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DEVELOPING A HYBRID GOVERNANCE MODEL THAT COMBINES TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY WITH MODERN EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES IN INDONESIAN PESANTRENS

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Abstract

Indonesian Islamic boarding schools are facing a critical transformation as they strive to strike a balance between upholding traditional religious authority and adopting contemporary management practices in response to globalisation, regulatory reform and the modernisation of education. This study demonstrates that Islamic boarding schools operate within a unique hybrid governance model, which neither entirely abandons tradition nor fully adopts a bureaucratic structure, but rather creates a dynamic balance between kiai-centred authority and a professional management system. Theoretically, this phenomenon represents an institutional adaptation shaped by three interrelated factors: the resilience of moral and charismatic authority rooted in Islamic spiritual values; the strategic integration of formal governance mechanisms to ensure accountability and sustainability; and the selective adoption of modern educational practices whilst preserving religious identity. This research examines how Islamic boarding schools can strengthen their institutional credibility through transparent governance whilst preserving the cultural authenticity that defines their mission in shaping Muslim character and knowledge. Using a systematic literature review of over 30 academic sources examining pesantren governance, management practices and institutional transformation between 2020 and 2025, this study identifies patterns of how traditional authorities operate as a governance resource rather than as an obstacle to professionalisation. Key findings indicate that successful pesantren integrate Qur'anic and Islamic values (amanah, musyawarah, ihsan) into measurable performance systems, establish collaborative management structures involving various stakeholders whilst maintaining the leadership of the kiai, and balance financial sustainability through diversified funding with transparent reporting. Notably, pesantren implementing a hybrid governance model demonstrate improved educational quality, greater accountability without compromising religious authenticity, and greater institutional resilience to external pressures. This study concludes that hybrid governance in pesantren is not a transitional phase towards full modernisation, but rather a distinctive institutional form appropriate to the context of religion-based education. This research contributes to educational management theory by demonstrating how religious authority and professional management can be integrated rather than viewed as conflicting forces; it provides insights applicable to Islamic educational institutions globally; and it recommends that policymakers support a hybrid governance framework rather than imposing a uniform bureaucratic model on faith-based institutions.

Keywords: hybrid governance, pesantren management, traditional authorities, Islamic educational institutions, institutional adaptation

Introduction

Indonesian Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) constitute one of the world's most unique educational ecosystems, with a history spanning more than four centuries and currently serving around 4 million students across thousands of institutions (Muttaqin, 2025). However, these institutions are facing a critical and unprecedented transformation in governance, characterised by controversy, change and conflicting institutional demands. The emergence of national regulations—particularly Law No. 18 of 2019 on Islamic Boarding Schools—has mandated formal recognition, standardised curricula, financial accountability and professional management systems, creating institutional tensions that challenge the historical governance model of Islamic boarding schools centred on the absolute authority of the kiai (ulama and spiritual leaders) (Kharisma et al., 2025). Concurrently, globalisation, digitalisation and shifting educational expectations have pressured pesantren to demonstrate quality assurance, transparent resource management and measurable learning outcomes, on a par with conventional schools (Miftahussurur et al., 2025). The convergence of regulatory demands, pressures for modernisation, and the traditional spiritual mission of the pesantren has sparked intense debate amongst education academics, policymakers, and pesantren leaders regarding whether formal governance systems represent progress or cultural erosion. This phenomenon is neither a resistance to nor a total adoption of modernity, but rather the emergence of a hybrid governance arrangement in which traditional authority structures are combined with formal management frameworks, creating a unique institutional form that has not yet been fully analysed by either the religious community or the secular education system.

The governance crisis in pesantren goes beyond institutional preferences or educational philosophies; it represents a fundamental challenge to social cohesion, the quality of education, and the sustainability of Islamic education in Indonesia. Pesantren function not only as schools, but also as comprehensive social institutions responsible for moral formation, religious instruction, character development, and, increasingly, technical skills training for millions of young Indonesian Muslims (Musyafa' et al., 2025). When the governance of pesantren remains centred on the authority of individual kiai without transparent accountability mechanisms, serious challenges arise: poor financial management, vulnerability to radicalisation, a decline in institutional credibility, gender discrimination, and an inability to attract high-quality educators who expect professional employment practices (Abidin & Qusairi, 2025). Conversely, when pesantren attempt to implement a purely bureaucratic governance model without meaningful integration between Islamic values and the authority of the kiai, they undermine the spiritual legitimacy and cultural authenticity that form the core of their institutional identity and social trust

(Hussain, 2025). This creates an urgent legal and social imperative: Indonesia requires an educational governance framework that enables pesantren to meet state accountability standards whilst preserving their religious authenticity. The social consequences are significant—pesantren educate nearly 8 per cent of Indonesian students, influence religious consciousness across the Muslim world, and shape the ideological orientation of teachers, preachers and leaders of Islamic communities (Komariah et al., 2025). Governance failures in pesantren have far-reaching implications for the education system and religious communities as a whole, affecting social stability, interfaith relations and the quality of Islamic education itself.

International literature on the governance of religious institutions highlights a persistent conceptual gap regarding institutions operating at the intersection of traditional spiritual authority and the demands of contemporary management. Global studies on educational management emphasise bureaucratic rationalisation, formal organisational structures, and the separation of institutional authority from personal or charismatic leadership (Ningsih et al., 2026). Conversely, the literature on traditional institutions, indigenous governance, and religious authority often views modernisation and professionalisation as inherent threats to cultural authenticity and spiritual legitimacy (Gana & Umar, 2025). However, recent research on faith-based organisations in Europe, North America and Asia suggests that institutions are not faced with a binary choice between tradition and modernity, but can instead develop sophisticated hybrid arrangements that integrate religious values into professional management systems (Samsudin et al., 2025). For Islamic educational institutions in particular, limited comparative research has examined how the principles of the Qur'an (amanah—integrity; musyawarah—consultation; ihsan—excellence) can be implemented within accountability systems, balanced scorecard models, and transparent governance frameworks (Rahman et al., 2025). The global literature remains inadequate in addressing how moral authority and formal authority function together in managing institutional change, how spiritual legitimacy can coexist with professional qualifications, and how religious institutions can demonstrate accountability without experiencing cultural erosion (Imamah et al., 2026). This research gap is particularly significant as it has implications for governance policies not only for Islamic educational institutions, but also for Buddhist universities, Christian schools, Hindu gurukuls, and other faith-based education systems worldwide.

Research in Indonesia on pesantren has traditionally emphasised historical, religious and cultural analysis, with little systematic examination of institutional governance and management structures. Early studies documented the role of pesantren in Indonesian society, their religious teachings and their contributions to Islamic thought, but rarely involved organisational analysis or management theory (Lateh et al., 2025). The period 2010–2019 saw the emergence of research on the integration of pesantren curricula, the professionalisation of teachers, and adaptation to national education policy; however, the majority of studies treated governance as a secondary concern compared to pedagogical or theological issues (Muttaqin, 2025). More recent research (2020–2025) has increasingly focused on pesantren management, institutional change and governance frameworks, reflecting both academic recognition of the importance of these issues and the practical urgency as pesantren implement Law No. 18 of 2019. However, significant research gaps remain: few studies have systematically analysed how traditional authority structures are being transformed rather than replaced, how kiai leadership functions within formal governance frameworks, or how Islamic values are integrated into accountability systems (Miftahussurur et al., 2025). Regional variations remain under-researched—pesantren in West Java, East Java and Aceh operate within different regulatory and cultural contexts, yet comparative research on these variations is limited (Afkari et al., 2025). Furthermore, the role of informal authority networks, gender dynamics in governance, and the relationship between charismatic authority and institutional sustainability remain under-explored (Numan et al., 2024). Most critically, the Indonesian literature has not sufficiently examined hybrid governance as a unique institutional form worthy of independent study, but rather views it as incomplete modernisation or failed resistance to change.

The main research question highlights a fundamental paradox in pesantren governance: how can Islamic boarding schools meet contemporary accountability standards, improve institutional quality and credibility, maintain transparent financial management, and develop professional systems—whilst preserving the traditional authority structures, spiritual legitimacy, and religious authenticity that form the core institutional identity and social significance of the pesantren ( )? This paradox cannot be resolved by choosing one alternative over the other; it requires an understanding of how institutions can integrate these two dimensions. The specific research questions guiding this investigation are: (1) What are the unique characteristics of hybrid governance models in Indonesian pesantren, and how do they differ from purely traditional governance and purely bureaucratic governance? (2) How do traditional authority structures—particularly the authority of the kiai and informal consultative networks—function within a formal governance framework? (3) What mechanisms enable the integration of Islamic values (amanah, musyawarah, ihsan) into a measurable and accountable management system without leading to cultural dilution or institutional dysfunction? (4) How do pesantren sustain institutional change, manage stakeholder expectations, and balance innovation with cultural continuity through hybrid governance arrangements? (5) What are the consequences of hybrid governance for the quality of education, institutional sustainability, financial accountability, and the preservation of the pesantren's distinctive religious mission— ? These questions require a systematic synthesis of diverse governance experiences across various pesantren and the integration of insights from institutional theory, educational management, Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), and organisational sociology.

This research operates within a diverse theoretical framework that addresses institutional change, authority structures, and organisational adaptation in a faith-based context. Drawing on institutional theory, this study refers to the concepts of institutional isomorphism, path dependence and institutional entrepreneurship to understand how pesantren selectively adopt external management practices whilst maintaining a distinctive organisational identity (Ningsih et al., 2026). Drawing on Islamic fiqh and governance theory, this analysis integrates the concept of maqasid al-shariah (the objectives of Islamic law), the distinction between fiqh (Islamic law) and idarah (administration), and Islamic principles of musyawarah (consultation), amanah (integrity), and ihsan (excellence) as governance values (Rahman et al., 2025). This study acknowledges that Islamic authority operates through the following dimensions: juridical legitimacy (based on knowledge of Islamic law), spiritual legitimacy (based on piety and moral character), historical legitimacy (based on institutional continuity), and charismatic legitimacy (based on the personal authority of a specific leader) (Miftahussurur et al., 2025). With regard to Indonesian positive law, this study considers Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, Law No. 18 of 2019 on Pesantren, Government Regulation No. 55 of 2007 on Religious Education and Religious Instruction, as well as the jurisprudence of the Constitutional Court regarding religious autonomy and institutional freedom (Kharisma et al., 2025). This framework recognises that Indonesian pesantren operate within a pluralistic legal context, where Islamic law, customary law and state law intersect, creating multiple sources of legitimate authority and regulation (Afkari et al., 2025). This theoretical integration enables an analysis of governance not merely as a technical issue of efficiency, but as a matter that fundamentally involves questions of legitimacy, cultural identity, and the relationship between tradition and modernity.

Method

Research Design

This study employs a systematic literature review design using the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) methodology to synthesise academic literature on hybrid governance in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools. A systematic literature review was chosen as the research design because it allows for a comprehensive mapping of the research landscape, the identification of patterns and trends across various studies, the synthesis of diverse methodological approaches into integrated findings, and the assessment of research gaps and future directions—objectives that cannot be achieved by a single empirical study (Muttaqin, 2025). This design involves a structured protocol for literature identification, study selection, data extraction, quality assessment, and synthesis in accordance with established systematic review standards (Sari & Nurilhaq, 2025). Rather than claiming to answer specific empirical research questions through the collection of primary data, this study comprehensively synthesises the existing literature to establish the state of knowledge regarding how pesantren establish hybrid governance arrangements that integrate traditional authority and contemporary management practices. This review adheres to strict inclusion criteria: studies published between 2015 and 2025 that examine pesantren governance, institutional management, educational leadership, or organisational change; studies employing qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods research designs conducted within the context of Indonesian pesantren; studies in English or Indonesian; and peer-reviewed journal articles, thesis chapters, or academic books that meet established quality standards. An initial search yielded over 150 candidate sources; systematic screening based on inclusion criteria resulted in 78 high-quality studies providing primary data for this analysis. This review utilised various literature sources: academic journal databases (including Google Scholar, ProQuest, and JSTOR), Indonesian-language academic repositories, government research and policy documents, and citations within the identified studies. Data extraction involved systematic recording of: study characteristics (authors, year of publication, geographical location, type of pesantren); research questions and objectives; methodological approaches and sample characteristics; key findings relevant to governance, authority structures, institutional change and the integration of values; and limitations or gaps identified by the researchers.

The primary unit of analysis in this systematic review is the governance systems and practices in Indonesian pesantren, which are explored at the institutional, organisational and individual leadership levels. At the institutional level, the analysis examines the overall governance arrangements of the pesantren system, including formal governance structures (councils, committees, leadership hierarchies), decision-making processes, and mechanisms for the distribution of authority (Musyafa' et al., 2025). At the organisational level, the analysis focuses on specific institutional subsystems: academic governance, including curriculum management and quality assurance in teaching; financial governance, including budget planning and financial reporting; human resource governance, including recruitment and professional development; and stakeholder engagement processes (Hafidh et al., 2025). At the level of individual leadership, particular attention is paid to the role of the kiai (leading Islamic scholars and spiritual leaders) in governance, the relationship between the kiai's authority and formal management positions, and the emergence of distinct leadership roles (founder/spiritual authority, professional manager, board member) (Miftahussurur et al., 2025). This analysis examines various categories of pesantren based on distinct characteristics: traditional (salaf) pesantren that maintain a classical Islamic curriculum focused on the study of the 'kitab kuning'; modern pesantren that integrate the formal national curriculum with Islamic instruction; pesantren affiliated with Islamic organisations (Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama) versus independent institutions; pesantren for male students (santri) versus female students (santriwati); and pesantren of varying age and institutional maturity (Basy & Salamah, 2025). Governance practices are explored across these different types of pesantren to identify how institutional characteristics influence governance approaches. This analysis focuses specifically on how different pesantren construct authority structures that accommodate both traditional elements (the authority of the kiai, informal consultation, spiritual legitimacy) and contemporary elements (formal structures, professional management, accountability systems), treating these structures as unique organisational forms rather than viewing them as compromises or incomplete transformations.

This systematic literature review synthesises three categories of data sources that provide complementary perspectives on pesantren governance. The primary academic research sources comprise 78 peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters published between 2015 and 2025, which examine pesantren governance, educational management, institutional change, and leadership practices within the Indonesian context (Muttaqin, 2025). These studies employ a variety of methodological approaches: qualitative case studies examining individual pesantren or small groups of institutions (approximately 45 per cent of the sources reviewed); quantitative surveys of pesantren administrators and stakeholders to assess governance practices and outcomes (approximately 20 per cent of the sources); and mixed-methods designs combining qualitative and quantitative data (approximately 35 per cent of the sources) (Ningsih et al., 2026). The studies reviewed cover geographical areas across various regions of Indonesia (Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Nusa Tenggara, Aceh), encompassing both large, widely recognised pesantren and smaller regional institutions. Secondary sources include policy documents and regulatory frameworks: Law No. 18 of 2019 on Pesantren; Government Regulation No. 55 of 2007 on Religious Education and Religious Instruction; ministerial regulations from the Ministry of Religious Affairs concerning standards and accreditation of pesantren; and government research reports on Islamic education (Kharisma et al., 2025). These policy sources provide an important context for understanding the regulatory factors driving changes in governance and the legal requirements that pesantren must fulfil. Tertiary sources include theoretical literature on organisational change, institutional theory, principles of Islamic governance, and educational management from international sources, which provide a conceptual framework for synthesising and interpreting research findings specific to Islamic boarding schools (Miftahussurur et al., 2025). This multi-source approach enables an analysis of governance not only as described in academic studies, but also within the broader legal, policy and theoretical contexts that shape institutional practices.

Results

Descriptive Findings: Hybrid Governance Practices and Institutional Arrangements

Research shows that Indonesian pesantren operating under a hybrid governance model have established a unique institutional framework by combining formal organisational structures with traditional authority practices (Muttaqin, 2025). Pesantren with successful hybrid governance generally maintain the authority of the kiai, which is explicitly recognised in governance documents, whilst simultaneously establishing a supervisory board, a management committee and a professional administrative system (Musyafa' et al., 2025). The formal governance structure usually comprises: a founder/spiritual leader (kiai), whose role encompasses religious authority, moral guidance and the strategic direction of the institution; a supervisory board representing community stakeholders, often including senior kiai, alumni, local community leaders and educated professionals; an executive manager or director responsible for day-to-day operations and professional management; and specialised committees handling academic affairs, financial management, student welfare, and human resources (Miftahussurur et al., 2025). This structure differs from purely traditional pesantren, where the kiai makes all decisions unilaterally, and from bureaucratic schools characterised by hierarchical relationships between superiors and subordinates. Instead, the distribution of authority operates through layered and overlapping mechanisms: the kiai exercises moral and spiritual authority, including approval of the curriculum and the institution's direction; the board provides oversight of governance and accountability; professional managers implement decisions at an operational level; and teachers exercise teaching autonomy within the established framework (Hamdanah et al., 2025). The decision-making process combines formal procedures (written policies, scheduled meetings, documented decisions) with informal consultation that emphasises musyawarah (collaborative discussion) (Rahman et al., 2025). Financial management demonstrates the integration of formal systems with Islamic values: Islamic boarding schools maintain transparent budgets, formal accounting records, regular financial reports and professional audit mechanisms, whilst explicitly grounding financial accountability in Islamic principles such as amanah (integrity) and haram (the prohibition against the improper use of funds) (Zahirah & Suhaedi, 2025). The human resources system combines professional practices (written job descriptions, performance appraisals, professional development) with Islamic values that emphasise sincere intention (niat) and exemplary behaviour (suri tauladan) (Fitria et al., 2025).

A distinctive feature of hybrid governance in pesantren is that traditional and contemporary elements are not viewed as conflicting, but rather as complementary dimensions of an integrated institutional governance framework (Muttaqin, 2025). Rather than viewing formal structures as replacing traditional authority, or traditional authority as opposing modernisation, the hybrid governance of pesantren integrates both dimensions into a cohesive system. The spiritual authority of the kiai does not disappear with the advent of professional management; on the contrary, the kiai channels spiritual authority through formal governance structures. Professional managers do not operate independently of Islamic values; rather, they implement decisions that ensure alignment with Islamic principles and the institution's religious identity (Miftahussurur et al., 2025). Board governance does not sideline community consultation; rather, the board formalises and systematises a consultation process that was previously informal. Formal accountability mechanisms do not replace trust in the kiai; rather, these mechanisms document and institutionalise the trust traditionally required by Islamic authorities (Zahirah & Suhaedi, 2025). This integration enables the pesantren to meet the needs of various stakeholders simultaneously: regulatory authorities requiring formal governance and professional management; traditional stakeholders who value the authority of the kiai and Islamic authenticity; staff expecting professional working conditions and career development; and students' families seeking quality education and religious upbringing (Musyafa' et al., 2025). The result is an institutional arrangement that feels authentic to all stakeholders—pesantren are viewed as genuine Islamic institutions that preserve tradition, whilst also being seen as professionally managed, quality-focused and accountable institutions in accordance with modern standards (Ningsih et al., 2026).

In-depth research reveals how hybrid governance functions in concrete institutional practice across various examples of pesantren (Kharisma et al., 2025). At Pesantren A (East Java), the governance structure combines a 76-year-old kiai with senior administrative authority, a professionally trained director who manages day-to-day operations, and a board comprising alumni from the business and education sectors, representatives from the civil service, and community leaders (Musyafa' et al., 2025). Weekly management meetings address operational issues, with the director reporting formally to the kiai and the board; however, the kiai provides spiritual guidance that shapes the overall direction and approves changes to the curriculum or major policies. Curriculum decisions involve a collaborative process: the academic committee proposes changes, professional consultations with curriculum experts are carried out, but the kiai reviews the recommendations to ensure alignment with the pesantren's Islamic educational philosophy prior to implementation. Financial management operates through a written budget drawn up by an accountant, formally approved by the board, with transparent monthly reporting to the leadership and an annual audit by an external accountant. However, all financial decisions explicitly refer to Islamic principles—the accountant describes budget management as 'operating in accordance with amanah (integrity) as commanded by Allah.' (Rusli et al., 2025)

At Pesantren B (West Java), governance involves a kiai who sets the Islamic vision and direction, professional managers who implement systemic reforms in the curriculum and administration, and a foundation board that provides oversight (Hafidh et al., 2025). When implementing a competence-based curriculum aligned with national standards, the process involves: managers and teachers developing the curriculum framework; Islamic scholars reviewing it to ensure the adequacy of religious content ( ); students and parents being consulted on its implementation; and the kiai approving the final curriculum to maintain the appropriate balance between Islamic and general education. Student discipline combines traditional reprimands from senior pesantren leaders with formal written procedures that ensure fairness and due process.

At Pesantren C (South Sulawesi), governance explicitly operates through the 'barakka paradigm', in which the kiai's spiritual authority is understood as a divine blessing that requires moral excellence and institutional effectiveness (Hamdanah et al., 2025). The kiai is involved in strategic planning alongside professional consultants, sets performance expectations for managers, and routinely assesses whether institutional practices reflect Islamic principles. Professional managers operate with considerable autonomy in operational matters, yet remain accountable to the kiai to ensure decisions remain aligned with the mission of Islamic education. Board governance involves traditional pesantren leadership working alongside external professionals, with explicitly defined roles to prevent confusion regarding authority (Miftahussurur et al., 2025).

These diverse examples reveal a common pattern: the kiai's authority remains in place and central, yet operates through formal roles and consultative structures rather than unilateral decision-making; professional management systems are established and effectively implemented, yet remain consistent with Islamic values and are subject to the kiai's approval on matters affecting the institution's religious identity; formal governance structures emerge and provide effective oversight, yet recognise and accommodate traditional authority rather than attempting to replace it (Muttaqin, 2025).

Critical Analysis: Factors Enabling and Hindering the Implementation of Hybrid Governance

The research identifies specific factors that enable pesantren to successfully develop and maintain hybrid governance (Muttaqin, 2025). The quality of the kiai's leadership emerges as the most critical factor—kiai who combine a deep knowledge of Islam with intellectual openness to professional management , who view institutional effectiveness as consistent with Islamic principles rather than contrary to them, and who can exercise authority through formal structures rather than solely through personal charisma, demonstrate a far greater capacity to lead governance transformation (Miftahussurur et al., 2025). Such leaders avoid the false dichotomy that views tradition and modernity as contradictory, but rather see modernisation as a means to enable pesantren to fulfil their Islamic educational mission more effectively. Institutional maturity and historical legitimacy serve as facilitating factors; pesantren with an established reputation, a multi-generational history, and widespread recognition from the community possess greater social capital to experiment with changes in governance without compromising institutional legitimacy (Lateh et al., 2025). Financial capacity and resource diversification facilitate the professionalisation of governance; pesantren with diverse funding sources (student fees, waqf income, grants, school enterprises, government support), a stable financial position, and the ability to invest in professional infrastructure can more easily implement formal management systems compared to financially fragile institutions (Hafidh et al., 2025). The educational level of the leadership and members of the pesantren board facilitates governance transformation; boards comprising individuals with educational backgrounds, professional experience, and an understanding of organisational management can more effectively steer institutional change and evaluate professional management (Ladiqi et al., 2020). The community context and stakeholder support significantly influence outcomes; pesantren in communities that value education, where educated individuals support institutional development, and where the government provides regulatory support rather than hostility, demonstrate greater capacity for transformation (Kharisma et al., 2025). Organisational structure and institutional size are important; medium-sized pesantren (200–1,000 students) often demonstrate greater capacity for change than very small institutions with limited resources or very large institutions with rigid bureaucracies (Ningsih et al., 2026). The availability of external resources and technical support—management training, consultancy services, peer learning networks—significantly facilitates institutional change (Sari & Nurilhaq, 2025). Finally, framing governance reforms in terms of Islamic principles rather than positioning them as secular modernisation enables pesantren to maintain stakeholder support and institutional cohesion during transformation (Rahman et al., 2025).

The successful development of hybrid governance in pesantren is not an automatic result of external pressures or policy requirements, but depends on the convergence of facilitating factors operating synergistically (Muttaqin, 2025). The most critical factor remains leadership—specifically, a kiai or founding leader who possesses sufficient intellectual acumen to engage seriously with concepts of professional management, a sufficiently strong religious foundation to ensure that modernisation supports the mission of Islamic education, and sufficient authority to steer institutional change whilst respecting community preferences (Hamdanah et al., 2025). Without such leadership, pesantren may adopt forms of governance without genuine transformation, or may abandon traditional elements in a way that undermines the institution's identity. Leadership must operate within a context where certain minimum conditions are met: the pesantren must have sufficient financial resources to invest in the professionalisation of governance without experiencing a financial crisis; it must have access to technical expertise through training, consultants, or peer networks; it must operate within a regulatory and community environment that is at least tolerant of changes to governance, if not actively supportive; and it must possess the educational and professional capacity amongst its board and staff to enable them to implement governance systems effectively (Musyafa' et al., 2025). When these conditions are met and leadership is committed to integrating tradition and modernity rather than choosing one over the other, a hybrid governance transformation becomes possible and sustainable. Conversely, even strong leadership cannot overcome extreme financial poverty, a hostile regulatory environment, or community resistance to institutional change.

Although there are supporting factors, the research identifies significant challenges that hinder the implementation and sustainability of hybrid governance in pesantren (Abidin & Qusairi, 2025). Limited financial resources remain a widespread constraint; many pesantren lack the capital to employ professional managers, invest in accounting systems, provide staff training, or establish board infrastructure, but instead struggle to cover the costs of basic education (Hamdana & Donna, 2024). Resistance to change has emerged in some pesantren communities; traditional stakeholders who view professional management as a threat to Islamic authenticity may actively oppose governance reforms, creating internal conflicts that hinder implementation (Kharisma et al., 2025). The underdeveloped capacity for professional management within pesantren communities means that even when pesantren establish formal structures, effective implementation proves difficult without external expertise, and training opportunities remain limited in many regions (Fitria et al., 2025). An unclear division of authority between kiai and professional managers gives rise to operational difficulties; when role boundaries remain ambiguous, conflicts arise regarding whose decisions take precedence in specific situations, and professional managers may lack the authority to implement decisions effectively (Miftahussurur et al., 2025). Limited technical capacity in the implementation of governance systems—particularly regarding financial management systems, documentation, and data-driven decision-making—constrains the effectiveness of professional systems, especially in rural pesantren with limited access to technology and expertise (Fauzi et al., 2025). The regulatory burden and the complexity of compliance require significant institutional capacity; pesantren that struggle to understand or implement the requirements of Law No. 18 of 2019 may perceive governance as a burden imposed from outside rather than as an opportunity for institutional strengthening (Afkari et al., 2025). Gender dynamics and challenges to inclusivity remain significant; many pesantren governance structures are still male-dominated, sidelining women from decision-making despite the vital roles they play within the institutions (Numan et al., 2024). Sustainability challenges arise when governance transformation is heavily reliant on specific individuals; pesantren may develop effective hybrid governance under visionary leadership, but reforms may fail when that leader leaves if the system is not sufficiently institutionalised (Amaliyah, 2025). Difficulties in reconciling stakeholder interests arise when different groups have conflicting expectations; families seeking religious education may oppose curriculum modernisation; advocates of modernisation may push for rapid change that alienates traditional stakeholders; teachers may oppose the evaluation system; and young leaders may clash with senior leadership over the pace of change (Sari & Nurilhaq, 2025). These limitations explain why governance transformation in pesantren requires sustained effort over an extended period (typically 5–10 years) rather than merely simple procedural changes.

Transformative Findings: Models, Mechanisms and Strategic Implications

Research indicates that hybrid governance is not a temporary transitional phase, but rather a distinctive institutional form suited to the context of religious-based education (Imamah et al., 2026). Rather than viewing pesantren governance as an inevitable evolutionary process from traditional forms towards fully bureaucratic ones, the evidence suggests that these institutions are establishing stable and sustainable hybrid arrangements that integrate both dimensions (Muttaqin, 2025). The most sophisticated hybrid governance models implement what researchers refer to as the 'operationalisation of Islamic values'—transforming abstract Islamic principles into concrete and measurable governance practices (Rahman et al., 2025). For example, the principle of amanah (integrity) is operationalised through: written financial policies setting out clear spending authorisations; regular financial reporting documenting the use of resources; audit mechanisms verifying compliance with financial principles; and explicit staff training on Islamic financial ethics. Similarly, musyawarah (consultation) is operationalised through: formal committee structures that provide a forum for consultation; scheduled decision-making processes that allow for meaningful input; documentation of the consultation process that creates transparency; and an explicit emphasis on the pursuit of consensus rather than unilateral authority (Sari & Nurilhaq, 2025). The principle of ihsan (excellence) is implemented through: quality standards that define expected educational outcomes; systematic evaluation mechanisms that measure performance against these standards; a process of continuous improvement based on evaluation findings; and professional development opportunities that enable staff to enhance their capabilities (Ningsih et al., 2026). Significantly, these operationalised Islamic values do not require the replacement of formal management systems; rather, Islamic principles serve as the underlying values of professional systems, explaining why professional management supports the institution's religious mission rather than conflicting with it (Imamah et al., 2026).

An advanced hybrid governance model utilises a 'balanced scorecard' approach adapted for Islamic boarding schools, measuring institutional performance across various dimensions: financial sustainability (through accounting indicators); educational quality (through learning outcomes and curriculum completion); religious formation (through students' religious knowledge and practice); community impact (through alumni contributions and community recognition); and stakeholder satisfaction (through surveys of families, teachers and students) (Imamah et al., 2026). This balanced approach prevents governance from becoming overly focused on financial aspects or neglecting Islamic formation as something that cannot be measured; rather, it integrates dimensions of accountability that are genuinely valued by Islamic boarding schools (Ningsih et al., 2026).

Paragraph 23: Reaffirmation of the Transformative Governance Model

The transformative significance of the hybrid governance model lies in demonstrating that institutional quality, transparency and accountability do not require sacrificing tradition or religious identity (Muttaqin, 2025). Pesantren that implement effective hybrid governance demonstrate that 'modernisation' does not mean becoming secular, Westernised, or culturally inauthentic—but rather building a system that enables Islamic values to be practised on an institutional scale more effectively than under purely traditional arrangements (Miftahussurur et al., 2025). A pesantren that ensures transparent financial management through audited financial statements is not becoming a "Western bureaucracy"; rather, it is institutionalising the Islamic value of amanah rather than relying solely on the personal trust in the kiai. A pesantren that establishes a curriculum committee and stakeholder consultation mechanisms is not "adopting secular democracy"; rather, it is institutionalising the Islamic principle of musyawarah, which enables meaningful consultation on a large scale. A pesantren that measures educational outcomes and implements quality improvements is not "abandoning the Islamic value of ' ' in favour of exam results"; rather, it is taking responsibility to ensure that Islamic education truly produces the desired outcomes, rather than merely relying on good intentions (Rahman et al., 2025). This reframing changes the way pesantren experience changes in governance—not as a betrayal of tradition, but as a more comprehensive fulfilment of tradition through a professional system (Yugo, 2025).

The research findings offer several strategic implications for pesantren leaders, policymakers and education administrators seeking to strengthen governance whilst preserving institutional authenticity (Muttaqin, 2025). Firstly, governance reforms must be explicitly grounded in Islamic principles and articulated as an effort to realise the mission of Islamic education, rather than as externally imposed bureaucratic requirements (Rahman et al., 2025). When pesantren leaders view professional management as an implementation of Islamic values such as amanah and ihsan, stakeholder resistance diminishes and sustainable implementation increases. Secondly, the governance structure must preserve the authentic role of traditional authorities whilst clarifying how these traditional authorities operate within a formal framework (Hamdanah et al., 2025). The kiai must remain the central institutional figure embodying spiritual and educational authority, but through consultative structures and formal roles, rather than through unilateral decision-making. Thirdly, professional management positions must be filled by individuals who understand and respect the religious mission and cultural context of the pesantren, rather than primarily by technically trained managers who are unfamiliar with Islamic education or pesantren traditions (Musyafa’ et al., 2025). Fourthly, the implementation of governance must involve the systematic engagement of stakeholders to ensure that traditional constituencies, supporters of modernisation, teachers, students and members of the community understand the changes and contribute to the design process, rather than simply accepting a top-down governance model (Sari & Nurilhaq, 2025). Fifth, pesantren must reject the view that governance is merely an administrative matter separate from the educational mission; rather, the governance structure must be explicitly linked to improving the quality of education and the institution’s effectiveness in serving students (Ningsih et al., 2026). Sixth, there must be extensive investment in professional development; Islamic boarding schools must provide training that enables religious leaders, managers, board members, teachers and staff to develop professional competencies aligned with their institutional roles (Fitria et al., 2025). Seventh, governance transformation must be carried out gradually over the long term (typically 5–10 years) rather than attempting sweeping changes rapidly, allowing stakeholders to adapt, systems to be refined through experience, and organisational culture to change gradually (Mustajib et al., 2025). Eighth, external regulations and requirements must be interpreted creatively to accommodate hybrid arrangements, rather than assuming that compliance necessitates a uniform bureaucratic system (Kharisma et al., 2025). Ninth, policymakers must develop a governance framework that recognises hybrid governance as a legitimate institutional form deserving of support and technical assistance, rather than forcing pesantren to conform to a secular bureaucratic model (Afkari et al., 2025). Finally, pesantren networks and associations must facilitate peer-to-peer learning on governance innovations, enabling institutions to draw on the experiences of others rather than developing approaches independently (Ladiqi et al., 2020).

Discussion

A systematic literature review indicates that Islamic pesantren in Indonesia are actively constructing a hybrid governance model that integrates traditional spiritual authority, Islamic values and contemporary professional management systems into a cohesive institutional framework (Muttaqin, 2025). These findings challenge the conventional narrative that portrays modernisation and tradition as mutually exclusive. Evidence suggests that pesantren neither abandon tradition in favour of secular modernity nor resist modernisation to preserve authenticity; rather, they engage in sophisticated institutional work that integrates both dimensions to strengthen institutional capacity whilst upholding their religious mission (Miftahussurur et al., 2025). The most successful pesantren establish formal governance structures (boards, professional management, transparent systems) whilst retaining genuine authority for the kiai leaders, implementing Islamic values within professional management systems, and developing decision-making processes that combine formal procedures with collaborative consultation (Muttaqin, 2025). This hybrid arrangement yields measurable improvements in institutional outcomes: improved educational quality through systematic curriculum management and teacher development; enhanced financial sustainability through transparent resource management and diversified funding; increased public credibility through demonstrated accountability; and the preservation of religious authenticity, as evidenced by students' sustained engagement in Islamic learning and practice (Musyafa' et al., 2025). This transformation occurs not through external coercion, but through leadership that recognises that professional management is consistent with the values of Islamic education, through a process of stakeholder engagement that builds support for change, and through a clear foundation for governance reform rooted in Islamic principles (Rahman et al., 2025). Significantly, this institutional transformation is taking place across various types of pesantren—traditional and modern, large and small, urban and rural, Javanese-based and regional—indicating that hybrid governance represents not a local adaptation for specific institutions, but rather an increasingly common institutional form within the pesantren landscape (Muttaqin, 2025).

These findings must be understood within the specific context of Indonesia, where pesantren operate within a pluralistic legal and regulatory environment, combining Islamic law, customary law and state law (Afkari et al., 2025). Historically, pesantren have operated with significant institutional autonomy ( ) under Islamic jurisprudence administered by kiai; however, Indonesia's national education system has increasingly regulated pesantren through legislation, government regulations and bureaucratic oversight, requiring formal accreditation, curriculum alignment, financial reporting and institutional accountability (Kharisma et al., 2025). Law No. 18 of 2019 marks a significant regulatory shift, formally recognising the role of pesantren education whilst simultaneously requiring pesantren to adopt formal governance, document management and accountability mechanisms (Kharisma et al., 2025). For pesantren, this legal transformation presents an institutional challenge: how to meet government requirements regarding professional governance and accountability whilst preserving the Islamic institutional identity and the authority of the kiai that characterise pesantren. Hybrid governance represents a pragmatic and creative response by pesantren to this regulatory environment, enabling institutions to comply with formal requirements whilst preserving their cultural authenticity (Miftahussurur et al., 2025). Furthermore, this occurs within the context of broader educational competition in Indonesia; as Muslim families increasingly prioritise quality when choosing between pesantren and secular schools offering modern curricula, professional management and measurable quality indicators, pesantren face pressure to demonstrate institutional quality and professional management in order to remain educationally competitive (Yugo, 2025). At the same time, religious communities and traditional stakeholders expect pesantren to preserve their distinctive Islamic character, resist trends towards secularisation, and uphold traditional Islamic pedagogy and spiritual formation—the very elements that distinguish them from secular schools. Hybrid governance enables pesantren to navigate these conflicting pressures by strengthening institutional quality and professionalism whilst preserving religious authenticity (Muttaqin, 2025).

From the perspective of organisational and institutional theory, hybrid governance in pesantren represents a unique institutional form worthy of theoretical development beyond the existing literature (Imamah et al., 2026). Organisational theory has traditionally viewed institutional change as a movement from traditional forms towards rational-legal bureaucratic structures (Weber's theory of rationalisation); however, pesantren demonstrate that institutions can preserve and revitalise traditional authority whilst simultaneously adopting professional management systems (Miftahussurur et al., 2025). This suggests the need for to conceptualise these types of authority as complementary rather than as successively replacing one another. Charismatic authority (Weber's category describing leadership based on personal qualities and spiritual legitimacy) does not disappear in pesantren with professional management; on the contrary, the kiai's charismatic authority increasingly operates through formal structures and consultative processes, blending with the rational-legal authority of professional managers. This represents what might be termed 'structured charisma'—maintaining personal spiritual authority whilst circumscribing it through organisational procedures that ensure accountability (Hamdanah et al., 2025). From an institutional theory perspective, hybrid governance represents a resolution of the tension between institutional logics—pesantren operate simultaneously according to a religious institutional logic that emphasises spiritual mission, community values and moral authority, and an economic/professional institutional logic that emphasises efficiency, accountability and professional qualifications (Ningsih et al., 2026). Rather than one logic dominating the other, successful pesantren integrate both logics, with professional systems supporting the religious mission and religious values underpinning professional practice. This is similar to what institutional researchers refer to as 'institutional bricolage'—the creative blending of institutional elements from different sources into a coherent whole—or 'institutional pluralism'—the accommodation of multiple legitimate institutional logics (Miftahussurur et al., 2025). From an organisational sociology perspective, hybrid governance reflects what some scholars refer to as "cultural management"—deliberate institutional efforts to maintain cultural authenticity and legitimacy whilst adopting new practices, by explicitly linking these new practices to traditional values and ensuring stakeholder involvement in the process of change (Muttaqin, 2025).

The research provides a detailed understanding of how authority actually functions within a hybrid governance framework, rather than remaining abstract (Miftahussurur et al., 2025). In pesantren with effective hybrid governance, the distribution of authority is not fixed but contextual—different decisions involve different authority structures. Strategic decisions affecting the core institutional identity and religious mission (curriculum foundations, institutional vision, adoption of practices potentially at odds with Islamic principles) remain under the authority of the kiai, often through consultative structures. Operational decisions implementing established policies (specific timetables, routine procurement, administrative procedures) operate under the authority of professional managers with limited involvement from the kiai. Governance decisions regarding institutional standards, policies and oversight operate through the authority of the board, with both the kiai and managers sharing responsibility. Staff decisions within their professional remit (teachers' teaching methods in accordance with curriculum guidelines; administrative staff organising work processes) operate under professional autonomy, subject to periodic evaluation (Musyafa' et al., 2025). This distinct distribution of authority prevents both the unilateral authority of the kiai, which hinders necessary institutional change, and professional management that creates a secular institutional character deviating from the Islamic mission. The decision-making process combines formal procedures (written policies, scheduled meetings, documented decisions that provide clarity and transparency) with informal consultation (deliberations emphasising consensus, relationship-building and inclusive input). Crucially, formal procedures and informal consultation reinforce rather than contradict one another—formal structures provide a forum and ensure accountability for consultation; informal consultation ensures that formal decisions retain their legitimacy within the community (Sari & Nurilhaq, 2025). Authority is not centred on traditional hierarchies or professional expertise alone, but rather on integration: religious leaders provide moral authority and ensure religious alignment; professional managers provide technical expertise and operational accountability; the council provides stakeholder representation and governance oversight; and teachers provide instructional authority within an agreed framework (Hamdanah et al., 2025).

This analysis expands upon and refines the conclusions of previous research on pesantren in several key respects (Muttaqin, 2025). Previous research has often depicted the transformation of pesantren governance as either a progressive modernisation leading to inevitable bureaucratisation (viewing tradition as an obstacle to be replaced) or cultural resistance to external pressures (viewing modernisation as a threat to authenticity) (Lateh et al., 2025). This systematic review reveals a more nuanced reality: pesantren are actively constructing a unique institutional form by integrating both dimensions, through deliberate leadership choices and stakeholder engagement, rather than merely resistance or compliance (Miftahussurur et al., 2025). Previous research has sometimes portrayed governance challenges as technical issues in implementing professional systems; this analysis reveals that governance transformation is fundamentally concerned with how institutions maintain legitimacy, authority and cultural identity whilst changing practices (Muttaqin, 2025). Previous research has often analysed individual institutions in isolation;

this synthesis reveals patterns across various types of pesantren, indicating systematic institutional transformation rather than isolated experiments (Musyafa' et al., 2025). Compared with international research on faith-based organisations and religious education, this analysis provides detailed evidence that religious authority and professional management can be integrated through deliberate governance design, contrary to the assumption that modernisation requires secularisation or resistance (Hussain, 2025). This analysis makes a theoretical contribution by demonstrating that institutional change in a religious context requires a conceptual framework distinct from models developed for secular organisations, particularly s regarding how institutions manage legitimate sources of authority and integrate cultural values into professional systems (Imamah et al., 2026).

These findings have implications at various levels (Muttaqin, 2025). Theoretically, this research contributes to institutional theory by demonstrating that institutions need not choose between traditional and modern forms, but can develop integrated arrangements in which different sources of authority operate synergistically; to organisational sociology by revealing how moral authority and formal authority function together in managing institutional change; and to Islamic studies by demonstrating how Islamic principles can be implemented within professional management systems (Rahman et al., 2025). In practical terms, this research provides insights for pesantren leaders that effective governance does not require a rejection of tradition or a rejection of professionalisation, but rather a careful integration of the two through: a clear foundation for governance reform rooted in Islamic values; the preservation of the authentic role of the kiai within formal structures; investment in stakeholder engagement and professional development; and patient, long-term implementation to facilitate a shift in organisational culture (Muttaqin, 2025). For policymakers, the research suggests that effective governance policies for Islamic educational institutions should: support a hybrid governance model rather than imposing a uniform bureaucratic model; provide technical assistance for the implementation of professional governance; recognise the authority of the kiai as a legitimate institutional element rather than viewing it as an obstacle to modernisation; allow for regulatory flexibility that accommodates diverse institutional approaches; and invest in professional development for pesantren leaders and managers (Afkari et al., 2025). For educational administrators and managers, this research indicates that professional management within a faith-based context requires: deep respect for the institution's religious mission and cultural identity; an understanding of traditional authority structures and how to operate within them; a commitment to stakeholder engagement and collaborative decision-making; and patience regarding the pace of institutional change within institutions deeply rooted in culture (Musyafa' et al., 2025). For international education researchers and practitioners working with faith-based institutions globally, this study offers insights applicable beyond Islamic boarding schools, including Christian schools, Buddhist universities, Hindu educational institutions, and other faith-based systems facing similar tensions between tradition and modernity (Ningsih et al., 2026).

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Indonesian pesantren are developing a hybrid governance model that integrates traditional religious authority, Islamic values and modern professional management systems into a cohesive institutional structure. Rather than representing a transitional phase towards full bureaucratisation, hybrid governance reflects a distinctive and appropriate institutional form for faith-based educational institutions that must simultaneously uphold their religious mission, cultural authenticity and educational quality. The findings indicate that effective hybrid governance depends on leadership capable of bridging tradition and modernity, the establishment of formal governance structures, the implementation of Islamic values in management practices, and ongoing engagement with key stakeholders in institutional decision-making. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the understanding of governance in religious-based educational institutions by demonstrating that organisational development does not always follow a linear transition from traditional to bureaucratic systems. Rather, institutions can develop governance structures that integrate various sources of authority. In the context of pesantren, the charismatic authority of the kiai can coexist with professional managerial authority, whilst religious values serve as a normative foundation that reinforces the legitimacy of modern governance practices. Consequently, Islamic principles do not hinder the professionalisation of the institution; rather, they provide an ethical framework that supports accountability, organisational cohesion and institutional credibility. In practical terms, these findings offer important implications for pesantren leaders and education policymakers. Institutional governance reform should not focus on replacing traditional leadership structures with modern administrative systems, but rather on fostering a balanced integration between religious leadership and professional management. Strengthening leadership capacity, developing transparent financial systems, and designing governance structures that preserve the strategic role of the kiai are essential for maintaining this hybrid model. Future research needs to explore in greater depth the dynamics of implementing hybrid governance in various pesantren contexts, particularly its impact on the quality of education, institutional sustainability, and public trust in Islamic pesantren education.

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