



Strategy for Developing *Pesantren* Business Units to Support the Economic Independence of *Santri*

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the development strategies of *pesantren* business units in supporting students' economic independence. This research employs a library research approach. The data were analyzed through descriptive qualitative methods, including thematic classification, synthesis of findings, and identification of research gaps. The findings show that *pesantren* business units play a strategic role as both institutional income sources and entrepreneurship laboratories for students. Through these business units, students gain practical experience in production, service, marketing, financial management, and the application of Islamic business ethics. The proposed development strategies include strengthening strategic management, diversifying businesses based on *pesantren* potential, conducting business feasibility studies, improving transparent financial governance, empowering students and alumni, expanding partnerships, and utilizing digital marketing. This study concludes that *pesantren* business units can become an important instrument for fostering students' economic independence when managed professionally, sustainably, and in accordance with Islamic values.

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INTRODUCTION

The economic independence of *santri* is a highly important aspect in the development of *pesantren* as educational institutions that focus not only on spiritual and academic aspects, but also on strengthening the economic capacity of their communities. *Pesantren* have a dual role, namely as educational institutions and as centers for economic development based on Islamic values (Ulum et al., 2025). The economic independence of *santri* enables them to develop financial skills, entrepreneurial abilities, and managerial capacity from an early stage, so that they can make positive contributions to local economic development while also strengthening the sustainability of *pesantren* themselves (Hakim et al., 2025; Muhtarom et al., 2024; Primadana, 2024).

One of the main mechanisms for supporting the economic independence of *santri* is the development of *pesantren* business units. These business units function as economic laboratories that allow *santri* to apply theories of management, entrepreneurship, and Islamic economic principles in practice. The integration of Islamic religious education with entrepreneurship has received attention in several studies; for example, the study by Hakim et al. (2025) shows that combining religious education with entrepreneurial practice can shape the character of *santri* while improving their economic abilities. Another study by Qomaro et al. (2025) emphasizes the importance of applying mu'amalah principles in the management of *santri* businesses, affirming that business activities must comply with ethical and sharia values while also producing positive social impacts.

In addition, the integration of Islamic economics into *pesantren* business units has been analyzed by Chamid et al. (2026), who show that sharia-based business management not only increases financial profit but also shapes an ethical and sustainable business culture. Febrianto et al. (2026) add that the application of strategic management principles in *pesantren* business units can improve operational effectiveness, maximize resource utilization, and optimize business outcomes. Meanwhile, the empirical study by Muhtarom et al. (2024) through a case study, shows that *pesantren* with well-organized business units are able to make a real contribution to the economic independence of *santri*, although this study remains limited to a certain number of cases and has not yet covered systematic development strategies more broadly.

Although previous studies have provided many insights, several gaps need to be addressed. First, most studies still focus on theory or the conceptual integration of religious education and entrepreneurship, while detailed operational strategies for developing *pesantren* business units remain limited. Second, although mu'amalah principles and the integration of Islamic economics have been discussed, the mapping of real challenges in the field, such as product innovation, human resource management, marketing, and financial management of *pesantren* business units, has not been widely analyzed. Third, the limited number of case studies and empirical data has resulted in a lack of practical guidance for *pesantren* managers in improving the economic independence of *santri*. This creates an important opportunity for the present study to formulate more measurable and comprehensive strategies for business unit development. These studies have shown that the combination of religious education, mu'amalah principles, and sharia management strategies has great potential to enhance the economic independence of *santri*. However, these studies have not sufficiently provided practical guidance that can be implemented by *pesantren* managers. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by systematically identifying strategies for developing *pesantren* business units and presenting recommendations that can be applied to support the economic independence of *santri*. This approach is expected not only to strengthen the economic foundation of *pesantren*, but also to equip *santri* with skills, experience, and business ethics that are relevant to broader socio-economic contexts. Thus, this study contributes to the literature on *pesantren*-based entrepreneurship education while also offering practical guidance for *pesantren* managers who seek to develop business units sustainably.

METHOD

This study uses a library research approach, which aims to analyze strategies for developing *pesantren* business units in supporting the economic independence of *santri*. This approach was chosen because the study focuses on conceptual analysis and strategy analysis based on the findings

of previous studies, without collecting primary data in the field. Thus, the study can explore findings from relevant literature and formulate applicable strategies based on the available evidence.

The research data sources consist of relevant academic publications, including journal articles, books, and case studies discussing the development of *pesantren* business units, *santri* entrepreneurship, and economic independence based on Islamic values. The data analysis process was carried out qualitatively and descriptively. The first stage was literature classification, in which references were organized according to the research focus, such as the integration of religious education and entrepreneurship, management of *pesantren* business units, and case studies on the economic independence of *santri*. The next stage was the synthesis of findings, in which patterns of strategies and best practices implemented in *pesantren* business units were identified. Furthermore, a gap analysis was conducted to identify the limitations of previous studies, such as the lack of operational guidance, marketing, innovation, and human resource development, so that more systematic development strategies could be formulated.

The validity of the study was maintained by using credible, peer-reviewed literature relevant to the *pesantren* context. This study does not use fictional citations; all information used can be verified from RIS data. In addition, notes are provided when information is incomplete or when abstracts are unavailable. Through this method, the study is expected to present literature-based and practical strategies for developing *pesantren* business units that genuinely support the economic independence of *santri*.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Pesantren Business Units

Pesantren business units are important instruments in building the economic independence of *pesantren* and *santri*. Their existence does not only function as a source of institutional income, but also as a medium for entrepreneurship education, management training, and the formation of productive character among *santri*. In the *pesantren* context, economic activities do not stand alone as purely business-oriented activities, but are integrated with educational values, da'wah, and moral development. Therefore, *pesantren* business units can be understood as spaces for economic practice that combine institutional interests, *santri* empowerment, and the strengthening of Islamic values.

The forms of *pesantren* business units are highly diverse, depending on the potential, needs, resources, and socio-economic environment of each *pesantren*. Arwani & Masrur (2022) show that the economic independence of *pesantren* can be developed through various business units, such as cooperatives, Muslim boutiques, drinking water production, laundry services, mobile phone counters, photocopying services, and other businesses that grow from the internal needs of the *pesantren*. This shows that many *pesantren* business units originate from the internal market, namely the needs of *santri*, teachers, and *pesantren* residents. This internal market becomes a strategic initial asset because *pesantren* already have regular consumers before expanding their businesses to the wider community.

The study by Rahman & Yulidawati (2025) at Pondok *Pesantren* Darul Hijrah Cindai Alus, Martapura, shows that *pesantren* business units can develop in more varied forms, such as fishponds, agricultural greenhouses, DH Mart, DH Water, DH Bakery, travel services, micro waqf banks, and teacher and *santri* cooperatives. This model shows that *pesantren* business units can be developed through diversification of business sectors, including trade, agriculture, services, and microfinance. The

philosophy of “from the *pesantren* for the *pesantren*,” “from teachers for teachers,” and “from *santri* for *santri*” indicates that *pesantren* business units have an internal empowerment orientation, not merely a profit-seeking orientation.

Muhtarom et al. (2024) also show that the economic independence of *pesantren* can be achieved through the establishment of business units involving internal elements of the *pesantren*, such as caregivers, *santri*, administrative staff, and business entity managers. This finding affirms that the success of *pesantren* business units is strongly influenced by the collective participation of all *pesantren* elements. Business units will not develop optimally if they rely only on one figure or are managed informally without a clear division of tasks. Therefore, governance, leadership, and *santri* involvement are important elements in building business sustainability.

In institutional form, *pesantren* cooperatives are one of the most commonly found models. Jauhari et al. (2026) show that Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor has developed various business units, such as printing, *santri* cooperatives, BMT, agriculture, livestock, and services. These business units involve *pesantren* leaders, teachers, alumni, and *santri*. This model shows that *pesantren* business units can develop into a broader economic ecosystem if supported by strong internal and external networks.

However, not all *pesantren* have the same readiness to develop business units. Primadana (2024) notes that the number of *pesantren* and *santri* in Indonesia is very large, but not all *pesantren* have established business units. This condition indicates a gap between the economic potential of *pesantren* and their actual capacity to build productive enterprises. Therefore, *pesantren* business units need to be understood not merely as additional activities, but as a strategic part of strengthening institutions and entrepreneurship education for *santri*. With good management, business units can become sources of income, economic laboratories, media for character formation, and instruments for empowering the *pesantren* community.

Strategies for Developing Pesantren Business Units

Strategies for developing *pesantren* business units need to be directed toward two main objectives, namely strengthening institutional economic independence and shaping the economic independence of *santri*. Therefore, business unit development cannot be carried out spontaneously, but must be designed through systematic planning, clear governance, and continuous evaluation. Febrianto et al. (2026) affirm that entrepreneurship education in *pesantren* needs to be developed based on strategic management so that economic development for *santri* has clear direction, targets, and evaluation mechanisms. Through this approach, business units do not only become sources of income for *pesantren*, but also become part of the educational process for *santri*.

The first strategy is strengthening strategic management. *Pesantren* need to establish an economic vision, map internal potential, identify market needs, and determine the type of business that aligns with the capacity of the *pesantren*. A good business unit is not established merely by following trends, but based on an analysis of needs, resources, and market opportunities. In this regard, *santri* can be involved in the processes of planning, production, service, marketing, and business evaluation. Such involvement is important so that business units truly become entrepreneurship laboratories that provide practical experience for *santri*.

The second strategy is business diversification based on *pesantren* potential. Arwani & Masrur (2022) show that *pesantren* business units can be developed from internal needs such as cooperatives,

laundry, photocopying, drinking water, and daily services for *santri*. Rahman and Yulidawati (2025) also show that *pesantren* can develop broader business models, such as minimarkets, bakeries, travel services, agriculture, fishponds, micro waqf banks, and cooperatives. This diversification is important because *pesantren* have many internal needs that can become an initial market. However, diversification must still consider capital capacity, human resource availability, and prospects for business sustainability.

The third strategy is the preparation of feasibility studies and business planning. Najriyah et al. (2025) emphasize the importance of feasibility analysis and business planning before *pesantren* develop business units. This is necessary so that *pesantren* can assess market potential, capital needs, operational risks, the availability of managerial personnel, and revenue projections. Without careful planning, business units risk becoming unsustainable or even becoming a burden for the *pesantren*. Therefore, every business plan needs to be preceded by a mapping of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

The fourth strategy is strengthening financial governance and funding. Karima (2026) explains that funding is an important aspect in maintaining the sustainability of the educational, social, and religious functions of *pesantren*. In the context of business units, *pesantren* need to implement transparent bookkeeping, separate institutional finances from business finances, and prepare periodic reports. Good financial governance will help *pesantren* evaluate business units that are productive, less productive, or require further development.

The fifth strategy is the integration of sharia values into *pesantren* business. (Anwar et al. (2024) emphasize that the economic independence of *pesantren* needs to be optimized through sharia-based business management. *Pesantren* business units must be based on the principles of honesty, trustworthiness, justice, responsibility, and social benefit. Qomaro et al. (2025) also show that strengthening the concept of *mu'amalah* in entrepreneurship can build the economic independence of *santri*. Thus, *pesantren* do not only produce *santri* who are capable of doing business, but also *santri* who understand Islamic business ethics.

The sixth strategy is strengthening networks and digitalization. Husni et al. (2025) show that alumni can play a role in mentoring, training, and developing *santri* entrepreneurship. In addition, Munir & Rokhmad (2022) and Zafriana et al. (2025) emphasize the importance of digital marketing in strengthening the competitiveness of *pesantren* products. Therefore, *pesantren* need to utilize alumni, social media, marketplaces, packaging design, and product branding. With an integrated strategy, *pesantren* business units can grow more professionally, competitively, and relevant to the needs of the modern economy.

The Impact of Business Units on the Economic Independence of Santri

Pesantren business units have an important impact on the economic independence of *santri* because they provide real and contextual economic learning spaces. Through business units, *santri* do not only learn entrepreneurship theoretically, but are also directly involved in production, services, marketing, financial management, and business evaluation. Hakim et al. (2025) show that the integration of Islamic religious education and entrepreneurship at Pondok *Pesantren* Dalwa is carried out through business skills training, the instilling of Islamic values in entrepreneurship, and the provision of basic knowledge of business management. This indicates that business units can become a medium for connecting religious education with economic skills.

The first impact is the improvement of *santri* entrepreneurial skills. *Santri* who are involved in business units learn to recognize opportunities, understand consumer needs, manage stock, serve customers, record transactions, and face business risks. Qomaro et al. (2025) show that entrepreneurship training based on *pesantren* business units, such as culinary businesses, bottled drinking water, mushroom cultivation, and catfish farming, is able to encourage *santri* to participate in business operations and identify business opportunities. Thus, business units function as practical laboratories that shape technical skills and an entrepreneurial mindset.

The second impact is the formation of independent, disciplined, and responsible character. The economic independence of *santri* is not only interpreted as the ability to earn income, but also as the ability to manage themselves, make decisions, collaborate, and take responsibility for tasks. Adri et al. (2025) show that the formation of entrepreneurial character and leadership spirit influences the economic independence of *santri*. In this context, *pesantren* business units become media for character education because values such as trustworthiness, hard work, honesty, and discipline are practiced in daily economic activities.

The third impact is the improvement of *santri* understanding of Islamic economics. *Pesantren* business units have a distinctive character because their business activities are inseparable from sharia values. *Santri* do not only learn how to generate profit, but also understand the importance of honesty, justice, responsibility, and social benefit in business. Chamid et al. (2026) explain that the integration of Islamic economics in *pesantren* can strengthen the economic independence of *santri* through a learning model that connects religious curricula and economic practice. Jauhari et al. (2026) also affirm that Islamic value-based *pesantren* entrepreneurship plays an important role in building economic independence.

The fourth impact is the improvement of *pesantren* financial independence, which also supports *santri* development. Well-managed business units can become sources of *pesantren* income, reduce dependence on external assistance, and strengthen the sustainability of educational programs. Muhtarom et al. (2024) show that *pesantren* can achieve economic independence through the establishment of business units involving internal elements of the *pesantren*. Rahman and Yulidawati (2025) also show that various *pesantren* business models can strengthen institutional economic independence. When *pesantren* have a strong economic foundation, educational facilities and entrepreneurship training for *santri* can also be developed more optimally.

The fifth impact is the improvement of *santri* competitiveness in facing the digital economy. Munir and Rokhmad (2022) show that developing the economic independence of *santri* during the pandemic required adaptive strategies, including digital marketing. Zafriana et al. (2025) also emphasize the importance of visual communication design and digital marketing to improve the competitiveness of *santri* and *pesantren* products. Thus, *pesantren* business units do not only equip *santri* with production skills, but also with branding, promotion, and digital marketing skills. Overall, *pesantren* business units contribute to shaping *santri* who are skilled, independent, religious, and ready to play a role in the economic life of society.

Challenges, Obstacles, and Recommendations for Developing Pesantren Business Units

The development of *pesantren* business units faces various internal and external challenges. Internally, the problems that often arise are related to limited capital, human resource capacity, institutional governance, financial management, and the suboptimal involvement of *santri* in business

processes. Externally, *pesantren* business units also face market competition, changes in consumer behavior, digitalization demands, and the need to build broader partnership networks. These challenges show that *pesantren* business units cannot be developed merely based on the spirit of independence, but require careful planning, a professional management system, and sustainability strategies aligned with the character of *pesantren*.

One of the main challenges is limited funding. Many *pesantren* still rely on *santri* fees and community support, which are not always stable. Karima (2026) explains that funding is an important aspect in ensuring the sustainability of the educational, social, and religious functions of *pesantren*. When *pesantren* intend to establish business units, issues of initial capital, cash flow, financial recording, and the separation between business finances and institutional finances become highly decisive. Therefore, the recommended step is to strengthen financial governance through systematic recordkeeping, transparent financial reports, realistic capital planning, and diversification of funding sources through independent business units, partnerships, and alumni support.

The next challenge is the low competence of human resources in business management. Meivira & Anwar (2025) show that one of the obstacles in managing *pesantren* businesses is the low competence of human resources in business management, marketing strategies, and business development. A similar point is made by Rizka & Salabi (2025), who state that entrepreneurship programs in *dayah* face challenges such as limited financial resources, a lack of entrepreneurship training for *ustaz*, and the persistence of traditional management practices. To address these obstacles, *pesantren* need to organize regular business management training for *santri*, *ustaz*, and business unit managers. Such training may include simple bookkeeping, customer service, marketing, stock management, market analysis, and business evaluation.

In addition to human resources, institutional governance is also an important obstacle. Many *pesantren* business units emerge from internal needs, but not all of them have clear organizational structures, divisions of tasks, standard operating procedures, and evaluation mechanisms. Anwar et al. (2024) affirm that optimizing the economic independence of *pesantren* requires strengthening management, optimizing business potential, expanding cooperation, improving human resource capabilities in sharia business management, and continuous evaluation. Therefore, the strategic recommendation is to establish a clear business unit management structure, develop standard operating procedures, set business targets, and conduct regular evaluations. With good governance, *pesantren* can identify which business units are growing, which need improvement, and which are no longer relevant to the needs of the *pesantren*.

Another challenge is weak business planning. Some *pesantren* business units are developed spontaneously without adequate feasibility studies. As a result, businesses risk becoming unsustainable because they are not supported by market analysis, capital readiness, human resource capacity, and risk calculation. Najriyah et al. (2025) emphasize the importance of feasibility studies and business planning in developing *pesantren* businesses, including through the mapping of physical capital, intellectual capital, and financial capital. Therefore, every business unit development should begin with an analysis of *pesantren* potential, consumer needs, market opportunities, internal strengths and weaknesses, and external threats. This approach will help *pesantren* choose the type of business most appropriate to their capacity and environment.

Kiai leadership is also a strategic factor in developing *pesantren* business units. Ulum et al. (2025) show that kiai play an important role as architects of *pesantren* economic governance, particularly through the combination of moral authority and strategic decision-making. However, increasingly complex business development requires a leadership pattern that is not only charismatic, but also able to delegate management to a competent team. The recommendation is that kiai continue to serve as directors of institutional values and vision, while the technical management of business units can be delegated to professional managers, teachers, alumni, or *santri* with business competence.

An equally important external challenge is digitalization. *Pesantren* business units often have potential products, but are not yet able to reach a broader market due to limitations in branding, packaging design, promotion, and digital marketing. Zafriana et al. (2025) show that visual communication design and digital marketing skills are important for increasing the competitiveness of *santri* and *pesantren* products. Therefore, *pesantren* need to strengthen *santri* digital literacy through training in promotional content, social media management, marketplace use, product photography, packaging design, and brand communication strategies. Digitalization does not only function as a marketing tool, but also as part of *santri* entrepreneurship learning in the era of the creative economy.

In addition, *pesantren* need to strengthen external partnerships. Husni et al. (2025) show that alumni can play a role in training, mentoring, and managing *pesantren* business units. Rizka and Salabi (2025) also emphasize the importance of collaboration with local governments, universities, and MSMEs in expanding business networks and strengthening institutional capacity. Thus, *pesantren* need to build networks with alumni, government agencies, universities, Islamic financial institutions, MSMEs, and business communities. These partnerships can help *pesantren* obtain access to training, capital, technology, markets, and business mentoring.

Given these various challenges, the main recommendation for *pesantren* is to develop business units in a planned, professional, collaborative, and Islamic value-based manner. *Pesantren* business units need to be directed as entrepreneurship laboratories for *santri*, not merely as sources of institutional income. Therefore, business unit development must integrate feasibility studies, financial governance, human resource training, digitalization, alumni empowerment, external partnerships, and the internalization of sharia values. Through these strategies, *pesantren* business units can become important instruments for strengthening the economic independence of *santri* while maintaining the sustainability of *pesantren* as institutions of education, da'wah, and community empowerment.

CONCLUSION

Pesantren business units have a strategic role in supporting the economic independence of *santri* because they function as practical and contextual spaces for economic learning. Through business units, *santri* do not only acquire theoretical knowledge of entrepreneurship, but are also directly involved in production, services, marketing, financial management, and business evaluation. Thus, *pesantren* business units can serve as entrepreneurship laboratories that integrate religious education, character formation, and the strengthening of economic skills.

The development strategy of *pesantren* business units needs to be carried out in a planned, professional, and sustainable manner. Several important strategies that can be applied include strengthening strategic management, diversifying businesses based on *pesantren* potential, preparing

business feasibility studies, strengthening financial governance, actively involving *santri*, empowering alumni, expanding partnership networks, and utilizing digital marketing. These strategies are important so that business units do not only become sources of institutional income, but also become an integral part of the education system and the economic empowerment of *santri*.

This study has limitations because it uses a literature review approach and relies only on references available in RIS format, so it does not involve primary data from *pesantren*, business unit managers, *santri*, alumni, or the surrounding community. In addition, not all references contain complete substantive information, so the analysis only uses data that can be confirmed from the titles, abstracts, keywords, and available metadata. Therefore, future research is recommended to use an empirical approach, either through case studies, interviews, field observations, or quantitative surveys, to examine the effectiveness of *pesantren* business unit development strategies in supporting the economic independence of *santri* in a more measurable way.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

In the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) utilized ChatGPT to assist with organizing the structure of the manuscript, improving the flow of arguments, and refining the presentation of ideas. All outputs were subsequently reviewed and revised by the author(s), who assume full responsibility for the final content of the publication.

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