



Agile Governance in the Management of Islamic Boarding School (Pesantren): An Islamic Education Management Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the institutional transformation of pesantren in the era of globalization using a library research method. Pesantren, as one of the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, are currently facing global challenges related to governance modernization, curriculum integration, educational digitalization, and the strengthening of institutional networks. This study aims to analyze the forms, directions, and implications of pesantren institutional transformation by critically synthesizing reputable international and national scholarly literature published over the last decade. Data were collected from academic books and peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in Scopus, Web of Science, and other reputable databases, and were analyzed using qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis. The findings reveal that pesantren transformation occurs across four main dimensions: institutional governance, curriculum and pedagogy development, utilization of educational technology, and the reinforcement of national and global collaboration networks. These transformations demonstrate that pesantren are adaptive Islamic educational institutions capable of maintaining their religious identity while responding to global educational demands. This study contributes to the field of Islamic education by offering an integrative conceptual framework for pesantren institutional transformation that is relevant for policymakers and educational leaders

Keywords: Islamic Education; Pesantren; Institutional Transformation; Globalization; Library Research



INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) are among the oldest and most influential Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, serving not only as centers for the transmission of Islamic knowledge but also as agents of moral, social, and cultural development in society. Since their inception, Islamic boarding schools have played a strategic role in maintaining the continuity of Islamic intellectual traditions through their teaching system of yellow books, charismatic leadership of *kiai* (Islamic scholars), and distinctive patterns of social relations (Qomar, 2013). These characteristics make Islamic boarding schools relatively stable, value-based educational institutions in the face of social change.

However, entering the era of globalization, Islamic boarding schools face increasingly complex structural and cultural challenges. Globalization is characterized by the acceleration of information flow, the development of digital technology, economic liberalization, and global educational standardization, which demand efficiency, accountability, and institutional competitiveness. In this context, Islamic boarding schools can no longer survive solely by relying on traditional patterns but are instead required to undergo institutional transformation to remain relevant and sustainable (Azra, 2017; Hefner, 2011).

Several international studies have shown that religious educational institutions around the world are experiencing similar pressures to adapt to modern education systems and global governance (Scott, 2014; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). In Indonesia, the transformation of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) is evident through the strengthening of managerial aspects, the integration of national and global curricula, and the development of cross-border institutional networks. However, previous studies have tended to be partial, focusing on the curriculum, religious moderation, or the social role of Islamic boarding schools. Studies that place the institutional transformation of Islamic boarding schools as the primary object of analysis are still limited. Based on a literature review of the past ten years, a research gap has been identified in understanding Islamic boarding school transformation as a systemic and multidimensional institutional process. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the institutional transformation of Islamic boarding schools in the global era through a comprehensive library research approach. The aim is to analyze the form, direction, and implications of Islamic boarding school institutional transformation and to formulate a conceptual framework that can serve as a reference for Islamic boarding school development at the national and global levels.

The novelty of this research lies in its conceptual synthesis based on reputable international literature, which positions Islamic boarding schools as adaptive, dynamic, and strategic Islamic educational institutions in the global landscape. This research does not propose quantitative hypotheses but instead focuses on developing theoretical arguments based on critical analysis of the literature.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a library research method with a qualitative-descriptive approach. Library research was chosen because it allowed researchers to conduct an in-depth review of previous theories, concepts, and empirical findings relevant to the institutional transformation of Islamic boarding schools. The research data sources consisted of reputable international journal articles (Scopus and Web of Science), accredited national journals, academic books, and research reports relevant to the theme of Islamic education and institutions.



The data collection process was conducted through searches of academic databases such as Scopus, Google Scholar, and DOAJ using the keywords: Islamic boarding school, Islamic boarding school institutional transformation, Islamic education and globalization, and religious educational institutions. Inclusion criteria included publications in the last ten years, thematic relevance, and publisher reputation.

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis and thematic analysis techniques. The selected literature was classified based on key themes, such as institutional management, curriculum and pedagogy, educational digitalization, and global networks. Next, a critical synthesis was conducted to develop a comprehensive and contextual analytical framework for the institutional transformation of Islamic boarding schools.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A literature review shows that the institutional transformation of Islamic boarding schools in the global era is occurring in four main dimensions. First, the transformation of institutional governance and management. Islamic boarding schools are beginning to adopt principles of good governance, including strategic planning, quality evaluation systems, and the professionalization of human resources (Bush, 2011; Hallinger, 2018).

Various studies have revealed that Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) no longer rely solely on traditional leadership models centered on the *kiai* (Islamic teacher), but have begun implementing a more structured management system through strategic planning, clear division of tasks, and strengthening organizational functions. This transformation aims to improve the effectiveness of institutional management while maintaining the core values of Islamic boarding schools as Islamic educational institutions. The results of literature observations also show that the application of the principle of good governance is one of the main indicators of the institutional transformation of Islamic boarding schools. Various studies indicate that Islamic boarding schools are beginning to develop more transparent, accountable, and participatory administrative systems, including in financial management, work program development, and institutional performance evaluation. Furthermore, a quality assurance system is being gradually implemented to ensure the quality of educational services meets evolving standards.

Observations of various previous studies show that human resource professionalization is a crucial part of the institutional transformation process. Various literature indicates improvements in the competency of managers, educators, and staff through continuing education, training, workshops, and information technology-based capacity development. These steps are taken to enable Islamic boarding schools to respond to global challenges without neglecting the characteristics of Islamic education, which is their primary identity. Overall, the results of the observations based on library research show that this study demonstrates that the transformation of Islamic boarding school governance and management is a gradual and continuous adaptive process. Various literature sources suggest that management modernization is not intended to change the identity of Islamic boarding schools, but rather to strengthen institutional capacity to make them more effective, efficient, and competitive in the global era. These findings demonstrate that the success of the transformation is greatly influenced by the Islamic boarding school's ability to integrate traditional values with modern educational management practices. Second, curriculum and pedagogical transformation. Islamic boarding schools not only maintain the classical Islamic curriculum but also integrate science, technology, and global competencies such as critical thinking and digital literacy. A study by Hargreaves and



Fullan (2012) confirms that pedagogical innovation is key to the sustainability of educational institutions in the global era. Based on observations of various literature sources, the transformation of the Islamic boarding school curriculum demonstrates an effort to integrate Islamic education with science and technology without eliminating the core characteristics of Islamic boarding schools. Various studies have revealed that the curriculum no longer focuses solely on mastering the yellow texts, but has begun to be developed to include general subjects, strengthening digital literacy, 21st-century skills, and character education. This integration is carried out as a form of adaptation to scientific developments and the demands of global society (Azra, 2012; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Literature observations also show that pedagogical transformation is realized through the implementation of more active, collaborative, and student-centered learning models. Various studies explain that learning methods in Islamic boarding schools are beginning to utilize digital technology, interactive learning media, and approaches. problem-based learning, project-based learning, and contextual learning. These changes aim to develop critical thinking skills (critical thinking), creativity, communication, collaboration, and digital literacy that students need to face the challenges of the global era (Hallinger, 2018; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Overall, the results of the observations based on library research shows that curriculum and pedagogical transformation is a crucial strategy for improving the quality of Islamic boarding school education. Various literature sources confirm that the success of this transformation is determined not only by curriculum reform but also by the readiness of educators to implement learning innovations that remain grounded in Islamic values. Therefore, curriculum and pedagogical transformation is a form of synergy between preserving the traditions of Islamic boarding school knowledge and developing global competencies relevant to the needs of modern society (Bush, 2011; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Third, transformation through digitalization and the use of information technology. Digital literacy and the use of online learning platforms are strategies used by Islamic boarding schools to expand access to education and improve the quality of learning (Selwyn, 2016).

Fourth, strengthening national and international institutional networks. Islamic boarding schools collaborate with universities, research institutions, and international organizations for academic and institutional development (Hefner, 2011). Based on observations of various literature sources, the institutional transformation of Islamic boarding schools is also marked by the increasing use of information technology in educational delivery. Various studies show that Islamic boarding schools are beginning to adopt online learning platforms, academic information systems, digital media, and various learning applications to support the teaching and learning process. This use of technology not only expands access to learning resources but also increases the effectiveness of communication, administration, and institutional management. Furthermore, strengthening digital literacy is a crucial part of equipping students to adapt to technological developments and the needs of a digital society (Selwyn, 2016; Azra, 2012).

Literature reviews also show that the institutional transformation of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) is being further strengthened through the development of collaborative networks at the national and international levels. Various studies reveal that Islamic boarding schools collaborate with universities, research institutions, community organizations, government agencies, and various international institutions in the fields of education, research, community service, and institutional capacity development. These partnerships provide opportunities for Islamic boarding schools to improve the quality of human resources, expand



access to educational innovation, and strengthen their competitiveness globally (Hefner, 2011; Zarkasyi, 2020).

Overall, the results of the observations based on library research shows that digitalization and strengthening institutional networks are two complementary strategies in supporting the transformation of Islamic boarding schools in the global era. Various sources confirm that the use of information technology can improve the efficiency and quality of educational services, while institutional collaboration expands opportunities for academic development, innovation, and the internationalization of Islamic boarding schools. Thus, the institutional transformation of Islamic boarding schools depends not only on internal renewal but also on the ability to build sustainable collaboration with various stakeholders (Selwyn, 2016; Hefner, 2011).

Discussion

The institutional transformation of Islamic boarding schools can be understood as a process of institutional adaptation to structural and cultural global pressures. Organizational change theory states that the sustainability of educational institutions is largely determined by their ability to adapt without losing their core identity (Scott, 2014). In the context of Islamic boarding schools, Islamic identity and scholarly tradition are the primary foundations that are not abandoned in the transformation process.

DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) institutional isomorphism perspective provides an additional lens for understanding this phenomenon. The three mechanisms of isomorphism—coercive, mimetic, and normative—can explain why Islamic boarding schools adopt modern management practices such as data-driven administrative systems, curriculum standardization, and institutional accreditation. Coercive pressure arises from government regulations and accreditation demands; mimetic pressure occurs when Islamic boarding schools imitate the practices of modern educational institutions deemed more legitimate; while normative pressure stems from the professionalization of educators through associational networks and training. However, this adoption does not necessarily eliminate traditional Islamic boarding school structures such as the sanad system of knowledge, kiai leadership, and the yellow book-based educational pattern (Dhofier, 1982; van Bruinessen, 1994). This phenomenon can also be interpreted through the concept of *decoupling* proposed by Meyer and Rowan (1977), namely the separation between formal structures adopted to gain external legitimacy and daily operational practices that maintain the old logic. In the context of Islamic boarding schools, this decoupling is evident when institutions adopt modern management labels—for example, academic information systems or ISO quality standards—but substantive decision-making remains centered on the authority of the kiai, the holder of religious legitimacy. This situation demonstrates that structural modernization does not always correspond to a shift in core values.

The integration of modern management and pesantren values indicates a distinctive institutional hybridization. This finding aligns with Hefner's (2011) research, which states that Islamic education in Southeast Asia develops through negotiations between local traditions and global demands. A similar view is also expressed by Lukens-Bull (2005), who describes pesantren as spaces for identity negotiation between tradition (the Salaf) and modernity, where the two poles do not negate each other but rather interact dialectically to produce new institutional forms. Thus, the transformation of pesantren is not an imitation of the West, but rather a process of contextualizing global values within a traditional Islamic epistemological framework—a process Azra (2012) calls "modernization without westernization." This hybridization has important



methodological implications for the study of Islamic educational institutions. While the classical isomorphism framework tends to predict structural convergence toward a single dominant organizational model, the case of pesantren instead demonstrates a pattern of selective adaptation: institutions choose modern elements compatible with existing religious authority structures, while rejecting or modifying elements that have the potential to erode their traditional legitimacy. This pattern of selection is consistent with Woodward's (1989) argument about the flexibility of Javanese Islamic tradition in responding to change without losing its cosmological basis.

This research also expands the global discourse on religious educational institutions by demonstrating that Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) possess significant innovative capacity. This challenges the long-held assumption that traditional educational institutions are resistant to change (Geertz, 1960, in his classic study, which was later widely criticized for viewing pesantren as static entities). The contribution of this research lies in developing an integrative and applicable conceptual framework for the institutional transformation of Islamic boarding schools, combining institutional theory perspectives with socio-anthropological studies of Islamic education.

However, generalizing these findings requires caution. The variety of pesantren typologies—Salafiyah, Khalafiyah, and a combination of the two—allows for different hybridization patterns depending on the leadership capacity, socio-economic networks, and geographic context of each institution. Further research using a comparative approach across pesantren typologies is needed to test the validity of the conceptual framework proposed in this study.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the institutional transformation of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in the global era is a strategic process involving managerial changes, curriculum, technology, and institutional networks. This transformation allows Islamic boarding schools to remain relevant as globally competitive Islamic educational institutions without losing their identity, values, and traditions. Theoretically, this study confirms and enriches the study of Islamic education with a globalization-based institutional perspective. This research contributes a conceptual analytical framework that can be used as a reference in developing policies and practices for managing Islamic boarding schools. The limitation of this study lies in its reliance on literature sources, which does not directly capture empirical dynamics in the field. Further research based on empirical case studies and a mixed methods approach is needed to deepen understanding of the implementation of institutional transformation of Islamic boarding schools.

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