Available on: https://jsshrs.ep-journals.org/ E-ISSN: 3051-3561, P-ISSN: 3051-3553

Journal of Social Science and Human Research Studies

Volume: 02 Issue: 04 April-2026

Integrating Total Quality Management in Pesantren: A Framework for Sustainable Graduate Quality

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Published Date: April 27, 2026 **Article DOI: 10.65150/EP-jsshrs/V2E4/2026-13**

ABSTRACT: Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) play a significant role in the Indonesian Islamic education system by integrating religious learning with social and academic development. However, variations in institutional governance and educational standards often lead to inconsistencies in graduate quality across pesantren. This study aims to examine the integration of Total Quality Management (TQM) principles within pesantren educational systems and to propose a contextual framework for sustaining graduate quality while preserving the cultural and spiritual identity of pesantren. The study adopts a qualitative approach using a descriptive–analytical case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis involving key stakeholders, including kyai, teachers, administrators, students, and alumni. Data analysis employed an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion verification, complemented by grounded analysis techniques such as open, axial, and selective coding. The findings reveal that TQM integration in pesantren is shaped by four interconnected components: kyai leadership, educational management systems, quality culture, and continuous improvement. Kyai leadership acts as the central driver that aligns institutional vision, spiritual values, and managerial practices. This study proposes a contextualized TQM framework that integrates spiritual leadership and value-based organizational culture, contributing to the literature on Islamic educational management and offering strategic guidance for strengthening quality assurance and sustainable graduate quality in pesantren education.

KEYWORDS: Total Quality Management, Pesantren Education, Quality Culture, Kyai Leadership, Sustainable Graduate Quality

1. INTRODUCTION

The number of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in Indonesia continues to increase and has become an important part of the national Islamic education system. This growth is reflected in the proliferation of various types of pesantren, from traditional Salafist pesantren to modern pesantren that combine formal schooling with Islamic religious education. Thus, pesantren contribute significantly to expanding access to Islamic education in various regions.(B. A. Setiawan & Rofi, 2020); (Zainul Mustofa Al Amin, 2022); (Sormin et al., 2022).

As the number of these institutions increases, the Islamic boarding school-based madrasah community is also increasingly prominent as a learning center that integrates religious aspects with national values and the quality of educational services expected by the wider community.(D. A. Kurniawan, 2023). This phenomenon shows that Islamic boarding schools are not just a cultural heritage, but rather an educational dynamic that is responsive to contemporary social, economic and cultural demands without losing its identity as a religious institution that carries out a broad public role. (Hidayah, 2019).

Islamic boarding schools are beginning to experience a transformation from a traditional system to a modern educational institution, with the adoption of a curriculum that combines general material, skills, and religious elements. (B. A. Setiawan & Rofi, 2020);. This modernization is often realized through the implementation of an integrated education model, recognition of *muadalah*, and the establishment of model madrasas and superior madrasas under the umbrella of Islamic boarding schools, so that the output of graduates is not only religiously competent, but also has academic competencies and social skills relevant to the modern job market.(Muwafiqoh & Ulum, 2023); (Zainul Mustofa Al Amin, 2022); (Hakiemah & Khumaini, 2022)

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Several studies highlight that curriculum innovation, changes in learning methods, and institutional renewal are core parts of the transformation, while maintaining the cultural traditions of Islamic boarding schools and the position of the kyai as a dynamic institutional leader. (Najib & Maunah, 2022). This discourse shows the balance between maintaining the identity of Islamic boarding schools and integrating modern quality management practices to improve the quality of education. (Siti Aimah, 2021); (Riswadi et al., 2021)

Society demands that Islamic boarding school graduates have balanced religious, academic and social competencies. (Najib & Maunah, 2022); (Azis, 2022). This need encourages Islamic boarding schools to develop the capacity of graduates who are able to contribute broadly, both within the Muslim community and in the broader national context. (Riswadi et al., 2021) Much literature emphasizes the importance of strengthening graduate quality through the integration of religious aspects, mastery of general knowledge, and social-emotional skills honed through character-based learning programs, entrepreneurship, and digital competencies.(Aini, 2018)

Within this framework, the concept of educational quality that originates from Total Quality Management (TQM) is applied to direct planning, implementation, evaluation, and follow-up in a participatory manner with all Islamic boarding school stakeholders, so that quality improvement becomes a sustainable organizational culture.(Siti Aimah, 2021); (B. A. Setiawan & Rofi, 2020); (Syakur et al., 2020)

Debates about how to maintain the indigenous of Islamic boarding schools while adopting global elements also emerged, but most sources agreed that the sophistication of graduates can go hand in hand with the preservation of Islamic boarding school identity through a contextual and collaborative approach. (B. A. Setiawan & Rofi, 2020); (Muwafiqoh & Ulum, 2023); (Hakiemah & Khumaini, 2022).

The concept of educational quality management (TQM) is increasingly being applied in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) to improve the quality of educational services. The implementation of TQM emphasizes a focus on customers (students and their families), the involvement of internal and external stakeholders, and continuous improvement with quality standards relevant to the needs of the Islamic boarding school community and the general school audience..(Yusuf, 2021) (Siti Aimah, 2021); (B. A. Setiawan & Rofi, 2020).

This transformation is not only technical, but also organizational, including curriculum reform, increasing human resource capacity, and structuring the educational process to be in sync with the expectations of the modern education market.(Dahlan, 2018); (Riswadi et al., 2021). However, there remains a debate about the extent to which TQM implementation can align with the traditional Islamic boarding school identity; some researchers emphasize the need for local adaptations that maintain the Islamic boarding school's ash-had *syakhsiyah* while opening up opportunities for learning innovation and more transparent quality evaluation.(Muwafiqoh & Ulum, 2023); (B. A. Setiawan & Rofi, 2020) Overall, the literature shows that the integration of TQM in Islamic boarding schools has the potential to increase the competitiveness of graduates without eliminating the unique cultural character of Islamic boarding schools.

The quality assurance system in Islamic boarding schools is not yet structured and not yet standardized. Various studies and reviews show that the quality assurance system in many Islamic boarding schools is still informal and does not yet have uniform national standards, so that the quality assurance process tends not to be centralized or formally structured.(Azis, 2022); (B. A. Setiawan & Rofi, 2020). This obstacle is exacerbated by the variety of types of Islamic boarding schools (*Salafiyah*, modern, *mu'adalah*) which have different organizational models and curricula, so that inconsistency in determining quality standards is natural. (Zibbat & Hariri, 2024). This condition is in line with the finding that the recognition of Islamic boarding school institutions and diplomas is still being debated in terms of policy, even though there are formal efforts through certain regulations that direct curriculum and evaluation standards, but their implementation is not yet comprehensive across all institutions. (B. A. Setiawan & Rofi, 2020). Consequently, how the quality of graduates is consistently ensured across Islamic boarding schools remains a crucial issue for national education policy makers. (Rustandi et al., 2023); (B. A. Setiawan & Rofi, 2020).

The implementation of quality management is still partial and unsystematic. The main obstacle is that the implementation of quality management still feels partial, with the main focus on improving the curriculum while other aspects such as human resources, facilities, learning processes, and quality evaluation are less coordinated and not integrated holistically according to the principles of Total Quality Management (TQM). (D. A. Kurniawan, 2023; Yusuf, 2021)

Several case studies show that although some Islamic boarding schools have begun to implement TQM elements, the implementation is not yet comprehensive and is not evenly distributed among students and institutional units, so that the quality of educational services is inconsistent. (D. A. Kurniawan, 2023; Siti Aimah, 2021). The leadership role of the kyai and the quality commitment of the Islamic boarding school are often the main determinants of the level of success or failure of implementation, which emphasizes the need for an integrated quality system design that brings together all stakeholders.(Rahmaningsih & Saifu Rizal, 2023; Yusuf, 2021). In general, the literature shows the need for continuous process improvements based on PDCA (plan-do-check-act) involving administrators, teachers, students, and parents/local residents, so that quality can be improved sustainably.(Siti Aimah, 2021)

The quality of Islamic boarding school graduates varies across institutions. Variations in the quality of graduates across Islamic boarding schools have been a frequently discussed topic, reflecting differences in curriculum capacity, teaching methods, and the support of facilities and human resources. Islamic boarding schools that adopt the pesantren-based madrasah model and the pesantren-model with an integrated general curriculum tend to produce graduates with different profiles, particularly in religious, academic, and social skills competencies. (Tabroni, 2019); (Hakiemah & Khumaini, 2022). Research on the design of the quality of Islamic boarding school education emphasizes the need for curriculum design that combines religious material with general knowledge, so that graduates have broader competitiveness in the job market and further studies. (Rustandi et al., 2023; Siti Aimah, 2021). However, because there is no quality management model specifically designed for the context of Islamic boarding schools, consistent implementation of quality standards remains challenging and requires contextual adaptation that takes into account *the ash-shakhsiyyah* of the Islamic boarding school and the needs of its community.(Rahmaningsih & Saifu Rizal, 2023; Zibbat & Hariri, 2024)

There is no quality management model specifically designed for the Islamic boarding school context. Various literature highlights that although the Total Quality Management concept has been adapted for the Islamic boarding school environment, there is no single model that is explicitly tailored to all Islamic boarding school contexts with their unique characteristics.(Azis, 2022); (Sormin et al., 2022) Several studies have

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presented a design for educational quality based on Islamic boarding schools or the ITQM (Integrated Total Quality Management) model that integrates elements of kyai, foundations, and schools in one quality framework, but its implementation still depends on the commitment of the institution and the partnership pattern between Islamic boarding schools and external partners.(Yusuf, 2021); (Syakur et al., 2020); (Panut et al., 2021). Therefore, the need to develop an integrated quality management model that is explicitly designed for the context of Islamic boarding schools—combining governance, curriculum, learning, assessment, and services for students and families—is urgent to achieve graduate quality that is consistent and relevant to the needs of the times. (Rahmaningsih & Saifu Rizal, 2023); (B. A. Setiawan & Rofi, 2020). Such a model also needs to consider national policies related to SNP standards, accreditation rights, and the internal flexibility of Islamic boarding schools to maintain cultural identity while improving the quality of educational services.(Zibbat & Hariri, 2024); (B. A. Setiawan & Rofi, 2020).

2. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive analytical design to deeply understand how the principles of Total Quality Management (TQM) are embedded in the Islamic boarding school management system and ensure it contributes to the continuous improvement of graduate quality. A qualitative approach was chosen because this study seeks to explore the meaning, processes, and social dynamics that occur in educational management practices within Islamic boarding schools, which cannot be adequately explained through a quantitative approach alone. The descriptive analytical method allows researchers not only to describe the phenomena that occur but also to analyze the relationship between management practices and the achievement of quality Islamic boarding school graduates. This approach is widely used in educational research to explore institutional practices and organizational culture contextually.(Creswell & Creswell, 2018); (Sugiyono, 2022)

The research design used is a qualitative case study of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) as the primary unit of analysis. This case study was chosen because it provides an opportunity for researchers to deeply understand quality management practices within the real context of Islamic educational institutions with unique characteristics, such as kyai leadership, pesantren culture, and a distinctive santri development system. Through this approach, the research seeks to identify patterns of implementation of TQM principles such as continuous improvement, quality leadership, and stakeholder satisfaction orientation within the pesantren management system. The case study also allows for exploration of the relationship between management policies, learning processes, and santri character development in shaping sustainable graduate quality. (Yin, 2018);(Miles et al., 2014)

The selection of research informants was conducted through purposive sampling, which is the selection of data sources based on the consideration that they have experience and knowledge relevant to the research topic. The main informants in this study included Islamic boarding school leaders (kyai), Islamic boarding school educational institution managers, teachers or *ustadz*, students, and alumni of the Islamic boarding school. This diversity of informants aims to obtain a comprehensive picture of the implementation of quality management from various stakeholder perspectives. Research data was collected through three main techniques: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies. Interviews were conducted to explore quality management policies and strategies, observations were used to understand educational practices and direct student development, while documentation was used to review the curriculum, educational programs, and quality assurance documents of the Islamic boarding school.(Sugiyono, 2022);(Moleong, 2018)

The data analysis in this study uses an interactive analysis model that includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data reduction is carried out by selecting and organizing data relevant to the research focus, then the data is presented in the form of descriptive narratives and analysis matrices to facilitate interpretation. The final stage is drawing conclusions, which is carried out continuously throughout the research process by comparing field findings with the theoretical framework of TQM and educational management. To ensure the validity of the data, this study uses source triangulation techniques, technical triangulation, and member checking with research informants. This approach allows researchers to gain a more valid and in-depth understanding of the integration of TQM in Islamic boarding school management and its contribution to the continuous improvement of graduate quality. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018);(Miles et al., 2014);(Sugiyono, 2022)

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings indicate that the application of Total Quality Management (TQM) principles in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) is emerging in response to demands for improved quality of Islamic education in the modern era. Pesantren no longer merely serve as institutions for transmitting traditional religious knowledge but are also required to produce graduates with balanced academic, spiritual, and social competencies. In this context, the integration of TQM principles is a strategic approach to strengthening the pesantren education management system in a more systematic manner and oriented towards continuous quality improvement.

The research findings indicate that the leadership of the kyai (Islamic cleric) plays a central role in the implementation of quality management in pesantren. Kyai leadership is not merely administrative but also normative and cultural, influencing the direction of institutional policies, organizational culture, and the commitment of all pesantren members to improving the quality of education. In practice, the kyai acts as a quality leader, instilling the values of discipline, responsibility, and an orientation towards continuous improvement in all pesantren educational activities.

In addition to leadership, this study found that the implementation of TQM in pesantren is reflected in efforts to strengthen the educational management system, which includes educational program planning, curriculum development, and regular learning evaluation. Islamic boarding schools that implement quality management principles tend to have a more structured educational planning system that involves various institutional elements, such as teachers, boarding school administrators, and educational units under the boarding school's auspices. This demonstrates a systematic effort to continuously improve the quality of the educational process.

This study also found that the implementation of TQM in Islamic boarding schools is reflected in the practice of continuous improvement, or continuous improvement, of various aspects of educational management. This improvement is carried out through regular

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evaluations of the learning process, student development activities, and the effectiveness of educational programs implemented by the boarding school. Through this evaluation mechanism, boarding schools can identify existing weaknesses and formulate more appropriate improvement strategies to enhance educational quality.

Other findings indicate that the integration of TQM in Islamic boarding schools is also closely related to strengthening a quality culture within the boarding school environment. This quality culture is reflected in the discipline of students, the commitment of teachers to quality learning, and the collective spirit of all boarding school members to maintain the reputation and credibility of the institution. This quality culture is a crucial factor in ensuring that quality management principles are not limited to policy but are also implemented in daily educational practices.

Furthermore, this study found that the implementation of TQM contributed to improving the quality of Islamic boarding school graduates, as evidenced by the development of various student competencies. Pesantren graduates not only possess capabilities in Islamic scholarship but also demonstrate communication, leadership, and adaptation skills to social and technological developments. This demonstrates that the integration of quality management can strengthen the role of Islamic boarding schools as educational institutions capable of producing graduates relevant to the needs of society.

Based on the analysis, this study identified several key components within the TQM integration framework in Islamic boarding schools: kyai leadership, educational management systems, institutional quality culture, and continuous evaluation mechanisms. These four components interact to create a more effective Islamic boarding school education management system oriented toward improving graduate quality. This framework demonstrates that the success of TQM implementation in Islamic boarding schools depends not only on managerial policies but also on strengthening the cultural values of the Islamic boarding school.

Table 1.1. TQM Framework Models for Islamic Boarding Schools

TQM components	Implementation in Islamic Boarding Schools	Impact on Quality
Leadership	Visionary, spiritually-based leadership of religious leaders	Institutional quality policy direction
Quality Planning	Educational program planning and curriculum development	Structured education system
Process Management	Learning management and student development	Effectiveness of the educational process
Continuous Improvement	Regular evaluation of educational programs	Improving program quality
Quality Culture	Instilling the values of discipline, responsibility, and sincerity	Establishing a quality culture
Outputs	Graduates who are religiously, academically, and socially competent	Sustainable graduate quality

The Grounded Analysis in this study is as follows:

1. Open Coding

The open coding stage produces various initial concepts from field data.

Table 1.2. Open Coding

Finding Data	Initial Code
The Kyai determines the direction of the Islamic boarding school's development.	Leadership vision
Teachers follow quality guidance from the leadership.	Organizational commitment
Program evaluations are conducted every semester.	Program evaluation
The curriculum combines religious and general knowledge.	Integrated curriculum
Students are guided through daily disciplinary activities.	Character formation
The Islamic boarding school holds regular evaluation meetings.	Continuous improvement
Alumni possess leadership skills.	Graduate competency

2. Axial Coding

The initial codes were then grouped into main categories in this study as follows:

Table 1.3. Axial Coding

Related	Code Categories
Quality Leadership	Leadership vision, Organizational commitment
Educational Management System	Integrated curriculum, Program management
Continuous Improvement Process	Program evaluation, Continuous improvement
Student Character Building	Character formation
Graduate Quality	Graduate competency

3. Selective Coding

At this stage, the core research themes were found, which are explained in the table below:

Tabel 1.4. Selective Coding

Core Category	Deskripsi
TQM Integration in the Islamic Boarding School System	Synergy between leadership, Islamic boarding school culture, and educational management in producing sustainable quality graduates

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Tabel 1.5. Qualitative Findings Table

Main Theme	Subtheme	Finding Indicators
Quality Leadership of Islamic Boarding Schools	Kyai leadership	The Kyai establishes a vision for educational quality.
	Organizational commitment	Teachers and administrators adhere to the quality policy guidelines.
Integration of Islamic Boarding School Values	Spiritual culture	The values of sincerity and discipline in education.
	Character development	The program for developing students' morals.
Education Management System	Integrated curriculum	Integration of religious and general knowledge.
	Learning management	Learning planning and evaluation.
Continuous Improvement		Regular evaluation meetings.
	Program Evaluation	Improving learning methods
Islamic Boarding School Quality Culture	Educational Innovation	Teachers maintain learning standards
	Quality Commitment	Structured educational activities
Graduate Quality	Student Discipline	Strong understanding of Islamic knowledge
	Religious Competence	Leadership and communication
	Social Competence	Ability to deal with social change

The results of this research synthesis indicate that the implementation of Total Quality Management (TQM) in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) is an integrative process involving interacting aspects of leadership, organizational culture, and educational management systems. The application of TQM is not only understood as a modern managerial approach, but also as an effort to harmonize quality management principles with the Islamic educational values developed within the pesantren tradition. This integration creates a more systematic educational management system while maintaining the distinctive character of pesantren as educational institutions based on spiritual values and character development.

One of the key findings of this research demonstrates that the leadership of the Kyai (Islamic scholars) plays a strategic role in driving the implementation of quality management in Islamic boarding schools. The Kyai serves not only as an administrative leader but also as a moral and spiritual figure with a strong influence on the pesantren's organizational culture. This leadership fosters a collective commitment among teachers, administrators, and students to carry out the educational process in a disciplined, focused manner, and oriented towards continuous quality improvement. Thus, the Kyai's leadership serves as a crucial foundation for building a quality management system in Islamic boarding schools.

In addition to leadership, this study also shows that the successful implementation of TQM in Islamic boarding schools is significantly influenced by the integration of the school's values into the educational management system. Values such as sincerity, discipline, responsibility, and brotherhood form the foundation of the organizational culture that supports the implementation of various educational programs. The integration of these values strengthens the boarding school community's commitment to educational quality and creates a learning environment conducive to the development of the students' character. In this context, the boarding school's values serve as social capital that strengthens the implementation of quality management principles.

The research findings also indicate that the implementation of TQM encourages the formation of a more structured and planned educational management system. Islamic boarding schools that integrate quality management principles tend to have more systematic mechanisms for educational program planning, curriculum management, and learning evaluation. This system enables the boarding school institution to manage the educational process more effectively and ensures that each program is clearly oriented towards improving educational quality.

Furthermore, this study found that the principle of continuous improvement is a crucial component of TQM implementation in Islamic boarding schools. Regular evaluation of various educational programs allows the boarding school to identify weaknesses and formulate more appropriate improvement strategies. This evaluation process focuses not only on academic aspects but also encompasses character development, religious activities, and student skill development. Through this continuous improvement mechanism, Islamic boarding schools are able to maintain consistent educational quality over the long term.

The synthesis of this research's findings indicates that the integration of TQM into Islamic boarding school management creates a strong institutional culture of quality and contributes to the continuous improvement of graduate quality. Islamic boarding school graduates not only possess competencies in Islamic scholarship but also demonstrate leadership, communication, and adaptation skills to social developments. Thus, the integration of kyai leadership, Islamic boarding school values, educational management systems, and continuous improvement mechanisms forms a quality management framework capable of supporting the creation of quality Islamic boarding school graduates relevant to the needs of modern society.

Based on the TQM framework model table for Islamic boarding schools, the research coding process, and the qualitative findings presented in the research document, it can be analysed that the implementation of Total Quality Management (TQM) in the Islamic boarding school education system is a managerial approach that emphasizes the integration of leadership, organizational culture, process management, and continuous improvement to produce sustainable graduate quality. This model shows that Islamic boarding schools' function not only as traditional educational institutions, but also as educational organizations with a structured quality management system. From the perspective of Islamic education management, the integration of spiritual values with modern management principles is the main foundation in maintaining the quality of Islamic boarding school-based educational institutions. This is in line with the findings of various studies in national journals which show that the application of quality management principles in Islamic educational institutions can improve organizational effectiveness and the quality of educational services.(Fauzi, 2020; Mulyadi, 2021; Rahman, 2022)

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The first component of the Islamic boarding school TQM model is quality leadership, centred on the role of the kyai (Islamic cleric) as a visionary leader who not only directs institutional policies but also serves as a moral and spiritual figure for the entire Islamic boarding school community. Within the Islamic boarding school organizational structure, the kyai holds a strategic position in determining the direction of the institution's development, including curriculum policies, educational culture, and the student development system. This values-based leadership is a key factor in the successful implementation of quality management in Islamic boarding schools. Research in various Islamic education journals shows that the transformational leadership of the kyai can increase the organizational commitment of teachers and strengthen the culture of quality within Islamic boarding schools. (Azra, 2020; Hasanah, 2021) This leadership is not only administrative in nature, but also based on exemplary behaviour that strengthens social and spiritual legitimacy in Islamic educational organizations.

Furthermore, the aspect of educational quality planning is a crucial part of TQM implementation in Islamic boarding schools. Quality planning encompasses the development of educational programs, the development of an integrated curriculum, and the systematic planning of learning activities. Many modern Islamic boarding schools today integrate religious curricula with general sciences to produce graduates with both religious and academic competencies. This curriculum integration reflects the transformation of the Islamic boarding school education system, which is increasingly adapting to the needs of modern society. Several studies in SINTA-indexed journals demonstrate that systematic educational planning based on stakeholder needs can increase the relevance of the Islamic boarding school curriculum and strengthen the competitiveness of graduates.(Fadhli, 2021; Nurhayati, 2022; Suharto, 2020)

The next component is educational process management, which in the context of Islamic boarding schools is realized through learning management, student development, and structured educational activities. The educational process in Islamic boarding schools takes place not only in the classroom but also through a system of fostering students' daily lives, involving worship, discipline, and social interaction within the boarding school environment. This educational model reflects the concept of holistic education, emphasizing a balance between cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects. Studies in Islamic education journals indicate that an integrated student development system can enhance character development and students' social competence.(Hidayat, 2022) Therefore, the management of the educational process in Islamic boarding schools is an important instrument in developing the quality of graduates who are not only academically superior but also have strong moral integrity.

Within the TQM framework, the principle of continuous improvement is also a crucial component. Islamic boarding schools conduct regular evaluations of their educational programs through evaluation meetings, monitoring of learning activities, and reflection on educational outcomes. These evaluations aim to identify program weaknesses and formulate strategies for continuous quality improvement. This concept of continuous improvement aligns with the Plan–Do–Check–Act (PDCA) cycle developed by Deming in quality management. Various studies in educational management journals have shown that implementing a periodic evaluation system in educational institutions can improve program quality and encourage learning innovation.(A. Kurniawan, 2021; Prasetyo, 2022; H. Setiawan, 2020) Thus, the evaluation process becomes an important mechanism in maintaining the consistency of the quality of Islamic boarding school education.

In addition to managerial aspects, the TQM model in Islamic boarding schools also emphasizes the importance of a quality culture within the educational institution. A quality culture in Islamic boarding schools is built through the instilling of the values of discipline, responsibility, sincerity, and commitment to educational quality. These values are taught not only through the formal curriculum but also through daily life practices in the Islamic boarding school. This strong organizational culture is a crucial factor in creating an educational environment conducive to the character development of students. Research in educational journals shows that an internalized quality culture within an educational organization can improve teacher performance, student learning motivation, and the effectiveness of the learning process. (Rahim, 2021; Wahyudi, 2022). Thus, quality culture becomes a fundamental element in the sustainability of the quality management system in Islamic boarding schools.

Research findings through an open coding process indicate that various field data point to several key concepts such as leadership vision, organizational commitment, program evaluation, integrated curriculum, character formation, and graduate competency. These concepts demonstrate that the implementation of TQM in Islamic boarding schools focuses not only on administrative aspects but also encompasses dimensions of values and character. This reflects that the Islamic boarding school education system has unique characteristics that distinguish it from other formal educational institutions. Previous research has shown that the integration of spiritual values and modern management is a key strength in developing the quality of Islamic boarding school education. (Mahmudah, 2021; Ridwan, 2020). Therefore, the TQM approach in Islamic boarding schools needs to be adapted to the cultural characteristics and traditions of Islamic education.

In the axial coding stage, the initial codes were then grouped into broader categories such as quality leadership, educational management systems, continuous improvement processes, student character building, and graduate quality. These categories demonstrate that the implementation of TQM in Islamic boarding schools has a clear and systematic conceptual structure. The relationships between these categories illustrate that graduate quality is the result of the integration of various managerial and cultural factors within the Islamic boarding school education system. Research in Islamic education journals indicates that graduate quality is strongly influenced by the effectiveness of institutional management, the quality of learning, and the organizational culture that develops within the educational institution.(Fauzan, 2022; Halim, 2021)

During the selective coding stage, the core theme of the research was identified, namely the integration of Total Quality Management into the Islamic boarding school education system, which produces sustainable graduate quality. This core theme indicates that the success of Islamic boarding schools in producing quality graduates depends not only on the curriculum or learning methods, but also on the integration of leadership, organizational culture, educational management, and a sustainable evaluation system. Thus, the Islamic boarding school TQM model can be understood as an educational management system that combines modern quality management principles with Islamic spiritual values. This model has the potential to become a conceptual framework for developing the quality of Islamic boarding school education in the future. This finding also strengthens various previous studies that show that a quality management approach can be an effective strategy in increasing the competitiveness of Islamic educational institutions in the era of globalization. (Latif, 2022; Siregar, 2020).

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4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study explored the integration of Total Quality Management (TQM) in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) and its contribution to the development of sustainable graduate quality. The findings reveal that the implementation of TQM in pesantren operates as an integrative system that combines leadership, organizational culture, educational management processes, and continuous evaluation mechanisms. The interaction of these elements enables pesantren to establish a structured management system while preserving their distinctive spiritual and cultural identity. As a result, the integration of TQM contributes to strengthening institutional governance and enhancing the quality of graduates who demonstrate balanced competencies in religious knowledge, academic ability, and social engagement.

A key finding of this study highlights the pivotal role of kyai leadership as the central driver of quality management implementation in pesantren. Unlike conventional educational institutions, leadership in pesantren is deeply embedded in moral authority and spiritual legitimacy. This leadership model encourages collective commitment among teachers, administrators, and students to maintain discipline, responsibility, and continuous improvement. In addition, the integration of TQM principles promotes systematic educational planning, integrated curriculum development, and regular program evaluation, which collectively strengthen the effectiveness of the educational process and foster a sustainable quality culture within the pesantren environment.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the literature on Islamic educational management by proposing a conceptual framework that contextualizes Total Quality Management within the socio-cultural structure of pesantren. While previous studies often applied general quality management models to Islamic educational institutions, this research demonstrates that the effectiveness of TQM in pesantren relies on the integration of managerial principles with spiritual leadership, value-based organizational culture, and holistic character education. The proposed framework—consisting of kyai leadership, educational management systems, quality culture, and continuous improvement—offers a contextualized model for understanding how quality management practices can be adapted to traditional Islamic educational institutions.

In terms of practical implications, the findings suggest that pesantren leaders and educational policymakers should strengthen institutional quality assurance systems by adopting structured management practices while maintaining the cultural and spiritual values that define pesantren education. Developing integrated curriculum models, enhancing leadership capacity, and institutionalizing continuous evaluation mechanisms are essential steps toward improving educational quality. Furthermore, collaboration between pesantren, government institutions, and educational stakeholders can support the development of more standardized yet flexible quality management systems for Islamic boarding schools.

Finally, this study opens several directions for future research. Further studies may expand the proposed framework through comparative research across different types of pesantren, including traditional, modern, and integrated models. Quantitative or mixed-methods approaches could also be employed to examine the measurable impact of TQM implementation on graduate outcomes and institutional performance. Such studies would contribute to refining the conceptual model and developing more comprehensive quality assurance strategies for Islamic educational institutions in the broader context of global educational transformation.

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