

THE DECISIONAL ROLES OF KIAI IN DEVELOPING THE ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE OF PONDOK PESANTREN

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ABSTRACT

The development of economic independence for Islamic boarding schools (pondok pesantren) has become an urgent necessity in facing the dynamic challenges of social and economic change. These institutions are required not only to rely on donations but also to develop productive enterprises to ensure the sustainability of the institution and the empowerment of the surrounding community. The purpose of this study is to examine the strategic role of the Kiai in managing the pesantren's resources through various decisional roles, such as entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator, and negotiator, as well as their effects on the economic development of the pesantren. The method used is a qualitative approach with a case study method. Data were collected through document analysis, observation of pesantren business activities, and interviews with pesantren managers. The study also analyzed data from pesantren businesses, including sectors such as fisheries, agriculture, mining, and waste processing. The results indicate that the effective leadership of the Kiai in executing decisional roles contributes significantly to the development of enterprises and the economic independence of the pesantren. The success of pesantren economic ventures not only increases revenue but also creates employment opportunities and empowers the local community. The synergy between leadership, resource management, and negotiation with various external parties is the key to creating pesantren that are independent, sustainable, and competitive in a modern context.

Kata Kunci: *Decisional Roles, Economic Independence, Pondok Pesantren*

ABSTRAK

Pengembangan kemandirian ekonomi pondok pesantren menjadi kebutuhan mendesak dalam menghadapi tantangan perubahan sosial dan ekonomi yang dinamis. Pesantren dituntut untuk tidak hanya bergantung pada donasi, namun juga mengembangkan usaha produktif guna menjamin keberlanjutan institusi dan pemberdayaan masyarakat sekitar. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengkaji peran strategis Kiai dalam mengelola sumber daya pesantren melalui berbagai peran decisional, seperti wirausaha, pengelola gangguan, pengalokasi sumber daya, dan negosiator, serta efeknya terhadap pembangunan ekonomi pesantren. Metode yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kasus. Pencarian data melalui analisis dokumen, observasi kegiatan bisnis pesantren, dan wawancara dengan para pengelola pesantren. Penelitian juga menganalisis data bisnis pesantren yang meliputi sektor perikanan, pertanian, pertambangan, dan pengolahan limbah. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan Kiai yang efektif dalam menjalankan peran decisional berkontribusi signifikan terhadap pengembangan usaha dan kemandirian ekonomi pesantren. Keberhasilan usaha ekonomi pesantren tidak hanya meningkatkan pendapatan, tetapi juga membuka lapangan kerja dan memberdayakan masyarakat lokal. Sinergi antara kepemimpinan, pengelolaan sumber daya, dan negosiasi dengan berbagai pihak eksternal menjadi kunci dalam menciptakan pesantren yang mandiri, berkelanjutan, dan mampu bersaing dalam konteks modern.

Key Words: *Decisional Roles, Kemandirian Perekonomian, Pondok Pesantren*

INTRODUCTION

Pondok Pesantren, as an Islamic educational institution rooted in tradition, has made important contributions to community development in Indonesia, not only in the religious and educational spheres but also in strengthening the economy at the local level (Hudaefi & Heryani, 2019). In facing the dynamics of globalization and modernization, the economic independence of pesantren has become increasingly important to maintain institutional sustainability and provide broader contributions to society (Agus dkk., 2023). The development of economic independence within pondok pesantren encompasses various important aspects, such as managing existing assets, developing productive business units, enhancing the capabilities and skills of students and the surrounding community, and utilizing digital technology to support these economic activities (Badrudin & Nugraha, 2025). Kiai's role is vital in determining strategic decisions related to these aspects (Cortes & Herrmann, 2021; Rachmad, 2022), considering the Kiai's position of authority and strong influence in determining pesantren policies and development direction. (Kamaludin, 2023).

As a central figure in the pesantren, the Kiai has a significant responsibility to direct the pesantren towards sustainable economic independence (Aprida dkk, 2024), making a deep understanding of the decisional roles they undertake very important. The Kiai is expected to be able to make strategic and innovative decisions to encourage the development of business units within the pesantren (Faizin, 2024). In carrying out their role, the Kiai must be able to manage all

available resources effectively and efficiently so that the pesantren's economic goals can be optimally achieved (Hafidh dkk, 2024). Additionally, the Kiai is expected to establish close and constructive partnerships with various parties such as the government, financial institutions, private sectors, and civil society organizations, as these are crucial for the economic advancement of the pesantren (Kurniady dkk, 2024).

The Kiai's role has also undergone a transformation in line with the times. In the past, the Kiai was primarily known as a teacher, preacher, and spiritual guide focusing on religious education and moral formation of students. (Rohani, 2024). However, in the present era, the Kiai is also required to be a managerial leader capable of managing the institution professionally. They have become social entrepreneurs with a vision for pesantren-based economic development, aiming not only for the sustainability of the pesantren but also for the economic empowerment of the community (Ridwan, 2020). The Kiai has the capacity to transform the characteristics of pesantren education from merely spreading Islamic teachings into concrete actions that adapt to current conditions and challenges (Hafidh dkk, 2025), making pesantren not only centers of religious knowledge but also institutions active in economic and social development.

To analyze the Kiai's role in pesantren economic development more systematically, this study uses Henry Mintzberg's (1973) concept of decisional roles. Mintzberg categorized managerial roles into three main categories: *interpersonal*, *informational*, dan *decisional*. *interpersonal*, *informational*, and *decisional*. The focus of this study is the decisional category, which consists of four main roles: 1) Entrepreneur, initiator of innovation and driver of organizational change. 2) Disturbance handler, resolver of conflicts or disruptive problems. 3) Resource allocator, decision-maker in resource distribution. 4) Negotiator, acts on behalf of the organization with external parties.

These four roles are used as an analytical lens to understand the Kiai's leadership strategy in promoting the economic independence of pesantren. By adopting Mintzberg's framework, this study provides a strong theoretical foundation for explaining how the Kiai functions not only spiritually but also as a manager and leader of a complex organization. The utilization of this theory also distinguishes this study from previous research, which has been largely descriptive and has not extensively used modern managerial perspectives.

Previous studies have discussed the Kiai's role in educational and socio-cultural contexts, but few have deeply highlighted how the Kiai performs strategic functions in economic decision-making. Therefore, this study attempts to fill this gap by focusing on how the Kiai, as a pesantren leader, can manage resources, resolve disturbances, establish negotiations, and promote integrated economic innovation to achieve institutional independence (Wajdi dkk., 2022; Ngaisah, 2023; Hafidh, 2017).

Thus, this study aims to examine in more detail the strategic roles of the Kiai in the context of decisional roles to manage and develop pesantren resources. This study focuses on Pondok Pesantren Ar-Risalah as the research location because this pesantren has demonstrated strong economic independence through various business units directly managed by the Kiai with a collaborative and professional approach. It is hoped that the results of this research can provide theoretical contributions to the development of leadership

studies in the pesantren environment and offer best practices that can be replicated by other pesantren in Indonesia.

Furthermore, this study is also expected to serve as a reference for policymakers in formulating strategies for pesantren economic empowerment. This aligns with the government's efforts to strengthen the economic role of pesantren through various programs such as One Pesantren One Product (OPOP) and community-based economic empowerment. This research has not only academic but also practical relevance in supporting the national development agenda based on Islamic values and local wisdom.

METHOD

This research was designed with a qualitative approach adopting a case study method to deeply analyze the Kiai's role in economic decision-making within the pesantren environment. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews involving various relevant parties, such as the Kiai themselves, pesantren administrators, students, and community figures connected to the pesantren.

In addition, direct observations were conducted to observe pesantren economic activities, decision making processes, and interactions between the Kiai and other pesantren members. In the analysis phase, the collected data will be processed using content analysis and thematic analysis techniques to identify patterns, themes, and categories relevant to the research focus. A descriptive approach is also used to provide a comprehensive and clear overview of the social phenomenon being studied. This qualitative approach is considered appropriate because it can explain in depth the complexity of the Kiai's role while extracting interpretations and meanings that emerge from the participation of the informants.

The research location was purposively selected, considering pesantren characteristics that matched the research focus, including the presence of diverse business units, the existence of an influential and visionary Kiai, and a long history of pesantren economic development. The researcher themselves acted as the primary instrument, directly involved in collecting and analyzing data, utilizing in-depth interview guides, field notes, and audio/visual recording tools.

To ensure the validity of the research data, triangulation techniques were applied by comparing information obtained from various sources and data collection methods, such as interviews, observations, and documentation. Data analysis was conducted inductively, starting from data collection, data reduction, data presentation, to drawing conclusions. With the addition of an ethnographic method, this research also seeks to understand the cultural and social aspects of the pesantren community holistically.

The designed methodology has the strength to generate deep understanding rich in context and social dimensions regarding how the Kiai carries out their economic role in the pesantren. This methodological approach allows the research to describe how the Kiai plays the roles of entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator, and negotiator in the real context of the pesantren. Thus, the research results are expected not only to be descriptive but also to build a deeper conceptual understanding related to pesantren-based economic leadership.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Decisional Roles Kiai at Pondok Pesantren Ar-Risalah

Role as Entrepreneur

The existence of pondok pesantren (pontren) in society holds a very strategic position, especially in the realm of education. As an institution deeply rooted in the community, pontren significantly contributes to fostering a collective spirit for progress and improving social welfare. Initially, pontren were often underestimated, perceived as prioritizing spiritual matters without balancing attention to worldly aspects.

However, in their new role as an entrepreneur, Kiai are able to respond wisely to the dynamics of changing times. They do not disrupt existing social networks but rather utilize them as a foundation and ideal mechanism for initiating positive social change. This phenomenon aligns with the development of leadership patterns shifting from a religio-paternalistic-charismatic model to a more persuasive and participatory style. In this modern leadership style, the Kiai emphasizes an open and interrelational approach with the ability to effectively sell ideas, like an inspiring and inviting leader.

Nevertheless, to actively participate and contribute to addressing economic challenges, pontren must first undertake an internal paradigm transformation. Previously, the dominant focus of pontren might have been solely on education and religious social activities. Now, recognizing the demands of the times, it is time for pontren to actively engage in various economic activities as part of empowerment and self-reliance efforts.

This shift in role is very important and strategic. Pontren do not only become centers of religious learning but also drivers of community welfare through economic innovation that remains rooted in social and spiritual values. This transformation is not merely following the flow of modernity but is a wise step to harmonize the function of pontren with the needs of the times without losing their long-established identity.

Since its establishment, Pesantren Ar-Risalah has been involved in businesses run by KH. Asep Saefulmillah. The pesantren businesses managed by the Kiai in various sectors are to support the development of quality at Pesantren Ar-Risalah, both in infrastructure development and human resources. Based on an interview with KH. Asep Saefulmillah:

"Pesantren Ar-Risalah is known as an agribusiness pesantren, a maritime pesantren because I developed businesses from that. I also have businesses in mining, agriculture, and even as a distributor. All my businesses are dedicated to the development of the pesantren, religion, and the community. Even all the land assets of Ar-Risalah are my private property which I then Waqf (endowed) because I know that for the future development of this pesantren to progress, the community must be involved in every process. And so that Ar-Risalah can be financially and managerially independent and can be part of the economic development of the community". (W.PKK-ARS.KASM.4)

The businesses run by KH. Asep Saefulmillah in various sectors, be it mining, agriculture, livestock, or distribution, certainly have a positive impact on

the development of the pesantren. Besides benefiting the pesantren, they also provide livelihoods for the surrounding community, because the pesantren's businesses are not for enriching the Kiai's personal wealth, but for the pesantren, religion, and the empowerment of the community's economy. Pesantren businesses were explained by Ade Mujiz Ridwan, SE, as the head of the pesantren agribusiness development division:

"Pondok Pesantren Ar-Risalah has been involved in the business world since its establishment. This is done so that the pesantren becomes an independent institution, free from dependence. Therefore, Kiai Asep developed and runs pesantren businesses to support this. The businesses developed and run by the pesantren include:

Table 1. Business Data of Pondok Pesantren Ar-Risalah

No	Pesantren Business Sector	Description
1	Fisheries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaborating with the Regional Fisheries Office (materials, legality); - Collaborating with the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries; - Pesantren fishing area is approximately 1.5 hectares; - Sales cover regional Ciamis to Central Java and Banten; Around 30 workers are involved; - Turnover from this business is about IDR 425,000,000 per year.
2	Mining	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaborating with the Regional Mining Office; - Collaborating with contractors, project developers, and regional SMEs; - Can produce about 150 cubic meters of various types and sizes of stone per day; Around 60 workers are involved; - Turnover from mining activities is IDR 1,500,000,000 per year.
3	Agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaborating with the Regional Agriculture Office; - Livestock feed supplier PT. Tanjungmulya Tasikmalaya; - Agricultural areas in Panumbangan (200 Hectares), Cisaga (2 Hectares), Pamarican (1 Hectare); - Permanent workers reach 50 people; - Involves up to 4000 local residents; - Turnover from corn farming activities reaches IDR 3,500,000,000 per year.
4	Plastic Processing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaborating with relevant agencies; - Waste comes from student activities in Pondok Pesantren Ar-Risalah and the surrounding community; - Turnover from waste management activities is IDR 125,000,000 per year.

Source: Interview with Ade Mujiz Ridwan (2024)

All businesses run by the Kiai and the pesantren are dedicated and oriented towards the institutional development in various aspects, both in

infrastructure and human resources. Pesantren Ar-Risalah can serve as a model for developing an independent pesantren; these Kiai and pesantren businesses enable the pesantren to be financially and managerially independent. Thanks to these businesses, KH. Asep Saefulmillah could develop his pesantren, which was then entirely endowed for the community. Through the pesantren's businesses, the surrounding community also experiences a positive economic impact, ultimately shifting the pesantren's orientation from solely spiritual matters to becoming a center for community economy.

Role as Disturbance Handler

The Kiai, as the leader of the pesantren, plays a crucial role in responding to various emerging problems, ranging from strategic issues to concrete disturbances that can threaten the operational continuity and existence of the pesantren. The Kiai's role becomes even more evident, especially when the pesantren is in a dynamic social environment that has the potential to cause friction with external parties. Such horizontal conflicts, which often occur between pesantren and surrounding communities, can disrupt harmony and even endanger the sustainability of the pesantren if not handled wisely. Therefore, it is very important for the Kiai not only to be responsive to emerging problems but also to implement preventive measures so that potential disturbances can be minimized early on.

Furthermore, the Kiai, as a central figure in the pesantren, does not work alone in managing this complex institution. The involvement of trusted parties is an effective strategy, not only in the context of internal pesantren development but also in various other aspects related to the continuity and progress of the pesantren. Good collaboration between the Kiai and these trusted individuals is important capital in facing challenges and seizing opportunities for the common good.

The Kiai's responsive and collaborative attitude is crucial for the quality of pesantren management. A Kiai who is sensitive to the external environment and capable of building a solid working network with trusted assistants will be able to maintain stability and even promote the progress of the pesantren in facing various evolving social and economic changes. This indicates that pesantren leadership is not only about authority but also adaptability and the ability to embrace various elements in managing a multi-functional religious institution.

The involvement of trusted individuals such as Rois/Roisah, Santri Coordinator, Mr. Ade Mujiz, and Mr. Iir Abdul Haris is a method used by the Kiai to handle and prevent problems that disturb the pesantren. This is reinforced by KH. Asep Saefulmillah in an interview:

"If there are disturbances entering the pesantren, at the very least we must be prepared and preventive, and immediately find solutions. The involvement of trusted individuals is important in the process of resolving these disturbances, in addition to the deliberation process". (W.PKK-ARS.KASM.4)

The preventive nature of the Kiai is absolutely necessary in handling a disturbance. When a problem arises, it must certainly be resolved quickly and

well. As stated by the education consultant of Ar-Risalah regarding how KH. Asep handles a problem:

"One thing he holds onto is, 'we must take action when the flood is only ankle-deep, don't wait until the flood reaches neck-high to make a decision for salvation.' His preventive characteristic in problem-solving is very high. He is also a very professional figure, oriented towards thorough and perfect outcomes in all matters". (W.PKK-ARS.KYARS.2)

Disturbances and problems originating internally can usually be resolved directly by the council of ustadz/ustadzah or teachers in the school. However, if there are problems or disturbances from external pesantren sources, KH. Asep involves his trusted individuals to directly participate with him in their resolution.

Role as Resource Allocator

The Kiai has an important role as a fund manager (resource allocator) in developing the economic independence of the pondok pesantren. In this position, the Kiai is responsible for determining how available funds are distributed appropriately to support various economic activities within the pesantren. The disbursement of funds must be done carefully to meet operational needs, business investments, and community empowerment programs within the pesantren. The Kiai must be able to identify priorities for fund usage that provide maximum benefits without neglecting the social values inherent in the pesantren. With effective resource management, the economic independence of the pesantren can be strengthened, reducing dependence on external aid and opening up opportunities for sustainable growth. The Kiai's function as a fund allocator is not merely administrative but also a strategic role in encouraging innovation and economic empowerment within the pesantren environment.

The pesantren's economic businesses play a very important role in supporting the overall economic development of the pesantren. Through the business units operated, the pesantren is not only able to meet internal operational needs but also to create sustainable sources of income. The success of these businesses allows the pesantren to reduce dependence on external assistance and build long-term economic independence. Additionally, the business activities carried out by the pesantren are often oriented towards social and educational values, thus maintaining the integrity and social function of the pesantren in society.

As the leader of the pesantren, KH. Asep Saefulmillah manages the pesantren's finances with the help of his wife, Hj. Ai Masitoh, in a professional manner. The large pesantren business and the significant number of students necessitate good management. The distribution of pesantren funds is very transparent, and the flow of funding from student payments (in Ar-Risalah called *Syahriyah*) is clearly distributed according to the needs of the students themselves. Student needs are not only related to consumption but also to the operational costs of their education during their time at the pesantren.

The Kiai's role in this context is very strategic, especially in managing and distributing the profits from pesantren businesses. The Kiai acts as a decision-maker responsible for ensuring that profit distribution is done fairly and

effectively for the development of the pesantren. Funds obtained from pesantren businesses are used to improve facilities, enhance educational quality, and support community empowerment programs around the pesantren. In this way, the Kiai is key in integrating the economic and social aspects of the pesantren, maintaining a balance between economic goals and the mission of *dakwah* (Islamic propagation) and education.

Role as Negotiator

The development of pesantren in this modern era demands that they be able to operate independently without relying too much on external assistance, especially from congregations or the wider community. Many cases show that the decline of pesantren occurs when support from their followers begins to decrease or even disappears. Pesantren, which initially emerged as institutions growing from and for the community, became heavily dependent on community funding. However, when the community begins to abandon the pesantren, the pesantren also faces the threat of decline.

Therefore, it is important for pesantren to be able to seek and manage their own sources of funding to support their operations and development. In this regard, the Kiai's role as a pesantren leader is crucial. The Kiai is expected to be not only a spiritual figure but also a strong and adept motivator in establishing various funding opportunities for the advancement of the pesantren. A tangible example can be seen in Pondok Pesantren Ar-Risalah, which not only relies on funds from the community but also receives support from businesses managed by the Kiai and official assistance from the government.

KH. Asep Saefulmillah is an example of a Kiai who possesses extraordinary negotiation skills in obtaining significant assistance and support for the pesantren's development. Through his skills, Ar-Risalah successfully obtained various important facilities and aid, ultimately making the pesantren one of the leading recipients of government assistance. This success demonstrates how the synergy between Kiai leadership, independent economic ventures, and external support can build a strong foundation for the future sustainability of the pesantren. The process of emotional approach, intense communication, *silaturahmi* (strengthening kinship/fellowship), and great negotiation skills are characteristic of KH. Asep Saefulmillah in the bureaucracy of leadership. This was explained in an interview with KH. Asep Saefulmillah:

"Communication skills are important for a leader. Pesantren Ar-Risalah being visited by ministers, governors, and even presidents is the result of my communication, *silaturahmi*, and lobbying. The result of this process is also that Ar-Risalah's business can develop because it is supported by the government in all its aspects, and the development of Ar-Risalah can also grow rapidly, such as the construction of *rusunawa* (low-cost apartments), a women's mosque, plastic processing, and the development of plant cultivation sponsored by LIPI".

The negotiation prowess of KH. Asep Saefulmillah is also clearly acknowledged by all members of Pesantren Ar-Risalah. The Kiai's excellent communication skills are supported by his extensive social connections with various elements of

society, government, and ministries, which ensures that the negotiation process for pesantren development projects always runs smoothly. This was elaborated by the Education Consultant of Ar-Risalah:

"Another unique thing about Kiai Asep is that he has a very broad social circle. At the grassroots level, he is very strong because he is not just a Kiai who sits in the mosque; he has been an active *mubaligh* (preacher) for decades. He also has a strong network within government bureaucracy and ministries, which are actually outside the traditional scope of pesantren, such as the Ministry of Maritime Affairs, Agriculture, Mining and Energy, and the Ministry of Public Housing, as well as LIPI, making it very easy for him to promote Ar-Risalah and convey information about this pesantren more widely to external parties".

The Kiai's negotiation ability has a very significant impact on pesantren development efforts. With these skills, the Kiai can establish communication and cooperation with various parties, such as the government, private institutions, and social communities, to obtain support in the form of facilities, funds, or other resources. Effective negotiation allows the pesantren to gain greater and more diverse opportunities for assistance, thereby strengthening the pesantren's economic and operational foundation. Additionally, this ability helps the pesantren in managing strategic external relations, which ultimately supports the sustainability and progress of the pesantren. In other words, negotiation skills are one of the main keys to overcoming challenges and opening up opportunities for the development of an independent and competitive pesantren.

The four decisional roles are consistently carried out by the Kiai of Pondok Pesantren Ar-Risalah. The integration of these roles shows that the Kiai does not merely perform administrative functions but also acts as a key player in realizing pesantren-based economic transformation.

If linked to Mintzberg's theory, Kiai Asep can be categorized as a leader who performs all managerial functions with a distinctive and contextual leadership style. He does not only focus on spirituality and morality but also on the strategic and practical aspects of institutional management.

This finding reinforces previous research, as revealed by Hafidh et al. (2022) that the success of pesantren is highly influenced by the Kiai's capacity to lead business units professionally and with an orientation towards empowerment. Furthermore, the Kiai's role also demonstrates alignment with the concept of adaptive leadership (Rachmad, 2022), which is the leader's ability to adjust strategies and leadership styles to environmental demands and changing times.

Moreover, the results of this study also indicate that the pesantren-based decisional leadership model has its own distinctiveness compared to general managerial models. The Kiai's direct involvement in all processes of planning, implementation, and evaluation of businesses makes them the central control of socio-economic transformation based on Islamic values.

In a practical perspective, this research implies that strengthening the Kiai's managerial capacity, entrepreneurship training, and pesantren-based policy support need to be continuously enhanced. Support from the government and the private sector should be directed towards strengthening local religious-

based leadership that has proven effective and deeply rooted in society. Thus, it can be concluded that the decisional roles of the Kiai at Pesantren Ar-Risalah not only make the pesantren an educational institution but also a driving force for a local economy that is independent, adaptive, and sustainable.

CONCLUSION

The development of economic independence for pondok pesantren is crucial for ensuring the continuity and progress of pesantren in facing social and economic changes. Pesantren need to develop various productive enterprises that not only serve to meet daily operational needs but also create sustainable sources of income. This is where the Kiai's role becomes very important, not only as a spiritual leader but also as a resource manager capable of wisely allocating funds and conducting strategic negotiations with various external parties, such as the government and other institutions. The Kiai's ability to establish cooperation and gain support from various institutions opens opportunities for pesantren to obtain significant facilities and assistance for institutional development and advancement. Through diverse business units such as agriculture, fisheries, and processing businesses, pesantren can improve the welfare of the surrounding community while strengthening their economic base. A business approach that continues to prioritize social values and educational goals allows pesantren to maintain their traditions while moving forward economically. Overall, the combination of visionary Kiai leadership, effective economic management, and collaboration with various stakeholders is key to the success of pesantren in achieving sustainable independence and competitiveness.

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