

Strategy for Independence and Economic Empowerment Using SWOT Analysis: A Case Study of Islamic Boarding Schools in North Sumatra

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Abstract. *Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) have become a significant economic force in many regions in Indonesia. However, Islamic boarding schools often face challenges in terms of capital, management, market access, and infrastructure, making it difficult to maximize independence. On the other hand, the Islamic boarding school independence program is a strategic agenda mandated by Law Number 18 of 2019. Therefore, this research aims to develop strategies for independence and economic empowerment of Islamic boarding schools. This research is qualitative and inductive. The research location is an Islamic boarding school in North Sumatra. The data analysis used is a SWOT analysis. The results of the SWOT analysis indicate that Islamic boarding schools are positioned in an SO (Strength-Opportunities) strategy, a strategy that emphasizes utilizing internal strengths to seize and optimize available opportunities in developing Islamic boarding school businesses.*

Keywords: *Independence, Empowerment, Islamic Boarding Schools, SWOT.*

Abstrak. *Pesantren telah menjadi kekuatan ekonomi yang signifikan di banyak wilayah di Indonesia. Namun, usaha pesantren kerap menghadapi tantangan dalam hal modal, manajemen, akses pasar, dan infrastruktur, menyebabkan kesulitan dalam memaksimalkan kemandirian. Di sisi lain program kemandirian pesantren merupakan agenda strategis yang diamanatkan dalam Undang-Undang Nomor 18 Tahun 2019. Oleh karena itu penelitian bertujuan strategi kemandirian dan pemberdayaan ekonomi pesantren. Jenis penelitian ini kualitatif induktif. Lokasi penelitian pada Pesantren di Sumatera Utara. Analisis data yang digunakan adalah analisis SWOT. Diperoleh hasil analisis SWOT bahwa pesantren berada pada posisi strategi SO (Strength-Opportunities), yaitu strategi yang menekankan pada pemanfaatan kekuatan internal yang dimiliki untuk menangkap dan mengoptimalkan peluang yang tersedia dalam pengembangan usaha pesantren.*

Kata Kunci : *Kemandirian, Pemberdayaan, Pesantren, SWOT.*

Introduction

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) are traditional Islamic educational institutions that have been an integral part of Indonesian society for centuries

(Enhas, 2023). The word "pesantren" comes from the Arabic word "funduq," which literally means a place to live together (Nining, 2021). Pesantren are not only educational institutions but also centers for spiritual, intellectual, and social development for the students who study there (Jauhari, 2020).

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) have demonstrated significant potential in developing students who are not only religious but also independent. The practical skills taught to students can help them become independent and productive individuals in society. They play a strategic role in society, as mandated by Article 4 of Law No. 18 of 2019. They have three main pillars: education, preaching, and community empowerment. The economic development of Islamic boarding schools is an integral part of their community empowerment function because it is oriented towards improving the welfare of both the internal and the surrounding community (Suwito, 2022).

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) have become a significant economic force in many regions in Indonesia, not only because they rely on a large number of students but also because they are able to manage various types of economic enterprises (Azizah & Fitriyani, 2018). This demonstrates that their existence is not limited to educational institutions, but also as agents of economic development that can contribute to the benefit of many people (Suwito, 2022).

However, Islamic boarding school businesses face challenges in terms of capital, management, market access, and infrastructure. Possible solutions include management training, the use of digital technology for marketing, and strategic partnerships. With the right approach, these businesses can contribute significantly to economic development and increase the financial independence of Islamic boarding schools. Empowerment is expected to produce a generation capable of facing the challenges of the times without losing their Islamic identity.

According to data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs as of January 2022, there are 26,975 Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) across Indonesia. West Java Province has the largest number of Islamic boarding schools, with 8,343 institutions, or approximately 30.92% of the national total. This is

followed by Banten Province with 4,579 Islamic boarding schools, and East Java Province with 4,452 Islamic boarding schools.

Meanwhile, according to available data, North Sumatra province has 331 Islamic boarding schools with a total of 105,902 students and 4,016 teaching staff. The distribution of these Islamic boarding schools is broken down by district/city, as shown in the figure below.

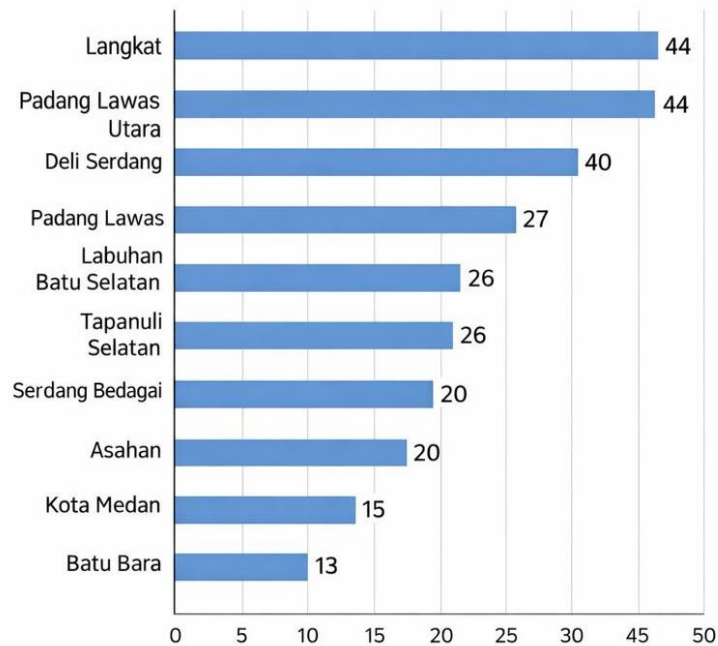


Figure 1. Islamic Boarding Schools Beneficiary of the Economic Independence Program in North Sumatra

Source: Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion, North Sumatra (2024)

Based on the graph of the distribution of Islamic boarding schools in North Sumatra Province, significant variation is evident between districts/cities. Langkat and North Padang Lawas Regencies have the highest number of Islamic boarding schools, indicating a strong religious education base and social support for the existence of Islamic boarding schools in the region. Deli Serdang and Padang Lawas Regencies also have a relatively large number of Islamic boarding schools, which can be attributed to population density, regional accessibility, and the growing socio-religious dynamics.

Based on the Islamic boarding school (pesantren) graph above, significant variation is evident between districts/cities. Langkat and North

Padang Lawas regencies hold the highest number of Islamic boarding schools, indicating a strong religious education base and social support for their presence in the region. Deli Serdang and Padang Lawas regencies also have a relatively large number of Islamic boarding schools, which can be attributed to population density, regional accessibility, and evolving socio-religious dynamics. Independent business units should be developed to support the operational needs of Islamic boarding schools. However, this has not yet been implemented by some existing Islamic boarding schools.

The Islamic boarding school independence program is a strategic agenda mandated by Law Number 18 of 2019 concerning Islamic Boarding Schools. Since 2021, Islamic boarding school independence has been designated as a national priority program. To realize this policy, the Ministry of Religious Affairs has launched several initiatives, including the Pesantrenpreneur program and the Islamic Boarding School Independence Roadmap (PJKP). By 2024, this program had reached approximately 5,000 Islamic boarding schools, with approximately 2,067 registered as beneficiaries. The implementation of the business incubation program developed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs encompasses various business stages comprehensively, from identification and business selection, business management processes, to marketing strategies for Islamic boarding school products. This priority program is designed with the principle of inclusivity, making it accessible to all Islamic boarding schools in need of support to strengthen economic independence.

Research conducted by Febrianty. N D, (2024) The findings of this study confirm that business orientation towards the food sector, the implementation of an integrated business model from upstream to downstream, and the strengthening of focused human resource competencies have a significant role in strengthening the economic independence of Islamic boarding schools. The synergy between these three aspects forms a fundamental framework for the overall development of the Islamic boarding school economy, while also positioning Islamic boarding schools as the

driving force for social and economic transformation in society.

Research conducted by Chamidi, A.L (2023) shows the economic empowerment of Islamic boarding schools through the implementation of an ecological protection system and the establishment of directly managed business units, namely Ibbien Mart, Net, Caffe, Canteen, Store, Baitul Maal al-Muhibbin, Foods, Wholesale, and Waste Bank. Septianingsih, D. A., & Rohmi, M. L. (2023) shows that business units developed in Islamic boarding schools have a significant role in supporting economic independence. This is realized through the implementation of entrepreneurship training for students, providing job opportunities for students and the surrounding community and sources of income for Islamic boarding schools. In line with the results of research conducted by Nisa, K., & Guspul, A. (2021) and Majid, A., Noviarita, H., & Anggraeni, E. (2023) emphasized that the existence of business units is an important factor in realizing the economic independence of Islamic boarding schools.

In this study, Islamic boarding school independence is not only interpreted as financial independence, but also as institutional independence that integrates educational, economic, and student empowerment functions. Based on the background through the phenomena, facts, and data above, the author is motivated to conduct a more in-depth study of the strategies for independence and economic empowerment of Islamic boarding schools by using a SWOT analysis of internal and external factors.

The novelty of this study lies in the development of a holistic concept of *pesantren* independence by integrating institutional, educational, economic, and student empowerment dimensions into a single strategic analytical framework. Unlike previous studies, which have generally focused only on economic independence or specific business units of *pesantren*, this research employs SWOT analysis to formulate sustainable institutional development strategies based on the actual internal and external conditions of *pesantren*. Furthermore, this study adopts a case study approach involving *pesantren* in North Sumatra, which exhibit diverse social, economic, and institutional characteristics. This approach enables the development of

a more contextual and adaptive model of institutional independence and economic empowerment that can serve as a reference for strengthening the sustainability and self-reliance of *pesantren* in other regions

Literature Review

Independence of Islamic Boarding Schools

Independence is a crucial indicator for the success of human- and community-based development (Sen, 1999; Dassucik, D., & Farida, I. 2025). Independence is closely related to empowerment theory, which positions individuals and institutions as subjects of change. Independence is the result of a continuous empowerment process, not an instantaneous condition (Zimmerman, M.A. 2000). In the context of education and Islamic boarding schools, independence is interpreted more comprehensively, encompassing spiritual, social, and economic dimensions. It not only shapes the personal independence of students through character education/spiritual discipline, but also institutional independence through resource management, productive business units, and strong social networks. The Islamic boarding school tradition, which emphasizes the values of simplicity, hard work, and togetherness, is an important social capital in building sustainable independence (Dhofier, 1982).

Economic Empowerment

In the context of community empowerment, fundamental efforts include improving the quality of education and health, as well as expanding access to economic resources, such as capital, skills, technology, information, and employment opportunities. Furthermore, empowerment also encompasses the development and strengthening of basic facilities and infrastructure, both physical and non-physical, to support sustainable community development (Dormauli et al. 2023). Islamic boarding school-based economic empowerment is an empowerment program that utilizes two approaches: bottom-up and top-down, where activities are implemented on the ground at the initiative of the caretaker or *kyai* (Islamic boarding school leader) in collaboration with the

Islamic boarding school community. Community economic empowerment is a desired condition, with the focus being on achieving human well-being (Anwar, M.K. (2008).

Previous Research

Research conducted by Harahap, S., & Syarif, D. (2022) found that the strategies used include establishing collaborations with various Islamic financial institutions, establishing partnerships with the government and relevant agencies, establishing marketable micro-enterprises, developing human resources within Islamic Boarding School Cooperatives (Kopontren), and conducting entrepreneurship training in Islamic Boarding Schools. Rahman, F. (2022) first explains the business development strategy for Islamic Boarding School business units, namely the boys' canteen, Campus II, Cooperatives, *Bait al-mÄl Wa at-Tamwil* (BMT), Air Berkah, a Plastic Waste Recycling Factory, and a Palm Oil Plantation, using the concept of Islamic business management. Second, efforts are made to establish business units within Islamic Boarding School independence development programs as the main drivers in the halal value chain ecosystem. Riduansyah, R., & Firayanti, Y. (2025) emphasize that the strategy for economic independence is achieved through competency-based human resource management, deliberation, financial transparency, and internal-external synergy.

Previous studies have demonstrated that *pesantren* possess significant potential to promote institutional sustainability through entrepreneurship development, productive business units, and community empowerment. Anwar et al. (2024) emphasized that the economic independence of Islamic boarding schools depends on effective resource management and Sharia-based business development. Likewise, Muiz et al. (2025) argued that community-based development strengthens institutional resilience by integrating education, entrepreneurship, and local economic resources. Meanwhile, Syaprudin (2019) highlighted that santri empowerment enhances institutional capacity through entrepreneurial learning. However, these studies primarily focus on specific aspects of economic independence and have not

comprehensively integrated institutional governance, education, economic empowerment, and strategic analysis into a unified framework. Therefore, this study fills the existing gap by employing SWOT analysis to formulate an integrated strategy for strengthening the institutional independence and economic empowerment of *pesantren* in North Sumatra.

Method

This study employed an inductive qualitative research design aimed at obtaining an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of institutional independence and economic empowerment in *pesantren*. An inductive qualitative approach enables researchers to explore social phenomena naturally and interpret meanings based on participants' experiences (Moleong, 2018). The study focused on examining organizational practices, economic activities, and empowerment strategies implemented by *pesantren*.

The research was conducted from 2024 to 2026 in three *pesantren* located in North Sumatra, Indonesia, selected because they have established business units that support institutional and economic independence. The research sites were:

1. PP Ar-Raudlatul Hasanah, Medan, which operates bottled drinking water production, a bakery, a student store, food stalls, a laundry service, tailoring, and a barbershop.
2. PP Tahfidz Taruna Al-Qolam, Deli Serdang, which manages a tempeh production business.
3. PP Ar-Rasyid, South Labuhanbatu, which operates a food and beverage canteen, a student store, and a laundry service.

The informants were selected using purposive sampling, with the criteria that they possess direct knowledge and active involvement in the planning, management, and implementation of *pesantren* economic activities. A total of nine key informants participated in this study, consisting of three informants from each *pesantren*, namely: (1) the head or leader of the *pesantren*, (2) the manager of the business unit, and (3) a teacher or administrator directly

involved in the implementation of economic empowerment programs. These informants were considered capable of providing comprehensive information regarding institutional governance, business management, and the empowerment of *santri*.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The interviews explored strategies for institutional independence, economic management, business development, and challenges faced by each *pesantren*. Observations were conducted to examine the implementation of productive business activities and institutional practices, while supporting documents, including organizational profiles, financial reports, business records, and institutional regulations, were reviewed to strengthen the research findings.

Data analysis employed the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) framework to identify internal and external factors influencing institutional independence and economic empowerment. The identified factors were subsequently synthesized to formulate strategic recommendations tailored to the conditions of each *pesantren*.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the study applied several validation procedures, including data triangulation (interviews, observations, and documentation), source triangulation (cross-checking information among leaders, business managers, and administrators), member checking by confirming interview results with participants, and peer debriefing with fellow researchers to minimize subjective bias. These procedures enhanced the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the research findings.

Results and Discussion

Matriks IFAS (*Internal Factor Analysis Summary*)

In this IFAS Matrix, the data obtained is data originating from the Islamic Boarding School's internal factor weighting normalization table and also data obtained from the internal factor assessment questionnaire.

Tabel 1. Matriks IFAS. Internal

Strength	Weight	Rating	Weight *Rating
S1 Religious and highly committed human resources, Islamic boarding school students and administrators demonstrate discipline, honesty, and a work ethic based on Islamic values.	0,1465	4	0,586149
S2 Public trust, Islamic boarding schools are trusted by the community as moral and social institutions, facilitating collaboration and product marketing.	0,1591	4	0,636222
S3 Extensive social networks, Islamic boarding schools have close ties with the surrounding community, alumni, and other religious institutions.	0,1991	3	0,597440
Sub Total (Strength)			1,819812
Weakness	Weight	Rating	Weight *Rating
W1 The suboptimal use of digital technology in marketing and business management.	0,1850	2	0,369979
W2 The primary focus on religious education sometimes results in the economic aspect not being a strategic priority.	0,1457	4	0,582997
W3 Limited managerial and entrepreneurial skills among Islamic boarding school administrators.	0,1645	4	0,658086
Sub Total (Weakness)			1,631531
Total IFAS	1,00		3,430874

Source: Processed Data, Author (2025)

Matriks EFAS (*External Factor Analysis Summary*)

In this EFAS matrix, the data obtained is data originating from the normalization table of external factors of Islamic boarding schools and also data obtained from the external factor assessment questionnaire.

Tabel 2. Matriks EFAS External

Oportunity	Weight	Rating	Weight *Rating
O1 Government and Islamic financial institution support for the Islamic boarding school economy (through programs such as Islamic Boarding	0,3257	3	0,977210

	School Independence, LKS-PU, and Sharia Business Credit).			
O2	The growth of the halal economy and Sharia-based creative industries accessible to Islamic boarding schools.	0,1704	3	0,511051
O3	Food and energy independence are national strategic issues that can be managed by Islamic boarding schools through agro-industry.	0,0943	4	0,377069
	Sub Total (Oportunity)			1,865330
	Threat	Weight	Rating	Weight *Rating
T1	Fluctuations in raw material and commodity prices can disrupt the sustainability of Islamic boarding school businesses.	0,1256	3	0,376946
T2	Lack of interest in entrepreneurship among the younger generation of Islamic boarding school students.	0,1633	2	0,326568
T3	Dependence on external assistance risks eroding independence.	0,1207	4	0,482852
	Sub Total (Threats)			1,186366
	Total IFAS	1,00		3,051696

Source: Processed Data, Author (2025)

In this matching stage, two methods are used: an internal-external matrix and a SWOT matrix diagram. This is done to determine the most appropriate strategy for the Islamic boarding school.

Table 3. Results of the Internal-External (IE) Matrix

External Factors	Strong (3.0-4.0)	Average (2.0-2.99)	Weak (1.0-1.99)
High (3.0-4.0)	I. GROWTH Concentration through Vertical Integration	II. GROWTH Concentration through Horizontal Integration	III. GROWTH Turnaround Strategy
Medium (2.0-2.99)	IV. STABILITY Cautious Strategy	V. GROWTH Horizontal Integration	VI. RETRENCHMENT Captive Company/ Divestment
Low (1.0-1.99)	VII. GROWTH Concentric Diversification	VIII. GROWTH Conglomerate Diversification	IX. RETRENCHMENT Bankruptcy/ Liquidation

Source: Processed Data, Author (2025)

Based on the results of the IFAS Matrix in table 1 and the EFAS Matrix in table 2, it is known that the IFAS value is 3.430874 and the EFAS value is 3.051696. Thus, the Islamic Boarding School is in cell number 1, which is a condition where the Islamic Boarding School is experiencing a period of growth. The calculation results show that the total score of the strength factor is higher than the total score of the weakness factor, indicating that stakeholders have dominant internal capabilities. Likewise, in external factors, the total score of opportunities shows a greater value than the total score of threats, so it can be concluded that the external environment of the Islamic boarding school provides a wide opportunity space for development. The combination of internal strengths and large external opportunities places the Islamic boarding school in Quadrant I in the SWOT analysis.

Therefore, the most relevant strategy to implement is an aggressive strategy (growth-oriented strategy), namely by optimizing internal strengths to the maximum in order to capture and utilize available long-term opportunities.

Table 4. SWOT Matrix Results

IFAS	STRENGTHS (S)	WEAKNESSES (W)
	<p>S1. . Religious and highly committed human resources. Students and Islamic boarding school administrators possess discipline, honesty, and a work ethic based on Islamic values.</p> <p>S2. Public trust value. Islamic boarding schools are trusted by the community as moral and social institutions, facilitating collaboration and product marketing.</p> <p>S3. Extensive social network. Islamic boarding schools have close ties with the surrounding community, alumni, and other religious institutions.</p>	<p>W1. The use of digital technology in marketing and business management is not yet optimal.</p> <p>W2. The primary orientation of religious education sometimes means that the economic aspect has not become a strategic priority.</p> <p>W3. Limited managerial and entrepreneurial skills among Islamic boarding school managers.</p>

EFAS	OPORTUNITIES (O)	THREATS (T)
	<p>O1. Government and Islamic financial institution support for the Islamic boarding school economy (through programs such as Islamic Boarding School Independence, LKS-PU, and Islamic KUR).</p> <p>O2. The growth of the halal economy and sharia-based creative industries that can be accessed by Islamic boarding schools.</p> <p>O3. Food and energy independence is a national strategic issue that can be managed by Islamic boarding schools through agro-industry..</p>	<p>T1. Fluctuations in the prices of raw materials and commodities can disrupt the sustainability of Islamic boarding school businesses.</p> <p>T2. Lack of interest among the younger generation of Islamic boarding school students in the field of entrepreneurship.</p> <p>T3. Dependence on external assistance risks reducing independence.</p>
<p>Hasil Strategi (S+O) (Strength+ Opportunity)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Leveraging the Religious, Disciplined, Honest, and Highly Motivated Human Resources of <i>Pesantren</i> to Develop Halal-Based Business Units and Sharia Creative Industries in a Professional and Sustainable Manner. (S1 + O2) 2. Leveraging Public Trust in <i>Pesantren</i> to Strengthen Collaboration, Access to Funding, and Business Development through Government Support and Islamic Financial Institutions. (S2 + O1) 3. Leveraging the Extensive Social Networks of <i>Pesantren</i> with Communities, Alumni, and Religious Institutions to Enhance Government and Islamic Financial Support and Develop Agro-Industrial Programs for Food and Energy Self-Reliance. (S3 + O1 + O3) 	

Based on the SWOT mapping results, the Islamic boarding school is positioned in Quadrant I, reflecting an organization with dominant internal strengths and extensive external opportunities. This position results in a recommendation for implementing a Strengths-Opportunities (SO) strategy, which emphasizes leveraging internal strengths to capture and optimize available opportunities. With this strategy, the Islamic boarding school is expected to contribute more significantly to the sustainable development of the Islamic boarding school economy, particularly in North Sumatra.

Discussion

1. Leveraging the Religious, Disciplined, Honest, and Highly Motivated Human Resources of *Pesantren* to Develop Halal-Based Business Units and Sharia Creative Industries in a Professional and Sustainable Manner.

The findings indicate that human resources constitute a strategic asset in achieving the economic independence of *pesantren*. Religious values, such as trustworthiness (*amanah*), discipline, honesty, and a strong work ethic, function

not only as moral principles but also as forms of social capital that enhance organizational trust, commitment, and productivity. From the perspective of the Resource-Based View (RBV) (Barney, 1991), human resources characterized by strong competencies, values, and organizational culture represent a sustainable competitive advantage that is difficult for other organizations to imitate. These findings are consistent with Syaprudin (2019), who found that entrepreneurship education and the empowerment of *santri* strengthen both institutional capacity and the sustainability of *pesantren* business units. Therefore, the success of *pesantren* enterprises depends not only on financial capital but also on the quality of human resources capable of integrating Islamic values with professional business practices.

2. Leveraging Public Trust in *Pesantren* to Strengthen Collaboration, Access to Funding, and Business Development through Government Support and Islamic Financial Institutions

The findings demonstrate that public trust represents an important form of social capital that strengthens the institutional capacity of *pesantren*. High levels of social legitimacy facilitate partnerships with government agencies, Islamic financial institutions, the private sector, and local communities. According to Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984), organizational success is strongly influenced by its ability to establish mutually beneficial relationships with key stakeholders. These findings support Anwar et al. (2024), who argued that the economic independence of *pesantren* depends on the synergy between effective institutional governance, efficient resource management, and stakeholder support. Consequently, public trust serves not only as a reputational asset but also as a strategic factor in expanding access to financing, business assistance, and the development of Sharia-based economic networks.

3. Leveraging the Extensive Social Networks of *Pesantren* with Communities, Alumni, and Religious Institutions to Enhance Government and Islamic Financial Support and Develop Agro-Industrial Programs for Food and Energy Self-Reliance

The findings reveal that the extensive social networks of *pesantren* function as bridging social capital, expanding access to information, resources, technology, and collaborative opportunities. Woolcock (1998) argued that social capital established through institutional and community networks contributes significantly to sustainable economic development. In this study, the involvement of alumni, local communities, government agencies, and Islamic financial institutions plays a crucial role in strengthening agro-industrial business development. This enables *pesantren* to function not only as educational institutions but also as centers of community economic empowerment. These findings are consistent with Muiz et al. (2025), who emphasized that community-based development enhances institutional resilience by integrating education, entrepreneurship, and local economic potential. Therefore, strengthening partnership networks is a key strategy for promoting adaptive and sustainable economic independence among *pesantren*.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the analysis on the SWOT diagram, it can be concluded that Islamic boarding schools are in the SO (Strength-Opportunities) strategy position, namely a strategy that emphasizes the use of internal strengths to capture and optimize available opportunities in the development of Islamic boarding school businesses, namely a) Utilization of human resources of Islamic boarding school students and managers who are religious, disciplined, honest, and have a high work ethic to develop business units based on the halal economy and sharia creative industry in a professional and sustainable manner, b) Utilization of the high level of public trust in Islamic boarding schools to strengthen access to collaboration, funding, and business development through government support and Islamic financial institutions, c) Utilization of the Islamic boarding school's extensive social network with the community, alumni, and religious institutions to optimize government support and Islamic financial institutions and develop food and energy independence programs based on Islamic boarding school agro-industry.

This study offers practical implications by providing strategic recommendations for *pesantren* administrators, government agencies, and Islamic financial institutions in formulating policies and implementing strategies to enhance the institutional independence and economic empowerment of *pesantren*.

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