



Transforming Pesantren: Adaptive Strategies in the Context of Educational Decentralization in Indonesia

Abd. Wahid Hasyim*, Abd. Chair

Islamic History and Civilization Study Program, Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Indonesia

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*Correspondence Address:

abd.wahid@uinjkt.ac.id

Abstract: The decentralization of governmental administration during Indonesia's Reform Order era has facilitated educational autonomy, enabling Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) to redefine their institutional frameworks. This study examines the transformation of pesantren in South Tangerang City within the context of educational autonomy. Using a qualitative methodology that combines historical and phenomenological approaches, data were gathered through in-depth interviews, observations, literature reviews, and focus group discussions. The research identified seventy pesantren distributed across seven sub-districts, with a significant concentration in Ciputat. These pesantren have undergone substantial transformations, integrating traditional religious education, such as kitab studies, with modern schooling systems, including madrasas and formal educational institutions. Certain pesantren serve specific demographics, such as orphans and converts, while others focus on formal education or the practice of specific Islamic tariqah. The observed transformations encompass human resources, curricula, educational facilities, and management structures. These changes highlight pesantren's dual commitment to preserving their religious heritage while responding to contemporary societal needs, embodying the philosophy of holistic education (*tafaqquh fi ilmi al-ukhrawy wa al-dunyawy*). This study contributes to the discourse on educational autonomy by offering a comprehensive perspective on pesantren's evolving role in balancing tradition and modernity within a dynamic educational landscape.

INTRODUCTION

Since the Reform Era, Indonesia's governmental administrative structure has undergone significant changes, transitioning from a centralized system to decentralization. This reform period has resulted in the delegation of administrative responsibilities to local governments, including the authority to manage the education sector—commonly referred to as educational autonomy (Afandi et al., 2022; Muluk, 2014; Syukur et al., 2024). For instance,

in South Tangerang, educational autonomy is reflected in the management of the city's education system.

Since attaining autonomous city status in 2008, South Tangerang has gained the authority to independently manage its affairs, including the education sector, supported by adequate revenue. Educational autonomy enables local governments at the city, district, and school levels to make decisions and implement policies related to education

(Afandi et al., 2022; Lazwardi, 2018; Pattinasarany, 2022).

The goal is to develop quality education services that are relevant to the needs of the community through effective collaboration among local governments, schools, and the community (Aritonang, 2018; Muttaqin, 2018). Achieving this requires a stronger commitment to fostering innovative and responsive education in South Tangerang. Despite a clear determination to enhance educator competencies and promote sustainable development, policy implementation faces significant challenges, including budget constraints, limited stakeholder support, and inadequate integration of innovation into the curriculum.

Educational autonomy enables schools to independently make decisions to enhance the quality of education and human resources, including fostering the development of professional teachers. This approach has attracted significant attention from stakeholders at both regional and international levels (Amon & Bustami, 2021; Nordholm et al., 2022; Wermke et al., 2019).

Education providers emphasize the importance of understanding educational autonomy, which positions schools as primary decision-makers with full responsibility for the educational process. Schools play a pivotal role in shaping and implementing educational policies. The quality and success of a school—whether marked by progress or regression—largely depend on the creativity and leadership of the principal in delivering quality education (Briones et al., 2022; Hoque et al., 2023; Kaso et al., 2021).

In the era of decentralization, authority previously held by the central and local governments—such as responsibilities for classroom infrastructure and education quality—has been fully devolved to the regional level (Hoadley, 2014; Somantri, 2018). Educational autonomy emerges as a

product of democratic governance, enabling local governments and schools to make decisions tailored to their unique potential and needs while actively involving various stakeholders in the decision-making process (Brinkerhoff & Wetterberg, 2016; Februannisa & Anggraini, 2022).

Efforts to implement the educational autonomy policy have resulted in at least four significant positive impacts. First, there has been an improvement in the quality of education, as schools gain greater authority to manage and optimize their resources effectively (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Pulimeno et al., 2020; Usman & Dangara, 2016). Second, financial efficiency has been achieved by utilizing local tax revenues and reducing operational costs, enabling schools to focus more on educational development and theoretical advancements (Boetti et al., 2012; Mason, 2020). Third, administrative efficiency has improved through the streamlining of bureaucratic processes and the elimination of unnecessary multilevel procedures (Marince et al., 2022; Maulana et al., 2022). Finally, educational opportunities in remote areas have expanded, promoting more equitable access and distribution of education (Coman et al., 2020; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

Since gaining autonomous status, South Tangerang has witnessed substantial progress in both religious and educational development. Data from the Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of South Tangerang City indicate that seventy pesantren are actively providing religious studies alongside other educational services. These institutions have modernized their development strategies, transitioning from traditional Islamic schools to organizing formal schools and madrasas. This research explores the role of pesantren from the period preceding South Tangerang's establishment as an autonomous city in 2008 to 2022, within

the framework of regional educational autonomy.

The quality of pesantren should not be confined to academic achievement alone; rather, it is a multidimensional concept encompassing the development of moral and ethical values, religious knowledge, and practical skills. This indicates a need for a balanced integration of traditional Islamic content with innovative teaching methods. As such, the educational quality of pesantren must reflect a harmony between preserving tradition and addressing contemporary educational demands.

The strategic objective of these institutions extends beyond producing individuals with spiritual knowledge to cultivating well-rounded individuals who excel in intellectual and ethical dimensions, ultimately contributing to society. This dual focus ensures that pesantren maintain their relevance while adapting to modern educational challenges.

Significant contributions to the understanding of education have been made by Musaddad (2023), Hadi (2022), Abdullah et al. (2019), and Nordholm et al. (2022). However, several research gaps remain, particularly concerning the transformation of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) within the framework of educational autonomy in South Tangerang. For instance, while Musaddad (2023) provides valuable insights into the history and characteristics of pesantren in Indonesia, his study does not specifically address the unique local dynamics and challenges faced by these institutions in South Tangerang. Similarly, Hadi (2022), research, which focuses on the process of formalizing education in pesantren, offers an essential foundation for understanding their evolution. Nonetheless, there is a pressing need to investigate the specific mechanisms of formalization in the management of pesantren in South Tangerang.

Additionally, understanding the barriers that hinder the effective realization of this formalization process in the region remains an underexplored area. Addressing these gaps would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how pesantren adapt to educational autonomy while navigating local complexities.

With respect to character education, Abdullah et al. (2019) examined the capacities of schools in Indonesia in fostering student character development, focusing on the impact of transformation in this area and the values emphasized by Islamic boarding schools. Similarly, Nordholm et al. (2022) explored the perceptions of school leaders. However, a detailed understanding of how school leaders perceive the relationship between autonomy and control, particularly in the context of the transformation of Islamic boarding schools, remains underexplored. Addressing this gap would offer valuable insights into the complexities of educational autonomy in these institutions.

This research addresses gaps in prior studies by offering a comprehensive and in-depth contextual analysis of the transformation of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) within the framework of educational autonomy in South Tangerang. The study significantly contributes to understanding the evolving role and transformation of *pesantren* under the decentralized education system implemented in South Tangerang City. Furthermore, the findings provide valuable insights for policymakers, supported by extensive data that serves as a robust reference for formulating quality education policies. The study also identifies various opportunities and challenges in enhancing the quality of *pesantren*, making it a critical reference for future research exploring the impacts of educational autonomy on educational quality in specific contexts.

METHOD

The research process commenced with the identification of existing research gaps through a review of the works of Musaddad (2023), Hadi (2022), Abdullah et al. (2019), and Nordholm et al. (2022). After establishing the foundational context in the introduction, a comprehensive literature review was conducted to examine prior studies, enabling the formulation of theoretical perspectives and the development of a robust conceptual framework.

The second step in this research process involves designing the study, with a focus on selecting a qualitative research methodology. During this stage, data collection is conducted based on the outlined research plan. The primary data collection instruments include in-depth interviews with key stakeholders such as Islamic boarding school managers, school leaders, and members of the local community. Additionally, direct observations were carried out at Islamic boarding schools to gain a deeper understanding of the ongoing transformations.

In the subsequent stage, the collected data is subjected to analysis. Researchers systematically process the information, identifying patterns and key findings. These findings are then interpreted within the framework of existing theories presented in the literature review. This interpretation serves as the foundation for drawing conclusions regarding the impact of educational autonomy on the transformation of Islamic boarding schools in South Tangerang.

Following data analysis, the research findings are structured into a comprehensive report, typically organized into sections including the introduction, methodology, results, and conclusions. The final stage involves disseminating the research findings through presentations at academic conferences and publication in scientific

journals, ensuring the broader academic community has access to the insights generated by this study.

By clearly identifying each stage—from recognizing research gaps to sharing results—the study provides a thorough understanding of how educational autonomy has influenced the transformation of Islamic boarding schools, particularly in South Tangerang.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

During the period of educational autonomy in South Tangerang, *pesantren* have undergone significant growth and development. The autonomous status granted to these institutions has provided them with greater control over the management and enhancement of religious education. This increased authority has enabled *pesantren* to customize their curricula to better address the needs of various stakeholders.

Several key outcomes have emerged from this ability to tailor curricula. Firstly, aligning the curriculum with contemporary societal demands allows *pesantren* to produce graduates who are well-prepared to navigate the complexities of modern society. For instance, integrating religious and spiritual education with science, technology, and entrepreneurship ensures a holistic educational approach. Secondly, offering diverse programs that cater to varying needs and interests attracts a more heterogeneous student body, fostering increased enrollment and diversity within the institution.

Additionally, educational autonomy has empowered *pesantren* to enhance their facilities and infrastructure, creating a more modern and comprehensive learning environment. Improved infrastructure significantly elevates the quality of education, particularly benefiting students from lower-middle-class

backgrounds, who might otherwise lack access to such resources (Fachrizal et al., 2023; Mizan et al., 2022; Muadin et al., 2023).

Pesantren can facilitate hands-on learning and skill development for students by building laboratories, libraries, and computer centers. Such infrastructure also enables the integration of technology into education, thereby enhancing students' digital literacy and access to digital resources. A safe and healthy learning environment, supported by proper infrastructure, ensures student well-being and academic success. As a result, pesantren find it beneficial to invest in infrastructure, as it not only attracts qualified teachers but also provides them with the necessary tools for effective teaching.

The progress of pesantren in the era of educational autonomy is evident in the increasing number of students and competent educators. Pesantren have become a primary choice for those seeking religious-based education that is both acceptable and of high quality. This indicates that pesantren can successfully adapt to the challenges of modern education while maintaining their core values and local wisdom. Furthermore, educational autonomy offers pesantren the opportunity to build partnerships with other educational institutions and government bodies.

Through such collaborations, pesantren can better address challenges by accessing the necessary resources and support. However, despite significant progress and growth in South Tangerang's pesantren during the era of educational autonomy, challenges remain. One key issue is improving accessibility and equity in religious education services to ensure that all members of society, regardless of age, have equal access to these services, thereby preventing any religious gaps in the region.

In conclusion, pesantren in South Tangerang have shown great potential and made significant contributions to providing the community with quality religious education that aligns with contemporary needs. By fostering collaboration and driving innovation in educational practices, pesantren are poised to play a vital role in the development of the national education system, unlocking their full potential as centers of Islamic knowledge and culture.

Darus-Sunnah Pesantren

Darus-Sunnah Pesantren, located in South Tangerang, was founded by Ali Mustafa Ya'qub. He received his early education at Seblak Pesantren and Tebuireng Pesantren before pursuing further studies at several universities, specializing in Tafsir-Hadith and Islamic Law. In 1996, he established Darus-Sunnah Pesantren, which initially began as a small gathering for three students in the living room of his home. Over time, it grew into a full-fledged pesantren with dormitory facilities. The institution is dedicated to providing quality religious education, with a focus on teaching Islamic knowledge and hadith.



Figure 1. Darus-Sunnah Pesantren.

Darus-Sunnah Pesantren was initially designed specifically for students who already possess a strong understanding of Arabic and religious knowledge, making it ideal for those at the college level. Holding student status is a prerequisite for enrollment at the

pesantren. After securing student status, prospective students must pass both written and oral tests that cover various subjects, including Hadith Science, Akidah (Theology), Islamic History, and general religious knowledge.

The pesantren combines traditional pesantren methods with a lecture-based system. Teaching within the pesantren follows the *sorogan* and *bandongan* methods, where students learn directly from the teacher in a one-on-one or group setting. In the lecture system, students are encouraged to independently analyze and reflect on the material or engage in group discussions. Students are also permitted to participate in campus organizations as long as they adhere to both campus and pesantren rules.

In 2014, Darus-Sunnah Pesantren expanded by opening a madrasah at the junior and senior high school levels, with a specialized focus on Hadith and Hadith Science. This enables students to deeply understand the second source of Islamic teachings by the time they graduate. The pesantren currently occupies a 4,000-square-meter area and has a male dormitory that can accommodate 400 students. Plans are underway for the construction of a new building, with an estimated cost of 20 billion rupiah.

Al-Matiin Pesantren

Al-Matiin Pesantren was founded in South Tangerang by Kiai Ucup, a scholar from Bogor, West Java, in 1994. The name "al-Matiin," meaning "Strong" in Arabic, reflects the pesantren's goal of transforming the surrounding environment and improving the quality of life by addressing negative habits. When Kiai Ucup first established the pesantren, he had limited resources, including 100 kilograms of rice and 100,000 rupiah. However, through determination and hard work, he taught from morning to night to raise the necessary operational funds.

Initially, Al-Matiin Pesantren had only two male students, but the number gradually increased. To attract more community involvement, Kiai Ucup opened a Quranic study group (TPA) and organized large-scale religious events, such as Isra Mi'raj and Maulid of the Prophet Muhammad. These efforts helped draw more residents to join the recitations at the pesantren. The pesantren's monthly operational costs now reach 174 million rupiah, ensuring its sustainability. Today, Al-Matiin Pesantren accommodates around 180 students, primarily from the Jabodetabek area, but also from other regions such as Palembang, Riau, and Bengkulu.



Figure 2. Al-Matiin Pesantren.

Students at Al-Matiin Pesantren are required to stay and study for six years, followed by one year of service as foster caregivers. However, students from outside the pesantren, particularly orphans, can enroll in the aliyah program for just three years. In addition to regular teaching and learning activities, the pesantren also organizes *dhikr* assemblies and *silat* (martial arts) sessions. The teaching methods employed include *tamyiz*, *sorogan*, and *tahfidz* (memorization) of the Qur'an.

Al-Matiin Pesantren has 24 teachers, most of whom are graduates from nearby universities. The pesantren actively participates in various forums and organizations to increase its societal

role and garner government support. Despite fluctuations in government assistance over different administrations, Al-Matiin continues to pursue its mission of producing pious scholars who can contribute to the development of society.

Al-Adzkar Pesantren

Al-Adzkar Pesantren, established in 2012 and located in South Tangerang, has grown significantly since its inception. Initially, the number of students was small, but today it accommodates over 450 students, most of whom live in dormitories. The students come from various nearby areas, including South Tangerang City, Tangerang Regency and City, Bogor Regency and City, as well as Bekasi Regency and City.



Figure 3. Al-Adzkar Pesantren.

Pesantren Al-Adzkar is a modern institution that integrates Islamic studies, general science, and technology. Arabic and English are the primary languages of daily communication, with the aim of cultivating a generation of believers, Muslims, *Muhsin* (those who excel in good deeds), and *Muttaqin* (those who are pious), who are intelligent, independent, modern, and have a global perspective.

In addition to offering formal education through Madrasa Tsanawiyah and Madrasa Aliyah, the pesantren runs an Olympic class program that focuses on preparing students for the National Science Olympiad. This combination of formal and diniyah (religious) education

has led to numerous achievements, including victories in various science and English competitions. Many of its graduates are successfully admitted to prominent state universities in Indonesia.

Education at Al-Adzkar places strong emphasis on *tahsin* (Qur'anic recitation) and *tahfidz* (Qur'an memorization), alongside formal studies and language learning. Daily activities include tahajud prayers, Qur'anic recitation, language classes, formal lessons, extracurricular activities, and independent study in the evenings. The focus on *tahsin* and *tahfidz* is one of the unique strengths of this pesantren.

Al-Islamiyah Pesantren

Al-Islamiyah Pesantren was founded in 1970 in South Tangerang as a small recitation group. Over time, it expanded into a comprehensive Islamic educational institution offering both formal and non-formal education. Today, the pesantren serves over 1,000 students, comprising both resident and non-resident learners. The resident students, who live in dormitories, mostly come from the Jabodetabek area.



Figure 4. Al-Islamiyah Pesantren.

The educational approach at Jamaah Islamiyah Pesantren emphasizes religious studies and Arabic language learning. Students are also required to memorize the Qur'an and study the *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic texts). In addition to religious education, the

pesantren offers formal schooling from the Ibtidaiyah (elementary) level up to higher education.

Daily recitation sessions are held every evening, where students study small texts according to their class level. The pesantren also offers a *tahfidz* al-Qur'an program and science olympiad classes. Teachers at the formal school are primarily graduates of Islamic universities, while the pesantren's religious teachers come from various well-known pesantren.

Many graduates of Jamaah Islamiyah Pesantren have gone on to excel in diverse fields, including becoming clerics, government officials, private sector employees, political activists, and entrepreneurs. The pesantren has played a vital role in shaping a generation with noble character and a global perspective, establishing itself as one of the leading pesantren in the South Tangerang area.

Markaz Hadith Pesantren

Markaz Hadith Pesantren, established in 2013, is led by Daud Rashid, an active preacher who delivers sermons both locally and outside the region. The pesantren's primary aim is to prepare students to become preachers, spreading Islam through *da'wah*. Located only in Serpong, South Tangerang, Markaz Hadith offers formal education at the junior and senior high school levels, though these are held in separate locations. The pesantren currently serves around 81 students from various regions, including students from Islamic minority areas.

All students are required to live in dormitories and participate in *tahfidz* (Qur'anic memorization) and Sharia science programs. They use Indonesian textbooks while practicing Arabic as part of their studies. Markaz Hadith offers scholarships and has structured regulations regarding the duration of study. The admission process involves three waves of registration. The

curriculum for junior and senior high school is independent, with teachers who have received specialized training in teaching and student engagement.



Figure 5. Markaz Hadith Pesantren.

Markaz Hadith Pesantren charges an administration fee and monthly living expenses for independent students. The Junior High School, established in 2013, follows the *Paket B* exam system. As an educational institution, Markaz Hadith is dedicated to developing intelligent, noble individuals who are prepared to become preachers and spread the teachings of Islam.

Assa'adah Pesantren

The history of Assa'adah Pesantren began in the home of Ahmad Ghazali in Setu, near the Assidiqiyah Pesantren. In 2007, through the efforts and prayers of his teacher, Dimiyati Rois, the pesantren was officially established on Jalan Raya Puspitek Puri Serpong, Setu District, South Tangerang City. The name "Assa'adah" was inspired by the founder's daughter, Siti Sa'adatul Alawiyah.

Pesantren Assa'adah follows a semi-modern curriculum that integrates the study of classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*) with formal junior and senior high school education. Additionally, the pesantren offers a Diniyah Mu'allimin Madrasah, which focuses on subjects like Nahwu (Arabic grammar), Shorof (morphology), and Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence). Every year, the pesantren accepts around 50-100 new students

through a rigorous selection process. All students are required to live in the dormitories and undergo a six-year learning program. To graduate, they must meet 13 specific requirements, including memorizing various Islamic texts and participating in community service.



Figure 6. Assa'adah Pesantren.

The pesantren's facilities have developed rapidly, including dormitories, a mosque, dining halls, clinics, and other essential amenities. English and Arabic are the mandatory languages of communication in the dormitories. With its focus on classical Islamic texts, the Qur'an, academic studies, and language mastery, Pesantren Assa'adah is dedicated to providing a comprehensive education that balances religious and general knowledge, aimed at producing a noble and capable generation.

Al-Husainy Pesantren

The history of Al-Husainy Pesantren began in 1980 when Habib Ali, along with his sister Syarifah Alawiyyah and her husband Nurhadi, established the Tarbiyah Nurusholihat Foundation in Slipi. In 1991, a plot of land in Lengkong Wetan, Tangerang Regency, was donated to the foundation. This land was then inaugurated as Al-Husainy Pesantren by Habib Abdurrahman Al Kaff and other prominent religious figures.

Al-Husainy Pesantren offers a comprehensive educational program, including the study of *kitab kuning*

(classical Islamic texts), formal education through Madrasah Tsanawiyah and Madrasah Aliyah, and a Quranic study program. Students are admitted through a three-phase selection process and are required to live in the dormitories. Additionally, there is a branch of Al-Husainy Pesantren in Puncak, Bogor, aimed at helping students improve their Quranic recitation skills.



Figure 7. al-Husainy Pesantren.

Currently, Al-Husainy Pesantren serves around 500 students and employs 60 teachers and staff, with students coming from various regions across Indonesia. The pesantren charges both administrative and monthly fees. Known for its focus on da'wah and public speaking activities, students are trained to deliver lectures in Indonesian, Arabic, and English. The pesantren offers well-developed facilities, including a mosque and dormitories, and follows a curriculum that combines government standards with local content.

Discussion

Both before and after the implementation of educational autonomy, pesantren in South Tangerang experienced rapid growth and development. According to data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, there are approximately 70 registered pesantren in South Tangerang City. However, it is suspected that many other pesantren have not submitted reports to the Head of the PAKIS Section (Religious Education and Islamic Religious Affairs) for various reasons,

such as possibly not meeting the official requirements of a pesantren or due to other unspecified considerations. The 70 registered pesantren were also identified as potential recipients of the Online Learning Assistance Fund during the COVID-19 pandemic, facilitated by the Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of South Tangerang City.

In addition to their traditional focus on religious book studies, many of these pesantren also provide a range of educational services, including modern schools and madrasas. The madrasas are under the guidance of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and cover levels from Kindergarten, Madrasa Ibtidaiyah (elementary), Madrasa Tsanawiyah (junior high), and Madrasa Aliyah (senior high), extending even to higher education institutions and student pesantren. Additionally, educational institutions such as Junior High Schools and Senior High Schools fall under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology.

These pesantren are distributed across all sub-districts in South Tangerang, with varying numbers in each area. The smallest concentration is in the North Serpong Sub-district, while the largest is in Ciputat Sub-district. Specifically, North Serpong has 2 pesantren, Serpong has 9, Setu has 5, Pondok Aren has 17, East Ciputat has 6, Ciputat has 22, and Pamulang has 9 pesantren.

The pesantren has the elements to fulfill the title of pesantren, including kiai, student, mosque, dormitory, and books (Fuadi, 2022). In addition, there are also pesantren that specialize as pesantren for orphans and the poor, special pesantren for *mualaf*, special pesantren for students, special pesantren for studying *hadith*, special pesantren for the Qur'an, pesantren by teaching *tarekat* and integrated pesantren which are a combination of traditional and modern, between reciting the Qur'an and

studying formally and classically, there are even pesantren that require their students to live and study in pesantren for six years, by studying formally and classically at the junior high school level, as well as the high school level, without having to ignore studying classical books by classical scholars (Idris et al., 2023; Isbah, 2020; Junaedi, 2020; Munjiat, 2021; Mustari, 2018; Ridwan et al., 2022; Zafi et al., 2021).

The seventy pesantren have generally made transformations and changes, but at different times according to the conditions and needs of each pesantren. Regarding status, pesantren have generally changed into foundations, meaning they have obtained authorization from the Ministry of Law and Human Rights. A foundation means its formal legality makes it easier to develop and build cooperation with other parties to advance pesantren education institutions.

In addition, *mudirul mahad*, in this case, has also been transformed from non-formal to formal education, which only recites the Quran from one pesantren to another, changing with leaps and bounds, which means increasing its education to the formal education level. Most *Kiai* and other pesantren caregivers and teachers in South Tangerang have undergraduate and graduate degrees, even from prestigious universities at home and abroad.

Pesantren in South Tangerang have changed the recruitment of students and learners, developing pesantren into semi-modern pesantren. In this context, the curriculum applied combines the national curriculum and the pesantren curriculum. The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Education and Research and Technology formulates the national curriculum. In contrast, the pesantren curriculum is the pesantren curriculum. It is usually carried out in traditional pesantren by studying Islamic religious

knowledge in *sorogan*, *wetonan*, *bandongan*, *balaghan*, and *halaqah*.

In addition, with the implementation of the national curriculum, pesantren no longer accept students by being sheathed but by screening and selecting. If they pass the selection, they then go to school formally or classically, and if they graduate from one level of education, the student will obtain a diploma. This formal legality allows the student to continue their education to a higher level and can even work with a salary according to the type of diploma obtained and others. Thus, pesantren can prepare students capable in science and technology but still with their Islamic identity as an institution of *tafaqquh fiddien* and *tafaqquh fil'ilmiddunyawi*.

Other pesantren transformations occur in management or management and changes in pesantren infrastructure. In the context of management, for example, administrative affairs in pesantren become more orderly, measurable, transparent, and accountable as a manifestation of quality assurance in a modern management system. Meanwhile, infrastructure transformation concentrates more on constructing student dormitories, classrooms, and worship facilities. Most pesantren build student dormitories not horizontally, given the limited land, but vertically, two and three levels, with several rooms expected to accommodate all students.

Another pesantren transformation is in the field of worship facilities and books. Initially, the books studied in pesantren were related to Islamic religious sciences, the works of classical scholars, and if in the Science of *Tauhid* generally referred to books by al-Ashary, in Fiqh Science using books by Imam Syafi'i and the Science of *Akhlaq* and *Tasawuf* usually using books by al-Ghazali. However, nowadays, with the introduction of formal schools such as kindergartens, preschools, elementary

schools, junior high schools, and high schools, the knowledge studied in pesantren is a combination of Islamic and general sciences (Hasanah et al., 2023; Maimunah et al., 2021; Mashudi, 2020). However, Islamic sciences remain a priority, not the only one. This is evident, among others, from the primary reading of the student, known as the "yellow book" in the mosque using the *sorogan*, *wetonan*, *balaghan*, or *bandongan* method, and *halaqah* (Kholili, 2021; Winata et al., 2021; Zarkasyi, 2017).

So, the mosque is not only for congregational prayers but also for studying books. Therefore, pesantren often expands the existing mosque to become more prominent and accommodate many students who have to worship and practice religious life (Isbah, 2020; Suradi, 2018). Thus, pesantren can be an agent of creating religious elites and maintaining Islamic traditions in a pluralistic and diverse society. At least three crucial roles can be played by pesantren when transforming: the center for the transmission of traditional Islamic sciences, the guardian and maintainer of traditional Islam, and the center for the reproduction of ulama (Chadidjah et al., 2020; Harnadi et al., 2021; Setiawan et al., 2023; Suradi, 2022).

The focus of the research is on exploring and understanding the transformation of Islamic boarding schools, particularly within the context of educational autonomy, with a specific emphasis on the South Tangerang area. The research aims to address knowledge gaps related to this transformation by delving deeper into various aspects, including the local context, the impact of educational autonomy, and the perspectives of school leaders. Specifically, the novelty of the research lies in its contribution to analyzing the formalization of Islamic boarding school management and its effects on students' character education, as well as providing

detailed insights into how local school leaders perceive the relationship between autonomy and control in managing this transformation.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the transformation of pesantren in South Tangerang City within the context of educational autonomy during the era of decentralization, which has enabled pesantren to integrate traditional religious education with modern systems. The transformation includes curriculum updates that combine religious studies with general knowledge, technology, and entrepreneurship; infrastructure modernization such as laboratories and libraries; and the implementation of more transparent and accountable management practices. Pesantren have also enhanced access and program diversity to meet community needs, including special groups such as converts and orphans. Despite significant progress, challenges such as gaps in educational services and the need for innovation remain to be addressed. This study provides insights into the strategic role of pesantren in maintaining a balance between tradition and modernity while contributing to a dynamic national education system.

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