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Kiai Leadership in Advancing Agribusiness Enterprises in Islamic Boarding Schools in Jambi Province

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Abstract:

This qualitative multiple case study investigates the leadership role of *kiai* in developing agribusiness enterprises at three Islamic boarding schools in Jambi Province: Pondok Pesantren Raudhatul Mujawwidin (Tebo), Pondok Pesantren Irsyadul Ibad (Batanghari), and Pondok Pesantren Al Muttaqin (Muaro Jambi). Data were obtained through interviews, observations, and document analysis to explore how *kiai* integrate Islamic values into economic activities and institutional management. Findings indicate that *kiai* leadership plays a transformative role beyond spiritual guidance, functioning as institutional entrepreneurs who design, implement, and sustain agribusiness programs. Their participative and visionary leadership fosters student engagement, builds external partnerships, and promotes pesantren self-reliance. Despite facing obstacles such as limited land and capital, *kiai* initiatives have made agribusiness a vehicle for education, character formation, and community empowerment. The study concludes that enhancing *kiai* managerial capacity and strengthening institutional collaboration are essential to advancing sustainable pesantren-based economies. This research contributes to the broader understanding of Islamic educational leadership by illustrating how faith-driven management can integrate spirituality, education, and entrepreneurship. The implications suggest that empowering *kiai* leadership in agribusiness development can serve as a strategic model for promoting economic independence and resilience among Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia.

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Introduction (مقدمة)

As the oldest educational institution, pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) play a vital role in social development and education in Indonesia. Pesantren do not only educate students (santri) in religious aspects but also contribute significantly to shaping their character, morals, and social skills. They serve as centers of learning that teach Islamic values while also equipping students with general knowledge and practical skills that can be applied in daily life (Harismansyah et.al, 2021).

Pesantren hold a strategic role in shaping generations with strong character – not only in terms of religious understanding, but also in terms of moral, ethical, and social competencies needed in community life. Through an integrative educational process that combines religious knowledge and character development, pesantren instill Islamic values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, tolerance, and social awareness. With a boarding school model and direct guidance from the kiai (Islamic clerics), students are not only taught theoretical knowledge but are also mentally and spiritually trained to become independent individuals of noble character, ready to act as agents of change who contribute meaningfully to the progress of the ummah (Muslim community) and the nation (Kasful & Liriwati, 2021).

Pesantren serve as agents of social change by integrating Islamic values and character education. Education in pesantren is not only focused on religious instruction but also includes aspects of morality, independence, and social skills. Through this process, pesantren function as environments where students internalize Islamic values while being trained in practical skills relevant to everyday life. This prepares them to contribute effectively to society upon completing their education (Nafisah et.al, 2024).

According to Robert Hefner in his work *Islamic Schools, Social Movements, and Democracy in Indonesia*, pesantren play a role in shaping Muslims who are not only religious but also adaptable to social change. He sees pesantren as institutions that develop both religious insight and social skills that are essential for community life, including the internalization of religious values across all aspects of life.

One of the promising areas for developing Islamic economics within pesantren lies in agribusiness. Pesantren that have access to farmland or livestock can utilize these resources to run agribusiness ventures in accordance with sharia principles, such as farming, animal husbandry, or processing agricultural products. Through agribusiness, pesantren can foster economic independence, create job opportunities for surrounding communities, and enhance students' skills in agriculture. This effort not only brings economic benefits to the pesantren and their local environment but also contributes to improving local food security in line with the principles of justice and sustainability in Islamic economics (Kasful & Liriwati, 2021).

Many pesantren have begun to utilize the natural resources around them to develop agriculture-based businesses and agricultural product processing. Through agribusiness activities, pesantren can not only meet the food needs of their students but also contribute to the local economy (Fauroni, 2011). This aligns with the goal of achieving financial independence, where pesantren are able to fund their operations and educational programs independently. It also allows pesantren to promote sustainable agriculture and provide training for students in good agricultural practices.

Agribusiness has become a rapidly growing sector among pesantren. According to data from the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs in 2020, as of 2018, there were around 1,529 pesantren engaged in agribusiness activities. In addition, 404 pesantren were involved in industrial sectors, 111 in trade, and 41 in marine and fisheries-based economic sectors. These figures demonstrate that pesantren have undergone significant economic diversification,

strengthening not only their internal economies but also contributing to the local economy across various strategic sectors.

The management of agribusiness ventures requires well-planned and structured administration, as agribusiness activities are not limited to crop cultivation alone, but also encompass the entire process related to agriculture. This includes the procurement of materials and equipment, harvesting processes, and the distribution of agricultural products. Given the complexity of these activities, effective management is essential to coordinate every aspect of agribusiness efficiently, from the initial stages of production to the marketing of the harvest (Liriwati et.al, 2021).

To achieve success in agribusiness ventures, the leadership of the *kiai* plays a crucial role. As central figures within *pesantren*, *kiai* are not only religious leaders but also serve as key figures in the development of economic activities such as agribusiness. With the strong trust placed in them by the *pesantren* community, *kiai* possess the capacity to mobilize both human and natural resources to support the operations of agribusiness initiatives.

Previous studies on *pesantren* economic development in Indonesia have primarily focused on financial management, vocational training, and student participation in entrepreneurial activities (Liriwati, 2021; Nafisah, 2024; Kasful, 2021). These studies emphasize the importance of integrating education and entrepreneurship but rarely examine the strategic role of *kiai* leadership in sustaining such initiatives. Most existing research treats the *kiai* merely as a moral figure or religious teacher rather than as an institutional leader and economic innovator. Moreover, limited attention has been given to how *kiai* apply Islamic values and leadership principles in managing agribusiness enterprises as part of *pesantren*'s self-reliance efforts. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by exploring how *kiai* leadership contributes to the design, implementation, and sustainability of agribusiness programs in Islamic boarding schools, offering new insights into faith-based leadership and Islamic educational management.

The author conducted observations at three *pesantren* in Jambi Province as research sites: Pondok Pesantren Raudhatul Mujawwidin in Tirta Kencana Village, Rimbo Bujang Subdistrict, Tebo Regency; Pondok Pesantren Irsyadul Ibad in Simpang Kubu Kandang Village, Pemayung Subdistrict, Batanghari Regency; and Pondok Pesantren Al Muttaqin in Ibru Village, Mestong Subdistrict, Muaro Jambi Regency.

Three *pesantren* in Jambi Province face various challenges in developing their agribusiness ventures. Pondok Pesantren Raudhatul Mujawwidin in Tebo struggles with issues related to human resources, limited access to capital, and difficulties in marketing agricultural products. Pondok Pesantren Irsyadul Ibad in Batanghari encounters obstacles in applying modern agricultural technology, limited market access, and problems maintaining product quality. Meanwhile, Pondok Pesantren Al Muttaqin in Muaro Jambi faces a lack of agribusiness training programs, insufficient government policy support, and the absence of integrated agribusiness education within the formal curriculum. These challenges highlight the need for more systematic support in training, policy development, and market access to enable *pesantren* agribusinesses to grow optimally.

Based on the results of the grand tour, the author is interested in conducting a more in-depth study on the development of agribusiness ventures under the research title: The Leadership of *Kiai* in the Development of Agribusiness Enterprises in Islamic Boarding Schools in Jambi Province.



Method (منهج)

This research adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to investigate the role of *kiai* leadership in the development of agribusiness enterprises within Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) in Jambi Province. The qualitative method was chosen to allow an in-depth exploration of social phenomena and leadership patterns within the *pesantren* environment. The

primary data collection techniques included field observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with key informants such as *kiai*, pesantren administrators, and selected students (*santri*) who were involved in agribusiness activities.

This research adopts a qualitative descriptive design to explore the role of *kiai* leadership in the development of agribusiness enterprises within Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) in Jambi Province. The qualitative approach enables a contextual and holistic understanding of leadership dynamics, institutional decision-making, and the integration of religious and economic values within the pesantren ecosystem.

The study employs a purposive sampling technique to select key informants who possess in-depth knowledge and active involvement in pesantren agribusiness management. Informants include *kiai* (as institutional leaders), pesantren administrators, and selected *santri* (students) directly engaged in farming, production, or marketing activities. A total of 12 participants were interviewed across three pesantren: Pondok Pesantren Raudhatul Mujawwidin (Tebo), Pondok Pesantren Irsyadul Ibad (Batanghari), and Pondok Pesantren Al Muttaqin (Muaro Jambi).

Data were collected through field observations, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and document analysis related to pesantren business planning, production reports, and management records. The data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, consisting of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. This model ensured systematic organization, cross-case comparison, and triangulation between data sources to enhance credibility and validity. The methodological framework allowed the researcher to capture the nuances of *kiai* leadership in designing, implementing, and sustaining agribusiness programs, while maintaining alignment with the spiritual and educational missions of the pesantren.



Results & Discussion (مناقشة)

Kiai Leadership in Jambi's Pesantren

The leadership of *kiai* in the context of agribusiness development in pesantren holds great potential in shaping visionary policies grounded in Islamic values. However, in practice, this strategic role has not been fully optimized due to limited managerial capacity and the minimal involvement of professional teams in agribusiness management. While *kiai* remain the central figures in decision-making, the absence of competent support teams in the field makes it difficult to implement business development ideas effectively (Hamsir et.al, 2023). Decisions are often made based on experience and intuition rather than data-driven planning or market research. As a result, promising business opportunities are frequently missed, and business risks are not systematically addressed. There is a need for synergy between religious leadership and technical expertise so that pesantren can become more adaptive to the dynamic challenges of the business world (Liriwati et.al, 2021).

On the other hand, the involvement of students (*santri*) in agribusiness activities remains sporadic and is not yet part of a structured educational curriculum. Most pesantren still treat agribusiness as an extracurricular activity rather than an integral component of the learning process. Consequently, students lack awareness and practical skills in agriculture and entrepreneurship. In fact, active student participation in agribusiness could serve as a medium for character education, hard work, responsibility, and independence (Hafidloh, 2025). If agribusiness activities were systematically integrated into the academic program, students would gain not only religious knowledge but also practical life skills. This would strengthen the role of pesantren in producing graduates who are both religiously grounded and economically productive.

Limited access to business capital and modern agricultural technology remains a dominant obstacle in the agribusiness development of the three pesantren. Most of the business financing still relies on limited internal funds, which are not consistently available. Efforts to

establish partnerships with financial institutions or external partners remain minimal, either due to a lack of networking or the absence of credible and feasible business models. Furthermore, the use of efficient and environmentally friendly agricultural technology has not been maximized. Without adequate support in terms of capital and technology, the agricultural outputs produced by pesantren struggle to compete in terms of both quality and quantity. Therefore, it is essential for pesantren to expand their networks and develop credible agribusiness proposals to attract external support (Izzat, 2025).

In terms of marketing, the three pesantren do not yet have effective strategies for promoting and distributing their products. Agricultural products are typically sold only at the local level and lack strong branding or identity. Yet, with today's digital technology, pesantren could utilize online platforms to market their products more broadly. However, a lack of understanding of digital marketing and the absence of skilled personnel in this area pose serious challenges. Marketing efforts remain conventional and passive, relying on walk-in buyers or internal pesantren networks. Targeted training and assistance are needed to help pesantren build competitive product brands and expand their markets in a sustainable way (Hakim et.al, 2019).

Institutional factors also affect the effectiveness of *kiai* leadership in agribusiness. The organizational structure for agribusiness management in pesantren remains unclear, with overlapping roles and responsibilities. The absence of standard operating procedures (SOPs) and standardized reporting systems has resulted in agribusiness activities being carried out without clear direction. Management remains informal and depends heavily on individual initiative, rather than on an established system. This hinders the processes of monitoring and evaluation and complicates future leadership succession and business continuity. Thus, pesantren need to establish a dedicated unit to manage agribusiness professionally, separate from the educational structure, while maintaining coordinated integration (Fahmi, R., & Aswirna, 2023).

One of the main strengths of *kiai* leadership is the ability to build trust and loyalty among the pesantren community and the surrounding society. This social capital should be harnessed to foster strategic collaborations with external stakeholders, such as government institutions, private sector entities, and farming communities. Unfortunately, this potential is not yet supported by effective communication strategies or systematic partnership proposals. Public trust in pesantren can become a powerful asset to attract participation in agribusiness development. However, to ensure successful collaboration, pesantren must demonstrate managerial capacity and a clear business vision. It is crucial to build awareness that collaboration does not compromise the independence of pesantren but rather strengthens their role as centers for community-based economic empowerment (Setiawan et.al 2025).

Overall, although initiatives for agribusiness development have been started in the three pesantren, their effectiveness remains limited due to the absence of comprehensive planning and a structured management system. The charismatic and respected leadership of *kiai* is an important asset, but it must be reinforced with a professional approach to business management. With adequate training, access to capital, market networks, and strong institutional systems, pesantren agribusinesses have the potential to evolve into independent and sustainable models of community-based Islamic economics. This transformation requires collective commitment and a willingness to innovate across all pesantren stakeholders. Therefore, the next steps should include strengthening institutional capacity, building strategic partnerships, and integrating spiritual values with productive economic practices (Rahman, et.al, 2024).

Development of Agribusiness in Jambi's Pesantren

The development of agribusiness in Pondok Pesantren Raudhatul Mujawwidin, Irsyadul Ibad, and Al Muttaqin has become part of a broader economic transformation strategy aimed at achieving sustainable financial independence. These pesantren utilize their land resources for agricultural activities such as vegetable and fruit cultivation, as well as livestock farming. These agribusiness efforts serve not only as a source of income but also as hands-on learning

opportunities for *santri*, involving them in the production and harvesting processes. Beyond economic goals, these activities instill important values such as discipline, hard work, and responsibility. Contextual learning bridges religious knowledge taught in the classroom with practical life skills needed in society. However, limitations in production facilities and infrastructure remain significant obstacles to improving output and efficiency (Kasimbara, 2024).

One strategy being introduced in some pesantren is agribusiness diversification. Several pesantren have expanded beyond farming to explore other ventures such as post-harvest processing into marketable products. For example, the production of banana chips, fish floss, or organic fertilizer is being managed by *santri* and administrators. This initiative aims to increase product value and broaden potential market reach. Although still limited in scale, diversification reflects a growing awareness of the need to adapt business models to market demands. To support this, entrepreneurship and business management training are essential to ensure these initiatives can grow and sustain themselves (Hikmah, 2021).

External collaboration has begun to take shape through partnerships with local governments, universities, and private institutions interested in supporting pesantren economic development. These partnerships range from technical training and equipment assistance to helping open market access. However, the intensity and sustainability of these collaborations still need strengthening. In many cases, partnerships are short-lived and lack long-term follow-up or structured planning. Yet sustainable partnerships are key to strengthening the role of pesantren as local economic actors. Therefore, pesantren must develop well-prepared project proposals and improve their communication with potential partners (Sulaiman et.al, 2018).

Agribusiness management remains a crucial factor that directly impacts the success of pesantren businesses. Management practices are often traditional and lack data-based planning or clear business strategies. Many pesantren administrators still have limited understanding of basic financial management, marketing, and human resource organization. Consequently, financial records are often poorly maintained, making evaluation and decision-making difficult. To address this, basic management training and simple bookkeeping systems should be introduced and consistently applied. Support from external parties to help establish efficient organizational structures will greatly enhance business sustainability.

Santri play a strategic role in the pesantren agribusiness ecosystem, not only as field workers but also as active learners who can grasp production, management, and marketing processes. However, their motivation and involvement largely depend on how pesantren leaders approach these activities. If agribusiness is seen merely as an extracurricular task without curricular integration, *santri* may view it as a burden. Therefore, it is important to design an agribusiness curriculum aligned with the pesantren's educational goals so that students experience holistic learning. This integration will help produce graduates who are not only religiously devout but also economically empowered (Rahman et.al, 2024).

Monitoring and evaluation systems still need to be strengthened in the implementation of pesantren agribusiness programs. Currently, many pesantren operate without measurable or systematic indicators of success. Evaluations are often based on subjective perceptions rather than clear performance metrics. A robust monitoring system would allow pesantren to identify which aspects are working effectively and which require improvement. This would enable agribusiness ventures to be improved incrementally and sustainably. Developing simple performance indicators and providing data-based evaluation training are important strategic steps that must be taken.

Overall, the development of pesantren-based agribusiness holds great promise for creating economically independent and socially relevant Islamic educational institutions. However, the success of such efforts depends heavily on the synergy between visionary leadership, external support, improved management systems, and integrated education. Pesantren are not only expected to deliver spiritual education but also to prepare students who

are capable of navigating modern economic challenges. Therefore, strengthening agribusiness must be seen as an integral part of the pesantren's educational and community empowerment mission. With the right support, pesantren can become models of adaptive, innovative, and self-reliant Islamic institutions.

The Role of Kiai Leadership in the Development of Pesantren Agribusiness

The leadership of the kiai in these pesantren demonstrates a unique blend of religious authority and entrepreneurial spirit. This dual function allows them to garner trust from the pesantren community while simultaneously driving agribusiness initiatives forward. Their deep-rooted influence within the pesantren structure ensures that agribusiness activities are not viewed as separate from the pesantren's religious mission, but rather as an extension of it. In this way, the kiai can integrate Islamic values into daily economic activities, creating a harmonious blend of faith and livelihood for both students and surrounding communities (Gumul, 2020).

At Pondok Pesantren Raudhatul Mujawwidin, the kiai has successfully fostered a culture of discipline and innovation among the students by linking agribusiness tasks with educational outcomes. For instance, students are not only taught about agricultural techniques but are also involved in hands-on cultivation, management, and marketing of products. This practical engagement builds character, responsibility, and a work ethic aligned with Islamic teachings. Such integration also allows the pesantren to produce graduates who are not only religiously knowledgeable but also economically competent (Valinkas, 2015).

In Pondok Pesantren Irsyadul Ibad, the leadership model emphasizes collaboration and empowerment. The kiai actively engages with local agricultural experts, government agencies, and business partners to enhance the pesantren's agribusiness operations. Through these partnerships, the pesantren has accessed technical training, funding assistance, and improved market access. This outward-looking approach reflects the kiai's ability to balance tradition with modernity, preserving religious values while embracing practical solutions for institutional sustainability (Vilatus, 2023).

Meanwhile, at Pondok Pesantren Al Muttaqin, the kiai's leadership has focused on fostering self-reliance and community engagement. The pesantren has developed agricultural programs that not only serve its internal needs but also benefit the surrounding villages. By producing staple crops and distributing them at affordable prices, the pesantren strengthens its relationship with the local community and builds a reputation as a center for both spiritual and economic empowerment. This has contributed to a broader social impact, making the pesantren a model for community-based economic development (Sihabudin, 2024).

Despite these achievements, the kiai leaders face ongoing structural and operational challenges. Limited access to arable land, inadequate farming tools, and a lack of formal training in agribusiness management often hinder expansion. The kiai must therefore continually innovate and seek strategic solutions, including mobilizing alumni networks, leveraging digital platforms, and promoting entrepreneurship among santri. These efforts require a long-term commitment to capacity building and resource optimization, underscoring the complex nature of pesantren-based agribusiness (Mustaan, 2020).

One of the distinguishing features of kiai leadership in this context is their commitment to value-based management. Agribusiness development is not solely driven by profit but also by the desire to cultivate ethical behavior, sustainability, and communal welfare. This value-oriented approach allows pesantren to act as incubators of halal entrepreneurship, where economic activity is bound by Islamic principles such as fairness, responsibility, and environmental stewardship. The kiai thus serve not only as business leaders but also as ethical guardians within the enterprise (Wijaya, 2022).

In conclusion, the role of the kiai in the development of pesantren agribusiness in Jambi Province is both vital and transformative. Their ability to combine spiritual guidance with managerial expertise ensures that agribusiness becomes an integral part of pesantren life,

contributing to educational enrichment, economic independence, and social impact. Strengthening the leadership capacity of the *kiai*, supported by collaborative networks and policy support, will be essential in expanding the role of pesantren as agents of sustainable rural development and Islamic economic resilience.



Conclusion (خاتمة)

The leadership of the *kiai* plays a pivotal role in shaping and advancing pesantren-based agribusiness by integrating religious values with economic innovation, fostering student empowerment, and engaging with external partners for sustainability. Their participative and visionary approach ensures that agribusiness becomes not only a means of financial independence but also a platform for character development and community service. Strengthening this leadership, along with addressing infrastructural and human resource challenges, is essential for realizing the full potential of pesantren as centers of holistic education and socio-economic transformation. For future research, further studies could explore comparative analyses of *kiai* leadership models across different regions or examine the long-term economic and educational impacts of pesantren-based agribusiness initiatives. Additionally, interdisciplinary research combining Islamic education, entrepreneurship, and digital innovation could provide new insights into how pesantren adapt to broader socio-economic and technological changes in Indonesia's evolving educational landscape.



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