

Kiai-preneurs: A Case Study of Entrepreneurial Leadership Models in the Economic Transformation of Pesantren

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Abstract

This study aims to identify and analyze the Kiai-preneur leadership model in the economic transformation of pesantren. The research was conducted at Darussalam Pesantren, Blokagung, Banyuwangi, which has successfully developed various entrepreneurial-based business units. This study applied a qualitative approach with a case study design. Informants were purposively selected, consisting of the pesantren leader (Kiai), foundation board, business unit managers, teachers involved in entrepreneurship curriculum, as well as students and alumni representatives. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, documentation, and audio-visual analysis. Data analysis employed Miles and Huberman's interactive model with source, method, and observer triangulation to ensure credibility. The findings reveal that the leadership of the Kiai in Darussalam has evolved into a hybrid entrepreneurial-religious leadership, combining religious authority with modern entrepreneurial management. Key findings include: (1) integration of Islamic values in business management, (2) pesantren curriculum functioning as an entrepreneurship incubator for students and alumni, and (3) adoption of digitalization in pesantren businesses. The contribution of this research is to develop a hybrid entrepreneurial-religious leadership model (Kiai-preneurs), analyzing the specific practices of Koppontren Ausath, BLK Darussalam, and DASSCO as concrete evidence of the transformation of the pesantren economy through religious authority and modern entrepreneurial management.

Keywords: *Kiai-Preneurs; Enterpreneurial Leadership; Economic Transformation of Pesantren.*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi dan menganalisis model kepemimpinan Kiai-preneur dalam transformasi ekonomi pesantren. Objek penelitian adalah Pondok Pesantren Darussalam Blokagung Banyuwangi yang telah berhasil mengembangkan berbagai unit usaha berbasis kewirausahaan pesantren. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Informan penelitian dipilih secara purposif yang terdiri atas pengasuh pesantren, ketua yayasan, pengelola unit usaha, guru yang terlibat dalam kurikulum kewirausahaan, serta perwakilan santri dan alumni. Teknik pengumpulan data meliputi wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipan, dokumentasi, dan analisis audio-visual. Analisis data menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman dengan triangulasi sumber, metode, dan pengamat untuk menjamin kredibilitas. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan

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Kiai di Darussalam Blokagung berkembang menjadi hybrid entrepreneurial-religious leadership yang memadukan otoritas religius dengan manajemen kewirausahaan modern. Temuan penting meliputi tiga aspek: (1) Koperasi Pondok Pesantren (Koppontren) Ausath integrasi adalah bukti nilai agama dalam pengelolaan usaha, (2) Balai Latihan Kerja (BLK) Darussalam menjadi inkubator kewirausahaan bagi santri dan alumni, dan (3) Darussalam Social Cooperation (DASSCO) sebagai bentuk adopsi digitalisasi usaha pesantren. Kontribusi penelitian ini adalah Mengembangkan model kepemimpinan hybrid entrepreneurial-religious (Kiai-preneurs), menganalisis praktik spesifik Koppontren Ausath, BLK Darussalam, dan DASSCO sebagai bukti nyata transformasi ekonomi pesantren melalui otoritas religius dan manajemen wirausaha modern..

Kata kunci : Kiai-preneurs; Kepemimpinan Wirausaha; Transformasi Ekonomi Pesantren

I. Introduction

There has been a shift in the role of the Kiai, from purely spiritual leaders to spiritual leaders who are also Kiai-preneurs (Umar et al., 2024; Karim et al., 2022). The demand for financial autonomy for pesantren and efforts to empower the internal and external communities economically. Pesantren do not only rely on infaq or donor funds but have begun to develop business units (e.g., cooperatives, minimarkets, integrated agriculture) that are directly led or initiated by Kiai (Hafidloh, 2025; Fahmi & Aswirna, 2023), where Islamic values such as honesty, justice, and social responsibility form the basis of their operations. The Kiai-preneur leadership model demonstrates the institutional adaptation of pesantren to the demands of the modern economy without sacrificing their religious identity, creating a unique synthesis between da'wah and business.

The Kiai-preneur model encourages internal economic transformation in Islamic boarding schools, turning students and alumni into productive economic agents (Izzat, 2025). Implementation of entrepreneurship curriculum, internships in pesantren business units, and emphasis on independence after graduation (Nasir et al., 2024; Isbah et al., 2023). The existence of business incubator programs in pesantren that guide students to start businesses, as well as organized alumni networks to promote the products/services of the boarding school or alumni (Gustomo et al., 2025; Bodolica & Spraggon, 2021). This erodes the stigma that pesantren graduates are only prepared to work in the religious sector, but are also ready to compete in the real sector. The entrepreneurial leadership of the Kiai serves as a catalyst for mobilizing human resources in pesantren to become workers and entrepreneurs with a work ethic based on spiritual values.

The Kiai-preneur model positions pesantren as significant centers of local economic growth, not merely as closed educational entities. The business units of pesantren often involve the surrounding community as suppliers of raw materials, partners, or consumers (Zaki et al., 2022). Pesantren business units create jobs for local villagers, increase cash flow in the region, and sometimes serve as pilot projects for local microeconomic initiatives, such as the development of regional specialty products

Kiai-preneurs: A Case Study of Entrepreneurial Leadership Models in the Economic Transformation of Pesantren

(Mustakim et al., 2024). This interaction shows that pesantren serve as a hub connecting local traditions with modern market mechanisms. The entrepreneurial leadership of the Kiai has a widespread multiplier effect, making pesantren key actors in economic development and community empowerment at the regional level.

The tension between *zuhud* (religious asceticism) and profit orientation represents a sociological "gray area" often overlooked in previous studies of pesantren leadership (Abitolkha & Alamin, 2025). Traditionally, *zuhud* is interpreted as an effort to distance oneself from worldly attachments to focus on the hereafter, whereas entrepreneurship demands capital accumulation, market efficiency, and aggressive material growth (Su & Lim, 2025). Current literature acknowledges that Kiai possess transformational characteristics, but it has yet to critically deconstruct how a Kiai-preneur navigates this identity clash when their spiritual authority confronts the pragmatic and often ruthless logic of business competition.

In this context, the Kiai-preneur leadership model deconstructs the meaning of profit by transforming it from an end goal into an instrument of *maslahah* (public benefit). The conflict between asceticism and gain is resolved through a paradigm where economic autonomy is a non-negotiable prerequisite for the sustainability of *da'wah* (religious calling) and the institution's independence from external donor funds (Harsono & Hara, 2025). The Kiai acts as a balancer, ensuring that the pesantren's economic growth does not lead to personal consumerism, but rather to the strengthening of educational facilities and the empowerment of students (*santri*) (Saputra et al., 2023). Consequently, the value of *zuhud* is preserved as an internal detachment from wealth, even as the Kiai physically leads the expansion of various productive business units.

Furthermore, significant sociological challenges arise in the form of risks regarding the commodification of religion or a shift in the Kiai's image from a spiritual guide to a corporate manager in the eyes of the community (Raya, 2025). This research is crucial because it aims to uncover the specific mechanisms of how Kiai utilize relational and social capital—such as mobilizing alumni networks as investors—without eroding the ecosystem of trust that serves as the foundation of their charismatic leadership (Bui & Jeng, 2022). Without an in-depth analysis of this point of conflict, we lose the understanding of how pesantren successfully achieve unique institutional innovation, where financial success is treated as tangible proof of "blessing" (*barakah*) and exemplary leadership, rather than a sign of fading religious piety.

Therefore, dissecting the conflict between asceticism and profit orientation is key to understanding the true "soul" of pesantren economic transformation in Indonesia. This study will not only enrich the literature on cross-cultural leadership but also provide solutions for many religious institutions struggling with the desire for financial independence while fearing the loss of their spiritual identity. By formulating a model

capable of harmonizing these two seemingly opposite poles, this research will produce a new blueprint on how religious ideology can become a catalyst for sustainable and competitive local economic growth without sacrificing traditional religious morality.

Several studies on Kiai leadership in pesantren reveal their important role in entrepreneurial development and institutional transformation. Kiai leaders demonstrate characteristics of transformational leadership, including charismatic influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration (Khoiri et al., 2022). Their entrepreneurial leadership involves four main functions: starting a business, facilitating development, mobilizing teachers and students, and involving alumni as investors in the pesantren's business units (Bashith et al., 2025; Hafidloh, 2025). Kiai effectively integrates traditional religious values with modern entrepreneurial principles, creating a unique educational environment that fosters innovation and independence among students. The leadership model combines a transformational approach with participatory elements, characterized by openness, active listening, and acceptance of subordinates' opinions. This multifaceted leadership style allows Kiai to utilize various forms of capital—intellectual, religious, social, and relational—to promote spiritual and economic development in the pesantren community.

This study is unique in that it does not merely identify leadership characteristics (such as charismatic, transformational, or participatory) as revealed by previous literature. Previous research has mapped that Kiai do indeed possess transformational and participatory characteristics and function in four main entrepreneurial functions. However, the novelty of this research is to deconstruct and construct a holistic Kiai-preneur Entrepreneurial Leadership Model. The proposed model will go beyond describing characteristics and functions, focusing on the specific mechanisms of how Kiai manage and balance the potential contradictions between traditional religious values (zuhud/asceticism) and modern entrepreneurial principles (profitability/risk). The most significant novelty is the detailed case study analysis of Kiai-preneur strategies in utilizing relational capital and social capital (alumni and community networks) in an integrated manner to create an independent and sustainable pesantren economic ecosystem, making it a center of local economic growth (not just a center of education). This approach offers a new sociological-economic perspective, providing a richer understanding of how Kiai leadership has successfully transformed religious ideology into economic institutional innovation in Indonesia.

This research is highly urgent, both academically and practically. Academically, this study is very important because it can fill the gap in the literature in comprehensively understanding how religious-based charismatic leadership (Kiai) can be transformed into an effective entrepreneurial leadership model. Most studies focus on the spiritual

role of Kiai, while their role as agents of economic transformation has yet to be explored in depth. Practically, the urgency of this research stems from the pressing need to find a grassroots economic development model based on local and sustainable values, especially amid the challenges of financial independence for Islamic educational institutions and rising unemployment. The Kiai-preneur model offers a unique framework that integrates religious morality with business practices, providing real solutions for the economic empowerment of pesantren communities and surrounding areas. Therefore, this research is highly feasible because its findings will not only enrich the theory of cross-cultural leadership and entrepreneurship, but can also be used as a blueprint for other pesantren and socio-religious institutions to encourage independence and contribute significantly to national economic growth. The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the Kiai-preneur leadership model in the economic transformation of pesantren to develop a framework for sustainable development.

II. Research Method

This research will be conducted at the Darussalam Pesantren in Blokagung, Banyuwangi, Indonesia. This location was chosen purposefully because the pesantren is widely known as one of the traditional Islamic educational institutions that has successfully undergone significant economic institutional transformation, making it an ideal model of the “Kiai-preneur” concept. Darussalam Blokagung Pesantren has various productive business units that are professionally managed under the direct initiative and leadership of the Kiai, such as the integrated agriculture sector, retail business, and microfinance services. This success makes it an information-rich case for an in-depth analysis of the entrepreneurial leadership model applied by the Kiai in mobilizing the resources of the pesantren and its community, which is highly relevant to the research title.

The approach used in this study is a qualitative approach. The reason for choosing this approach is because the study aims to understand and interpret a complex social phenomenon, namely the entrepreneurial leadership model of Kiai in its natural context. The qualitative approach allows researchers to obtain in-depth, meaningful, and descriptive data about the processes, motivations, and values underlying the actions of Kiai and the pesantren community. The type of research that will be used is a case study. A case study was chosen because it allows for intensive and in-depth exploration of a single unit (Darussalam Blokagung Islamic Boarding School) to reveal the unique characteristics and specific mechanisms of the Kiai-preneur leadership model, which are difficult to measure with a quantitative approach.

Research informants will be selected purposively, including akhwan caregivers as leaders, foundation chairpersons, pesantren business unit managers, teachers/ustaz involved in entrepreneurship curriculum development, and representatives of santri and

alumni who are successful entrepreneurs. The selection of these informants aims to obtain diverse and comprehensive perspectives on the implementation of the Kiai-preneur model.

The main data collection technique used was in-depth interviews to explore personal narratives and perspectives. In addition, participant observation will be used to directly observe interactions and business processes in the pesantren environment; documentation will be used to collect written data such as business unit financial reports and curricula; and audio-visual analysis will include videos and recordings of Kiai lectures containing motivational messages and entrepreneurial values.

The data analysis technique used is the three-stream interactive model (Interactive Model) from Miles and Huberman. This model was chosen because it allows for systematic and continuous data analysis through three interrelated steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The analysis process is carried out iteratively, i.e., simultaneously with the data collection process. To ensure the validity and credibility of the research data, triangulation techniques are used. The triangulation applied includes: Source Triangulation, which is comparing data from various informants (Kiai, managers, students/alumni); Method triangulation, which involves comparing interview results with observation and documentation results; and Observer triangulation, which involves other experts or academics to review and verify the data interpretation by the main researcher.

III. Result and Discussion

A. Research Finding

1. Kooptonern Ausath is Proof of the Integration of Religious Values in Business Management

The Ausath Pesantren Cooperative (Koppontren) serves as concrete evidence of the integration of religious values in business management. In this context, the Kiai utilizes his religious authority not only for spiritual guidance, but also to provide strong religious legitimacy to Koppontren. This ensures that every managerial decision and business practice at Koppontren, from determining profit margins to profit-sharing patterns, remains based on religious values (in accordance with sharia principles). The trust of the local community, driven by the figure of the Kiai, is a key factor in the success of Koppontren in the trade and service sectors. Thus, Koppontren Ausath is a manifestation of the Kiai's innovative leadership, which has successfully combined modern entrepreneurial management with religious authority to achieve economic independence for the pesantren.

The gradual transformation of pesantren leadership from traditional to modern forms (Isbah, 2020). In the early stages, leadership was still traditional, with religious authority

as the main foundation. Subsequently, Islamic boarding schools began to develop businesses as an effort to increase independence (Sholehudin et al., 2025; Humaidi, 2021). The transformation continues through the implementation of value-based management, which is economic decision-making based on religious principles (Rosmarin et al., 2023). The next stage is marked by the participation of santri in business units, which strengthens their role not only as students but also as actors in the independence of the pesantren (Auliyah et al., 2025)(Zaki et al., 2022). Ultimately, this process leads to modern leadership that integrates religion with entrepreneurship (Aimah et al., 2024), thereby achieving a balance between spiritual values and the needs of the times. The role of leadership is explained in the following table:

Table 1. The Role of Kiai in Hybrid Leadership at Darussalam Islamic Boarding School, Blokagung

Leadership Aspects	Form of Implementation	Field Evidence	Impact on Pesantren
Religious Authority	Caring for students, religious decision-making	Observations of regular recitations, interviews with senior students	Maintaining legitimacy and compliance
Business Management	Management of cooperatives, printing, agriculture	Cooperative financial documents, land observation results	Increasing economic independence
Hybrid Innovation	Integration of religious values in business	Board meeting notes, community testimonials	Public trust & business sustainability

Source: Researcher Analysis

The table illustrates how the leadership of the Kiai in Darussalam Blokagung combines three aspects: religious authority, business management, and hybrid innovation. The data was obtained through interviews, documents, and observations, showing that the religious legitimacy of the Kiai is the basis of trust that strengthens the sustainability of the pesantren business unit (Ariatin et al., 2024) (Buanaputra et al., 2022) (Mujahid, 2021). Kiai not only provide spiritual leadership, but also instill religious values in managerial practices (Futaqi & Mashuri, 2022) . From these findings, it can be concluded that the leadership model of the Kiai at the Darussalam Blokagung Islamic Boarding School is no longer merely charismatic leadership, but has developed into a hybrid entrepreneurial-religious leadership model that is capable of integrating religious authority with entrepreneurial innovation. This model has become one of the main factors in the success of the boarding school in transforming itself towards economic independence. The relevance of religious values in Islamic boarding school economics comes from the Al-Qur'an Surah Al-Jumu'ah verse 10 which reads:

"When the prayer has been performed, then spread out on the face of the earth; and seek the grace of Allah and remember Allah often so that you may be successful." (Interview, 2025).

This verse is the theological basis for Koppontren Ausath in integrating worship and work. The success of the business unit proves that spirituality is not an obstacle, but rather a driving force for sharia business professionalism which brings benefits to the Islamic boarding school's economic independence. The following is data from in-depth interviews that reveals the synchronization of religious values in the management of Koppontren Ausath:

"The role of the Kiai is to set the direction (compass) and provide religious legitimacy. Within our structure, the Kiai ensures that business development does not deviate from the Islamic law. His authority provides a sense of security and trust for cooperative members and students' guardians. When the Kiai grants his blessing or 'dawuh' to a business unit, it is seen as an economic struggle (jihad iqtishadi), making social obstacles on the ground easier to overcome due to the spiritual obedience of all stakeholders." (Interview, 2025).

The leadership at Pesantren Darussalam Blokagung, manifested through Koppontren Ausath, represents a sophisticated "social capital conversion" where religious authority is not merely a static tradition but a dynamic engine for economic mobilization (Madueke, 2025) (Auliyah et al., 2025). This Hybrid Entrepreneurial-Religious Leadership (Colacel, 2025) model functions by utilizing the Kiai's charismatic legitimacy to mitigate the high transaction costs typically found in traditional markets (Faisal et al., 2022)—specifically, the cost of establishing trust. By embedding sharia principles into the very fabric of business operations (Mutmainnah, 2023), the Kiai-preneur ensures that "profit" is perceived by the community not as secular greed, but as *falah* (holistic success). This is explicitly visualized in a framework where religious capital serves as the foundation, social capital (alumni/community) as the bridge, and entrepreneurial innovation as the superstructure.

The depth of this integration is best captured through the voices of the actors themselves. KI-01 (The Kiai) emphasizes that the transition to a business-oriented model is a form of contemporary jihad:

"Our goal with Koppontren is not to accumulate wealth for the sake of it, but to ensure the pesantren is not 'hand-below' (dependent). If the pesantren is economically enslaved, our *dakwah* loses its bite. Business here is an extension of our prayer; the integrity of the scale is as sacred as the integrity of the prayer mat" (Interview, 2025).

Similarly, PB-01 (Business Manager) noted how the Kiai's presence stabilizes the market:

"When we launched our printing unit, we didn't just sell services; we sold the Kiai's 'barakah' and 'amanah'. People come to us because they believe that a business led by a Kiai will not cheat them" (Interview, 2025).

These quotes highlight that religious values are not just "added on" but are the primary competitive advantage of the enterprise. However, this hybridity is not without its internal contradictions and systemic risks. A critical analysis reveals a latent conflict between *zuhud* (asceticism) and the necessity of profit accumulation. There is an ever-present risk of "commodifying charisma," where the spiritual sanctity of the Kiai might be eroded if the business units face failure or ethical scandals. If the profit motive becomes too dominant, the *santri* (students) risk being viewed as a "low-cost labor force" rather than apprentices. As AS-02 (Santri/Internal Staff) pointed out:

"Sometimes we struggle to find the balance between when we are serving the Kiai for spiritual merit and when we are working for a commercial entity that requires professional wages" (Interview, 2025).

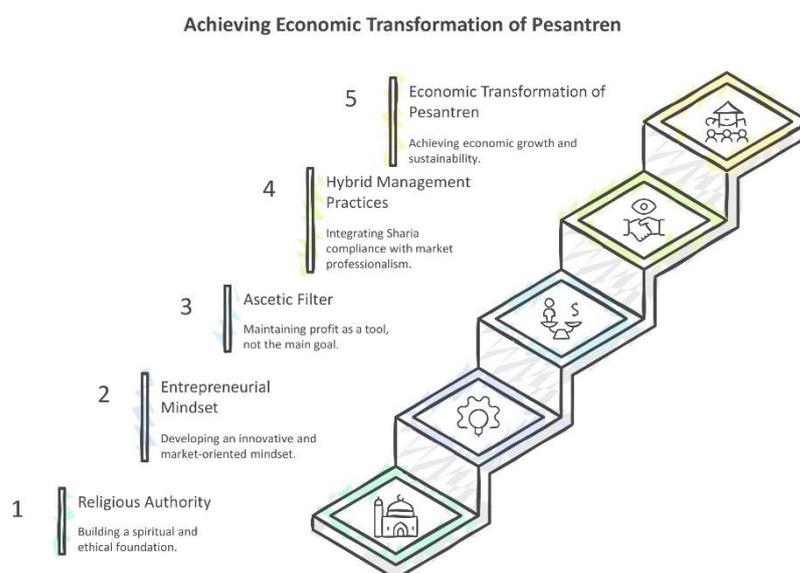
This tension suggests that the Kiai-preneur must constantly perform a "balancing act," ensuring that the secular logic of the market does not cannibalize the sacred logic of the pesantren. In conclusion, the Kiai-preneur model at Darussalam Blokagung is an institutional innovation that redefines the boundaries between the sacred and the profane. It moves beyond the Weberian "traditional authority" into a "rational-legal-charismatic" hybrid (Lee, 2022). The success of Koppontren Ausath proves that when religious legitimacy is used to provide an ethical framework for modern management, it creates a sustainable economic ecosystem that benefits the local community (Hariram et al., 2023) (R'boul, 2021). However, the long-term viability of this model depends on the Kiai's ability to maintain the "zuhud" ethos—ensuring that the business remains a tool for the institution's spiritual mission rather than the institution becoming a tool for the business (Abitolkha & Alamin, 2025). This research confirms that the transformation is not just about "selling products," but about rebranding religious identity for the 21st-century economy.

The hybrid leadership model operates through a strategic mechanism of converting religious capital (Jamaludin et al., 2024), which encompasses charisma and scriptural authority, into economic capital manifested as market trust and managerial efficiency (Alghababsheh & Galliar, 2021). In practice, the Kiai does not merely utilize religious decrees as instruments of power to command, but rather as a foundation to build a business ecosystem with a unique competitive advantage: unconditional integrity (Khalil et al., 2025). This structure can be visualized through the conceptual framework of "The Kiai-preneur Blueprint," which resembles a three-story building where every level is

sifted through a "Zuhud Filter" acting as a moral compass to maintain the equilibrium between profit orientation and the essence of religious asceticism.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

On the ground floor, there are strategic capital inputs consisting of Religious Capital (blessings or barakah and clerical legitimacy), Social Capital (reliant on militant alumni



networks and community trust), and Intellectual Capital (which synergizes Sharia law with modern business literacy). Moving to the main floor, the hybrid leadership process takes place, implementing Value-Based Management where every economic decision is weighed based on the principle of *maslahah* (public interest). This process is driven by an innovative entrepreneurial spirit that remains culturally polite and is executed through a participatory-charismatic leadership style. Ultimately, on the top floor, this economic transformation yields outcomes in the form of institutional self-reliance—freeing the pesantren from dependency on external aid—social empowerment through local job creation, and sustainable *da'wah*, where business units serve as the engine for broader and independent religious outreach.

2. BLK Darussalam Becomes an Entrepreneurship Incubator for Studies and Alumni

The innovative entrepreneurship curriculum program at Darussalam Pesantren in Blokagung finds its tangible and functional form through the Darussalam Vocational Training Center (BLK), which effectively serves as an entrepreneurship incubator for students and alumni. The pesantren curriculum not only teaches religious knowledge (*kitab kuning*), but also instills practical skills such as basic accounting, digital marketing, and sharia-based MSME management. The Darussalam BLK is an operational platform

that facilitates the integration of this knowledge into real action. At the BLK, students not only receive theoretical material but are also directly involved in existing pesantren business units, thereby gaining valuable practical experience. This direct involvement enables effective knowledge transfer and the formation of a ready-to-use entrepreneurial mindset. Through BLK, pesantren are transformed into educational institutions as well as economic development centers, equipping their graduates with dual competencies: spiritual depth (*tafaqquh fiddin*) and economic independence (entrepreneurial skills). Therefore, the Darussalam BLK is not merely a training facility, but an innovative model that ensures a practice-based curriculum can produce *Kiai-preneurs* and economically independent alumni. The documentation of activities at the Darussalam BLK is as follows:



Figure 2. Documentation of Activities at The Darussalam Vocational Training Center

The image shows the training atmosphere at the Darussalam Vocational Training Center (BLK), where students participate in technology-based learning under the guidance of instructors in a modern and professional environment (Zhang, 2022). This activity reflects the role of BLK as an entrepreneurship incubator that integrates Islamic boarding school values with practical skills such as digital literacy, business management, and sharia marketing (Mujiatun et al., 2025; Ulfa & Firdausa, 2021). This is in line with David Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of learning through direct experience as an effective process in shaping real competencies and skills. Through practice at the BLK, students not only gain religious knowledge, but also concrete experiences that foster economic independence and entrepreneurial spirit, making BLK Darussalam an innovative model of pesantren education that prepares a religious, creative, and adaptive generation in the digital age.

The Darussalam Vocational Training Center (BLK) functions as more than a mere facility; it represents a strategic "locus of transformation" where the traditional *tafaqquh*

fiddin (spiritual understanding) is synthesized with modern market demands (Jais et al., 2025). While previous descriptions focus on the presence of facilities, a deeper analysis reveals that the BLK operates as a bridge between theoretical piety and practical agency (Pingeot & Pouliot, 2024). By adopting David Kolb's Experiential Learning framework, the pesantren ensures that the entrepreneurial mindset is not merely a cognitive concept but an embodied habitus formed through constant interaction with technology and market logic within a professional environment.

The effectiveness of this integration is validated by the actors on the ground, who describe the BLK as a space where spiritual values meet technical precision. PB-02 (BLK Instructor/Manager) explains the philosophy behind this dual competency:

"We don't want our students to be just 'good at praying' but 'bad at paying.' At the BLK, we teach them that a clean line of code or an accurate accounting balance is also a form of worship (ibadah). If they can manage a digital marketing campaign with the same honesty they use in prayer, they have truly mastered the curriculum" (Interview, 2025).

For the students, the BLK represents a shift in self-perception—from traditional students to adaptive economic agents. AS-03 (Santri/Trainee) shared:

"Before joining the BLK training, I thought my only future was to be a teacher in a village madrasah. Now, I see that I can be a graphic designer while still maintaining my identity as a santri. The Kiai taught us that independence (mandiri) is a noble trait of the Prophet, and the BLK gives us the 'tools' to be noble like that" (Interview, 2025).

This pedagogical shift challenges the old stigma that pesantren graduates are ill-equipped for the real sector (Hristov, 2024). By embedding basic accounting and digital marketing within the "kitab kuning" environment (Raya, 2025), Darussalam Blokagung is performing an institutional hybridization (Güngördü-Arioğlu & Tunçalp, 2024). The BLK serves as an incubator that mitigates the risk of "vocational mismatch" by ensuring that skills are not just technical, but are rooted in Sharia-based MSME management.

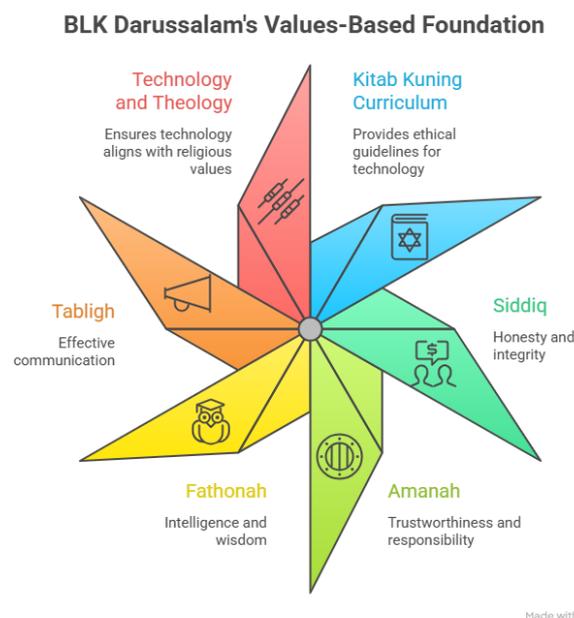
This model proves that the "Kiai-preneur" spirit is successfully decentralized from the charismatic figure of the Kiai into a systematic institutional curriculum (Yani et al., 2022). The BLK Darussalam thus acts as the engine of the pesantren's economic development center, producing a generation that is not only spiritually deep but also economically resilient—a crucial requirement for the sustainability of Islamic institutions in the digital age. The transformation at Pesantren Darussalam Blokagung is not merely a collection of vocational programs but a structured "Hybrid Competency Matrix." In this model, the BLK serves as the converter where spiritual values (Beyers, 2021) (the "Sacred") meet market technicality (the "Secular"). This can be visualized as an integrated system where religious principles act as the operational OS (Operating System), and vocational skills act as the applications (Software). The BLK Darussalam succeeds because it decentralizes the

Kiai-preneurs: A Case Study of Entrepreneurial Leadership Models in the Economic Transformation of Pesantren

Kiai's charisma into a systematic Experiential Learning Cycle (Prasmiwardana et al., 2025). Based on the field data and informant perspectives, this hybrid model can be explicitly deconstructed into four key conceptual stages:

Figure 3. The Operationalization of Hybrid Leadership

The most significant theoretical contribution of the BLK Darussalam is the



Institutionalization of the Kiai-preneur Spirit. In many traditional settings, entrepreneurship dies with the leader (Becker & Hvide, 2022). However, at Blokagung, the hybrid leadership model is "coded" into the BLK's curriculum. This ensures that the Kiai-preneur model is no longer dependent solely on the charismatic figure of the Kiai, but is embedded within the institutional structure (Yani et al., 2022). This pedagogical shift creates a Sustainable Economic Ecosystem where religious ideology is successfully transformed into economic innovation (Zhanbayev et al., 2023). By rooting digital literacy and sharia marketing in the "kitab kuning" environment, the BLK mitigates the conflict between *zuhud* and profit, proving that professional technical precision is the modern manifestation of traditional religious integrity.

Although BLK Darussalam serves as a sophisticated engine for economic empowerment, a critical sociological lens reveals that this "Institutionalization of the Kiai-preneur Spirit" carries latent risks and profound value conflicts. The synthesis of *kitab kuning* with digital marketing does not merely create a "Hybrid Competency Matrix"; it forces a confrontation between the logic of religious sanctity and the logic of market rationalization (Alotaibi et al., 2022). The first risk emerges as "secularization

through skill," where there is a concern that the technical professionalism emphasized by the BLK might obscure the pesantren's spiritual ethos (Salam-Salmaoui et al., 2025). If students prioritize "clean code" or "SEO rankings" purely for their market value, the Zuhud Filter—which dictates that profit is only a means to a spiritual end—risks becoming diluted and losing its essence as a moral compass.

Furthermore, the direct involvement of students in pesantren business units through the Experiential Learning framework triggers an ethical dilemma regarding the student's status (Mariyono, 2025). This creates a "Santri-Worker" paradox, where in the pesantren tradition, labor for the Kiai is considered khidmah (devotional service); however, when that labor is directed toward professional, profit-oriented business units, the line between education and exploitation becomes dangerously thin (Tidhar et al., 2025). The risk of commodifying "spiritual depth" for the sake of business efficiency becomes a reality if it is not accompanied by clear labor rights boundaries, potentially undermining the social justice values taught within Islam.

Lastly, the effort to root digital literacy within the kitab kuning environment risks turning religious identity into a mere "marketing gimmick (Raya, 2025)." The use of "Sharia Marketing" labels can be a double-edged sword (Qizam et al., 2025); if BLK graduates engage in aggressive market tactics typical of the digital age, it may trigger a conflict with the traditional value of tawadhu (humility) (Rozana et al., 2024). The transformation of students into "adaptive economic agents" requires them to face constant Double Bottom Line pressure, where financial success must be continuously tested so as not to sacrifice moral integrity (Ete et al., 2022). Therefore, the sustainability of the Kiai-preneur model at BLK Darussalam highly depends on the institution's ability to conduct internal "Ethical Audits" to ensure that technical precision remains a manifestation of integrity, rather than a substitute for spiritual piety.

3. Darussalam Social Cooperation (DASSCO) Forms Digitalization Adoption for Pesantren

The leadership role of the Kiai as a catalyst for the adoption of digital innovation at the Darussalam Blokagung Pesantren is explicitly manifested through the initiation and development of Darussalam Social Cooperation (DASSCO), which is a strategic form of digitalization of the pesantren business, utilizing the Kiai's approval to empower young administrators to use modern technology, such as social media and e-commerce. Instead of maintaining traditional patterns, the pesantren now uses DASSCO to market the products of its business units (cooperatives, printing, and services) digitally, thereby successfully reaching consumers outside the Banyuwangi region. More than just marketing, digitization through DASSCO has also brought fundamental changes to internal governance; the digital recording system that has been implemented has significantly improved the transparency and financial accountability of the cooperative.

Thus, DASSCO is not only a digital business platform but also a representation of the success of hybrid entrepreneurial-religious leadership that can integrate religious legitimacy with the need for technological innovation to transform the economic independence of pesantren.

This program was launched with the aim of providing a forum for economic empowerment, especially for Islamic boarding school graduates, so that they have entrepreneurial skills and access to business networks (Qizam et al., 2025). This initiative demonstrates the pesantren's commitment to expanding its role not only as an educational and missionary institution, but also as a center for economic empowerment of the community (Purnomo et al., 2024). Thus, DASSCO has become a tangible form of integration between religious, social, and economic independence values within the framework of strengthening Islamic boarding school alumni amid modern challenges. The integration is presented in the following table:

Table 2. Integration of Religious and Entrepreneurship Curriculum at Darussalam Blokagung

Field	Materials/Program	Field Evidence	Results
Religion	Yellow book, fiqh muamalah	Curriculum notes	Understanding Sharia law
Entrepreneurship	Accounting, digital marketing, agriculture	Training modules, student practice results	Students are able to manage businesses
Incubator	Pesantren business unit	Student business portfolios	Alumni are independent entrepreneurs

Source: Researcher Analysis

The integration of religious and entrepreneurship curricula at Darussalam Blokagung, as shown in Table 2, has successfully transformed the pesantren into an economic incubator that is relevant to contemporary needs (Zaki et al., 2022). This curriculum synergizes spiritual and practical education (Naidoo, 2021), where the Religion field teaches muamalah fiqh and the Kitab Kuning to provide an understanding of sharia law as the ethical foundation of business (Arfaizar, 2023). At the same time, the Entrepreneurship field equips students with essential skills such as accounting, digital marketing (Sousa et al., 2024), and agriculture, which, as proven through training modules and practical results, have enabled students to manage businesses effectively (Igwe et al., 2021). The culmination of this integration is the Incubator program, which utilizes the pesantren's business units as a platform for practical experience, resulting in a solid portfolio of student businesses (Zaki et al., 2025). The collective success of this

program proves that the Darussalam Blokagung curriculum has successfully created a holistic education model that produces independent, entrepreneurial alumni, preparing them to be spiritually ready and economically competent to enter modern society.

The initiation of Darussalam Social Cooperation (DASSCO) marks a critical evolution from traditional charismatic authority to digital-rational legitimacy (Nikolakakis, 2024). By leveraging the Kiai's "approval" to sanction technological adoption, the pesantren effectively bypasses the traditional resistance often associated with digital shifts in religious institutions (Sirait, 2024). DASSCO is not merely a digital marketplace; it is a digitized social ecosystem that converts the loyalty of a sprawling alumni network into a measurable, transparent, and scalable economic force (Shi & Li, 2025). This transition signifies that the Kiai-preneur model has successfully entered the era of Algorithm-Based Empowerment, where religious values are encoded into digital recording systems to ensure financial accountability.

The shift toward digitalization is deeply rooted in the Kiai's strategic vision, which frames technology as a modern "sword" for economic jihad. KI-01 (The Kiai) articulated this transition with clarity:

"Digitalization through DASSCO is our way of ensuring that the 'barakah' of the pesantren travels further than the physical walls of Blokagung. I told the young administrators that if the Prophet used the best caravans of his time, we must use the best digital platforms of ours. This is not about leaving our traditions, but about giving our traditions a faster vehicle" (Interview, 2025).

This top-down legitimacy allows the technical team to operate with religious confidence. PB-03 (Digital Manager of DASSCO) highlighted the impact on transparency:

"Before DASSCO, our financial records were scattered. Now, every rupiah is tracked digitally. The Kiai insisted on this because, in Sharia, 'amanah' (trustworthiness) must be verifiable. Digitalization is our way of practicing 'hisab' (accounting) before the actual Day of Judgment" (Interview, 2025).

The synergy presented in Table 2 demonstrates that Darussalam Blokagung has successfully avoided the trap of "vocational mismatch" by creating a Circular Learning Economy (Renfors, 2024). In this model, Fiqh Muamalah (Islamic jurisprudence on transactions) provides the ethical boundaries, while digital marketing provides the operational reach (Faizi et al., 2025). The BLK and DASSCO act as twin engines: the BLK prepares the "human software," and DASSCO provides the "market hardware." This ensures that when students practice digital accounting or social media marketing, they are not just performing secular tasks but are engaging in institutionalized worship.

However, the transition to DASSCO also introduces a critical shift in the alumni relationship (Makarius et al., 2025). By providing a "business network" rather than just a "spiritual network," the pesantren is repositioning itself as a Socio-Economic Hub (Hidayah, 2021). This model proves that the Kiai-preneur leadership has evolved into a

Kiai-preneurs: A Case Study of Entrepreneurial Leadership Models in the Economic Transformation of Pesantren

Hybrid Innovation Framework (Bellis et al., 2024), where religious legitimacy is no longer just about giving sermons, but about validating technological tools that ensure the survival and independence of the ummah in a competitive digital age. The success of DASSCO ultimately lies in its ability to make transparency a sacred duty, transforming the pesantren's economy into a professional, accountable, and highly adaptive modern entity.

The evolution of DASSCO at Pesantren Darussalam Blokagung represents a "Technological Leap" where the Kiai's traditional authority is encoded into a Digital Governance Matrix. In this model, digitalization acts as the bridge that connects Religious Legitimacy with Market Scalability (Törnberg, 2023). This framework is visualized as a circular ecosystem where the Kiai's "blessing" (spiritual input) is processed through digital transparency (operational process) to produce community independence (socio-economic output).

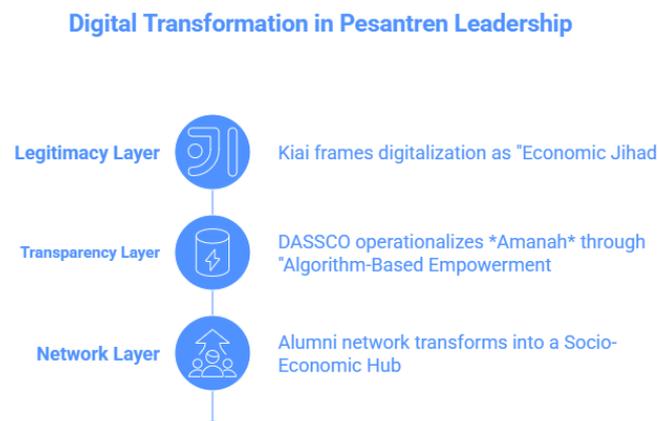


Figure 4. The Conceptual Operationalization of DASSCO

The most significant theoretical novelty here is the concept of "Digital Barakah." Unlike traditional business models that see technology as a secular tool for profit, the Kiai-preneur model at Blokagung views digitalization as a vehicle for "extending the pesantren's blessing (Mudhofi et al., 2025)." The explicit visualization of this hybrid model proves that religious institutions can achieve Digital-Rational Legitimacy without losing their sacred identity. By integrating the Kitab Kuning (ethical foundation) with DASSCO (operational platform), the pesantren mitigates the risk of financial opacity (Saptono & Khozen, 2024). This framework confirms that the Hybrid Innovation Framework is not just about "selling products online," but about the institutionalization of transparency (Haghighi & Takian, 2024). In this ecosystem, the Kiai's role evolves from a preacher to a "validator of systems," ensuring that the pesantren's economic transformation remains both professionally competitive and spiritually grounded in the digital age.

While DASSCO represents an impressive technological leap for alumni independence (Suryono et al., 2023), the integration of the Kiai's charismatic authority with digital algorithmic logic introduces critical tensions, specifically the risk of shifting from value-based leadership to purely data-driven leadership (Anton et al., 2023). When e-commerce metrics and system efficiency become the primary benchmarks for success, there is a latent threat that spiritual considerations and qualitative welfare will be marginalized by quantitative figures (Chhibber et al., 2025), ultimately reducing the Kiai's role from a moral compass to a mere technical "system validator (Abitolkha & Alamin, 2025)." This creates a risk of a widening gap between technocratic digital managers and the santri community, who still adhere to traditional relational patterns.

Furthermore, the implementation of this digital transparency system triggers a sociological paradox within the alumni network (Ali et al., 2024), where previously emotional-spiritual bonds begin to shift toward transactional-professional relationships (Davis et al., 2021). Utilizing alumni loyalty as a digital market base could be perceived as a form of commodifying the teacher-student relationship, potentially sparking resistance if not managed with extreme care (Wu et al., 2022). There is a risk that alumni may feel their inner closeness to the pesantren is being exploited for platform growth, even when such growth is narratively framed within the spirit of the ummah's economic independence. Moreover, the use of social media and digital marketing demands aggressive and competitive market behavior (Ali Abbasi et al., 2022), which fundamentally often contradicts the ethos of *zuhud* (asceticism) and *tawadhu* (humility) taught within the pesantren. DASSCO managers are caught in an ethical dilemma: they must remain dominant in the global market for profit accumulation, while pesantren values demand self-restraint from worldly ambitions (Hidayah, 2021). The success of "digitalizing barakah" at Darussalam Blokagung, therefore, highly depends on the institution's ability to ensure that this transparent and accountable system does not imprison noble religious values within the cold algorithms of profit-seeking, ensuring that this transformation retains its spiritual "soul" amidst an impersonal digital economy.

IV. Conclusion

The study concludes that the Kiai-preneur leadership model at the Darussalam Blokagung Pesantren has successfully operationalized a hybrid entrepreneurial-religious leadership framework. This model transcends traditional spiritual guidance by positioning the Kiai as a strategic driver of institutional business management, entrepreneurial curriculum development, and alumni empowerment. By synthesizing religious legitimacy with modern economic principles, the pesantren has successfully transformed from a traditional educational entity into a sustainable center for local economic empowerment. This unique integration ensures that financial independence is

Kiai-preneurs: A Case Study of Entrepreneurial Leadership Models in the Economic Transformation of Pesantren

achieved without sacrificing the institution's sacred mission, establishing the Kiai-preneur as a vital actor in the contemporary digital economy.

Furthermore, the synergy between religious and entrepreneurial curricula has turned the pesantren into a functional entrepreneurship incubator. This is evidenced by the operational success of the Darussalam Vocational Training Center (BLK) and the DASSCO platform, which bridge the gap between theoretical Fiqh Muamalah and practical market demands. These initiatives not only foster a ready-to-use entrepreneurial mindset among students but also create a multiplier effect on the community's economy through increased transparency and expanded market access. Consequently, this hybrid model offers a relevant and applicable blueprint for other Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia seeking to navigate the pressures of modernization while maintaining traditional integrity.

Despite these significant findings, the primary limitation of this research lies in its single-site focus on the Darussalam Blokagung Pesantren. The specific cultural and social capital inherent to this institution may limit the direct generalization of the Kiai-preneur model to other boarding schools with different organizational scales or socio-economic environments. Additionally, while the study qualitatively confirms the success of hybrid integration, it lacks an in-depth quantitative analysis regarding the precise profitability of business units, the long-term career trajectories of alumni, or the exact statistical multiplier effect on the surrounding local economy.

Therefore, future research should adopt mixed-methods approaches and comparative studies across diverse regions to test the model's variability and cross-contextual applicability. Subsequent investigations ought to explicitly measure the financial performance of pesantren enterprises and track the longitudinal success of alumni integrated within platforms like DASSCO. Most importantly, future scholars should delve deeper into the management of ambiguity, exploring how different Kiai-preneurs navigate the inherent tensions between charismatic religious authority and the pragmatic, often ruthless, demands of global business principles to ensure long-term spiritual and material equilibrium.

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