

Transforming Educational Management in Islamic Boarding Schools: A Historical and Digital Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the transformation of educational management in Islamic boarding schools (Islamic Boarding School) from historical and digital perspectives, using Buntet Islamic Boarding School in Cirebon as a case study. Employing a qualitative-descriptive design with a historical approach, the research integrates literature review, field observation, and semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal three significant transformation dimensions: (1) the digitalization of management systems through applications such as Simapel and SIMATREN, which enhance accountability, transparency, and institutional efficiency; (2) curriculum transformation that integrates classical Islamic texts (kitab kuning) with modern digital pedagogy, improving students' religious and technological literacy; and (3) the strengthening of Islamic Boarding School -based academic culture through research development, publication, and digital literacy training. The study concludes that the managerial transformation of Islamic Boarding School is not merely a response to modernization but an adaptive effort to harmonize spirituality and digital innovation in a hybrid management model. Recommendations include expanding digital literacy programs, training educators in educational technology, and fostering collaboration with external institutions to sustain innovation. This research contributes to the global discourse on Islamic educational management by demonstrating how faith-based schools can balance tradition and technological progress within a culturally grounded framework.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a crucial foundation for shaping individual character and building a nation's civilization. In Indonesia, the education system has undergone significant changes across the curriculum, teaching methods, and institutional management. Amidst all these changes, Islamic Boarding Schools continue to play an important role as Islamic educational institutions, capable of adapting and remaining relevant in shaping their students' character, spirituality, and social skills (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2021). Islamic Boarding School not only serves as a center for the dissemination of Islamic knowledge but also as a community-based educational model rich in local cultural values harmoniously integrated with Islamic teachings (Harahap et al., 2025).

The unique Islamic Boarding School education system, which fosters independence, discipline, and morals in students, makes it one of the state-recognized educational alternatives. In fact, in various recent studies, Islamic Boarding Schools are recognized as educational institutions with high resilience to social and global crises because they are grounded in values, participatory, and have strong social networks (Maulidin, 2024). Therefore, it is not surprising that many parties are now pushing for the integration of Islamic Boarding School values into the broader national education system to strengthen character education and value-based social development.

Recent bibliometric research by Gazali and Budiana (2023) adds weight to this perspective by charting the global academic conversation on Islamic Boarding Schools from 1994 to 2022, using Scopus data. Their

study breaks down Islamic Boarding School research into two key areas: a micro dimension that delves into internal aspects, such as educational systems, traditions, and the relationships between kyai and santri, and a macro dimension that examines how these institutions respond to social, political, and technological changes. They also pinpoint three distinct phases in the evolution of Islamic Boarding School research — initiation, development, and expansion — showing a notable rise in scholarly interest, particularly in areas such as modernization, digitalization, and institutional transformation. This trend underscores that Islamic Boarding Schools are increasingly recognized as flexible educational institutions that can harmonize local wisdom with the demands of global education.

Historically, the education management system in Islamic Boarding Schools has tended to be simple yet highly effective, with the figure of the kiai serving as a charismatic leader who fulfills multiple roles, including teacher, spiritual guide, organizer, and central figure in decision-making (Abdul Muis, 2020). Islamic Boarding School has successfully maintained its existence amid the various challenges of the times, thanks to the values passed down through generations and its ability to adapt. One real example of this resilience is the Buntet Islamic Boarding School in Cirebon Regency. This large boarding school has existed since the 18th century and is known as a center of education and socio-religious movements.

Islamic Boarding School Buntet has undergone a significant transformation in its management, evolving from a traditional system focused on classical knowledge and direct student care by the kiai to becoming a formal educational institution, such as a madrasah or public school. This change became even stronger after the integration of the national curriculum and the government's recognition of Islamic Boarding Schools as part of the national education system. This transformation demands more systematic, transparent, and professional management.

The challenges of modernization and globalization have pushed Islamic Boarding Schools to not only preserve traditional values but also adopt new managerial approaches, including digitalization in their management systems. Adaptation to information technology has become increasingly important, especially in administration, learning, data archiving, and institutional communication (Mulyana, 2020). This is an inevitable step if Islamic Boarding Schools want to remain relevant and competitive amidst global educational changes.

However, this transformation should not forget the roots of tradition and spirituality, which are the soul of the Islamic Boarding School. The ideal approach is a hybrid management model that combines modern management principles with the cultural and spiritual values of an Islamic Boarding School. This is important so that Islamic boarding schools can continue to produce graduates who are not only academically competent but also have strong moral values, are independent, and have a strong social commitment.

One important strategy in contemporary Islamic Boarding School management is strengthening governance aligned with the institution's vision and mission. A clear vision will determine the direction of institutional development, while a structured mission will guide operational activities. Islamic Boarding School Buntet, for example, has begun digitizing its learning system and student data management through information technology-based applications, in response to the need for greater efficiency and transparency in management.

Thus, a historical analysis of the Islamic Boarding School management system is crucial not only to document the changes that have occurred but also to provide a foundation for formulating adaptive and sustainable management strategies. The integration of tradition preservation and managerial innovation is key to ensuring that the Islamic Boarding School continues to function as a beacon of Islamic civilization, capable of facing the challenges of the times without losing its identity. Islamic Boarding School is not just a place to study religion; it also serves as a center for character development, intellectualism, and community leadership that can bring positive change to the nation and society.

2. METHOD

In this journal, the author adopts a descriptive, qualitative approach, blending it with a historical study model and library research, while incorporating field data gathered through participatory observation and semi-structured interviews. This method was chosen to dive deeper into the dynamics of educational management in Islamic Boarding Schools, examining it from historical, conceptual, and contemporary practice perspectives, with a special emphasis on Buntet Islamic Boarding School in Cirebon as a case study.

The qualitative approach was selected because the goal of this study is to grasp the meanings, values, and practices of educational management that unfold in Islamic Boarding Schools, all within their distinct sociocultural and religious contexts. By using a qualitative lens, the researcher can delve into the intricate realities that quantitative methods or mere statistical data cannot fully capture. As Moleong (2017) points out, qualitative research is particularly effective for revealing subjective, symbolic, and contextual understandings of social practices, including the educational management systems found within Islamic Boarding Schools.

In this study, we took a historical approach to explore the evolution of educational management in the Islamic Boarding School, looking at it both chronologically and contextually. By delving into historical studies,

we can piece together how Islamic Boarding School management systems have evolved over the years, highlighting shifts in institutional structures, leadership styles, management strategies, and the integration of traditional values with modern management practices. This exploration is especially significant, as Islamic Boarding Schools are the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, having played a crucial role in shaping the social and religious fabric of society since before colonial times.

Focusing on Buntet Islamic Boarding School in Cirebon, we chose this institution because it exemplifies the shift from traditional management methods to more contemporary and digital systems. In this light, historical research not only documents past events but also reveals the enduring values and managerial innovations that have emerged within the school.

For this study, we gathered data from a variety of sources, including scientific literature, historical texts, journal articles, archival documents, and both primary and secondary sources. This included historical records from Buntet Islamic Boarding School, national education regulations, and the institution's internal publications. We then analyzed the collected data descriptively and qualitatively, focusing on interpreting the meanings, symbols, and narratives that shape the educational management system in the Islamic Boarding School.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Concept and Principles of Islamic Educational Management

Islamic educational management plays a crucial role in our education system. It is not just about being effective and efficient; it also aims to weave spiritual and transcendent values into the learning experience. In today's world, we see Islamic educational management as more than just a set of administrative tasks. It is a strategic approach that helps us achieve broad educational goals, encompassing intellectual, moral, social, and spiritual aspects (Desri Arwen et al., 2025).

The term "management" derives from the English verb "to manage," which means to regulate or administer. More specifically, it refers to leaders and leadership, those individuals who take on the role of guiding others. When we talk about a manager, we mean someone who leads or holds a leadership position. As Stoner points out, management is a process that involves planning, organizing, directing, and controlling the efforts of team members, as well as utilizing various resources to meet organizational objectives (Muslichah Erma Widiyana, 2020).

Wahyuddin (2023) describes Islamic educational management as a systematic way of overseeing educational institutions grounded in Islamic values, such as faith, knowledge, justice, and social responsibility. These principles lay the groundwork for crafting educational policies that not only aim for academic success but also prioritize the nurturing of moral character and the values of tawhid (the oneness of God).

As emphasized by Chotimah, Qudsy, and Yusuf (2025), Islamic educational management should not be confined to textual or top-down applications of religious principles but must be implemented contextually and substantively. Genuine Islamic management integrates the values of justice, balance, and tolerance within institutional culture and leadership practice, ensuring that management decisions reflect both faith-based ethics and humanistic considerations. This perspective underscores the need for Islamic education management to harmonize administrative professionalism with moral and spiritual authenticity.

From an Islamic viewpoint, educational management goes beyond achieving success in this world; it also aims for *ukhrawi* goals, including finding happiness in both our current lives and the hereafter. This perspective aligns perfectly with the core principles of Islamic education, which strive to nurture the essence of humanity (*insānīyah al-insān*) through a holistic approach known as *tarbiyah*, addressing physical, intellectual, and spiritual growth. A beautiful illustration of this concept can be found in the Qur'an, specifically in Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 31, where Allah SWT imparts knowledge to Prophet Adam by teaching him the names of all things. This moment symbolizes the very first gift of knowledge to humanity:

"And He taught Adam the names all of them. Then He presented them to the angels and said, 'Inform Me of the names of these, if you are truthful.'" (QS. Al-Baqarah: 31).

This verse underscores that education is an integral part of *sunnatullah* and serves as a philosophical foundation for Islamic educational management. According to classical exegesis, such as *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, this verse indicates that Allah endowed Adam with comprehensive knowledge, including the names and functions of all things, thereby establishing his superiority over the angels in knowledge (Ibn Kathīr, 1999). Contemporary scholars, such as al-Marāghī, interpret this verse as a sign of human intellectual capacity and responsibility to seek, preserve, and apply knowledge for the benefit of humanity and the fulfillment of divine trust (al-Marāghī, 2006, pp. 82–83).

Therefore, education in Islam must be designed and managed in accordance with divine principles and the values of *tawhīd*.

Islamic educational management also functions as a means to realize the objectives of national education as stipulated in Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System. Its goal is to develop learners'

potential so that they become individuals who are faithful, pious, and possess noble character. Consequently, the management of Islamic educational institutions must create an ecosystem that fosters the achievement of *insān kāmil*, a holistic individual who balances spirituality with intellectual competence (Mujamil, 2021).

In educational management, several key functions are widely recognized in modern management theory. These include:

1. Planning involves setting clear directions and strategies for educational activities in a systematic and forward-thinking manner.
2. Organizing: Here, the focus is on structuring the organization, assigning tasks, and grouping educational activities to work together effectively.
3. Actuating: This involves rallying human resources to implement the planned strategies.
4. Controlling: This function evaluates how healthy activities are being implemented and makes adjustments when things do not go as planned.

These four functions are often summarized under the acronym POAC (Planning, Organizing, Actuating, Controlling), which forms the core cycle of educational management (Syarhani, 2022). Notable scholars like Skinner, Fayol, Gulick, and Robbins have also introduced additional functions — such as staffing, reporting, budgeting, and coordination — but these still align with the POAC framework.

On another note, the principles of Islamic educational management are deeply rooted in moral and spiritual values that guide managerial tasks. Ramayulis (in Syarhani, 2022) highlights eight essential principles of Islamic educational management:

1. *Ikhlas* (Sincerity): Managing education purely for the sake of Allah SWT.
2. Honesty: Carrying out responsibilities with transparency and integrity.
3. Trustworthiness (*Amānah*): Fulfilling the responsibilities entrusted to you by others.
4. Justice: Ensuring fair and proportional treatment for everyone involved.
5. Responsibility: Being fully aware of the consequences of your actions while performing tasks.
6. Dynamism: Staying innovative and adaptable to the changing times.
7. Practicality: Making sure resources are used efficiently.
8. Flexibility: Being open to new ideas that align with Islamic values.

These principles not only shape how we manage education but also set Islamic educational management apart from the broader field. In an Islamic framework, management extends beyond productivity and material gains; it emphasizes values such as devotion, justice, and responsibility, which are regarded as divine mandates from Allah SWT.

So, Islamic educational management is about organizing educational institutions that not only incorporate modern management theories but are also deeply rooted in Islamic teachings. The ultimate aim is to nurture a generation that excels intellectually while also developing a strong spiritual character, enabling them to fulfill their role as *khalīfah* on earth and make a positive impact on humanity.

3.2 Islamic Boarding School as Islamic Educational Institutions: Conceptual, Historical, and Systemic Perspectives

The word "Islamic Boarding School" comes from "santri," which refers to students, combined with the prefix "pe-an," indicating a place where these students live or study. This highlights the Islamic Boarding School as a unique, informal educational setting that's deeply intertwined with Islamic traditions in the archipelago (Nugroho & Sahlan, 2022). On the other hand, "pondok" is thought to have its roots in the Arabic word "funduq," which means "lodging" or "inn" (Habibi, 2023).

Pondok Islamic Boarding Schools are traditional Islamic educational institutions with a rich history in Indonesia's educational landscape. As some of the oldest components of the Islamic education system, Islamic Boarding Schools not only fulfill religious functions but also serve as vital hubs for moral development, cultural enrichment, and social change. Their presence is closely linked to the spread of Islam throughout the Indonesian archipelago, with some historians suggesting that the first Islamic Boarding School appeared in the 14th century during the time of Raden Rahmat (Sunan Ampel), or even earlier, around 1062 CE in Pamekasan, Madura. However, this remains a topic of debate among scholars (Detik.com, n.d.).

Historically, Islamic Boarding Schools represent one of the oldest and most resilient forms of Islamic education in Indonesia. As highlighted by Dhofier, Abdullah, and Rahman (Isbah, 2020), the Islamic Boarding School originated from traditional *halaqah* systems dedicated to *tafaqquh fi al-din*, the deep understanding of Islamic sciences under the personal guidance of a *kiai*. Throughout Indonesia's social and political evolution — from the colonial period to independence and modern nationhood — Islamic Boarding Schools have consistently demonstrated their adaptive capacity. They transformed from informal centers of Islamic propagation (*tabligh* and *ta'lim*) into structured educational institutions integrated within the national education system. This transformation illustrates the systemic flexibility of Islamic Boarding Schools, which not only

preserve spiritual and moral traditions but also embrace administrative and curricular reforms to remain relevant amid globalization and educational modernization.

According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (2021), Islamic Boarding Schools are community-driven educational institutions that play a key role in nurturing ethical, independent, and competitive Muslim generations. The establishment of these institutions was shaped by global intellectual exchanges, particularly from the Arab world and India, which can be traced through the evolution of various jurisprudential schools (madhhab). Initially, Islamic Boarding Schools were centers for religious education and the dissemination of Islam. However, over time, they evolved into respected institutions within society, becoming a source of pride for Muslims in the archipelago, even as they navigated cultural challenges in their formative years (Susilo & Wulansari, 2020).

According to Bahrudin and Widodo (2023), the essence of Islamic Boarding School is defined by several key features: a kyai (religious leader) who serves as the leading authority, santri (students) who are eager to learn, a mosque that acts as the hub for worship and education, dormitories (pondok) where students reside, and the kitab kuning (classical Islamic texts) that form the backbone of the curriculum. These elements have remained consistent over the years, even as they adapt to new circumstances.

The educational approach at the Islamic Boarding School is unique, setting it apart from traditional formal education. The learning experience is more relaxed and personal, using methods such as sorogan (one-on-one study with the kyai), wetonan (group study with the kyai's insights), and bandungan (listening together as the kyai discusses classical texts). As noted by the Ma'arif Institute (2021), this system fosters a strong sense of religious character, focusing not just on knowledge but also on internalizing values, practicing worship, and building a close bond between teacher and student. Santri are encouraged to develop qualities like independence, simplicity, and respect for scholarly authority (ta'dzim).

The kitab kuning serves as the primary teaching resource, covering subjects such as fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), tauhid (theology), tafsir (Qur'anic interpretation), hadith (Prophetic traditions), nahwu-sharaf (Arabic grammar), and akhlaq (ethics). By transmitting knowledge through the kitab kuning, Islamic Boarding Schools play a vital role in preserving and revitalizing the classical Islamic intellectual tradition, deeply rooted in the scholarly legacy of the ulama (Wahid & Nurhasanah, 2024).

3.3 Modernization of Islamic Boarding School and Managerial Transformation

As time marches on, pondok Islamic Boarding schools, traditional Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, are encountering a host of new challenges. This changing environment is urging Islamic Boarding Schools to adapt and innovate to remain relevant and play a larger role in advancing national education. The ongoing modernization of Islamic Boarding Schools encompasses various areas, including updates to the curriculum, teaching methods, and management practices, as well as strategies to economically and socially uplift the communities surrounding them.

Hanun Asroah (2011) thoroughly examined the capacity of Islamic Boarding Schools to address the challenges of modernization in *The Journal of Indonesian Islam*. She points out that the sustainability of Islamic Boarding Schools over the years hinges on their capacity to respond to external social and cultural shifts while preserving their traditional identity. Her analysis reveals that Islamic Boarding Schools operate through four essential mechanisms — adaptation, goal achievement, integration, and latency — that together help them maintain stability and continuity while evolving in response to societal changes. These adaptive mechanisms demonstrate how Islamic Boarding Schools incorporate modern elements — such as formal education systems, management structures, and technological advancements — while remaining true to their core values of spirituality, simplicity, and community-focused education.

In this context of adaptive transformation, the Islamic Boarding School also plays a vital role in boosting social mobility and empowering lower-income communities. As noted by Kholid and Supriyadi (2022), Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia are not just centers for religious education; they also serve as vehicles for social and economic progress for marginalized groups. Through educational modernization, skill-based curricula, and innovative institutional practices, Islamic Boarding Schools are helping to cultivate a new educated Muslim middle class that harmonizes traditional values with contemporary societal frameworks. This dual function — preserving religious and cultural authenticity while fostering socio-economic progress — demonstrates the transformative power of Islamic Boarding Schools in shaping Indonesia's modern educational landscape.

Furthermore, Abuddar, Zubaidi, and Maulana (2024) highlight the importance of traditional practices in Islamic boarding schools, like sorogan, bandongan, and kitab kuning recitation, as vital components for fostering students' overall growth. These customs help develop spirituality, discipline, independence, and social awareness, guiding students to become morally sound, intellectually equipped, and socially responsible individuals. In this comprehensive educational approach, Islamic Boarding School blends spiritual development with modern skills, readying students to tackle future technological and societal challenges. By upholding these traditions while welcoming innovation, Islamic Boarding Schools remain powerful institutions that harmonize faith, knowledge, and character in their quest for educational excellence.

The managerial transformation of the Islamic Boarding School is also inseparable from the issue of accountability. As noted by Nurkhin (2024), his systematic review identifies the Islamic Boarding School's double accountability responsibility to God and to society, rooted in both Islamic and local cultural values. This moral foundation aligns with the legitimacy theory, which underscores the importance of transparency, ethical management, and public trust in Islamic Boarding School institutions.

Empirical evidence from Indonesian studies also reinforces these theoretical perspectives. For instance, Izza and Al Azizi (2022) found that students living in Islamic Boarding School environments demonstrated stronger character traits and discipline than their non-boarding peers, while Rizfa Faiza et al. (2022) revealed how Islamic Boarding School-based enterprises and social finance (ZISWAF) have enhanced community economic empowerment in East Java. Similarly, Sugiono and Indrarini (2022) highlight the Islamic Boarding School's role in fostering economic independence and social entrepreneurship among surrounding communities. These findings support the argument that Islamic Boarding Schools not only preserve spiritual values but also actively contribute to social welfare, leadership formation, and sustainable community development, making them a distinctive model of Islamic educational management that bridges tradition and innovation.

A report from the Directorate of Islamic Religious Education and Islamic Boarding Schools of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (2022) outlines five key areas for modernizing Islamic Boarding Schools. First up is curriculum integration, which means blending religious studies with general subjects like math, science, technology, and foreign languages through accredited formal madrasah education. Next is the digitalization of learning, where Islamic Boarding Schools are increasingly embracing digital platforms, learning management systems (LMS), and social media for both teaching and administrative tasks (Rahmawati & Syamsudin, 2023). The third aspect focuses on strengthening management and leadership by implementing professional, accountable, and strategically planned governance systems (Sutrisno & Lestari, 2024). Fourth, there is the economic development of Islamic Boarding Schools, which involves setting up business units such as cooperatives, livestock farming, agriculture, and even digital marketing as part of their independence programs (Fauzi & Ramadhani, 2022). Finally, a collaborative approach highlights the Islamic Boarding School's willingness to forge strategic partnerships with government entities, NGOs, universities, and donor agencies to enhance its institutional quality and capacity.

This transformation shows that modernization does not erase the Islamic character and values of the Islamic Boarding School; instead, it enhances its role as a key player in community-based human resource development. In fact, UNESCO (2022) acknowledges Islamic Boarding Schools as a form of value-driven education that has stood firm even during global crises, including the pandemic.

Moreover, the evolution of Islamic Boarding Schools has shifted their identity from mere centers of religious education to vibrant hubs of social innovation, economic empowerment, and character education. Nowadays, Islamic Boarding Schools are crucial in fostering religious moderation, multicultural education, and community development, all of which are deeply rooted in local wisdom (Kurniawan, 2024). This important role has been legally supported by Law No. 18 of 2019 on Islamic Boarding Schools, which recognizes them as a vital part of the national education system and grants them the authority to offer three types of education: diniyah (religious), formal religious education, and vocational training.

In our globalized world, modernizing Islamic Boarding schools has become essential. With the rapid advancements in science and technology reshaping many aspects of life, including education, Islamic Boarding Schools are expected not only to uphold Islamic values and scholarly traditions but also to weave science and technology into their teaching methods. Some Islamic Boarding Schools have already established computer labs, introduced foreign language classes, and adopted e-learning to meet the demand for graduates who are spiritually grounded, intellectually sharp, and professionally skilled (Lailiyah & Wahid, 2024).

Digitalization has become a vital part of this strategy. As Deputy Minister of Religious Affairs Romo Muhammad Syafi'i points out, it is not just a handy tool; it is a means of adapting to the needs of our times (NU Jabar, n.d.). Nowadays, digital systems are used for everything from managing academics to facilitating communication between teachers and parents to handling financial reports. However, Syafi'i also raised some important concerns about the risks of digitalization, such as the potential for less direct supervision from teachers and parents and the risk of diminished character education. This is where Imam Al-Ghazali's insights come into play. He believed that education is about 90% character development and only 10% knowledge transfer (NU Jabar, n.d.).

On top of that, advancements in technology, especially Artificial Intelligence (AI), are changing how we learn and access information. Both teachers and students are increasingly turning to digital resources rather than traditional printed books, as evidenced by the growing number of digital libraries in various Islamic Boarding Schools. This shift aligns with the fihiyyah principle *al-muhafadzatu 'ala al-qadim al-shalih wa al-akhdzu bi al-jadid al-ashlah*, preserving valuable traditions while embracing better innovations (Manan, 2019).

Zarkasyi & Hasan (2022) argue that modernizing Islamic education in Islamic Boarding Schools is essential to address the ever-evolving challenges we face, especially amid digital disruption and the increasing complexity of societal needs. They emphasize that Islamic education should not be confined to a rigid divide between religious and secular studies; instead, it should be integrative and adaptable to technological advancements. Graduates from Islamic education, including those from Islamic Boarding Schools, need to emerge not only with a deep understanding of their faith but also with digital skills, data literacy, and 21st-century competencies.

In the context of building a civil society in the age of Society 5.0, Islamic Boarding Schools need to create educational models that are not only digital but also relevant and forward-thinking. These models aim to uphold Islamic values while boosting the competitiveness of santri on both national and global stages. This can be achieved by integrating technology into learning experiences, managing institutions effectively, and developing strategies to empower the local economy.

3.4 Digitalization of Education in Buntet Islamic Boarding School : Strategies and Implementation

Buntet Islamic Boarding School, established back in 1750 CE by KH. Muqoyyim is considered one of the oldest Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia. In its early days, the Islamic Boarding School was relatively humble, featuring just a handful of simple houses, a small langgar (prayer hall), and basic student accommodations in the Kedungmalang area. However, over time, especially after the colonial era, the institution grew significantly. Fast forward to today, and Buntet Islamic Boarding School has transformed into a sprawling educational complex, boasting numerous dormitories, various formal and informal educational institutions, and even higher education options such as the College of Islamic Education (STIT) and the Nursing Academy (Akper).

What sets Buntet Islamic Boarding School apart from other Islamic Boarding schools is its unique decentralized boarding system. Rather than having a single dormitory complex, students (santri) are spread across 70 different pondok (dormitories), each run independently by its own kyai (administrator). While each pondok has its own teaching and caregiving style, shaped by the personality and leadership of its caretaker, they all operate under the umbrella of the Buntet Islamic Boarding School Islamic Education Foundation (YLPI). They are collectively overseen by senior kyais within the Council of Elders (Dewan Sepuh) (Luthfi Yusuf, 2025).

Historically, the management of education at Buntet Islamic Boarding School has been deeply rooted in traditional methods that reflect Islamic values and local wisdom. While the term "management" was not explicitly used in the past, there was a clear and systematic governance structure in place, with distinct roles for kyais, teachers (ustadz), senior students, and administrators. The core values that shaped this management approach included adab (ethics), trust, moral responsibility, exemplary conduct, discipline, and the quest for barakah (divine blessing). As time went on, the Islamic Boarding School adapted to modern changes by implementing more organized management systems, such as archiving student data, establishing formal governance structures, and beginning its journey toward digitalization, all while maintaining its value-driven, tradition-focused management style.

The foundational values that have consistently guided the educational management of the Islamic Boarding School through the years include:

1. Sincerity (Ikhlās): This is the main spiritual force that inspires kyais and teachers in their guidance of students, fueled by their commitment to da'wah and dedication.
2. Simplicity: This is evident in the caretakers' way of life and an educational system that values meaning and substance over material wealth.
3. Self-reliance: Students learn to manage their time, meet their personal needs, and take charge of their own learning.
4. Humility (Tawāḍu') and Etiquette (Adab): These qualities are often regarded as more important than mere intellectual knowledge, highlighting the significance of moral character over intellectual prowess.
5. Brotherhood (Ukhuwah): A sense of community is fostered, built on solidarity and mutual support among students and teachers.

These values have stood firm as foundational pillars, preserved through generations, even as educational methods have evolved.

As a deeply rooted Islamic educational institution, Buntet Islamic Boarding School is continually evolving to meet today's challenges. In the face of globalization, the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and the rise of Society 5.0, the Islamic Boarding School has embraced an educational transformation model that is both digital and adaptable. This shift is not just about adopting new technology; it is a comprehensive change that affects management, teaching methods, and cultural values. In this light, the digitalization of education at Buntet Islamic Boarding School is a practical approach to enhancing institutional management effectiveness, improving teaching quality, and solidifying the Islamic Boarding School's position as a vital Islamic educational hub in our modern world.

Through this innovative strategy, Buntet Islamic Boarding School shows that holding onto traditional values while welcoming new ideas can go hand in hand, creating an Islamic educational system that is not only excellent but also moderate and competitive.

On a structural level, the formal educational institutions within Buntet Islamic Boarding School cater to students of various ages, from early childhood to higher education. This includes Kindergartens (TK), Qur'anic Learning Centers (TPA), Islamic elementary schools (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, MI) for both boys and girls, Islamic junior high schools (MTsNU) for Putra I, Putra II, and Putri III, as well as Islamic senior high schools (MANU) for both genders. There is also a State Islamic Senior High School (MAN) within the Islamic Boarding School complex, which serves most of the resident santri, even though it operates independently of the foundation.

At the vocational level, YLPI is responsible for Buntet Islamic Boarding School Vocational High School (SMK), which focuses on developing vocational skills and preparing students for the workforce. Right now, the school offers five programs that are tailored to meet the needs of both industry and the community: Motorcycle Engineering (TSM), Light Vehicle Engineering (TKR), Visual Communication Design (DKV), Accounting and Financial Institutions (AKL), and Nursing and Caregiver Assistance (AKC). These programs showcase Buntet Islamic Boarding School's dedication to graduating students who are not only well-versed in religious knowledge but also ready to take on the challenges of the modern job market.

On the higher education front, YLPI runs the Buntet Islamic Boarding School Nursing Academy (AKPER), which has been in operation since 1997 and specializes in vocational health education. Additionally, the College of Islamic Education (STIT), founded in 2017, is currently transitioning to the Buntet Islamic Boarding School Islamic Institute (IAI). This institution offers a variety of undergraduate programs, including Islamic Education (PAI), Islamic Family Law (HKI), and Islamic Business Management (MBS), all aimed at advancing modern Islamic higher education while upholding the values of Islamic Boarding Schools.

For those seeking non-formal education, YLPI also manages Madrasah Diniyah and the Language and Computer Institute (LBK), which provides extra skills training for students and the broader community. In total, there are over 10 formal educational units, along with numerous non-formal and diniyah institutions under YLPI's umbrella, making Buntet Islamic Boarding School a well-rounded and integrated Islamic educational ecosystem (Luthfi Yusuf, 2025).

3.5 Dimensions of Transformation: Digitalization, Curriculum, and Academic Culture

The transformation of educational management at Buntet Islamic Boarding School can be observed through three key dimensions: (1) digitalization of management and enhancement of digital literacy, (2) curriculum transformation and pedagogical methods, and (3) strengthening of academic culture rooted in Islamic Boarding School values.

First, in terms of Digitalization of Management and Digital Literacy, Buntet Islamic Boarding School has taken significant strides since 2023 by weaving information technology into its educational management framework. The Buntet Islamic Education Foundation (YLPI) has partnered with the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, the Nahdlatul Ulama Institute for Information and Communication (LTN PBNU), and students from STIT Buntet to launch digital literacy training for both santri and teachers. During these sessions, students learned how to craft digital da'wah content for social media using straightforward tools, such as smartphones. This initiative not only sparks creativity but also aligns with a value-driven digital da'wah movement (NU Online, 2023). Additionally, a digital academic information system has been launched, featuring online attendance tracking, grade reporting, class scheduling, and communication between teachers and parents. The introduction of Learning Management Systems (LMS) has further enhanced online and hybrid learning, making institutional management more efficient and transparent.

Second, in the area of Curriculum Transformation and Pedagogical Methods, Buntet Islamic Boarding School no longer focuses solely on the study of the kitab kuning (classical Islamic texts) as its core material. The curriculum has been redesigned to be integrative, incorporating new subjects such as information technology, entrepreneurship, 21st-century skills, and digital literacy. Pedagogical methods have also been updated: while traditional methods like sorogan and bandongan remain a hallmark of Islamic Boarding School education, digital approaches are increasingly adopted. Teachers use digital kitab kuning applications, e-learning platforms, and multimedia-based learning tools to help santri better understand study materials in more contextually relevant ways (Luthfi Yusuf, 2024). This transformation reflects the institution's serious commitment to equipping students with both religious competencies and adaptive skills to face the rapidly changing modern world.

Third, in the aspect of Academic Culture and the Integration of Islamic Boarding School Values, STIT Buntet plays a crucial role in shaping students' intellectual and spiritual character. Beginning in the 2024/2025 academic year, STIT officially integrated Islamic Boarding School values, such as adab (ethics),

khidmah (service), and spirituality, into the orientation program for new students through the Introduction to Academic and Student Culture Program (PBAK). This approach strengthens the Islamic Boarding School-based academic identity in the midst of a fast-paced digital era (STIT Buntet, 2024). Furthermore, the establishment of the digital scientific journal TSAQAFATUNA provides concrete evidence of the institution's commitment to developing a research culture. The journal serves as a platform for lecturers, teachers, and students to write and disseminate contemporary Islamic thought while remaining grounded in traditional values and Islamic epistemology.

3.6 Digitalization in the Educational Management System

The rise of digital technology has significantly transformed the educational management system at Buntet Islamic Boarding School. Here, technology is not just an add-on; it has become a vital part of how the institution is run and how learning happens. Digitalization not only makes information more accessible but also speeds up changes in work culture, teaching methods, and the connections between educational institutions and their communities (Amin, 2024).

When it comes to teaching, digital technology is a valuable tool for enhancing materials and improving the quality of student learning. Some practical examples include using audiovisual media and digital platforms to support interactive, context-based teaching and learning. Teachers are increasingly utilizing instructional videos, engaging presentations, and online learning applications in formal educational settings.

Moreover, vocational institutions like SMK Mekanika have stepped up by providing training in graphic design and computer technology for santri. These programs aim to equip students with hands-on skills that align with job market needs, such as expertise in design software and computer hardware assembly (SMK Mekanika NU, 2024). This kind of training is a proactive step towards transforming vocational education into a more digital focus.

On the administrative side, educational institutions under the Buntet Islamic Education Foundation (YLPI) have adopted academic information systems and digital attendance tools. These systems streamline the management of student data, academic records, and attendance tracking, making them more efficient and organized. Plus, communication between schools and parents has become quicker and more transparent. This change signifies a shift from traditional manual systems to a tech-driven governance model that is more accountable and responsive (Luthfi Yusuf, 2025).

At the higher education level, STIT Buntet Islamic Boarding School has taken the lead in embracing digitalization in academia with its online scientific journal, TSAQAFATUNA. This platform offers a space for both students and lecturers to publish their work. Additionally, the institution's official website has become a vital resource for sharing academic and institutional information (STIT Buntet, 2025).

One of the standout innovations is the introduction of Simapel (Electronic Management and Service Information System), which was rolled out at MANU Putra Buntet Islamic Boarding School on April 22, 2025. This app was created to streamline digital academic administration, covering everything from teacher and student attendance to reporting on learning activities, managing student permissions, and sharing daily updates and teaching schedules. Thanks to Simapel, student discipline has improved, while teachers and staff have become more efficient, and educational accountability has been strengthened. Plus, the system promotes digital literacy among educators and improves internal communication within the institution (Wawan, 2025).

Buntet Islamic Boarding School has rolled out SIMATREN (Islamic Boarding School Management Information System) in conjunction with Simapel. This web-based application streamlines the management of student data, dormitory assignments, class schedules, financial reports, and student savings. A standout feature is its QR-code-based attendance system, which allows parents to access online student reports. This has really boosted parental involvement in the educational journey and enhanced communication between the Islamic Boarding School and families.

When it comes to student recruitment, various formal educational institutions under YLPI—including junior high schools (MTs), senior high schools (MA), vocational schools (SMK), and higher education institutions—have adopted an Online Student Admission System (PPDB Online). This system streamlines the registration process with digital data verification, seamless document uploads, and automated exam card printing. By adopting this platform, institutions not only save time and resources but also demonstrate their commitment to providing modern, adaptable educational services.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, Buntet Islamic Boarding School has fully embraced digital learning (e-learning). Today, tools such as Google Classroom, Zoom Meetings, and digital modules are essential to daily teaching and learning. Additionally, active learning strategies, such as project-based learning and the jigsaw method, have been integrated with technology to foster student engagement and enhance understanding. These innovations have transformed learning into a more contextual, collaborative experience that resonates with today's digital-savvy generation (Luthfi Yusuf, 2025). Digitalization at Buntet Islamic Boarding School showcases a thoughtful blend of embracing new technology while holding onto cherished traditional values. The digital advancements introduced here do not overshadow essential Islamic Boarding School principles

such as adab (ethics), sincerity (ikhhlās), and discipline; in fact, they enhance them. Technology is seen as a supportive tool that bolsters the core of Islamic Boarding School education, rather than a replacement for the spiritual values that have been the bedrock of Buntet's Islamic educational approach.

4. DISCUSSION

This section explores the findings from the Buntet Islamic Boarding School case study in greater depth by linking them to broader empirical and conceptual literature, while considering the limitations and practical implications of digitalizing Islamic Boarding School management. The approach aims to situate the results within academic debates on modernizing faith-based educational institutions and hybrid management models, with empathy toward the cultural and social contexts that shape human experiences such as how these changes affect the daily lives of students (santri), teachers, and religious leaders (kiai), ensuring discussions are not merely technical but also attuned to emotional and community aspects. The findings on three key transformation dimensions digitalization of management systems, curriculum changes, and strengthening academic culture align with patterns in the literature, as illustrated by Gazali and Budiana (2023), who describe Islamic Boarding School evolution where digitalization serves as a primary driver of change, as well as Nurkhin (2024) and Zarkasyi and Hasan (2022), who emphasize how technology integration enhances administrative accountability and accessibility. However, unlike linear modernization views that assume a straightforward process, this study reveals adaptive-hybrid dynamics at Buntet, where technology is selectively and contextually applied to preserve adab (ethical and courteous values) and the kiai's spiritual leadership role, adding nuance to prior generalizations by demonstrating that such transformations represent not total replacement but harmonious integration of tradition and innovation.

Although the benefits of digitalization are evident, such as operational efficiency and data-driven decision-making, challenges like digital access disparities and literacy gaps, risks of eroding pedagogical relationships, professional workload burdens, and data privacy issues must be addressed with empathy, that is, understanding their impacts on individuals involved, such as additional stress for educators or potential isolation for students. Mitigations include phased training tailored to skill levels, blended learning models prioritizing face-to-face interactions to foster character and core values, incentives for educators to reduce resistance, and standard operating procedures (SOPs) for data protection, including parental consent and routine security audits. Research limitations, such as the focus on a single case that provides strong contextual insights but limited generalizability, necessitate comparative studies across Islamic Boarding Schools and longitudinal approaches to measure long-term effects on learning outcomes and institutional resilience, ensuring innovations remain ethical and sustainable while considering social equity.

Theoretically, this study contributes empirical evidence of hybridization in religious education management, that is, how traditional institutions blend modern managerial practices without losing foundational values, enriching institutional adaptation theories and the concept of dual accountability (to divine and societal norms) unique to Islamic Boarding School, aiding in understanding this evolution as a dynamic and human-centered process. Methodologically, the qualitative-historical approach, integrating archival data, fieldwork observations, and semi-structured interviews, serves as a reference model for case studies in other religious contexts, capturing the temporal dimensions of transformation with depth and empathy. Practically, it offers guidelines for a phased digital implementation, starting with administration, then supportive pedagogy, and finally online content, customized training packages for educators aligned with their roles, and partnership models with external stakeholders such as governments, NGOs, and universities, all adaptable nationally and internationally to support inclusive growth.

Finally, policy implications include targeted funding to reduce digital divides among Islamic Boarding Schools, ethical standards for data governance and for the use of educational technology, ongoing professional development programs for Islamic Boarding School educators, and cross-national comparative research to test the transferability of the hybrid model to madrasahs or other faith-based institutions. Future studies employing mixed-methods designs will quantitatively assess the impacts on learning and character formation, while exploring long-term adaptation dynamics, fostering harmonious and meaningful Islamic Boarding School evolution for their communities—a step that underscores the importance of holistic, human-centered approaches in educational reform. In this way, we not only advance academic knowledge but also ensure that Islamic Boarding School digitalization remains relevant and supportive of the wellbeing of all stakeholders involved.

5. CONCLUSION

The transformation of educational management at Buntet Islamic Boarding School, Cirebon, reflects a dynamic, context-specific process of institutional adaptation to social, cultural, and technological changes in the modern era. As an Islamic educational institution with deep historical roots dating back to the 18th century, Buntet Islamic Boarding School has not only preserved its existence amid modernization and globalization but also demonstrated its capacity to pioneer the integration of digital technology into an educational management system grounded in values and spirituality.

This study reveals that managerial transformation within the Islamic Boarding School environment is not merely a response to technological advancements. Instead, it represents the actualization of the Islamic Boarding School's traditional values within a more systematic, efficient, and future-oriented managerial framework. Values such as sincerity (ikhlas), independence, humility (tawadu'), etiquette (adab), and brotherhood (ukhuwah) continue to serve as the foundation for policy-making and the implementation of educational programs. This is what distinguishes Islamic Boarding School from other educational institutions: transformation occurs without erasing Islamic identity and the noble values passed down across generations.

One of Buntet Islamic Boarding School's most significant contributions to contemporary managerial transformation is the adoption of digital systems, such as Simapel (Electronic Management and Service Information System) and SIMATREN (Islamic Boarding School Management Information System), as well as the application of digital learning systems, including LMS platforms, audiovisual media, and digital kitab kuning applications. These innovations not only strengthen institutional effectiveness and accountability but also expand access to quality education for students in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and Society 5.0.

Furthermore, this research underscores the importance of adopting a hybrid approach in managing Islamic education. This involves combining modern management principles (POAC: Planning, Organizing, Actuating, Controlling) with the Islamic Boarding School's distinctive spiritual and cultural values. Such an approach allows Islamic Boarding Schools to enhance their competitiveness within the national education ecosystem while preserving their authenticity as centers for character formation, moral development, and community leadership.

Nevertheless, the digital transformation is not without challenges. Islamic Boarding Schools continue to face issues such as unequal levels of digital literacy, cultural resistance to technology, and the potential for diminished emotional closeness between teachers and students. Therefore, it is essential to develop strategies that strengthen digital literacy while remaining rooted in tradition and spirituality, and to support these efforts with continuous training programs for educators and administrators.

The findings of this study may serve as both theoretical and practical references for other Islamic educational institutions in designing value-based, technology-driven, and responsive managerial transformation strategies. Islamic Boarding schools, as exemplified by Buntet, are not only able to endure in modernity but can also lead progressive and sustainable change.

Ultimately, the transformation of educational management at Buntet Islamic Boarding School illustrates that traditional Islamic educational institutions hold significant potential to become the educational institutions of the future, provided they can preserve their foundational values while remaining open to innovation. In this way, Islamic Boarding Schools can continue to play their strategic role as beacons of Islamic civilization, guardians of national morality, and agents of social change that are inclusive, adaptive, and transformative in an ever-evolving world.

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