

Socio-Economic Empowerment of The Community Through Islamic Boarding School

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Abstract

This study examines the transformative role of Pondok Pesantren Darussalam Kunir in fostering socio-economic development within its surrounding community. By implementing empowerment programs that integrate students (santri) and local residents, the pesantren not only serves as an educational institution but also as a catalyst for sustainable economic growth. Through job creation, vocational training, and cooperative development, the pesantren enhances local livelihoods while fostering self-reliance. Key initiatives include hiring local labor in agriculture, construction, and livestock management, as well as operating cooperatives that supply essential goods to both the pesantren and the broader community. Moreover, entrepreneurial training has empowered local residents to establish and sustain small businesses, reducing economic dependency and promoting financial resilience. The findings reveal a significant socio-economic impact, demonstrating how pesantren-based initiatives can serve as scalable models for community-driven development. Strengthening partnerships with government agencies and private sectors could further amplify these impacts, ensuring long-term economic sustainability. This study contributes to the discourse on the role of Islamic educational institutions in community empowerment, offering insights for policymakers and development practitioners seeking to integrate religious institutions into broader socio-economic frameworks.

Keywords: Islamic Boarding Schools; Economic Empowerment; Community Development; Socio-economic.

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Introduction

Islamic Boarding Schools (pesantren) have long been educational institutions that not only focus on religious teaching but also become an important part of the social and cultural life of Indonesian society (Hidayat et al., 2018; Kasdini, 2024; Staquf, 2025; Usman, 2013). In the context of modernization and the challenges of globalization, Islamic boarding schools face great opportunities to transform into empowerment centers that can contribute to improving the economy of society, especially in rural areas. With more than 30,000 Islamic boarding schools spread throughout Indonesia, the potential of Islamic boarding schools to support socio-economic empowerment is very large but is often not utilized optimally (Badrudin et al., 2018; Nadia Fairuza Azzahra, 2020; Setiawan, 2019).

The phenomenon of high poverty, especially in rural areas, is one of the major challenges faced by the Indonesian government (Pau, 2024; Retnosari, 2024; Vita Ferezagia, 2018). Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), Indonesia's national poverty rate in 2021 was recorded at 10.14%, with a higher proportion occurring in rural areas (BPS, 2024). This reflects the existence of a fairly large socio-economic gap between urban and rural areas, which requires more inclusive and sustainable economic empowerment efforts (Taufiq et al., 2020). With 45% of Islamic boarding schools located in rural areas, Islamic boarding schools have strategic potential to play a role in reducing socio-economic disparities and improving community welfare, especially in areas with high poverty rates (Azizah & Fitriyani, 2018). The Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School in Subang is one example of an Islamic boarding school that can play a role in this context, through its strong closeness to the local community (Lailida et al., 2023; Putra, 2021; Samudera, 2023).

Although Islamic boarding schools have played a major role in religious education, the major challenge faced is how to optimize the role of Islamic boarding schools in the economic field (Amin & Panorama, 2021; Asri, 2022). Many Islamic boarding schools still focus on religious education, but the potential to empower communities through skills education, entrepreneurship, and local resource management is often not optimally utilized (Muhadi, 2024; Nadzir,

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2016; NurwadjahAhmad et al., 2020; Putri et al., 2021). This is where the importance of an Islamic boarding school-based economic empowerment approach lies, which not only educates students in the field of religion but also equips them with practical skills that can be applied in everyday life (Susanto, 2014; Radif, 2017; Asri, 2022).

The role of Islamic Boarding Schools is not only as an Islamic educational institution but also has a role in empowering the community around the Islamic Boarding School, as in the research of Khariri (2020), who stated that Islamic Boarding School Cooperatives have an influence on the economic and social fields of the community. Zohdi & Baidawi (2023), said that Islamic Boarding Schools open up employment opportunities and involve the community in the Islamic Boarding School economy. Subekti & Fauzi (2018), community empowerment through Islamic Boarding Schools by building Islamic Madrasah Diniyah has a very good impact on community empowerment. Previous research on community empowerment through Islamic Boarding Schools was only in the fields of employment, education, and economy. In this case, there is still an opportunity for more in-depth research to be studied, namely that Islamic boarding schools also have a role in the field of religion for the surrounding community.

This study focuses on the Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School in Subang to explore the potential of the Islamic boarding school in empowering the economy and social community around it. This Islamic boarding school, with its close social proximity between students and the surrounding community, has great potential to become a center of empowerment that not only teaches religious values but also entrepreneurial and economic skills that can improve the quality of life of the community. For example, skills training programs based in Islamic boarding schools, micro-enterprise development, and Islamic boarding school cooperatives can be the first step to reducing the community's dependence on external assistance and encouraging economic independence. Through the right approach, Islamic boarding schools can become places that encourage socioeconomic transformation of the community, from a passive mindset to a more productive one. Programs that are relevant to local needs, such as skills training for students and the community, as well as the development of Sharia-based businesses, can accelerate improvements in welfare in rural areas, as has been implemented in several other Islamic boarding schools (Chusmeru et al., 2017; Kurniawan et al., 2023; Sulaiman et al., 2016).

The Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School, located in the Subang area, also has the potential to play a central role in introducing Islamic boarding school-based economic empowerment models that have proven effective in other areas (Surya, 2021). The involvement of Islamic boarding schools in the development of Islamic boarding school-based cooperatives or micro-enterprises can inspire other Islamic boarding schools to follow suit, as well as encourage more Islamic boarding schools to become involved in empowering the community's economy (Halimah & Rahman, 2023; Manajemen et al., 2024; Ningsih, 2017; Syathiri et al., 2022). Based on this, a study was conducted that aims to explore more deeply the role of the Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School which plays an active role in community empowerment, especially in terms of employment, local economic development, and social empowerment that can improve the quality of life of the community. The main focus of this study is to identify the potential and challenges faced by Islamic boarding schools in economic empowerment, as well as to explore effective empowerment models that can be applied in Islamic boarding school environments. In addition, this study also aims to identify the contribution of Islamic boarding schools to local economic development and how Islamic boarding schools can play a role in reducing poverty and improving the standard of living of people in rural areas. It is hoped that the results of this study can provide a more comprehensive insight into the role of the Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School as an agent of socio-economic change in Subang, as well as suggest more effective and innovative empowerment strategies that can be adopted by other Islamic boarding schools throughout Indonesia.

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design, which allows researchers to explore the role of the Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School, Subang, in empowering the social and economic community in depth. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to obtain more authentic and comprehensive data through the collection of descriptive information without involving numbers. The population of this study was the Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School, which is located in a rural area of Subang with a relatively high poverty rate. The sample was taken using purposive sampling, involving Islamic boarding school managers, senior students, and the surrounding community involved in the Islamic boarding school empowerment program. Data collection was carried

out using participatory observation techniques to understand the empowerment activities carried out, as well as semi-structured interviews to explore the views and experiences of informants related to the research topic. The data collected were then documented through field notes and audio recordings that were transcribed for further analysis (Mulyana et al., 2024).

The data obtained were analyzed using discourse analysis techniques to identify the main themes related to social and economic empowerment carried out by the Islamic boarding school. The results of the analysis are explained in the form of descriptive texts that describe how the Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School plays its role in improving community welfare. To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, this study applies triangulation techniques, namely comparing information obtained from observations, interviews, and supporting documents to ensure consistency of findings. This study is limited to the Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School in the rural area of Subang, and although the results cannot be generalized widely, this study is expected to provide in-depth insights into the role of Islamic boarding schools in economic and social empowerment. The method used refers to the qualitative research guide by Creswell (2014) Creswell & Poth (2016) and discourse analysis according to Fairclough (2013).

Results and Discussion

Based on the results of observations and interviews with various sources, researchers obtained data related to community economic empowerment activities by the Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School including employment, business or trading opportunities, social activities, and education. In detail, it can be described as follows:

Islamic boarding schools continue to strive to improve facilities and infrastructure, including the construction of important facilities such as classrooms and dormitories. In order to support this development, Islamic boarding schools require a sufficient number of workers for various types of work. Islamic boarding school policies prioritize local residents in recruiting workers. This aims to provide direct benefits to the surrounding community by creating job opportunities that can improve their standard of living. If workers from local residents are not available, then the Islamic boarding school will look for workers from outside. As in the table below:

Table 1. Labor distribution.

No	Type of work	Amount	Information
1	Construction workers	15 people	All men
2	Cook	5 people	All Women
3	Rice field manager	5 people	All men
4	Garden manager	3 people	All men
5	Goat farming	2 persons	All men
6	Cleaning worker	3 people	All men
7	Security guard	2 persons	All men
	Amount	35 people	

Based on the table. The largest workforce is allocated to construction work, involving 15 men. They are responsible for the construction and renovation of the Islamic boarding school facilities. In addition, to meet daily needs such as food, the Islamic boarding school employs 5 women as cooks. In the agricultural sector, there are 5 men as rice field managers, who are responsible for planting, caring for, and harvesting agricultural products. In addition, there are 3 men who are responsible as garden managers to ensure that the garden plants remain productive. In the livestock sector, 2 men are specifically assigned to manage goats, including feeding, caring for, and maintaining the health of the livestock. The Islamic boarding school also ensures that the cleanliness and security of the environment are well maintained. For this reason, they employ 3 men as cleaners and 2 men as security officers or guards. Overall, the total number of workers involved reaches 35 people, with the majority of workers being men. The dominance of men in most types of work reflects the greater physical needs in these tasks, such as construction, garden management, and security. In addition, female workers also contribute in important roles, especially as cooks.

The pesantren policy of prioritizing the local community in recruiting workers reflects a commitment to empowering the local economy. By creating jobs in various sectors, pesantren not only carry out educational functions but also play

an active role as a driver of the local community’s economy. This is one of the real manifestations of pesantren in supporting social welfare in a sustainable manner.

Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School not only functions as a center for religious education, but also has a strategic role in empowering the economy of the surrounding community. One real form of this effort is to provide an opportunity for local residents to deposit their merchandise at the Islamic boarding school cooperative. The items deposited include food and daily necessities for students, such as fried foods, uduk rice, buras, crackers, and sausages. This activity not only meets the consumption needs of students, but also becomes a source of additional income for the community around the Islamic boarding school. In addition, the Islamic boarding school also provides an opportunity for local residents to open stalls in the Islamic boarding school area once a month, which coincides with the schedule of visits by the students’ guardians. On that day, the local community sells various types of merchandise, ranging from food, drinks, to other student needs. This opportunity is a momentum for the community to expand their market reach by taking advantage of the crowds and enthusiasm of the visitors who attend.

Based on the records of the Islamic boarding school cooperative, currently there are 10 local people who routinely entrust their merchandise to the cooperative. The goods are marketed to students, Islamic boarding school managers, and visitors, with a mutually beneficial cooperation system. The cooperative functions as a facilitator that ensures that the merchandise sells well, while the community gets stable market access in the Islamic boarding school environment.

Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School has demonstrated a strong commitment to supporting the surrounding community through social empowerment programs. One of the leading initiatives is providing assistance in the form of rice and money to elderly people (lansia) in the area around the Islamic boarding school. This program is run with a routine distribution system every three months, coinciding with the rice harvest season managed by the Islamic boarding school. To date, 30 elderly people have felt the direct benefits of this program. This social assistance program aims to help ease the economic burden of elderly people who tend to be financially vulnerable. Most of the recipients of assistance are individuals who are no longer able to work productively and depend on support from their families or surrounding communities. By providing assistance in the form of basic necessities such as rice and money, the Islamic boarding school hopes to improve the welfare and sense of security for the elderly.

Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School continues to be committed to improving its social and spiritual role in society. One form of this contribution is the granting of a mandate by Pak Kyai to the Asatidz council who were specifically selected to carry out teaching and preaching tasks. This Asatidz Council was selected based on proven competencies in various religious fields, such as teaching reading and writing the Qur’an, becoming a prayer leader, delivering lectures, and giving public religious studies in the prayer rooms around the Islamic boarding school. Until now, there have been 5 Asatidz council members who have been given the trust to carry out this mandate. This program aims to strengthen the relationship between the Islamic boarding school and the surrounding community through the dissemination of practical and applicable religious knowledge.

Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School continues to demonstrate its commitment to community empowerment, especially in the field of religion. One of its flagship programs is the regular pengajian held every week, precisely on Sundays, with Pak Kyai. This activity has become an integral part of the spiritual life of the surrounding community, involving around 50 residents consisting of fathers and mothers. This regular pengajian aims to improve the community’s understanding of religion, strengthen Islamic values in everyday life, and create a more religious and harmonious community. Through this pengajian, the community not only gains religious insight but also solutions to various life problems from an Islamic perspective. The background of this program is based on the importance of religious education as a moral foundation for society. As a respected cleric, Pak Kyai plays an important role in conveying Islamic teachings comprehensively and guiding the community to apply them in everyday life.

Based on the explanation above, the following table can be made:

Table 2. Distribution of Benefits of Islamic Boarding Schools for the Community

Type of Activity	Number of Recipients	Information
Provision of Job Opportunities	35 people	Social Function
Selling in a cooperative	10 people	Community Empowerment and Creativity
Rice and money aid	30 people	Social Function

Type of Activity	Number of Recipients	Information
Regular weekly study sessions	50 people	Community empowerment
Providing teachers/tutors	5 people	Education

Based on Table 2 above, Islamic boarding schools provide benefits to the surrounding community and those far away in terms of material and non-material things.

Supporting and inhibiting factors play a crucial role in the economic empowerment of pesantren. On one hand, there are various challenges that hinder the development of pesantren businesses, such as limited financial resources that restrict business expansion, as well as the lack of managerial knowledge and entrepreneurial skills. Inadequate infrastructure, such as poor road access and limited internet connectivity, poses significant obstacles, especially for pesantren in remote areas. Additionally, resistance to change, particularly in adopting technology and modern methods, often impedes innovation. Uneven policy support and limited access to broader markets further exacerbate these challenges. In many cases, well-designed empowerment programs face setbacks due to a lack of continuous mentoring.

However, despite these challenges, pesantren possesses several supporting factors that can be leveraged to strengthen economic empowerment. Social capital, in the form of alumni networks, community support, and donors, serves as a valuable asset in business development. The high level of public trust in pesantren creates opportunities for economic programs such as sharia cooperatives, while the presence of students (*santri*) and local communities provides a potential workforce that can be trained and empowered. Moreover, the rise of the Sharia economy, driven by increasing demand for halal products, offers pesantren the chance to innovate in business in accordance with Islamic principles. The utilization of digital technology expands marketing opportunities, while government policies such as the Entrepreneur program provide support through funding access and training. By maximizing supporting factors and addressing inhibiting factors, pesantren can play an even greater role in economic empowerment based on Islamic values.

Empowerment Strategy to overcome challenges and take advantage of opportunities, a structured strategy is needed. First, entrepreneurship and management training must be a priority to improve the capacity of Islamic boarding school managers. Basic infrastructure such as road access and internet connections need to be improved through collaboration with the government and the private sector. Business digitalization can expand market reach through e-commerce platforms and social media. Diversification of businesses based on local potentials, such as agribusiness, crafts, and Sharia-based services, can significantly increase Islamic boarding school income. Partnerships with external institutions, such as Islamic banks and donor organizations, can strengthen financial and operational support. Continuous monitoring and evaluation are needed to ensure that empowerment programs run effectively. With this comprehensive approach, Islamic boarding schools will not only become centers of education but also driving forces for an empowered and sustainable community economy.

Islamic boarding schools have long been recognized as religious educational institutions that play a crucial role in character-building and strengthening the spirituality of Muslims. However, their role extends beyond religious education, as they also contribute significantly to community welfare through various empowerment programs. In accordance with Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 18 of 2019 concerning Islamic Boarding Schools, community empowerment is implemented through several initiatives, including fieldwork training and practice, strengthening the economic potential of both the boarding school and the surrounding community, and establishing cooperatives, financial institutions, and micro, small, and medium enterprises. Additionally, these institutions provide assistance in marketing community products, offer loans and financial aid, and conduct financial management training to optimize and control economic quality. Furthermore, Islamic boarding schools engage in social community activities, integrate technology into the industrial sector, and continuously develop other programs to enhance their role in fostering a more prosperous and self-sufficient society.

Economic empowerment based on Islamic boarding schools is expected to create new jobs and increase local economic competitiveness, through appropriate community empowerment. It will be an action to reduce poverty with awareness of expanding capabilities, such as general education, basic health care, and ideal plans in community protection. In addition, there is a real distribution of capital in this case, namely land and access to capital (Yulivan, 2021). According to Agus, the direction of community empowerment is to make the community stronger and develop to live better and more balanced. This is because efforts from community empowerment can generate business and broaden horizons for

society to be useful so that it can help society make decisions that are considered natural and natural about themselves (Fahmi & Prasetyo, 2020; Payne, 2020).

In this case, Islamic boarding schools have the potential to become pioneers in developing small and medium enterprises (SMEs) around the Islamic boarding school. With the access that Islamic boarding schools have to local resources, such as farmers and craftsmen, Islamic boarding schools can function as a place for local products to be marketed, both for the internal needs of the Islamic boarding school and for sale outside. Products produced by the local community, such as food, drinks, and other daily necessities, can be marketed to students, teachers, and visitors to the Islamic boarding school. This allows for a sustainable economic cycle around the Islamic boarding school that supports the development of small businesses that involve the general public. In other words, Islamic boarding schools can become trading centers for local products, which strengthen the regional economy while providing benefits for small business owners (Zohdi & Baidawi, 2023). Islamic boarding schools today, many manage cooperatives or joint ventures to improve the economy of the boarding school while helping the surrounding community. These cooperatives can be in the form of microfinance institutions or businesses that produce certain products such as agricultural businesses, trade, and microfinance services. With these cooperatives, students and the surrounding community can benefit from providing basic necessities at more affordable prices for the community (Huda, 2021).

In line with the previous discussion, the results of this study indicate that the Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School has a significant role in community empowerment through various fields, namely economic, social, educational, and religious. This Islamic boarding school not only carries out its main function as a religious educational institution, but also becomes a driving force for the economy and welfare of the surrounding community. The Islamic boarding school has created a real economic impact through the provision of employment and support for the trading activities of the surrounding community. Data shows that 35 workers have been employed to support various types of work in the Islamic boarding school environment. This work includes the construction, agriculture, livestock, and cleaning service sectors, with priority given to residents around the Islamic boarding school. This approach reflects the Islamic boarding school's commitment to supporting the local economy.

In addition, the existence of the Islamic boarding school cooperative provides an opportunity for 10 local people to entrust their merchandise, such as food and daily necessities for students. This system allows the community to gain stable market access, while strengthening economic relations between the Islamic boarding school and the community. Providing opportunities for the community to open trading stalls every month also creates additional opportunities to increase their income. The Islamic boarding school also shows a major contribution in the social aspect through routine assistance programs for the elderly. As many as 30 elderly people have received assistance in the form of rice and money every three months, coinciding with the rice harvest season. This program has a significant impact in easing the economic burden on the elderly, especially those who do not have a fixed income. This initiative shows how the Islamic boarding school utilizes internal resources, such as rice harvests, to support the welfare of vulnerable communities.

In the field of education, Islamic boarding schools focus on strengthening the spiritual and intellectual capacity of the community. Through the mandate given to the 5-person board of Asatidz, Islamic boarding schools contribute to teaching reading and writing the Qur'an, delivering lectures, and conducting religious studies in the surrounding prayer rooms. This program creates a positive impact in increasing Qur'an literacy and the community's understanding of religion. The presence of competent Asatidz strengthens the relationship between Islamic boarding schools and the community and creates a more religious community. Regular weekly religious studies involving around 50 residents are also one of the leading programs in spiritual empowerment. This activity provides a deep understanding of religion while also being a discussion forum to answer life's challenges from an Islamic perspective. Through these religious studies, Islamic boarding schools act as centers for fostering morals and ethics in the community, while strengthening relations between scholars and the community.

Conclusions

Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School has a very important role in the socio-economic empowerment of the surrounding community. Through various activities carried out, this Islamic boarding school is able to create jobs and increase the income of the local community. By giving priority to local residents in recruiting workers for various sectors such as construction, agriculture, and animal husbandry, this Islamic boarding school helps reduce

unemployment and improve the local economy. In addition, the Islamic boarding school also develops the local economy through a cooperative that accommodates the needs of the community and the Islamic boarding school for goods. This cooperative program allows the surrounding community to expand market access for their products, while the Islamic boarding school also benefits from the diversity of goods offered, which in turn improves social and economic relations between the Islamic boarding school and the local community.

Darussalam Kunir Islamic Boarding School also focuses on skills and entrepreneurship training. This training program provides practical skills for students and the surrounding community, allowing them to develop micro-businesses. Thus, Islamic boarding schools not only act as religious educational institutions but also as agents of change that can reduce the community's dependence on external assistance by encouraging economic independence. However, there are still opportunities to increase the economic impact generated. By expanding training programs, strengthening the cooperative model, and improving the facilities and infrastructure of the pesantren, Darussalam Kunir can increase its contribution to economic empowerment at a broader level. In addition, collaboration with other pesantren and the private and government sectors will expand the scope of benefits to communities in rural areas, helping to realize more effective poverty alleviation.

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