



<https://doi.org/10.61650/ajis.v4i1.1373>

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Managing Pesantren Business Units for Santri Economic Empowerment in OKU Timur: A Narrative Synthesis

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Article History: 20 February 2026 • Revised: 25 March 2025 • Accepted: 15 April 2026 • Published: 30 April 2026
date pending

ABSTRACT

Pesantren business units can support institutional income and provide practical learning for santri, yet a profitable enterprise does not automatically empower its student participants. This structured narrative synthesis examines business-unit management in the Belitang area of Ogan Komering Ulu Timur (OKU Timur), with the published study of Darul Huda, Subulussalam, and Darul Falah as the local anchor. Comparative studies on pesantren enterprise and entrepreneurship education inform a proposed framework linking planning, organizing, implementation, and control with five dimensions of empowerment: access, meaningful participation, capacity, agency, and sustainability. The framework asks leaders to set both business and learning objectives, assign progressively responsible roles, teach financial and operational skills through practice, and use business records for reflection. Local resources, market conditions, alumni relationships, Islamic ethical commitments, and students' academic schedules shape which activities are viable. The source describes eleven core publications but does not report a fully reproducible search or quality appraisal; this article therefore presents a narrative conceptual model rather than a systematic review or a new field evaluation. Future multi-case research should document actual student decisions, skill development, business outcomes, and longer-term opportunities.

Keywords: Pesantren Business Units; Santri Empowerment; Economic Independence; Entrepreneurship Education; Narrative Review



ABSTRAK

Unit usaha pesantren dapat mendukung pendapatan lembaga sekaligus menjadi tempat belajar praktik bagi santri, tetapi usaha yang menghasilkan keuntungan tidak serta-merta memberdayakan peserta didiknya. Sintesis naratif terstruktur ini mengkaji pengelolaan unit usaha di wilayah Belitang, Ogan Komering Ulu Timur (OKU Timur), dengan studi terbitan tentang Darul Huda, Subulussalam, dan Darul Falah sebagai pijakan setempat. Penelitian pembandingan tentang usaha pesantren dan pendidikan kewirausahaan digunakan untuk mengajukan kerangka yang menghubungkan perencanaan, pengorganisasian, pelaksanaan, dan pengendalian dengan lima dimensi pemberdayaan: akses, partisipasi bermakna, kapasitas, agensi, dan keberlanjutan. Kerangka tersebut menuntut sasaran bisnis dan pembelajaran, pembagian peran bertahap, latihan keterampilan keuangan dan operasional, serta refleksi berbasis catatan usaha. Sumber menyebut sebelas publikasi inti tanpa strategi penelusuran dan penilaian mutu yang sepenuhnya dapat direplikasi. Karena itu, artikel ini menyajikan model konseptual naratif, bukan tinjauan sistematis atau evaluasi lapangan baru. Penelitian lanjutan perlu mendokumentasikan keputusan santri, perkembangan keterampilan, hasil usaha, dan peluang jangka panjang.

Kata kunci: Unit Usaha Pesantren; Pemberdayaan Santri; Kemandirian Ekonomi; Pendidikan Kewirausahaan; Tinjauan Naratif

How to cite: Muhlisin, Sugianik, D., Suwanto, Fahni, I., & Rahmanto, S. (2026). Management of Pesantren Business Units as a Model for Student Economic Empowerment in OKU Timur Regency: Managing Pesantren Business Units for Santri Economic Empowerment in OKU Timur: A Narrative Synthesis. *Assyfa Journal of Islamic Studies*, 4(1), 685–691. Retrieved from <https://journal.assyfa.com/index.php/ajis/article/view/1373>

1. INTRODUCTION

Pesantren increasingly combine religious education with enterprises that support institutional operations and local livelihoods. Cooperatives, retail outlets, services, farming, and production can also expose santri to practical economic work. Whether such activities educate students depends on what they are able to learn, discuss, and decide. Institutional revenue and student empowerment should therefore be examined as related but separate outcomes (Kuratko, 2005; Amalia & von Korflesch, 2021).

Published research in Belitang, OKU Timur describes business-unit development at Darul Huda, Subulussalam, and Darul Falah, with involvement from caregivers, administrative personnel, managers, and students (Muhtarom et al., 2024). Their portfolios vary with local opportunities, as reported in other pesantren enterprise studies (Fathony et al., 2021; Ladiva, 2023; Musyafa, 2023). Other Indonesian studies discuss business management, student involvement, and the economic independence of pesantren (Arwani & Masrur, 2022; Rahman et al., 2023).

Entrepreneurship education research suggests that practical experience can develop competencies when action is combined with mentoring and reflection (Motta & Galina, 2023; Nabi et al., 2017). A student assigned repetitive unpaid work without learning goals or increasing discretion might contribute to a business without gaining agency. Empowerment research offers a way to distinguish access to resources from the ability to make meaningful choices (Kabeer, 1999). Reviews of entrepreneurship education also caution that intentions and practical skills are distinct outcomes (Bae et al., 2014; Bauman & Lucy, 2021; Carpenter & Wilson, 2022).

The gap addressed here concerns the pathway from the management of a business unit to observable student learning and economic agency. This article synthesizes local cases and broader research into a framework joining planning, organizing, implementation, and control with access, participation, capacity, agency, and sustainability. It proposes a model for field validation rather than reporting new observations from OKU Timur, consistent with prior local accounts of santripreneur and community empowerment (Masum & Wajdi, 2018; Muttaqin, 2011).

2. RESEARCH METHODS

The supplied manuscript identifies eleven core scholarly publications and describes a structured narrative review of pesantren economic management, santri participation, entrepreneurship learning, and empowerment. Its search terms included business units, economic independence, student empowerment, entrepreneurship, experiential learning, and business management. The main contemporary publication window was 2021–2026, supplemented by foundational theory.

The source describes inclusion by topical relevance, identifiable publication, and sufficient material for thematic comparison. It does not report database-specific search strings, exact search dates, screening totals, excluded records, or a formal quality appraisal. We therefore describe the method as narrative synthesis and avoid the claim that every eligible publication was captured (Snyder, 2019).

The Belitang study by Muhtarom et al. (2024) serves as a published local case, while comparative pesantren studies contribute information about unit types, actors, constraints, and student roles. Work on entrepreneurship education, financial learning, and empowerment provides analytic concepts. These literatures differ in setting and design; their findings are not pooled into a numerical effect estimate.

For synthesis, source descriptions were mapped against planning, organizing, implementation, and control, followed by access, participation, capacity, agency, and sustainability. We distinguish a reported practice in a published study from an element newly proposed by this article. The resulting cycle is an analytic proposition, not an observed program operated across the three Belitang institutions (Miles et al., 2019).

3. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The local anchor reports business units at three Belitang pesantren. Darul Huda was described as operating garment production, drinking-water services, a cooperative, photocopying, agriculture, and fisheries; Subulussalam developed a shop, cooperative, workshop, plantation, and agriculture (Muhtarom et al., 2024). The variation suggests that an enterprise portfolio should respond to available resources and markets.

Comparative studies report student participation in management, marketing, development, and financial reporting, alongside constraints of capital, personnel, and market recognition (Arwani & Masrur, 2022; Rahman et al., 2023). More recent work describes a pathway involving recruitment, basic training, practice, delegated responsibility, evaluation, and alumni support (Albastomi et al.,

2026). These are reported across different studies, not all verified at every Belitang site (Zohdi & Umami, 2025).

Planning in the proposed framework specifies two aims for each unit: financial viability and student learning. Leaders can identify local demand, costs, a suitable student schedule, and the skills that participants could acquire. Organizing then allocates adult accountability while giving santri defined entry roles and an understood route toward more responsibility. This makes access and participation explicit, with peer mentoring and coaching as possible supports (Kubberød et al., 2018; Kutzhanova et al., 2009).

Implementation concerns practice in production, customer service, inventory, marketing, simple bookkeeping, and problem solving. The educational value depends on structured feedback and opportunities to interpret choices, as research on experiential entrepreneurship education suggests (Motta & Galina, 2023). Control uses sales, costs, inventory, customer feedback, and student reflections to guide both business decisions and learning.

The proposed cycle is: diagnose local resources and student needs; set business and learning objectives; allocate and train roles; practice with increasing responsibility; review financial and learning evidence; refine or diversify; and repeat. Empowerment is evaluated through access, participation, capacity, agency, and sustainability. Diversification is a possible response to feedback, rather than an obligatory expansion of business units.

4. DISCUSSION

The Belitang evidence shows institutional initiatives, but it does not by itself establish whether individual santri gained greater decision-making power. Kabeer's (1999) distinction among resources, agency, and achievements helps prevent revenue from being mistaken for empowerment. The model therefore asks for records of which students entered a unit, what information they received, which decisions they influenced, and what they achieved.

Planning should protect both educational and business aims. A unit may be financially promising yet unsuitable for a student's schedule or provide little learning beyond routine labor. Strategic resource management research in pesantren links income-generating units to educational goals (Kurniady et al., 2024). A feasible plan should state learning objectives, budget assumptions, supervision needs, and conditions under which a unit will be revised.

Organizing should distinguish adult fiduciary responsibility from graduated student authority. Managers remain answerable for safety, finances, and quality, while students can progress from observation and routine tasks to inventory, customer interaction, simple analysis, and proposals. Studies of santri-centered enterprise emphasize that mentoring and active involvement matter (Anggadwita et al., 2021; Arwani & Masrur, 2022).

Experiential learning requires more than repeated exposure to work. Reviewing an actual transaction, error, customer concern, or stock decision can connect practical action with concepts in enterprise and finance (Motta & Galina, 2023). Entrepreneurship education reviews also caution that outcomes vary by pedagogy and are often measured only in the short term (Nabi et al., 2017; Rideout & Gray, 2013).

Financial literacy can make students' participation more meaningful. Transparent records of costs, prices, margins, stock, and cash flow allow them to reason about trade-offs. A meta-analysis of school financial education shows that evaluation design and the timing of measurement affect observed results (Kaiser & Menkhoff, 2020). For pesantren, the appropriate assessment would examine what santri can explain and apply, not merely whether a unit keeps accounts.

Diversification may reduce dependence on one market, but it can also spread limited managerial capacity too thin. The proposed cycle treats a new product or partner as a decision arising from evidence of demand, resources, and learning value. Local studies document different enterprise types and constraints (Muhtarom et al., 2024; Zohdi & Umami, 2025). There is no basis here for specifying one optimal portfolio for OKU Timur; organizational learning requires using feedback to revise plans (Senge, 1990).

Islamic ethical commitments can guide accountability, honest reporting, fair allocation of work, and social benefit. These commitments matter most when they govern actual decisions, such as transparent bookkeeping and limits on student labor. The model treats ethics as conditions for both business and educational quality; practical learning may also develop through communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). It does not claim that every reviewed pesantren has implemented these principles in the same way.

The model's main limitation is evidentiary: it synthesizes published cases and theory without observing a new cohort of santri or comparing institutions over time. Future multi-case research should document entry and exit from roles, mentoring, student decisions, financial understanding, enterprise performance, and later opportunities. Such data would help test whether the management cycle produces empowerment rather than only institutional income.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Pesantren business units may serve as sites of santri economic learning when management deliberately combines financial goals with access, meaningful participation, practical capacity, decision-making agency, and sustainability. The proposed cycle connects planning, organizing, implementation, and control to training, graduated responsibility, and evidence-based reflection.

The framework is a narrative synthesis anchored in published Belitang cases, not an empirical evaluation of all pesantren in OKU Timur. Managers can use its questions to design and document learning, while future field studies should test the proposed links using student-level and enterprise-level evidence.

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