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Navigating Modernity and Tradition: Strategic Practices in Islamic Schools at The West Kalimantan-Malaysia Border

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NAVIGATING MODERNITY AND TRADITION: STRATEGIC PRACTICES IN ISLAMIC SCHOOLS AT THE WEST KALIMANTAN-MALAYSIA BORDER

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Abstract

This study explored the strategic management practices adopted by Kyai in Islamic boarding schools along the West Kalimantan-Malaysia border, focusing on overcoming challenges posed by geographical isolation and limited resources. Employing a qualitative case study methodology, interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including Kyai, Ustadz, and Madrasah Heads, to gather insights into their strategic management approaches. The findings indicated that Kyai plays a pivotal role in institutional growth through systematic strategic planning, which includes conducting SWOT analyses, developing strategic documents, and ensuring structured implementation. The study highlighted how effective leadership and strategic planning are crucial in driving institutional transformation and sustainability in resource-constrained settings, demonstrating the dynamic adaptation of traditional educational models to modern educational demands. The implications of this research suggest that adapting traditional educational frameworks to contemporary management practices enhances institutional capabilities to navigate modern educational and socio-economic challenges, providing a model for similar educational institutions in resource-limited settings.

Keywords: Strategic Management; Kyai Leadership; Islamic Boarding Schools; West Kalimantan-Malaysia Border; Educational Resilience.

A. Introduction

Islamic boarding schools, or *Pesantren*, hold a deeply rooted position within Indonesia's educational and religious landscape, particularly in rural and border areas where access to formal education is often limited (Aliyyah, 2023). Historically, *Pesantren* has played a vital role in preserving Islamic traditions and values (Azizah, 2023; Mahmudah, 2023). However, in the context of modern society, these institutions face increasing challenges in aligning with contemporary educational standards while maintaining their foundational values. In border regions such as the West Kalimantan-Malaysia frontier, these challenges are amplified by geographical isolation, resource scarcity, and cross-border socio-political dynamics (Ashari et al., 2022; Assa'idi, 2021a, 2021b; Isbah, 2020; Muafiah et al., 2022). Within this complex environment, the leadership of *Kyai*, a traditional religious figure central to *Pesantren* governance, becomes pivotal in ensuring these institutions' sustainability and relevance (Arifin, 2022; Misdah, 2020).

Despite the central role of *Kyai*, research on their strategic management practices remains limited. Existing studies often highlight the challenges faced by *Pesantren* but fail to address how *Kyai* effectively navigates these issues through systematic management approaches (Bakar & Ikhwan, 2023; Chasanah, 2020). This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring how *Kyai* employs strategic management practices to balance tradition with modern educational demands in the border region, particularly in the face of resource limitations and cultural complexities (Ashari et al., 2022; Hudaa et al., 2024; Machmudi, 2021a, 2021b; Zarkasyi, 2020).

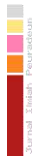
One significant critique of *Pesantren* is their perceived resistance to modernization. Scholars argue that this resistance, especially in isolated rural settings, limits the ability of *Pesantren* to produce graduates who can navigate the demands of modern society (Anah, 2021; N. Azizah et al., 2021; Barid et al., 2024; Wasehudin et al., 2023). However, emerging research suggests that many *Pesantren* gradually integrate modern management practices, challenging these stereotypes. These practices enable institutions to remain competitive while preserving their religious and cultural

identities (Budiharso & Suharto, 2022; Hikmawan et al., 2020; Ikhwan & Yuniana, 2022). This integration is particularly evident in *Pesantren* along the West Kalimantan-Malaysia border, where schools must address the dual demands of religious education and globalized modernity (Rizqulloh & Kuncoro, 2022; Syafrudin & Na'a, 2010).

Socio-economic and geopolitical factors uniquely shape the challenges faced by border-region *Pesantren*. Resource scarcity, cross-border interactions, and cultural exchanges introduce complexities necessitating innovative leadership and management. *Kyai* plays a crucial role in this context, guiding *Pesantren* to navigate internal challenges and external pressures while preserving their religious integrity (Hudaa et al., 2024; Jaenullah et al., 2022). The application of strategic management theory, often associated with corporate settings, is particularly relevant in addressing these challenges. In this study, strategic management is a systematic process of formulating, implementing, and evaluating strategies to achieve institutional sustainability and a competitive edge (Ashari et al., 2022; Badrudin et al., 2021; Dewi & Wajdi, 2022).

This paper argues that the strategic management practices of *Kyai*, particularly in border *Pesantren*, follow three critical stages: strategic formulation, implementation, and evaluation. During the formulation stage, conduct thorough analyses of internal and external factors using tools such as SWOT analysis to address challenges like resource scarcity and cross-border socio-political dynamics (Benzaghta et al., 2021; Fachrizal et al., 2023). Implementation involves translating these strategies into actionable plans, such as revising curricula, improving infrastructure, and fostering stakeholder engagement, all tailored to the unique challenges of border regions (Hastasari et al., 2022; Idrus, 2020). Finally, strategic evaluation ensures the continuous monitoring and adaptation of strategies to remain responsive to evolving conditions (Raheem & Ismael, 2022; Mumtaz et al., 2024).

The findings of this study contribute to a deeper understanding of how strategic management can be effectively applied in *Pesantren*, particularly in border regions. By addressing the research gap in this area, the



paper highlights the pivotal role of *Kyai* in steering these institutions toward sustainability and relevance, balancing tradition with modernity. This research underscores the potential for *Pesantren* to thrive under the guidance of innovative leadership, even in resource-constrained and geopolitically complex settings.

B. Method

This study adopted a qualitative research methodology utilizing a case study approach, as detailed by Creswell and Poth (2017), to investigate the strategic management practices in Islamic boarding schools along the West Kalimantan-Malaysia border. The case study method was particularly effective in capturing the complexities of the strategic management processes within their specific geographical and cultural contexts (Yin, 2017). The research participants included two *Kyai*, four Ustadz, and four Madrasah Heads from *Pesantren* Al-Mizan and *Pesantren* Akhlaqul Karimah, selected through purposive sampling to gather detailed insights into their strategic management roles (Peterson, 2019).

Data collection was multifaceted, encompassing in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews were meticulously planned and executed to delve into the strategic management practices, with questions crafted to elucidate the planning, implementation, and evaluation phases of strategic management (Brinkmann, 2022). Participant observation allowed for a deeper understanding of the day-to-day application of strategies and the interaction between leadership and educational practices (Schensul, 2019; Walidin et al., 2023). Furthermore, a thorough analysis of institutional documents such as strategic plans, meeting records, and performance reports provided concrete evidence of the strategies employed and their effectiveness (Kyngäs et al., 2020).

The analytical process adhered to the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which involved three key processes: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing, ensuring a comprehensive and

systematic examination of the collected data (Miles et al., 2014; Walidin et al., 2015). This method facilitated the identification of core themes and patterns, linking strategic management practices to institutional outcomes and providing a robust framework for interpreting the data about the theoretical constructs of strategic management in educational settings.

C. Results and Discussion

This study investigates the strategic management practices employed by *Kyai* in Islamic boarding schools (*Pesantren*) located along the West Kalimantan-Malaysia border. Given the unique challenges faced by *Pesantren* in this region—such as limited resources, geographical isolation, and cross-border socio-political dynamics—this introduction helps contextualize the results. It highlights the importance of understanding how *Kyai* navigates these complexities effectively. This section presents the study's findings, highlighting the strategic formulation, implementation, and evaluation processes and their impact on institutional development. The results are directly linked to the data collection methods—interviews, observations, and document analysis—ensuring a clear connection between evidence and conclusions.

1. Results

This study examined the strategic management processes employed by *Pesantren*, located along the West Kalimantan-Malaysia border. Based on in-depth interviews, participant observations, and document analysis, key findings emerged across multiple areas of the strategic management process, including SWOT analysis, strategic planning, resource mobilization, educational innovations, and monitoring and evaluation.

a. SWOT analysis

The SWOT analysis revealed critical factors influencing the strategic direction of *Pesantren*. This analysis was informed by qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews with *Kyai*, *Ustadz*, and *Madrasah* Heads, observations of institutional activities, and analysis of strategic documents.



1) *Internal strengths and weaknesses*

Interviews and observations highlighted the strong communal ethos and deeply rooted traditions of *Pesantren* as their primary strengths. A *Kyai* stated: *"Our communal ties are the backbone of our institution. They ensure unity and dedication among students and teachers, which is crucial for preserving our traditions"* (Interview, 2023). Observation notes during religious gatherings confirmed this, showing a high level of community engagement.

However, resource limitations and challenges in adopting modern technology were significant weaknesses. One Ustadz explained: *"Our facilities are outdated. We struggle to provide students with access to essential modern tools, such as computers and reliable internet, which are critical for their education"* (Interview, 2023). Institutional documents, such as funding proposals, further revealed recurring budget shortfalls impacting infrastructure development.

2) *External opportunities and threats*

The study found that opportunities for cross-border collaborations and program expansion were pivotal in shaping strategic goals. A Madrasah Head emphasized: *"Collaborations with Malaysian institutions have opened new doors for knowledge exchange and joint programs, which benefit both teachers and students"* (Interview, 2023). Examples of these collaborations include joint workshops and cultural exchange programs, as documented in institutional reports. Nevertheless, regulatory challenges and financial constraints posed ongoing threats. For example, funding delays due to cross-border bureaucratic hurdles were highlighted in meeting minutes, while interview responses indicated concerns over the sustainability of partnerships. Table 1 summarises these SWOT factors.

Table 1. SWOT analysis of *Pesantren*

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Strong communal ethos Deep-rooted traditions	Limited resources for infrastructure Difficulty in integrating modern technology	Expanding educational programs Cross-border collaborations with Malaysian schools	Regulatory challenges due to border dynamics Financial constraints affecting long-term plans

b. Strategic planning documents

Strategic planning in *Pesantren* was found to be systematic and participatory, involving multiple stakeholders in defining goals and objectives. Document analysis showed that strategic plans included detailed timelines, key performance indicators (KPIs), and stakeholder roles.

1) Stakeholder involvement

Stakeholder consultations were integral to the planning process. A *Kyai* shared: “We make sure that teachers, parents, and community members are part of the discussions. This way, our plans address their needs and gain their support” (Interview, 2023). Observations of planning meetings supported this, revealing active engagement from diverse stakeholders, including parents and community leaders.

2) Key objectives and implementation

The analysis identified three core objectives: improving educational quality, enhancing infrastructure, and fostering cross-border collaborations. Strategic documents highlighted specific actions, such as integrating digital tools and expanding vocational training, paired with KPIs (Table 2), providing a roadmap for measurable progress.

Table 2. Key performance indicators from strategic planning documents

Objective	Action Plan	Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
Enhance educational quality	Integrate technology and expand vocational training	Increased student engagement and academic performance
Improve infrastructure	Renovate classrooms and dormitories	Improved learning and living conditions
Build cross-border collaborations	Partner with Malaysian institutions	Increased joint programs and knowledge exchanges

The findings suggest that these strategic planning documents are foundational to aligning *Pesantren's* long-term goals with measurable outcomes, fostering a more structured and transparent approach to institutional management.



c. Resource mobilization and capacity building

Resource mobilization emerged as a critical area for sustaining *Pesantren's* strategic initiatives. Data from interviews and documents revealed multiple approaches, including community fundraising, NGO partnerships, and cross-border collaborations.

1) Community engagement

Interviews revealed that community contributions played a significant role in supporting infrastructure projects. A Ustadz noted: *"We rely on local communities for funding. Their commitment to the Pesantren ensures that we can maintain and improve facilities, even with limited external support"* (Interview, 2023). Observation of a fundraising event further illustrated the community's active participation.

2) Capacity building

Training programs for staff were another focus area. Document analysis revealed increased professional development sessions, particularly in technology integration and classroom management. A teacher shared: *"The training sessions have been invaluable. They've helped us modernise our teaching methods and improve student engagement"* (Interview, 2023). Progress is illustrated in Figure 1, showing a steady increase in training sessions and resulting improvements in infrastructure.



Figure 1: Resource mobilization and capacity-building activities

Figure 1 shows the progress made in these areas. The number of training sessions conducted (in areas such as technology adoption, vocational training, and classroom management) has steadily increased, showing a solid commitment to capacity building. Simultaneously, fundraising efforts have resulted in a gradual improvement in infrastructure, allowing for the modernization of the facilities, although challenges remain in fully addressing the resource gaps.

d. Implementation of educational innovations

Pesantren demonstrated significant progress in integrating educational innovations, including using digital tools and expanding vocational training programs.

1) Technology integration

Observations revealed that multimedia tools enhanced classroom interactions. During one observed session, students showed increased attentiveness and participation when using digital tools. A teacher remarked: *"These tools make lessons more interactive, helping students retain information better"* (Observation, 2023).

2) Vocational training expansion

Vocational training programs equip students with practical skills, such as tailoring and computer literacy. A Ustadz explained: *"These programs give students a sense of purpose and prepare them for life after graduation"* (Interview, 2023). Documented outcomes, such as improved employability and increased student participation, are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3. Impact of educational innovations on student performance

Program Introduced	Initial Observations	Outcomes
Technology Integration in Classrooms	Increased student engagement	Improved test scores in science and math
Vocational Training Expansion	Higher student participation in skill-based courses	Increased employability and post-graduation opportunities



The findings indicate that these educational innovations, despite initial infrastructural challenges, have improved student performance and higher employability rates, demonstrating the success of the strategic efforts to modernize the curriculum.

e. Monitoring and evaluation structures

Monitoring systems were established to ensure alignment with strategic goals. Regular feedback sessions with staff and students informed continuous improvements.

1) Performance metrics

Evaluation reports showed a steady increase in student enrollment, retention rates, and satisfaction levels. A *Kyai* explained: “Regular reviews help us adapt to challenges and stay on course. Feedback from students and staff is central to this process” (Interview, 2023). Figure 2 highlights improvements, such as a 20% increase in enrollment and a 15% improvement in retention over three years.

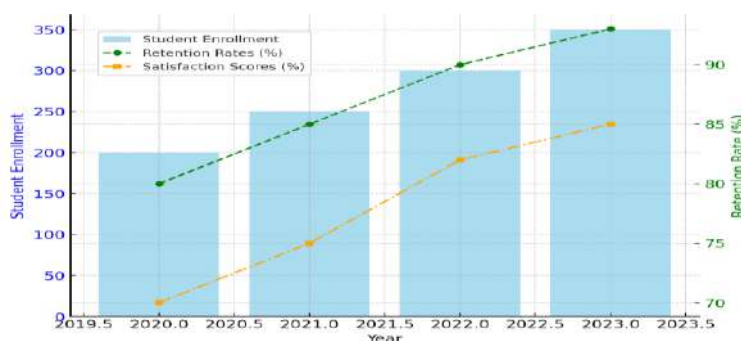


Figure 2. Monitoring and evaluation feedback summary

Figure 2 presents critical metrics used to assess the success of the strategic management process. The data shows a steady increase in student enrollment and retention rates and improved satisfaction scores among staff and students. For example, student enrollment increased by 20% over three years, and retention rates improved by 15%, reflecting the positive impact of the strategic initiatives.

2) *Challenges encountered*

Despite success, the study identified challenges in implementation. Resistance to change was particularly evident among staff, as noted in interviews: *"Some teachers struggled to adapt to digital tools, requiring extra training and support"* (Interview, 2023). Financial constraints also persisted, delaying infrastructure upgrades. A Madrasah Head commented: *"We continue to face funding shortages, which limit our ability to modernize our facilities"* (Interview, 2023).

Financial limitations also pose significant challenges. While resource mobilization efforts helped mitigate some of these issues, the need for more substantial investments in infrastructure remained. A Madrasah Head commented, *"We are still working on securing more funding to modernize our facilities fully, but this will take time"*. (Interview, 2023). These challenges underscore the importance of adaptive leadership and community engagement in overcoming barriers to change.

The study's results reveal that *Pesantren's* strategic management processes were largely successful in improving educational outcomes, modernizing infrastructure, and building cross-border collaborations. Key strengths, such as a solid communal ethos and structured strategic planning, enabled these institutions to navigate external challenges. However, financial limitations and resistance to technological change remained persistent obstacles. The results suggest that continued focus on resource mobilization, capacity building, and monitoring will be essential for ensuring the long-term sustainability and growth of the *Pesantren*.

The findings highlight the effectiveness of *Kyai*-led strategic management in addressing challenges unique to border-region *Pesantren*. However, ongoing efforts in resource mobilization, capacity building, and stakeholder engagement are essential for ensuring sustainability. This study underscores the importance of adaptive leadership and community-driven approaches in fostering institutional resilience.

2. Discussion

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the strategic management practices employed by *Kyai* in Islamic boarding schools (*Pesantren*) along the West Kalimantan-Malaysia border. The findings highlight how *Kyai* navigates various institutional challenges, including resource scarcity, geographical isolation, and socio-political dynamics while ensuring the sustainability and relevance of their institutions. This section critically examines the study's results, linking them to theoretical frameworks and previous literature on strategic management in educational settings.

a. Strategic formulation: Addressing institutional challenges through SWOT analysis

One of the fundamental aspects of strategic management in *Pesantren* is the ability of *Kyai* to formulate effective strategies based on a comprehensive understanding of internal and external factors. The study's SWOT analysis reveals that the strengths of *Pesantren* lie in their strong communal ethos and deeply rooted traditions, which foster institutional cohesion and resilience (Aliyyah, 2023; Azizah, 2023). However, weaknesses such as outdated infrastructure and limited access to modern educational resources pose significant challenges (Bakar & Ikhwan, 2023; Chasanah, 2020).

Externally, cross-border collaborations with Malaysian institutions present valuable opportunities for knowledge exchange and institutional development (Rizqulloh & Kuncoro, 2022). However, bureaucratic challenges and financial constraints remain substantial threats to institutional sustainability (Hudaa et al., 2024; Jaenullah et al., 2022). This dynamic requires *Kyai* to engage in adaptive strategic planning that aligns traditional educational models with contemporary management approaches (Ashari et al., 2022).

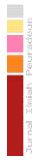
From the above statement, it can be understood that the strategies formulated by *Kyai* in managing *Pesantren* are not only aimed at preserving

traditional values but also at adapting to the demands of modernity. In addressing infrastructure limitations and restricted access to educational technology, strategically managed *Pesantren* has begun to adopt innovative approaches, such as optimizing local resources, strengthening community involvement, and enhancing collaboration with external institutions to secure financial and technical support (Siswanto, 2020). For instance, some *Pesantren* have leveraged their strong social capital to establish donor networks and mobilize community-based funding to support educational facility development (Jaenullah et al., 2022; Tabrani et al., 2023).

Furthermore, cross-border collaborations with institutions in Malaysia not only create opportunities for academic exchange and faculty capacity-building but also introduce challenges related to regulatory differences and variations in educational policies (Rizqulloh & Kuncoro, 2022). As a result, *Kyai* is required to demonstrate adaptive leadership capabilities to navigate bureaucratic challenges and design sustainable strategies that consider policy shifts, student needs, and the socio-economic dynamics of border regions (Ashari et al., 2022). Through this approach, *Pesantren* not only sustains itself amid existing constraints but also evolves into an educational institution capable of making significant contributions to the development of a competitive and globally competent human resource base.

b. Strategic implementation: Enhancing institutional capacity through leadership and innovation

The study highlights how *Kyai* translates strategic plans into actionable initiatives. One key strategy involves enhancing infrastructure and integrating modern technology into the learning process. While some teachers initially resisted these changes, targeted professional development programs helped facilitate the transition (Badrudin et al., 2021). Observations and interviews indicate that implementing digital tools has improved student engagement and academic performance (Hikmawan et al., 2020; Ikhwan & Yuniana, 2022).



In addition to educational technology, *Pesantren* has expanded vocational training programs to equip students with practical skills relevant to their socio-economic context. These initiatives align with previous findings that emphasize the role of vocational training in enhancing the employability of *Pesantren* graduates (Barid et al., 2024; Wasehudin et al., 2023). By incorporating both religious education and practical skill development, *Kyai* ensures that students are well-prepared to navigate the complexities of modern society (Hudaa et al., 2024).

Building upon these findings, it becomes evident that the ability of *Kyai* to integrate modern educational strategies within *Pesantren* reflects a form of adaptive leadership that aligns with contemporary educational management theories. According to Atasoy (2020), effective institutional transformation is largely dependent on leadership styles that foster innovation while maintaining organizational identity. In this context, *Kyai* not only serves as religious guides but also as change agents who facilitate the adoption of digital tools and vocational training programs, ensuring that students are equipped with both spiritual and practical competencies. This approach aligns with Budiharso & Suharto (2022), who argue that modern *Pesantren* must embrace a hybrid model that merges traditional religious instruction with contemporary skill-building to enhance graduates' economic opportunities and social mobility.

Moreover, the process of integrating modern strategies into *Pesantren* aligns with Raheem & Ismael's (2022) strategic management framework, which emphasizes the importance of continuous assessment and responsiveness to external changes. By implementing structured professional development programs, *Kyai* mitigates resistance to change among educators and fosters a more receptive institutional culture.

Furthermore, these findings support the argument that *Pesantren* operating in border regions must adopt a dual-pronged approach: preserving religious traditions while embracing socio-economic modernization. The case of *Pesantren* along the West Kalimantan-Malaysia border demonstrates that strategic management practices when effectively

implemented, can help overcome geographic and economic constraints while ensuring institutional sustainability (Dewi & Wajdi, 2022). By aligning their educational models with both Islamic educational traditions and modern vocational imperatives, *Kyai* reinforces the relevance of *Pesantren* in contemporary society, enabling graduates to contribute meaningfully to their communities.

c. Strategic evaluation: Ensuring institutional sustainability and continuous improvement

A critical aspect of strategic management in *Pesantren* is the continuous monitoring and evaluation of implemented strategies. The study finds that regular feedback mechanisms, including periodic reviews and stakeholder consultations, have been instrumental in adapting strategies to evolving challenges (Raheem & Ismael, 2022). Quantitative data from institutional reports show significant improvements in student enrollment, retention rates, and overall institutional performance following the implementation of strategic management practices (Miles et al., 2014).

The ability of *Kyai* to engage in dynamic strategic evaluation ensures that *Pesantren* remains resilient in the face of financial and regulatory uncertainties. This finding aligns with existing literature that highlights the importance of continuous assessment and refinement in educational management (Ahmadi, 2020; Siswanto, 2020). The study underscores that effective leadership, coupled with an adaptive strategic management approach, is essential for institutional sustainability (Budiharso & Suharto, 2022; Sholeh et al., 2024; Wardi et al., 2024).

Building upon these findings, the role of continuous monitoring and evaluation in *Pesantren* management reflects the principles of Total Quality Management (TQM) in education, which emphasizes continuous improvement, stakeholder involvement, and data-driven decision-making (Kyngäs et al., 2020). By implementing structured feedback mechanisms, *Kyai* ensures that strategic initiatives remain aligned with institutional goals while adapting to external pressures. This is particularly relevant in border



region *Pesantren*, where socio-political fluctuations and economic challenges necessitate agile management strategies (Jaenullah et al., 2022; Darwanto et al., 2024). The integration of regular evaluations also aligns with the Learning Organization Theory proposed by Senge (1990), which asserts that institutions must foster a culture of reflection and continuous learning to sustain long-term growth. In this context, *Pesantren* operates not merely as static religious institutions but as dynamic organizations that evolve in response to internal and external demands.

Furthermore, the application of strategic evaluation practices in *Pesantren* aligns with evidence from institutional performance studies, which highlight that schools with robust assessment frameworks experience higher retention rates, improved student outcomes, and greater institutional credibility (Hudaa et al., 2024). The ability of *Kyai* to conduct structured evaluations enables them to identify inefficiencies and refine educational policies, ensuring that *Pesantren* maintains its relevance in an increasingly competitive educational landscape. This is consistent with Raheem & Ismael's (2022) findings, which suggest that strategic management in education must incorporate ongoing assessments to ensure long-term sustainability and adaptability. Additionally, by engaging stakeholders—including teachers, students, and community members—in the evaluation process, *Pesantren* fosters a sense of shared responsibility, further strengthening institutional commitment to continuous improvement (Dewi & Wajdi, 2022).

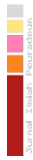
This perspective reinforces the argument that strategic management in *Pesantren* must be holistic, integrating traditional Islamic values with modern management methodologies to achieve optimal institutional outcomes. The findings suggest that *Pesantren* who actively engage in iterative evaluation processes are better positioned to navigate financial constraints, policy changes, and technological advancements, ensuring their continued contribution to educational and socio-economic development (Budiharso & Suharto, 2022).

d. Balancing tradition and modernity: The role of *Kyai* in Islamic educational leadership

The dual role of *Kyai* as spiritual leaders and institutional managers is central to the success of *Pesantren* in border regions. Interviews with key stakeholders reveal that *Kyai* plays a pivotal role in maintaining the religious identity of *Pesantren* while simultaneously fostering innovation and institutional growth (Misdah, 2020). This balance between tradition and modernity is crucial in ensuring that *Pesantren* remains relevant in the contemporary educational landscape (Azizah et al., 2021; Maghfiroh et al., 2024).

Moreover, cross-border engagement has enabled *Pesantren* to integrate best practices from regional educational systems while preserving their core Islamic values (Roqib, 2021; Sumanti et al., 2024). These findings reinforce the argument that strategic management in *Pesantren* is not merely a reactive response to external challenges but a proactive effort to shape institutional trajectories in alignment with both religious and modern educational imperatives (Dewi & Wajdi, 2022; Nastain et al., 2024).

Kyai, as both spiritual figures and institutional leaders, embody this dual function by actively shaping the strategic direction of *Pesantren* while simultaneously being influenced by evolving socio-political and economic contexts. Their ability to integrate modern educational methodologies without compromising religious integrity reflects an adaptive leadership style that aligns with contemporary organizational change theories (Atasoy, 2020). Furthermore, the engagement of *Pesantren* in cross-border collaborations demonstrates the principles of Globalization Theory, wherein local institutions selectively incorporate external influences to enhance their internal structures while maintaining cultural identity (Rizqulloh & Kuncoro, 2022). By adopting strategic planning models that combine traditional Islamic pedagogies with modern governance practices, *Kyai* ensures that *Pesantren* remains resilient and competitive in an increasingly interconnected educational landscape (Budiharso & Suharto, 2022; Basri et al., 2024; Misdah et al., 2025;). This approach not only strengthens institutional sustainability but also fosters a more holistic educational



experience that equips students with both religious and contemporary competencies, reinforcing the role of *Pesantren* as a dynamic institutions capable of navigating the complexities of modern education.

e. Implications for Islamic educational institutions and policy development

The findings of this study provide significant insights into the strategic management of Islamic educational institutions, particularly in regions facing socio-economic constraints and geopolitical challenges. The case of *Pesantren* along the West Kalimantan-Malaysia border highlights that institutional resilience is not solely dependent on internal leadership but also on the ability to foster participatory governance and dynamic stakeholder engagement. This aligns with *Transformational Leadership Theory*, which emphasizes the role of visionary leaders in inspiring institutional change and ensuring long-term sustainability (Atasoy, 2020). The *Kyai*, as central figures in *Pesantren*, play a crucial role in shaping institutional strategies that balance religious values with modern governance, thereby enabling these institutions to adapt to contemporary educational challenges (Budiharso & Suharto, 2022; Ghafar, 2023; Choiri & Ardyansyah, 2024).

Furthermore, this study underscores the growing significance of cross-border educational collaborations in strengthening institutional capacity and broadening access to global academic resources. As *Pesantren* engages in transnational partnerships, they contribute to the globalization of Islamic education, positioning themselves as key players in fostering inter-regional knowledge exchange and curriculum innovation (Rizqulloh & Kuncoro, 2022). This perspective aligns with *Globalization Theory*, which posits that educational institutions must navigate and integrate external influences to remain relevant in a rapidly evolving global landscape (Schensul, 2019). Digital transformation further enhances this process, allowing *Pesantren* to modernize their pedagogical approaches and expand their outreach beyond traditional classroom settings (Hudaa et al., 2024; Susanto et al., 2024). By adopting digital learning tools and integrating

hybrid education models, *Pesantren* can position themselves within the broader discourse of international educational reform.

The implications of these findings extend beyond the national context, offering valuable lessons for Islamic educational institutions worldwide. The adaptive strategies employed by *Pesantren* in Indonesia could serve as a model for other faith-based institutions grappling with similar challenges in different parts of the world. As globalization continues to shape education, *Pesantren* has the potential to contribute to the international discourse on religious education reform by showcasing how traditional institutions can successfully integrate modern strategic management principles while maintaining their religious and cultural identities (Dewi & Wajdi, 2022; Tabrani et al., 2023). Future research should explore the scalability of these strategies in different cultural and socio-political contexts, as well as the long-term impact of digital transformation on *Pesantren's* role in the global education sector.

D. Conclusion

This research provides a comprehensive analysis of the strategic management techniques implemented by *Kyai* at Islamic boarding schools along the West Kalimantan-Malaysia border, emphasizing their critical role in merging the preservation of Islamic traditions with the imperatives of contemporary education. Employing analytical tools such as SWOT analysis, *Kyai* adeptly pinpointed internal strengths, including communal solidarity and adherence to religious traditions, while addressing notable weaknesses such as the scarcity of infrastructure and modern technological resources. Their leadership was instrumental in capitalizing on external opportunities like cross-border collaborations and educational program expansions to counteract threats from regulatory challenges and financial constraints.

Through a model of participatory leadership, *Kyai* cultivated a sense of ownership among teachers, students, and community members, facilitating the adoption of innovative practices without undermining the



school's religious identity. The process of strategic evaluation, characterized by continual feedback and incremental improvements, showcased the essential role of adaptability in fostering sustainable growth within these institutions.

This study makes a significant contribution to the field of Islamic education management by delineating a replicable framework that integrates traditional values with contemporary strategic practices. The leadership model exemplified by the *Kyai* demonstrates how deeply rooted educational institutions can navigate the challenges of modern education effectively, providing actionable insights for policymakers, educators, and institutional leaders. Particularly, it highlights how resource-limited Islamic boarding schools can flourish through meticulous strategic planning, capacity building, and robust stakeholder engagement. Nevertheless, the research also underscores persistent obstacles such as resource constraints and resistance to change, stressing the necessity for continuous capacity enhancement and the development of strategic partnerships.

For future research, it is imperative to explore how these strategies can be refined and adapted to a broader array of contexts. This should include an examination of specific innovative strategies like digital transformation and the expansion of vocational training, alongside comparative studies across diverse cultural and geographic landscapes. Longitudinal studies would also be beneficial to assess the enduring impacts of strategic management practices on the sustainability and educational outcomes of institutions. By highlighting the effectiveness of *Kyai*-led strategic management in tackling the distinct challenges faced by border-region *Pesantren*, this study offers a valuable blueprint for Islamic educational institutions aiming to modernize while preserving their cultural and religious foundations. The findings underscore the paramount importance of leadership, adaptability, and inclusivity in promoting institutional resilience amidst the dynamic global educational landscape.

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