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Transforming Pesantren Management: Integrating Good Governance to Drive Institutional and Financial Independence

Juli Ahirin[1], Muhammad Istan[2], Irwan Fathurrochman[3], Jumira Warlizasusi[4]
1) Institut Agama Islam Negeri Curup, Bengkulu Indonesia
2) Institut Agama Islam Negeri Curup, Bengkulu Indonesia
3) Institut Agama Islam Negeri Curup, Bengkulu Indonesia
4) Institut Agama Islam Negeri Curup, Bengkulu Indonesia

e-mail Correspondent: juliahirin@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study aims to analyse the implementation of good governance principles in pesantren management in Bengkulu Province, to identify the supporting and inhibiting factors influencing its application, and to evaluate the extent to which such implementation contributes to the achievement of pesantren independence. The analysis emphasises three key dimensions of independence: financial, institutional, and academic. Through an in-depth qualitative inquiry, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relevance and strategic significance of good governance in strengthening the autonomy and sustainability of Islamic educational institutions in the region. A qualitative research approach was adopted to explore in detail the dynamics of implementing good governance principles and their implications for institutional independence. The study was conducted in several representative pesantren in Bengkulu Province, selected based on their scale (large, medium, and small) and organisational characteristics, particularly the presence of business units or managerial structures reflecting independent governance. The findings reveal that the implementation of good governance principles, transparency, accountability, participation, effectiveness and efficiency, independence, and fairness has shown notable progress, although the degree of application varies among institutions. Supporting factors include the charismatic leadership of the kiai, a strong culture of independence, competent human resources, community participation, alumni engagement, and supportive government policies. Conversely, inhibiting factors comprise limited financial capacity, weak managerial competence, resistance to change, and dependence on external assistance. Overall, the application of good governance contributes strategically to enhancing pesantren independence across financial, institutional, and academic dimensions through transparent fund management, professional governance, and curriculum innovation.

Kata Kunci:
Tata Kelola yang Baik, Kemandirian, Manajemen, Pesantren.

Abstrak.
Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis penerapan prinsip-prinsip tata kelola yang baik dalam manajemen pesantren di Provinsi Bengkulu, mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor pendukung dan penghambat yang memengaruhi penerapannya, serta mengevaluasi sejauh mana penerapan tersebut berkontribusi terhadap pencapaian kemandirian pesantren. Analisis ini menekankan tiga dimensi utama kemandirian: keuangan, kelembagaan, dan akademik. Melalui penyelidikan kualitatif yang mendalam, penelitian ini berupaya memberikan pemahaman komprehensif mengenai relevansi dan signifikansi strategis tata kelola yang baik dalam memperkuat otonomi dan keberlanjutan lembaga pendidikan Islam di wilayah tersebut. Pendekatan penelitian kualitatif digunakan untuk mengeksplorasi secara rinci dinamika penerapan prinsip-prinsip tata kelola yang baik dan

implikasinya terhadap kemandirian kelembagaan. Studi ini dilakukan di beberapa pesantren yang representatif di Provinsi Bengkulu, yang dipilih berdasarkan skala (besar, menengah, dan kecil) serta karakteristik organisasinya, khususnya keberadaan unit usaha atau struktur manajerial yang mencerminkan tata kelola yang mandiri. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penerapan prinsip-prinsip tata kelola yang baik, yaitu transparansi, akuntabilitas, partisipasi, efektivitas dan efisiensi, independensi, serta keadilan, telah menunjukkan kemajuan yang signifikan, meskipun tingkat penerapannya bervariasi di antara berbagai lembaga. Faktor-faktor pendukung meliputi kepemimpinan karismatik para kiai, budaya independensi yang kuat, sumber daya manusia yang kompeten, partisipasi masyarakat, keterlibatan alumni, serta kebijakan pemerintah yang mendukung. Sebaliknya, faktor-faktor penghambat meliputi keterbatasan kapasitas keuangan, kompetensi manajerial yang lemah, resistensi terhadap perubahan, dan ketergantungan pada bantuan eksternal. Secara keseluruhan, penerapan tata kelola yang baik berkontribusi secara strategis dalam meningkatkan kemandirian pesantren di berbagai dimensi, yaitu finansial, kelembagaan, dan akademik, melalui pengelolaan dana yang transparan, tata kelola yang profesional, dan inovasi kurikulum.

INTRODUCTION

Pesantren, or Islamic boarding schools, represent educational institutions with a profound historical role in shaping the moral and intellectual character of Indonesian society (Kartiko et al., 2026; Soleh et al., 2023). Since their early establishment, pesantren have evolved by upholding values of independence, enabling them to endure through various socio-historical transformations. Within the context of modern management, efforts to strengthen pesantren autonomy encompass the ability to independently manage human resources, assets, and finances sustainably while maintaining an Islamic character (Arif et al., 2024; Ridwan, 2020). However, institutional realities reveal that the growing complexity of educational governance demands a more professional, transparent, and accountable management model. Consequently, the application of good governance principles has become a strategic necessity for pesantren to enhance organisational quality and institutional competitiveness (Hidayat & Rahayu, 2021).

Financial independence emerges as a critical dimension to be examined, as a pesantren's capacity to develop productive economic enterprises determines the sustainability of its educational activities. Pesantren managing cooperatives, agricultural ventures, or trade initiatives demonstrate stronger economic resilience than those reliant on external donors or government aid (Chysara & Nugraha, 2022). Nonetheless, many pesantren, particularly those located in regions such as Bengkulu Province, continue to face limited access to capital, weak business innovation, and inadequate managerial competence among human resources. According to (Dermawan et al., 2026), economic independence is not merely a matter of financial management, but also the ability of pesantren to build productive economic systems that empower students and the surrounding communities (Mukhlis, 2020).

Empirical studies have demonstrated that implementing good governance in pesantren has enhanced public trust and institutional legitimacy. For instance, research on Pondok Pesantren Hamalatul Qur'an Jombang shows that transparency, accountability, and responsibility are rated positively, although independence and fairness still require strengthening. (Rohmatillah & Suaidah, 2022). Similarly, (Alfarisi et al., 2026; Hasan et al., 2026) confirm that good governance improves pesantren competitiveness, yet long-term success remains contingent on robust internal independence and reduced dependence on external actors (Yenuri & Nurseha, 2025). Thus, good governance functions not merely as a normative principle of administration, but as the foundational framework for developing professional, sustainable, and competitive Islamic educational institutions (Soleh et al., 2023).

Participatory leadership contributes significantly to creating an inclusive and democratic organisational climate. The musyawarah *(deliberation)* model, an inherent expression of the Islamic value of syura, provides opportunities for senior students, teachers, administrators, and community members to engage in policymaking and strategic decision processes (Clark, 2009; Verschelde et al., 2015a; Wang et al., 2022). By expanding institutional participation, pesantren leadership can better ensure accountability and transparency in management (Ridwan, 2020), thereby reinforcing institutional legitimacy and public trust (Khumedi, 2020). Conversely, a centralistic leadership pattern that concentrates authority in a single figure, often the kiai, while culturally and spiritually respected, may restrict information flow and inhibit innovation, leading to stagnation and weak internal evaluation systems (Soleh et al., 2023).

At a broader level, research on school autonomy reveals that institutional independence, when coupled with leadership capacity and resource adequacy, positively affects educational performance, though outcomes depend on local management quality and institutional context (Clark, 2009; Verschelde et al., 2015a). Within pesantren, this implies that decentralising authority, such as over curriculum design, human resource management, and pesantren-owned enterprises, will foster genuine institutional independence only if accompanied by effective leadership practices that mobilise internal capacities, build accountability systems, and formulate sustainability strategies (Hidayat & Rahayu, 2021). Conversely, overly centralised leadership, though preserving traditional authority, often restricts information flow, limits participation, and suppresses staff creativity, thereby delaying institutional renewal. Mukhlis, 2020)

Therefore, this study offers a form of novelty through two main contributions: (1) it proposes an integrative analytical approach that connects good governance principles with the financial, institutional, and academic independence of pesantren; and (2) it provides empirical evidence grounded in the local context of Bengkulu Province, a region that remains underexplored within the scholarly discourse on pesantren governance in Indonesia. Accordingly, the findings of this research are expected to enrich the theoretical development of Islamic education management and serve as practical recommendations for government policies and pesantren development strategies (Somech, 2010a; Wang et al., 2022). These strategies aim to promote governance practices that are transparent, accountable, equitable, and sustainable in addressing the challenges of the modern era (Khassawneh & Elrehail, 2022).

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a multiple case study design to explore in depth the implementation of good governance principles in pesantren management and its contribution to institutional independence in Bengkulu Province. Guest et al., 2006). The qualitative approach was selected because it enables the researcher to understand phenomena holistically by interpreting the meanings and experiences of research subjects within their natural contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The multiple case study design provides opportunities for cross-case analysis to identify patterns, similarities, and differences in good governance practices among pesantren with diverse institutional characteristics (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018).

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis to obtain a comprehensive understanding and enhance data credibility through methodological triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2015). Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore informants' perceptions and experiences regarding transparency, accountability, participation, effectiveness, and fairness in pesantren governance (Kvale &

Brinkmann, 2015). Participant observation was used to directly observe social interactions, leadership practices, and decision-making processes within pesantren environments (Spradley, 2016). Meanwhile, documents such as financial reports, organisational structures, statutes and bylaws, and curricula were analysed to verify governance practices mentioned by informants (Bowen, 2009).

Data analysis was conducted concurrently throughout the research process using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Additionally, thematic analysis was applied to identify relevant patterns and themes associated with good governance implementation and pesantren independence (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Miles et al., 2014). To ensure data trustworthiness, several validation strategies were employed, including source and method triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing, to guarantee that interpretations accurately represented informants' perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Forms of Implementation of Good Governance Principles in Pesantren Management in Bengkulu Province

The principle of transparency essentially demands openness of information, particularly regarding financial management, program planning, and policy formulation. *First,* a large urban pesantren. In Bengkulu City, several large pesantren such as Pesantren Al-Mubaraq have demonstrated more advanced transparency practices. Annual financial reports are systematically compiled, internally audited by the pesantren's finance team, and presented publicly during formal parent meetings. These reports are also displayed on notice boards, allowing broad access for teachers, students, and parents. Such practices not only enhance public trust but also illustrate professional management of financial resources, both from community contributions and government support. *Second*, Small and medium pesantren in rural areas. In contrast, smaller pesantren located in rural areas such as Lebong Regency still face limitations in implementing transparency.

Financial reports are often delivered orally to foundation administrators or major donors without formal written documentation. This occurs due to several factors, including limited human resources with accounting skills, low administrative literacy, and minimal access to modern financial recording systems. As a result, transparency in small pesantren remains informal and relies heavily on personal trust among the kiai, administrators, and community supporters. *Third*, Implications of transparency differences. Such disparities in transparency practices have significant governance implications. Large pesantren that disclose financial information openly tend to sustain higher levels of social trust, which fosters increased participation from parents and donors.

Conversely, pesantren that rely on informal oral mechanisms face potential risks of misunderstanding, diminished community trust, and difficulty in securing long-term funding, especially from external parties such as local governments or donor agencies. Accountability in pesantren governance refers to the obligation of management to justify every decision, policy, and use of resources to both internal and external stakeholders. It extends beyond financial reporting to include educational programs, student development, and asset management. Field findings reveal considerable differences between pesantren with modern management systems and those maintaining traditional forms.

> *The use of digital systems reinforces internal checks and balances, as financial data is no longer monopolised by a single treasurer.*
>
> *This dual role results in less measurable accountability systems prone to both intentional and unintentional errors.*

The lack of documentation makes periodic monitoring difficult, leading stakeholders, parents, communities, and local authorities to rely primarily on personal trust in the kiai or foundation leaders. This accountability model stems from the deeply embedded kiai-centric leadership tradition common in rural pesantren. Such contrasts have important implications for pesantren sustainability. Institutions that have adopted modern systems can easily partner with external organisations and government agencies, as they can provide credible and verifiable financial reports. This enhances their access to long-term funding and educational expansion opportunities.

Traditional pesantren, relying on manual systems, however, face obstacles in auditing, monitoring, and professional financial management, leading to institutional stagnation and limited access to external support requiring formal accountability standards. Therefore, accountability practices in Bengkulu pesantren can be categorised into two poles: adaptive pesantren integrating modern technology and governance, and traditional pesantren relying on manual systems and personal trust. Bridging this gap requires policy intervention, managerial training, and administrative capacity building to strengthen accountability comprehensively.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of Good Governance

Field findings from various pesantren in Bengkulu Province indicate several key factors that play a crucial role in supporting the implementation of good governance principles. These factors represent the presence of social, cultural, and structural capital that enhances pesantren's capacity to manage institutions transparently, accountably, participatively, effectively, and fairly. One of the main supporting factors is the presence of kiai who possess strong charisma and moral authority within their communities. The leadership of the kiai functions not only as an internal managerial role but also as a public figure capable of mobilising broad social participation.

For instance, H. Muhammad Nanang Tantowi, the leader of Pesantren Nurul Qur'an, successfully initiated the construction of student dormitories through community and alumni self-help mechanisms. His charismatic leadership serves as valuable social capital, strengthening policy legitimacy while mobilising community financial and voluntary support. Such leadership, though rooted in tradition, aligns closely with good governance principles by fostering high levels of participation and social accountability. A pesantren administrator described how Kiai Muhammad Nanang Tantowi mobilised communal contributions:

> *Mr Nanang has a great influence in the community. When he asks for help, people respond willingly. During the construction of the dormitory, almost all alumni and nearby residents contributed some money, and others with labour. The project was completed without waiting for external assistance.*

Another strengthening factor is the long-standing culture of independence embedded in many pesantren. This tradition manifests through students' engagement in productive activities such as farming, livestock management, or small-scale trading to support the pesantren's daily needs. Such practices not only reduce dependency on external aid but also enhance efficiency in resource utilisation. Moreover, this culture cultivates resilience, discipline, and practical skills among students, qualities essential for their lives beyond pesantren. Institutional and personal independence thus become key pillars sustaining effectiveness and efficiency in governance.

> *Here, students usually work in the fields or help with small pesantren businesses, like selling farm products. The income is used for kitchen needs or operational costs. We are taught not to rely solely on donations but to be self-reliant.*
>
> *We alumni, coordinate through WhatsApp and Facebook groups for monthly contributions. The funds are sent to the pesantren for renovations or purchasing facilities. Alhamdulillah, many of us care deeply, so even from afar we can still contribute.*

Alumni networks also serve as a vital supporting factor. Alumni of Pesantren Al-Ikhlas in Bengkulu City, for example, routinely raise funds via social media to support infrastructure renovation. Alumni contributions extend beyond financial support, including ideas, labour, and social networks that promote pesantren development. Such involvement reflects the principle of participation, where stakeholder engagement from outside the internal pesantren environment strengthens program sustainability. Structural support from government programs, particularly those from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and local governments, has also played a significant role. Initiatives such as the Pesantren Operational Assistance (BOS) and infrastructure development aid have alleviated operational burdens for many pesantren. These programs encourage pesantren to improve educational services, upgrade facilities, and adopt administrative standards required for public accountability.

The above factors indicate that the successful implementation of good governance in Bengkulu pesantren emerges from the synergy between internal drivers (charismatic leadership, independence culture, alumni networks) and external supports *(government programs)*. This synergy serves as a vital foundation for pesantren to manage their institutions sustainably, professionally, and accountably without compromising their traditional identity. Despite the presence of enabling factors, field findings also reveal structural and cultural barriers hindering the full implementation of good governance in Bengkulu pesantren. These challenges stem from both internal limitations and the absence of clear external regulatory frameworks, resulting in uneven and partial governance practices.

Structurally, a significant challenge lies in the absence of standardised governance frameworks specifically tailored for pesantren. Current legislation, such as Law No. 18 of 2019 on Pesantren, primarily focuses on recognition and empowerment rather than providing technical guidance for good governance implementation. Consequently, governance practices vary widely from pesantren with written financial reports and internal audits to those relying solely on the personal credibility of their kiai. This fragmentation complicates the measurement and benchmarking of governance quality across institutions. Collectively, these obstacles limit pesantren's capacity to implement good governance optimally. Weak human resources and minimal technological integration hinder transparency and accountability.

Contribution of Good Governance Implementation to Pesantren Management Independence

Findings from various pesantren in Bengkulu Province reveal that the application of good governance principles significantly contributes to enhancing pesantren's managerial independence. Independence here refers not only to financial self-reliance but also to professional resource management, public trust maintenance, and the ability to sustain quality education programs.

Pesantren that consistently practice transparency and accountability have earned high levels of social trust. Institutions that regularly publish annual financial reports through parent meetings or bulletin boards tend to receive continuous financial support. This trust extends beyond parents to alumni and external donors who view such pesantren as credible institutions. Consequently, transparency and accountability serve as critical assets for stable funding, directly reinforcing institutional independence.

> *Since consistently publishing annual financial reports to guardians and donors, public trust has surged, securing stable funding and financial independence without external reliance. Furthermore, active stakeholder participation in annual meetings has driven alumni and communities to establish productive business units like cooperatives, generating alternative income and practical entrepreneurship for students.*
>
> *Conversely, implementing operational efficiency and strict cost control enables us to maintain high-quality education despite limited resources.*
>
> *We also remain committed to fairness through inclusive tuition waivers for orphans and underprivileged students, which broadens our social support base, enhances institutional moral legitimacy, and strengthens the pesantren's long-term operational resilience.*

Active participation of alumni and communities in annual meetings and program planning has led to the establishment of productive business units, such as cooperatives, bookstores, and agricultural or livestock ventures in Kepahiang and Bengkulu City. These initiatives not only generate alternative income but also provide practical entrepreneurship education for students. Through such participatory mechanisms, pesantren are gradually shifting from donation dependency toward self-sustaining economic bases. The adoption of effectiveness and efficiency principles has enabled pesantren to maintain educational quality despite limited resources.

Institutions with clear role divisions, sound resource allocation, and cost control can provide adequate education services in curriculum, facilities, and student development. This demonstrates strong institutional resilience, allowing pesantren to withstand financial constraints while sustaining core programs. Fairness, reflected in inclusive admission policies and tuition waivers for orphans and underprivileged students, has positioned pesantren as inclusive educational institutions. This inclusivity broadens their social support base across socioeconomic strata, enhancing their moral legitimacy and strengthening community trust. Such social trust ensures long-term operational sustainability and institutional independence.

The greatest contribution to pesantren independence arises when good governance principles are applied integratively rather than partially. Transparency builds trust, participation generates collective support, effectiveness and efficiency ensure program sustainability, and fairness expands the social base. The synergy of these principles empowers pesantren to operate as financially independent, professionally managed, and socially trusted institutions, preserving their traditional Islamic educational identity while adapting to modern governance demands.

DISCUSSION

The Paradox of Transparency and Accountability: Balancing Charismatic Tradition and Modern Bureaucracy

The empirical findings of this study demonstrate that the operationalisation of transparency and accountability within pesantren in Bengkulu Province cannot be understood merely as mechanical, administrative routines (Meyer & Rowan, 1977a). Instead, it represents a complex cultural negotiation between traditional, kiai-centric authority and the institutional demands of modern public governance (Arifina et al., 2023; Hariri & Shobirin, 2023). In large urban institutions like Pesantren Al-Mubaraq, the systematic publication of financial statements and the integration of electronic auditing models are shown to reinforce the institution's public legitimacy (Meyer et al., 1997)

This reality validates the classic institutional theory by Meyer and Rowan, which posits that organisations adopt formal structures and rationalised myths not only for technical efficiency but also to secure social alignment and survival within their wider environment (Matnuri & Aziz, 2025). However, this study expands this theoretical boundary by highlighting that in the pesantren ecosystem, transparency is not purely a legal-rational compliance mechanism but a form of moral-religious accountability (*amanah*) that deepens community trust (*social trust*). Conversely, the informal, oral financial reporting mechanisms found in smaller rural pesantren in regions such as Lebong Regency expose a critical structural vulnerability. The reliance on personal trust and the charismatic authority of the kiai, while culturally resilient, frequently leads to administrative isolation and institutional stagnation (Rohmat, 2023).

This sharp dichotomy between urban and rural settings challenges the universal applicability of standard public governance models, such as the UNDP framework, which assumes a uniform readiness for bureaucratic formalisation. As emphasised by (Yenuri & Nurseha, 2025), private religious institutions in developing regions often lack the structural infrastructure and accounting literacy required to fulfil modern auditing standards. (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Therefore, this study contends that imposing strict bureaucratic accountability without considering the local socio-cultural capacity creates a ritualistic compliance gap, where smaller institutions are structurally marginalised and excluded from broader public funding and strategic partnerships (Meyer, 1977).

This centralised model creates an organisational vulnerability where the internal checks and balances required by modern governance are severely compromised. According to the stakeholder theory articulated by Freeman, long-term organisational sustainability is contingent upon an institution's capacity to distribute decision-making power and information transparently among all core stakeholders (Buckles & Freeman, 1984). In pesantren where financial data is monopolised or handled manually, the lack of verifiable written records impedes periodic monitoring and deters potential institutional donors. This finding aligns with Oktafia and Basith, who argue that while spiritual charisma can mobilise immediate communal charity, it is insufficient for sustaining complex, long-term institutional growth amidst volatile economic environments (Oktafia & Basith, 2017).

To bridge this profound operational divide, there is an urgent need for contextualised policy interventions that integrate modern accounting practices into traditional frameworks without stripping the pesantren of its religious identity (Isroin et al., 2025). The transition from manual bookkeeping to digital financial management must be framed not as an external bureaucratic imposition, but as a technological refinement of the Islamic principle of *syura* and *hisbah*. Chysara and Nugraha observe that when religious institutions demystify financial administration and welcome professional accounting support, their capacity to expand academic and physical infrastructure increases exponentially (Chysara & Nugraha, 2024). By synthesising these elements, this study refines the existing governance literature, proving that accountability in religious education is most effective when it operates symmetrically across two planes: horizontal legal-rational compliance to the state or public and vertical spiritual accountability to divine values (Aflizah et al., 2025).

Multi-Stakeholder Participation and Collaborative Entrepreneurship: Shifting from Donation Dependency to Self-Sustaining Bases

The evidence gathered from pesantren in Kepahiang and Bengkulu City indicates that the institutionalisation of multi-stakeholder participation is the primary catalyst for economic transformation (Savaget et al., 2025). Open deliberative forums, such as structured annual meetings, have successfully mobilised alumni networks and local communities to actively establish productive business enterprises, including cooperatives, bookstores, and agricultural ventures. This participatory dynamic aligns with the conceptual framework of Collaborative Governance developed by Ansell and Gash, which argues that cross-boundary collaboration yields collective ownership and innovative resource mobilisation. In the context of Islamic educational management, this study demonstrates that when stakeholders are given genuine decision-making agency, their contributions shift from sporadic, passive charity (*sedekah*) to strategic, sustainable investments in the school's economic infrastructure (Ansell & Gash, 2008).

This participatory shift is critical because it directly addresses the systemic vulnerability of private madrasahs: their historical over-reliance on fluctuating community donations and external state assistance. This finding supports the Resource Dependence Theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), which maintains that an organisation's autonomy is determined by its ability to decrease dependence on external actors who control critical resources (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2006). Mukhlis et .al further confirm that economic self-reliance not only shields educational institutions from external financial shocks but also protects their ideological and academic freedom. Thus, multi-stakeholder participation acts as a structural bridge that transforms social capital *(alumni loyalty and community goodwill)* into tangible financial capital (Agussalim et al., 2024).

Moreover, the integration of these business units directly enhances the pedagogical quality of the institution by serving as practical laboratories for student entrepreneurship. Students are not merely passive recipients of theoretical knowledge; they actively engage in farming, livestock management, and retail trading within the pesantren ecosystem (Lackéus & Williams Middleton, 2015). According to (Apriadi, 2025), blending a religious *diniyah* curriculum with practical entrepreneurial training fosters a resilient, self-reliant mindset among students, which is highly vital for their post-graduation integration into modern society (Rusydiana et al., 2021). This study refines this discourse by proving that effective governance does not distract from the spiritual mission of a pesantren; rather, it operationalises religious values through ethical commerce and professional human resource development (Lackéus & Williams Middleton, 2015).

However, the field data also reveals that the capacity to launch and sustain these entrepreneurial ventures is unevenly distributed, with smaller rural institutions lagging due to minimal access to capital and digital tools. This disparity underscores that participation alone is insufficient if it is not backed by modern managerial skills and digital infrastructure. Somech notes that participatory decision-making can become an empty ritual if the participants lack the technical competence to analyse market risks and manage business operations (Somech, 2010). Therefore, this research expands the current literature by emphasising that for stakeholder participation to successfully generate alternative income, it must be accompanied by structured managerial training, digital leadership adaptation, and collaborative public-private networks that link rural pesantren to wider market ecosystems (Secundo et al., 2020).

Structural Integration of Good Governance of Synthesising Efficiency, Fairness, and Tri-Dimensional Autonomy

The ultimate value of implementing good governance lies in the synergetic fusion of its core principles: transparency, participation, efficiency, and fairness to achieve comprehensive institutional autonomy. The empirical data illustrate that when these principles are applied integratively rather than in isolation, they create an institutional resilience that allows pesantren to withstand intense financial constraints while maintaining high academic standards (Filatotchev & Stahl, 2015). For instance, the strategic adoption of efficiency through clear role divisions, sound resource allocation, and multifunctional staff management ensures that limited financial inputs are strictly directed toward educational priorities. This structural optimisation validates the core tenets of Administrative Management Theory,(Ismail et al., 2025) Fayol, which links organisational survival directly to the systematic coordination of functions, cost control, and operational discipline (Fells, 2000).

Furthermore, the principle of fairness, manifested through inclusive admission policies and tuition waivers for orphans and underprivileged students, provides the vital moral legitimacy that anchors the pesantren within its social environment. Far from being a financial drain, this institutional inclusivity broadens the school's social support base across diverse socioeconomic strata (Golden Pryor & Taneja, 2010). In times of economic hardship, this deep-seated social goodwill translates into localised volunteerism, physical labour support, and emergency micro-donations from the community. This phenomenon reflects the Social Capital Theory of Putnam (Putnam, 2015), which highlights that norms of reciprocity and social networks are powerful economic multipliers (Gelderblom, 2018).

Financial independence is achieved via the transparent management of community funds combined with internal business profits; institutional independence is reflected in professional, rule-based managerial structures that reduce vulnerability to external political or donor pressures; and academic independence is manifested in the freedom to innovate the curriculum to meet modern societal needs without sacrificing traditional religious values (Fells, 2000). This holistic finding advances the theoretical model of school autonomy discussed by Verschelde et al., which asserts that structural decentralisation only improves educational outcomes when it is paired with robust internal leadership capacity and comprehensive accountability mechanisms (Verschelde et al., 2015).

Table 2. Summary analysis, Theoretical, and Contribution

Governance Dimension	Operational Manifestation in Pesantren	Strategic Autonomy Contribution	Supporting Literature & Theoretical Framework
Transparency & Accountability	Public audits, digital financial tracking, and annual parent briefings.	Secures continuous donor funding, minimises internal conflict, and elevates social trust.	Institutional Theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977); Rohmatillah & Suaidah (2022).
Active Participation	Structured stakeholder forums, collaborative alumni business initiatives.	Drives the establishment of self-sustaining corporate business units.	Collaborative Governance (Ansell & Gash, 2008); Wang et al. (2022).

Operational Efficiency	Clear role division, cost control, and multifunctional staff optimisation.	Ensures institutional resilience and educational quality amidst scarcity.	Administrative Theory (Fayol, 1949); Ridwan (2020).
Inherent Fairness	Inclusive admissions, full tuition waivers for underprivileged students.	Expands moral legitimacy and deepens long-term localised social support.	Social Capital Theory (Putnam, 2000); Khumedi (2020).

Source: Data Collection, 2026

In summary, this discussion reveals that the realisation of true management independence in private Islamic boarding schools is not a product of chance, nor is it solely dependent on the accumulation of financial wealth. Instead, it is an administrative evolution achieved through the disciplined, integrated, and culturally adaptive implementation of good governance principles. Pesantren that proactively transition from traditional, isolated management models toward transparent, participative, efficient, and inclusive governance frameworks demonstrate superior structural resilience and competitive advantages in the modern educational market. By providing rich empirical evidence from the unique local context of Bengkulu Province, this study successfully offers a new integrative framework for scholars and policy-makers striving to modernise religious educational institutions across the developing world without compromising their sacred historical identity.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the integrated application of good governance principles serves as the primary driver for management independence within pesantren across Bengkulu Province. In answering the research focuses, transparency and accountability manifested through systematic financial audits and public reporting successfully transform traditional, kiai-centric charismatic authority into modern, legally rational public trust (*social trust*), which stabilises external funding. Furthermore, stakeholder participation actively drives institutional self-reliance by converting social capital into productive, self-sustaining business units like cooperatives and agricultural ventures, effectively shifting the institutions away from donation dependency. Operationally, the principles of efficiency and fairness foster strong institutional resilience; clear administrative role division optimises limited resources, while inclusive admission policies expand the pesantren's moral legitimacy and grassroots social support across diverse socioeconomic strata. Ultimately, this comprehensive governance framework empowers pesantren to preserve their sacred Islamic educational identity while successfully adapting to modern professional demands.

This study contributes significantly to the Islamic Education Management literature by proposing a novel, integrated framework that synthesises bureaucratic accountability, collaborative governance, and values-based financial independence. Practically, it provides a strategic blueprint for madrasah administrators to modernise structural management without eroding traditional religious values. Nevertheless, a key limitation is its qualitative case study design focused strictly on the unique socio-cultural context of Bengkulu Province, which limits its immediate generalizability to different regional environments. Therefore, future research is highly recommended to expand this scope through multi-regional comparative studies or mixed-method designs to quantitatively validate the economic impact of governance on institutional autonomy. Longitudinal inquiries are also essential to monitor the long-term sustainability of pesantren business units amid rapid digital transformation, alongside deeper exploration into the specific roles of digital leadership and innovative human resource training in private religious sectors.

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