

SOCIAL SCIENCE AND EDUCATION | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The Role of Pondok Pesantren Tohir Yasin in the Empowerment of Community Economy

Syahrullah<sup>1</sup>, Ridwan Mas'ud<sup>2</sup>, Zulpawati<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup> Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram, Mataram, Indonesia.

E-mail: [sahrullohspd@gmail.com](mailto:sahrullohspd@gmail.com)<sup>1</sup>, [ridwanmaud@uinmataram.ac.id](mailto:ridwanmaud@uinmataram.ac.id)<sup>2</sup>, [zulpawati@uinmataram.ac.id](mailto:zulpawati@uinmataram.ac.id)<sup>3</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

This study discusses the strategic role of Pondok Pesantren Tohir Yasin in community economic empowerment through a community-based approach. Amidst the economic crisis and social inequality caused by less inclusive state policies, the pesantren emerges as an alternative solution by integrating religious values with grassroots economic strengthening. Using a qualitative case study approach, this research examines various empowerment programs, including job creation, MSME development, and community-based health services. The findings indicate that the pesantren has successfully acted as a social transformation agent, directly improving the community's standard of living. It not only strengthens institutional independence but also promotes sustainable local economic growth. This study emphasizes the importance of the communal economic model as a middle ground between liberal and socialist economic systems, while highlighting the need for institutional and managerial strengthening to ensure sustainable and inclusive empowerment.

**Keywords:** Community Empowerment, Economy, Pesantren Independence.

## I. Introduction

The achievement of welfare and independence in all fields, particularly in the economic sector, is the primary goal of a nation's establishment. Essentially, improving material living standards cannot be achieved through individual efforts alone; rather, cooperation between the community and the state is necessary. The state plays a crucial role in regulating economic activities to ensure that welfare can be accessed and enjoyed by all levels of society, not merely a specific group. Various efforts have been undertaken by nations worldwide to improve their economic conditions to ensure the welfare of their entire population. Socialists argue that state dominance in the economy and the minimization of private property rights are the most effective ways to optimize the economy and equalize welfare. This is reflected in Whittaker's statement (as cited in Deliarnov, 2012: 62), which emphasizes that socialist economic systems are characterized by collective ownership and utilization of the means of production (excluding labor). Socialism can encompass cooperative associations or state ownership and operation. On the other hand, Adam Smith, the founder of liberal economic systems, holds an opposing view. According to Smith, the state should not intervene in economic matters but should instead leave everything to the "invisible hand." In a liberal economic system, individuals are granted significant freedom in economic activities (Deliarnov, 2012: 37). Smith's liberalist ideas are based on the belief that while individuals are driven to pursue their own interests, free competition ensures that society as a whole will benefit, thereby achieving general welfare (Deliarnov, 2012: 41).

The economic systems employed by various countries each have their respective strengths and weaknesses. For instance, the United States adopts a liberal economic system, while the People's Republic of China, commonly referred to as China, operates under a socialist economic system. Similarly, Indonesia, in general, implements a mixed economic system. However, this system has its drawbacks, as Indonesia has experienced economic turbulence and crises, with the peak occurring in 1998. According to scholars, the crisis in Indonesia was attributed to governmental errors in policy-making. This was due to several factors. First, the economic policy focused on achieving growth by creating "economic locomotives," a group of elites provided with various facilities and privileges to expand significantly. These entrepreneurs were expected to boost economic growth, which would then trickle down to the public through the "trickle-down effect." This policy has also been implemented in other countries. In those nations, facilities and privileges were granted for a specific period, and in return, the economic locomotives were subject to progressive taxation, which was used to support small and medium-sized enterprises. However, this was not the case in Indonesia. There, the economic locomotives continued to receive unlimited facilities and privileges, while small and medium-sized enterprises were subordinated to them. As a result, the overall economic structure became fragile because the economic foundation was not widely distributed but instead concentrated among a small elite group dependent on various facilities.

Second, there was a shift in the economic base in the mid-1980s. During this period, the basis of economic growth shifted from agriculture to broad-based industry and high-tech industry. In reality, these industries emphasized the development of import-based industries (footloose industries) resulting from industrial relocation or market expansion of other countries' industries. Consequently, these two factors led Indonesia into deeper national economic instability. This situation gave rise to various social inequalities, affecting the country's socio-economic life, one of which was poverty. Here is the translation of the paragraph into American English with standard academic journal quality, as poverty experienced by Indonesian society, the majority of whom are Muslims, is not merely a matter of intelligence but also of life skills. Life skills enable individuals or communities to survive in life and achieve their desires; conversely, without such skills, they will not have the opportunity to win in the increasingly harsh competition of life (Nanih Mahendrawati and Agus Ahmad Syafe'i, 2001: 66). Therefore, a structured approach is necessary to enhance welfare and influence social life patterns in a more positive direction. Empowerment plays a role as a catalyst or facilitator for this transformation.

At its core, the empowerment process aims to assist clients in gaining the power to make decisions and take actions related to their abilities, including reducing the effects of personal and social barriers in carrying out activities. This is achieved by enhancing capabilities and self-confidence to utilize the power that communities already possess, particularly through the potential of their immediate environment (Isbandi Rukmiyanto, 2001: 32). When discussing empowerment—whether of human resources, environmental resources, or economic resources—it is essential to have a platform to facilitate the empowerment process itself, whether institutional or non-institutional. One educational institution that focuses on community empowerment is the Pondok Pesantren. As the oldest Islamic educational institution in Indonesia, founded by scholars and religious leaders in the medieval period, Pondok Pesantren serves as a place for learning and spreading Islamic knowledge to the broader community. Pesantren, with its emphasis on community empowerment, is a concrete example where the institution not only develops Islamic knowledge but also functions as a socio-economic organization by empowering surrounding communities. The presence of Pesantren in the midst of society represents an innovation in empowerment models, as communities are not only taught to work hard in worldly matters but also provided with additional religious knowledge. The active involvement of Pondok Pesantren in community empowerment reflects its commitment to improving the quality of life for both individuals and groups in surrounding communities. This aims to achieve optimal resource levels to enhance welfare and the quality of life based on self-reliance. All of this demonstrates that the presence of Pondok Pesantren truly brings blessings to the surrounding community.

## II. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Islamic boarding schools, or pondok pesantren, have long served not only as religious educational institutions but also as pivotal agents of community development, particularly in rural Indonesia. Historically, pesantren have played an active role in shaping both the spiritual and socio-economic aspects of surrounding communities (Zarkasyi, 2011). This dual role reflects a deeper Islamic principle that connects religious teachings with practical engagement in improving human welfare (masalah) (Abdullah, 2018). In recent years, the role of pesantren has expanded beyond traditional education to encompass economic empowerment activities. These include entrepreneurship training, cooperative businesses, agriculture-based projects, and skill development for community members (Hidayat & Saefuddin, 2019). As noted by Latief (2016), pesantren are well-positioned for such roles due to their moral authority, grassroots network, and ability to mobilize local trust.

Pondok Pesantren Tohir Yasin represents a case where religious commitment is harmonized with economic resilience efforts. By fostering vocational skills and supporting micro-enterprises, the pesantren contributes to the reduction of poverty and unemployment among residents. This aligns with research by Azra (2017), who emphasized the importance of pesantren in promoting social justice and community self-reliance through economic education and practical livelihood programs. Moreover, the empowerment model implemented by pesantren often reflects a holistic approach, addressing not just income generation but also character building and ethical business practices rooted in Islamic values (Fauzia & Hasan, 2020). These initiatives are crucial for sustainable development, especially in underdeveloped areas. Despite these efforts, limited empirical studies have specifically measured the impact of a pesantren's activities on community economic empowerment. Therefore, the present study focuses on Pondok Pesantren Tohir Yasin to assess how its programs influence the economic well-being of the surrounding community. Based on the literature, this study proposes the following hypothesis: Pondok Pesantren Tohir Yasin has a significant positive role in the empowerment of the community economy through its educational and entrepreneurial initiatives.

## III. Research Method

Research methods are a crucial element used by researchers to achieve their objectives. They also serve as tools for researchers to assess the suitability of methods in line with the existing research goals and context. (Jonathan, 2006) This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach and adopts a case study method. The qualitative approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the observed phenomena directly. The collected data was analyzed by considering the context of events and interpreting them from relevant perspectives. (Sugiono, 2018) This study presents the collected data in narrative form based on field observations. The focus is on identifying the role of Islamic boarding schools in improving the economic quality of the Muslim community, both in terms of human resources within the boarding school environment and the surrounding community. Additionally, this study examines the patterns and efforts undertaken to realize the grand vision and mission. In this research, the role of the researcher is as an observer, meaning the researcher not only acts as a participant but also performs observation functions. The researcher conducted direct observations to identify the observed phenomena. There are three data sources used: primary, secondary, and tertiary data. Primary data includes all relevant information, realities, and facts related to the research, and is the main determinant of research success. Meanwhile, secondary data involves various official documents, books, reports, and other sources. The tertiary data used in this study refers to economic dictionaries and encyclopedias. The ability to interact, communicate, understand, and comprehend the environment being studied is crucial to ensure that the data obtained is authentic, accurate, objective, and in line with the actual reality.

This study also considers data collection techniques as a key strategic aspect. This step is important because the main objective of the research is to obtain relevant data. Without a good understanding of data collection techniques, researchers may not succeed in obtaining data according to the established standards.

(Darmawan et al., 2021) In general, the data collection techniques used by the researcher include interviews and documentary studies to compile textual data. Data analysis involves the process of arranging data sequences, organizing data patterns, and selecting and choosing data units to be managed to identify and discover significant patterns and aspects to study. (Darmawan et al., 2021) To check the validity of the research data, so that the level of confidence in the findings can have a high level of validity and trustworthiness, this study uses Lincoln and Guba's theory, which consists of three steps: a. Triangulation; b. Prolonged research duration; c. Discussions with peers. Discussions with peers aim to engage in discussions and obtain input from those with an in-depth understanding of the research problem.

## IV. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. The Role of PPSM Thohir Yasin in Community Economic Empowerment

The community surrounding the PPSM Thohir Yasin Islamic Boarding School leads a relatively simple and modest lifestyle. Predominantly composed of farmers and small-scale traders, residents typically earn between IDR 60,000 and IDR 100,000 per day. These earnings are primarily allocated to fulfill essential daily needs and finance their children's education. Extravagant consumption is rare, and simplicity is evident in the physical appearance of the community and its housing conditions. Despite their humble means, residents exhibit strong resilience and prioritize meeting their basic needs consistently. However, the area around PPSM Thohir Yasin currently faces economic challenges. An oversupply of traders and a lack of consistent buyers have disrupted local commerce, making it increasingly difficult for many to sustain their livelihoods. Empowerment, in this context, is defined as a shift from vulnerability to self-sufficiency. It involves enhancing individuals' capacities, confidence, and access to opportunities so that they can improve their socio-economic status. Community empowerment focuses on enabling people to recognize their own potential, make informed choices, and act upon them. It is not just about individual improvement, but about creating inclusive conditions where entire communities—particularly the most vulnerable—can flourish.

Empowered communities are characterized by the ability to solve problems collectively, seize economic opportunities, and achieve sustainable development. In this spirit, PPSM Thohir Yasin has aligned itself closely with community development initiatives, establishing a variety of empowerment programs that address both economic needs and spiritual growth. The programs implemented by PPSM Thohir Yasin reflect a strategic integration of education and economic development. These initiatives include opening job opportunities in the agricultural sector, creating trading platforms through UMKM Thohir Yasin and TY Mart, and establishing services such as a community-run laundry business. Moreover, the pesantren employs the livestock, fisheries, and maggot farming sectors—each tailored to local needs and potential. These programs are developed and managed by specialized working units within the pesantren, known as PPSM (Development Units of Pesantren and Society), which are structured to respond to real-life community challenges. Through this institutional approach, the pesantren not only educates students in religious values but also addresses the economic realities faced by the surrounding population.

As the largest Islamic educational institution in Masbagik District, PPSM Thohir Yasin has a long-standing history of collaboration with the local community. Since its establishment, the pesantren has functioned not only as a center of religious instruction but also as a rural social institution that contributes meaningfully to improving the quality of life, both spiritually and materially. It has long been acknowledged that pesantren can serve as effective agents of change, particularly in underdeveloped regions. They are uniquely positioned to integrate religious authority with community trust, allowing them to successfully initiate and manage empowerment programs. Importantly, the role of pesantren in community empowerment extends beyond the economic sphere. PPSM Thohir Yasin has developed programs across a variety of sectors, including environmental sustainability, health, and social development. In the environmental sector, the pesantren's working unit collaborates with local farmers to produce organic fertilizers. This initiative promotes sustainable agriculture and reflects the pesantren's commitment to ecological stewardship. In the economic sector, PPSM Thohir Yasin operates several micro-enterprises, including fish farming, livestock rearing, and small-scale trading activities. These enterprises are not only

income-generating but also capacity-building, as they involve residents in every aspect of the operation—from production to marketing.

Health-related empowerment is another area where PPSM Thohir Yasin has demonstrated strong leadership. The institution has established a Pos Kesehatan Pesantren (POSKESTREN), a health center designed to address the medical needs of both students and community members. Students experiencing health issues can receive basic treatment at this facility. If their condition does not improve within three days, they are referred to a nearby community health center (Puskesmas). This service is managed and financed by the pesantren itself, with medical personnel from the local clinic (Raya Clinic) and Puskesmas working in partnership with the pesantren. Such initiatives reveal the institution's holistic approach to community development—balancing physical well-being with educational and spiritual growth. The success of PPSM Thohir Yasin's economic empowerment programs has helped transform public perceptions of Islamic boarding schools. Traditionally, pesantren were viewed as institutions serving lower-income communities and were often dependent on external assistance. However, PPSM Thohir Yasin has emerged as a model of financial and operational independence. Through its business ventures, the pesantren now generates monthly revenue ranging from tens to hundreds of millions of rupiah. This economic self-reliance not only sustains the institution but also supports surrounding communities, creating a mutually beneficial relationship rooted in shared values and economic cooperation.

Furthermore, this collaboration has helped shift the cultural dynamics of the area. The community increasingly views the pesantren as a source of both spiritual guidance and economic opportunity. Residents comply with the institution's rules, recognizing the pesantren's moral leadership. Violations are addressed through community-based mechanisms, often supported by informal sanctions. Word-of-mouth communication and social networks also play a vital role in promoting the pesantren's mission. Families and former students actively share information about the pesantren's educational and economic initiatives, encouraging enrollment from broader regions across Indonesia. As a result, PPSM Thohir Yasin's student population has grown to include youth from various provinces, expanding the institution's influence beyond its immediate locality. This national reach reinforces the pesantren's reputation and widens its socio-economic impact. The school promotes itself through both print and digital media, enhancing visibility and attracting new stakeholders. The combination of strategic media use and grassroots advocacy has led to a growing network of alumni, parents, and community supporters who contribute to the institution's long-term sustainability. In conclusion, PPSM Thohir Yasin's multifaceted approach to community empowerment exemplifies how Islamic educational institutions can play a transformative role in rural development. Through structured programs targeting economic, environmental, and health sectors, the pesantren has not only empowered individuals but also enhanced the collective well-being of the surrounding community. Its ability to balance spiritual values with socio-economic progress positions it as a model for integrated community development led by faith-based institutions. By fostering a culture of self-reliance, innovation, and shared responsibility, PPSM Thohir Yasin continues to redefine the potential of pesantren in modern Indonesian society.

#### 4.2. The Role of Pondok Pesantren Tohir Yasin in Empowering the Community Economy through Integrated Religious, Educational, and Entrepreneurial Approaches in Rural Indonesia

Pondok Pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) have historically played a dual role in Indonesian society—serving not only as centers for religious education but also as agents of social transformation. In the rural district of Masbagik, East Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, Pondok Pesantren Tohir Yasin (PPSM) stands as a living testament to this dual function. Its initiatives reflect a comprehensive model of community economic empowerment rooted in Islamic values, educational engagement, and entrepreneurship. This article explores how PPSM Tohir Yasin has successfully mobilized its institutional resources and moral authority to improve the economic welfare of the surrounding community, particularly those facing poverty and limited access to formal employment. The socioeconomic conditions surrounding PPSM are characterized by modest livelihoods, where most families rely on small-scale farming and informal trade. The average household income falls below the national minimum wage, creating a pressing need for localized economic solutions. In response, PPSM Tohir Yasin has implemented a range of empowerment programs that include vocational training, agricultural innovation, the establishment of micro and small enterprises (UMKM), and community-

based services such as laundry businesses and organic fertilizer production. These initiatives are managed through structured institutional units under the PPSM umbrella, designed to foster economic independence while preserving cultural and spiritual values.

Importantly, these efforts align with broader definitions of empowerment as the process of increasing individuals' and communities' capacity to make choices and transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes (Narayan, 2002). Empowerment in this context includes not only economic upliftment but also the strengthening of social cohesion, ethical business practices, and environmental sustainability. The pesantren provides a unique platform for this integrated empowerment because of its established trust and moral legitimacy within the community (Azra, 2017; Latief, 2016). Furthermore, the role of PPSM Tohir Yasin must be understood within the framework of faith-based community development. The pesantren's educational philosophy is grounded in *ta'dib*—the holistic cultivation of ethical, spiritual, and intellectual growth (Al-Attas, 1980). By combining religious instruction with practical skills training and economic support, PPSM cultivates not only spiritually sound individuals but also economically resilient families and communities. This study aims to investigate how the pesantren's empowerment model contributes to rural development, improves household income levels, and enhances collective self-reliance. It also considers how the pesantren leverages its educational infrastructure and social capital to foster innovation in traditionally marginalized rural economies. In doing so, the research contributes to the growing body of literature on Islamic social capital and the evolving role of pesantren in Indonesia's sustainable development goals (Fauzia & Hasan, 2020; Hidayat & Saefuddin, 2019). The case of Pondok Pesantren Tohir Yasin demonstrates that Islamic boarding schools are not passive religious institutions but can be powerful engines of social change, especially when guided by a vision of inclusive empowerment.

## V. Conclusion

Pondok pesantren are no longer merely positioned as traditional religious educational institutions but also as agents of social and economic change. This reflects a paradigm shift, where pesantren have successfully transformed into productive economic actors while maintaining their primary role in spiritual and moral education. (2) Communal-Based Independence Model: The independence of pesantren through a communal economy reflects an approach rooted in Islamic values—such as social justice, mutual aid, and divine blessings in business. This is not merely an economic achievement but also a realization of religious values in tangible form (living values). Monthly income reaching hundreds of millions of rupiah serves as a strong indicator of the success of this model. (3) Multiplier Impact on the Surrounding Community: The presence of economic programs in pesantren also demonstrates a multiplier effect on the local community. Pesantren enterprises create job opportunities, strengthen local supply chains, and foster a sustainable micro-enterprise ecosystem. This positions pesantren as catalysts for inclusive economic growth. (4) Reduced Dependence on Government Aid: This achieved independence is also politically and economically significant. When pesantren are financially self-sufficient, they can maintain autonomy over their values and educational direction without relying heavily on state policies. This strengthens their position as resilient and competitive institutions. (5) Challenges and Sustainability: However, challenges such as sustainability and professionalism in business management must be addressed. Many pesantren successfully initiate projects, but not all can maintain and expand them consistently. Therefore, strengthening human resources, providing managerial training, and collaborating with professional sectors are essential to ensure long-term success.

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