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Strategic Management Practices in Islamic Boarding Schools: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Background: Pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) have evolved from purely religious educational institutions into complex organisations managing business units, cooperatives, and community empowerment programmes, a shift accelerated by Indonesia's Pesantren Law (2019) and the One Pesantren One Product programme. Despite this growth, research on how pesantren strategically manage this dual educational and socio-economic mandate remains fragmented across isolated themes such as leadership, governance, and quality management.

Research Gap: Prior studies remain largely fragmented, examining leadership, digitalisation, governance, financial management, human resource development, or educational quality in isolation rather than as interconnected components of a coherent strategic management system. Few studies have systematically synthesised how various strategic management practices jointly contribute to institutional performance, resilience, and sustainability across the more than 42,000 pesantren operating in Indonesia today.

Novelty: This study conducts a Systematic Literature Review to map research development on strategic management in pesantren, synthesise empirical evidence across six domains, and construct an integrated conceptual framework positioning religious leadership as the foundational legitimising layer from which strategic planning, managerial operationalisation, and institutional performance reciprocally flow.

Method: This study employed a Systematic Literature Review using the Scopus database. An initial search using the keywords "Islamic Boarding School" OR "Pesantren" yielded 1,430 publications, narrowed to 241 management related articles, and screened by title and abstract following PRISMA guidelines to yield 82 peer reviewed journal articles (2012 to 2026) for thematic content analysis, complemented by keyword co occurrence mapping using VOSviewer.

Results: Publication output has grown sharply since 2019, with over half of the studies published in the last three years. The co occurrence map reveals four interlocking clusters: leadership and human capital, educational quality and strategic formulation, an explicit strategic management vocabulary, and financial accountability. Findings show that strategic planning is predominantly emergent, kiai leadership functions as the legitimising precondition for other strategic instruments, and governance is shifting toward hybrid accountability models.

Conclusion: The review synthesises these findings into an integrated conceptual framework offering a theoretical bridge across previously disconnected research streams and a practical reference for strengthening pesantren strategic management capacity. Future research should develop validated survey instruments, conduct longitudinal studies, and extend analysis to pesantren networks and cross country comparisons.

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INTRODUCTION

Pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) are among the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, functioning not only as centres of education and religious propagation (dakwah) but increasingly as complex organisations with distinct economic, social, and institutional roles. Over the past few decades, pesantren have undergone substantial institutional transformation through the development of business units, cooperatives, halal industries, sharia microfinance institutions, and community empowerment programmes. A concrete illustration of this can be seen in the One Pesantren One Product (OPOP) programme, initiated by the West Java Provincial Government since 2019 through the Dinas Koperasi dan Usaha Kecil (Sucipto et al., 2024).

This development has been further shaped by the enactment of Pesantren Law Number 18 of 2019, which grants formal recognition to pesantren within the national education system while opening broader opportunities for institutional and economic development. At the same time, the accompanying bureaucratisation process introduces new demands for accountability, standardisation, and administrative professionalism, pressures that require pesantren leadership to adopt more deliberate strategic management approaches rather than relying solely on traditional (kiai-centred) governance models. Studies by Nurtawab (2025) and Millie (2025) show that modernising pesantren governance must be balanced against the organisation's capacity to preserve its distinctive religious and cultural identity while meeting the demands of modern institutional administration, a balancing act that is, in essence, a strategic management challenge.

A growing body of literature has begun to examine specific dimensions of strategic management within pesantren. Studies on strategic planning emphasise the importance of environmental scanning, human-resource-needs analysis, and performance evaluation as foundations for sustainable institutional development (Tabrani et al., 2023). Related work on organisational resilience shows that leadership regeneration and structured human resource cadre development are key strategic levers for long-term institutional sustainability (Anggung et al., 2025), while (Wafa et al., 2026) demonstrates that environmental scanning, adaptive decision-making, and reinforcement of core organisational values are critical to navigating dynamic external environments. Complementary studies highlight strategic responses to digital transformation (Supriyono et al., 2025) and to supply chain and halal business management (Chaniago et al., 2024), both of which show that institutional success depends on deliberate strategy formulation, continuous evaluation, and internal control mechanisms rather than reactive management.

The quality of an institution's strategic management is also shaped by leadership style, governance structure, and management compliance. Ariatin et al. (2024) shows that leadership integrating entrepreneurial orientation with Islamic values is a critical driver of enterprise sustainability. Studies on organisational commitment further indicate that Islamic leadership, organisational culture, and work ethics significantly shape strategic outcomes, while research on Total Quality Management (TQM) in Islamic boarding schools underscores the role of continuous-improvement culture as a strategic foundation for institutional quality enhancement. Additional studies, such as (Al-Hakim et al., 2025), affirm that pesantren occupy a strategic position as institutional "laboratories" of the sharia economy, contingent on institutional strengthening, human resource development, and stakeholder collaboration.

Despite this expanding body of research, prior studies remain largely fragmented, examining leadership, digitalisation, governance, financial management, human resource development, or educational quality in isolation, rather than as interconnected components of a coherent strategic management system. Few studies have systematically synthesised how various strategic management practices, strategic planning, leadership, human resource strategy, financial and governance strategy, quality management, and technology adoption jointly contribute to institutional performance, resilience,

and sustainability across the more than 42,000 pesantren operating in Indonesia today. This fragmentation limits the field's ability to offer an integrated conceptual understanding of how pesantren, as distinctive faith-based organisations, can strategically manage their dual mandate as both religious-educational institutions and increasingly complex socio-economic enterprises.

Accordingly, this study conducts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to map the development of research on strategic management practices in Islamic boarding schools, to synthesise empirical evidence on how strategic planning, leadership, human resource management, governance, financial management, and quality/technology-related strategies contribute to institutional performance and sustainability, and to construct an integrated conceptual framework that can inform both future research and empirical practice.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to synthesize and critically evaluate the existing body of knowledge on strategic management practices in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren). The SLR approach was selected because it provides a transparent, rigorous, and reproducible procedure for identifying, selecting, evaluating, and synthesizing relevant literature. Compared with traditional literature reviews, SLR minimizes selection bias and enables researchers to identify research trends, theoretical developments, and existing research gaps (Kitchenham et al., 2009; Tranfield et al., 2003).

Data Source

The literature was collected from the Scopus database, which was selected because it is one of the world's largest and most comprehensive databases of peer-reviewed scientific publications. Scopus provides high-quality publications across various disciplines and is widely recognized as a reliable source for systematic literature reviews.

Search Strategy and Selection Criteria

The literature search was conducted in the Scopus database using the keyword "Islamic Boarding School" OR Pesantren, limited to publications indexed between 2000 and 2026 to capture both the foundational and the most recent literature on pesantren management. This initial search yielded 1,430 publications. Limiting the subject area to management-related disciplines narrowed this to 241 articles, which were then screened in two further stages: first by title, retaining only studies addressing organizational management, governance, strategic management, leadership, human resource and financial management, accountability, organizational resilience, entrepreneurship, or digital transformation in pesantren (101 articles retained); then by abstract, retaining only studies substantively discussing strategic planning/formulation/implementation, leadership, governance, HR/financial/quality management, or organizational resilience in a pesantren setting. Articles were excluded at either stage if they focused primarily on curriculum, religious instruction, student learning, language/linguistics, health and nutrition, or educational methodology without an organizational management dimension; on purely historical, architectural, or technical (e.g., application/algorithm) topics without a management lens; were duplicates; or lacked sufficient information for qualitative analysis. Only peer-reviewed, full-text English-language journal articles indexed in Scopus were considered. Applying these criteria yielded a final set of 82 journal articles for qualitative synthesis, as illustrated in the PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1).

It is important to acknowledge two boundary conditions of this search strategy. First, restricting the search to Scopus, while ensuring a baseline of peer-reviewed quality, necessarily excludes studies indexed only in other databases (e.g., Web of Science, Google Scholar, DOAJ) or in national indexing systems such as Garuda/SINTA, as well as grey literature (theses, government reports, and conference proceedings not indexed in Scopus); the corpus should therefore be read as a Scopus-indexed subset of the wider pesantren management literature rather than an exhaustive census of it. Second, restricting the review to full-text, English-language articles is likely to have introduced a language-selection bias: because pesantren research is also extensively published in Bahasa Indonesia, particularly in SINTA-accredited national journals oriented toward domestic practitioners and policymakers, this criterion may have skewed the corpus toward studies framed for an international academic audience and under-

represented grassroots, practitioner-facing accounts of day-to-day strategic management practice. Future reviews would benefit from a multi-database, multilingual search strategy to test whether the thematic structure and conclusions reported here hold across this broader, more linguistically diverse body of literature.

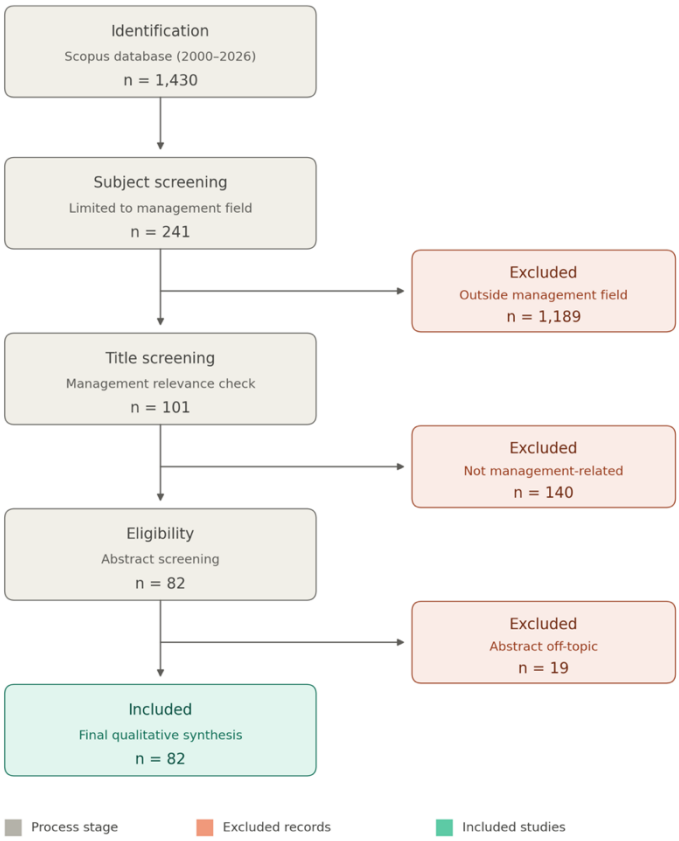

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of Literature Selection

Source: Authors (Developed based on the PRISMA framework)

Data Analysis and Research Mapping

The final dataset of 82 selected articles was analyzed using qualitative content analysis, in which each article was reviewed to extract its research objectives, methodology, theoretical perspective, major findings, and implications for strategic management practices in Islamic boarding schools. Studies were then classified into thematic categories, strategic planning and formulation, leadership, human resource management, financial management and accountability, quality management (TQM/ balanced scorecard), organizational resilience and change management, governance, and business/ entrepreneurship strategy, to identify dominant research trends, emerging issues, and gaps that inform a conceptual framework for sustainable institutional development in pesantren.

This qualitative synthesis was complemented by bibliometric mapping using VOSviewer, to visualize keyword co-occurrence patterns and thematic relationships across the selected studies, while Microsoft Excel was used to organize bibliographic data, classify themes, and generate descriptive statistics on article characteristics. Together, these two approaches provide a comprehensive picture of how strategic management research in Islamic boarding schools has evolved and where future research opportunities lie.

RESULTS

Overview of Management Research on Islamic Boarding Schools

Narrowing the analysis to the 82 articles retained after title and abstract screening reveals a growth pattern that closely mirrors, but is more concentrated than, the broader 241-article corpus discussed earlier. Publication activity was negligible before 2018, with only isolated articles appearing in 2012 (1) and 2015–2017 (1–2 per year), confirming that strategic management, as a distinct analytical lens on pesantren, was essentially absent from the literature during this early period. A turning point occurs from 2018 onward, when output rises to 4 articles and then stabilizes at 7 articles per year for three consecutive years (2019–2021), suggesting that the years following the enactment of the Pesantren Law (Law No. 18 of 2019) marked the point at which strategic management began to be treated as a coherent research theme rather than an incidental byproduct of broader educational-management studies.

The corpus then shows a second, sharper acceleration from 2022 onward (9, 7, 8 articles in 2022–2024) before peaking at 14 articles in 2025, the single most productive year in the dataset. Cumulatively, more than half of the 82 studies (43 articles, or 52%) were published within the last three years (2024–2026), indicating that the strategic management of Islamic boarding schools is not only a growing field but one whose most substantive contributions are highly recent, reinforcing both the relevance and the timing of this review. The slightly lower count in 2026 (13 articles) is again attributable to partial-year indexing rather than a genuine reversal of the trend. Compared to the 241-article overview, this narrower trajectory demonstrates that the general rise of pesantren-related management research has increasingly translated into research that engages explicitly and substantively with strategic management constructs planning, formulation, implementation, and resilience rather than treating strategy only tangentially.

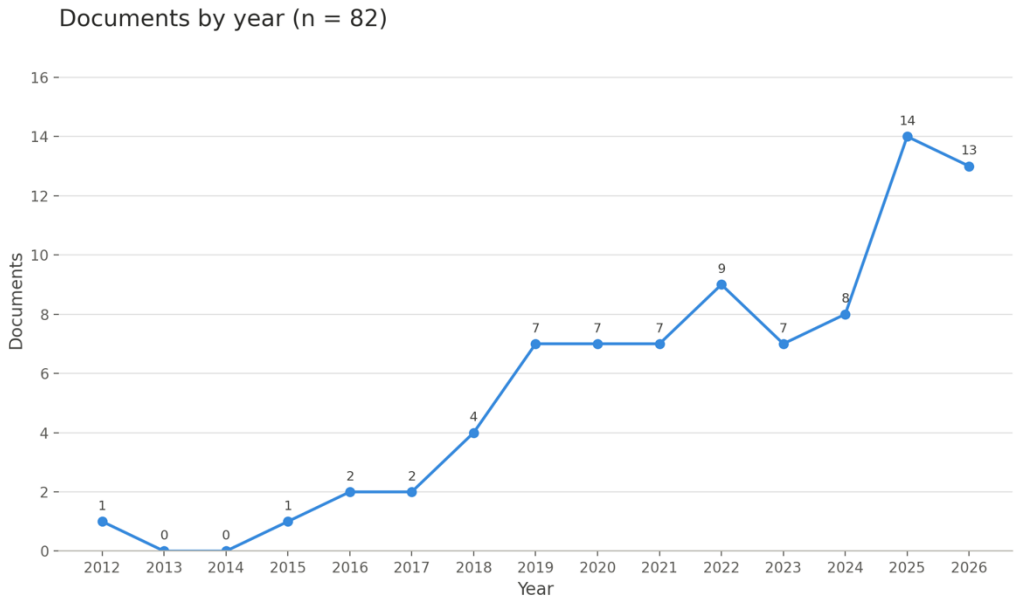

Figure 2. Document Publication by Year

Keyword Co-Occurrence Mapping

To complement the temporal analysis, a keyword co-occurrence map was constructed from the titles and abstracts of the 82 reviewed studies (Figure 3), grouping terms into four thematic clusters through modularity-based community detection.

The green cluster, the largest and most central, anchored by pesantren and islamic boarding school, connects to leadership, governance, sustainability, curriculum management, human resource management, entrepreneurship, and organizational resilience. This cluster represents the institutional and human-capital core of strategic management research in pesantren: how kiai leadership, HR development, and organizational culture jointly shape institutional capacity and resilience.

The red cluster, centered on islamic education, indonesia, and educational quality, connects to quality management, total quality management, strategic formulation, information management, and

waqf. This cluster reflects the quality-assurance and institutional-formulation dimension of the literature, how strategic intent is translated into concrete quality-management mechanisms (TQM, service quality) within the Indonesian pesantren context specifically.

The blue cluster groups strategic management, strategic planning, management practices, and sustainability, forming a tighter, more specialized node cluster that represents the explicit strategic-management vocabulary this review specifically targeted. Its comparatively smaller size relative to the green and red clusters, even after the screening process filtered out non-strategic studies, indicates that even within a corpus curated for strategic relevance, dedicated strategic-management terminology (as opposed to general "management" or "leadership" language) remains a minority discourse, reinforcing the observation from the broader 241-article map that strategic management in pesantren is conceptually under-theorized relative to adjacent themes.

The purple cluster, comprising financial management, financial accountability, and accountability, forms a small but distinct node grouping, confirming that financial governance and accountability constitute a coherent, recognizable sub-theme within the strategic management literature, closely tied to, but analytically separable from, the broader governance discussion in the green cluster.

Taken together, the co-occurrence map corroborates the eight thematic categories identified in the Data Analysis section (strategic planning/formulation, leadership, HR management, financial management/accountability, quality management, organizational resilience/change management, governance, and business/entrepreneurship strategy), while also revealing the relative weight of each theme: leadership, governance, and institutional/educational quality dominate the discourse, whereas explicit strategic-planning language and organizational-resilience terminology remain comparatively sparse. This imbalance constitutes an important empirical gap that motivates the conceptual framework proposed in the following section namely, the need for a more integrative treatment of strategic management that explicitly connects leadership and HR practices (green cluster) with financial governance (purple cluster) and quality-formulation mechanisms (red cluster) under a unified strategic-management framework, rather than treating them as parallel but disconnected research streams.

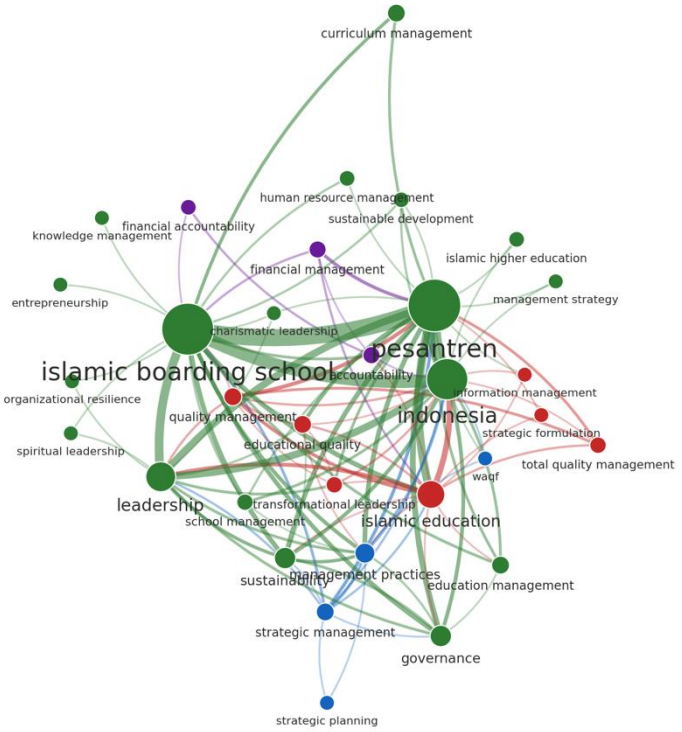

Figure 3. Keyword co-occurrence mapping

Thematic Synthesis: Six Domains of Strategic Management Practice

Building on the bibliometric overview and the keyword co-occurrence structure, the remainder of this section unpacks the substantive content behind each cluster through a close reading of the 82 studies, supplemented by three full-text articles retrieved for in-depth illustration (Ariatin et al., 2024; Sirojuddin et al., 2022). These in-depth cases are used not as additional corpus entries but as evidentiary anchors that make the abstracted cluster themes empirically concrete.

Strategic Planning and Formulation

Consistent with the comparatively small size of the blue cluster, articles that explicitly foreground strategic planning and formulation (Dhewanto et al., 2023; Hamid, 2012; Harjawati et al., 2026; Huda et al., 2025; Misdah et al., 2025; Puruwita and Murdayanti, 2018; Wafa et al., 2026; Zakaria and Yusmaliana, 2023; Zaki et al., 2019) portray strategic planning in pesantren as rarely following the formal, linear sequence assumed by conventional strategic-management theory (environmental scanning → formulation → implementation → evaluation). Instead, strategy formation is emergent and relational, forged through continuous negotiation between the kiai's vision, curricular modernization pressures, and external socio-economic constraints. Misdah et al. (2025), for instance, document how Islamic schools at the West Kalimantan–Malaysia border navigate tradition and modernity through adaptive rather than prescriptive strategic practices, while Wafa et al. (2026) show that the strategic management of organisational resilience in a plural society is built through the internalisation of multicultural values into governance structures rather than through formal strategic-planning documents.

A similar pattern is evident at the level of pesantren business units. Harjawati et al. (2026) identify five interlocking domains of integrated business strategy in pesantren-based enterprises, human resource management, cooperation, marketing, production, and finance, all executed in a phenomenological, context-dependent manner rather than through standardized strategic instruments. Dhewanto et al. (2023) reinforce this by showing that sustainable entrepreneurship strategies for pesantren business units in times of crisis rest on human-centred strategies (strengthening faith, cultivating an agile workplace, maintaining coordination, and fostering employee loyalty) rather than on formal planning tools such as SWOT analysis or the balanced scorecard. Studies that adopt more structured techniques, such as the Fuzzy Delphi approach used by Lateh et al. (2024) for private Islamic schools in southern Thailand, represent early attempts to formalise strategic planning through expert consensus, yet remain anchored in locally specific religious value frameworks.

Overall, strategic planning in pesantren operates under a dual logic: a substantive religious logic (barakah, exemplary leadership, and maslahah) coexists with a rational-managerial logic borrowed from modern management theory. The tension between these two logics recurs throughout the corpus and constitutes a defining feature that distinguishes pesantren strategic management from that of secular educational institutions and helps explain why the blue cluster's dedicated strategic-management vocabulary remains comparatively thin relative to the broader leadership and quality discourse that surrounds it.

Leadership as the Institutional Core

Leadership is the most frequently recurring theme in the corpus and sits at the centre of the green cluster, consistent with its role as the connective tissue linking governance, sustainability, curriculum management, human resource management, entrepreneurship, and organisational resilience. The reviewed studies identify at least five overlapping leadership styles: transformational leadership (Ilyasin and Zamroni, 2017; Salim et al., 2024), charismatic leadership (Hariadi et al., 2024), spiritual leadership (Suryadi et al., 2024), moral leadership (Bahri et al., 2026), and the multicultural leadership of the kiai (Futaqi and Mashuri, 2022). Ilyas et al. (2019) trace the transformation of dayah leadership in Aceh from a solitary authority structure toward a collective, authoritative form oriented toward public policy, a shift that reflects the broadening authority base of pesantren under pressure from the formal education system.

Notably, several studies move beyond description to test leadership's causal relationship with institutional outcomes. Suryadi et al. (2024) find that spiritual leadership affects organisational resilience through the mediating role of entrepreneurial innovation, while Mukhlisin et al. (2022) link Islamic leadership directly to institutional performance. Bahri et al. (2026) add nuance through a comparative study of moral leadership across two pesantren, showing that the development of a leader's moral

character is not generic but strongly contingent on each institution's historical trajectory and scholarly lineage (sanad).

In-depth evidence on how leadership interacts with entrepreneurial quality is provided by the full-text case of Ariatin et al. (2023) on entrepreneurial Muslim leadership in an Islamic Cooperative Business Unit (ICBU) in West Java. Drawing on NVivo-coded in-depth interviews with 16 informants, the study identifies three complementary qualities required of a pesantren business-unit leader: leadership quality (exemplary conduct, decisiveness, active listening, and encouraging critical thinking among subordinates), entrepreneurial quality (open-mindedness, good relationships with the kiai and the surrounding community, and professionalism), and Muslim quality (siddiq, amanah, tabligh, and fathanah, modelled on the leadership of the Prophet Muhammad). The finding that kiai support is the single strongest determinant of business-unit sustainability, even stronger than professional managerial competence itself, echoes the power-relations dynamic reported by Mardia et al. (2026) regarding teacher powerlessness in curriculum management, where the dominance of the kiai's charisma can constrain the autonomy and innovation of managerial actors further down the hierarchy.

This tension exposes an important paradox in pesantren strategic management: the very charisma and authority that generate legitimacy and accelerate change (Ilyas et al., 2019; Suryadi et al., 2024; Ariatin et al., 2023) can simultaneously act as a structural constraint on the decentralisation of decision-making, managerial professionalisation, and teacher/staff empowerment (Mardia et al., 2026). Leadership effectiveness in pesantren therefore cannot be understood solely as a function of a particular leadership style. It is better understood as the outcome of a dynamic balance between charismatic-religious authority and the space for managerial participation afforded to subordinates, a balance that also explains why leadership so thoroughly permeates the green cluster's other constructs (HRM, resilience, entrepreneurship) rather than standing apart from them.

Human Resource Management

Research on human resource management (HRM) in pesantren traces a trajectory from tradition-based competency development toward more systematic approaches. Uhbiyati (2015) develops a competency-based HR development model for ustadz in salaf pesantren, one of the earliest attempts to formalise teacher-capacity development beyond the traditional apprenticeship (nyantri) model. Ridwan et al. (2023) extend this discourse by framing HR bureaucratic reform as a precondition for educational quality, while Arromy et al. (2023) empirically confirm that HRM and principal leadership jointly contribute to improved educational quality.

The most granular evidence on quantitative HR planning comes from the full-text case of Tabrani et al. (2023), which examines the International Standard Madrasah Amanatul Ummah in Mojokerto. This study stands out as one of the few in the corpus to apply a trend-analysis approach based on linear regression to forecast the demand for teachers of nationally examined subjects, grounding its projections in the historical growth trend of new-student intake. The trend equation $Y = a + bt$ enables the institution to plan teacher recruitment proactively rather than reactively, pre-empting the two classic risks of educational HR planning: teacher shortages (which force teachers to take on overloaded or mismatched assignments) and teacher surpluses (which burden the operating budget). The study further introduces a modification of importance-performance analysis (IPA) into a performance-importance-advisory-standard (PIAS) analysis, adding two new parameters, institutional support (standard) and the opinions of education-management experts (advisory) to the evaluation of pesantren service quality. This PIAS approach constitutes a meaningful methodological contribution to the field, as it addresses a key limitation of conventional IPA (its sole reliance on respondent perception) by integrating expert judgment and institutional norms into a single gap-based analytical framework.

At the operational level, the research of (Sirojuddin et al., 2022) on integrated curriculum management based on multiple intelligences at Pondok Pesantren Riyadlul Jannah shows how the HRM function is embedded within the planning–actuating–controlling cycle of curriculum management, including the explicit preparation of teaching staff as part of the curriculum-planning stage. The theory-then-application (connectionism) habituation pattern documented in this case further underscores that pesantren teacher development cannot be separated from the habituation of tauhid-based values that constitute the spirit of pesantren education, meaning that generic corporate HR models require substantial contextual adaptation before they can be meaningfully applied in a pesantren setting. Overall,

the HRM literature reveals a gradual shift from an intuitive approach based on personal trust in the kiai/caregiver toward a more data- and evidence-based approach, although the application of quantitative methods such as trend analysis and PIAS analysis (Tabrani et al., 2023) remains the exception rather than the norm within the reviewed corpus.

Governance, Accountability, and Financial Management

Governance and financial accountability occupy a distinct but recognisable niche in the literature, consistent with the small yet coherent purple cluster identified in the co-occurrence map. This reflects the legitimacy pressures pesantren face as institutions that manage public funds (zakat, infaq, waqf, and donor assistance) while historically operating under highly personalised, kiai-centred ownership and control structures. Buanaputra et al. (2021) highlight the tension between accountability and legitimacy in pesantren, where demands for formal accountability (transparent, auditable financial reporting) often collide with traditional legitimacy mechanisms rooted in personal trust in the kiai. Basri and Siti-Nabiha (2016)) reinforce this through a grounded-theory account of how accounting practice in an Islamic setting is shaped by the negotiation between administrative rationality and religious values. Nurkhin et al. (2024), through a systematic review of pesantren accountability, confirm that the accountability discourse in pesantren still centres on trust, financial reporting transparency, and donation governance rather than on formal, regulation-based oversight mechanisms.

On the more technical side of financial management, Puruwita and Murdayanti (2018) consistently raise the issues of transparency and the measurement of financial management in pesantren as Islamic educational institutions, while Handayani et al. (2022) conceptualise pesantren financial accountability as a multidimensional construct that cannot be reduced to reporting compliance alone. In terms of integrated non-financial performance measurement, Ashfahany et al. (2024) and Machmuddah et al. (2017) apply the balanced scorecard to a waqf-based pesantren and a modern pesantren (Assalaam) respectively, showing that corporate strategic-management instruments can be adapted to evaluate the performance of a non-profit religious organisation across four perspectives (financial, customer/student, internal process, and learning-and-growth), although the weighting and indicators of the financial perspective require modification given the non-profit orientation of pesantren.

At the level of Islamic philanthropic asset governance, Hambari et al. (2026) make an important contribution through an analysis of waqf management at the Badan Kerjasama Pondok Pesantren Indonesia (BKsPPI), integrating marketing and strategic governance approaches simultaneously, and demonstrating that the financial sustainability of networked pesantren increasingly depends on the professionalisation of cross-institutional waqf-asset governance rather than solely on individual, trust-based local donations. Amar Bustomi et al. (2025) extend the relevance of governance into the digital era by showing that media literacy and management openness moderate the relationship between digital exposure and public trust in pesantren sustainability during the post-truth era, a finding that broadens the accountability discussion from conventional financial reporting to public communication and digital reputation.

Collectively, this body of literature shows that pesantren governance is evolving from a trust-based governance model anchored in the kiai's moral authority toward a hybrid governance model that combines formal accountability mechanisms (financial reports, audits, balanced scorecards) with religious legitimacy, which remains the primary foundation of public trust, a coexistence that also explains why the purple cluster, despite being small, remains analytically distinct from, yet closely tied to, the broader governance vocabulary embedded in the green cluster.

Quality Management, Curriculum, and Technology-Based Strategies

This thematic cluster is the largest in the corpus (more than one-third of the articles), mirroring the centrality of the red cluster (islamic education, indonesia, educational quality) and confirming that educational quality and curriculum constitute the most closely watched strategic outputs in pesantren management research. Several studies apply Total Quality Management (TQM) instruments explicitly, such as Faizah et al. (2018), who use a fuzzy-SERVQUAL approach to assess the quality of pesantren information systems; Efendi (2022), who links TQM and curriculum implementation to educational quality; and (Sudir et al., 2025), who explore teacher and principal perspectives on TQM implementation in pesantren. At the curriculum level, the full-text case of Sirojuddin et al. (2022) on integrated curriculum management based on multiple intelligences at Pondok Pesantren Riyadlul Jannah

demonstrates in detail how the three management functions (planning, actuating, and controlling) are applied to integrate the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Religious Affairs, and pesantren curricula into a coherent whole, with tauhid values serving as the integrative umbrella. The tiered supervision pattern documented in the case (daily, weekly, monthly, and semestral) shows that the controlling function in pesantren curriculum management tends to be informal and personal at the daily level (teacher observation and brief notes) but becomes formalised at the semestral evaluation level, which involves the caregiver, coordinators, and parents, a gradation of supervisory formality not extensively discussed in other studies within the corpus.

The power-relations dimension of curriculum management is also critically examined. Mardia et al. (2026) find that constrained teacher autonomy in curriculum decision-making which they term 'teacher powerlessness', is rooted in hierarchical managerial structures, the dominance of the kiai's charisma, and the absence of sustained professional training. Najib et al. (2026) deepen this analysis through a power-relations lens on curriculum management for the multicultural character development of santri, while Rozi et al. (2023) and Junaedi et al. (2025) respectively examine curriculum management based on spiritual-intellectual mentality and a transformational curriculum model through interpretive epistemology, showing that pesantren curricula function not merely as instruments of knowledge transfer but as arenas for character formation and the negotiation of Islamic-national identity.

On the technology and digitalisation dimension, a growing number of recent studies (2020–2026) point to an acceleration in the adoption of technology in pesantren management, ranging from hdigital-literacy work-practice training (Fathullah et al., 2023), pesantren educational management in the digital 4.0 era (Abidin, 2020; Indra et al., 2020), Internet of Things applications for pesantren edupreneurship using a Fuzzy Analytical Hierarchy Process (Lutfiyah et al., 2025), to the role of educational technology in student satisfaction, moderated by kiai leadership and institutional support (Manaf et al., 2026). Muttaqin (2023) have even begun to explore competitive-advantage management for madrasah in the artificial-intelligence era, signalling that the strategic-management discourse in pesantren is shifting from mere administrative technology adoption toward more forward-looking anticipation of fourth- and fifth-generation technological disruption. Nevertheless, most studies in this technology sub-cluster remain descriptive-exploratory and have yet to test the causal impact of technology adoption on measurable institutional performance indicators.

Synthesising this cluster, pesantren quality management operates across three interacting layers: (1) formal quality instruments adapted from corporate management (TQM, SERVQUAL, balanced scorecard), (2) curriculum as a vehicle for integrating Islamic values with general knowledge, and (3) technology as both an accelerator and a new challenge to autonomy and power relations within pesantren, a layered structure consistent with the red cluster's dual emphasis on educational quality and strategic formulation.

Institutional Performance and Sustainability

As the culmination of the preceding five domains, institutional performance and sustainability are examined from multiple angles: resilience to crisis and disaster, the economic sustainability of business units, and social-environmental sustainability. On the crisis-mitigation dimension, Ifendi (2021) and Aulia et al. (2019) respectively examine COVID-19 emergency-response management and pesantren-based disaster-mitigation strategy (a case study of Pondok Pesantren Darunnajah Cipining, Bogor), showing that pesantren, with their concentrated 24-hour residential student populations, face unique vulnerabilities alongside unique collective mitigation capacities compared with conventional day schools. On the economic-sustainability dimension, Zaki et al., (2019) examine business-network strategy in an Islamic microfinance institution affiliated with a pesantren, while Dhewanto et al. (2023) explicitly link sustainable entrepreneurship strategies for pesantren business units to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1, 4, 8, 10, and 17, making it one of the few studies in the corpus to position pesantren explicitly as agents of global sustainable development rather than merely local religious educational institutions.

On the environmental-sustainability dimension, Ferdiansyah et al. (2025) introduce the concept of eco-pesantren as a nexus between education and sustainability within an Islamic public-administration frame, extending the meaning of pesantren sustainability beyond financial dimensions to ecological ones. Meanwhile, the use of the balanced scorecard by Ashfahany et al. (2024) and Machmuddah et al. (2017)

reflects an effort to operationalise multidimensional performance (financial and non-financial) more measurably, though both remain single-case studies, limiting generalisability across pesantren typologies (salaf, modern, and hybrid).

Synthesising this evidence, pesantren performance and sustainability cannot be reduced to a single metric (e.g., business-unit profitability or graduate numbers) but constitute a multidimensional construct encompassing resilience to external shocks, the economic sustainability of business units, socio-religious sustainability (moderation and multiculturalism), and an emerging environmental-sustainability dimension, an expansion of scope consistent with the global shift in sustainability discourse from a single bottom line toward a triple bottom line (economic, social, and environmental).

DISCUSSION

Toward an Integrated Conceptual Framework

Integrating the findings across the six domains above and the four keyword clusters identified earlier, this review proposes a cyclical conceptual framework for pesantren strategic management centred on kiai leadership as the axis connecting all domains of strategic management. Unlike conventional strategic-management models, which position strategic planning as the rational-linear starting point, the framework proposed here positions charismatic-religious leadership as the legitimising precondition that must be present before formal strategy can be implemented effectively, a pattern that recurs consistently across domains, from business-unit success (Ariatin et al., 2023) and organisational resilience (Suryadi et al., 2024) to successful curriculum reform (Sirojuddin et al., 2022).

The proposed framework consists of four reciprocally interacting layers: (1) the foundational layer of values and religious leadership (the kiai/caregiver as the source of legitimacy, with Muslim qualities, siddiq, amanah, tabligh, fathanah as the ethical basis, corresponding to the leadership node of the green cluster); (2) the adaptive strategic-planning layer (emergent strategy formulation that accommodates the tension between tradition and modernity, corresponding to the blue cluster); (3) the managerial operationalisation layer (encompassing HRM, governance-finance, and quality/curriculum/technology management, jointly implemented through the planning–actuating–controlling cycle, corresponding to the green, purple, and red clusters respectively); and (4) the institutional-outcome layer (educational quality performance, business-unit financial sustainability, and organisational resilience), which in turn feeds back into and reinforces the legitimacy of leadership in the first layer. Table 1 summarises the mapping of domains, key mechanisms, representative studies, and outcomes within this framework.

Table 1. Mapping of Strategic Management Domains, Key Mechanisms, and Institutional Outcomes in Pesantren

Domain (Cluster)	Key Mechanism	Key Representative Studies	Institutional Outcome
Leadership & Values (Green)	Kiai charisma; spiritual/moral leadership; Muslim quality (siddiq-amanah-tabligh-fathanah)	Ilyas et al. (2019); Suryadi et al. (2024); Ariatin et al. (2023); Bahri et al. (2026)	Legitimacy; organisational resilience; business-unit sustainability
Strategic Planning (Blue)	Emergent-adaptive strategy formulation; tradition-modernity negotiation	Misdah et al. (2025); Wafa et al. (2026); Zakaria et al. (2025); Lateh et al. (2024)	Resilience to disruption; institutional adaptation
Human Resource Management (Green)	Ustadz/teacher competency development; quantitative trend-based planning	Uhbiyati (2015); Arromy et al. (2023); ZA et al. (2023)	Adequacy and quality of teaching staff
Governance & Finance (Purple)	Hybrid accountability; balanced scorecard; waqf governance	Buanaputra et al. (2022); Ashfahany et al. (2024); Hambari et al. (2026)	Public trust; financial sustainability
Quality, Curriculum & Technology (Red)	TQM/SERVQUAL; curriculum integration; digitalisation	Sirojuddin et al. (2022); Efendi (2022); Manaf et al. (2026)	Graduate quality; student satisfaction

Performance & Sustainability	Crisis mitigation; sustainable entrepreneurship; eco-pesantren	Ifendi (2021); Dhewanto et al. (2023); Ferdiansyah et al. (2025)	Resilience; contribution to SDGs

The primary theoretical contribution of this framework is that it positions religious leadership not as one independent variable among several parallel managerial constructs, but as an antecedent condition that moderates the effectiveness of every other strategic-management instrument. The implication is that replicating 'best-practice' strategic management from one pesantren to another or transplanting it wholesale from the corporate sector, is unlikely to produce equivalent results unless the leadership-legitimacy context specific to each institution is accounted for. This echoes the contingency argument in mainstream strategic-management theory, while foregrounding a distinctly religio-cultural dimension rarely addressed in that literature, and offers a substantive theoretical bridge across the four keyword clusters that the co-occurrence analysis showed to be otherwise loosely connected.

Research Gaps and Future Research Agenda

A critical reading of the 82 articles reveals several research gaps that warrant a future research agenda. First, a methodological gap: the dominance of single-case qualitative studies (more than half of the corpus) limits both generalisability and the testing of causal relationships among strategic-management variables. Studies employing quantitative or mixed-methods designs with multi-pesantren samples, such as the trend-analysis and PIAS-analysis approach used by Tabrani et al. (2023), remain the exception and could fruitfully be replicated across pesantren typologies (salaf, modern, tahfidz, and hybrid). Second, a domain-integration gap: most studies examine a single strategic-management domain in isolation (e.g., leadership alone, or financial accountability alone), while studies integrating three or more domains simultaneously (such as Harjawati et al., 2026) remain rare, even though the conceptual framework proposed above shows that the six domains interact reciprocally.

Third, a cross-context comparison gap: nearly all studies focus on pesantren in Indonesia (with the exception of Lateh et al. (2024) in southern Thailand), so the generalisability of the pesantren strategic-management framework to residential Islamic educational institutions in other countries (e.g., madrasah in South Asia or Islamic boarding schools in West Africa) still requires further empirical testing. Fourth, a longitudinal-impact gap: most studies are cross-sectional snapshots and therefore cannot capture the long-term dynamics of pesantren strategic management, particularly with regard to kiai leadership succession, a critical issue given that leadership constitutes the central axis of the proposed framework, and given the highly personal, not-yet-systemically-institutionalised character of pesantren leadership.

Fifth, a unit-of-analysis gap: existing studies typically focus on the institutional level (a single pesantren) or the individual level (a single leader), while the inter-pesantren network level (Hambari et al., 2026) remains rarely explored, even though cross-institutional economic and governance consolidation may represent a significant emerging direction for the collective sustainability of the pesantren sector. Building on these gaps, future research is encouraged to: (a) develop validated survey instruments to test the integrated conceptual framework quantitatively across multi-pesantren samples; (b) conduct longitudinal studies to capture leadership-succession dynamics and long-term strategic sustainability; (c) extend the unit of analysis to pesantren networks and consortia; and (d) undertake cross-country comparative studies to test the extent to which this religious-leadership-centred strategic-management framework generalises to residential Islamic educational institutions beyond Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review set out to map the development of research on strategic management practices in Islamic boarding schools, to synthesise empirical evidence on how strategic planning, leadership, human resource management, governance, financial management, and quality/technology-related strategies contribute to institutional performance and sustainability, and to construct an integrated conceptual framework capable of informing both future research and empirical practice. The reviewed corpus shows that this field has matured rapidly over the past decade, with its thematic structure converging on an institutional and human-capital core built around leadership, governance, and human resource management; an educational-quality and strategic-formulation

dimension specific to the Indonesian context; an explicit but still comparatively underdeveloped strategic-management vocabulary; and a distinct financial-accountability sub-theme.

Across these domains, three central conclusions emerge. First, strategic planning in Islamic boarding schools is predominantly emergent and relational rather than formal and linear, forged through continuous negotiation between religious leadership vision, curricular modernisation pressures, and external socio-economic constraints, and operating under a dual logic that blends substantive religious rationality with rational-managerial logic borrowed from mainstream theory. Second, charismatic-religious leadership functions not merely as one managerial variable among many but as the legitimising precondition for the effectiveness of every other strategic-management instrument, from human resource development and curriculum reform to entrepreneurship and organisational resilience; this centrality, however, carries an inherent paradox, since the same charisma that accelerates institutional change and secures legitimacy can simultaneously constrain the decentralisation of decision-making and the professionalisation of management. Third, governance, financial management, and quality/technology-related strategies are progressively evolving from personalised, trust-based practices toward hybrid models that combine formal accountability instruments with the religious legitimacy that remains the primary foundation of public trust.

The principal theoretical contribution of this review is an integrated conceptual framework that departs from conventional strategic-management models by positioning religious leadership as the foundational, legitimising layer from which strategic planning, managerial operationalisation, and institutional outcomes reciprocally flow and feed back. By explicitly connecting leadership and human-capital practices with financial governance and quality-formulation mechanisms under a single strategic-management framework, this review addresses the conceptual fragmentation that has characterised the field, in which these themes have largely been studied as parallel rather than interdependent research streams, while also extending contingency-based strategic-management theory to foreground a religio-cultural dimension of institutional legitimacy rarely addressed in mainstream literature.

Notwithstanding the limitations inherent in a corpus that remains predominantly qualitative, single-case, and concentrated in one national context, compounded by its reliance on a single database, Scopus, and its restriction to English-language publications, which may have excluded relevant Bahasa Indonesia-language and non-Scopus-indexed literature, this review makes a timely contribution to a rapidly growing field. It demonstrates that strategic management in Islamic boarding schools is not a peripheral borrowing from corporate management theory but a distinct, theologically and culturally embedded practice that merits sustained scholarly attention in its own right. As these institutions continue to navigate the twin pressures of modernisation and tradition preservation, digitalisation and value continuity, and economic self-sufficiency and religious mission, the integrated framework proposed here offers both a conceptual anchor for future empirical testing and a practical reference point for strengthening their strategic management capacity.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Conceptualization, research design, and methodology development were carried out by the authors. Literature search, article screening, and data extraction were conducted by the authors. Formal analysis, including qualitative content analysis and bibliometric mapping using VOSviewer, was performed by the authors. Thematic classification, synthesis of findings, and the development of the integrated conceptual framework were carried out collaboratively. Original draft preparation and writing were conducted by the authors, while review, editing, and revision were performed collaboratively. All

authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of this work.

AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used AI-assisted tools, such as grammar checkers and language enhancement software, solely for the purpose of improving readability and refining the language of the manuscript. No generative AI tools were used for literature search, article screening, data analysis, thematic synthesis, conceptual framework development, or core scientific writing. The authors take full responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and integrity of the research findings and the final content of this article.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper. The research was conducted independently, and the results are presented objectively and without bias. The authors have no affiliation with or financial interest in any Islamic boarding school, educational institution, or organization that could be perceived as influencing the analysis or conclusions of this study.

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