

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOLS IN THE ERA OF REGIONAL AUTONOMY: A STUDY OF THE MILLENNIAL ASHQAF TAHFIDZ BOARDING SCHOOL

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Abstract

This study analyzes the opportunities and challenges faced by Islamic boarding schools in the era of regional autonomy, focusing on Ashqaf Millennial Tahfidz Boarding School in Pontianak. In the context of liquid modernity, marked by rapid social change, technological disruption, and policy decentralization, Islamic boarding schools are required to develop flexible and adaptive institutional strategies. This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study method. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with boarding school administrators, participatory observation, and documentation of relevant regulations. The findings show that regional autonomy provides opportunities for Islamic boarding schools through legal recognition under Law No. 18 of 2019 and greater flexibility to develop curriculum innovations based on local potential. Ashqaf responds to these opportunities by integrating digital technology through the GEMAR program, a digital-based Qur'anic learning and student development initiative, and by strengthening economic self-reliance through Baitul Maal Ashqaf (BMA), an institutional financial and social fund management unit coordinated with BAZNAS. However, regional fiscal disparities and unequal political commitment across local governments remain key challenges in ensuring equitable quality among Islamic boarding schools. This study concludes that the integration of Qur'anic spiritual values, represented through the ASI concept, with adaptive modern management strengthens the resilience of Islamic boarding schools as independent and inclusive partners in regional educational development.

Keywords: *Islamic Boarding School, Regional Autonomy, Liquid Modernity, Institutional Resilience, Educational Management*

A. Introduction

Islamic boarding schools have long been recognized as Islamic educational institutions that play a strategic role in shaping the religious, moral, and social character of Indonesian society through an intensive process of internalizing Islamic values. As centers for the transmission of religious knowledge, Islamic boarding schools are not merely places of learning but spaces for the formation of religious culture that emphasize habit formation, exemplary behavior, and the strengthening of students' spirituality in daily life. However, amidst increasingly complex changes of the times, Islamic boarding schools now face a global challenge described by Zygmunt Bauman as "Liquid Modernity." In this context, traditional social structures and values have become unstable, demanding that educational institutions possess a high degree of flexibility in responding to rapid technological disruption (Bauman, 2000).

This state of liquid modernity places Islamic boarding schools at the center of the challenges of globalization, characterized by the unrestricted flow of information and shifting social ethics among the younger generation. These challenges require Islamic boarding schools not only to preserve classical scholarly traditions (turats) but also to adapt to the needs of a modern, digital society. As emphasized by Toifur (2018), the modernization of pesantren is a necessity to ensure these institutions do not lose their relevance; pesantren are required to innovate their teaching methods without sacrificing their fundamental Islamic values. This transformation shifts the paradigm of pesantren from institutions previously considered static to dynamic institutions responsive to the changing times.

One tangible manifestation of this adaptation is the emergence of contemporary pesantren models, such as the Ashqaf Millennial Tahfidz Boarding School, which integrates Quranic memorization education with a digital technology approach. This pesantren does not allow its students to simply sit idly by, but rather encourages them to actively develop their interests and talents through an interactive, soft-skills-based learning ecosystem. The success of this model aligns with Luthfan's (2000) perspective, which states that digital-based innovations in Quranic education can enhance the appeal of religious education in the eyes of the younger generation, while simultaneously strengthening the pesantren's position as a progressive and sustainable agent of social change. This has become a crucial foundation for understanding how Islamic boarding schools navigate opportunities and challenges in the era of regional autonomy, which provides ample space for local innovation.

The dynamics of this transformation of Islamic boarding schools are closely intertwined with changes in the national policy framework through the implementation of regional autonomy, which grants broad authority to local governments to design and manage the education system in accordance with local characteristics and potential. This decentralization policy has become a crucial turning point that has spurred the emergence of various educational innovations rooted in local wisdom, where Islamic boarding schools are no longer viewed as separate entities but rather as an integral part of regional development priorities. This has opened opportunities for the adoption of affirmative policies supporting the existence of Islamic boarding schools, ranging from the provision of facilities and infrastructure to the strengthening of institutional capacity in a more context-specific manner.

The strengthening of pesantren's bargaining position has been further solidified by the enactment of Law No. 18 of 2019 on Pesantren, which provides strong legal legitimacy for the distinctiveness and autonomy of these institutions within the national education system. This regulation serves as a normative foundation for local governments to provide concrete support, such as budget allocations and programs to improve the quality of human resources, so that Islamic boarding schools can transform into strategic centers for community empowerment. As stated by Widiastuti et al. (2024), the active role of local governments in facilitating Islamic boarding schools is crucial to the success of these

institutions, not only in excelling in educational aspects but also in fulfilling broad socio-economic functions for the surrounding community.

However, despite these regulatory opportunities, the decentralization of education also introduces new complexities in the form of policy disparities across regions, which have the potential to hinder the equitable distribution of quality Islamic boarding schools. Differences in regional fiscal capacity and variations in the political commitment of policymakers result in uneven support for Islamic educational institutions, with regions having limited financial resources tending to prioritize other sectors deemed more urgent. This situation aligns with the findings of Rizka et al (2000), who assert that disparities in the implementation of autonomy can create gaps in access to quality education, thereby requiring Islamic boarding schools to possess strong adaptive strategies and robust self-reliance to remain resilient amidst the uncertainty of local policy support.

In response to the complex challenges of our time, Pondok Tahfidz Millennial Ashqaf in Pontianak has emerged as a model of a contemporary Islamic boarding school that boldly integrates Quranic memorization education with digital technology. The educational model developed no longer relies solely on conventional memorization methods but has transformed into an interactive learning ecosystem that leverages social media and digital devices to equip students with soft skills relevant in the age of disruption. This adaptation serves as tangible proof that the integration of Islamic values and modern technology is an effective strategy for maintaining the relevance of Islamic boarding schools among Millennials and Gen Z, who are deeply immersed in the digital world.

The primary driving force behind this pesantren's operations lies in the implementation of spiritual values known by the acronym ASI (Al-Qur'an, Prayer, and Charity), a concept directly inspired by Qur'anic verse 29 of Surah Fatir regarding a business venture that will never incur a loss. These values are internalized not merely as rituals of worship, but as the foundation of professional management that fosters financial independence through the establishment of Baitul Maal Ashqaf. As a specialized division, Baitul Maal plays an active role in managing Islamic social financial instruments including Zakat, Infak, Sedekah, and Wakaf (ZISWAF) from the community under accountable governance standards. This strategy enables the pesantren to achieve strong sustainability, ensuring that the educational process continues to run optimally without having to rely entirely on the fluctuations of budgetary support from the local government.

The economic self reliance built through the optimization of community funds aligns with the findings of Widiastuti et al. (2024), who emphasize that the strategic role of institutions in managing local economic potential is crucial to the transformation of Islamic boarding schools into socio-economically empowered institutions. By not positioning itself as a passive institution waiting for aid, Pondok Ashqaf demonstrates that the resilience of Islamic boarding schools can be achieved through synergy between traditional values and modern management innovations. This model of self-reliance ultimately not only ensures the operational sustainability of the boarding school but also strengthens the pesantren's

position as an independent driving force for community empowerment amidst the dynamics of regional autonomy.

In addition to economic self-reliance, social transformation is achieved through digital outreach innovations known as the GEMAR (Movement to Cherish the Qur'an) program. This program serves as an inclusive bridge connecting Islamic boarding schools with the broader community and students' guardians, transcending physical and geographical barriers. By utilizing a video conferencing platform (Zoom), GEMAR creates a fluid learning ecosystem where, every dawn, participants are invited to memorize one verse of the Qur'an and consistently delve into its meaning. This initiative demonstrates that information technology, when managed adaptively, can strengthen the position of Islamic boarding schools as agents of progressive and sustainable social change amidst the dynamics of modern society.

The GEMAR program is also designed to fill productive community spaces at 9:00 a.m., 1:00 p.m., 4:00 p.m., and 8:00 p.m. through group Quran recitation sessions and readings of translations led directly by the students. The active involvement of students as instructors or Quran study leaders (student leadership) serves not only as a means of da'wah but also as a method to strengthen students' soft skills and self-confidence in serving the digital community. Through this continuous pattern of interaction, the pesantren has successfully shifted public perception from an institution once viewed as static to a dynamic one capable of building an educational ecosystem highly relevant to the character of Millennials and Gen Z.

Although previous research has shown that pesantren demonstrate a high degree of resilience in responding to various national policies, most literature reviews still tend to focus on large or well-established pesantren on the island of Java. This leaves a significant research gap regarding how millennial tahfidz-based pesantren outside Java, such as in West Kalimantan, navigate regional autonomy opportunities through economic self-reliance strategies (ZISWAF) and technological innovation. Therefore, this study aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the opportunities and challenges faced by the Ashqaf Millennial Tahfidz Boarding School as a model of adaptive, innovative, and sustainable pesantren management within the framework of an evolving educational decentralization process.

B. Method

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study method to provide an in-depth analysis of the opportunities and challenges faced by Pondok Tahfidz Millennial Ashqaf in the era of regional autonomy, particularly in relation to the transformation of Islamic boarding schools that integrate traditional Islamic values with digital technology. The research site was purposively selected at Pondok Tahfidz Millennial Ashqaf in Pontianak City because of its distinctive efforts in developing economic self-reliance and digital-based da'wah innovation.

The informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in institutional management, learning activities, and program

implementation. They consisted of boarding school administrators, caregivers, teachers, students, and managers of Baitul Maal Ashqaf. These informants were considered relevant because they possessed knowledge and experience related to ASI management strategies, namely Al-Qur'an, Shalat, and Infak, as well as the implementation of the GEMAR program and ZISWAF-based economic empowerment. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted to explore institutional strategies, program implementation, and the challenges faced by the pesantren in responding to regional autonomy. Participatory observation was used to examine the use of digital technology in learning activities and the management of Baitul Maal. Documentation was carried out by reviewing relevant regulations, institutional documents, program records, and supporting materials related to pesantren management.

Data analysis was conducted using an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The collected data were first reduced by selecting information relevant to the research focus. The data were then coded and grouped into several themes, including regional autonomy opportunities, institutional challenges, digital-based learning innovation, ASI-based management, and ZISWAF-based economic self-reliance. The themes were analyzed descriptively and interpreted using the Liquid Modernity framework and the perspective of educational decentralization to understand the pesantren's flexibility in responding to social, technological, and policy changes.

To ensure trustworthiness, this study applied credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability criteria. Credibility was maintained through triangulation of sources and techniques, member checking, and prolonged engagement in the research field. Dependability was ensured by documenting the research process systematically, including data collection procedures, interview notes, and analytical decisions. Confirmability was strengthened by maintaining objectivity through reflective notes and cross-checking findings with supporting documents. Transferability was supported by providing a detailed description of the research context, informant characteristics, and institutional setting, enabling readers to assess the relevance of the findings to similar pesantren contexts.

C. Finding and Discussion

The Resilience of Islamic Boarding Schools Amid Liquid Modernity and Digital Disruption

The rise of tahfidz-based Islamic boarding schools with a millennial approach, as reflected in the model developed by Pondok Tahfidz Millennial Ashqaf, cannot be separated from the growing public demand for religious education that is not only normative but also contextual and relevant to the realities of the digital age. The rapid development of information technology has transformed patterns of interaction, learning methods, and the construction of values among the younger generation. This situation demands the emergence of Islamic educational institutions capable of bridging the gap

between spiritual depth and the skills needed to navigate the modern world, so that the values of the Qur'an are not merely memorized but also understood and implemented in daily life which is increasingly digital.

Hal ini merupakan respons aktif terhadap kondisi masyarakat yang berada dalam fase *liquid modernity* (modernitas cair), di mana lembaga pendidikan dituntut memiliki fleksibilitas tinggi agar nilai-nilai keislaman tetap relevan di tengah arus informasi yang tidak stabil (Bauman, 2000). Dalam situasi di mana masyarakat mulai mencari alternatif pendidikan yang lebih menekankan pada pembinaan akhlak dan spiritualitas akibat krisis moral di era globalisasi, Ashqaf hadir sebagai ruang strategis yang tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai tempat menghafal Al-Qur'an, tetapi juga sebagai pusat pembentukan identitas keislaman generasi muda yang adaptif terhadap perubahan zaman.

Adaptation of the Digital-Based Tahfidz Curriculum Based on an interview with Ustadzah Resti, Head of the Curriculum Division, the adaptation involves shifting from a static memorization model to an interactive and personalized learning ecosystem. She emphasized that the curriculum is designed to enable students to visualize the meaning of verses with the aid of digital devices, so that memorization is not merely rote but is also deeply understood. This approach aims to ensure that students do not merely become text memorizers but also possess strong digital literacy skills to address the challenges of the modern era. The educational model developed is not solely focused on memorization but also integrates interactive learning methods, the use of social media, and the development of students' soft skills so they can actively engage in the digital society.

This innovation in digital-based Qur'an learning methods aligns with Luthfan's (2000) findings, which affirm that the integration of technology can enhance the appeal and effectiveness of Qur'an memorization education for the younger generation, while simultaneously strengthening the position of Islamic boarding schools as agents of progressive and sustainable social change. By creating a supportive learning environment, Islamic boarding schools can build an educational ecosystem relevant to the character of Millennials and Gen Z. As stated by Toifur (2000), the modernization of Islamic boarding schools is a necessity in facing the challenges of globalization, where these institutions are required to innovate without losing their fundamental Islamic values.

The fundamental force that serves as the primary driving force behind all activities and policies at Pondok Tahfidz Millennial Ashqaf lies in the internalization of spiritual values encapsulated in the acronym ASI (Al-Qur'an, Prayer, and Charity). Based on an interview with the Head of the Boarding School, Kyai Haji Luthfan, he emphasized that the ASI concept is not merely an organizational slogan, but a manifestation of theological belief rooted in the Qur'an, Surah Fatir, verse 29. This verse promises a trade that will never fail (*tijaratan lan tabur*) for those who consistently read the Book of Allah, perform prayer, and spend a portion of their sustenance. From a boarding school management perspective, this value is transformed into operational standards that shape the character of the students holistically.

In practical terms, the Qur'an is positioned as the standard for digital interaction and ethics, prayer is established as a solid pillar of self-discipline, and charitable giving is

managed as a means of cultivating social compassion while also driving economic self-reliance. Kyai Haji Luthfan emphasizes that through a scheduled and measured rhythm of worship, students are shaped into individuals with strong self-control amidst the vortex of moral crisis and uncertainty of values in the era of globalization. This strategy for internalizing spiritual values aligns with Zarkasyi's (2020) perspective, which states that the modernization of Islamic boarding schools must remain grounded in the fundamental values of Islam so that the transformation process does not lead to a loss of Islamic identity a hallmark of these institutions.

Furthermore, Pondok Ashqaf's success in integrating ASI values into its organizational management system demonstrates that spiritual capital can be converted into the driving force behind institutional self-reliance. As explained by Sulistiawan (2006), the integration of Salafi traditions which emphasize spiritual aspects with modern management is key for Islamic boarding schools to remain relevant and competitive. Thus, ASI values not only serve as the foundation for ritual worship but also function as a strategy for institutional resilience, enabling Pondok Ashqaf to stand firm as both a moral bastion and a center of innovation amidst the ever-changing dynamics of society.

The Use of Digital Technology and Social Resonance (GEMAR Program): Digital transformation at Pondok Ashqaf has reached its peak through innovative outreach that transcends the physical boundaries of the boarding school through the GEMAR (Movement to Cherish the Qur'an) program. According to Ustadz Imam Ali, Chair of the GEMAR Program, the use of teleconference platforms such as Zoom is not merely a technical communication tool, but a strategy to create an inclusive da'wah space that breaks down geographical barriers between the pesantren, students' guardians, and the general public. This program serves as a concrete response to the conditions of liquid modernity, where religious institutions must be present in the virtual space that has become the center of modern society's activities.

The program is implemented in a structured manner, involving the community in memorizing one verse each morning at dawn, accompanied by reflection on its meaning to deepen contextual understanding. It doesn't stop there; GEMAR also fills productive time slots at 9:00 AM, 1:00 PM, 4:00 PM, and 8:00 PM through group recitation sessions and readings of the Indonesian translation led directly by the students. The involvement of students as instructors or recitation leaders (student leadership) is a strategy to strengthen their soft skills and self-confidence so that they can play an active role as subjects in the digital society, rather than merely passive objects.

This innovation strengthens the position of Islamic boarding schools as agents of progressive and sustainable social change in the era of decentralization. As noted by Toifur (2018), the modernization of Islamic boarding schools is a necessity in addressing the challenges of globalization, ensuring that the values of the Qur'an are not confined to the text alone but are understood and implemented in our increasingly digital daily lives. Through GEMAR, Pondok Ashqaf has successfully built an educational ecosystem relevant to the character of Millennials and Gen Z, while proving that technology can be

an effective means to expand the reach of da'wah and strengthen the emotional bond between the pesantren and the community.

Opportunities for Regional Autonomy and the Legitimacy of the Pesantren Law

The implementation of regional autonomy in Indonesia has undergone a significant regulatory evolution through several key legal frameworks, namely Law No. 22 of 1999, Law No. 32 of 2004, and most recently, Law No. 23 of 2014 on Regional Government. These three regulations do not merely represent technical administrative changes but reflect a fundamental paradigm shift from a centralized governance system toward a more proportional and context-sensitive decentralized system. From this perspective, the distribution of authority between the central and local governments is structured in such a way that the management of public resources can be carried out more effectively and efficiently in accordance with actual local needs.

Specifically in the education sector, this legal framework reinforces the role of local governments as the primary actors with the authority to formulate policies, manage resources, and determine the direction of educational development that is adaptive to the characteristics of their respective regions. This decentralization of education marks a significant turning point that has spurred the emergence of locally-based educational innovations, including creating space for the development of religious institutions such as Islamic boarding schools so that they are no longer entirely confined within a rigid and centralized policy framework. As emphasized by Rizka et al. (2024), decentralization plays a crucial role in fostering community participation and providing educational institutions with the flexibility to make necessary adjustments in response to evolving social dynamics. This aligns with Aini's (2022) perspective, which emphasizes that regional autonomy enhances the capacity of community-based institutions to remain relevant and sustainable through self-governance and curriculum innovation responsive to the demands of the times. Thus, regional autonomy regulations are not merely administrative instruments but serve as a foundation for Islamic boarding schools to grow as dynamic institutions deeply rooted in local values while remaining adaptable to global advancements.

Affirmative Policies and Local Innovation The decentralization of education, as a logical consequence of regional autonomy, has become a pivotal turning point in fostering the emergence of locally-based educational innovations, including the development of Islamic boarding schools. The authority held by local governments opens up a wide space for the emergence of various affirmative policies that support the existence and strengthening of pesantren, ranging from the provision of operational assistance, facilitation of facilities and infrastructure, to the strengthening of institutional capacity in a more measurable manner. Within this framework, pesantren are no longer viewed as institutions operating independently without systemic support but have become an integral part of the regional development ecosystem that directly contributes to improving the quality of community education.

According to Rizka et al. (2024), decentralization plays a crucial role in driving educational innovation and increasing community participation in institutional management, thereby giving Islamic boarding schools greater opportunities to build

strategic collaborations with various stakeholders at the local level. This flexibility allows the Pontianak City Government to design special programs that specifically support the unique educational model at Pondok Ashqaf, such as the integration of the tahfidz curriculum with digital literacy.

Furthermore, concrete support from local governments through budget allocations and the strengthening of partnership networks is a key instrument in ensuring the sustainability of these innovations. As emphasized by Widiastuti et al. (2024), the active role of local governments is crucial in driving the transformation of Islamic boarding schools so that they are not only focused on religious education but are also capable of fulfilling broader socio-economic functions within the community. Thus, regional autonomy provides pesantren with the flexibility to develop distinctive, responsive, and adaptive educational models in line with the times without being rigidly bound by uniform national standards.

Legal Strengthening Through the Pesantren Law The strategic position of Pondok Ashqaf within the national education system has been further strengthened by the enactment of Law No. 18 of 2019 on Pesantren. This regulation provides strong legal legitimacy for the existence of pesantren as an integral part of the education system in Indonesia. This formal recognition encompasses not only legal aspects but also acknowledges the uniqueness, autonomy, and significant contributions of Islamic boarding schools in shaping the nation's character. Within the context of dynamic regional autonomy, this law serves as a crucial normative foundation for strengthening synergy among the central government, local governments, and the Islamic boarding schools themselves. As emphasized by Huda (2021), this legitimacy provides legal certainty for Islamic boarding schools to gain equal access to educational resources without having to lose their original identity.

With this robust legal framework in place, Islamic boarding schools such as Pondok Ashqaf are no longer viewed as institutions operating independently without support from the formal system. Instead, they have become an integral part of the regional development ecosystem, contributing to the improvement of educational quality and the well-being of the broader community. This regulatory support enables local governments to act as key actors in facilitating the development of Islamic boarding schools through various concrete policy instruments. This view is reinforced by Maimun (2020), who states that systemic support from local governments through derivative regulations at the local level is crucial to the success of modernizing Islamic boarding school management in the era of disruption.

Furthermore, this legitimacy provides space for pesantren to expand their role as centers of community empowerment. Pesantren now have greater opportunities to serve as driving forces in strengthening the economic well-being of the Muslim community and fostering moderate and inclusive religious literacy. This aligns with Zuhri's (2021) perspective, which explains that a clear legal framework enables pesantren to manage religious social funds more independently and professionally. Thus, the Pesantren Law

serves as a strategic bridge connecting the internal potential of the pesantren with various policy opportunities in the era of regional autonomy.

The Strategic Role of Local Governments The success of implementing regional autonomy policies in the religious education sector depends heavily on the active role and political will of local governments as key actors. This commitment is crucial because decentralization grants full authority to local governments to determine development priorities, including the allocation of resources for Islamic educational institutions. Widiyastuti et al. (2024) emphasize that the involvement of local governments is critical in driving the transformation of Islamic boarding schools so that they are not only focused on normative educational aspects but also capable of fulfilling broader socio-economic functions for the community. Concrete support in the form of budget allocation, provision of infrastructure, and strengthening of partnership networks are important instruments provided by local governments to ensure the sustainability of innovation in institutions such as Pondok Ashqaf.

Furthermore, the strategic role of local governments within the framework of decentralization also includes facilitating human resource development and strengthening the institutional capacity of Islamic boarding schools to make them more competitive. This aligns with Huda (2021) perspective, which states that synergy between local regulations and the potential of Islamic boarding schools can create a more inclusive and globally competitive educational ecosystem. Without affirmative policies at the local level, Islamic boarding schools risk stagnation due to unequal access to development resources. Therefore, collaboration between local governments and Islamic boarding school administrators is an absolute prerequisite for realizing an educational model that is adaptive to the changing times.

This view is supported by Maimun (2020), who explains that integrating regional development programs with the pesantren curriculum can accelerate the achievement of digital literacy and social welfare goals in the community. In the context of Pondok Ashqaf, local government support through operational assistance schemes or digital partnership programs serves as a crucial stimulus for the development of innovative programs such as GEMAR and economic empowerment through Baitul Maal. Thus, the existence of regional autonomy policies not only provides administrative space but must also be accompanied by a genuine commitment from local governments to position Islamic boarding schools as strategic partners in sustainable regional development.

Curriculum Flexibility Rooted in Local Potential. Regional autonomy provides significant flexibility for educational institutions like Pondok Ashqaf to innovate their tahfidz curriculum through a digital approach that responds to the characteristics of Millennials and Gen Z. Within a decentralized ecosystem, Islamic boarding schools are no longer rigidly bound by national standards which are often uniform but are granted the freedom to design instructional systems that are more relevant, adaptive, and rooted in local values as well as the needs of today's digital society. This administrative freedom enables the integration of traditional values (turats) with modern technological literacy,

thereby creating an educational model that is not only oriented toward cognitive-religious aspects but also toward life skills in the digital age.

As emphasized by Aini (2022), decentralization fundamentally enhances the capacity of community-based institutions to continue innovating and maintaining their relevance amid the dynamics of rapid social change. This flexibility is a crucial tool for Islamic boarding schools in undertaking managerial and curricular transformations to remain competitive. This perspective is reinforced by Raihani's (2016) research, which highlights that leadership and autonomy in religious schools in Indonesia enable more effective adaptation of culture and values compared to centralized systems. In this context, Pondok Ashqaf leverages this autonomy to position itself as a dynamic institution, where the digital curriculum is not viewed as a threat to tradition but rather as a means to strengthen the dissemination of the Qur'an in the virtual realm.

Furthermore, the success of this technology-based curriculum integration is also influenced by the institution's ability to manage its unique resources. According to the study by Lukens (2005), Islamic boarding schools possess a unique ability to navigate the tension between Islamic identity and modernity, where curricular autonomy is key to producing graduates who are moderate yet technologically proficient. Thus, regional autonomy is not merely about providing administrative space but serves as the primary driver for pesantren to transform into centers of excellence capable of addressing global challenges without being detached from their spiritual roots.

Structural Challenges and Regional Fiscal Imbalances

The implementation of regional autonomy, which grants broad authority to local governments, often faces structural obstacles in practice, such as uneven bureaucratic capacity in formulating comprehensive religious education policies. This situation places Islamic boarding schools in a vulnerable position because they are highly dependent on local political dynamics and the subjective commitment of policymakers in each region. Consequently, the direction of the boarding schools' development varies greatly; institutions located in areas with a strong religious vision tend to develop rapidly, while those in areas with different development priorities often experience stagnant support.

Huda (2021) explains that in a decentralized system, disparities in support often arise due to differing interpretations of regulations at the local level. This results in unequal access, where some Islamic boarding schools receive excessive material support, while other institutions are overlooked by government assistance programs. The lack of preparedness among local government officials to translate central regulations into technical policies at the district or city level often triggers overlapping jurisdictions, which is confusing for pesantren administrators on the ground.

Furthermore, this phenomenon is complicated by the unstable fiscal realities of local governments, where support for pesantren is often viewed as an optional budgetary burden rather than a systemic obligation. As noted by Fajar (2022), without minimal standardization in religious education services at the local level, pesantren will remain trapped in administrative uncertainty that hinders long-term planning. Therefore,

synchronization between the central and local governments is an absolute prerequisite so that autonomy does not merely become a tool for the distribution of power, but rather an instrument of inclusive empowerment for all Islamic educational institutions.

This competitive pressure becomes increasingly evident as pesantren must contend with formal educational institutions that possess more comprehensive and standardized resources. Changes in people's lifestyles and the penetration of global culture have also shifted public perception, compelling pesantren not only to preserve their traditional values but also to innovate in ways that address the needs of the times. In line with Tan's (2011) argument in a prestigious international journal, the sustainability of pesantren's role as agents of social change depends heavily on their ability to engage in strategic negotiation between the demands of digital modernity and the preservation of the spiritual identity that forms the very foundation of their existence.

Competitive pressures within the national education landscape are now an unavoidable reality, especially as Islamic boarding schools must contend with formal educational institutions that have more comprehensive resource support and strictly accredited quality assurance standards. Changes in the lifestyle of urban communities and the massive penetration of global culture through cyberspace have also shifted public perceptions of Islamic educational institutions; people now tend to seek institutions that offer not only spiritual depth but also a competitive edge in cognitive aspects and practical skills. Therefore, Rakhmawati's (2023) study highlights that the success of Islamic boarding schools in navigating the challenges of autonomy heavily depends on the managerial ability of school leaders to build effective political communication networks with local governments. Without strong negotiation skills, the significant potential offered by the Pesantren Law and decentralization schemes will be difficult to fully realize in the form of infrastructure support or human resource capacity building.

This policy disparity is fundamentally rooted in disparities in fiscal capacity among regions, where areas with strong financial capabilities tend to have greater discretion to allocate budgets for the development of Islamic boarding schools. Conversely, regions with fiscal constraints are often forced to reprioritize budgets toward sectors deemed more administratively urgent, resulting in concrete support for Islamic educational institutions frequently being minimized. This phenomenon is reinforced by Zuhri's (2021) study, which highlights that reliance on the Regional Budget (APBD) can be a "double-edged sword"; on one hand, it provides significant funding opportunities, but on the other, it creates uncertainty (precarity) for institutions lacking a strong foundation of economic self-reliance.

This risk of dependency becomes increasingly evident when linked to local political fluctuations that can abruptly shift the direction of budgetary support. As explained by Prasetyo (2023), pesantren that rely too heavily on government aid without diversifying their revenue sources will be vulnerable to operational shocks during leadership transitions at the local level. Therefore, local fiscal capacity is not only a determinant of the success of physical infrastructure but also a test of the pesantren's institutional resilience in navigating the uncertainty of such policy support.

These fluctuating fiscal conditions then directly impact classic challenges such as limitations in human resource quality and the provision of technological infrastructure requiring high investment costs. Amid the rapid pace of digitalization, Islamic boarding schools are now required to undergo a total transformation from enhancing the professionalism of educators to modernizing management systems to avoid stagnation in the face of a younger generation with high expectations regarding technological literacy. This demands a smart reallocation of resources to ensure that digital integration does not merely scratch the surface but becomes an integral part of a new organizational culture.

According to Maimun (2020) the greatest challenge for Islamic boarding schools in the era of regional autonomy is not merely a matter of funding availability, but rather the leadership's ability to transition from traditional, experience-based management practices to a modern, systematic, and accountable governance model. This view is supported by the findings of Hidayat (2022), who emphasizes that the success of pesantren modernization heavily depends on the courage of pesantren leaders to adopt credible quality management standards without compromising the values of the pesantren. Thus, professional governance is an absolute prerequisite for Islamic boarding schools to be able to convert fiscal constraints into opportunities for innovation through more efficient and transparent resource management.

Pesantren are called upon not merely to be guardians of static traditions, but to engage in radical innovation capable of addressing the needs of the times without undermining the noble values that form their foundation. In line with Tan's (2011) argument in a prestigious international journal, the sustainability of the pesantren's role as an agent of social change hinges on its ability to engage in strategic negotiation between the demands of digital modernity and the preservation of the spiritual identity that forms the root of its existence. Failure to navigate this intersection risks trapping Islamic boarding schools in a detrimental dichotomy: becoming too modern to the point of losing their identity, or too traditional to the point of being isolated from the progress of civilization. Therefore, curriculum and management adaptation in the era of regional autonomy must be viewed as an effort to rebrand Islamic boarding schools to demonstrate that Islamic values remain compatible with advancements in information technology.

This competitive phenomenon is further reinforced by Rizki's (2025) study, which highlights the importance of diversifying educational programs in Islamic boarding schools to counter the dominance of international-standard formal schools. According to him, boarding schools that can transform their unique characteristics into added value such as a Quran memorization program integrated with data literacy will hold greater appeal for millennial parents. Furthermore, Arifin (2024) emphasizes that institutional credibility in the era of regional autonomy is no longer measured solely by the charisma of its leadership, but rather by the extent to which the institution can demonstrate public accountability and management transparency. Thus, this competitive challenge ultimately serves as a positive catalyst for Islamic boarding schools to transform into educational institutions that are more professional, credible, and globally competitive.

Strategy for Self-Reliance: Baitul Maal and a Self-Sustaining Economy

Amid the complex dynamics of decentralization policies and the high volatility of local fiscal support, Pondok Tahfidz Millennial Ashqaf has taken a transformative step by building financial autonomy through the optimization of Islamic financial instruments. This strategy should not be viewed merely as a survival strategy amid limited government subsidies, but rather as a form of institutional resilience that is visionary in the face of macroeconomic policy uncertainty. By creating an independent funding base, the pesantren is able to mitigate the risks of bureaucracy and local political fluctuations, so that the process of knowledge transmission and character building for students can continue to run optimally without significant financial obstacles.

This self-reliance serves as a crucial foundation for Islamic boarding schools to maintain their educational autonomy and the integrity of the noble values they uphold. As emphasized by Zuhri (2021), Islamic educational institutions that successfully build a self-sustaining economic ecosystem tend to have stronger bargaining power and more assured operational sustainability compared to institutions that are entirely dependent on grant assistance. Furthermore, Prasetyo (2023), in his study on budget policy, emphasizes that financial resilience is an absolute prerequisite for educational institutions in decentralized regions to avoid being trapped in the vortex of regional budget precariousness. Thus, Pondok Ashqaf's strategic steps in managing these sharia economic instruments serve as a model for the transformation of modern Islamic boarding schools into adaptive, self-reliant, and globally competitive institutions.

The optimization of ZISWAF and the legal status of this financial independence institution are structurally realized through the establishment of Baitul Maal Ashqaf (BMA) as a specialized division entrusted with the responsibility of managing public funds professionally and productively. Based on an interview with Ustadz Anton Setiadji, Director of Baitul Maal Ashqaf, he emphasized that BMA is not merely an internal donation collection unit, but an official institution operating legally under the coordination of BAZNAS (National Zakat Agency). This legal status serves as a crucial foundation that provides legal certainty, ensuring that the entire management of Zakat, Infak, Sedekah, and Wakaf (ZISWAF) within the Pondok Ashqaf environment is carried out in full compliance with national regulatory standards.

Ustadz Anton added that as a BAZNAS partner institution, BMA adopts the principle of information transparency, whereby financial and Sharia audits are conducted transparently on a regular basis. This step is taken to ensure that every rupiah entrusted by donors is managed accountably and targeted appropriately according to the recipients' categories. As explained by Fahmi (2025), the integration of pesantren-based zakat institutions with national authorities such as BAZNAS is an effective strategy to enhance public trust through strict audit standardization and an integrated reporting system.

Furthermore, the accountability demonstrated by BMA through this audit process aligns with Arifin's (2024) perspective, which emphasizes that in the era of regional autonomy, the credibility of religious institutions is no longer measured solely by the personal charisma of their leaders, but rather by the extent to which these institutions can

demonstrate managerial transparency and compliance with state regulations. Thus, BMA functions not only as a provider of operational funds but also as an instrument that elevates the prestige of pesantren professionalism in the eyes of the broader public.

Resilience and Philanthropy Across Existence Baitul Maal Ashqaf (BMA) has proven itself to be a main pillar that not only maintains the operational stability of Pondok Ashqaf amidst national economic fluctuations but also serves as an inclusive instrument of resilience. Interestingly, this financial independence is not only enjoyed internally by the boarding school's academic community but has transformed into a philanthropic force that transcends geographical and institutional boundaries. Ustadz Anton Setiadji revealed that the benefits of BMA have extended to partner Islamic boarding schools through cross-subsidy schemes and operational assistance, a strategic step to collectively strengthen the Islamic education ecosystem in West Kalimantan.

Furthermore, BMA plays an active role in humanitarian missions by reaching out to Muslim communities in remote areas as well as convert communities, which often face dual challenges: limited logistical access and a lack of spiritual guidance. BMA's interventions which involve distributing basic aid alongside religious guidance demonstrate that the organization serves as a bridge between civilizations. This ability to support other entities serves as empirical evidence that professional ZISWAF management can transform the paradigm of Islamic boarding schools; from being frequently positioned as beneficiaries (*mustahik*), they now stand firmly as strategic providers of benefits (*muzakki/munfiq*) in community development.

This shift in roles aligns with Sari's (2023) study, which emphasizes that Islamic philanthropy independently managed by educational institutions is more effective in reaching marginalized segments of society compared to top-down aid programs. Furthermore, Nasution (2023), in his journal article on *da'wah* in marginalized areas, underscores that strengthening the convert community through Islamic social funds is a vital instrument in maintaining social stability and the resilience of faith in remote regions. Thus, BMA serves not only as the heart of Pondok Ashqaf but also as the lungs of the *da'wah* and community empowerment movement in West Kalimantan.

Institutional Sustainability and Public Trust Public trust is a fundamental form of social capital that serves as a key determinant in ensuring the long-term operational sustainability of Pondok Ashqaf. Within the Islamic philanthropy ecosystem, trust is not merely a moral impression but a strategic asset built through consistency between program commitments and the actual utilization of funds. Financial management at Baitul Maal Ashqaf (BMA), conducted transparently, professionally, and well-documented, systematically fosters collective confidence within the community. This is what encourages donors and zakat contributors to continue entrusting their assets, as there is assurance that these funds are managed in accordance with the principles of good organizational governance.

As explained in Zuhri's (2021) study, the economic independence of Islamic boarding schools based on strengthening accountable ZISWAF governance is a crucial key for Islamic educational institutions to free themselves from the trap of dependence on local

government budgets, which are often volatile and unpredictable. This autonomy grants Islamic boarding schools full autonomy in determining the direction of educational development without being co-opted by the political interests of local budgets.

Furthermore, Arifin (2024) emphasizes that in the era of information transparency, financial transparency supported by regular audit results such as those conducted by the BMA in collaboration with BAZNAS serves as a very strong instrument of legitimacy. This legitimacy enables Pondok Ashqaf not only to survive financially but also to expand its collaborative networks with various private sectors and the international community. Thus, this positive correlation between accountability and public trust serves as a driving force for educational innovations at Ashqaf, ensuring that the vision of producing a generation of digitally literate hafiz remains intact amidst the challenges of the times.

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Community Empowerment through Productive Waqf: The Transformation of Baitul Maal Ashqaf (BMA) also addresses a more strategic dimension through community empowerment based on the management of productive waqf. This program is systematically designed to create and manage economic assets, the proceeds of which are reinvested for the sustainable welfare of the community. The implementation of productive waqf breaks the chain of dependence on incidental donations by creating a steady source of income used to fund free education for male and female students, as well as providing business capital for the economic empowerment of students. By converting idle assets into active assets, BMA ensures that every philanthropic instrument has added value that goes beyond mere consumptive aid.

This phenomenon aligns with the findings of Widiastuti et al. (2024), who emphasize that the role of modern Islamic boarding schools in the era of decentralization has undergone a significant shift, from merely being traditional educational institutions to becoming drivers of the community's economy. Pondok Ashqaf's success in integrating spiritual values into professional asset management practices demonstrates that the concept of "Infak" within the ASI (Al-Qur'an, Sunnah, Infak) philosophical framework is not merely a ritual recommendation, but a real economic force. Through the BMA, Pondok

Ashqaf demonstrates that Islamic boarding schools can stand as independent, inclusive entities that generate broad socio-economic impacts for the surrounding community.

The sustainability of this model is reinforced by Huda's (2021) perspective, which states that community-based economic empowerment in Islamic boarding schools is a long-term solution to strengthen the national economic structure from the grassroots level. Thus, BMA functions not only as an internal financial supporter but also as a living laboratory for transparent, accountable, and transformative sharia economic practices. The existence of this institution serves as tangible proof that, amidst the challenges of regional autonomy, Islamic boarding schools remain capable of serving as beacons of civilization that are financially empowered and socially beneficial.

Resilience and Cross-Border Philanthropy: The Role of Empowering Quran Teachers. The existence of Baitul Maal Ashqaf (BMA) has proven to be a cornerstone that not only maintains the operational stability of Pondok Ashqaf amid national and regional economic fluctuations but also positions the Islamic boarding school as a hub of goodwill. This self-reliance was visionarily designed to create a broader social impact, extending beyond the physical walls of the boarding school to reach other entities in need. According to Ustadz Anton Setiadji, the benefits of BMA's existence have extended to partner boarding schools through cross-subsidy schemes and operational assistance. This initiative reflects the spirit of collaboration among Islamic educational institutions to grow together in the face of limited access to funding at the regional level.

Furthermore, BMA has made a fundamental breakthrough by optimizing the role and welfare of Quran teachers in remote areas. This program is a tactical response to the objective reality that many Quran teachers in remote regions work with great dedication but without adequate compensation. These precarious conditions have the potential to systematically hinder the sustainability of grassroots da'wah. Through a systematic and measurable ZISWAF utilization scheme, BMA distributes monthly incentives and da'wah support to frontline Quran teachers. This allows them to focus entirely on community development without being burdened by pressing basic economic issues.

Upaya filantropi ini menjangkau wilayah marjinal yang lebih luas, mencakup masyarakat Muslim di pedalaman serta para mualaf yang memerlukan pendampingan spiritual berkelanjutan. Intervensi BMA dalam bentuk bantuan logistik yang dibarengi dengan penguatan literasi keagamaan merupakan bentuk nyata dari dakwah bil-hal. Sebagaimana ditegaskan oleh Sari (2023), keterlibatan lembaga filantropi Islam dalam menjamin kesejahteraan pendidik di daerah terpencil merupakan instrumen vital dalam menjaga ketahanan akidah serta meningkatkan kualitas literasi keagamaan di wilayah-wilayah yang sulit terjangkau oleh kebijakan formal pemerintah. Dengan demikian, BMA tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai penyokong finansial internal, melainkan sebagai mesin penggerak keadilan sosial yang memastikan cahaya Al-Qur'an tetap bersinar hingga ke pelosok Nusantara.

E. Conclusion

Based on the findings, this study concludes that Pondok Tahfidz Millennial Ashqaf represents an adaptive model of Islamic boarding school transformation in the era of regional autonomy. Its success lies in the ability to integrate traditional Islamic values with digital technology, institutional resilience, and economic self-reliance. Theoretically, this study contributes to contemporary Islamic education studies by showing that pesantren modernization does not necessarily weaken traditional values, but can strengthen them through value-based digital innovation. From a policy perspective, local governments should position pesantren as strategic partners in socio-religious and educational development, rather than merely as recipients of assistance. Policy support is needed through clearer regulatory facilitation, strengthening of the ZISWAF ecosystem, capacity-building programs, and institutional collaboration with bodies such as BAZNAS. These efforts can help pesantren develop sustainable economic units and improve their contribution to community empowerment. Practically, this study recommends that pesantren administrators strengthen adaptive management by integrating digital learning, internalizing spiritual values such as ASI (Al-Qur'an, Shalat, and Infak), and developing Baitul Maal or similar economic units as instruments of institutional independence and social service. Such strategies may serve as a reference for other pesantren seeking to build innovative, independent, and socially relevant educational systems. Future research is recommended to examine similar models in different pesantren contexts, compare pesantren transformation across regions, and explore the long-term impact of digital innovation and ZISWAF-based economic management on institutional sustainability, student development, and community empowerment.

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