QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORKS IN INDONESIAN PESANTREN: A SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT MODEL FOR ISLAMIC EDUCATION

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Corresponding Author: Muhammad Kharis Fadillah Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Intan Lampung, Email: mkharisfadillah@radenintan.ac.id **Keywords:** quality assurance; pesantren; Islamic education management; Sustainability; educational leadership.	This study examines quality assurance frameworks in Indonesian pesantren and explores how these frameworks can be developed into a sustainable management model for Islamic education. Pesantren, as long standing Islamic educational institutions, possess distinctive cultural, religious, and organizational characteristics that differentiate them from conventional educational institutions. While contemporary demands for accountability and accreditation have increased the relevance of formal quality assurance systems, many pesantren continue to rely on value based practices rooted in moral authority, communal discipline, and religious leadership. This study addresses the gap between externally driven quality assurance models and the internal educational logic of pesantren. Using a qualitative multiple case study approach, data were collected through semi structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving pesantren leaders, teachers, and administrators. The findings reveal that quality assurance in pesantren operates through a hybrid framework combining formal managerial instruments with informal value oriented mechanisms. Leadership, particularly the role of the kiai, plays a central role in defining educational quality and sustaining institutional coherence. Informal practices such as daily discipline, ethical modeling, and dialogical evaluation function as continuous quality control mechanisms, while formal documentation and internal review systems support external accountability. The study further demonstrates that sustainable quality assurance depends on the alignment between management practices and institutional values. Based on empirical findings, this research proposes a sustainable quality assurance management model that integrates value orientation, balanced leadership, adaptive formalization, continuous reflection, and human resource development. This model contributes to educational management literature by offering a context sensitive approach to quality assurance grounded in Islamic educational traditions. The findings provide practical insights for pesantren leaders and policymakers seeking to enhance educational quality while preserving the identity and mission of Islamic education.

Introduction

Quality assurance has emerged as a fundamental issue in contemporary education, closely linked to demands for accountability, transparency, and continuous institutional improvement. Across different educational systems, quality assurance is no longer understood merely as a technical instrument for evaluation, but as a comprehensive management process that shapes institutional culture, governance, and sustainability (Azizah & Witri, 2021; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). Within Islamic education, particularly in traditional institutions such as pesantren in Indonesia, the discourse on quality assurance develops within a distinctive historical, cultural, and religious context that differs significantly from mainstream educational institutions (Ajizah et al., 2025).

Pesantren represent one of the oldest and most influential forms of Islamic education in Indonesia. Historically, pesantren functioned as centers of religious learning, moral formation, and social leadership, emphasizing mastery of classical Islamic texts, obedience to religious authority, and the cultivation of ethical character. The educational process in pesantren is deeply embedded in daily life,

where learning, worship, and social interaction form an integrated system. This holistic nature has enabled pesantren to survive for centuries and to play a crucial role in shaping Indonesian Islamic identity (Abidin et al., 2024; Dhofier, 2011).

However, contemporary educational transformations have placed pesantren within an increasingly complex environment. The expansion of formal education, state regulation, accreditation mechanisms, and public demand for measurable outcomes have altered the landscape in which pesantren operate. Many pesantren have expanded their educational services to include formal madrasah, vocational schools, and even higher education institutions. This transformation has inevitably exposed pesantren to quality assurance systems that are often derived from modern managerial and bureaucratic paradigms (Azra, 2019; Raihani, 2012).

Quality assurance frameworks commonly applied in national education systems tend to emphasize standardization, performance indicators, documentation, and external evaluation. While such frameworks are effective in ensuring minimum standards and comparability, they often overlook the moral, spiritual, and cultural dimensions that define Islamic educational institutions (Hill et al., 2003; Westerheijden et al., 2007). In the context of pesantren, quality has traditionally been assessed through non formal indicators such as the moral authority of the kiai, the intellectual depth of graduates, the continuity of scholarly transmission, and the ethical conduct of the community (Agustin, 2020). These indicators are difficult to translate into conventional quality assurance metrics, yet they remain central to the legitimacy and sustainability of pesantren education (Hasbulloh, n.d.).

This situation creates a structural tension between externally imposed quality assurance mechanisms and the internal value system of pesantren. On the one hand, pesantren are required to comply with national standards in order to gain legal recognition, access public funding, and enhance institutional credibility (ABDUL, 2022). On the other hand, uncritical adoption of external quality assurance models risks undermining the autonomy, identity, and educational philosophy of pesantren. As a result, quality assurance in pesantren is often implemented in a fragmented or symbolic manner, fulfilling administrative requirements without being fully integrated into institutional management and educational practice (Huda et al., 2019).

From a management perspective, sustainability in education involves more than maintaining operational continuity. Sustainable educational management requires the capacity to preserve core institutional values while responding adaptively to social, technological, and policy changes (Adawiyah et al., 2024). Educational institutions are increasingly required to demonstrate not only effectiveness and efficiency, but also resilience and long term relevance in rapidly changing environments. In this context, sustainability emphasizes the integration of values, organizational learning, and adaptive governance within educational management.

When applied to education, value oriented management implies that quality assurance should serve broader educational purposes, including the development of intellectual capacity, ethical awareness, social responsibility, and personal character. Quality assurance is therefore not merely a procedural mechanism for compliance, but a strategic process that supports holistic educational outcomes and institutional integrity. Such an approach aligns quality assurance with the core mission of education rather than reducing it to administrative formality.

Despite the strategic importance of quality assurance for pesantren, existing academic studies remain limited in scope. Many studies focus on descriptive accounts of quality improvement initiatives or assess pesantren compliance with accreditation requirements. While such studies provide valuable empirical insights, they often fail to conceptualize quality assurance as an integrated management framework rooted in pesantren values and organizational culture. Moreover, few studies explicitly address sustainability as a core dimension of quality assurance in Islamic education, particularly in relation to long term institutional development and value preservation (Adawiyah et al., 2024).

This gap in the literature highlights the need for a more context sensitive approach to quality assurance in pesantren. Rather than positioning pesantren as passive recipients of external quality frameworks, it is necessary to explore how pesantren actively interpret, adapt, and reconstruct quality assurance mechanisms in accordance with their educational mission and institutional identity. Such an approach recognizes pesantren as dynamic educational institutions capable of generating indigenous management models that align with both religious values and contemporary quality demands.

This study aims to contribute to that effort by examining quality assurance frameworks within Indonesian pesantren and reconstructing them into a sustainable management model for Islamic education. The focus is not limited to technical procedures or administrative compliance, but extends to leadership patterns, institutional culture, decision making processes, and long term educational

objectives. By situating quality assurance within the lived reality of pesantren, this study seeks to articulate a model that is both academically robust and culturally legitimate.

The significance of this research lies in its potential theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it challenges dominant quality assurance paradigms by offering an alternative model grounded in Islamic educational traditions and local institutional practices. Practically, it provides guidance for pesantren leaders, educational policymakers, and quality assurance practitioners who seek to enhance institutional quality without compromising the moral and spiritual foundations of Islamic education.

In the broader context of educational reform, the sustainability of pesantren depends on their ability to balance tradition and transformation. Quality assurance, when understood as a value driven and context based management process, can serve as a strategic instrument for ensuring that pesantren remain relevant, credible, and faithful to their educational mission. In this sense, quality assurance is not merely about meeting standards, but about safeguarding the continuity and integrity of Islamic education in Indonesia across generations.

Research Method

This study adopts a qualitative research design using a case study approach to investigate quality assurance frameworks in Indonesian pesantren and to reconstruct a sustainable management model for Islamic education. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for exploring complex social and educational phenomena that are deeply embedded in cultural values, institutional traditions, and human interactions (Creswell, 2013). In the context of pesantren, quality assurance is not merely a technical or administrative mechanism, but a value oriented process shaped by religious authority, leadership patterns, and communal norms.

The case study approach allows for an in depth and holistic examination of quality assurance practices within their real life institutional context. Case studies are widely used in educational management research to capture the interaction between organizational structures, leadership, and cultural dynamics (Yin et al., 2019). This study employs a multiple case study design to enable analytical comparison and to strengthen the robustness of the emerging conceptual model. The selected pesantren represent institutions that have engaged with formal or semi formal quality assurance systems while maintaining strong traditional identities. Such selection enables the study to explore how pesantren negotiate external quality demands with internal educational values.

Data collection was conducted using multiple qualitative methods, including semi structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The use of multiple data sources is intended to enhance data richness and to support triangulation, which is essential for ensuring credibility in qualitative research (Chand, 2025). Semi structured interviews were carried out with key informants such as kiai, pesantren leaders, quality assurance coordinators, teachers, and administrative staff. These informants were purposively selected based on their involvement in institutional governance, educational planning, and quality assurance processes (Miles et al., 2014). The interview protocol focused on participants' understanding of educational quality, institutional goals, quality assurance mechanisms, leadership roles, challenges, and strategies for long term sustainability.

Participant observation was employed to capture how quality assurance practices are enacted in daily pesantren life. Observation focused on teaching and learning activities, evaluation routines, administrative processes, and informal interactions that reflect institutional values and quality culture. Observation is particularly important in religious educational settings, where many quality related practices are embedded in routine behavior and moral discipline rather than formal documentation (Raihani, 2012). Field notes were recorded systematically to document observed practices and contextual conditions relevant to quality assurance and management.

Document analysis was conducted to examine formal representations of quality assurance within pesantren. Documents analyzed included internal quality assurance guidelines, curriculum frameworks, evaluation reports, accreditation documents, organizational structures, and policy statements. Document analysis enables researchers to understand how institutions articulate quality goals and management strategies at the formal level, as well as to assess consistency between policy and practice (Bowen, 2004). These documents also provided important contextual information regarding institutional history and development.

Data analysis followed an inductive thematic approach. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were coded and categorized using thematic analysis procedures as outlined by Braun and Clarke. Initial coding focused on identifying recurring concepts related to quality assurance practices,

management processes, institutional values, and sustainability (Bowen, 2004). These codes were then refined into broader themes through constant comparison across cases and data sources. The analysis moved iteratively between data and theory to construct a sustainable quality assurance management model grounded in empirical findings.

To ensure trustworthiness, this study applied several validation strategies. Triangulation was achieved by cross checking data from interviews, observations, and documents. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with selected participants to confirm interpretive accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Prolonged engagement in the research sites allowed the researcher to develop contextual sensitivity and to reduce interpretive bias. Ethical considerations were addressed throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was ensured through anonymization of personal and institutional identities. The researcher maintained reflexivity and cultural sensitivity, recognizing the religious significance of pesantren environments and the ethical responsibility of representing them respectfully (Cook, 2001).

Overall, this methodological framework provides a rigorous and context sensitive foundation for understanding quality assurance in Indonesian pesantren and for developing a sustainable management model for Islamic education that is both empirically grounded and theoretically informed.

Research Finding
Existing Quality Assurance Frameworks in Indonesian Pesantren

The results of this study demonstrate that quality assurance frameworks in Indonesian pesantren operate through a hybrid system that combines formal managerial instruments with deeply rooted religious, cultural, and moral practices. Unlike conventional educational institutions where quality assurance is largely procedural and documentation driven, pesantren implement quality assurance as a lived institutional process embedded in leadership authority, daily discipline, and communal values. This hybrid character reflects the historical evolution of pesantren as moral communities rather than purely administrative organizations (Anwar & Rosyad, 2021; Dhofier, 2011).

A central finding concerns the role of leadership in defining and maintaining educational quality. In the pesantren studied, quality assurance is strongly associated with the authority of the kiai as the highest educational and moral leader. The kiai functions simultaneously as policy maker, supervisor, and moral exemplar (Dhofier, 2011). Decisions related to curriculum orientation, teacher selection, student discipline, and evaluation standards are largely guided by the kiai's vision of religious and educational excellence. This leadership centered framework creates a strong internal quality control mechanism based on trust, obedience, and moral legitimacy (Al Asyari, n.d.). Similar patterns have been identified in previous studies, which emphasize that pesantren leadership relies more on normative authority than on bureaucratic procedures.

Despite the dominance of personal leadership, the findings indicate a gradual institutionalization of formal quality assurance mechanisms, particularly in pesantren that manage formal education units such as madrasah or Islamic higher education institutions. These pesantren have developed internal documents including academic guidelines, curriculum plans, evaluation instruments, and internal review reports. Such documents are often aligned with national accreditation requirements and internal quality assurance systems mandated by educational authorities (Achmadin et al., 2024). However, their implementation remains flexible and adaptive. Rather than functioning as rigid rules, these documents serve as reference points that guide practice while allowing contextual discretion. This selective adaptation supports the argument that pesantren adopt modern management tools pragmatically rather than ideologically (Arif et al., 2024; Azra, 2019).

Informal quality assurance practices remain central to institutional life. Daily routines such as structured prayer schedules, compulsory study sessions, halaqah discussions, and continuous supervision of student behavior serve as mechanisms of ongoing monitoring and formative evaluation. Teachers and senior students play a crucial role in enforcing discipline and modeling ethical conduct. Quality is assessed not only through academic mastery but also through observable changes in behavior, responsibility, and religious commitment (Aithal & Maiya, 2023). This finding aligns with Harvey and Green's concept of quality as transformation, where educational quality is understood in terms of personal and moral development rather than output efficiency (Harvey & Green, 1993).

Curriculum management also reflects a distinctive quality assurance logic. Mastery of classical Islamic texts remains a primary indicator of academic quality. Evaluation methods are often qualitative and dialogical, relying on oral examinations, direct questioning, and observation of students' reasoning abilities (Dr. Hamid, 2017; Hendawi et al., 2024). While these methods may lack standardized scoring

systems, they enable teachers to assess depth of understanding and intellectual maturity. Studies on pesantren pedagogy suggest that such assessment practices are effective in cultivating analytical thinking and ethical reasoning, even though they resist quantification (Adib, 2021; Bruinessen, 1990).

However, the findings also reveal structural challenges within existing quality assurance frameworks. The coexistence of formal and informal mechanisms sometimes produces fragmentation. Administrative documentation required for accreditation is often perceived as burdensome and disconnected from daily educational practice. Limited human resource capacity and lack of formal training in quality assurance concepts further constrain systematic implementation. These challenges echo findings from broader studies on faith based educational institutions, which highlight tensions between accountability demands and institutional culture (Hanafi, 2019; Huda et al., 2022).

Table 1 summarizes the main components of existing quality assurance frameworks identified in the pesantren studied

Dimension	Quality Assurance Practice	Main Actors	Characteristics
Leadership	Direct supervision and decision making	Kiai	Moral authority, trust based control
Curriculum	Mastery of classical texts and integrated subjects	Teachers, kiai	Depth oriented, dialogical assessment
Teaching process	Daily routines and disciplined schedules	Teachers, senior students	Continuous monitoring
Evaluation	Oral exams and behavioral observation	Teachers	Qualitative and formative
Formal management	Internal guidelines and accreditation documents	Administrators	Adaptive and selective use
Quality culture	Ethical modeling and communal discipline	Entire pesantren community	Value driven and implicit

Table 1. Existing Quality Assurance Components in Indonesian Pesantren

The data presented in Table 1 illustrate that quality assurance in pesantren is multidimensional and cannot be reduced to formal procedures alone. Leadership authority and communal discipline function as the backbone of quality control, while formal management instruments play a supportive role. This configuration explains why pesantren have been able to maintain educational quality over long periods despite limited bureaucratic structures.

From an analytical perspective, these findings challenge dominant assumptions in quality assurance literature that equate quality with standardization and measurement. In pesantren, quality assurance is primarily relational and moral, grounded in shared values and continuous interaction. While this approach has proven effective in sustaining institutional identity, it faces limitations in responding to external accountability demands. The lack of standardized documentation and explicit indicators makes it difficult for pesantren to demonstrate quality in terms recognized by external stakeholders.

Nevertheless, the existing frameworks also offer important lessons for sustainable educational management. The strong integration between leadership, values, and daily practice creates a resilient quality culture that is not easily disrupted by policy changes. This suggests that sustainability in Islamic education is closely linked to the alignment between quality assurance mechanisms and institutional ethos. Studies on sustainable education management emphasize that quality systems rooted in organizational culture are more durable than those imposed externally (Adawiyah et al., 2024; Bruinessen, 1990).

In sum, the findings indicate that quality assurance frameworks in Indonesian pesantren are characterized by hybridity, combining traditional moral governance with selective formalization. While this hybridity presents challenges, it also constitutes a unique strength that can serve as the foundation for developing a sustainable quality assurance management model for Islamic education. The next section builds upon these findings to articulate such a model by integrating pesantren values with adaptive management principles.

Developing a Sustainable Quality Assurance Management Model for Islamic Education in Pesantren
Building upon the empirical findings of existing quality assurance frameworks in Indonesian pesantren, this section discusses the construction of a sustainable quality assurance management model that is context sensitive, value oriented, and institutionally viable. Sustainability in this model is not understood merely as organizational survival, but as the long term capacity of pesantren to preserve their

educational mission, maintain quality standards, and adapt to changing social and policy environments. The discussion integrates empirical insights from the field with relevant theories of educational management and Islamic educational philosophy (Amrullah & Mutholingah, 2025).

A key finding from this study is that sustainability in pesantren quality assurance depends on the alignment between formal management mechanisms and institutional values. Pesantren that demonstrate stronger continuity in educational quality are those that treat quality assurance as an extension of their moral and religious commitments rather than as an external administrative requirement. This confirms the argument that quality assurance systems are more effective when they are embedded within organizational culture and shared values (Achmadin et al., 2024; Al-Fairusy et al., 2020). In pesantren, values such as sincerity, discipline, responsibility, and obedience to knowledge authority function as internal drivers of quality, shaping both behavior and decision making processes. From an Islamic educational perspective, this value driven orientation reflects the foundational aims of pesantren education, which emphasize the development of faith, intellect, and ethical conduct as integrated educational outcomes. Education in pesantren is fundamentally oriented toward forming morally grounded and intellectually capable individuals who are able to contribute responsibly to society (Amirudin et al., 2025). When quality assurance is framed within this educational orientation, it functions as a mechanism for safeguarding the core purposes of education rather than merely serving as a technical instrument of control. In this sense, quality assurance supports balance, coherence, and long term institutional orientation, which are essential for sustainable educational management (Said et al., 2023).

Leadership emerges as a decisive factor in translating values into sustainable management practices. While the charismatic authority of the kiai plays a central role in maintaining quality, the findings also reveal potential vulnerabilities associated with leadership dependency. Institutions that rely exclusively on personal authority face challenges during leadership transitions or periods of organizational expansion (Y. Arifin & Priyana, 2025). Therefore, a sustainable quality assurance management model requires a balance between personalized leadership and institutionalized systems. This involves formalizing quality assurance procedures, delegating responsibilities, and building collective ownership without undermining traditional authority structures. Similar conclusions have been drawn in studies of leadership sustainability in faith based education, which highlight the importance of shared leadership and organizational learning (S. Arifin et al., 2024).

Another critical component of the proposed model is adaptive formalization. Rather than adopting standardized quality assurance frameworks wholesale, pesantren benefit from developing contextual indicators that reflect both academic rigor and moral development. The findings indicate that pesantren already possess rich qualitative indicators of quality, such as student discipline, ethical behavior, and intellectual maturity (Alazmi & Bush, 2024; Fikri et al., 2025). The challenge lies in translating these indicators into manageable and communicable forms that can support internal reflection and external accountability. Educational management literature supports this approach, suggesting that hybrid quality models combining qualitative and quantitative indicators are more suitable for complex educational environments (Akhyar, 2024).

Continuous improvement and reflective practice also constitute essential pillars of sustainability. The study finds that reflective practices are deeply embedded in pesantren culture through regular meetings, collective deliberation, and informal feedback mechanisms. However, these practices often remain undocumented and depend on individual initiative. Formalizing reflection through structured review cycles, internal audits, and documented follow up actions can enhance institutional memory and learning. This aligns with the principle of continuous improvement, which is widely recognized as a cornerstone of effective quality assurance systems (ABDUL, 2022).

Human resource development is another determinant of sustainability. Sustainable quality assurance requires teachers and administrators who possess not only subject matter expertise but also an understanding of quality management principles. The findings indicate that limited training in quality assurance constrains systematic implementation in many pesantren. Investing in capacity building through training, mentoring, and professional development strengthens institutional resilience and reduces dependence on individual leaders. This supports broader research on educational sustainability, which emphasizes the role of human capital in maintaining quality systems over time (Adawiyah et al., 2024).

Based on these discussions, a sustainable quality assurance management model for pesantren can be conceptualized as an integrative system consisting of value orientation, leadership balance, adaptive formalization, continuous reflection, and human resource development. These components are not

sequential but interrelated, forming a dynamic management ecosystem (Adib, 2021). Sustainability emerges from the coherence of this ecosystem rather than from the strength of any single component.

The implications of this model extend beyond pesantren as isolated institutions. At the policy level, the findings suggest that quality assurance frameworks for Islamic education should allow flexibility and contextual adaptation. Uniform standards that ignore institutional diversity risk undermining sustainability and legitimacy. Policymakers can support pesantren by recognizing value based indicators of quality and providing capacity building rather than imposing rigid compliance mechanisms. This approach is consistent with contemporary debates on differentiated quality assurance systems in education (Al Asyari, n.d.; Bruinessen, 1990).

At the institutional level, pesantren leaders are encouraged to view quality assurance as a strategic and ethical responsibility. By integrating quality assurance into long term planning and daily practice, pesantren can enhance educational credibility while safeguarding their identity. The model proposed in this study demonstrates that sustainability and quality are not competing objectives, but mutually reinforcing when grounded in the institutional values and educational mission of pesantren.
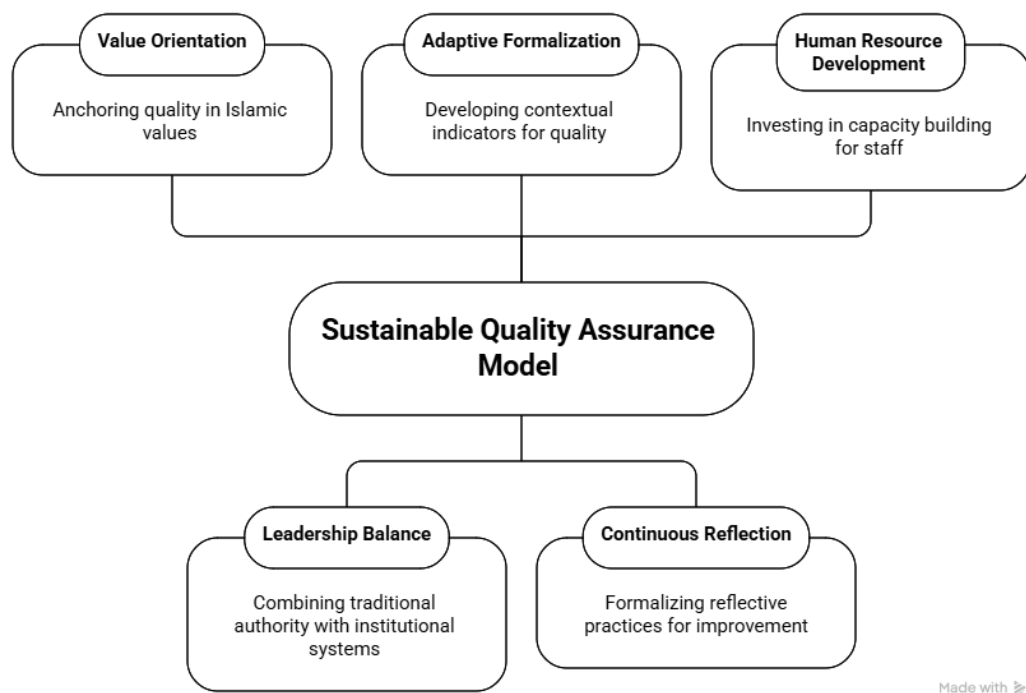

Figure 1 Sustainable Quality Assurance Model for Pesantren

In conclusion, the development of a sustainable quality assurance management model for Islamic education in pesantren requires a shift from procedural compliance to value driven management. The empirical findings confirm that pesantren possess strong internal resources for quality assurance rooted in leadership, culture, and tradition. By systematically integrating these resources with adaptive management practices, pesantren can construct quality assurance systems that are resilient, meaningful, and aligned with their educational. This contribution enriches the broader discourse on quality assurance by offering an alternative model grounded in Islamic educational institutions and contextual realities.

Conclusion

This study has examined quality assurance frameworks in Indonesian pesantren and explored how these frameworks can be reconstructed into a sustainable management model for Islamic education. The findings demonstrate that quality assurance in pesantren operates through a hybrid system that integrates formal management mechanisms with deeply embedded religious values, leadership authority, and communal practices. Rather than functioning solely as a technical or bureaucratic

instrument, quality assurance in pesantren is a value driven process that reflects the moral and educational mission of the institution.

The study reveals that leadership, particularly the role of the kiai, remains central to maintaining educational quality. Moral authority, personal supervision, and exemplary conduct serve as powerful internal quality control mechanisms. At the same time, the increasing engagement of pesantren with formal education systems has encouraged the gradual adoption of documented quality assurance procedures. While this institutionalization enhances accountability and external legitimacy, it also introduces challenges related to administrative capacity and alignment with pesantren values.

The analysis further shows that sustainability in quality assurance depends on the coherence between institutional culture and management practices. Pesantren that succeed in maintaining quality over time are those that frame quality assurance as an extension of their ethical commitments rather than as an externally imposed requirement. The integration of Islamic educational values, particularly those aligned with maqasid oriented thinking, enables pesantren to preserve their identity while adapting to changing educational environments.

Based on these findings, this study proposes a sustainable quality assurance management model grounded in value integration, balanced leadership, adaptive formalization, continuous reflection, and human resource development. This model emphasizes that sustainability emerges from the interaction of these elements rather than from rigid standardization. By recognizing and formalizing existing strengths within pesantren culture, the model offers a viable alternative to conventional quality assurance paradigms.

The contribution of this study is twofold. Theoretically, it enriches the literature on educational management and Islamic education by offering a context sensitive perspective on quality assurance rooted in pesantren traditions. Practically, it provides guidance for pesantren leaders and policymakers seeking to enhance educational quality without compromising institutional identity. Future research may extend this model through comparative studies across different types of pesantren or by examining its applicability in other Islamic educational contexts.

In conclusion, quality assurance in Indonesian pesantren should be understood not merely as a mechanism for compliance, but as a strategic and ethical commitment to sustaining the integrity and transformative mission of Islamic education across generations.

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