

Review of Education Management, Implementation of Learning Aspects, and Cooperation of Islamic Boarding School Cooperatives

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Abstract

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in Indonesia play a significant role not only in religious education but also in developing students' practical competencies and character to respond to changing social and economic demands. This study examines the potential implementation of cooperative-based education in pesantren and its contribution to students' skill development and character formation. A qualitative approach was employed through a literature review and analysis of selected case studies concerning the implementation and management of cooperatives in Indonesian pesantren. The findings indicate that cooperatives can function beyond their conventional economic role as experiential learning environments that integrate entrepreneurship, financial literacy, leadership, teamwork, responsibility, and decision-making into students' everyday learning experiences. Participation in cooperative activities also contributes to the development of character values, including independence, discipline, mutual cooperation, and social responsibility. The novelty of this study lies in conceptualizing pesantren cooperatives as an integrated educational ecosystem rather than merely as economic institutions, thereby linking cooperative management, experiential learning, skills development, and character education within a single educational framework. The analysis further indicates that this potential depends on effective management, meaningful student participation, institutional support, and systematic integration with the formal curriculum. Therefore, strengthening collaboration between pesantren and cooperatives and developing a contextual, competency-oriented curriculum are recommended to enhance students' readiness for further education, employment, entrepreneurship, and participation in community life. This study contributes a conceptual perspective for repositioning pesantren cooperatives as strategic instruments for holistic student development.

Keywords: *pesantren; cooperative education; skills development; character education; entrepreneurship.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools have an important role in education, not only in the religious field, but also in the development of life skills that are in accordance with the needs of the community (Maulidin, 2024; Saniah, 2018). In the midst of social and economic changes, the development of cooperatives is one of the efforts of Islamic boarding schools to improve the quality of education as well as economic independence (Maulidin, 2024; Sholikhah, 2022).

Islamic boarding school cooperatives not only function as business units, but also as learning facilities that provide practical experience to students in planning, resource management, marketing, and decision-making (Ashar, 2017; Nugraha, 2022). This is in line with Sulaiman et al. (2016) who showed that Islamic boarding school cooperatives can be a means of social and economic education and support the independence of students.

The integration of cooperatives into education not only teaches students about business theory, but also helps them develop interpersonal and leadership skills (Haramain & Mufaizah, 2025; Rafsanjani, 2017). Through cooperation in managing cooperatives, students learn the importance of teamwork and effective communication, which are key skills in the world of work. In addition, they are also trained in conflict resolution and collaborative decision-making so that they have the ability to adapt to various situations (Nugraha, 2022).

By integrating cooperatives into the educational curriculum, students are not only prepared to become experts in the field of religion, but also equipped to face real-world challenges, especially in the field of entrepreneurship. Cooperatives act as a bridge that connects theory with practice and prepares students to actively contribute to society (Sidik et al., 2025). In addition, cooperatives provide space for students to innovate by creating products or services that are beneficial to the surrounding community (Sholikhah, 2022).

In this context, Islamic boarding schools can function as centers for local economic development through cooperatives. By utilizing available resources, such as agricultural products, handicrafts, and community-based services, students can manage businesses that are not only economically profitable, but also contribute to the welfare of the community. This is in line with Islamic principles that emphasize social justice and responsibility to others (Fatih, 2025).

In addition, the development of cooperatives in Islamic boarding schools can create a network of cooperation between Islamic boarding schools, the community, and other institutions. Such collaboration can strengthen the position of Islamic boarding schools as educational institutions that are relevant and responsive to social and economic needs (hidayatullah et al., 2023; Syauquillah et al., 2023a). With the support of various stakeholders, Islamic boarding schools can gain access to the training, resources, and information needed to increase the capacity of cooperative management.

In the end, the existence of cooperatives in Islamic boarding schools has a positive impact not only on students, but also on the surrounding community. Cooperatives can be a model of community-based economic empowerment that helps create jobs and reduce poverty (Sidik et al., 2025; Syauquillah et al., 2023). Thus, Islamic boarding schools are not only places of education, but also centers of innovation and social empowerment that bring positive changes to society.

Overall, the development of cooperatives in Islamic boarding schools is a strategic step that can answer educational and economic challenges in the modern era. By focusing on cooperative education, Islamic boarding schools can produce a generation that not only has a strong foundation of religious knowledge, but also practical skills that are ready to be used to face various real-world challenges (Sulaiman et al., 2016). It is time for Islamic boarding schools to utilize the potential of cooperatives as a means to create sustainable change and contribute to the improvement of people's lives (hidayatullah et al., 2023; Maulidin, 2024).

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach to examine the role and potential implementation of cooperatives as an educational component in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools (pesantren). A qualitative approach was selected because the study focused on understanding the educational functions, learning experiences, skills development, and character formation associated with cooperative activities in pesantren. Rather than measuring the relationship between variables statistically, the study sought to interpret patterns and meanings emerging from the existing literature and documented cases.

Data were collected through a structured literature review of scholarly publications and relevant documents addressing pesantren education, cooperative management, entrepreneurship education, experiential learning, skills development, and character education. Relevant case studies concerning the implementation of cooperatives in pesantren were also examined to identify how cooperative activities are organized and incorporated into students' educational experiences. The literature and cases were selected based on their relevance to the research focus, availability of substantive information regarding cooperative-based educational practices, and their contribution to understanding the development of students' competencies and character.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis involved four stages: data familiarization, identification and coding of relevant information, development of thematic categories,

and interpretation of relationships among emerging themes. The analysis focused particularly on four dimensions: (1) the educational functions of pesantren cooperatives, (2) students' practical and entrepreneurial skills, (3) character development through participation in cooperative activities, and (4) institutional and curricular factors supporting implementation. The findings were subsequently synthesized to develop a conceptual understanding of cooperatives as an integrated educational ecosystem within pesantren. This analytical process was intended to move beyond describing the economic functions of cooperatives and to identify their broader contribution to holistic student development..

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that cooperatives in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) serve a broader function than merely operating as business units. Cooperatives can function as experiential learning environments that provide students (santri) with direct experience in managing economic and organizational activities. Integrating cooperatives into the pesantren education system, including through Islamic economics and entrepreneurship education, enables santri to connect conceptual knowledge with real-life practice. Their involvement in financial management, product marketing, customer service, decision-making, and daily cooperative operations allows them to develop a more concrete and contextual understanding of business management.

Table 1. Educational Functions of Cooperatives in Islamic Boarding Schools

Dimension	Cooperative Activities	Competencies Developed	Character Values	Educational Implications
Entrepreneurship	Product development, marketing, identifying business opportunities, and managing sales	Entrepreneurial skills, creativity, opportunity recognition, and business decision-making	Independence, confidence, initiative	Provides practical experience for developing entrepreneurial readiness
Financial Management	Recording transactions, managing cash flow, budgeting, and financial reporting	Financial literacy, numeracy, planning, and accountability	Honesty, responsibility, discipline	Strengthens students' ability to manage financial resources responsibly
Management and Leadership	Business planning, task allocation, coordination, and decision-making	Leadership, organizational management, problem-solving, and decision-making	Responsibility, discipline, cooperation	Develops managerial competencies relevant to employment and entrepreneurship
Marketing and Customer Service	Product promotion, sales, customer interaction, and market observation	Communication, marketing, negotiation, and customer-service skills	Courtesy, responsibility, adaptability	Improves students' communication and market-oriented competencies
Cooperative Participation	Group work, member services, collective decision-making, and organizational activities	Teamwork, communication, collaboration, and democratic participation	Mutual cooperation, fairness, openness, and social responsibility	Connects cooperative principles with students' social and organizational learning
Islamic Economic Practice	Applying fairness, honesty, transparency, and collective welfare in business activities	Ethical decision-making and responsible economic behavior	Honesty, justice, trustworthiness, and social responsibility	Integrates economic learning with Islamic and moral values
Experiential Learning	Direct participation in daily cooperative operations, reflection, and problem-solving	Practical knowledge, adaptability, critical thinking, and self-directed learning	Independence, perseverance, responsibility, and confidence	Transforms the cooperative from an economic unit into a contextual learning environment

Source: Synthesized from the literature and case studies reviewed in this study (Azizah, 2020; Muntadzirah et al., 2022; Sari et al., 2021).

As presented in Table 1, the educational functions of pesantren cooperatives can be categorized into several interconnected dimensions, including entrepreneurship, financial management, leadership, marketing, cooperative participation, Islamic economic practice, and experiential learning. These dimensions demonstrate that cooperative activities provide opportunities for santri to acquire competencies through direct participation rather than through theoretical instruction alone. The educational value of cooperatives therefore emerges from the interaction between practical activities, competency development, and character formation.

The findings further indicate that the strongest educational potential of cooperatives lies in their capacity to connect learning with authentic economic activities. For example, financial management activities can simultaneously develop financial literacy and accountability, while marketing activities can strengthen communication and entrepreneurial skills. Similarly, participation in collective decision-making can develop leadership and collaboration while reinforcing values of democracy, fairness, and social responsibility. This interconnectedness suggests that cooperative activities can provide a form of experiential learning in which cognitive, practical, and affective dimensions of learning occur simultaneously.

The synthesis also shows that the educational contribution of cooperatives extends beyond individual skills. Cooperative participation creates opportunities for santri to practice values that are central to both cooperative principles and pesantren education, particularly honesty, responsibility, discipline, mutual cooperation, and collective welfare. Thus, the cooperative can serve as a contextual environment in which character education is embedded in everyday activities rather than delivered exclusively through formal classroom instruction.

In the context of entrepreneurship education, pesantren cooperatives can serve as learning environments that provide santri with practical opportunities to identify business opportunities, manage resources, make decisions, and respond to challenges arising from real business activities. Such experiences enable santri not only to understand entrepreneurship theoretically but also to develop the skills and attitudes required to engage in economic activities independently. Cooperatives can therefore provide a learning space that simultaneously integrates knowledge, practical skills, and direct experience (Azizah, 2020).

Participation in cooperative activities can also contribute to the development of santri's managerial and entrepreneurial competencies. Activities such as business planning, resource management, risk analysis, marketing, task allocation, and decision-making provide practical experiences that are relevant to the demands of the labor market and entrepreneurial development. This is particularly important because pesantren education is increasingly expected not only to produce graduates with religious knowledge but also individuals equipped with competencies that enable them to adapt to changing social and economic conditions. Cooperative education can therefore serve as an approach to strengthening santri's readiness to enter the workforce or develop independent businesses after completing their education.

Beyond technical and managerial competencies, cooperative activities also have an important character-building dimension. Cooperative principles emphasizing fairness, transparency, honesty, responsibility, discipline, collaboration, democracy, and collective well-being can be internalized through direct participation in cooperative activities. These values become more meaningful when they are not merely presented as learning materials but are practiced through task distribution, financial management, member services, problem-solving, and collective decision-making. Within the pesantren context, such experiences can strengthen the development of santri who are independent, responsible, possess a strong work ethic, and are capable of collaborating within their communities.

Entrepreneurship education integrated with cooperative activities can further promote santri's independence. Business activities provide opportunities for santri to develop creativity, identify and utilize opportunities, and make decisions when addressing real-world problems. These processes can strengthen their self-confidence and willingness to take initiative in economic activities. Therefore,

entrepreneurial experiences gained during their time at pesantren can provide not only business management skills but also personal and social capital for navigating economic life after graduation (Muntadziroh et al., 2022).

These findings suggest that integrating cooperatives into pesantren education can support a more holistic educational approach. Cooperatives can function not only as instruments for strengthening the economic self-reliance of pesantren but also as contextual learning spaces that integrate economic knowledge, practical skills, entrepreneurship, and character education. Cooperative principles that are compatible with Islamic values, such as justice, honesty, responsibility, and collective welfare, can be directly implemented in everyday activities. This approach enables learning to become more meaningful because santri have opportunities to experience, practice, and reflect on the values and skills they acquire through their participation in cooperative activities.

However, the educational utilization of cooperatives cannot be separated from the management capacity and institutional support of pesantren. Cooperatives need to be managed professionally while simultaneously providing meaningful opportunities for santri participation. If santri involvement is limited to routine operational tasks without adequate learning processes, reflection, and mentoring, the educational function of cooperatives may not develop optimally. Therefore, stronger and more systematic integration is required between cooperative activities, learning objectives, mentoring, and competency assessment.

Strengthening the educational function of cooperatives also requires collaboration among pesantren, cooperatives, formal educational institutions, universities, and training organizations. Such partnerships can provide santri with access to seminars, training programs, mentoring, resources, and practical experiences that are more closely aligned with evolving labor-market and entrepreneurial demands. Collaboration with external stakeholders can also broaden santri's perspectives on business management, product innovation, marketing, financial literacy, and economic development. Consequently, pesantren cooperatives should not operate as isolated institutional units but should become part of a broader learning ecosystem that connects pesantren with wider economic and professional environments.

This finding is consistent with research demonstrating that cooperative education and training can improve santri's knowledge and skills in understanding and managing cooperatives. Thus, the existence of cooperatives not only provides economic benefits to pesantren but can also serve as a means of developing santri's entrepreneurial competencies (Sari et al., 2021). This finding further reinforces the argument that the role of cooperatives in pesantren should be understood through two complementary dimensions: the economic dimension and the educational dimension.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the role of cooperatives in pesantren extends beyond their economic function. Cooperatives have the potential to become a learning ecosystem that integrates practical experience, technical and managerial skill development, entrepreneurship education, and character formation. This perspective is significant because it positions cooperatives not merely as supporting units for the economic self-reliance of pesantren but as part of an educational strategy for preparing santri to participate in social life, employment, and entrepreneurial activities. Optimizing this function requires professional management, active student participation, continuous mentoring, and systematic integration of cooperative activities into the pesantren curriculum. Through such an approach, santri's experiences in cooperative activities can become valuable resources for developing independence, responsibility, collaboration, and readiness to respond to an increasingly complex and rapidly changing world.

4. CONCLUSION

The integration of cooperative education into the pesantren curriculum has the potential to extend the function of cooperatives beyond economic activities toward a broader educational role. The findings demonstrate that cooperative-based activities can provide santri with contextual and experiential

learning opportunities that connect theoretical knowledge with practical economic activities. Through participation in financial management, business planning, marketing, decision-making, and daily cooperative operations, santri can develop practical, managerial, and entrepreneurial competencies that are relevant to employment, entrepreneurship, and social participation after graduation.

The study also highlights the contribution of cooperative activities to character development. The application of cooperative principles, including fairness, honesty, responsibility, mutual cooperation, democratic participation, and collective welfare, provides opportunities for santri to practice these values in authentic social and economic contexts. Accordingly, cooperatives can function as a learning environment in which competency development and character formation occur simultaneously.

The main contribution of this study is the conceptualization of the pesantren cooperative as an integrated learning ecosystem, rather than merely as an economic unit supporting institutional self-reliance. This perspective emphasizes the interconnectedness of experiential learning, entrepreneurship education, skills development, and character formation within pesantren education. However, realizing this potential requires professional cooperative management, meaningful santri participation, continuous mentoring, curriculum integration, and collaboration with educational institutions, universities, and relevant training organizations.

Therefore, strengthening the educational function of pesantren cooperatives should become part of a broader strategy for developing graduates who are not only knowledgeable but also independent, entrepreneurial, socially responsible, and capable of adapting to changing economic and social environments. Future research should empirically examine the effectiveness of different cooperative-based learning models and assess their long-term effects on santri's entrepreneurial competencies, employability, and character development.

AI USAGE STATEMENT

No AI tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

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