
The Role of Pesantren Economic Empowerment in Fostering the Economic Self-Reliance of Santri

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the forms of economic empowerment implemented in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), analyze their role in promoting students' economic independence, and identify their impact on students' entrepreneurial skills and entrepreneurial mindset. The study employed a qualitative approach using a library research design combined with a case study at Salafiyah Dawuhan Islamic Boarding School, Situbondo Regency. Data were collected through documentation, limited observation, and literature review, and were analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that economic empowerment is implemented in an integrated manner through the development of productive business units, student cooperatives, entrepreneurship training, and practice-based learning (*learning by doing*). The active involvement of students in business management enhances their entrepreneurial skills, managerial experience, sense of responsibility, self-confidence, and economic independence. Furthermore, the implementation of Islamic business ethics, such as honesty, trustworthiness (*amanah*), and responsibility, serves as an essential foundation for developing students with integrity and self-reliance. The economic empowerment program also contributes positively to strengthening the socio-economic relationship between the *pesantren* and the surrounding community. Therefore, economic empowerment in *pesantren* plays a strategic role in developing independent, productive, and competitive students through the integration of education, entrepreneurial practice, and Islamic values.

Keywords: Economic Empowerment, *Pesantren*, Students' Economic Independence, Entrepreneurship, Creative Economy

INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) are the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia. They play a strategic role not only in transmitting Islamic knowledge but also in promoting social and economic empowerment within society. In the context of national development, *pesantren* face increasing challenges in preparing students (*santri*) who are not only spiritually and intellectually competent but also economically independent. Economic independence has become increasingly important as competition in the labor market intensifies and graduates are expected to create their own entrepreneurial opportunities.

As the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, *pesantren* have long contributed to the development of religious knowledge, moral values, and character building, while also fostering social and economic development. Along with rapid social transformation and national economic development, *pesantren* are confronted with increasingly complex challenges, particularly in equipping *santri* with the skills necessary to adapt to changing socio-economic conditions.

Current social realities indicate that many *pesantren* graduates continue to face limited access to formal employment opportunities. This situation requires *pesantren* to extend their educational mission beyond religious instruction by providing *santri* with essential life skills and economic competencies. Economic independence is therefore a crucial issue, as it directly relates to graduates' readiness to become self-reliant, engage in entrepreneurship, and make productive contributions to society.

Within this context, economic empowerment has emerged as a relevant and practical strategy for *pesantren*. Economic empowerment refers to the process of enhancing the capacity of individuals and communities to manage economic resources independently and sustainably. Previous studies have demonstrated that *pesantren* possess significant potential to develop productive business units based on creative economic activities and local resources. These initiatives serve not only as learning platforms but also as sources of economic strengthening for both *santri* and the *pesantren* itself.

The empirical conditions at Salafiyah Dawuhan Islamic Boarding School illustrate concrete efforts to promote students' economic empowerment. In addition to providing Islamic education, the *pesantren* manages various economic activities that actively involve *santri*, including snack food production units, student cooperatives, and small-scale businesses designed to meet the needs of both the *pesantren* and the surrounding community. These activities provide practical learning opportunities that introduce *santri* to real-world entrepreneurial practices.

Nevertheless, implementing economic empowerment programs within *pesantren* is not without challenges. Limited financial capital, human resources, and business management capacity remain major obstacles to strengthening students' economic independence. Furthermore, not all *pesantren* have developed structured and sustainable economic empowerment models. Consequently, in-depth academic research is needed to better understand how economic empowerment contributes to fostering the economic independence of *santri*.

Previous research has shown that community-based economic empowerment and creative economy initiatives can improve community welfare while fostering entrepreneurial

attitudes (Agusti, 2023; Rasyidi, 2022). With their strong social foundations, *pesantren* possess considerable potential to establish productive business enterprises involving *santri* directly, including student cooperatives, creative economy ventures, home industries, and entrepreneurship training programs.

Economic empowerment within *pesantren* is not solely aimed at increasing income but also at cultivating independent, responsible, and ethical individuals. Accordingly, examining the role of economic empowerment in promoting students' economic independence represents an important area of academic inquiry.

Based on these considerations, this study focuses on Salafiyah Dawuhan Islamic Boarding School as a case study. The research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the economic empowerment practices implemented within the *pesantren*, examine its role in fostering students' economic independence, and identify the impacts of these initiatives on both the students and the surrounding community. It is expected that the findings will contribute both theoretically and practically to the development of sustainable economic empowerment models for *pesantren* in Indonesia.

Based on the background presented above, the research questions are as follows: What forms of economic empowerment are implemented within the *pesantren*. What role does economic empowerment play in promoting the economic independence of *santri*. What are the impacts of economic empowerment on the entrepreneurial attitudes and skills of *santri*. The objectives of this study are: To describe the forms of economic empowerment implemented in the *pesantren*. To analyze the role of economic empowerment in promoting the economic independence of *santri*

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Concept of Economic Empowerment

Economic empowerment is a development concept oriented toward enhancing the capacity, access, and control of individuals and groups over economic resources in order to improve their welfare sustainably. Economic empowerment is not merely understood as the provision of financial assistance but as a process of social transformation that positions communities as active agents of development. According to Kabeer (2019), economic empowerment is closely associated with individuals' ability to make strategic life choices that were previously constrained by limited access and existing social and economic structures.

From the perspective of sustainable development, economic empowerment encompasses three principal dimensions: (1) capacity building, (2) strengthening access to economic resources and opportunities, and (3) enhancing self-reliance and business sustainability. Chambers (2020) argues that effective economic empowerment should be based on local potential, active community participation, and support for vulnerable groups in order to achieve social and economic justice.

Community-based economic empowerment has become a widely adopted approach in communities and social institutions, including *pesantren*. This approach emphasizes collective participation, collaboration, and joint business management to create greater

economic value. Rasyidi (2022) explains that community-based economic empowerment aims to foster self-reliance through the utilization of local resources, the strengthening of social networks, and continuous mentoring.

Within the context of pesantren, economic empowerment possesses distinctive characteristics because it is integrated with Islamic values and character education. Pesantren function not only as centers of Islamic education but also as agents of community economic empowerment. According to Agusti (2023), economic empowerment in pesantren is directed toward developing students' entrepreneurial spirit based on religious values, Islamic business ethics, honesty, and social responsibility.

The creative economy has become one of the strategic instruments for promoting economic empowerment in pesantren. The creative economy emphasizes innovation, creativity, and knowledge as the primary sources of economic value creation. Agusti et al. (2024) argue that the creative economy enhances the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises through product differentiation, process innovation, and the strengthening of local identity. In pesantren, the creative economy is implemented through local product processing, home-based industries, and independently managed student business units.

Therefore, economic empowerment within the pesantren context can be understood as an integrated process involving the enhancement of students' capacities, the development of productive business enterprises, and the internalization of Islamic values. Its objective extends beyond increasing income to developing students who are self-reliant, competitive, and capable of contributing to sustainable community economic development.

Students' Economic Independence

Students' economic independence refers to their ability to meet their own economic needs and manage economic activities independently by utilizing their personal potential, skills, and available resources. Abdullah and Hakim (2019) explain that students' economic independence extends beyond income generation to include the ability to make economic decisions, manage business risks, and develop a sustainable entrepreneurial mindset. Within the pesantren context, economic independence constitutes an essential component of character education, preparing students to face social and economic challenges after graduation.

Arifin and Ma'arif (2020) emphasize that students' economic independence can be fostered through the development of the santripreneur model, which integrates Islamic education with entrepreneurial practice. This model positions students as active participants in the economic activities of the pesantren, including the management of cooperatives, production units, and service enterprises. Through direct involvement, students acquire practical experience in business management, business planning, and product marketing, significantly improving their readiness to achieve economic self-reliance.

Fauzi and Hidayat (2021) found that pesantren business units play a strategic role in fostering students' economic independence. Collectively managed business units provide practice-based learning environments in which students develop competencies in basic bookkeeping, capital management, and teamwork. These experiences become valuable

social and economic capital that enables students to establish and manage their own businesses in the future.

Furthermore, Huda and Santoso (2022) argue that students' economic empowerment should be implemented continuously through entrepreneurship mentoring and training programs. This approach emphasizes the importance of Islamic economic literacy, Islamic business ethics, and innovative capabilities in creating value-added products. Consequently, students' economic independence is oriented not only toward material gains but also toward business sustainability and blessings (*barakah*) in accordance with Islamic principles.

A study by Mulyani and Rohman (2023) demonstrated that strengthening entrepreneurship education within *pesantren* significantly contributes to improving students' economic independence. Students who receive systematic entrepreneurship training tend to exhibit greater self-confidence, stronger entrepreneurial motivation, and enhanced ability to identify market opportunities. These findings indicate that entrepreneurship education integrated into the *pesantren* educational system effectively produces economically independent and productive graduates.

Based on these studies, it can be concluded that students' economic independence results from the synergy between entrepreneurship education, active participation in *pesantren* business units, and continuous mentoring. *Pesantren* therefore play a strategic role in preparing students to become human resources who excel not only spiritually but also economically through independence and competitiveness.

Previous Studies

Numerous studies have examined economic empowerment in *pesantren*. Rasyidi (2022) found that community-based economic empowerment in *pesantren* significantly contributes to improving both community welfare and students' economic independence. Agusti (2023) demonstrated that creative economy strategies are effective in fostering students' entrepreneurial spirit. Meanwhile, Agusti et al. (2024), in their study on community economic development through the creative economy, emphasized the importance of continuous mentoring and entrepreneurship training.

In addition, Surur et al. (2024) reported that Project-Based Learning significantly improves learners' practical skills and work readiness. These findings are highly relevant to the context of economic empowerment in *pesantren*, where experiential learning plays a crucial role in developing entrepreneurial competencies and economic self-reliance among students.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach using a combination of library research and a case study design. The library research was conducted to examine the concepts of economic empowerment, students' economic independence, and relevant findings from previous studies. Meanwhile, the case study approach was used to obtain a contextual

understanding of the implementation of economic empowerment practices within an Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*).

This combined approach was selected to ensure that the study is not only conceptual in nature but also capable of describing the empirical realities of how economic empowerment contributes to fostering students' economic independence within the *pesantren* environment.

Research Site

The case study was conducted at Salafiyah Dawuhan Islamic Boarding School (*Pesantren Salafiyah Dawuhan*), located in Dawuhan Village, Situbondo Regency, Indonesia. The *pesantren* was selected purposively because it has implemented various student economic empowerment programs that are integrated into its educational activities, including productive business units, creative economy initiatives, and entrepreneurship training based on local potential.

Salafiyah Dawuhan Islamic Boarding School is recognized for actively involving *santri* in the management of productive business enterprises as part of its self-reliance education. These activities include household product processing, student cooperatives, and collectively managed small businesses supervised by the *pesantren's* caretakers and management.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected using three primary techniques: (1) documentation of *pesantren* archives and business unit activity reports, (2) limited observation of students' economic empowerment activities, and (3) a literature review of relevant scholarly journals. Data obtained from both the library research and the case study were analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis through three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the case study conducted at Salafiyah Dawuhan Islamic Boarding School (*Pesantren Salafiyah Dawuhan*), students' economic empowerment is implemented systematically and integrated into the *pesantren* educational system. The economic empowerment program is not implemented as a standalone initiative but constitutes an integral component of character development, aiming to cultivate students who are independent, responsible, and possess a strong work ethic.

First, Salafiyah Dawuhan Islamic Boarding School has established productive business units that actively involve *santri* in business management. These business units include snack food production, student cooperatives, and small-scale enterprises that primarily serve the internal needs of the *pesantren*. Students participate in every stage of the business process, including production, packaging, and product distribution. This involvement provides them with hands-on experience and a comprehensive understanding of business operations.

Second, the *pesantren* organizes practical and context-based entrepreneurship training programs. These programs cover fundamental entrepreneurship concepts, basic business management, financial management, and product marketing strategies. Rather than relying solely on theoretical instruction, the training is directly implemented through the activities of the *pesantren*'s business units. This approach enables students to understand the relationship between entrepreneurial theory and real-world business practice.

Third, Salafiyah Dawuhan Islamic Boarding School adopts a learning-by-doing approach in implementing students' economic empowerment. Students are assigned responsibilities according to their abilities and educational levels, such as maintaining basic financial records, ensuring product quality, and serving customers. This experiential learning model develops discipline, responsibility, teamwork, and practical managerial competencies.

Fourth, the findings reveal significant changes in students' economic attitudes and behaviors after participating in the economic empowerment program. Students become more self-reliant, develop greater self-confidence, and demonstrate stronger initiative in economic activities. Several students have even been able to develop simple business ideas independently by utilizing the economic potential available in the surrounding community.

Fifth, economic empowerment at Salafiyah Dawuhan Islamic Boarding School is firmly grounded in the principles of Islamic business ethics. Students are guided to conduct business based on honesty, trustworthiness (*amanah*), diligence, and the pursuit of *barakah* (divine blessings). These values are integrated into every economic activity, ensuring that students' economic independence is directed not only toward material achievement but also toward character development and moral integrity.

Overall, the findings indicate that the economic empowerment programs implemented at Salafiyah Dawuhan Islamic Boarding School have had a positive impact on enhancing students' entrepreneurial skills, practical experience, and economic independence. These programs serve as effective learning platforms that prepare students to become economically productive and self-reliant individuals upon completing their education.

Discussion

This discussion provides a more comprehensive interpretation of the findings obtained from Salafiyah Dawuhan Islamic Boarding School by relating them to relevant theories and previous studies on *pesantren*-based economic empowerment and students' economic independence. The findings demonstrate that the *pesantren* functions not only as an institution for Islamic education but also as a socio-economic institution capable of developing independent and productive human resources.

The finding regarding students' active participation in the *pesantren*'s business units supports the theory of participatory economic empowerment. Rasyidi (2022) argues that active participation is a key determinant of successful economic empowerment in *pesantren*. At Salafiyah Dawuhan Islamic Boarding School, students are directly involved in every stage of business activities, including production, management, and marketing. Such participation provides extensive experiential learning opportunities that enable students to understand economic realities while fostering responsibility and self-reliance.

The results also indicate that the learning-by-doing approach is highly effective in improving students' economic competencies. This finding is consistent with constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes that knowledge is acquired through direct experience. Surur et al. (2024) demonstrated that Project-Based Learning significantly enhances learners' practical skills and work readiness. In the context of Salafiyah Dawuhan Islamic Boarding School, business practice functions as an effective experiential learning medium for developing entrepreneurial competencies among students.

From an entrepreneurial perspective, the economic empowerment programs implemented at Salafiyah Dawuhan Islamic Boarding School make a substantial contribution to fostering students' entrepreneurial mindset. Agusti (2023) argues that the creative economy within *pesantren* encourages creativity, innovation, and risk-taking behavior. This is reflected in the findings, which show that students have begun to generate business ideas, manage simple products, and recognize market opportunities within the surrounding community.

Islamic business ethics also emerged as an important aspect of this study. Economic empowerment at Salafiyah Dawuhan Islamic Boarding School is not solely directed toward generating financial benefits but also emphasizes the cultivation of honesty, trustworthiness (*amanah*), and *barakah* in business activities. Huda and Santoso (2022) emphasize that economic empowerment in *pesantren* should be grounded in Islamic values to ensure that students' economic independence is both sustainable and meaningful. The findings indicate that these ethical values have been successfully internalized throughout students' economic activities.

Beyond its impact on students, the economic empowerment program also contributes positively to the surrounding community. The *pesantren's* business units involve local community members in production and distribution activities, thereby strengthening socio-economic relationships between the *pesantren* and the local community. This finding is consistent with Agusti et al. (2024), who argue that *pesantren* can function as drivers of local economic development through community-based empowerment initiatives.

Furthermore, this discussion demonstrates that the success of economic empowerment in *pesantren* is strongly influenced by the synergy between visionary leadership, students' active participation, and the sustainability of business programs. Effective leadership creates a supportive environment for entrepreneurial development and experiential economic learning. This finding is consistent with Nugraha and Agusti (2023), who highlight the importance of accountability and leadership values in managing faith-based educational institutions.

In conclusion, the findings confirm that economic empowerment at Salafiyah Dawuhan Islamic Boarding School represents a holistic process integrating education, entrepreneurial practice, Islamic values, and community empowerment. This integrated model has proven effective in promoting students' economic independence and may serve as a valuable reference for other *pesantren* seeking to develop sustainable economic empowerment programs.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that economic empowerment plays a strategic role in promoting the economic independence of *santri*. Economic empowerment programs implemented by the *pesantren* through creative economy initiatives, productive business units, and entrepreneurship training have been shown to enhance students' entrepreneurial skills, practical experience, and self-reliance. These programs contribute not only to students' economic competencies but also to the development of independent, productive, and responsible individuals who are well prepared to contribute to society.

Recommendations

It is recommended that *pesantren* continue to develop sustainable economic empowerment programs through collaboration with various stakeholders, including government agencies, educational institutions, and the private sector. Future research is encouraged to employ field-based empirical approaches to examine the impacts of economic empowerment programs in specific *pesantren* settings and to provide more comprehensive evidence regarding their effectiveness in fostering students' economic independence.

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