge in pesantren-related research, particularly regarding the shift from sorogan-based pedagogy to digital learning modalities. Furthermore, recent investigations have addressed specific dimensions including servant leadership in pesantren (Helmi & Sari, 2021), sharia-based entrepreneurship education (Ghafar, 2023), and banking synergies for infrastructure development (Wahid et al., 2026). Despite this expanding body of literature, a critical gap persists: most studies have adopted single-case or single dimension approaches,

examining either curriculum reform, leadership, or technology adoption in isolation. There remains an insufficiency of integrative, multi-case research that holistically examines how pesantren simultaneously navigate curriculum integration, pedagogical modernization, and governance reform to enhance educational quality.

The purpose of this study is to address this scholarly gap by investigating the multidimensional role of pesantren in enhancing the quality of religious education in Indonesia through a comprehensive transformation perspective. Specifically, this research aims to: (1) analyze how pesantren integrate traditional Islamic curricula with contemporary educational content to improve learning outcomes; (2) examine the pedagogical modernization strategies employed by pesantren while maintaining their core identity of character formation; and (3) explore the institutional governance mechanisms that facilitate or hinder educational quality enhancement. This focus distinguishes the present study from existing literature by adopting a triadic analytical framework that simultaneously addresses curriculum, pedagogy, and governance three interconnected dimensions that have rarely been examined collectively in previous research on pesantren transformation.

This study advances the argument that pesantren educational quality enhancement is contingent upon the synergistic interaction of three transformative dimensions curriculum integration, pedagogical modernization, and institutional governance reform rather than any single factor operating in isolation. Drawing upon the classical pesantren principle of *al-muhafazhah 'ala al-qadim al-shalih wa al-akhdzu bi al-jadid al-ashlah* (preserving good old traditions while adopting better new ones), we contend that pesantren that strategically operationalize this principle across all three dimensions demonstrate measurably superior educational outcomes compared to those that pursue transformation in a fragmented manner. Furthermore, we argue that the *kiai's* transformative leadership serves as the critical catalytic factor that enables the coherent integration of these three dimensions. This proposition is examined through empirical evidence drawn from six pesantren representing diverse institutional typologies.

The significance of this investigation is further underscored by the Indonesian government's formal recognition of pesantren through Law Number 18 of 2019 concerning Pesantren (*Undang-Undang Pesantren*), which legally affirms pesantren as an integral component of the national education system with distinctive characteristics. This legislation, coupled with the Ministry of Religious Affairs' ongoing policy initiatives including the Child-Friendly Pesantren Program (*Pesantren Ramah Anak*) and the acceleration of pesantren human resource development (Kemenag, 2024), creates both opportunities and expectations for pesantren to enhance their educational quality while preserving their unique identity. The interplay between these regulatory frameworks and the internal transformation dynamics of pesantren constitutes a fertile area for scholarly inquiry that this study seeks to illuminate.

The reminder of this article is organized as follows. The method section elaborates on the qualitative multiple case study design, describing the selection criteria for the six participating pesantren, the data collection instruments, and the analytical procedures employed. The results section presents empirical findings organized around the three dimensions of transformation: curriculum integration, pedagogical modernization, and institutional governance. The discussion

section interprets these findings in relation to existing theoretical frameworks and empirical studies, proposes a triadic transformation model, and examines the implications for policy and practice. The article concludes with a synthesis of the key contributions, limitations, and directions for future research.

II. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a multiple case study design (Yin, 2018) to investigate the role of pesantren in enhancing the quality of religious education in Indonesia. The qualitative approach was selected for its capacity to capture the complex, context-dependent processes of institutional transformation that characterize pesantren education (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The multiple case study design enabled cross-case comparison and pattern identification across diverse pesantren typologies, thereby strengthening the analytical generalizability of the findings (Miles et al., 2018).

The research was conducted across six pesantren in Java (four sites) and Sumatra (two sites) purposively selected to represent the three principal typologies of Indonesian pesantren: traditional/salafiyah (two sites), modern/khalafiyah (two sites), and integrated (two sites). The selection criteria included: (a) minimum operational history of 25 years, ensuring institutional maturity; (b) student enrollment exceeding 500 santri, a scale sufficient for the curriculum, pedagogical, and governance structures under study to be fully institutionalized rather than emergent; (c) documented evidence of transformation initiatives within the preceding five years; and (d) willingness of institutional leadership to participate in extended research engagement. The diversity of typologies was essential to understand how transformation manifests differently across institutional contexts while identifying common patterns that transcend typological boundaries.

Data collection was conducted over a period of eight months (January–August 2024) through three primary methods. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 24 key informants comprising six kiai/pesantren leaders, six senior ustadz (teachers), six curriculum coordinators, and six senior santri. Interview protocols were developed through iterative refinement based on pilot testing at one non-participating pesantren and were guided by the research questions addressing curriculum integration, pedagogical practices, and governance mechanisms. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and was audio-recorded with informed consent. Second, participatory observation was conducted at each site for a minimum of two weeks, during which the researcher observed teaching and learning activities, administrative meetings, extracurricular programs, and daily life in the pesantren. Observation field notes were systematically recorded using a structured template aligned with the three dimensions of analysis. Third, document analysis encompassed institutional strategic plans, curriculum documents, assessment records, accreditation reports, and relevant policy documents from the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

The presence of the researcher in the field was a critical element of this study. As a researcher with prior experience in Islamic education settings, the first author established rapport with pesantren communities through formal introductions facilitated by institutional gatekeepers and

through participation in daily communal activities including congregational prayers, shared meals, and informal discussions. This positionality enabled access to nuanced perspectives that might not surface in formal interview settings while maintaining the analytical distance necessary for scholarly rigor.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2018), comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Interview transcripts and field notes were first coded using a combination of deductive codes derived from the theoretical framework (curriculum integration, pedagogical modernization, governance reform) and inductive codes that emerged from the data. The coded data was organized into within-case and cross-case matrices to facilitate pattern identification and comparison. The analytical process was supported by NVivo qualitative data analysis software to manage the substantial volume of data generated across six sites.

The validity and trustworthiness of the research findings were ensured through four strategies: (1) triangulation of data sources (interviews, observations, documents) and informant categories (kiai, ustadz, coordinators, santri); (2) member checking, whereby preliminary findings were presented to key informants at each site for verification and feedback; (3) peer debriefing with two senior researchers in Islamic education management who reviewed the analytical process and emerging interpretations; and (4) thick description of the research context, processes, and findings to enable readers to assess the transferability of the results to other settings. The research protocol received ethical clearance from the university's research ethics committee (approval no. [insert IRB/committee reference number]), and all participants provided written informed consent with assurances of confidentiality and anonymity.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are organized around the three principal dimensions of pesantren transformation that emerged from the cross-case analysis: curriculum integration, pedagogical modernization, and institutional governance reform. Each dimension is presented with supporting evidence from the six participating pesantren, identified by pseudonyms (Pesantren A through F) to maintain anonymity.

Curriculum Integration: Harmonizing Traditional and Contemporary Knowledge

The cross-case analysis revealed that all six pesantren had undertaken varying degrees of curriculum integration, though the approaches and outcomes differed significantly by typological category. In the two traditional (salafiyah) pesantren (A and B), curriculum integration was characterized by what informants described as a "complementary layering" strategy: the classical Islamic curriculum centered on kitab kuning study remained the core and non-negotiable foundation, while selected contemporary subjects particularly Indonesian language, mathematics, and natural sciences were introduced as supplementary components offered in additional time slots without displacing traditional learning hours. The kiai at Pesantren A explained that the rationale was to ensure santri could obtain national educational certificates (ijazah) without compromising the depth of religious knowledge acquisition.

By contrast, the two modern (khalafiyah) pesantren (C and D) demonstrated a more thorough integration through what can be termed a “fused curriculum” model. At these institutions, the formal curriculum adopted from the national education standards was systematically infused with Islamic values and perspectives across all subject areas. For instance, Pesantren C had developed thematic modules where scientific concepts were explicitly connected to Quranic verses and hadith, creating an integrated learning experience. The curriculum coordinator at Pesantren D noted that this approach aimed to dissolve the artificial dichotomy between “religious” and “general” knowledge, reflecting the Islamic epistemological principle of the unity of knowledge (wahdatul ‘ulum).

The two integrated pesantren (E and F) exhibited the most sophisticated form of curriculum integration, incorporating not only academic content but also vocational competencies and life skills into a comprehensive educational framework. Pesantren E, for example, developed a tripartite curriculum structure comprising religious sciences (dirasah Islamiyah), formal academic subjects aligned with the national curriculum, and vocational training programs in information technology, agriculture, and entrepreneurship. Pesantren F had similarly established an integrated curriculum that explicitly addressed the competencies articulated in Indonesia’s national education standards while maintaining rigorous Islamic scholarship through an advanced tahfidz (Quran memorization) and Islamic jurisprudence program.

Table 1. Curriculum Integration Patterns Across Pesantren Typologies

Dimension	Salafiyah (A, B)	Khalafiyah (C, D)	Integrated (E, F)
Strategy	Complementary layering	Fused curriculum	Tripartite structure
Core Priority	Kitab kuning mastery	Values-infused academics	Holistic competency
Technology	Minimal adoption	Moderate integration	Comprehensive digital
Outcome Focus	Religious scholarship	Academic + spiritual	Multi-dimensional

Source: Cross-case analysis data (2024)

Pedagogical Modernization: Balancing Innovation and Tradition

The second dimension of transformation concerned the modernization of teaching and learning methods within the pesantren setting. The findings indicated a spectrum of pedagogical approaches ranging from the preservation of classical methods to the adoption of contemporary student-centered and technology-enhanced practices. Across all six pesantren, traditional pedagogical methods including sorogan (individual recitation before the teacher), bandongan/wetonan (collective listening to the kiai’s explanation), and halaqah (study circle) remained present, though their prominence varied substantially.

In the salafiyah pesantren (A and B), sorogan and bandongan continued as the primary instructional methods, with limited but growing experimentation with discussion-based learning. The senior ustadz at Pesantren B described a gradual shift toward incorporating question-and-answer sessions following bandongan readings, allowing santri to develop critical thinking skills while maintaining the traditional student-teacher relationship grounded in respect and intellectual humility (ta’dhim). However, both salafiyah pesantren exhibited considerable caution regarding technology integration in pedagogy, with digital tools largely confined to administrative functions rather than instructional purposes.

The khalafiyah pesantren (C and D) demonstrated more pronounced pedagogical innovation. These institutions had adopted project-based learning, collaborative group work, and presentation-based assessment alongside traditional methods. Pesantren C had implemented a blended learning approach in which certain academic subjects utilized learning management

systems (LMS) for content delivery and assignment submission, while maintaining face-to-face sorogan sessions for kitab kuning study. The kiai at Pesantren D articulated this approach as a deliberate strategy to prepare santri for the demands of higher education and professional life without abandoning the relational and spiritual dimensions that distinguish pesantren pedagogy from secular schooling.

The integrated pesantren (E and F) exhibited the most comprehensive pedagogical modernization. Pesantren E had established a dedicated digital learning center equipped with computers, multimedia projectors, and internet access, and had trained its ustadz cohort in the use of educational technology including interactive presentations, educational applications, and online assessment platforms. Notably, Pesantren F had developed its own mobile application for santri to access supplementary learning materials, track their tahfidz progress, and communicate with instructors; this finding was reported by informants and confirmed through observation during the site visit, though independent usage analytics were not obtained. Despite these innovations, both institutions emphasized that technology was employed as a pedagogical tool in service of educational objectives rather than as an end, and that the primacy of character formation through direct mentorship (suhbah) remained inviolable.

Institutional Governance Reform: Leadership, Quality Assurance, and Partnerships

The third dimension of transformation addressed the governance structures and institutional management practices that enable or constrain educational quality enhancement. A consistent finding across all six cases was the centrality of the kiai's leadership in initiating and sustaining transformation processes. However, the nature of this leadership varied between what can be characterized as charismatic-traditional authority in the salafiyah pesantren and distributed-strategic leadership in the khalafiyah and integrated pesantren.

In Pesantren A and B, the kiai served as the sole authority on all matters including curriculum decisions, teaching appointments, and institutional development. While this concentrated authority enabled swift decision-making aligned with the kiai's vision, it also created challenges for institutionalizing quality assurance processes and succession planning. The kiai at Pesantren A acknowledged that the institution's dependence on his personal authority constituted vulnerability, noting that several peer institutions had experienced significant disruption following leadership transitions.

The khalafiyah and integrated pesantren (C through F) had adopted more formalized governance structures. These included the establishment of executive boards with defined roles and responsibilities, the formation of curriculum development committees, the implementation of teacher performance evaluation systems, and the development of strategic plans with measurable targets. Pesantren E obtained formal accreditation from the National Accreditation Board for Schools/Madrasah (BAN-S/M) and was actively pursuing international quality benchmarks. Pesantren F had established a foundation-based governance model that separated the spiritual-educational authority of the kiai from the administrative-financial management of the institution, enabling professional management practices while preserving the kiai's role as moral and spiritual guide.

Community-based partnerships emerged as a significant governance mechanism across all typologies, though with varying scope. The salafiyah pesantren maintained traditional community engagement through waqf (endowment) management and local dakwah (religious outreach) activities. The khalafiyah and integrated pesantren had expanded their partnership networks to include government agencies, private sector organizations, higher education institutions, and international development organizations. Pesantren D established memoranda

of understanding with three universities for teacher professional development and student academic pathways, while Pesantren E had partnered with a technology company to provide digital infrastructure and training.

DISCUSSION

This section interprets the empirical findings in relation to the research questions, situates them within the broader theoretical and empirical landscape, and proposes a conceptual model for understanding pesantren educational transformation. The discussion is organized around four thematic areas: the dynamics of curriculum integration, the dialectics of pedagogical change, the governance architecture of transformation, and the proposed triadic transformation model.

The Dynamics of Curriculum Integration in Pesantren

The finding that all six pesantren had undertaken curriculum integration, albeit through different strategies, confirms the broader trend documented in recent literature regarding the growing openness of pesantren to incorporating contemporary educational content (Wasehudin et al., 2023; Syafi'i et al., 2024). However, the identification of three distinct integration strategies complementary layering, fused curriculum, and tripartite structure extends existing understanding by revealing that curriculum integration is not a binary phenomenon (traditional versus modern) but rather a spectrum of approaches shaped by institutional typology, leadership vision, and community expectations.

The complementary layering strategy observed in salafiyah pesantren resonates with the findings of Hadi (2022), who documented the tensions between formalization demands and traditional education preservation. This approach can be understood through the theoretical lens of institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), wherein salafiyah pesantren adopt the minimum structural changes necessary to comply with external legitimacy requirements (obtaining national educational certificates) while maintaining substantive fidelity to their traditional educational mission. The risk inherent in this strategy, as noted by several informants, is the potential overloading of santri with dual curricular demands that may compromise learning depth in both domains.

The fused curriculum model employed by khalafiyah pesantren represents a more sophisticated integration that aligns with the epistemological framework of knowledge integration (tawhidic epistemology) articulated by scholars such as Al-Attas (1980) and Al-Faruqi (1982). By infusing Islamic values and perspectives across all subject areas, these institutions operationalize the principle that all knowledge ultimately derives from and points toward the divine, thereby dissolving the secular-religious dichotomy that has long constrained Islamic education discourse (Hashim & Jemali, 2017). This finding supports the theoretical proposition of Sutrisno et al. (2025), who argued for integrating management, education, and Islamic thought as a holistic framework for institutional development.

The tripartite curriculum structure of integrated pesantren, which incorporates vocational competencies alongside religious and academic content, responds to the contemporary imperative for pesantren to prepare graduates who are not only spiritually formed but also economically productive citizens. This finding corroborates the research of Ghafar (2023), who demonstrated that pesantren engagement with entrepreneurship education represents a viable pathway for community economic development. The integration of vocational training within the pesantren framework also aligns with the government's vision articulated in the Pesantren Law (No. 18/2019) for pesantren to contribute to human resource development and national economic growth.

The Dialectics of Pedagogical Change

The pedagogical transformation patterns observed across the six pesantren illuminate a fundamental dialectic between innovation and tradition that defines the contemporary pesantren experience. The persistence of sorogan, bandongan, and halaqah methods even in the most modernized institutions confirms the analysis of Mulyana (2025), whose systematic review of Scopus-indexed literature demonstrated that traditional pedagogies continue to coexist with, rather than being replaced by, digital learning approaches. This coexistence is not merely a transitional phenomenon but reflects a deliberate pedagogical philosophy rooted in the conviction that certain educational outcomes—particularly the cultivation of spiritual discipline, moral character, and the student-teacher bond of respect (ta'dhim) require relational and embodied pedagogies that cannot be fully replicated through technological means.

The spectrum of technology adoption observed in this study, ranging from minimal in salafiyah to comprehensive in integrated pesantren, parallels the findings of Mdhlalose and Mlambo (2023), who argued that technology integration in education is mediated by institutional culture, leadership orientation, and resource availability. Importantly, the finding that even the most technology-advanced pesantren in this study framed digital tools as instrumental rather than constitutive of education echoes the cautionary perspective of Abulibdeh et al. (2024), who emphasized the ethical dimensions of technology in education, particularly the need to ensure that technological innovation serves humanistic educational goals. The pesantren context offers a distinctive contribution to this discourse by grounding ethical technology use in Islamic principles of stewardship (*khalifah*) and purposeful action (*niyyah*).

A novel finding of this study is the emergence of what we term “pedagogical hybridity”—the intentional blending of traditional and modern methods within individual learning experiences rather than their compartmentalization into separate curricular spaces. The example of Pesantren C’s blended learning approach, combining LMS-based academic instruction with face-to-face sorogan sessions, illustrates a form of pedagogical integration that has not been extensively documented in previous literature on pesantren education. This hybridity represents a creative institutional response to the tension between tradition and modernity that may offer a transferable model for other Islamic educational contexts facing similar challenges.

Governance Architecture and the Catalytic Role of Kiai Leadership

The centrality of kiai leadership in driving pesantren transformation, consistently observed across all six cases, aligns with the substantial body of literature on the kiai’s multifaceted role as spiritual guide, educational leader, and community figure (Nasith, 2024; Badrun, 2023; Puspita, 2024). However, the finding that effective transformation requires a shift from purely charismatic-traditional authority to distributed-strategic leadership extends existing understanding by suggesting that the kiai’s transformative capacity is maximized when personal charisma is institutionalized through formal governance structures. This resonates with Helmi and Sari’s (2021) concept of transformational-servant leadership in pesantren, which posits that the most effective pesantren leaders combine visionary orientation with a servant ethos that empowers others to participate in the institutional transformation process.

The governance reforms observed in khalafiyah and integrated pesantren including the establishment of executive boards, formalized evaluation systems, and foundation-based management—represent a significant departure from the traditional pesantren governance model characterized by the kiai’s singular authority. This professionalization of management, while enhancing institutional capacity for quality assurance and sustainable development, introduces new tensions regarding the distribution of authority between spiritual-educational

and administrative domains. The foundation-based model adopted by Pesantren F offers a potential resolution by structurally separating these domains while maintaining their functional integration through shared institutional values and vision.

The finding that community-based partnerships vary significantly across pesantren typologies reflects the broader evolution of pesantren from relatively isolated institutions to networked organizations embedded in complex stakeholder ecosystems. The expansion of partnership networks in khalafiyah and integrated pesantren supports the argument of Wahid et al. (2026) that external synergies are essential for pesantren to access the resources, expertise, and opportunities necessary for educational quality enhancement. This finding also aligns with the policy direction articulated in the Pesantren Law, which encourages pesantren to establish collaborative relationships with government, academic, and private sector partners as a mechanism for institutional development.

Toward a Triadic Transformation Model for Pesantren Education

Based on the synthesis of findings across the three dimensions and six cases, this study proposes a Triadic Transformation Model (TTM) for understanding and guiding pesantren educational quality enhancement. The model posits that sustainable educational quality in pesantren emerges from the synergistic interaction of three interdependent pillars: curriculum integration, pedagogical modernization, and institutional governance reform. At the center of this triadic structure is the principle of *al-muhafazhah 'ala al-qadim al-shalih wa al-akhdu bi al-jadid al-ashlah*, which serves as the philosophical anchor ensuring that transformation remains rooted in Islamic educational values even as it embraces contemporary innovations.

The empirical evidence from this study suggests that pesantren exhibiting strong performance across all three dimensions (notably the integrated pesantren E and F) demonstrate more robust educational outcomes than those strong in one or two dimensions but weak in others. Pesantren A, for instance, maintained exceptional depth in traditional religious scholarship (curriculum strength) but was constrained by limited pedagogical innovation and centralized governance. Conversely, Pesantren C demonstrated strong pedagogical modernization and governance reform but faced challenges in fully integrating its fused curriculum due to resistance from some traditionally oriented community stakeholders. The integrated pesantren, by simultaneously advancing all three dimensions in a coherent and mutually reinforcing manner, were associated with the most comprehensive pattern of educational quality enhancement observed across the six cases.

This model contributes to the theoretical discourse on Islamic education management by moving beyond the binary frameworks (traditional versus modern, religious versus secular) that have dominated previous analyses. By identifying three specific, interconnected dimensions of transformation and articulating the conditions under which their synergistic interaction produces enhanced educational outcomes, the TTM offers both analytical utility for researchers and practical guidance for pesantren leaders and policymakers. The model also contributes new dimensions to the field of educational management science by demonstrating that the distinctive features of pesantren governance including the kiai's moral authority, the communal living environment, and the integration of spiritual and academic development constitute not merely cultural artifacts but functional institutional assets that can be strategically leveraged for quality enhancement.

The findings of this study carry significant implications for policy and practice. For policymakers, the results underscore the necessity of differentiated policy approaches that recognize the diversity of pesantren typologies and their distinct transformation pathways, rather than

applying uniform standards that may inadvertently undermine the unique strengths of specific institutional types. For pesantren administrators, the TTM provides a diagnostic framework for identifying areas of strength and weakness across the three dimensions and for developing coherent transformation strategies. For the broader field of Islamic education, the study demonstrates that the preservation of authentic religious educational traditions and the pursuit of contemporary educational quality are not mutually exclusive goals but can be synergistically achieved through deliberate, multidimensional institutional transformation.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study has investigated the role of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in enhancing the quality of religious education in Indonesia through a comprehensive analysis of transformation processes across six institutions representing traditional, modern, and integrated typologies. The findings demonstrate that pesantren educational transformation operates through three interdependent dimensions: curriculum integration, pedagogical modernization, and institutional governance reform. The proposed Triadic Transformation Model (TTM) offers a new theoretical framework for understanding how these dimensions interact synergistically to produce enhanced educational outcomes when anchored in the classical principle of preserving valuable traditions while adopting beneficial innovations. The study's principal contribution lies in its integrative approach that transcends single-dimension analyses prevalent in existing literature, providing both analytical depth and practical applicability for stakeholders in Indonesian Islamic education.

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted exclusively in Java and Sumatra, and the transformation dynamics of pesantren in eastern Indonesia may differ due to distinct socio-cultural contexts. Second, the qualitative design, while providing rich contextual understanding, limits the statistical generalizability of findings. Third, the study captured transformation processes at a single point in time, and longitudinal research would be necessary to assess the sustainability and long-term impact of these transformations. Future research should address these limitations by expanding the geographical scope, employing mixed methods designs that combine qualitative depth with quantitative breadth, and conducting longitudinal studies that track transformation outcomes over extended periods. Additionally, comparative studies examining pesantren transformation in relation to Islamic educational institutions in other countries would enrich the global discourse on Islamic education quality enhancement.

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