

Diversification of Funding Based on Productive Assets as a Strategy for the Economic Self-Reliance of Islamic Boarding Schools

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ABSTRACT

The transformation of financing patterns in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) from external dependence toward internal self-reliance is a crucial issue for institutional sustainability. This study aims to analyze how productive asset management contributes to the economic independence of pesantren and to identify the success factors and challenges encountered in its implementation. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed at Darul Qur'an Islamic Boarding School in Kundur Utara, Riau Islands. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation involving institutional leaders, business managers, educators, and community members, followed by an interactive analysis model consisting of data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that the utilization of productive assets significantly increases independent income and reduces reliance on unstable external funding. Unexpectedly, this process triggers an organic shift toward more professional management practices while fostering student and community empowerment through collective economic participation. However, implementation faces structural constraints, such as limited capital and managerial capacity, alongside cultural resistance toward economic modernization. The implication of this research is that asset-based funding diversification serves as a strategic and sustainable model for enhancing financial autonomy without eroding the traditional religious identity of the pesantren. This study provides a vital reference for policymakers and practitioners to develop "management hybridization" models that integrate professional economic practices with institutional values to ensure long-term institutional resilience.

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INTRODUCTION

The transformation of financing patterns in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) from external dependence toward internal self-reliance has become a crucial phenomenon in contemporary Islamic education (Arif et al., 2025; Bruinessen, 1995; Fatah et al., 2025; Hasan et al., 2024; Hasbunallah et al., 2023; Utama & Salim, 2024). Traditionally, pesantren have relied on external funding sources such as donations, grants, and government assistance, which are often unstable and insufficient to ensure long-term institutional sustainability (Anam et al., 2024; Ayubi & Masruri, 2025; Baihaqi et al., 2023; Hermawan, 2025; Yeoh et al., 2023). This phenomenon drives the need for alternative strategies through the utilization of productive assets—economic resources capable of generating sustainable income if managed effectively (Buanaputra et al., 2022). The practice of funding diversification through business units, such as agriculture and cooperatives, is now essential to support educational operations while increasing institutional resilience (Beck, 2023; Pu et al., 2021).

While the integration of economic activities within pesantren is growing, there are important discussions regarding the balance between traditional values and modern economic demands (Fauzi et al., 2025; Rofiq, 2025; Salim et al., 2024). Some studies highlight the positive impact of economic empowerment, while others argue that activities too focused on business risk shifting the core religious and social values of the pesantren (Adiyono et al., 2025; Aryasutha et al., 2025; Hadisi et al., 2025; Happyana et al., 2025; Hatipoğlu, 2024; Kardi et al., 2023). This indicates the existence of differing perspectives regarding the role of economic modernization in Islamic educational institutions, which requires in-depth analysis through a qualitative descriptive approach.

Previous research has generally focused only on specific aspects of pesantren economic development, such as entrepreneurship, cooperative management, or the contribution of business units to financing in a partial manner (Insawan, 2023; Qizam et al., 2025). However, these studies tend to examine these elements separately, leaving a research gap in understanding how structural, cultural, and managerial dimensions interact to shape sustainable economic independence. Existing writings are insufficient to explain how productive assets can be effectively integrated within the broader governance of the pesantren.

This study aims to address these shortcomings by comprehensively analyzing how productive asset management contributes to strengthening the economic independence of pesantren, identifying success factors, and examining implementation challenges in the field. The primary focus of this paper is to fill the literature gap by directly linking economic practices with institutional values and governance structures, thereby unifying previously fragmented perspectives into an integrative understanding. Furthermore, the author intends to test the argument that asset-based funding diversification is a significant sustainable strategy for increasing financial independence, provided that the pesantren adapts structurally and culturally. The hypothesis being tested is that transforming productive asset management from traditional patterns to professional ones will strengthen institutional resilience without compromising religious identity, serving as a vital reference for developing adaptive economic strategies in Islamic educational institutions.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach aimed at obtaining an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of economic management in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) through the utilization of productive assets within their natural context (Harjawati et al., 2026; Insawan, 2023). The research was conducted at Darul Qur'an Islamic Boarding School, located in Kundur Utara, Karimun Regency, Riau Islands, which represents the implementation of productive asset management in a pesantren

environment. A descriptive qualitative design was used to systematically describe management practices, challenges, and impacts in achieving economic independence (Insawan, 2023).

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained from key informants, including pesantren leaders, business unit managers, educators, students (santri), and members of the surrounding community who are directly involved in or affected by economic activities (Sugiyono, 2021). Secondary data were collected from institutional documents, financial reports, business activity archives, and relevant scientific literature.

Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation (Yin et al., 2021). The instruments used in this study included interview guidelines, observation field notes, and document analysis sheets to ensure systematic data collection.

Data analysis was conducted using an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Monaro et al., 2022). The analysis process was carried out continuously throughout the research to ensure consistency between data collection and interpretation.

To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the data, this study applied source triangulation by comparing information from different informants, method triangulation by integrating interviews, observations, and documentation, and member checking by reconfirming findings with participants (Lim, 2025; Natow, 2020). In addition, prolonged engagement and persistent observation were conducted to ensure that the findings accurately reflect the real conditions in the field.

Table 1. Profile and Criteria of Research Informants

No	Informant Category	Informant Criteria	Number	Role in the Study
1	Pesantren Leaders	Have authority in policymaking and institutional management	1–2 persons	Provide information on policies and the direction of pesantren economic development
2	Business Unit Managers	Directly involved in managing productive assets (cooperatives, agriculture, etc.)	2–4 persons	Explain operational processes, business management, and challenges encountered
3	Educators	Teachers or religious instructors knowledgeable about pesantren economic activities	2–3 persons	Provide perspectives on the integration of economic activities with education
4	Students (Santri)	Students involved in business unit activities	3–5 persons	Provide firsthand experiences of participation in productive activities
5	Local Community	Community members involved in or affected by pesantren economic activities	2–3 persons	Provide views on the social and economic impact on the surrounding environment
6	Documentation/Archives	Official documents such as financial reports, institutional profiles, and activity records	-	Serve as supporting data to strengthen interview and observation findings

Based on **Table 1**, this study involves various stakeholders who have direct roles and relevance to the management of productive asset-based economic activities in pesantren. Pesantren leaders are positioned as key informants due to their authority in determining policies and the direction of institutional economic development, making their insights strategic and conceptual in nature.

Business unit managers serve as primary informants in describing operational practices, including planning, implementation, and evaluation of business activities. Educators are included to provide perspectives on the relationship between economic activities and the educational process within the pesantren.

Students (santri) who are directly involved in business units offer empirical insights into their experiences, learning processes, and participation in productive activities. Meanwhile, members of the surrounding community are considered important informants to assess the social and economic impacts of pesantren activities.

In addition, documentation data such as financial reports and activity records are used as supporting evidence to strengthen the validity of the findings. By involving diverse informants, this study is expected to produce a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of pesantren economic management.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Productive Asset Utilization and Income Enhancement

The utilization of productive assets has been shown to significantly increase the independent income of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) (Qizam et al., 2025). This occurs because assets that were previously passive such as idle land, unused buildings, or students' skills are optimized into income-generating economic resources (Jaafar et al., 2025; Linenberger, 2023). The main reason for this increase is the diversification of business activities, which allows pesantren to avoid reliance on a single funding source, such as donations or student fees, and instead develop multiple sustainable revenue streams (Abidin et al., 2024; Andayani et al., 2025).

Empirical evidence shows that pesantren managing business units such as agriculture, livestock farming, cooperatives, or the production of goods and services experience more stable income and are even able to cover most of their operational costs independently (Qizam et al., 2025; Zaki et al., 2022). In addition, the involvement of students in productive activities reduces labor costs while simultaneously enhancing their skills (Jung, 2020). Field data also indicate an increase in financial surplus that can be allocated to the development of educational facilities and internal welfare. Thus, it can be concluded that optimizing productive assets is an effective strategy for promoting the economic independence of pesantren while strengthening their long-term sustainability.

Based on interviews with administrators and students at a pesantren that has developed productive assets, it was found that asset utilization has a tangible impact on increasing independent income. The treasurer stated that, *"since we utilized idle land for agricultural and livestock businesses, the pesantren's income is no longer solely dependent on student fees. In recent months, the results of these businesses have been able to cover most of the daily operational costs."* Similarly, a cooperative unit manager explained that business diversification stabilizes cash flow, particularly when donations decline.

Meanwhile, a student involved in production activities stated that, *"we not only study religion, but are also taught how to manage a business, from production to marketing. The results are also used to support the pesantren's needs."* This statement indicates that asset utilization impacts not only financial aspects but also enhances human resource capacity within the pesantren. Overall, the optimization of productive assets has made a significant contribution to economic independence and operational sustainability.

The interview results further reveal that the utilization of productive assets is not merely an economic strategy but also an institutional transformation process toward stronger financial independence. Statements from the treasurer and business managers confirm that optimizing previously unproductive resources has generated significant new income streams, reducing

dependence on student fees and external donations. This reflects a shift toward more adaptive and sustainability-oriented financial management (Carmeli et al., 2020; Dharmayanti et al., 2023). Additionally, student involvement in business activities demonstrates the pesantren’s role as a practical entrepreneurship learning space (Mariyono, 2025). Thus, productive assets not only increase income but also strengthen internal capacity in both managerial and human resource aspects. As illustrated in **Figure 1**, the utilization of productive assets follows a structured process that transforms idle resources into sustainable income-generating activities.



Figure 1. Flow of Productive Asset Utilization in Pesantren

Professional Management as a Key Factor in Successful Funding Diversification

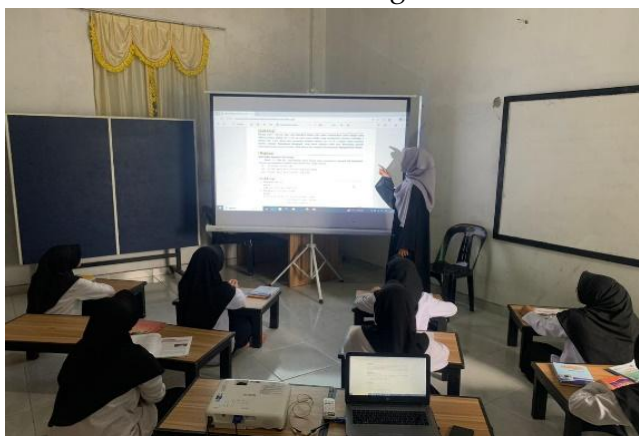
Professional management is a key factor in the success of funding diversification in pesantren. This is because managing productive assets and business units requires structured, transparent, and well-planned systems, rather than traditional management approaches (Hepburn et al., 2021; Lin et al., 2024). The importance of professional management lies in the increasing complexity of pesantren economic activities, which demands clear task division, accurate financial recording, and data-driven decision-making (Atstsaury et al., 2024; S.-M. Liu et al., 2024; T. Liu et al., 2025; Sabariah et al., 2025; Tihabsah et al., 2024).

Field evidence shows that pesantren implementing professional management — such as structured business unit organizations, periodic financial reports, and the involvement of alumni or economic experts — are more successful in developing new funding sources than those relying on informal management. Professionally managed business units are also more efficient, competitive, and capable of generating sustainable income. Therefore, management professionalization is a fundamental element in successful funding diversification, as it enhances both asset management effectiveness and long-term economic sustainability (Mohamed et al., 2021; Mujiatun et al., 2025). **Table 2** presents the mentoring strategies and their impact on the development of professional management in pesantren business units.

Table 2. Description of Professional Management Mentoring and Business Unit Outcomes

No	Mentoring Description (Professional Management)	Outcomes
1	Implementation of structured business unit management with clear task division	More effective operations and reduced overlap
2	Preparation of periodic and transparent financial reports	Increased accountability and data-driven decision-making
3	Involvement of alumni or experts in business management	Improved management quality and new revenue development
4	Implementation of business planning and regular evaluation	Greater adaptability and sustained income growth
5	Data-based decision-making and business analysis	Increased efficiency and minimized risks

As shown in **Table 2**, the implementation of professional management mentoring significantly improves the effectiveness of business unit management. Structured management systems improve operational efficiency and prevent role overlap. Transparent financial reporting enhances accountability and supports rational decision-making. The involvement of experts improves management quality and encourages the emergence of new competitive income sources. Business planning and routine evaluations make business units more adaptive to market changes, ensuring income sustainability. Overall, professionalization strengthens operational efficiency, competitiveness, and long-term economic independence. As shown in **Figure 2**, monitoring and evaluation activities are conducted through structured discussions involving various stakeholders

**Figure 2.** Monitoring and Evaluation of Business Unit Performance

Monitoring and evaluation activities indicate the implementation of a structured management system focused on improving governance quality. These activities are typically conducted through formal meetings involving administrators and stakeholders to review performance, identify challenges, and formulate future strategies. (Huriyah & Chiang, 2025; Shittu et al., 2025; Suryanto et al., 2024) Supporting documents such as financial reports, performance charts, and evaluation records demonstrate that these processes are data-driven and systematically planned. Active participation also reflects a culture of openness and continuous improvement. Thus, monitoring and evaluation serve as

concrete evidence of management professionalization contributing to operational efficiency and sustainability.

Business Diversification Encourages the Empowerment of Students and Local Communities

Business diversification in pesantren significantly promotes the empowerment of both students and surrounding communities. This is because the development of various business units not only aims to increase institutional income but also serves as a community-based socio-economic empowerment mechanism (Wibowo et al., 2023).

Pesantren play a dual role as educational institutions and social centers, making them strategic platforms for integrating religious education with entrepreneurial practice (Bashith et al., 2025; Mariyono, 2025; Wibowo et al., 2023). Field evidence shows that students actively participate in production, management, and marketing activities. Local communities also benefit through job creation, business partnerships, and access to economic opportunities.

Thus, diversification functions as an effective empowerment instrument, enhancing economic independence while generating broader social benefits (Harjawati et al., 2026; Rofiah et al., 2025).



Figure 3. Illustration of Pesantren Business Diversification

The illustration demonstrates that pesantren act as integrated empowerment hubs combining education, economy, and social aspects. Students engage in experiential learning, while communities gain economic opportunities. Overall, these activities contribute to both institutional independence and collective welfare.

Asset-Based Funding Diversification Enhances Financial Independence

Asset-based funding diversification has been proven to enhance the financial independence of pesantren. This finding is based on the fact that reliance on external funding sources such as donations, alms, and government assistance tends to be fluctuating and does not guarantee institutional sustainability (Ulfa, 2025)(Alhifni & Ahwarumi, 2025). Therefore, the development of productive assets such as cooperatives, agriculture, livestock, and service-based businesses serves as a strategic alternative to generate more stable and sustainable income streams. Empirical evidence shows that pesantren actively managing productive assets are able to meet most of their operational needs independently and, in some cases, even expand educational programs and student welfare without significant dependence on external parties (Asyhari et al., 2022)(Ikhwan & Yuniana, 2022). Furthermore, the implementation of more professional management systems in business units strengthens the effectiveness of this diversification strategy (Ely & Thomas, 2023).

Thus, it can be concluded that asset-based funding diversification not only functions as a complementary strategy, but also serves as a main pillar in achieving adaptive, sustainable, and resilient economic independence of pesantren in responding to economic dynamics (Afif et al., 2025; Hariyati & Rofiq, 2024; Humaida et al., 2026).

Based on in-depth interviews with pesantren administrators and business unit managers, it was found that asset-based funding diversification contributes significantly to financial independence. One informant, namely the pesantren leader, stated:

“Since we developed business units such as student cooperatives and agriculture, our daily operational needs are no longer entirely dependent on donors. In fact, some educational programs can now be financed through the results of our own business activities.”

This statement was reinforced by a business unit manager who explained that the implementation of more professional management practices, such as financial record-keeping and business planning, has significantly increased annual income. Meanwhile, students involved in business activities expressed that, in addition to supporting the pesantren’s financial sustainability, they also gain direct entrepreneurial experience. The consistency of information among informants highlights the important role of productive assets in sustaining the pesantren’s economy (Farhanillah et al., 2025). Therefore, these interview findings confirm that funding diversification through the development of productive assets is not merely conceptual, but has produced tangible impacts in improving financial independence.

The interview results further indicate that asset-based funding diversification has transformed the economic management pattern of pesantren from dependency toward a more structured form of independence. The statement from the pesantren leader reflects a shift in the primary source of funding, where business units are no longer supplementary but have become the main pillar supporting daily operations. This is supported by the explanation from business unit managers emphasizing the importance of professional management, suggesting that the success of diversification is achieved through systematic planning and structured management processes rather than occurring naturally.

In addition, student involvement in business activities highlights an educational dimension that expands the role of pesantren not only as religious educational institutions but also as centers for practical entrepreneurial learning. Overall, these findings demonstrate that asset-based funding diversification does not only impact financial aspects but also fosters a culture of independence, professionalism, and empowerment within the pesantren ecosystem.

Structural and Cultural Challenges in Diversification

There are structural and cultural challenges in the implementation of asset-based funding diversification in pesantren. This finding is based on the understanding that the development of business units requires not only economic resources but also institutional readiness and internal cultural acceptance. Structurally, limited access to business capital, weak marketing networks, and low managerial capacity are the main obstacles that hinder the optimal management of productive assets (Zahid et al., 2024)(Mbonyane et al., 2023).

On the other hand, from a cultural perspective, there are still prevailing views among some pesantren administrators that consider business activities to be less aligned with the values of sincerity and traditional Islamic education, which leads to resistance toward economic innovation (Faizin, 2024; Miftahuddin et al., 2024; Yusuf et al., 2024). Empirical evidence obtained from observations and interviews shows that several business units have not developed optimally due to weak business planning and insufficient internal support. In addition, there is a tendency for business management to be carried out informally without professional standards. Therefore, it can be concluded that the

success of funding diversification depends not only on the availability of assets but also on the ability of pesantren to overcome structural barriers and transform organizational culture into a more adaptive and productive system (Hafidh et al., 2026)(Prasetyo, 2022).

Table 3. Mentoring Strategies and Their Impact on the Transformation of Pesantren Economic Independence

Mentoring Description	Outcomes
Strengthening understanding of asset-based funding diversification among pesantren administrators	Increased awareness of financial independence and reduced dependence on external donations
Business management assistance (business planning, financial recording, and performance evaluation)	More structured and professional business management, with visible income growth
Human resource capacity building in entrepreneurship and business literacy	Improved competence in managing businesses and identifying economic opportunities
Strengthening access to networks and product marketing	Expanded market opportunities and increased competitiveness of pesantren products
Mindset transformation mentoring (from traditional to productive orientation)	Reduced resistance to business activities and the emergence of a culture of independence and economic innovation

Table 3 shows that the mentoring process plays a highly significant role in addressing structural and cultural challenges in the implementation of asset-based funding diversification in pesantren. Each stage of assistance does not only focus on technical aspects of business management but also addresses awareness, human resource capacity, and mindset transformation. The results indicate a gradual transformation, starting from increased understanding of the importance of financial independence to the establishment of more structured and professional business management systems. Furthermore, strengthening human resource capacity and expanding market access contribute to broader economic opportunities for pesantren. Importantly, mentoring also helps reduce cultural resistance to business activities, thereby creating a balance between traditional values and the demands of modernization (Xue et al., 2024)(Parsloe, 2024). Overall, these findings indicate that comprehensive mentoring is a key factor in promoting successful funding diversification and strengthening the long-term economic independence of pesantren.



Figure 4. Students Managing a Basic Needs Cooperative

Figure 4 represents the practical implementation of asset-based funding diversification in pesantren through the management of a basic needs cooperative.. It shows interaction between administrators (possibly female teachers or staff) and students who are directly involved in business activities, reflecting both a learning process and empowerment.

The stacks of rice in the background indicate an organized stock management or distribution system, highlighting the managerial aspect of productive asset development. From a cultural perspective, the image also demonstrates that economic activities can be carried out in harmony with pesantren values without diminishing the Islamic identity of those involved. This aligns with the study's findings that funding diversification not only improves financial independence but also fosters a productive and collaborative culture. Therefore, this figure serves as visual evidence that pesantren are capable of adapting to economic challenges through the collective management of productive assets involving all internal stakeholders (Darwanto et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the management of productive assets is a pivotal strategy for strengthening the economic independence of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren). The key findings reveal that the utilization of these assets does not merely increase revenue, but more unexpectedly, it triggers an organic transformation of the institutional financing structure from external dependency toward a sustainable, internally driven capacity. Furthermore, the study uncovers that this economic strengthening is inherently collective, creating a unique synergy between leaders, students, and the community that produces broader social impacts beyond financial gains, such as systematic skill development and social empowerment.

In terms of academic contribution, this research offers a new perspective by bridging the gap between traditional pesantren values and modern professional management. While it confirms previous studies on the importance of business units, this study provides a more integrative concept by demonstrating that managerial professionalization can be harmonized with institutional identity without causing cultural erosion. This finding challenges the assumption that economic modernization necessarily conflicts with the core religious values of pesantren, offering a more nuanced model of "management hybridization" in Islamic educational settings.

However, this study acknowledges several limitations that highlight the need for future research. The primary limitation lies in the specific qualitative context of a single institution, which may not represent the full diversity of the pesantren landscape. Future studies should explore quantitative measurements of financial performance and comparative analyses across more diverse regional contexts and pesantren types to achieve more comprehensive results. Additionally, there is a significant need for research into the integration of digital entrepreneurship and broader market networks to inform better policy decisions for the sustainability of pesantren economic ecosystems.

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