

Analysis of Islamic Education Policy on Pesantren Institutionalization

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ABSTRACT

Pesantren are the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia and play a strategic role in education, da'wah (Islamic propagation), and community empowerment. The development of Islamic education policies has strengthened the position of pesantren through the enactment of Law Number 18 of 2019 on Pesantren and its implementing regulations. This study aims to analyze Islamic education policies related to pesantren institutions, examine their implications for institutional development, and identify challenges in their implementation. The study employs a library research method with a descriptive-analytical approach. Data were collected from laws and regulations, books, scholarly journals, and official documents issued by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The findings indicate that government policies have provided recognition, affirmation, and facilitation for pesantren, thereby strengthening their legal legitimacy, institutional governance, access to funding, and quality development. However, policy implementation continues to face several challenges, including bureaucratization, limited human resources, disparities in facilities among pesantren, and the potential reduction of institutional autonomy due to the application of uniform administrative standards. Therefore, adaptive and contextual policies are needed to ensure that the strengthening of pesantren institutions remains aligned with their characteristics, traditions, and independence as community-based Islamic educational institutions.

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools, commonly known as pesantren, are among the oldest Islamic educational institutions that have grown and developed alongside Muslim communities in Indonesia. Since their emergence, pesantren have not only served as centers for the transmission of Islamic knowledge but have also functioned as institutions for character formation, Islamic preaching (dakwah), and community social empowerment. Pesantren possess distinctive characteristics that differentiate them from other educational institutions, including the kiai as the central figure, santri (students) who reside in dormitories, the mosque as the center of educational and religious activities, and the use of kitab kuning (traditional Islamic texts) as the primary source of learning.

Over time, pesantren have undergone significant transformation. The modernization of education and the demands of contemporary developments have encouraged pesantren to undertake various forms of adaptation while maintaining their Islamic identity. These changes have also been accompanied by growing government attention to the role of pesantren as an integral part of the national education system. A major milestone in this development was the enactment of Law Number 18 of 2019 concerning Pesantren, which formally recognizes pesantren as institutions of education, Islamic preaching, and community empowerment.

The enactment of the Pesantren Law marked an important milestone in the history of Islamic education policy in Indonesia. This regulation strengthens the position of pesantren through the principles of recognition, affirmation, and facilitation provided by the state. In addition, the government has issued

various implementing regulations, including Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation Number 30 of 2020 concerning the Establishment and Administration of Pesantren, PMA Number 31 of 2020 concerning Pesantren Education, and PMA Number 32 of 2020 concerning Ma'had Aly. These regulations provide a legal foundation for strengthening the institutional capacity of pesantren in terms of legal status, governance, and educational administration.

According to data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs for the 2025/2026 academic year, the number of pesantren in Indonesia has reached more than 42,000 institutions, encompassing various forms and levels of education. These data indicate that pesantren constitute an important component of the national education system and make a significant contribution to the development of Indonesia's human resources.

Nevertheless, the implementation of policies concerning the institutional development of pesantren is not without challenges. Administrative standardization, quality assurance requirements, limited human resources, and the potential for bureaucratization are among the issues that require serious attention. Therefore, an in-depth examination of Islamic education policies concerning pesantren institutions is necessary to determine the extent to which these policies can strengthen pesantren institutions without undermining their distinctive characteristics and institutional autonomy.

Several previous studies have examined Law Number 18 of 2019 concerning Pesantren. Thontawi and Huriati (2024) examined aspects of Islamic education policy within the Pesantren Law, while Syarifah and Munandar (2025) focused on government recognition and the policy implications for pesantren education. However, these studies have primarily focused on the normative aspects of the policy and have not specifically analyzed the relationship between the primary regulation and its implementing regulations in strengthening pesantren institutions. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by comprehensively analyzing the relationship between Law Number 18 of 2019 and Minister of PMA Number 30, 31, and 32 of 2020 in strengthening the institutional capacity of pesantren.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze Islamic education policies concerning pesantren institutions, identify the implications of these policies for the institutional development of pesantren, and examine the various challenges arising from their implementation.

Various previous studies have examined pesantren policies following the enactment of Law Number 18 of 2019 on Pesantren, particularly regarding aspects of state recognition of pesantren, the position of pesantren in the national education system, and the normative implications of the regulation on Islamic education. However, most studies still focus on normative studies on the substance of the law or general implications of pesantren education policies. Studies that specifically analyze the relationship between Law Number 18 of 2019 and its derivative regulations, namely PMA Number 30 of 2020, PMA Number 31 of 2020, and PMA Number 32 of 2020, in encouraging institutional transformation of pesantren are still relatively limited. In addition, there is not much research that comprehensively examines how the principles of recognition, affirmation, and facilitation impact the strengthening of governance, institutional modernization, access to funding, and the challenges of bureaucratization that could affect the independence of pesantren. Therefore, this research is conducted to fill the gap by analyzing more deeply the relationship between pesantren policies and institutional changes that occur, as well as identifying various implementation challenges that emerge in the practice of pesantren management.

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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs a library research method with a descriptive-analytical approach. This method was chosen because the study focuses on analyzing Islamic education policies related to pesantren institutions based on various relevant written sources.

The research data sources consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data include legislation related to pesantren, namely Law Number 18 of 2019 on Pesantren, Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation Number 30 of 2020 on the Establishment and Management of Pesantren, PMA Number 31 of 2020 on Pesantren Education, and PMA Number 32 of 2020 on Ma'had Aly. Secondary data are obtained from books, scientific journals, theses, research articles, and official documents of the Ministry of Religious Affairs discussing pesantren and Islamic education policies.

Data collection techniques are carried out through documentation studies by identifying, reading, reviewing, and classifying various sources relevant to the research theme. Furthermore, the data are analyzed using content analysis techniques, namely by examining the substance of policies, identifying policy objectives and impacts, and studying their implications for the development of pesantren institutions.

The analysis is conducted through several stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. With this approach, the research is expected to provide a comprehensive overview of Islamic education policies on pesantren institutions and the challenges of their implementation in the context of national education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the study of Law Number 18 of 2019 on Pesantren, Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation Number 30 of 2020, PMA Number 31 of 2020, PMA Number 32 of 2020, and various academic literature on pesantren education, several main findings were obtained as follows:

Strengthening of Legal Status and State Recognition of Pesantren

The results show that the enactment of Law Number 18 of 2019 on Pesantren is a turning point in the history of Islamic education policy in Indonesia. Before the law, pesantren were socially and culturally recognized by society, but lacked a specific legal framework governing their existence and development. Through the Pesantren Law, the state provides recognition, affirmation, and facilitation to pesantren. Recognition is manifested in the form of acknowledgment of pesantren as educational institutions with unique characteristics and significant contributions to national development. Affirmation is given through various policies supporting the sustainability of pesantren education. Facilitation is realized in the form of assistance, mentoring, and institutional guidance by the government.

Increased Diversification of Pesantren Institutions

Data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs for the 2025/2026 Academic Year shows that pesantren institutions have developed rapidly. There are 42,391 pesantren spread across Indonesia with various educational models evolving according to community needs. In addition to traditional pesantren (salafiyah), various forms of pesantren education have developed, such as: Equivalence Education in Salafiyah Pesantren, Muadalah Education Unit, Formal Diniyah Education, Ma'had Aly as higher education based on pesantren. This diversity shows that pesantren are able to adapt to changing times without losing their Islamic identity.

Strengthening Governance and Administration of Pesantren

The research also shows that government policies encourage pesantren to improve their institutional governance. Pesantren are now required to have clear legality, an organized administrative system, an integrated student database, and more professional human resource management. The existence of digital systems such as the Education Management Information System (EMIS) and the Aid Management Information System (SIMBA) has become an important instrument in managing pesantren institutions more modernly and accountably. Opening Access to Funding and Improving Quality With strong legal recognition, pesantren gain wider access to various government programs. Pesantren can obtain assistance for infrastructure development, capacity-building programs for educators, operational education assistance, and pesantren economic empowerment programs. This shows that Islamic education policies are not only oriented towards educational aspects but also support the strengthening of the social and economic functions of pesantren.

Pesantren as an Islamic Educational Institution with Institutional Distinctiveness

Historically, pesantren are Islamic educational institutions born from the needs of Indonesian Muslim society. Unlike formal schools built through state bureaucracy, pesantren grew from cultural relationships between kiai and the community. The characteristics of pesantren lie in the existence of five main elements, namely kiai, santri, pondok (boarding house), mosque, and kitab kuning (classical Islamic texts). These five elements form a unique education system that cannot be separated from one another. Therefore, education policies for pesantren cannot be equated with policies for general schools. Kiai hold a central position as spiritual leaders, policymakers, and guardians of pesantren scholarly traditions. In this context, the success of a policy is greatly influenced by the extent to which the policy respects the authority and independence of pesantren. Pesantren are one of the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia that have played an important role in character building, development of Islamic knowledge, and fostering social life. As an Islamic educational institution, pesantren have distinctive characteristics that differentiate them from other educational institutions. One of the characteristics of pesantren is the presence of kiai as central figures. Kiai not only act as educators but also as leaders, spiritual guides, and decision-makers in pesantren management. The authority and exemplary nature of kiai are important factors in the education process of santri. Santri live together in a boarding house (pondok) environment with other santri. They not only learn religious knowledge in class but also live together in the pesantren environment. This system allows character building, discipline, independence, and the practice of Islamic values directly in daily life. The existence of a boarding house (pondok) is a main characteristic of pesantren. Through boarding life, the education process takes place 24 hours, not limited to teaching and learning activities in class. Santri are guided to live a simple, independent, and responsible life. The mosque is the center of pesantren activities. In addition to being used for worship, the mosque is also a place for learning, discussion, recitation, and socio-religious activities. This shows that education in pesantren integrates spiritual and intellectual aspects. Traditional pesantren are known for learning kitab kuning, namely classical Arabic texts discussing various Islamic disciplines such as fiqh, tafsir, hadith, akhlak, and nahwu-sharaf. The teaching of kitab kuning is a distinctive identity that differentiates pesantren from general education institutions. Pesantren not only emphasize mastery of knowledge but also the formation of noble character. Values such as sincerity, simplicity, independence, Islamic brotherhood, and responsibility are instilled in the daily life of santri. Pesantren generally have a strong relationship with the surrounding community. In addition to being an education center, pesantren also function as a center for da'wah, community empowerment, and socio-religious development. Therefore, the existence of pesantren often has a positive impact on the surrounding environment.

Transformation of Pesantren Education Policy in Indonesia

The journey of pesantren education policy shows a change in the government's paradigm. In the past, pesantren were often positioned as alternative educational institutions outside the mainstream national

education system. However, after the enactment of Law Number 18 of 2019 on Pesantren, a significant change occurred. Pesantren are no longer seen as peripheral educational institutions but as an integral part of the national education system with equal rights and status as other educational institutions. This paradigm shift indicates an increased awareness of the state regarding the contribution of pesantren in enlightening the nation's life, building community character, and maintaining religious moderation.

Analysis of Implementation of Recognition, Affirmation, and Facilitation

The principles of recognition, affirmation, and facilitation are at the core of current pesantren education policies. First, recognition provides official acknowledgment of pesantren graduates. Through the Muadalah system, PDF, and Ma'had Aly, pesantren graduates have wider opportunities to continue their education or enter the workforce. Second, affirmation is realized through various policies that provide special attention to pesantren as community-based educational institutions. This policy aims to reduce disparities in education access between pesantren and other formal educational institutions. Third, facilitation is carried out through the provision of infrastructure assistance, institutional mentoring, enhancement of educator competencies, and financial support. These three principles show that the state seeks to strengthen the existence of pesantren without eliminating their distinctive characteristics.

Challenges of Bureaucratization and Standardization of Pesantren

Although bringing many benefits, pesantren institutional policies also face several challenges. One of the main challenges is the increasing bureaucratization of pesantren. Various administrative requirements, reporting, accreditation, and data collection often become a burden for pesantren, especially small pesantren with limited human resources. In addition, the application of national standards that are too uniform has the potential to reduce the flexibility of pesantren in developing education systems according to local traditions and community needs. If not managed properly, this condition can create tension between state regulatory demands and the independence of pesantren as community-based educational institutions.

Challenges of Human Resource Quality

The implementation of pesantren institutional policies also faces obstacles in the aspect of human resources. Many pesantren still experience limitations in administrative staff who have capabilities in information technology and institutional management. This condition is evident in the management of EMIS, SIMBA, and various other administrative applications that require digital competence. Therefore, increasing HR capacity is an urgent need so that pesantren can adapt to the development of modern administrative systems.

Implications of Policy on Pesantren Modernization

Islamic education policies on pesantren institutions have encouraged modernization processes in various aspects. The modernization includes: Strengthening institutional management systems; Development of more adaptive curricula; Improvement of educator quality; Utilization of information technology; Strengthening cooperation networks with government and society. This modernization should not be understood as an effort to eliminate pesantren traditions, but as a process of strengthening institutions so that pesantren can answer the challenges of the times.

Prospects for Development of Pesantren Institutions in the Future

In the future, pesantren have great opportunities to develop into superior and competitive Islamic education centers. With tens of thousands of institutions and millions of santri, pesantren have a very strong social capital to contribute to national development. The direction of pesantren institutional development should focus on four main aspects, namely: Strengthening institutional management and governance; Improving the quality of pesantren human resources; Developing quality assurance systems based on pesantren characteristics; Strengthening collaboration between pesantren, government, business, and society.

With this strategy, pesantren can maintain their Islamic identity while increasing competitiveness in the era of globalization and digital transformation.

Impact of Policy on Sustainability of Pesantren Education

In general, Islamic education policies on pesantren institutions have a positive impact on the sustainability of pesantren. Stronger legality increases public trust in pesantren. Access to government assistance accelerates the development of educational facilities. Meanwhile, strengthening governance increases the effectiveness of education implementation. However, the success of this policy still depends on the government's ability to apply a flexible and participatory approach. Pesantren must be positioned as strategic partners of the state, not just objects of regulation. Thus, the goal of strengthening institutions can be achieved without eliminating traditional values, independence, and moral authority that have been the main strength of pesantren.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that the enactment of Law Number 18 of 2019 on Pesantren and its derivative regulations has brought fundamental changes in the institutional position of pesantren in Indonesia. Through the principles of recognition, affirmation, and facilitation, the state not only provides legal recognition to pesantren but also encourages institutional transformation through strengthening governance, expanding funding access, improving education quality, and modernizing administrative systems.

This finding indicates that pesantren policies have played a role as an instrument for integrating pesantren into the national education system without losing their Islamic identity. However, this research also finds that institutional strengthening is not without consequences. Demands for standardization, administrative digitalization, and institutional accountability have the potential to increase bureaucratic burdens, especially for pesantren with limited human resources and supporting facilities. Thus, the main challenge of pesantren policy going forward is no longer on the aspect of formal recognition, but on the government's ability to design policies that can balance the need for institutional modernization with the preservation of independence and distinctive characteristics of pesantren. Therefore, pesantren development policies need to be directed towards a more adaptive, participatory, and needs-based approach. This approach is important so that the process of institutional strengthening not only results in improved governance and accountability but also maintains traditional values, flexibility, and independence that are the main foundation of pesantren sustainability in Indonesia.

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