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Internationalization of Al-Ittifaqiah Islamic Boarding School

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ABSTRACT. Pesantren as a traditional Islamic educational institution continues to adapt to the challenges of the times, including in the process of internationalization. Pesantren Al IttifaqiahIndralaya, located in OganIlir Regency, South Sumatra, is one of the pesantren that has successfully implemented an internationalization strategy to improve the quality of education, develop human resources, and expand global networks. This study aims to examine the internationalization efforts carried out by Pesantren Al Ittifaqiah, including aspects of the curriculum, collaboration with international institutions, and development of the competence of students and educators. The research method used is a qualitative approach with data collection through interviews, observations, and documentation. The results of the study show that Pesantren Al Ittifaqiah has integrated a traditional Islamic-based curriculum with international education programs, such as teaching foreign languages (Arabic and English) and organizing student exchange programs abroad. In addition, this pesantren also collaborates with various international educational institutions to develop academic programs and improve the capacity of educators. The internationalization of this pesantren has a positive impact on improving the quality of students, especially in terms of language skills, global insight, and academic competence. However, this process also faces various challenges, such as limited facilities, the need to adapt to global culture, and limited funding. This study concludes that the internationalization of Islamic boarding schools not only strengthens the position of Al Ittifaqiah Islamic Boarding School in the national Islamic education arena, but also opens up opportunities for students to compete at the global level without losing their Islamic identity.

Keywords: *Internationalization, Islamic Boarding School, Al Ittifaqiah, Islamic Education, Globalization*

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INTRODUCTION

Education encompasses Islamic religious-based institutions known as pesantren. Today, pesantren have developed into modern educational institutions, with some even transforming into internationally recognized boarding schools. In such institutions, some or all of the students (santri) reside within the pesantren environment under a boarding school system("The Role of Islamic Boarding Schools in Student Empowerment," 2024). Pesantren are educational institutions that specialize in Tafaqquh fi al-Din (deep understanding of religion). They serve as centers for exploring the sources of Islamic knowledge and for fostering students' moral development. Pesantren play a significant role in driving transformative changes within society through the internationalization of education. The educational model applied in pesantren is grounded in the Qur'an and Hadith while also engaging in collaboration with the global community. Demonstrates that the internationalization of education in pesantren can motivate the development of highly competitive human resources while simultaneously preparing society to face the challenges of global competition(Bukhori Muslim et al., 2024)

The contribution of pesantren education at both the national and international levels is highly significant and relevant in enhancing the quality of human resources within the Muslim community. Pesantren education emphasizes a balance between intellectual and moral aspects, which serves as its main strength, thereby holding great potential to compete and be recognized on the global stage. (Arroisi et al., 2025). This includes pesantren stakeholders who are willing to reform the curriculum internally and specifically, as well as develop programs that lead toward the internationalization of pesantren. Modern pesantren, in their efforts to achieve international-standard education, encourage stakeholders to expand their roles and make meaningful contributions to students, the nation, and humanity. Society regards pesantren as a reference for applying the values of the Qur'an, which simultaneously serves as a transformative step for pesantren toward becoming a world-class education system.

An international-standard pesantren must possess unique characteristics and distinctive strengths that set it apart from other international educational institutions in the process of internationalization. The substantive values of the Qur'an must be preserved so that they are not eroded by technological developments or foreign cultural influences. The government plays a crucial role in supporting the development of modern pesantren, yet such support should not be directive in nature, in order to maintain the independence of the pesantren(Nadhif Muhammad Mumtaz et al., 2024). Therefore, it is important to discuss international-standard pesantren. This study examines the process of internationalization at Pesantren Al IttifaqiahIndralaya in OganIlir, South Sumatra, which can be strengthened through student exchange programs, educational collaborations with foreign institutions, the enhancement of foreign language proficiency, and international partnerships in education that integrate a soft power approach(Hernández-Torrano et al., 2024).

METHOD

The research method employed in this journal(Creswell & Creswell, 2023), titled The Internationalization of Pesantren Al IttifaqiahIndralayaOganIlir, South Sumatra, is a qualitative approach. This study was conducted to explore the internationalization efforts implemented by Pesantren Al Ittifaqiah, with a focus on curriculum development, collaboration with international institutions, and the enhancement of both students' and educators' competencies. Data collection was carried out using several key techniques, namely in depth interviews with relevant stakeholders (such as pesantren administrators, educators, and students)(Floris et al., 2024), direct observation of

pesantren activities related to internationalization, and documentation analysis, including curriculum documents, cooperation reports, and other supporting data. The data analysis process was conducted descriptively with the aim of gaining an in depth understanding of the internationalization phenomenon, encompassing the identification of strategies, program implementation, and challenges encountered. This approach was chosen because it provides flexibility in exploring complex social and educational phenomena, and it allows the researcher to obtain a holistic picture of the pesantren's transformation in facing global challenges(Poth et al., 2024).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

An internationally recognized pesantren can be realized by enhancing quality and standards through various efforts, such as transforming the mindset of pesantren stakeholders toward more modern management that is oriented toward skills relevant to technological advancements. In addition, student exchange programs abroad serve as an effective solution to support the improvement of pesantren quality. The continuous process of Islamic modernization will further strengthen the position of Islamic educational institutions as adaptive and competitive entities(Thoyib et al., 2024).

Students and teachers in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) live their daily lives in accordance with Islamic values, which serve as the hallmark of pesantren in preserving religiosity and morality. The courteous attitude of the students reflects the formation of a positive image of the pesantren, making it easier for the wider community to recognize and understand the distinctive characteristics of educational life within the pesantren("Character Education through Philosophical Values in Traditional Islamic Boarding Schools," 2023).

Al Ittifaqiah Islamic Boarding School, as an Islamic educational institution in Indonesia, provides positive impacts and values that contribute significantly to society. Several efforts toward the internationalization of the pesantren, along with the supporting factors that foster the development of such programs, play an important role in building a positive image and strengthening the profile of the pesantren through various international initiatives carried out within the institution.

1. Positive Image in the Internalization of Pesantran

Various programs at pesantren, including activities that support its internationalization, can be found at Al Ittifaqiah Islamic Boarding School. Within this pesantren, there are numerous educational institutions ranging from kindergarten to higher education, including both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

2. Religious and Moral Education

Al Ittifaqiah focuses primarily on Islamic religious education and moral development. Students (santri) are equipped with religious teachings, noble character, and ethical norms that are applied in daily life. This approach plays a crucial role in shaping good character. Islamic religious education holds a vital position in the character education process within the madrasah(Miftahuddin et al., 2024).

a. Skills Development

Al Ittifaqiah Islamic Boarding School not only focuses on religious education but also fosters the development of practical skills such as farming, palm oil and vegetable cultivation, handicrafts, tailoring, bead flower making, and various other activities. These programs equip students (santri) with useful skills for everyday life. Considering the increasing demands of the job market, pesantren graduates are required to refine their competencies further. In addition to serving as

provisions for entering the workforce, these skills also support the students' livelihoods after graduation(Amarathunga et al., 2024).

b. Independence and Responsibility

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) must cultivate independence and responsibility while remaining open to the changes brought about by the era of globalization and technological advancement, so that they can position themselves on par with other educational institutions(Wahono et al., 2023). The system at Pesantren Al Ittifaqiah, which grants a high level of autonomy to its students (santri), supports the development of independence and responsibility. The students are taught to manage their own time, following a well-structured schedule of activities systematically organized by the pesantren's quality assurance center. This way, the students are trained to become more independent and capable of taking responsibility for their daily tasks effectively.

The implementation of autonomy at Pesantren Al Ittifaqiah also facilitates the achievement of the pesantren's internationalization goals. Even for students who do not continue their studies at universities abroad, they still have opportunities to pursue higher education in Indonesia. Furthermore, students at this pesantren are equipped with skills, memorization of the Qur'an, mastery of the Arabic language, and strong religiosity attributes that contribute to improving the quality of human resources in Indonesia.

Parents naturally wish for their children to grow into individuals who are well-rounded, independent, confident, resilient, socially capable, and creative. The ability to think creatively is considered one of the key elements in facing and solving various challenges in life(Van Hooijdonk et al., 2020).

c. Togetherness and Solidarity

The sense of togetherness and solidarity among the students, as well as social intelligence within the Al Ittifaqiah Islamic Boarding School, is reflected in their interactions. The pesantren fosters an environment that encourages students from diverse backgrounds to learn to live together as one community, respect differences, and cooperate in achieving common goals(Budirahayu& Saud, 2021).

d. Tolerance and Openness

Pesantren often serve as a place where various ethnic groups and social backgrounds can unite. As stated in Surah Al-Hujurat verse 13: *"O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you."*

This verse teaches the values of tolerance, openness, and respect for diversity. Through an understanding of these values, students at Al Ittifaqiah Islamic Boarding School can develop the ability to live harmoniously and practice mutual tolerance. Indonesia, as a nation with diverse backgrounds, is known for its wide variety of ethnic groups, cultures, traditions, languages, religions, races, and perspectives(Pepinsky et al., 2024).

e. Leadership Development

Pesantren Al Ittifaqiah can serve as an excellent platform for leadership development through the presence of student organizations. The pesantren leaders, such as the kiai, play a crucial role in guiding and serving as role models for the students. The mindset and outlook within the pesantren tend to be open to concepts of change and innovation, which becomes a strength in ensuring the pesantren's sustainability amid the rapidly evolving dynamics of life.

The student organization at Pesantren Al Ittifaqiah, known as OSPI (OrganisasiSantriPondokPesantren Al Ittifaqiah), continues to carry out the core functions of management planning, organizing, leading, and controlling through effective and well-structured communication. This organization greatly supports the smooth operation of the broader pesantren, most of which is overseen by the kiai, who consistently strive to place each individual according to their respective competencies(Department of Islamic Education Management,

Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, Institut Agama Islam NegeriKendari, Indonesia, abdulkadir.iainkendari@gmail.com et al., 2023).

f. Character Education

The positive religious experiences undergone by the students at PondokPesantren Al Ittifaqiah are reflected in their daily activities, which are designed to shape their character. These activities include performing tahajjud prayer before dawn, congregational subuh prayer, guided and communal recitation of the Qur'an, as well as various other programs that focus on character building. In addition to mastering academic skills, the pesantren also emphasizes the importance of cultivating good character values, such as honesty, justice, and simplicity. Various educational issues in Indonesia, such as a culture of cheating, group brawls, bullying, promiscuity, pornography, drugs, as well as addiction to games and music, indicate a moral decline that can undermine the nation's foundation.

Human resources are a key factor in the progress of a nation, as character development takes place through education that not only emphasizes the cognitive aspect but also requires a balance between affective and psychomotor education. Therefore, strengthening character education must be developed in educational institutions as an effort to address moral decline and to reinforce the nation's identity(Student of Doctoral Program at SebelasMaret University Surakarta, Indonesia & Lecturer at IKIP PGRI Bojonegoro, Indonesia, nikidanajwasalsabila@gmail.com et al., 2020).

Pesantren strive to adapt to the changing times while maintaining their positive values through various programs that focus on character development, thereby creating a positive image of pesantren despite the many challenges and rapid changes over time.

The positive image of pesantren is built through several aspects. First, through the international strategies applied by the pesantren. Second, the uniqueness of pesantren as reflected in the independence and responsibility of its students. Third, the pesantren is well-targeted for communities seeking quality and sustainable education for their children. Fourth, the fact that alumni of PondokPesantren Al Ittifaqiah demonstrate strong competence in both religious and general knowledge. In addition, the pesantren also develops religious, leadership, and character education aspects such as honesty, justice, simplicity, and more.

3. Internationalization of Pesantren

The national education system is strengthened by one of the key Islamic educational institutions, namely pesantren. Pesantren have continued to exist until today; however, while some pesantren that were once filled with many students remain active, others have gradually lost their students and no longer function as they once did(Arif et al., 2020).The internationalization of pesantren education refers to efforts to bring pesantren into a global context through improving the quality of education, updating the curriculum, and strengthening international networks. Historically, pesantren served as traditional educational institutions in Indonesia. Today, however, pesantren have transformed into centers of learning capable of competing at the international level. Several key aspects are essential in the process of pesantren internationalization:

a. Educational Cooperation with Foreign Countries

International educational cooperation is closely linked to the concept of soft power (Gauttam et al., 2024). In this context, pesantren must develop strategies to enhance their soft power in order to establish partnerships in international education, particularly with institutions in Egypt, Morocco, and Sudan. Through such initiatives, graduates of PondokPesantren Al Ittifaqiah will no longer be perceived as having low competitiveness. Instead, education will be strengthened and elevated through the process of pesantren internationalization.

b. Cooperation with International Institutions and Cross-National Education

Pesantren can establish partnerships with international educational institutions and organizations, thereby creating opportunities for students from various countries to study at pesantren. For instance, student exchange programs with Japan, as well as reciprocal exchanges

involving Al Ittifaqiahsantri or international students studying at the Institut Agama Islam Al-Qur'an Al Ittifaqiah (IAIQ), enrich cultural diversity and provide broader insights into Islam and Indonesian culture. Exchange programs for students, academic mobility, training initiatives, and collaborative projects represent forms of cross-national education that can introduce new perspectives while addressing inequalities in educational facilities and infrastructure in Indonesia(Enkhtur et al., 2024).

c. Establishment of International Organizations

International organizations dedicated to education, science, and culture, such as UNESCO, aim to foster peace through global cooperation in these fields. Indonesia has been a member of UNESCO since May 27, 2023, in line with its constitutional mandate to contribute to global order. The Indonesian government has also applied to become part of UNESCO's Executive Board for the 2023–2027 term (*Biro Umum&PengadaanBarang Dan JasaKemendikdasmen*, n.d.)At the pesantren level, Al Ittifaqiah has developed collaborations with higher education institutions in Morocco and Sudan, reflecting its commitment to international cooperation.

d. International Curriculum

Pesantren Al Ittifaqiah integrates elements of international curricula into its educational programs. This includes foreign language learning (Arabic and English), cross-cultural studies, and an understanding of global issues. Curriculum integration is achieved by adopting themes from international educational standards that align with the pesantren's learning objectives (Shahjahan et al., 2024).

e. Participation in International Forums

Pesantren can actively participate in international forums, conferences, and seminars to share experiences, knowledge, and best practices with global educational institutions. The Institut Agama Islam Al-Qur'an Al Ittifaqiah (IAIQI) regularly involves its lecturers in such international forums. Community leaders, education experts, and social observers also engage in discussions on cultural and national character in both national and international seminars, contributing to policy recommendations, legislation, and stronger law enforcement (Rochmansjah&Saputra, 2024).

f. Use of Information Technology

Pesantren Al Ittifaqiah utilizes information technology, such as social media and online platforms, for meetings, student learning, and disseminating information about pesantren. These platforms are also used to promote Islamic culture and interact with international audiences. Although the rapid development of information and communication technology poses both positive and negative impacts particularly concerning gadget use in primary education (Caballero-Julia et al., 2024)PAlIttifaqiahpesantren regulates gadget use strictly. Boarding students are prohibited from bringing mobile phones, minimizing negative effects, while university students benefit from technology in learning through tools such as Mendeley, reference managers, and online platforms like Zoom.

g. International Research and Publications

Lecturers at IAIQI actively conduct research, publish in international journals, and present their work at international conferences on Islamic and educational issues. Activities include planning publications, designing posters, and organizing events through the pesantren's public relations division (Horta& Santos, 2020).

h. Multicultural Training

The Institut Agama Islam Al-Qur'an Al Ittifaqiah organizes multicultural training programs for students and staff to foster understanding and respect for cultural and religious diversity. Multicultural education is particularly important for preventing radicalism, and the pesantren tradition combined with the boarding school system provides an effective platform for instilling these values (Latif&Hafid, 2021)

i. Strengthening Foreign Language Proficiency

Mastery of foreign languages, particularly English and Arabic, is a key element in the internationalization of pesantren(Silviyanti et al., 2024). At Al Ittifaqiah, foreign languages are already integrated into daily conversations. Strengthening students' proficiency in both written and spoken forms enables them to access global literature and engage with international communities, thereby enhancing their competitiveness at the global level (Ovchinnikova et al., 2024).

j. Alumni Mobility

One of the most effective ways for pesantren to gain international recognition is through the mobility of its alumni. Graduates and lecturers of Al Ittifaqiah who pursue higher education in Malaysia or work abroad serve as ambassadors of the pesantren, introducing its values and educational strengths to the global stage. These alumni represent pesantren education that combines intellectual excellence in both religious and general knowledge with strong moral character (Arroisi et al., 2025)

CONCLUSION

Al-Ittifaqiah Islamic Boarding School has successfully implemented an internationalization strategy that not only focuses on enhancing the quality of religious education but also emphasizes the development of students' practical skills and character. Through the integration of an Islamic-based curriculum with international programs, the pesantren has succeeded in producing students who possess strong academic and religious competencies, along with practical skills beneficial for everyday life. Furthermore, the institution highlights character formation such as honesty, justice, and simplicity as a foundation for building a positive image of the pesantren. Despite challenges such as limited facilities and funding, the internationalization of the pesantren has opened opportunities for students to compete globally without losing their Islamic identity. Thus, Al-Ittifaqiah stands as an important model in efforts to improve the quality of Islamic education in Indonesia through a balanced approach that integrates religious education, practical skills, and character development. In addition, Al-Ittifaqiah has adapted to international curricula, integrated information technology through its website, and encouraged faculty research focused on international collaboration. These steps demonstrate the pesantren's commitment to continuous development, innovation adoption, and strengthening the quality of education in facing global challenges while maintaining a strong Islamic identity.

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