

# Empowerment of Islamic Boarding School Students Based on the Local Potential in Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims at mapping the potential of Islamic boarding schools along with the students' problems and planning the empowerment of the students. This study might benefit the students to live independently and further enrich the treasury of the empowerment model conducted in boarding schools. This qualitative study used the caregivers of Islamic boarding schools, religious teachers, and students as the research participants. The data were collected through observation, FGDs, and interviews. The obtained data were analyzed using Assed Based Community Development technique. Results showed that Ushulul Hikmah Islamic Boarding School in Gresik, East Java Province, had thousand students, a dense environment with a shift from rural to industrial areas, charismatic religious leader, large land areas, big market potentials, and sufficient IT devices. The problems faced by the students included the lack of development of their interests and talents so that the suitable empowerment model was entrepreneurship and makeup training.

**Keywords:** Islamic boarding school, students, empowerment, skills, makeup

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The typical model of Indonesian religious education is Islamic boarding school, which is an Indonesian Islamic educational institution that aims to explore and practice the knowledge of Islam as a guide to daily life as *tafaqquh fiddin* (Mastery of religion) by emphasizing the importance of good morals in social life [1]. In Indonesia, Islamic boarding school is often associated with the well-known term called *pesantren*. *Pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) becomes the oldest educational system in Indonesia that begins with the presence of a cleric figure as the teacher with numbers of students who want to get the Islam knowledge. The Islam teaching process is conducted in mosques and the teacher's homes [2]. In the subsequent developments, *pesantren* improved its management with a more modernization and finally introduced *Madrasah Diniyyah* or a religious school.

The *pesantren*'s education model not only emphasizes the deepening of religion but also the formation of soft skills through the implementation of character buildings such as low

profile, humility, patience, affection, mutual respect, and responsibility. The characters are formed through the habituation process in daily life. The existence of *pesantren* in the community provides a very strong contribution in creating social changes, transforming values, becoming an alternative educational institution for local residents, and leading the community's economy and wealth.

Based on data from The Ministry of Religion the number of *pesantren* in Indonesia reached 5.938 *pesantren* and the number of santri 3.962.700. East Java Province becomes a province with the largest number of *pesantren* reaching 6,000 institutions in total [3]. The era of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 marked by the digitalization of all life elements, the acceleration of communication, and high competition requires *pesantren* to improve by empowering superior and competitive Human Resources. Religious science or knowledge as well as the mastery of hard skills become the factors that should be considered in order to achieve the goal of creating skillful and independent human beings. The combination of religious knowledge, science mastery, and skills has become students' formidable force in conquering the era changes. Therefore, this study specifically aims to map the *pesantren*'s potential along with the students' problems and

design an empowerment model for female students in Ushulul Hikmah Al-Ibrohimi Islamic Boarding Schools in Gresik, East Java Province.

*Pesantren* is built based on five pillars namely *Kyai* or a religious leader, *santri* or students, recitation, boarding house, and mosque along with the whole activities [4]. *Kyai* is a pious, authoritative, respected, and responsible figure for the existence of *pesantren*. Boarding house is a hostel where students are supported with both physical and non-physical facilities. The mosque is a center of religious worship and scientific activities. *Santri* is *pesantren*'s student who is bound by various rules and surrendered by parents to seek knowledge. Yellow Book, or *Kitab Kuning*, becomes the *pesantren*'s curriculum system that should be used within the teaching process. Referring to the five pillars of *pesantren*, there are three types of *pesantren*. First, *Pesantren* type A has several characteristics such as the fact that the student study and live in the boarding schools. Moreover, the curriculum focuses on *Kyai*'s figures and the learning model is in a form of *sorogan* (face-to-face learning and individually between students and teachers or *kiai*) or *bandongan* (collective Learning atau together learning). The last characteristic is that no *Madrasah* system is applied. Second, *Pesantren* Type B is characterized by the fact that the students lived in dormitories, the mixture of learning process between the *pesantren* and national curriculum, clear curriculum, the presence of special place functioning as a school. The third *pesantren* type has the characteristics of *pesantren* functioned as dormitories only so that the students should study in school which is outside of the *pesantren* areas. At last, the studying times are always conducted inside the *pesantren* areas and this typical *pesantren* has no well-programmed curriculum [5].

In terms of scientific aspects, *pesantren* is grouped into three types namely *salaf*, *khalaf*, and comprehensive *pesantren*. *Salaf* (traditional) *pesantren* which focuses on teaching classical knowledge from the 15<sup>th</sup> century through the yellow book by applying *bandongan* teaching method or *sorogan*, the teacher reads the book and students imitate it). In its development, a *Diniyyah* class is formed to facilitate the division of *santri* levels. *Khalaf* (modern) *pesantren* reveals the fact that the study of classical books is no longer prominent and the curriculum is developed by incorporating general knowledge in Islamic boarding schools. The comprehensive ones combine traditional and modern education and teaching systems. The yellow book is still being taught but the schooling system continues to be developed [6].

In accordance with the typology of *pesantren* above, this study focuses on Ushulul Hikmah Al-Ibrohimi Islamic Boarding School in Gresik. At first, the school or the *pesantren* was very traditional and only provided non-formal education (*Madrasah Diniyyah*) in the form of a gradual study of the yellow book and *tahfidz* Quran's (Memorization The Quran). Most of the *santri* who lived in the boarding school came to *Kyai*. However, in line with the demands of the

community and responding to the global needs, this Islamic boarding school opened a formal *Madrasah* starting from Islamic Primary School, *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* (Junior High School), and *Madrasah Aliyah* (Senior High School). Formal school students came from local residents and they lived in the provided dorms. In an effort to strengthen the educational process, in 2017, a policy was implemented to make all formal school students settle in the dorms and participate in Islamic Boarding School activities (interview with KH. Rosyid, a *Pesantren* Caregiver, on 15 February 2019). Thus, scientifically this *pesantren* is categorized as comprehensive type.

The orientation of this *pesantren* is aimed at deepening religious knowledge through education in *Madrasah Diniyyah* and formal education from elementary, junior high, to senior high school levels. The main problem faced by this *pesantren* is the minimum programs for developing students' potentials in connection with their interests and talents. This problem should be considered vital since the students must conceive intense life competition spirit that can make them survive in the present competitive world.

The existence of Islamic boarding schools in the community plays an important role to empower society effectively. Aqil explained that the role of *pesantren* is to be an instrumental and facilitator, mobilization, human resources, agent of development, and the center of excellence [7]. The instrumental and facilitator roles are not only as an educational and religious institution but also as an institution of community empowerment. The social role becomes very strategic in setting an example or inviting development that can be utilized by the whole communities. The role of human resources is to optimize the *pesantren*'s potential. The role as an agent of development is to respond to the bad social conditions by the implementation of moral transformations. The role as an agent of social change is to liberate society from all moral violence, impoverishment of science, and poverty. *Pesantren* also has a role as a center of excellence in disseminating moderate, tolerant, and merciful Islamic teachings for all beings.

*Pesantren* in education sector has carried out the transmission of traditional Islamic science as guardians and maintainers of the continuity of traditional Islamic traditions and as the centers of the science growth. Thus, Islamic boarding schools move from *tafaqquh fiddin* institutions, or an institution to studying religion, which develop Islamic into social sciences.

## 2. METHOD

This study is a qualitative research. The data were collected using observation techniques of the students' daily activities and the *pesantren*'s curriculum, interviews with *Kyai* and *santri*, FGD with students' guardians, students, and

religious teachers. This study used a naturalistic approach to find the understanding of certain phenomena in a contextually specific setting that aims to comprehend social phenomena from the participant's point of view in a form of descriptive analysis [7]. The obtained data were analyzed during the research process. The validity test used triangulation.

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Mapping Problems and Potentials of Islamic Boarding Schools

Usulul Hikmah Al-Ibrohimi Islamic Boarding School had a vision of creating a noble person with a spiritual and intellectual balance and *Akhlaqul karimah* (good morals), or good attitude, towards the generations of *ulul albab* who were capable, skillful, independent, creative, ethical, tolerant, responsible, and useful for both religion and nation. Based on this vision, male students were trained entrepreneurship by managing the "*Silahain*" herbal medicine distributed in East Java Province. The results of this effort could help the students' living costs. While there were 800 female students who had not been trained in entrepreneurship. They more focused on the deepening of religion. Most of the students attended formal education besides memorizing the Quran and participating in *Madrasah Diniyyah*. Some students only specialized in memorizing the Quran without attending formal education in *Madrasah*. There were also students who joined *Madrasah Diniyyah* program only without attending the formal *Madrasah*. Further, the *santri* came from diverse family economic backgrounds (interview with KH. Rosyid, Pesantren Caregiver on May 12, 2019).

Based on the field observations and interviews, the problems faced by female students included (1) during the boarding school, they were limited to getting religious material (the Yellow Book / Memorizing the Qur'an), not getting entrepreneurial guidance; (2) did not have sufficient skills that could be developed for independent living after graduating from *pesantren*; (3) most of the students did not continue their studies at tertiary institutions, but chose to be married and employed; (4) the female students' talents and skills had not been explored and developed well. During this time, the *pesantren* had developed extra activities for female students but still limited to the arts namely the Qur'an and *qasidah* recitations. Other areas of interest and talent such as skills that women instinctively most had were not yet developed. *Pesantren* did not have data of students' interests, talents, and non-academic abilities to be mapped as a basis for the implementation of students' self-development programs. The students' entrepreneurship program had not been honed so it needed to be given stimulation and strengthening [8].

Based on the results of researchers' observations of student's daily life and socio-cultural settings, the Ushulul Hikmah Islamic Boarding School had several potentials such

as in human resources in which thousand students became significant assets to be empowered. This *pesantren*'s surrounding environment was densely populated and had very high respect for *Kyai*'s figure. This *pesantren* was in the midst of a shift from rural to urban communities as the development of national companies in that region and international ports that directed on changes of people's lifestyles. The *pesantren* had extensive land ownership, large market potential with a harmonious relationship between religious institutions and the surrounding community, adequate IT devices, and leader's leadership skills. Those potentials become a large capital to conduct empowerment programs for the female students.

#### 3.2 The Empowering Model of Islamic Boarding School

Community empowerment was a concept of economic development as a new development paradigm that was people-centered, participatory, empowering, and sustainable [9]. Efforts to empower the community could be seen from three sides. First, creating an atmosphere enabled the potential of developing communities. Everyone had strengths and potentials that could be honed and developed. In the context of *pesantren*, the residents needed to be motivated, explored, and raised through religious means and programs. Second, strengthening the potential was possessed by the community with a positive step in the form of providing various inputs as well as opening access and opportunities that would make the community empowered. Cultivating the value of a culture of hard work, saving, openness, and accountability might protect the community, prevent the weak turning onto more tremendous, prevent unbalanced competition, and prevent strong exploitation of the weak [10]. The ultimate goal was to make the community independent and build the ability to advance towards a better life in a sustainable manner.

Community development or community empowerment was an effort to establish community through the realization of the potential and capabilities possessed [11]. Empowerment prioritized the efforts of the community themselves who were encouraged to achieve the empowerment attainments. In other words, empowering was to enable and create independent of society. Empowerment was very distant from the connotation of dependency. Thus, social development programs were not oriented on that of charitable or punitive programs, but promoted empowerment programs which were people-centered, participatory, empowering, and sustainable [12].

Empowerment of *pesantren* referred to the ability of students to have access to productive resources that enabled them to obtain the required goods and services and participated in the development and decision making processes. The enhancement in the quality of students' life and welfare included economic improvements especially food sufficiency, social welfare, and actualization of their own potential.

Student's economic improvement was undertaken by opening up opportunities to access economic resources and competencies in managing the economy including human resources, entrepreneurship/entrepreneurship, organization administration and management, and skills. Knowledge and skills became the instruments in achieving work competency. The empowerment of students in the economic sector was expected after graduating from *pesantren* so that the students would become the role models both in the productive economy or as cadres of economic empowerment, in addition to its main role as a religious teacher who had known about Islamic science.

Entrepreneurship was a concrete step to empower *pesantren*. The entrepreneurial spirit needed to be habituated and taught so that the students could compete and lived professionally by working after graduation. Entrepreneurial spirit was a spirit of independence to find a source of income by opening a business or channeling the creativity for wealth. An entrepreneur required to grow his entrepreneurial spirit in order to be able to think creatively and innovatively to achieve goals. Entrepreneurship was an attitude, soul, and ability to create something new that was very valuable and useful for all stakeholders. It was also a mental attitude and spirit that was always active, empowered, and creative, of which was able to increase community's income.

In regard to the map of the potential of *pesantren* and the problems faced by the female students, the students' empowerment in the economic sector was carried out in the following phases: (1) mapping the talent to attract students interested in special fields such as beauty, fashion, food processing, and public speaking. At this stage, all students were given a questionnaire/needs analysis; (2) categorizing the development of interests and talents; (3) initiating the formation of students' entrepreneurial spirit with the training on motivation and independence; (4) training skills such as daily makeup, graduation and guest makeup training, Muslim bridal makeup training, Muslim makeup contest, and the formation of the "Beatucian Muslimah" community; and (5) assistance in opening a makeup service business.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Usulul Hikmah Islamic Boarding School in Gresik, East Java Province, has the potential of human resources with a large number of students, a densely populated environment, charismatic *Kyai*, large land ownership, big market potential, and adequate information technology devices. The female students' problems encompass the lack of development of students' interests and talents. The suitable empowerment model for this *pesantren* based on the field and needs analysis was the cultivation of entrepreneurship and beauty skills training. Future studies might work to reveal the student's empowerment results after a variety of program interventions.

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