



Exploring Transformational Leadership in Fostering Student Entrepreneurship and Independence in Islamic Boarding Schools

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to explore how transformational leadership contributes to the development of entrepreneurship and student independence within Islamic boarding schools. A qualitative single-case study design was employed. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with five purposively selected informants, participatory observations, and document analysis. Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, while trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation, member checking, prolonged engagement, and peer debriefing. The findings reveal that transformational leadership is manifested through the four dimensions of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Entrepreneurship development is facilitated through professional business management, structured internship programs, and the integration of Islamic values into organizational practices. Student independence emerges through interconnected personal, social, vocational, and financial competencies. Transformational leadership supports these outcomes by fostering character development, integrating entrepreneurial learning into educational activities, providing experiential learning opportunities, and implementing evaluation mechanisms that balance spiritual and managerial accountability. The study implies that transformational leadership can serve as an effective framework for integrating entrepreneurship education, character formation, and institutional sustainability within Islamic educational settings. It also highlights the importance of combining spiritual values with professional governance to strengthen student independence and support sustainable economic development.

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) have long served as important institutions for religious education, character formation, and social development in Indonesia (Nurdiansyah & Veri, 2025). Beyond transmitting Islamic knowledge, pesantren play a strategic role in shaping human resources capable of contributing to social and economic progress. In contemporary society, however, educational institutions are increasingly expected to produce graduates who possess not only strong moral and spiritual values but also entrepreneurial competencies and self-reliance. This expectation reflects broader societal demands arising from economic uncertainty, youth unemployment, and the need for sustainable community development (Arief et al., 2025; Fauzi et al., 2021). Educational institutions that successfully combine religious values with entrepreneurial capacity can contribute significantly to social welfare and economic resilience. Evidence indicates that entrepreneurship education enhances employability, innovation, and economic participation among young people (Fahham, 2020). Consequently, the ability of pesantren to develop entrepreneurial and independent graduates has become an important issue extending beyond educational outcomes to broader societal development. Therefore, understanding the leadership mechanisms that facilitate these outcomes is increasingly important.

Despite their strategic role, many pesantren continue to face structural challenges that limit their capacity to fulfil both religious and socio-economic functions. One major challenge is financial dependence on external funding sources, including donations, charitable contributions, and government assistance (Darwanto et al., 2024). Such dependence may reduce institutional autonomy and constrain long-term strategic planning. Another challenge concerns graduate readiness for contemporary labour markets. Many pesantren graduates are still perceived as lacking vocational skills and entrepreneurial competencies required to compete in increasingly dynamic economic environments. This perception contributes to a persistent stigma that pesantren primarily produce religious scholars while offering limited preparation for economic participation (Nur & Yaqin, 2023). Furthermore, insufficient integration between religious education and entrepreneurship programs often restricts opportunities for students to develop practical skills. As a result, pesantren face growing pressure to redesign educational systems capable of fostering both religious excellence and economic independence while maintaining their distinctive Islamic identity.

These challenges are increasingly visible in the field, where only a limited number of pesantren have successfully developed sustainable entrepreneurship ecosystems integrated into educational activities (Lasut & Neman, 2025). While

many institutions have introduced small-scale business units, these initiatives frequently function as supplementary income sources rather than comprehensive educational platforms for entrepreneurship development. In contrast, several leading pesantren have demonstrated that entrepreneurship can be institutionalized through professional management systems, structured student involvement, and value-based organizational governance. Such institutions illustrate how entrepreneurship education can become an integral component of character formation and independence development. The existence of these contrasting realities highlights the importance of leadership in determining whether entrepreneurship programs merely generate revenue or become transformative educational experiences. Consequently, examining how leadership practices shape entrepreneurship ecosystems and student independence provides an important opportunity to understand institutional success factors and generate lessons applicable to other Islamic educational institutions.

Previous studies have examined leadership, entrepreneurship education, and student independence within pesantren from different perspectives. The role of pesantren leadership in promoting entrepreneurial values among students has been highlighted as an important factor in supporting entrepreneurial activities and fostering visionary leadership within educational institutions. Similarly, Warsah (2020) explored entrepreneurship education strategies within pesantren and demonstrated that experiential learning contributes positively to entrepreneurial awareness. Other studies have emphasized the importance of entrepreneurship as a mechanism for strengthening institutional sustainability and student employability (Basori et al., 2023; Hanafi et al., 2021). These findings collectively suggest that leadership and entrepreneurship education play important roles in pesantren development. Nevertheless, most existing studies focus on individual programs or isolated educational practices rather than examining the broader organizational processes through which leadership influences entrepreneurship and independence simultaneously (Susanto et al., 2025). Consequently, current knowledge remains fragmented and provides limited understanding of how leadership integrates multiple dimensions of institutional transformation within Islamic educational settings (Fadere et al., 2024).

Research on student independence has also generated valuable insights but reveals important conceptual and empirical limitations. Chotimah and Mujahid (2024), for example, examined leadership-driven initiatives aimed at strengthening student independence and found that educational experiences contribute significantly to personal responsibility and social competence. However, most studies conceptualize independence as an individual outcome

without adequately analysing the institutional mechanisms that facilitate its development (Hussen & Onia, 2024). Furthermore, existing research rarely investigates how entrepreneurship programs, organizational culture, and leadership practices interact to cultivate independence across personal, social, vocational, and financial dimensions (Salim et al., 2025). Theoretical applications of transformational leadership within pesantren contexts also remain relatively limited despite the framework's relevance for explaining organizational change and human development. As a result, significant gaps persist regarding how transformational leadership operates within religious educational institutions that simultaneously pursue spiritual, educational, and economic objectives (Mabruhah & Faza, 2025).

Addressing these limitations requires a more comprehensive analytical framework capable of capturing the interaction between leadership, entrepreneurship development, and student independence. The novelty of this study lies in its examination of transformational leadership as an integrative mechanism connecting professional management systems, entrepreneurship ecosystems, and structured independence formation within a pesantren setting. Unlike previous studies that investigate these variables separately, this research explores how they function as interconnected components of institutional transformation. In addition, the study contributes to the growing discourse on Islamic educational leadership by demonstrating how spiritual values can be integrated with modern governance practices and entrepreneurship education. This perspective extends transformational leadership theory beyond conventional organizational contexts and provides a more nuanced understanding of leadership within faith-based institutions. Therefore, the study offers both theoretical advancement and practical relevance for sustainable educational development.

Based on these considerations, this study addresses the following research problem: how does transformational leadership contribute to the development of entrepreneurship and student independence within an Islamic boarding school? This question is important because leadership is widely recognized as a critical factor influencing organizational culture, educational innovation, and human resource development. This study argues that leadership characterized by idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration can facilitate the integration of entrepreneurship education and independence formation. The study further argues that entrepreneurship development and student independence are strengthened when leadership practices align spiritual values with professional governance and experiential learning opportunities. By exploring these relationships within a comprehensive institutional context, the research contributes to educational

leadership literature while providing an evidence-based model that may inform the development of economically sustainable and educationally transformative Islamic educational institutions.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach using a single-case study design (Hamdanah et al., 2025). A case study was considered appropriate because the research sought to obtain an in-depth understanding of transformational leadership, entrepreneurship development, and student independence within their real-life institutional context. The approach enabled the researcher to examine complex social processes, organizational practices, and leadership dynamics that could not be separated from the broader educational environment in which they occurred (Abubakar et al., 2025; Faturahman et al., 2023). The qualitative case study design was therefore selected to generate rich and contextualized insights into how transformational leadership operates within an Islamic educational institution and contributes to entrepreneurship and independence formation.

The study was conducted at Pondok Pesantren Sunan Drajat during the period from December 2025 to February 2026. The research site was purposively selected because of its distinctive characteristics, including an integrated entrepreneurship holding system, diversified business units operating across multiple economic sectors, international business networks, and its recognition as a national model of pesantren economic self-reliance (Misdah et al., 2025). Data were collected through three complementary techniques. First, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with five purposively selected informants representing leadership, management, and student perspectives. Second, participatory observations were undertaken across various institutional activities, including daily educational routines, business operations, organizational meetings, and internship supervision processes (Karim et al., 2022). Third, document analysis was conducted using institutional records, organizational documents, internship curricula, operational guidelines, and other relevant materials to strengthen the credibility and completeness of the findings.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (Miles & Huberman, 1994), consisting of four interconnected stages: data condensation, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data condensation involved selecting, focusing, and simplifying information obtained from interviews, observations, and documents. Data reduction was conducted through coding and categorizing data into themes related to transformational leadership, entrepreneurship, and student

independence. Subsequently, data were organized through narrative displays to facilitate interpretation and pattern identification. Finally, conclusions were continuously verified through comparison across data sources and research stages. To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed source triangulation, method triangulation, member checking, prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and peer debriefing. All participants provided informed consent prior to data collection, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process. Based on the research objectives and the theoretical framework of transformational leadership proposed by Bass and Avolio (1994), this study developed a conceptual framework to guide data collection, analysis, and interpretation. The framework illustrates the relationships among transformational leadership, the entrepreneurship ecosystem, and student independence within the pesantren context, while highlighting the mediating roles of spiritual values, character formation, professional management, and curriculum integration in connecting leadership practices with entrepreneurship development and student independence outcomes.



Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: Transformational Leadership, Entrepreneurship Ecosystem, and Student Independence

Mediating Mechanisms: Spiritual Values | Character Formation | Professional Management | Integrated Curriculum

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework underpinning this study. Transformational leadership, consisting of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass & Avolio, 1994), serves as the primary driving force in developing the entrepreneurship ecosystem and student independence. The entrepreneurship ecosystem is represented through professional holding-based business management, structured internship programs, performance management systems, spiritual-managerial evaluation mechanisms, and an integrated curriculum. These institutional processes contribute to the development of student independence across multiple dimensions, including personal, social,

vocational, financial, digital, and spiritual competencies. The framework further suggests that spiritual values, character formation, professional management, and curriculum integration function as mediating mechanisms linking transformational leadership with entrepreneurship development and student independence. This framework guided data collection, analysis, and interpretation throughout the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Implementation of Transformational Leadership

Interview and observational data showed that leadership within the pesantren encompassed religious, social, economic, and character-development dimensions. During the interview, KH. Abdul Ghofur stated:

"Pesantren should not only teach religious knowledge but also prepare students to become independent individuals who contribute to broader social welfare both economically and spiritually." (KH. Abdul Ghofur)

This statement was supported by Ning Biyati Ahwarumi, who explained that leadership practices incorporate religious values, discipline, entrepreneurship, and professional management within the institutional system. She further stated that institutional development is directed toward strengthening religious education while supporting economic self-reliance and organizational management.

Observational data recorded the direct involvement of KH. Abdul Ghofur in daily inspections of educational facilities and business units. Weekly coordination meetings required division heads to present reports on activities, achievements, and operational challenges. Daily briefings combined Duha prayer, Qur'anic recitation, organizational reporting, and work planning. Institutional documents showed the existence of specialized divisions responsible for information technology, human resources, finance, purchasing, and legal affairs.

Interview data identified several recurring leadership practices. Informants described the leader's direct involvement in institutional activities and decision-making processes. They also reported the continuous communication of institutional goals related to social responsibility and community welfare. Interview and documentary data indicated the use of performance indicators, digital reporting systems, and routine evaluations. Internship supervision records further showed mentoring activities, internship placements, and periodic evaluations involving staff members and student interns.

Entrepreneurship Development

Interview, observation, and documentary data showed that entrepreneurship activities were organized through an integrated holding system consisting of more than ten business units. These units included retail services, bakery production, bottled water manufacturing, salt production, fertilizer production, information technology services, Islamic microfinance, travel services, convection manufacturing, livestock enterprises, and supporting service businesses.

"Entrepreneurship in the pesantren is not merely oriented toward profit generation, but toward developing responsibility, discipline, and social contribution among students." (Muhammad Irsyad)

Observation records showed that daily operational briefings included spiritual activities and business performance reporting. Routine inspections were conducted to monitor product quality, inventory, and operational activities. Student interns prepared weekly reports, presented operational outcomes, and participated in supervisory meetings.

Documentary and interview data indicated that internship programs were provided primarily for vocational and university-level students. Internship periods ranged from three to six months. Students were assigned to different business units through rotational placements. Educational activities incorporated themes related to responsibility, honesty, professionalism, and social welfare within learning and work environments.

Formation of Student Independence

Interview, observation, and documentary data identified three stages of student independence formation. The first stage involved personal self-management, including organizing daily schedules, managing responsibilities, and fulfilling personal needs. The second stage involved participation in organizational roles and collective responsibilities. Students who demonstrated self-management skills were assigned responsibilities as dormitory leaders, organizational officers, and coordinators of institutional activities.

The third stage involved participation in internship programs within organizational and business units. Internship activities included financial reporting, operational management, team coordination, and routine workplace responsibilities.

"Students are trained to manage responsibilities independently, including financial reporting, organizational duties, and work discipline." (Muhammad Amiludin)

Observation records showed that student interns prepared sales reports, inventory records, work schedules, and operational documentation. Students also participated in shift handovers, coordination meetings, and problem-reporting procedures.

Analysis of interview, observation, and documentary data identified twelve dimensions of student independence: personal self-management, discipline, responsibility, decision-making ability, work ethic, time management, resilience, economic independence, social responsibility, spiritual commitment, financial literacy, and vocational competence. Institutional documents further showed student and alumni involvement in the development of digital management systems used in financial and organizational administration.

The Role of Transformational Leadership in Enhancing Entrepreneurship and Student Independence

The findings showed that entrepreneurship development and student independence were implemented through four institutional mechanisms. The first mechanism involved character formation based on the principle of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*. This principle was embedded in educational activities, organizational programs, and daily institutional routines.

The second mechanism involved the integration of entrepreneurial values into educational programs and religious learning activities. Responsibility, discipline, commitment, honesty, and social contribution were incorporated into classroom learning, organizational activities, and practical work experiences.

The third mechanism involved structured internship programs within the *pesantren's* business units. Documentary data showed that internship placements generally lasted between three and six months and included rotational assignments across different divisions to provide students with exposure to various operational functions.

The fourth mechanism involved periodic evaluation procedures that combined operational performance assessments with spiritual activities conducted within institutional routines. Observation data showed that daily briefings, organizational meetings, and reporting activities incorporated both managerial and spiritual components.

Observation and documentary data further showed that leadership practices, organizational culture, curriculum activities, business operations, internship programs, and evaluation systems were implemented within the same institutional environment.

Table 1. Growth of Entrepreneurship and Student Independence at Pondok Pesantren Sunan Drajat

No.	Aspect	Condition Before (2011)	Condition After (2022–2026)	Source/Evidence
1	Annual Business Revenue	Limited institutional revenue	Substantial institutional financial growth with large-scale annual business revenue	Interview: Ning Biyati Ahwarumi (2026)
2	Monthly Contribution to Operations	Tens of millions IDR/month	Over 1 billion IDR/month (informant account)	Supports operations, infrastructure & staff welfare
3	Number of Business Units	Limited business units	10+ professionally managed holding units (upstream–downstream)	Minimarket, bakery, bottled water, salt, convection, livestock, IT, travel, laundry, fertilizer
4	Market Reach	Local (Lamongan region)	National and international: 9 restaurants in Malaysia	Central government recognition as national best practice
5	Student Work Experience	No structured professional involvement	Alumni in KPI-based roles; 3–6 month structured internships with cross-divisional rotation	Interview: M. Irsyad (2026); Observation (2026)
6	Institutional Management System	Traditional kiai-centric authority	Professional: KPI, balanced scorecard, CPA external audit, integrated IT system	8 observation sessions; annual working conference
7	National Recognition	No formal recognition	Berita Jatim Award; Bank Indonesia award: best Islamic economic practitioner	Central government recognition as pesantren berdikari best practice

Data were triangulated through interviews, participatory observations (8 sessions, ~24 hours), and institutional documentation (2026). Financial data are reported on the basis of informant accounts; independent documentary verification is recommended for subsequent research.

Table 1 presents the development of entrepreneurship and student independence within the institution over time. The findings indicate substantial progress in business diversification, financial sustainability, organizational professionalization, and market expansion. The table also demonstrates increased student participation in structured entrepreneurial learning through internships and professional work experiences. Furthermore, institutional development is reflected in the adoption of modern management systems, technology-based governance, and broader national recognition, suggesting that entrepreneurship and student independence have become increasingly integrated into the overall educational and organizational framework.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that transformational leadership plays a central role in fostering entrepreneurship and student independence within the pesantren context. The four dimensions of transformational leadership idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration were evident in leadership practices that integrated spiritual values, professional governance, and educational objectives. These findings support the proposition that transformational leaders influence followers not only through formal authority but also by inspiring shared values and long-term commitment. The findings also reinforce the argument that transformational leadership elevates followers' motivations by connecting individual aspirations with broader moral purposes (Bass & Avolio, 1994). However, unlike most previous studies conducted in secular organizational settings, the present study shows that transformational leadership in a pesantren operates through the integration of religious authority and professional management, creating a distinctive leadership configuration within Islamic educational institutions.

The entrepreneurship ecosystem identified in this study extends previous findings on entrepreneurship education in pesantren. Earlier studies emphasized entrepreneurship as a means of developing entrepreneurial awareness, economic empowerment, or small-scale business activities (Warsah, 2020). In contrast, the present study reveals a more comprehensive institutional model in which entrepreneurship is embedded within an integrated holding system supported by professional management practices, structured internships, performance measurement systems, and digital governance mechanisms. This finding suggests that entrepreneurship education can function not merely as an instructional activity but as an organizational ecosystem that simultaneously serves educational, economic, and social purposes. Theoretically, this expands existing discussions on Islamic entrepreneurship education by illustrating how entrepreneurial learning can be institutionalized through formal governance structures while remaining grounded in Islamic ethical principles.

The findings concerning student independence also provide important insights into the character formation literature. Previous studies generally conceptualized independence as an individual outcome influenced by educational experiences or leadership policies (Chotimah & Mujahid, 2024; Umiyah & Kusuma, 2023). This study demonstrates that independence is developed through a systematic and progressive process encompassing personal, social, vocational, financial, digital, and spiritual dimensions. Such findings show how moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action can be integrated within a

comprehensive institutional environment (Naimah et al., 2020). The evidence indicates that student independence is not merely the acquisition of practical skills but rather the internalization of values manifested through consistent behavioural practices and professional responsibilities.

Another important finding concerns the mediating role of spiritual values in linking leadership, entrepreneurship, and student independence. The motivational capacity of transformational leadership and the moral dimension of leadership transformation have been widely recognized in the literature (Bass & Avolio, 1994). The present study extends these perspectives by demonstrating that spiritual values function as an institutional mechanism through which leadership vision is translated into organizational culture, curriculum design, internship programs, and evaluation systems. Rather than relying solely on interpersonal influence, leadership objectives become embedded within organizational structures that continuously reproduce desired behaviours and values. This mechanism provides a novel explanation of how transformational leadership can sustain organizational change within faith-based educational institutions.

From a practical perspective, the findings offer an evidence-based model that may guide other Islamic educational institutions seeking to strengthen entrepreneurship development and student independence. The integration of professional governance systems, structured internship programs, entrepreneurship-oriented curricula, and spiritually grounded organizational culture demonstrates a viable strategy for enhancing institutional sustainability while maintaining religious values. The findings suggest that pesantren can achieve economic self-reliance without compromising their educational and spiritual missions (Ma'arif et al., 2023). Consequently, policymakers, educational leaders, and pesantren administrators may consider adopting similar approaches to address financial dependency and improve graduate preparedness for contemporary economic challenges.

The principal novelty and contribution of this study lie in the identification of a pesantren-based transformational leadership model that integrates spiritual authority, professional governance, entrepreneurship education, and systematic independence formation within a single institutional ecosystem. Previous studies have generally examined leadership, entrepreneurship, or student independence as separate phenomena (Warsah, 2020; Chotimah & Mujahid, 2024). By contrast, this study demonstrates how transformational leadership simultaneously orchestrates these dimensions through interconnected institutional mechanisms. The study therefore contributes theoretically to the development of transformational leadership literature in Islamic educational contexts and contributes practically by offering a replicable model for sustainable entrepreneurship development and student independence in faith-based educational institutions.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that transformational leadership can serve as an effective mechanism for integrating spiritual values, entrepreneurship education, and professional governance within Islamic educational institutions, thereby fostering both entrepreneurship and student independence through a coherent institutional ecosystem. The most important lesson from this research is that student independence and entrepreneurial capacity are not developed through isolated training activities but through the systematic alignment of leadership vision, organizational culture, curriculum, experiential learning, and accountability systems. Academically, this study contributes to the development of transformational leadership literature by extending its application to Islamic educational settings and proposing a model in which spiritual authority and professional management operate as complementary mechanisms for educational and economic development. Nevertheless, the findings are limited by the use of a single-site qualitative case study, which restricts the transferability of results to other institutional contexts. Future studies should employ comparative multi-site designs, mixed-method approaches, and longitudinal investigations of alumni outcomes to examine the broader applicability, sustainability, and long-term effects of transformational leadership on entrepreneurship development and student independence across diverse Islamic educational institutions.

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