

The Decline of Pesantren: Examining Leadership, Financial Constraints, and Social Transformation

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Abstract

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) are central to Indonesia's Islamic education system. However, in recent decades, many pesantren have faced significant challenges, ultimately leading to their closure. This study aims to identify the key factors contributing to this phenomenon, focusing on leadership, management, financial constraints, and socio-cultural changes. The research employs a qualitative approach, utilizing case studies of five pesantren in Central Java that have ceased operations. Data were collected through interviews with pesantren administrators, Kiai descendants, alumni, and local community members. Additionally, participatory observation and document analysis were conducted to gain a comprehensive understanding of the conditions preceding the closure of these institutions. The findings indicate that the lack of leadership regeneration is one of the primary factors causing institutional instability in pesantren. Many pesantren remain overly dependent on the Kiai figure without a precise succession mechanism, challenging leadership transitions. Furthermore, unprofessional management practices, such as the absence of transparent financial record-keeping and data-driven decision-making, have exacerbated the decline of these institutions. Financial constraints also pose a serious challenge, as most pesantren rely heavily on unstable community donations without implementing a diversified funding strategy. Socio-cultural factors, including shifts in societal preferences toward formal education based on science and technology and urbanization, have further diminished parental interest in enrolling their children in pesantren. This study provides valuable insights for stakeholders in Islamic education, particularly in designing policies that support pesantren sustainability. Reforming leadership systems, implementing modern management practices, diversifying funding sources, and integrating modern skill-based curricula are strategic steps that must be taken to ensure that pesantren remain relevant and sustainable in the era of globalization.

Keywords: Islamic Education, Institutional Reform, Institutional Sustainability, Social Dynamics, Economic Transformation.

Abstrak

Pesantren memiliki peran sentral dalam sistem pendidikan Islam di Indonesia, tetapi dalam beberapa dekade terakhir, banyak pesantren menghadapi tantangan besar yang berujung pada penutupan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor utama yang berkontribusi terhadap fenomena ini, dengan fokus pada aspek kepemimpinan, manajemen, keuangan, serta perubahan sosial dan budaya. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif dengan studi kasus pada beberapa pesantren di Jawa Tengah yang telah

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berhenti beroperasi. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan pengelola pesantren, keturunan kiai, alumni, dan masyarakat sekitar. Selain itu, observasi partisipatif dan analisis dokumen turut dilakukan untuk mendapatkan gambaran menyeluruh tentang kondisi pesantren sebelum penutupan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kurangnya regenerasi kepemimpinan menjadi salah satu faktor utama yang menyebabkan ketidakstabilan institusi pesantren. Banyak pesantren masih bergantung pada figur kiai secara eksklusif tanpa mekanisme kaderisasi yang jelas, sehingga mengalami kesulitan dalam transisi kepemimpinan. Selain itu, manajemen yang tidak profesional, seperti kurangnya pencatatan keuangan yang transparan dan pengambilan keputusan yang tidak berbasis data, turut memperburuk kondisi pesantren. Keterbatasan sumber daya finansial juga menjadi kendala serius, di mana sebagian besar pesantren masih bergantung pada donasi masyarakat yang tidak stabil tanpa strategi diversifikasi pendanaan. Faktor sosial dan budaya, seperti perubahan preferensi masyarakat terhadap pendidikan formal berbasis sains dan teknologi serta urbanisasi, semakin mengurangi minat orang tua untuk mengirim anak-anak mereka ke pesantren. Penelitian ini memberikan wawasan penting bagi pemangku kepentingan dalam dunia pendidikan Islam, terutama dalam merancang kebijakan yang mendukung keberlanjutan pesantren. Reformasi sistem kepemimpinan, penerapan manajemen modern, diversifikasi sumber pendanaan, serta inovasi kurikulum berbasis keterampilan modern menjadi langkah strategis yang perlu diterapkan untuk memastikan pesantren tetap relevan dan berkelanjutan di era globalisasi.

Kata kunci : Pendidikan Islam, Reformasi Institusional, Keberlanjutan Lembaga, Dinamika Sosial, Transformasi Ekonomi.

I. Introduction

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) have long served as the backbone of Islamic education in Indonesia, playing a crucial role in shaping religious knowledge and character in society (Asror, 2017; Purwanto et al., 2021; Sauri et al., 2018; Taufikin, 2021, 2022). However, in recent decades, several pesantren have faced significant challenges leading to their closure. This phenomenon raises fundamental questions regarding the factors contributing to the shutdown of pesantren in Indonesia.

The significance of pesantren in Indonesia is well-documented, with their role extending beyond religious education to include social and economic functions (Fazlurrahman et al., 2022; Hudaefi & Heryani, 2019; Isbah & Sakhiyya, 2023; Suwendi et al., 2024). Historically, pesantren have adapted to various socio-political changes, maintaining their relevance despite external pressures (Bashori, 2017). However, contemporary developments such as globalization, rapid technological advancement, and socio-cultural shifts have posed unprecedented challenges to these institutions (Estuningtyas et al., 2023). Recent studies suggest that pesantren must evolve to address these changes, yet many struggle to do so, leading to operational difficulties and eventual closure (Budiharso & Suharto, 2022).

One of the critical issues contributing to the closure of pesantren is the lack of leadership regeneration. Many pesantren depend on charismatic leadership, often centered around a single Kiai (Islamic scholar), whose absence due to aging or death leads to institutional instability. Research by Rofiaty (2019; Sulistyorini et al., 2022) highlights

the importance of leadership effectiveness in pesantren governance, particularly in delegation, decision-making, and conflict management. However, a significant gap remains in understanding how leadership transition failures directly impact pesantren sustainability.

Another crucial factor is poor management practices. Many pesantren still operate under traditional governance structures that lack modern management principles, making them unable to compete and adapt to changing educational landscapes (Budiharso & Suharto, 2022; Indra et al., 2020; Kawakip, 2020). Studies indicate that pesantren need to incorporate professional management practices to ensure financial sustainability, administrative efficiency, and curriculum modernization (Basori et al., 2023; Prasetyo, 2022; Rahtikawatie et al., 2021; Thoha & Hannan, 2022). Without these adaptations, pesantren struggle to attract students and secure the necessary funding.

Financial constraints further exacerbate the problem. Many pesantren rely on community donations, which can be inconsistent and insufficient for operational and infrastructural needs. Government support remains limited, and pesantren cannot often generate independent revenue (Anwar & Sholiha, 2024; Faisol et al., 2023; Mi'raj et al., 2023; Sandria et al., 2024). This financial instability has led to difficulties in maintaining facilities, paying staff, and investing in curriculum development, further pushing these institutions toward closure.

Additionally, socio-cultural changes have altered public perceptions of pesantren education. The increasing demand for formal education with strong vocational prospects has led many families to choose alternative schooling options over pesantren. Globalization and urbanization have also shifted educational preferences, reducing pesantren enrollment rates (Kawakip, 2020; Us et al., 2023; Zuhri & Sibaweh, 2023). These factors have collectively weakened the traditional stronghold of pesantren in Indonesian society.

A comprehensive literature review suggests that the intersection between leadership issues, financial constraints, managerial inefficiencies, and socio-cultural shifts remains underexplored. While existing studies have examined these factors separately, a significant research gap exists in understanding how these elements interact and collectively lead to pesantren closures.

This research aims to bridge this gap by integrating an analysis of leadership management and institutional sustainability in the context of pesantren closures. By examining the interplay between leadership regeneration, financial sustainability, and managerial adaptation, this study seeks to provide a holistic understanding of the challenges currently faced by pesantren. Specifically, this research aims to address the following key questions: How does the lack of leadership regeneration contribute to the closure of pesantren in Indonesia, to what extent does the implementation of a traditional, non-professional management system affect the competitiveness and

adaptability of pesantren, how do financial constraints impact the operational sustainability and development of pesantren, and in what ways do social and cultural changes driven by modernization and globalization influence public interest in pesantren. The findings of this study are expected to offer valuable insights for policymakers, education practitioners, and pesantren administrators in formulating strategies to enhance the resilience and longevity of pesantren institutions in Indonesia.

II. Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study method (Stake, R. E, 1995; Viera, 2024). This approach was chosen as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the factors contributing to the closure of pesantren in Indonesia. A case study facilitates a broader understanding of social and institutional phenomena within specific contexts (Robert K. Yin, 2018). This research focuses on comprehending the internal and external dynamics leading to the closure of pesantren, emphasizing leadership, management, financial sustainability, and socio-cultural changes.

This study was conducted in five pesantren in Central Java that have ceased operations (The names of the pesantren are deliberately hidden for privacy reasons). These locations were selected based on socio-economic conditions, managerial practices, and variations in leadership diversity. The research respondents include pesantren administrators, the descendants of Kiai, alumni, and local community members. Specifically, the study involves eight family members or descendants of Kiai who once led the pesantren, 10 local community members, and 12 alumni who previously studied at this pesantren.

Data collection was carried out through three primary techniques: 1) In-Depth Interviews – Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore respondents' experiences and perspectives regarding the factors leading to the closure of pesantren. This technique was used to gather information on leadership, management, and financial and social challenges encountered before the pesantren ceased operations. 2) Participant Observation – The researcher directly observed the physical condition of the closed pesantren, including its buildings, surroundings, and social interactions within the community previously affiliated with the pesantren. 3) Document Analysis – Additional data were obtained from previous documents, such as financial records, internal archives, and educational policies implemented before the closure (Bowen, 2009).

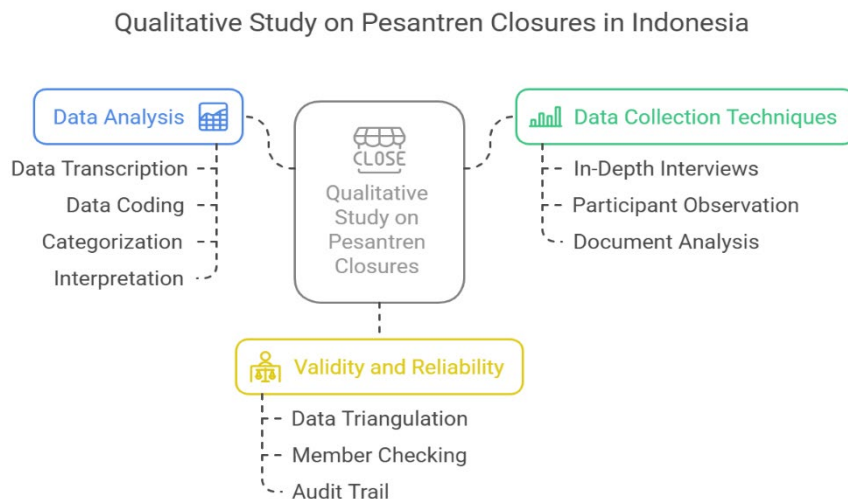
Data analysis was conducted using a thematic approach as proposed by (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The steps adopted in data analysis include:

1. Data Transcription: Interviews were recorded and transcribed to ensure data accuracy.
2. Data Coding: Identification of key themes emerging from the data, such as leadership issues, financial difficulties, and social changes.

3. Categorization: Data were categorized into significant themes aligned with the research objectives.
4. Interpretation: The researcher interpreted the analysis results by referencing relevant theories and prior studies to understand patterns and contributing factors leading to pesantren closures.

This study employs several strategies to ensure data validity and reliability, including: 1) Data Triangulation – Using multiple data sources (interviews, observations, and documents) to ensure consistency in findings. 2) Member Checking – Interview results and data analyses were reviewed with respondents to confirm the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations. 3) Audit Trail – The entire research process was meticulously documented to ensure transparency and facilitate replication in future studies.

Figure 1. Methodological Research Procedure



This research adheres to ethical considerations in social research, including Informed Consent – Participants were provided with information about the research objectives and were granted consent before participating in interviews. Data Confidentiality – Respondents' names and pesantren identities were anonymized to protect privacy and ensure data security. Transparency – Respondents were given the right to decline to answer sensitive questions.

III. Result and Discussion

The findings of this study reveal several key factors contributing to the closure of pesantren in Indonesia. Thematic analysis of data obtained through in-depth interviews with eight family members or descendants of Kiai who once led pesantren, 10 local community members, and 12 alumni who previously studied at these institutions, along with participant observation and document analysis, indicates that leadership

The Decline of Pesantren: Examining Leadership, Financial Constraints, and Social Transformation
regeneration issues, unprofessional management, financial constraints, and socio-cultural changes are the dominant factors in this phenomenon

A. Lack of Leadership Regeneration

Many pesantren lack an effective leadership regeneration mechanism. The tradition of charismatic leadership centered around the Kiai makes the leadership transition a significant challenge. When a Kiai passes away or is no longer able to lead, pesantren often lose direction, ultimately resulting in structural dysfunction and operational cessation. (Fauzi, 2012; Gunawan et al., 2023; Rahtikawatie et al., 2021; Zaki et al., 2022) The absence of a leadership succession system in many pesantren exacerbates this issue, as no prepared leader can assume the strategic role necessary for institutional sustainability.

Table 1. Interview: Leadership Mechanism

Theme	Interview Excerpts	Frequency	Percentage	Interpretation
Lack of leadership regeneration	"After the Kiai passed away, no one could replace him with the same authority."	12	40%	Pesantren loses direction when the main Kiai dies without a prepared successor.
Absence of leadership succession	"We never discussed who would continue leading the pesantren after the Kiai."	8	26.7%	The absence of a transparent leadership succession system makes regeneration difficult.
Dependence on the Kiai figure	"Students and administrators only follow what the Kiai commands."	10	33.3%	Highly centralized leadership makes pesantren struggle to adapt after losing the central leader.

Data interpretation from table 1 indicates that the lack of preparedness in leadership regeneration significantly contributes to pesantren closures. Most respondents (40%) revealed that the absence of a leader as strong as the previous Kiai led to institutional instability. Approximately 26.7% also highlighted the lack of a leadership succession mechanism as a primary contributing factor. In comparison, 33.3% noted that pesantren were overly dependent on the Kiai figure without a transparent transition system.

Table 2. Observation and Documentation for Leadership Mechanism

Observation Aspects	Observational Findings
Physical Condition of Pesantren	Many buildings have been abandoned and are no longer used for educational activities.
Community Interaction	Minimal interaction between the community and pesantren after its closure.
Presence of Students	No students remain living or studying in the closed pesantren environment.
Administrative Documentation	No well-organized financial records were found before the pesantren closed.

Based on table 2: The results of this study reveal that the closure of pesantren in Indonesia is not driven by a single factor but rather by a combination of interrelated internal and external factors. The primary aspects contributing to this phenomenon are the lack of leadership regeneration, unprofessional management, financial constraints, and socio-cultural changes. A more comprehensive analysis is required to further understand these findings by comparing them with theories on leadership, educational management, pesantren economics, and socio-cultural dynamics.

In the context of leadership, the transformational leadership theory proposed by (Bass, B. M., & Avolio B. J., 1994) asserts that a leader must be able to establish a sustainable succession system to ensure organizational continuity even when the primary leader is no longer active. However, this study finds that pesantren still rely heavily on a charismatic leadership model centered around the figure of the Kiai. (Fauzi, 2012; Gunawan et al., 2023; Rahtikawatie et al., 2021; Zaki et al., 2022). This dependence results in stagnation and difficulties in leadership succession when the kiai passes away or can no longer lead. These findings align with the study by (Tamam and Sa'ud, 2016), which states that pesantren without a strong succession mechanism are more vulnerable to structural dysfunction. The distinction of this study lies in highlighting the long-term impact of the absence of systematic leadership on institutional sustainability. This subject has not been extensively examined in previous research.

From an educational management perspective, this study reveals that pesantren have yet to adopt modern management principles based on data and efficiency. (Drucker, 1999), His strategic management concept emphasizes the importance of data-driven decision-making systems, financial transparency, and human resource evaluation. However, the pesantren examined in this study continue to be managed traditionally, lacking proper financial record-keeping, systematic teacher management, and data-based decision-making processes (Basori et al., 2023; Ma'arif et al., 2023; Murdayanti & Puruwita, 2017; Rahtikawatie et al., 2021). These findings are reinforced by (Budiharso and Suharto, 2022), who found that pesantren implementing modern management systems tend to be more resilient than those relying on traditional methods.

In the financial aspect, this study confirms that pesantren without diversified income sources are more susceptible to operational difficulties (Anwar & Sholiha, 2024; Faisol et al., 2023; Mi'raj et al., 2023; Sandria et al., 2024). Levin's (2001) theory of educational, financial sustainability suggests that educational institutions relying on a single revenue source are more likely to experience stagnation and even closure compared to those with multiple income streams (Al-Filali et al., 2024; Chantaranimi et al., 2023; Standish, 2008; Todd, 2003). This study finds that most pesantren primarily depend on unstable community donations, with minimal government support. The key difference between these findings and previous studies is that this research highlights how the inability of

The Decline of Pesantren: Examining Leadership, Financial Constraints, and Social Transformation
pesantren to adapt to modern educational economic models exacerbates their financial difficulties.

Social and cultural changes also significantly affect student enrollment's decline and pesantren's sustainability. (Kawakip, 2020; Us et al., 2023; Zuhri & Sibaweh, 2023) Public preference for formal education based on science and technology has increased, leading to a decline in interest in pesantren-based education. This finding is supported by (Dhofier, 1980; Zamakhsyari Dhofier, 1982), who noted that pesantren failing to adapt their curricula to modern skills tend to struggle to attract students. However, this study finds that urbanization and modernization have substantial impacts beyond shifts in educational preferences. Many families traditionally sent their children to pesantren now prefer technology-oriented schools due to more apparent career prospects. This illustrates that social change affects individual preferences and collective family decisions in choosing an educational system for their children.

To clarify the novelty of this study, the following comparison with previous research is provided:

Table 3. The Novelty: Leadership Mechanism

Aspect	Previous Studies	Findings of This Study	New Contribution
Leadership Succession	The kiai plays a central role in pesantren sustainability	Dependence on a single figure makes succession difficult, leading to pesantren closure.	Highlights the long-term impact of the absence of succession planning on institutional sustainability.
Educational Management	Pesantren that adopt modern management practices are more resilient	Many pesantren still operate traditionally without data-driven management systems.	Reveals how the lack of governance weakens pesantren competitiveness.
Financial Sustainability	Pesantren relying on a single income source are more vulnerable	Community donations are unstable, with no income diversification.	Identifies the lack of educational and economic strategy as a primary cause of the closure.
Social Changes	Society increasingly prefers technology-based formal education	Besides educational preference shifts, urbanization accelerates the decline of pesantren.	Shows that social changes are not only individual but also collective family decisions.

From table 3: This study confirms that pesantren in Indonesia face serious challenges requiring more concrete policy interventions. Reforms in leadership systems, adopting modern management practices, diversification of funding sources, and curriculum innovation are crucial steps to ensure the sustainability of pesantren in the modern era. This study provides new perspectives by emphasizing the complex interaction between internal and external factors affecting pesantren while offering insights for future Islamic education policies

B. Unprofessional Management in Indonesian Pesantren

Most pesantren in Indonesia are still managed traditionally with an unprofessional system. Many pesantren do not apply modern management principles in administration,

finance, or human resource management. This hinders their ability to adapt to increasingly complex contemporary demands (Basori et al., 2023; Prasetyo, 2022; Rahtikawatie et al., 2021; Thoha & Hannan, 2022). The lack of transparent financial recording and data-driven decision-making systems further weakens pesantren's competitiveness in facing external challenges.

Table 4. Interview: Management in Pesantren

Theme	Interview Excerpt	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of modern administrative systems	"We still record finances manually without a digital system."	10	33.3%
Decision-making not based on data	"Decisions are often based on the kiai's intuition rather than analysis."	8	26.7%
Lack of financial transparency	"There are no financial reports accessible to other administrators."	7	23.3%
Unstructured HR management	"There is no evaluation system for teaching staff."	5	16.7%

Based on the table 4 above: Interview results show that 33.3% of respondents indicated that pesantren still use manual record-keeping without digitalization, making them prone to errors. About 26.7% stated that strategic decisions were primarily based on intuition rather than data analysis. The lack of financial transparency was also a significant issue, with 23.3% of respondents admitting that financial reports were not openly accessible. Additionally, 16.7% of respondents indicated no structured system for evaluating or managing human resources.

Table 5. Observation dan Documentation

Observation Aspect	Findings
Administrative System	Financial records are still kept in notebooks without digital bookkeeping.
Managerial Decision-Making	No periodic documented meetings for strategic decision-making.
Financial Transparency	No financial reports were published for the Pesantren community.
Human Resource Management	No performance assessment or training system for teaching staff.

Observations indicate that the studied pesantren have not yet implemented a digital-based administrative system, which hampers management efficiency. Important decisions are not well documented, making evaluation difficult. Financial transparency is a significant issue due to the absence of publicly accessible reports. Additionally, human resource management lacks a transparent evaluation system, which can impact the quality of education and overall operations.

This study highlights how internal and external factors contribute to the closure of pesantren in Indonesia. The lack of leadership regeneration, unprofessional management, financial constraints, and socio-cultural changes are key aspects that make it difficult for pesantren to sustain themselves. From an academic perspective, these findings should be further examined by comparing them with theories on leadership,

The Decline of Pesantren: Examining Leadership, Financial Constraints, and Social Transformation
educational management, pesantren economics, and social change to understand their relevance and novelty.

In the leadership context, the transformational leadership theory proposed by (Bass, B. M., & Avolio, B. J., 1994) asserts that a leader must establish a sustainable cadre system to maintain organizational stability despite leadership transitions. However, this study finds that many pesantren still adopt a charismatic leadership model centered on the figure of the kiai without a structured cadre system (Fauzi, 2012; Gunawan et al., 2023; Rahtikawatie et al., 2021; Zaki et al., 2022). This dependency results in stagnation and leadership regeneration difficulties when the kiai dies or can no longer lead. These findings align with (Sa'ud, 2016) research, which states that pesantren without a strong cadre system are more vulnerable to institutional instability. However, this study adds a new perspective by demonstrating that the lack of leadership regeneration affects the internal structure and influences public trust in the sustainability of pesantren.

From an educational management perspective, the findings of this study indicate that pesantren are still managed traditionally without adopting modern management principles. (Drucker, 1999), In his concept of strategic management, he emphasizes the importance of data-driven decision-making systems, financial transparency, and human resource evaluation to ensure organizational sustainability. However, this study found that many pesantren lack proper financial record-keeping, data-driven decision-making systems, and systematic evaluation of teaching staff (Basori et al., 2023; Prasetyo, 2022; Rahtikawatie et al., 2021; Thoha & Hannan, 2022). A previous study by (Budiharso and Suharto, 2022) demonstrated that pesantren adopting modern management systems were more resilient than those relying on traditional methods. The new contribution of this study lies in emphasizing how unprofessional management not only leads to internal inefficiencies but also hinders pesantren adaptation to external challenges.

In terms of financial aspects, this study confirms that pesantren without diversified revenue streams are more vulnerable to operational difficulties (Anwar & Sholiha, 2024; Faisol et al., 2023; Mi'raj et al., 2023; Sandria et al., 2024). Levin's (2001) theory of financial sustainability in education asserts that educational institutions relying on a single source of income are at greater risk of stagnation compared to those with diverse revenue sources (Al-Filali et al., 2024; Chantaranimi et al., 2023; Standish, 2008; Todd, 2003). This study found that most pesantren still rely on unstable community donations, with minimal government support. While previous studies focused more on the importance of external assistance for pesantren (Bashori, 2017; Iswantir et al., 2019; Nuriz & Awang, 2021), this study adds insight that pesantren failing to develop independent economic strategies are more likely to face closure.

From a social change perspective, this study found that societal preferences for education have shifted significantly. (Kawakip, 2020; Us et al., 2023; Zuhri & Sibaweh, 2023) Demonstrated that many families opt for formal schools with science- and

technology-based curricula, considering them more relevant to labor market needs. Similarly, (Dhofier, 1980 Zamakhsyari Dhofier 1982) noted that pesantren, failing to adapt their curricula to contemporary developments, tend to experience a decline in student enrollment. However, this study found that urbanization and modernization have a broader impact than previously assumed. Many families that traditionally sent their children to pesantren now prefer technology-based schools due to the accessibility of education and more precise job prospects. These findings highlight that individual preferences and collective family decisions influence social change in selecting educational systems for their children.

To clarify this study's contribution to academic literature, the following comparison with previous research is presented:

Table 6. The Novelty Management of Pesantren

Aspect	Previous Research	Findings of This Study	New Contribution
Leadership Regeneration	Pesantren leaders play a central role in sustainability	Dependence on a single figure makes leadership regeneration difficult.	Demonstrates that the absence of leadership succession directly affects public trust in pesantren.
Educational Management	Pesantren implementing modern management are more resilient	Many pesantren still use traditional systems without digital financial records.	Reveals that unprofessional management hinders adaptation to external challenges.
Pesantren Finance	Pesantren relying on a single income source are more vulnerable	Community donations are unstable, with minimal revenue diversification.	This shows that weak educational and economic strategies accelerate financial crises.
Social Change	Society prefers formal, technology-based education	Urbanization and modernization increasingly shift societal education preferences.	Reveals that social change occurs not only individually but also collectively within families.

Overall, this study affirms that pesantren in Indonesia face significant challenges that require concrete policy interventions. Reforming leadership systems, implementing modern management practices, diversifying funding sources, and innovating curricula are crucial steps to ensure the sustainability of pesantren in the modern era. This study provides a new perspective by emphasizing the complex interaction between internal and external factors affecting pesantren, offering insights for developing future Islamic education policies.

C. Financial Resource Limitations

The lack of financial support from both the government and the community poses a significant challenge to the sustainability of pesantren. Many pesantren rely heavily on community donations, which are often unstable and insufficient to cover operational needs and infrastructure development. (Anwar & Sholiha, 2024; Faisol et al., 2023; Mi'raj et al., 2023; Sandria et al., 2024) stated that pesantren without a diversified funding

The Decline of Pesantren: Examining Leadership, Financial Constraints, and Social Transformation
strategy are more vulnerable to financial crises, particularly in the face of rising operational costs.

Table 7. Interview: Financial in Pesantren

Theme	Interview Excerpts	Frequency	Percentage
Dependence on community donations	"We rely solely on donations from congregants, which are sometimes insufficient to pay teachers' salaries."	12	40%
Minimal government support	"There is no specific government funding for small pesantren like ours."	9	30%
Lack of financial management strategy	"The pesantren does not have a long-term financial plan."	6	20%
Inadequate infrastructure	"The buildings are deteriorating, but we lack funds for renovations."	3	10%

Interpretation: 40% of respondents stated that pesantren heavily depend on community donations, often insufficient to finance daily operations. Meanwhile, 30% of respondents expressed concerns about the lack of government support for small pesantren. Additionally, 20% of respondents highlighted the absence of a long-term financial strategy, making it difficult for pesantren to manage existing resources. Furthermore, 10% of respondents emphasized the deteriorating infrastructure due to financial constraints.

Table 8. Observation in Finance

Observation Aspect	Observed Findings
Funding Sources	No stable income source apart from community donations.
Infrastructure Condition	Many buildings exhibit minor to severe damage without repairs.
Financial Management	No structured and well-documented bookkeeping system was found.
Government Assistance	The government allocates no regular operational aid.

The observations indicate that the studied pesantren lack stable financial sources beyond community donations, which fluctuate and are unreliable in the long term. Pesantren's infrastructure has suffered from unaddressed damage due to financial limitations. Additionally, financial management remains highly traditional, with inadequate bookkeeping practices, making effective budget planning difficult. The lack of government assistance further exacerbates the financial instability of pesantren, threatening their long-term viability.

This study finds that financial resource constraints are one of the primary factors contributing to pesantren closures in Indonesia. This issue is closely linked to Pesantren's reliance on unstable community donations, minimal government support, the absence of financial management strategies, and worsening infrastructure due to limited funds. A comparative analysis with existing theories and previous studies on educational financial management, pesantren economics, and sustainability models for educational institutions will be conducted to understand these findings further.

In the theory of educational finance, Levin (2001) states that educational institutions that rely solely on a single source of income are more susceptible to stagnation compared to those with diversified funding sources (Al-Filali et al., 2024; Chantaranimi et al., 2023; Standish, 2008; Todd, 2003). The findings of this study align with (those of Anwar & Sholiha, 2024 Faisol et al., 2023 Mi'raj et al., 2023 and Sandria et al., 2024), who highlight that pesantren without financial diversification strategies are more likely to experience financial crises. However, this study offers a new perspective by demonstrating that the issue extends beyond dependence on community donations and includes pesantren's lack of long-term financial planning.

Furthermore, (Budiharso & Suharto, 2022) revealed that pesantren who successfully navigate economic challenges manage their finances with a transparent and well-documented system. However, this study finds that most pesantren facing closure lack organized financial records, making budget allocation difficult. The primary distinction from previous studies is that this research examines financial management from an internal administrative perspective and explores how financial constraints directly impact infrastructure conditions and the welfare of pesantren educators.

From the perspective of Islamic education policy, (Bashori, 2017; Iswantir et al., 2019; Nuriz & Awang, 2021) emphasizes that pesantren receiving government support tend to be more stable regarding operations and infrastructure. The findings of this study confirm that the lack of government assistance is a significant challenge for small pesantren who do not have access to subsidies or stable operational funding. However, the novel contribution of this research is its identification that pesantren who do not actively seek alternative funding opportunities from private sector initiatives or corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs are more vulnerable to financial difficulties than those who establish partnership networks.

In the context of educational infrastructure development, (Kawakip, 2020; Us et al., 2023; Zuhri & Sibaweh, 2023) found that many pesantren experienced a decline due to a lack of investment in facility improvements and modernization. This study reveals that neglected infrastructure deterioration leads to declining student enrollment and diminished public trust in pesantren. Unlike previous studies, this research highlights that financial limitations affect the quality of education and the public perception of pesantren's viability as a reliable educational institution.

To provide a clearer understanding of this study's contributions, the following table compares the findings with previous research:

Table 9. The Novelty: Financial Mechanism

Aspect	Previous Studies	Findings of This Study	Novel Contribution
Pesantren Financial Strategies	Pesantren without income diversification are vulnerable	Reliance on community donations	Highlights that the lack of long-term financial planning

The Decline of Pesantren: Examining Leadership, Financial Constraints, and Social Transformation

Financial Management	Proper financial administration enhances pesantren sustainability.	leads to financial instability. Most pesantren that closed lacked transparent financial records.	exacerbates Pesantren's financial conditions. Reveals that the lack of financial transparency affects budget allocation effectiveness.
Government Support	Subsidized pesantren are more operationally stable	Limited government aid exacerbates financial distress in small pesantren.	It identifies that pesantren who fail to seek alternative funding sources are more prone to financial crises.
Infrastructure and Public Trust	The poor pesantren infrastructure reduces student enrollment (Wahid, 2020).	Facility deterioration due to funding shortages discourages public interest.	It shows that financial constraints impact the pesantren's physical conditions and public image.

Overall, this study confirms that financial constraints are a dominant factor in pesantren closures by providing deeper insights into how financial management, funding strategies, and infrastructure conditions interact in shaping pesantren sustainability. Therefore, a more comprehensive policy intervention is needed, including sustainable funding programs, financial management training for pesantren administrators, and incentives for pesantren that successfully establish partnerships with the private sector and local communities. This study makes a significant contribution to the development of Islamic education policy in Indonesia by emphasizing the importance of sustainable financial planning to ensure the long-term viability of pesantren.

D. Social and Cultural Changes

Globalization and modernization have significantly influenced societal preferences in selecting educational institutions. Many parents now prefer formal schools with curricula emphasizing science and technology, perceiving them as more relevant to labor market demands. (Kawakip, 2020; Us et al., 2023; Zuhri & Sibaweh, 2023) Found that pesantren who fail to innovate their curricula experience a significant decline in student enrollment, ultimately impacting their sustainability.

Findings from this study indicate that the closure of pesantren is not attributable to a single factor but rather to a combination of interrelated internal and external elements. Thus, a holistic and policy-based approach is required to address these challenges and ensure the sustainability of pesantren as vital Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia.

Table 10. Interview: Social-Cultural Factors

Theme	Interview Quotation	Frequency	Percentage
Preference for formal schools	"We chose public schools because they offer clearer job prospects."	13	43.3%
Lack of curriculum innovation	"Pesantren lack modern skills training, such as technology and foreign languages."	9	30%
Stigma against pesantren	"Many believe pesantren graduates struggle in the job market."	5	16.7%
Urbanization and lifestyle changes	"Children nowadays are more interested in technology-based schools than pesantren."	3	10%

Interpretation: A total of 43.3% of respondents expressed a preference for formal schools due to their more apparent career prospects. Additionally, 30% of respondents highlighted the lack of curriculum innovation in Pesantren as a key reason for declining interest. 16.7% of respondents cited the stigmatization of Pesantren graduates as less competitive in the job market, while 10% attributed shifting educational preferences to urbanization and evolving lifestyles favoring technology-based learning.

Table 11. Observation

Observed Aspect	Observation Findings
Student Enrollment	Declining enrollment over the past five years.
Pesantren Curriculum	Lack of adaptation to technological advancements and modern skills.
Public Perception	Parents increasingly favor formal schooling over pesantren.
Information Access	Limited digital learning resources for students.

Observational findings indicate that pesantren included in this study have experienced a steady decline in student enrollment over recent years, coinciding with rising public preference for formal education. Pesantren curricula have not been significantly updated to incorporate modern technological skills, and societal attitudes increasingly favor formal schools. Additionally, limited digital learning access for students has widened the gap between pesantren and other educational institutions.

Social and cultural shifts represent one of the primary challenges affecting pesantren sustainability in Indonesia. Globalization and modernization have reshaped societal preferences, with many parents opting for formal, science- and technology-based education, which they perceive as better aligned with labor market demands (Kawakip, 2020; Us et al., 2023; Zuhri & Sibaweh, 2023). This study confirms that declining pesantren enrollment is not solely due to individual preference shifts but also stems from pesantren struggling to adapt to modern educational dynamics.

Within the framework of social change theory proposed by Giddens (1991), modernization has profoundly affected traditional educational institutions, including Pesantren. It was found that Pesantren, failing to innovate their curricula, faces sharp enrollment declines. This study corroborates that finding but adds a new dimension by emphasizing that shifting public preferences are driven not only by curriculum deficiencies but also by external factors such as urbanization and evolving lifestyles, which increasingly prioritize technology-based education.

In Islamic education, (Iswantir et al., 2019; Nuriz & Awang, 2021) emphasizes that pesantren face significant challenges in adapting to social changes, particularly in incorporating modern skills into their curricula. The findings of this study indicate that pesantren who do not integrate technology-based education and foreign language instruction experience a decline in societal appeal. (Budiharso & Suharto, 2022) Supports this conclusion, asserting that pesantren who maintain a strictly classical curriculum

without innovation are more vulnerable to losing students than those who begin incorporating modern skills.

Furthermore, the stigma surrounding pesantren graduates, perceived as less competitive in the job market, has been identified as another factor contributing to the decline in student enrollment. (Bourdieu, 1986)'s theory of cultural capital posits that education plays a crucial role in shaping the social capital that determines an individual's status in society (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014). This study finds that pesantren graduates are still viewed as lacking the competencies required in the labor market compared to their counterparts from formal schools. This finding aligns with (Dhofier, 1980), who argues that the lack of vocational education in pesantren reinforces the perception that pesantren graduates face limitations in professional competition.

Urbanization also plays a crucial role in reshaping the educational landscape of pesantren. (Kawakip, 2020; Us et al., 2023; Zuhri & Sibaweh, 2023) This study demonstrates that many urban families prefer technology-based schools, perceiving them as more aligned with contemporary developments. This study extends these findings by revealing that this trend is not confined to urban areas but is also increasingly prevalent in rural regions, further shifting preferences from pesantren to formal schools.

To better illustrate this study's contributions to academic literature, the following table compares its findings with previous research:

Table 12. The Novelty and Contribution

Aspect	Previous Research	Findings of This Study	New Contribution
Educational Preferences	Society prefers technology-based formal schools	This trend is also occurring in rural areas.	Demonstrates that urbanization accelerates the shift from pesantren to formal schools.
Pesantren Curriculum	Pesantren that do not innovate experience a decline in student enrollment	A curriculum that fails to accommodate modern skills reduces pesantren's appeal.	Reveals that curriculum innovation is a key factor in attracting students.
Stigma of Pesantren Graduates	Pesantren graduates are perceived as less competitive in the job market.	This stigma is exacerbated by the lack of vocational education in pesantren.	Shows that without integrating modern skills, this stigma remains challenging to overcome.
Impact of Urbanization	Lifestyle changes reduce interest in traditional education	Urbanization influences not only individual preferences but also collective family decisions.	Demonstrates that social change occurs individually and as a family-based educational decision.

Overall, this study affirms that social and cultural changes play a significant role in determining the sustainability of pesantren. Without curriculum innovation, adaptive strategies for social transformation, and efforts to enhance the competitiveness of graduates in the job market, pesantren will find it increasingly difficult to attract public

interest. Therefore, Islamic education policies must consider these factors to ensure that pesantren remain relevant educational institutions in the modern era.

IV. Conclusion

This study reveals that the closure of pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) in Indonesia results from various interrelated factors, including the lack of leadership regeneration, unprofessional management, financial constraints, and social and cultural changes. The heavy dependence on the figure of the kiai (Islamic scholar) without a transparent cadre system leads to instability in pesantren leadership. Additionally, the continued reliance on traditional management systems that do not incorporate modern principles weakens pesantren's competitiveness in adapting to contemporary changes. On the other hand, financial constraints pose a significant challenge, particularly for pesantren who rely solely on community donations without a strategy for diversifying their funding sources. The rapid modernization and shifting societal preference toward formal, technology-based education has further accelerated the decline in student enrollment, ultimately impacting the sustainability of pesantren.

The implications of these findings highlight the urgent need for reforms in pesantren leadership and management systems to enhance their adaptability to contemporary challenges. Funding diversification strategies are crucial for improving financial stability, while curriculum innovation must be prioritized to ensure pesantren remain relevant to the needs of modern society. The government and other stakeholders are expected to provide more systematic support through policies that strengthen pesantren institutions regarding regulations, financial assistance, and human resource development. As a contribution to academic literature, this study underscores the importance of a holistic approach in understanding the factors leading to the closure of pesantren, which have often been analyzed separately in previous research. This study opens opportunities for further research to explore sustainable strategies for pesantren, particularly in the context of managerial innovation and adaptation to social change. Thus, the findings of this research are expected to serve as a foundation for more effective policy formulation to ensure that pesantren remains an integral part of the Islamic Education System in Indonesia.

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The Decline of Pesantren: Examining Leadership, Financial Constraints, and Social Transformation
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