

Sustaining Islamic Values through Institutional Innovation: A Case Study of an Indonesian Vocational Pesantren

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ABSTRACT: *This study aims to examine how Pondok Pesantren Manbaul Ulum in Indonesia implements management innovation strategies to develop its Vocational Secondary School (VSS) while preserving its core Islamic values in an increasingly competitive vocational education landscape. Employing a qualitative single-case study design, the research collected data through semi-structured interviews with 10 purposively selected informants, representing leaders, curriculum developers, teachers, and students, supplemented by participatory observation and document analysis. Methodological triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing ensured data validity, and analysis followed Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's interactive model. The findings demonstrate that the pesantren's success is anchored in a deliberate model of institutional hybridity operationalised through a structured dual-curriculum, a disciplinary system that converts piety into a strategic VRIN resource, and a market positioning strategy centred on producing morally grounded graduates. These mechanisms create a synergistic fusion of religious and vocational logics that strengthens organisational resilience and competitive advantage. The study's limitations include its reliance on a single case in one geographical context, which restricts generalizability, suggesting that future research should examine diverse pesantren models or employ mixed methods. This study offers originality by providing a process-based explanation of how faith-based institutions can transform religious values into strategic resources, contributing to institutional theory and offering practical guidance for religious educational organisations navigating modernisation.*

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana Pondok Pesantren Manbaul Ulum di Indonesia menerapkan strategi inovasi manajemen untuk mengembangkan Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan (SMK) sambil melestarikan nilai-nilai inti Islamnya dalam lanskap pendidikan vokasi yang semakin

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kompetitif. Menggunakan desain studi kasus tunggal kualitatif, penelitian mengumpulkan data melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan 10 informan yang dipilih secara sengaja, mewakili pemimpin, pengembang kurikulum, guru, dan siswa, dilengkapi dengan observasi partisipatif dan analisis dokumen. Triangulasi metodologis, pemeriksaan anggota, dan pembekalan sejawat memastikan validitas data, dan analisis mengikuti model interaktif Miles, Huberman, dan Saldaña. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa keberhasilan pesantren berlabuh pada model hibriditas kelembagaan yang disengaja yang dioperasionalkan melalui kurikulum ganda terstruktur, sistem disiplin yang mengubah kesalehan menjadi sumber daya VRIN strategis, dan strategi pemosisian pasar yang berpusat pada menghasilkan lulusan yang membumi secara moral. Mekanisme ini menciptakan perpaduan sinergis antara logika agama dan kejuruan yang memperkuat ketahanan organisasi dan keunggulan kompetitif. Keterbatasan penelitian ini termasuk ketergantungannya pada satu kasus dalam satu konteks geografis, yang membatasi generalisasi, menunjukkan bahwa penelitian di masa depan harus memeriksa beragam model pesantren atau menggunakan metode campuran. Studi ini menawarkan orisinalitas dengan memberikan penjelasan berbasis proses tentang bagaimana lembaga berbasis agama dapat mengubah nilai-nilai agama menjadi sumber daya strategis, berkontribusi pada teori kelembagaan dan menawarkan panduan praktis bagi organisasi pendidikan keagamaan yang menavigasi modernisasi.

Keywords: *Institutional Hybridity, Islamic Boarding School, Management Innovation, Resource-Based View, Vocational Education.*

Received: October 7, 2025; Revised: December 20, 2025; Accepted: January 27, 2026

I. INTRODUCTION

In the context of Indonesia, the dual challenge of integrating modern vocational education within traditional religious institutions such as *pesantren* raises significant questions about identity and efficacy, particularly as these institutions face pressures from global market-driven reforms to evolve while preserving core religious values (Asrori et al., 2025; Jamroji, 2024). This complexity becomes increasingly evident in *pesantren* that establish formal Vocational High Schools to meet societal demands for skills that can be directly applied in the workforce (Abdurrohim et al., 2023; Afifudin et al., 2025; Rodliyah et al., 2024). Such initiatives risk eroding fundamental religious values, despite their potential to increase participation and improve educational quality (Safitri, 2024). The need for management innovation is therefore crucial, as it underscores the importance of transforming educational management by integrating modern practices with Islamic values—an effort that requires qualitative inquiry to uncover the complex strategies involved (Faizin, 2024; Mufron, 2020; Shofiyyah et al., 2023). According to Nurdin & Samudi (2023), the content of religious education must remain relevant and of high quality by responding to contemporary needs, while Horwitz (2021) and Kholida et al. (2025) demonstrate that educational achievement varies across religious traditions, thereby emphasising the importance of contextually adapted educational frameworks. *Pesantren* seek to balance labour market demands with societal expectations that their graduates remain morally upright and grounded in religious values (Af'idah & Nisfa, 2025; Purwowidodo & Zaini, 2024). The process of

pesantren hybridisation transforms the role of *pesantren* through the integration of tradition and modernity in education, while simultaneously giving rise to challenges related to equity, identity formation, and social responsibility in the era of globalisation (Azra et al., 2010; Kisyanto, 2025).

While the structural diversification of *pesantren* into formal vocational education has been widely documented, a critical gap persists in understanding the operational management strategies that enable this transformation (Azra et al., 2010). *Pesantren* are educational institutions undergoing significant transformation, particularly in their efforts to integrate character education with vocational skills (Halimah et al., 2024; Khoiruddin & Masrukin, 2022; Mujahid, 2021). However, research that examines in detail how *pesantren* manage this integration in everyday practice, through time management, the implementation of discipline, and institutional strategies, remains very limited (N. A. R. Alam et al., 2025; Sista & Sodikin, 2022; Syah et al., 2025). Therefore, a shift in research approaches is needed, moving beyond general descriptive accounts toward more in-depth strategic and operational analyses so that the process of *pesantren* adaptation to educational reform can be comprehensively understood.

The structural diversification of *pesantren* into formal vocational education has been widely discussed in various studies. However, understanding of the operational management strategies that enable this transformation remains relatively limited; such strategies include curriculum integration, human resource management, and institutional governance practices (S. Alam et al., 2024; Ritonga, 2025). Existing literature on the structural diversification of *pesantren* into formal vocational education is generally descriptive and tends to emphasize what institutional changes occur, while discussion of how managerial systems support these changes has not been examined in depth (Achmadin et al., 2024; Budiharso et al., 2023; Suwendi et al., 2024). Other studies also stress the importance of aligning character education with vocational skills (Mau, 2024; Solihin et al., 2020). Recent empirical research indicates a growing trend toward the vocationalization of *pesantren*. This trend is reflected in the adoption of hybrid vocational governance models and the institutional restructuring of *pesantren*, these efforts are directed toward meeting labor market standards in post-pandemic Indonesia. However, despite these advancements, the precise mechanisms, such as daily scheduling, disciplinary systems, organizational governance, and strategic market positioning, that allow *pesantren* to hybridize modern competencies with Islamic values remain empirically underexplored (Adiyono et al., 2024). Consequently, the current discourse necessitates a shift from descriptive accounts to a rigorous analytical focus on the strategic and operational dynamics that underpin sustainable adaptation within *pesantren* amid rapid educational reform.

The novelty of this paper resides in its innovative theoretical framework that integrates Institutional Logics and the Resource-Based View (RBV) to shift the discourse on *pesantren* transformation from historical description to analyzing how *Pesantren Manbaul Ulum* reconciles competing community-religious and market-state logics, leveraging internal cultural resources for competitive advantage (Barney et al., 2021; Mustafa et al., 2024; Renkema-Singh & Hilletoft, 2025). This article is considered novel because it does not merely describe changes in *pesantren*, but analyzes in depth how those changes are implemented. By using the Institutional Logics and RBV frameworks, the study explains how *Pesantren Manbaul Ulum* balances religious values with market and state demands through the use of internal cultural resources, thereby filling a gap in previous studies that had not examined the operational mechanisms

behind *pesantren* transformation. While studies acknowledge the importance of aligning vocational training with ethical frameworks to enhance relevance (Zulhi et al., 2023), and the necessity for *pesantren* to balance market demands with traditional values (Supraptono et al., 2021). this study provides a granular, process-oriented model of the specific managerial strategies that enable these institutions to cohesively merge vocational aspirations with Islamic tenets, offering essential insights for sustaining relevance in an evolving educational landscape (Raj, 2025; Renkema-Singh & Hilletoft, 2025).

This paper is built on the central argument that the success of Pesantren Manbaul Ulum is not accidental but is the result of a deliberate and sophisticated strategy of institutional hybridity. We posit that the *pesantren* does not merely allow its traditional and modern systems to coexist; it actively creates a synergistic ecosystem where each reinforces the other. Specifically, this paper seeks to demonstrate that: 1) the integration is operationalised through a structured "dual-curriculum" model that frames vocational learning within a spiritual context; 2) the internalisation of values is achieved through a unique disciplinary system that functions as a strategic, VRIN (Valuable, Rare, Inimitable, Non-substitutable) resource; and 3) the *pesantren* strategically positions itself in the educational market by leveraging this very hybridity, the production of "morally-grounded technicians", as its unique selling proposition, thereby turning a potential identity conflict into a source of sustainable competitive advantage.

II. METHOD

This study utilised a qualitative single-case study design to conduct an in-depth exploration of the integrated educational model at Pesantren Manbaul Ulum and its Vocational School in Wonosari, Bondowoso, from January to June 2024, providing a rich, contextualised understanding of institutional innovation and strategic management in this unique religious-vocational context. The research context aligns with insights regarding the critical role of institutional support in fostering sustainable educational innovations (Lyu, 2024), while directly addressing the necessity for qualitative investigation into the holistic dynamics of innovation within educational settings identified by Noruzy et al. (2017). By focusing on the operational mechanisms behind strategic integration, this targeted investigation moves beyond descriptive accounts prevalent in existing literature to develop a process-oriented model that demonstrates how such institutions can constructively navigate the dual imperatives of maintaining religious integrity while achieving educational and competitive relevance.

For the sake of depth and triangulation, data were gathered through three primary methods. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a particular group chosen among the key holders representing major functional domains of the institution. Rather than being selected based on high numerical quantity, the informants were clustered on the basis of competency fields, namely leadership, curriculum and academic management, teaching practice, and exposure to students. Each cluster had either 2 or 3 participants strategically selected, making a core group of 10 informants who played a significant role in the *pesantren*-Vocational School integration process. With this limitation on the number of interviewees, it would lend itself to greater citation patterns, thematic consistency, and more reliable cross-validation both within and across clusters. Second, participatory observation was done, placing the researcher within the workings of the day-to-day unfolding of events such as the religious rituals, the

vocational workshops, and school governance functions, thereby enabling direct observation of the embedding of the values into practice. Finally, document analysis was conducted on key institutional records, including curriculum documents (*Kurikulum Operasional Satuan Pendidikan/KOSP*), MoUs with industry partners, disciplinary records, parent satisfaction surveys, and the *pesantren's* historical archives. This combination of focused interviews, observation, and document analysis not only enhanced the credibility of the data but also facilitated triangulation without the usual disagreements of having an overly large sample for interviews.

The data analysis followed an interactive model as proposed by Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña (2014), which consists of three concurrent flows of activity: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Operationally, all interview transcripts, field notes, and documents were first coded openly. These codes were then grouped into categories based on thematic similarities (e.g., "Integration Strategies", "Disciplinary Mechanisms", "Market Positioning"). These categories were subsequently organised into the central themes presented in the findings section. Throughout the process, continuous reflection and peer debriefing were utilised to enhance the trustworthiness and validity of the analysis. Data analysis was subsequently thought of as following the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldañah, which consisted of three stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data condensation theoretically refers to an analytical process wherein raw information is selected, simplified, abstracted, and transformed into meaningful units. Practically, this begins by open coding interview transcripts, observational notes, and documents, and gradually progresses to the focusing and categorisation of the emergent codes into analytical clusters such as "integration strategies," "disciplinary mechanisms," "market positioning," and so on. This has been integrated under display data, wherein the categories have been organised into matrices for visualisation and thematic charts aimed at identifying patterns, relationships, and contradictions across stakeholder groups. The last concluding stage, drawing and verifying conclusions, contains the development of interpretations, making the robustness check of emerging themes, and conducting comparisons iteratively against data sources to secure even consistency and depth of explanation.

To validate these analyses, a few measures were incorporated for research credibility and trustworthiness in the analysis. Methodological triangulation was achieved through the verification of interview findings with observations and documents. Member checking was done as preliminary interpretations were shared with selected informants for accuracy and to eliminate researcher bias. External qualitative researchers did a peer debriefing on the study in order to sharpen the boundaries of themes and question personal biases. Last, audit trail maintenance documented all the analytical decisions made and coding revisions done within that timeframe. This has thus fortified the analysis as theoretically sound and empirically trustworthy.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The field research at Pesantren Manbaul Ulum revealed a multifaceted institutional innovation strategy designed to navigate the competitive vocational education market while rigorously sustaining its core Islamic values. The findings are organised into three key themes: 1) The Dual-Curriculum Integration Model, 2) Value Internalisation

through Disciplinary Mechanisms, and 3) Strategic Market Positioning of Manbaul Ulum Vocational School.

The Dual-Curriculum Integration Model: Blending *Salaf* and *Khalaf*

A central finding is the formalised integration of the traditional (*salaf*) curriculum with the national vocational (*khalaf*) curriculum. This is not a mere co-existence but a structured, scheduled synergy. Data from document analysis and interviews with the school principal and curriculum head show a deliberate daily timetable that interweaves religious and vocational activities.

Table 1. Daily integrated schedule for students vocational school

Time (WIB)	Activities	Curriculum Realm	Mandatory Participants
04.00 – 05.00	Tahajud & Tadarus Al-Qur'an	Salaf	Hostel & Non-Student
07.00 – 07.45	Dhuha Prayer & Qur'an Study Together	Salaf	All Students
07.45 – 12.30	Vocational Theory Class (Multimedia, Pharmacy, etc.)	Khalaf	All Students
12.30 – 13.00	Congregational Prayer and Cult (Short Study)	Salaf	All Students
13.00 – 15.00	Vocational Practicum (Lab/Workshop)	Khalaf	All Students
17.00 – 18.00	Asar Prayer & Study of the Yellow Book	Salaf	Sabrina is in a dorm room.
19.00 – 21.00	Guided Learning & Skill Development (Graphic Design, etc.)	Mixed	All Students

Source: Field observation and interview with curriculum head, 2024

Table 1 clearly visualises the model of integration of *salaf* (religious) and *khalaf* (vocational) curricula implemented at the Manbaul Ulum Islamic Boarding School, which shows not only co-existence but deep structural synchronisation. This daily schedule is designed to systematically frame vocational activities, such as theory and practice classes in the workshop, with religious rituals such as Dhuha prayers, congregational Dhuhr, and the study of the Qur'an and the yellow book. This interlocking or time attribution creates a learning ecosystem where the development of technical competencies always begins, is interspersed, and ends with the strengthening of spiritual and Islamic values. This mechanism ensures that religious values are not taught in isolation, but are internalised as the context and ethical framework of each vocational skill learned. Furthermore, the differentiation of obligations, such as the study of the yellow book after Asr, which is only mandatory for mukim students, shows the strategic flexibility of *pesantren* in applying this core model to various types of students (students and non-students), while maintaining the intensity of religious education in the dormitory environment.

This structured integration ensures that vocational learning is consistently framed within an Islamic spiritual and ethical context, addressing the potential "moral vacuum" often associated with purely market-driven vocational education. As captured in Table 1, the dual curriculum model is operationalised by a further verification of the field data provided by interviews, observations, and documentation. Interview excerpts with teachers reveal that vocational instructors purposely start every class with moral

reflection on items pertaining to the day's technical material, thereby illustrating how religious values permeate pedagogical routines. Participatory observations over several weeks confirmed that students invariably proceed from religious rituals to workshop activities without any time intervals, thereby attesting to the *pesantren's* strict adherence to integrated scheduling. Documentary verification, in the form of logs of attendance, sheets for the observance of worship, and records of workshop access, all indicate that attendance of religious activities impacts students' access to vocational facilities, thereby strengthening the *pesantren's* strategic dealing that emphasises piety as an entry route to competence. Such multi-sourced data affirm the idea that the daily schedule is not just a formal plan but rather a lived practice that systematically orchestrates the interdependence of *salaf* and *khalaf* learning.

Value Internalisation through Disciplinary and Reward Mechanisms

The *pesantren* employs a robust system of discipline and spiritual metrics to internalise Islamic values. Interview data from 15 teachers and five dormitory supervisors (*mushrif*) identified key mechanisms. The most significant finding is the direct linkage between religious observance and academic/vocational privileges.

Table 2. Disciplinary and incentive mechanisms for value internalisation

Mechanism Type	Description	Purpose / Consequence
Punishment	Deduction of points, additional cleaning duties, or temporary suspension of workshop access for violations such as leaving congregational prayers.	Providing real consequences for neglect of worship, linking spiritual discipline with access to vocational learning.
Spiritual Metric	It is mandatory to recite the Qur'an twice a month, with progress recorded in a personal log book.	Ensuring continued engagement with the primary sources of Islam, forming the identity of the Qur'an.
Reward & Recognition	Students with religious observance and high academic achievement are given the role of peer mentors or assistants in advanced laboratory projects.	Providing incentives for excellence in both domains, as well as fostering leadership based on integration between piety and competence.

Source: Interviews with teachers and *mushrif*, 2024

Table 2 reveals how the disciplinary system at the Manbaul Ulum Islamic Boarding School functions as a strategic social engineering mechanism, transforming abstract values into measurable operational practices. Through a careful combination of punishment (such as the revocation of workshop access for missing congregational prayers), spiritual metrics (such as the target of khatam Al-Qur'an), and rewards (such as recognition as a mentor), these *pesantren* effectively create an ecosystem where spiritual obedience and academic-vocational achievement are not only expected, but mutually reinforcing. The logical consequence of this design is the internalisation of an understanding that technical competence without piety is flawed. Conversely, piety must be manifested in the form of high competence and work discipline. Thus, this system succeeded in encoding Islamic ethics into the DNA of the vocational education process, resulting in graduates who were not only skilful but also possessed of measurable and guaranteed moral integrity.

One dormitory supervisor stated, "A student who is negligent in prayer will find his access card to the multimedia lab deactivated. We want them to understand that

technical skill without divine consciousness is meaningless." This quote encapsulates the strategic fusion of disciplinary systems.

Strategic Market Positioning of Manbaul Ulum Vocational School

To compete with state-run vocational schools, Manbaul Ulum Vocational School has strategically positioned itself by leveraging its unique *pesantren* identity and forming robust industry partnerships. A survey of 150 parents of Vocational School students revealed the primary reasons for choosing the institution.

Table 3. Primary reasons for parents choosing Manbaul Ulum Vocational School (n=150)

Reason	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Strong Emphasis on Character and Religious Education	112	74.7%
Affordable Tuition Fees	98	65.3%
Good Reputation & Graduate Absorption Track Record	85	56.7%
Variety of Relevant Vocational Majors	79	52.7%
Safe & Disciplined School Environment	75	50.0%

Source: Parental perception survey, 2024

Based on the data in Table 3, the main attraction of Manbaul Ulum Vocational School in the eyes of parents lies precisely in the intangible values it offers, not solely in instrumental excellence. The highest-ranked "Strong Emphasis on Character and Religious Education" factor indicates that, in the competitive vocational education market, successful positioning is one that is able to offer "moral assurance" to the younger generation. This reinforces the proposition that Islamic boarding school innovations in hybridising religious and market logic create a unique competitive advantage that secular competitors do not have. This parental choice also affirms that affordable costs (65.3%) and reputation for graduate absorption (56.7%) function as driving factors, but the core value that is the main differentiator is the institution's ability to instil Islamic character and identity in the context of modern vocational education. Furthermore, data from the school's partnership records show a significant expansion in MoUs with Industries (*Dunia Usaha dan Dunia Industri/DUDI*), which is a critical factor for vocational school credibility and graduate employability.

Table 4. Growth of industry partnerships at Manbaul Ulum Vocational School

Academic Year	New MoUs Signed	Cumulative MoUs	Key Sectors
2019–2020	3	12	Automotive, Tailoring
2020–2021	2	14	Multimedia, Agriculture
2021–2022	5	19	Pharmacy, IT, Automotive
2022–2023	4	23	Hospitality, Digital Marketing
2023–2024	6	29	Clinical Pharmacy, Advanced Agribusiness

Source: Manbaul Ulum Vocational School partnership office document analysis, 2024

Table 4 shows the growth trend of Manbaul Ulum's Vocational School industrial partnership (*Memorandum of Understanding/MoU*), which is not only consistent but also significantly accelerating, from the accumulation of 12 MoUs in 2019–2020 to 29 MoUs in 2023–2024, with a record six new MoUs signed in the last year. This growth pattern, especially in modern and high-demand sectors such as Clinical Pharmacy, Modern Agribusiness, and Digital Marketing, shows that the value of the *pesantren* proposition, namely producing graduates who are technically competent and with high integrity, is increasingly recognised and needed by the DUDI. This strategic expansion not only reflects an effective response to labour market dynamics but also serves as a strong external validation that a hybrid education model that integrates religious logic and market logic has succeeded in creating graduates who have different and competitive added value in the eyes of the industry.

This increasingly diversified partnership growth pattern also proves the institutional innovation hypothesis that the hybridisation of *pesantren* values is actually a competitive advantage in Indonesia's increasingly competitive vocational ecosystem. The trust given by industries in strategic sectors such as clinical pharmacy and modern agribusiness—which requires high ethical standards and accountability—is empirical proof that the integrity of character formed through the discipline of Islamic boarding schools has been considered as social capital that can be converted into economic value. In other words, this educational model succeeds in transcending the traditional dichotomy between religious education that is considered closed and the demands of the job market that are pragmatic, creating an ecosystem that in institutional logic theory is called "hybrid institutional logics"—where religious logic and market logic do not negate each other but instead work together to create a unique and adaptive institutional form. The increase in the number and quality of this MoU is thus not just a quantitative indicator, but a reflection of the acceptance of a new paradigm in vocational education that places ethics and spirituality as core competencies in facing the industrial revolution 4.0.

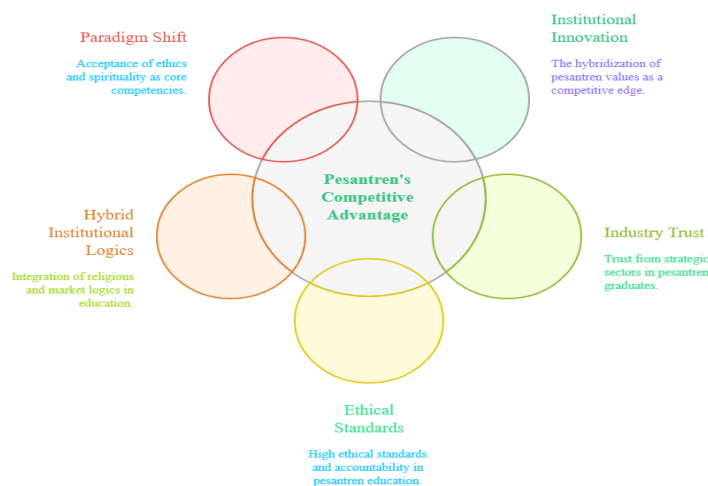


Figure 1. Hybrid educational model

The Head of the Vocational School explained this strategy: "Our competitors have bigger budgets from the government. Our advantage is our product: graduates who are not only technically skilled but also trustworthy, disciplined, and morally grounded. This is what we sell to our industry partners, and they value it."

Table 5. Representative interview excerpts supporting strategic market positioning findings

Informant Cluster	Code	Role	Representative Interview Excerpt
Leadership Cluster	P1	Head of SMK	“Our competitors have bigger budgets from the government. Our advantage is our product: graduates who are not only technically skilled but also trustworthy, disciplined, and morally grounded.”
Leadership Cluster	P2	Kyai (<i>Pesantren</i> Leader)	“Industry partners trust us because we guarantee moral integrity. Skill can be trained, but honesty and discipline require a spiritual ecosystem.”
Curriculum & Academic Management	P3	Curriculum Head	“We design the curriculum so that every technical competency has an ethical anchor. This alignment is what the industry repeatedly appreciates.”
Curriculum & Academic Management	P4	Academic Coordinator	“When companies visit, they always ask about students’ discipline first, not just their technical certificates.”
Teacher Cluster	P5	Vocational Teacher (Multimedia)	“Companies told us they prefer our students because they are punctual and responsible. These soft skills come from <i>pesantren</i> discipline.”
Teacher Cluster	P6	Vocational Teacher (Pharmacy)	“Even in practicum, we integrate adab before skill. The industry acknowledges that students with strong attitudes learn faster on the job.”
Teacher Cluster	P7	Religious Studies Teacher	“Market relevance is important, but we ensure their morality does not fade. This balance becomes our unique selling point.”
Student Cluster	P8	Student (<i>Santri</i>)	“When we interned at companies, they said the reason they accepted us was that <i>pesantren</i> students are usually disciplined.”
Student Cluster	P9	Student (Non- <i>Santri</i>)	“The combination of workshop skills and <i>pesantren</i> ethics helps us be more confident during industrial placements.”
Industry-Linked Administration	P10	Partnership & MoU Officer	“Most of our MoUs grew because industries saw the consistency of our graduates’ behaviour and work ethic during internships.”

Table 5 illustrates how strategic market positioning is supported by consistent perspectives across all informant clusters, not solely from the head of the Vocational School. Voices from leadership, curriculum managers, teachers, students, and the partnership office collectively emphasise that the *pesantren*’s competitive advantage lies in producing morally disciplined and technically competent graduates. These multi-source interview excerpts demonstrate strong triangulation, showing that industry appreciation for character, discipline, and work ethic is a recurring theme across

stakeholders. The convergence of views confirms that the *pesantren's* hybrid model is not merely conceptual but is recognised and validated at multiple operational levels. In conclusion, the findings demonstrate that Pesantren Manbaul Ulum's innovation is a calculated, multi-layered strategy. It successfully creates a "hybrid" educational model where the reinforcement of Islamic values through discipline and integration becomes the unique selling proposition that allows it to thrive in a competitive market.

Sustaining Islamic Values through Institutional Innovation

The findings from Pesantren Manbaul Ulum illustrate a sophisticated model of institutional adaptation that transcends mere structural change, highlighting the *pesantren's* strategic innovation in hybridising competing institutional logics. By employing the theoretical frameworks of Institutional Logics and the RBV, this analysis argues that the *pesantren* effectively navigates the complex landscape of market demands and religious imperatives, ultimately creating a unique, inimitable resource that confers a competitive advantage. As noted by Pinz et al. (2024), organisations that align multiple logics within their value creation processes can enhance stability in hybrid forms, thereby consolidating diverse institutional demands into a coherent strategy. This notion of organised logics resonates with the concept of structured flexibility emphasised by Smith & Besharov (2019), suggesting that adaptability in responding to competing demands is pivotal for sustaining organisational hybridity. This study extends the Institutional Logics framework by showing how *pesantren* not only balance contending religious–market logics but actively synthesise them into a new hybrid logic that reshapes daily practices, governance, and identity formation—thus expanding the theory's reach into faith-based vocational institutions in non-Western contexts. Furthermore, this study's findings sharpen the RBV by demonstrating that, when institutionalised as an operational mechanism, religious discipline acts as a VRIN resource borne out of cultural–organisational processes rather than through inheritance or naturation, thereby providing a conceptual alteration to the formation and sustenance of intangible resources in hybrid organisations.

Organisations that successfully align multiple institutional logics within the value-creation process tend to exhibit greater stability in hybrid organisational forms (Gregori et al., 2019; Zollo et al., 2023). Their study mainly deals with nonprofit hybrid organisations in general, not specifically with Islamic education. However, the mechanisms they describe, cultural integration, value consolidation, and governance alignment, are very much relevant to *pesantren* since they also operate under intersecting logics of religion, community, and market. To strengthen this link, research on faith-based education institutions describes similar dynamics in that faith-based schools engage in selective coupling and internal alignment to maintain their spiritual identity while responding to external performance pressures (Supraptono et al., 2021). This perspective complements the concept of structured flexibility, in which adaptive processes to competing institutional demands are necessary to sustain hybrid organisational forms in religious institutions such as *pesantren* (Asrori et al., 2025; Mustofa et al., 2023). Collectively, these studies provide a broader theoretical foundation for applying hybrid logic theory to Islamic boarding schools undergoing vocational modernisation.

This study demonstrates that Pesantren Manbaul Ulum's strategic hybridisation of religious and vocational logics exemplifies how engaging with institutional plurality can uncover new market opportunities while enhancing organisational agency,

ultimately creating a compelling case of strategic coherence amid complexity. The *pesantren*'s innovative practices in managing tensions among competing logics reflect findings on the importance of cultivating environments that enable the dual achievement of religious missions and commercial viability, thereby reinforcing Islamic values while addressing practical educational needs (Basori et al., 2023; Muhajir et al., 2025; Zahiri & Sahal, 2025). Through its detailed account of the operational strategies enabling this hybridisation, this research contributes valuable insights into the mechanisms that facilitate effective institutional adaptation, underscoring how religious educational institutions can not only navigate but thrive within increasingly complex socio-economic landscapes by transforming institutional complexity into strategic advantage.

1. Hybridising institutional logics: beyond co-existence to synergy

Research on *pesantren* in Indonesia shows that these institutions face a dual challenge: maintaining religious traditions while meeting the demands of modern education. Recent studies find that *pesantren* adapt institutionally through changes in governance and practices that preserve core Islamic values while remaining responsive to social and educational changes (Sugito, 2024). The concept of hybrid *pesantren* emerges when *pesantren* integrate traditional practices with digital learning, extending their educational authority into the technological realm without losing their religious identity (Mustofa et al., 2023). Evaluations of vocational schools within the *pesantren* context also indicate that integrating religious education with work-related skills presents dilemmas but also opportunities to synergise both logics (Muttaqin, 2025). The hybrid learning model, which combines traditional teaching with digital technology, demonstrates that *pesantren* can enhance 21st-century competencies while continuing to strengthen Islamic values (Afifudin et al., 2025). The integrated daily schedule is not merely a juxtaposition of these logics but a structural mechanism whereby vocational training activities are framed and sanctified by religious practices, such as prayer and Quranic study, thus reinforcing the *pesantren's* religious mission while fulfilling contemporary educational demands. In this section, the Institutional Logics framework is used as an analytical lens to interpret how Islamic boarding schools negotiate structural change, reconfigure symbolic meanings, and redesign managerial practices in response to external pressures (Kholida et al., 2025). The Indonesian educational landscape represents a battleground of competing institutional logics, where the traditional religious-community logic of *pesantren*, which emphasises sacred authority and the reproduction of religious knowledge, combats the modern state-market logic of vocational education that prioritises employability and technical competence (Muhajir et al., 2025). While existing literature often frames the relationship between these logics as one of tension or compromise, our findings from Pesantren Manbaul Ulum suggest a more dynamic process. Specifically, this institution has managed to go beyond mere compromise, creating a deliberate hybrid logic that integrates these competing frameworks into a cohesive operational strategy. The integrated daily schedule is not simply a juxtaposition of these logics, but rather a structural mechanism in which vocational training activities are framed and sanctified by religious practices, such as prayer and Quranic study, thus reinforcing the *pesantren's* religious mission, while also addressing contemporary demands for technical competence and employability (Abdurrohim et al., 2023).

This innovative approach challenges the earlier discourses put forth by scholars such as Geertz (1960) and Horikoshi (2001), who primarily characterised the authority of *kyais* as conventional and charismatic. At the outset, we have an innovative answer to the

earlier anthropological interpretations of *pesantren* leadership, posed not so much in rejectionism as a broadened approach. Research shows that kyai leadership is not only based on traditional charisma but also includes managerial capacity and involvement in managing modern education, including policy and administrative aspects in the digital era (Ramadhani et al., 2025). Another study finds that kyai combine informal authority with managerial competence in educational and organisational practices in *pesantren*, including planning, organising, and evaluating educational processes (Fauzi et al., 2025). A study on kyai leadership in *pesantren* economic organisation development shows that kyai play a strategic role in economic empowerment and institutional management, reflecting a broader role beyond traditional authority (Prastyanto, 2024).

Our findings support such an extended argument by demonstrating how the kyais at Manbaul Ulum not only embody spiritual and charismatic leadership but also strategically implement initiatives related to organising, curriculum integration, and market positioning, moving far beyond the classical tropes of symbolic authority. Hence, instead of opposing Geertz and Horikoshi, this work shows how kyai authority has evolved into an in-between power that mixes charismatic legitimacy with contemporary managerial rationality. In contrast, the leadership of Kyai Salwa epitomises institutional entrepreneurship, a concept articulated by Battilana et al. (2009), where charismatic authority is deftly leveraged to integrate a potentially disruptive market logic into the *pesantren's* operational fabric. This argument is supported by Pache & Santos (2013), who illustrate that hybrid organisations internally manage competing institutional logics not through decoupling but via selective coupling—strategic alignment that solidifies legitimacy without necessitating costly compromises. Our analysis further undermines Azra et al. (2010) concerns regarding the detrimental impacts that such changes may impose on Islamic educational dynamics. Instead, when managed through a hybrid logic, the incorporation of vocational education emerges as a mechanism that sustains and revitalises religious values, rendering them functional and relevant in a contemporary economic context.

Overall, this case study of Manbaul Ulum provides critical insights into how *pesantren* can not only survive but thrive amidst institutional pluralism, thereby contributing to a broader discourse on the management of competing logics within hybrid organisations. As highlighted by Smith & Besharov (2019), navigating multiple institutional logics is not merely a challenge to be reconciled but an opportunity for innovative re-framing that can enhance operational viability and social impact in complex environments.

2. Disciplinary mechanisms as strategic resources: The RBV of piety

The findings from Pesantren Manbaul Ulum indicate that its system of disciplinary mechanisms serves as a strategic resource, aligning with the principles of the RBV. This theory posits that organisations must possess resources that are VRIN to achieve sustained competitive advantage. The analysis reveals that this disciplinary framework is not merely a cultural artefact but a pivotal VRIN resource that distinguishes Manbaul Ulum within the educational landscape. First, this system is particularly Valuable, producing "moral graduates" that meet the expectations of parents and industry partners. Survey results support this, although specific data should be referenced directly in this context.

Its 24/7 all-around immersive educational environment is the Rarity of the system; therefore, it can hardly be made available to the public and state vocational schools, where formal instruction strictly limits learning to classroom hours, and any moral

formation is given only through periodic counselling, not uninterrupted habituation. Quite the opposite, the residential model of the *pesantren* embeds religious rituals, collective discipline, and character-building within the students' everyday life, creating forms of behavioural consistency that secular institutions cannot systematically construct. The system is also Inimitable because its effectiveness arises from a socio-religious culture, communitarian norms, and the kyais' charisma-attributes that state vocational schools cannot duplicate due to their different approach to governance, cultural mandates, and regulatory constraints. The upshot is that there is a high degree of causal ambiguity: even though any competitors may attempt to imitate certain disciplinary practices, they remain cut off from the spiritual authority, communal ethos, and integrated environment that makes the *pesantren* model uniquely effective.

Finally, the Non-substitutability of this framework is critical; no technological solution or alternative counselling program can effectively replicate the peer-supported and spiritually-sanctioned discipline inherent to the *pesantren* framework. The identification and leverage of strategic resources such as this remain essential for educational organisations striving to elevate their competitive stance.

Thus, the ability of Pesantren Manbaul Ulum to enforce discipline and embed core values reflects its core competency and extends the RBV framework traditionally applied in corporate contexts into educational environments. This adaptation suggests that attributes like "piety" and "discipline" are not merely cultural elements but can be strategically integrated into an educational organisation's portfolio of intangible assets that contribute to its long-term viability and success. These findings encourage further research on how educational institutions can cultivate similar VRIN resources in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

3. Strategic positioning: leveraging hybridity as a unique selling proposition

The market success of Manbaul Ulum Vocational School, evidenced by parental choice (Table 3) and growing industry partnerships (Table 4), can be understood through the lens of strategic positioning. Instead of competing with state schools on the same grounds (e.g., more advanced equipment, lower fees), the *pesantren* has chosen a differentiation strategy.

Our survey data (Table 3) clearly shows that the primary driver for parental choice is the "Strong Emphasis on Character and Religious Education" (74.7%), outweighing even "Affordable Tuition Fees" (65.3%). This indicates that the *pesantren* has successfully created and communicated a unique value proposition. It does not sell vocational skills alone; it sells "vocational skills with guaranteed moral integrity."

This positioning directly addresses the anxieties of Muslim parents in a modernising world, who desire economic security for their children without compromising religious identity. The growing number of MoUs (Table 4) indicates that the industry also recognises this value proposition. Employers are not just buying technical skills; they are buying a reduction in the transactional costs associated with employee reliability, honesty, and discipline—traits that the *pesantren's* system is explicitly designed to produce.

4. Theoretical and practical implications

This study has several important implications that extend the discourse in both theoretical and practical domains. Theoretically, it enriches Institutional Theory by

demonstrating how religious organisations can hybridise competing logics, allowing them to thrive while maintaining core identities, a concept that suggests hybrid organisations can create new institutional logics that integrate and balance conflicting demands. However, the specific reference Labadze et al. (2023) does not adequately support this assertion, as it primarily discusses how educators can provide students with a sustainable competitive advantage without directly addressing hybrid organisations.

Additionally, the findings contribute to Strategic Management literature by illustrating how non-traditional resources, such as cultural discipline and religious piety, can function as significant sources of sustainable competitive advantage within the education sector. Nevertheless, the reference Brendel et al. (2021) focuses on discipline culture in an educational environment and does not explicitly discuss how ethical organising leads to competitive benefits, limiting its relevance to this claim.

Practically, the model established at Manbaul Ulum provides a comprehensive blueprint for other Islamic educational institutions grappling with similar market pressures. It illustrates that a successful path forward does not involve an abandonment of tradition in favour of modernity, nor a rejection of modern demands to preserve tradition. However, rather a strategic integration of both that strengthens and enhances each other. This is particularly relevant as institutions face pressures to produce graduates equipped for today's economic landscape without compromising their religious convictions. Nonetheless, the reference discusses the digital economy and competitive advantage. However, it does not mention managing competing logics or preserving foundational values in educational settings, leading to a lack of support for the claim made (Fast et al., 2023).

In constructing a diagrammatic representation of the findings from this research, it is vital to incorporate multiple bibliometric analyses that emphasise the interconnections within the literature. The significance of article length has been underscored by Labadze et al. (2023), who noted that lengthier articles can offer a more comprehensive methodology and discussion, enhancing their citation potential and subsequent impact within the academic community. This observation aligns with citation analyses, such as those conducted, which often have greater visibility and citation rates due to their categorisation bias towards STEM fields, leading to a disproportionate representation of research outputs across disciplines (Maddi et al., 2025). Moreover, the integration of various bibliometric tools like co-citation and bibliographic coupling can further illuminate thematic classifications in published literature, thus allowing for a nuanced understanding of research trends and author collaborations (Hollweck & Lofthouse, 2021). Furthermore, the work demonstrates how visualisation methods, specifically using diagrams such as Kano diagrams, can enhance the interpretability of citation patterns across different countries and article types, providing a more precise depiction of the interconnectedness of research within a specific field (Chou et al., 2021). Therefore, the diagram not only encapsulates the quantitative metrics of citations and publications but also contextualises them against qualitative analyses that underscore the intricate web of scientific collaboration and knowledge exchange (Arias-Chávez et al., 2022). This comprehensive approach is essential for accurately portraying the complexities of research influences and impacts, ultimately allowing stakeholders to navigate and leverage this information effectively in their academic endeavours.

5. Limitations and avenues for future research

This study's findings have significant implications for future research avenues in the context of vocational education within religious institutions. First, a quantitative study could measure the correlation between religious compliance and graduate employability or workplace performance, shedding light on the tangible benefits of faith-based education in securing meaningful employment. Previous research indicates a positive relationship between strategic planning in educational institutions and enhanced performance outcomes. This suggests that future studies could systematically analyse how embedded religious values influence not only academic success but also professional integration.

Second, exploring similar hybrid educational models in different socio-cultural contexts, such as in Christian or Buddhist vocational schools, could lead to a comparative theory of faith-based vocational education. Such comparative studies could reveal universal strategies for integrating tradition with modern educational practices and adapting these models to varying cultural norms, as evidenced by strategic planning research highlighting educational contexts (Afifudin et al., 2025; Muttaqin, 2025).

Lastly, it is crucial to investigate the long-term sustainability of the hybrid model, particularly during leadership transitions from the founding kyais to subsequent generations. The resource-based view suggests that the retention and adaptability of VRIN resources will be critical in maintaining institutional integrity during such transitions (Zhou & Park, 2024). This aligns with findings that effective leadership and strategic planning positively influence organisational performance in educational settings (Azhar et al., 2024), emphasising the role of vision and adaptability as foundational for enduring success.

As a whole, the showing of innovation at Pesantren Manbaul Ulum demonstrates an in-depth understanding of institutional agility with educational implications transcending time-honoured institutions. It represents a type of change not only "beyond the mosque" in a physical sense, but also a re-conceptualisation of boundaries, crafting a new educative model where sacred and secular, traditional and modern are synergistically fused in an effort to ensure resilience and competitiveness within a fast-evolving landscape. In theory, this study shows how the Institutional Logics framework describes how *pesantren* negotiate and hybridise competing value systems. At the same time, the Resource-Based View explains how this process of hybridisation results in the development of unique and non-replicable capabilities that show how the joint fusion of these two theories lends considerable strength in providing an account of how *pesantren* negotiate on a strategic level in maintaining relevance within contemporary vocational education.

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on this study, the most surprising finding that was only revealed after field investigation was that the strategic innovation of Islamic boarding schools does not lie in curriculum integration alone, but in the transformation of the discipline system and VRIN that cannot be replicated. The direct link between worship adherence (such as perseverance in congregational prayer) and access to vocational learning facilities (such as multimedia workshops) suggests a model in which spirituality is structurally operationalised as a quality control mechanism for human resources. This results in

graduates who have a unique differentiation—a competent technician with a guarantee of moral integrity, that cannot be replicated by any secular vocational educational institution. However, these revolutionary findings must be seen in the context of research limitations, namely the use of a single case study in a single geographic location with a limited sample, so generalisation of findings needs to be done carefully. For further research, it is necessary to explore with a broader scope—covering various typologies of Islamic boarding schools, variations in geographical locations, and education levels, as well as the use of a mixed-methods approach that can measure the statistical correlation between the discipline of worship and the career success of graduates in the world of work. It is only through such a deep and more comprehensive understanding that education policies explicitly directed toward the effective and sustainable support of the modern *pesantren*-hybrid model can be formulated. This reinforces the central proposition of the study: that the synthesis of Institutional Logics and the RBV offers a cohesive theoretical lens through which one can explain how Manbaul Ulum, and possibly likewise *pesantren*, translate hybrid values into strategic capabilities that allow their continued adaptability within the modern vocation of education.

V. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors wish to express their profound gratitude to the leadership, administrators, teachers, and students of Pesantren Manbaul Ulum, Wonosari, Bondowoso, for their invaluable participation, openness, and hospitality throughout the course of this study. Their willingness to share their time, experiences, and insights was fundamental to the depth of this research. We also extend our sincere thanks to the anonymous reviewers whose constructive and insightful feedback significantly strengthened the quality of this manuscript.

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