



Management of Life Skills-Based Islamic Education at Al-Amin Islamic Boarding School Indramayu

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ABSTRACT

The increasing demand for graduates who master both religious knowledge and practical competencies has encouraged Islamic boarding schools to integrate life skills into their educational management. This study analyzes how Al-Amin Islamic Boarding School, a mid-sized rural pesantren in Kandanghaur, Indramayu, manages life skills-based Islamic education, with a distinctive approach that empowers students to be independent and socially responsible. Using a qualitative descriptive design with a case study approach, data were collected through documentation, observation, and institutional profile analysis. The study examines the planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation stages of life skills programs embedded in the pesantren environment. The findings reveal that innovation emerges in several management aspects: (1) planning emphasizes competencies aligned with rural socio-economic realities, (2) organizing involves structured collaboration between teachers and student mentors, (3) implementation integrates discipline with experiential learning such as agriculture, entrepreneurship training, and leadership practice, and (4) evaluation adopts informal but continuous behavioral assessments to measure student initiative. This study contributes to the underexplored field of rural pesantren management by demonstrating how structured integration of life skills into educational management can balance religious instruction with practical competencies. The Al-Amin model thus offers a replicable framework for advancing Islamic education reform through life skills-based management.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic education has historically played a central role in shaping Indonesian society through pesantren, which are long-standing institutions preserving religious values and moral formation. Pesantren remain vital, particularly in rural areas, where they emphasize religious understanding, character building, and community service. However, the demands of the 21st century have prompted a paradigm shift. The traditional focus on purely spiritual and religious knowledge is increasingly being challenged by the urgent need for life skills that equip graduates to thrive in a competitive and globalized world (Salim & Hamid, 2022).

The rise of globalization, technological disruption, and socio-economic transformation has revealed the limitations of religious education models that neglect practical competencies. A lack of such skills has contributed to youth unemployment, underemployment, and weak entrepreneurial capacity (Munir & Izzati, 2020). These challenges affect pesantren graduates as well, many of whom struggle with financial independence, adaptive behavior, and problem-solving in real contexts. Modern education thus highlights the importance of life skills—critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, entrepreneurship, and digital literacy Yusof & Rahman,

(2021), which are in harmony with Islamic teachings encouraging self-reliance (*ikhtiar*), social responsibility (*ukhuwah*), and continuous learning (*ta'lim*).

In response, there has been growing attention to integrating life skills into Islamic education. The Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs has encouraged pesantren to design contextual education models that align religious values with socio-economic needs (Kemenag RI, 2021). Yet, implementation across pesantren varies widely, with many still relying on traditional managerial systems that are ill-equipped to sustain life skills education (Nugroho & Lestari, 2023). Previous studies highlight both potential and barriers: Fauzi, (2020) noted that structured life skills education enhances student resilience; Rahayu, (2020) emphasized the link between entrepreneurship training and graduate productivity; while Syahputra, (2021) pointed to weaknesses in management systems and teacher preparation. Nevertheless, most of this research focuses on large or modern pesantren, leaving small and mid-sized rural pesantren underexplored.

This study addresses that gap by examining Pondok Pesantren Al-Amin in Kandanghaur, Indramayu, West Java. As a mid-sized pesantren operating in a rural setting, Al-Amin has developed innovative yet modest approaches to integrating life skills into its system, particularly through agriculture, entrepreneurship, leadership assignments, and hands-on training. By analyzing the management process—planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation—this study highlights grassroots innovation in Islamic education that has received limited scholarly attention. The purpose of this study is to analyze how life skills-based Islamic education management is implemented at Pondok Pesantren Al-Amin, with specific attention to the planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation of its programs.

RESEARCH METHOD

General Background of the Research

This study was conducted to explore the managerial practices of life skills-based Islamic education at Pondok Pesantren Al-Amin in Kandanghaur, Indramayu. A qualitative case study approach was employed to obtain an in-depth understanding of the context-specific implementation of life skills education within a traditional Islamic educational institution. The case study design enabled a holistic and contextual exploration of the phenomenon, allowing the researcher to capture the patterns, structures, and dynamics of educational management as directly experienced by the key stakeholders.

The research assumes that successful life skills education is inseparable from effective management practices. Therefore, the methodology was designed not only to observe program outcomes but also to analyze the processes of planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating life skills education in the pesantren. This aligns with the interpretive nature of qualitative inquiry, emphasizing meaning-making within the lived context of the pesantren.

Participants

The participants in this study included pesantren leaders (kyai and senior administrators), supervising teachers (ustaz), student mentors (senior santri), and selected students actively engaged in life skills training. Participants were identified based on their involvement in program planning and execution, as documented in institutional records and confirmed during fieldwork.

Purposive sampling was employed to ensure the inclusion of information-rich cases. Key informants included program coordinators, division heads responsible for entrepreneurship and vocational training, and students who held leadership responsibilities. These participants were chosen because their perspectives provided comprehensive insights into both managerial strategies and student experiences.

Instruments and Procedures

Data were collected through three primary methods: documentation analysis, direct observation, and semi-structured interviews. Documentation included internal reports, activity schedules, skill development modules, and visual materials (e.g., posters, student portfolios). Direct observation was conducted during on-site visits to the pesantren, focusing on daily routines, life skills training sessions, and the interaction between teachers and students. The researcher maintained field notes and used observation sheets structured around key management indicators: planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with pesantren leaders, supervising teachers, and selected students. These interviews allowed the researcher to explore participants' perspectives on how life skills education was designed, implemented, and evaluated within the pesantren system. Informal conversations during observation periods were also recorded as supplementary data to capture nuances often absent from formal interviews.

The research instruments were designed with flexibility, allowing categories and coding schemes to evolve as new insights emerged. This adaptive process supported a deeper understanding of how management practices shaped the effectiveness of life skills education in the pesantren.

Data Analysis

The data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles & Huberman, (2014), which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. During data reduction, information from observations, interviews, and documents was filtered for relevance to the research focus. In the display stage, the data were organized thematically to identify patterns and relationships across management practices. The final stage involved drawing conclusions and verifying them through triangulation.

Triangulation was conducted by cross-checking information from interviews with observational data and institutional documents. For instance, leadership practices described by administrators were compared with direct observations of student activities and official program guidelines. To enhance credibility, member checking was applied by discussing preliminary findings with selected participants, ensuring interpretations were consistent with their lived experiences.

Research Ethics and Researcher's Role

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. Permission to conduct research was obtained from the pesantren leadership. Informed consent was secured from all participants, who were assured of confidentiality and voluntary participation. The researcher was present on-site, engaging in observations while maintaining analytical distance to avoid influencing the natural setting. Objectivity was ensured by documenting data systematically and cross-verifying multiple sources.

Research Duration and Scope

The research was conducted over a two-month period, encompassing both weekly and monthly life skills training activities. This timeframe was considered adequate because the pesantren operates on a structured management cycle in which planning, implementation, and evaluation occur within a monthly rhythm. Weekly observations enabled the researcher to capture routine managerial practices, such as coordination meetings, activity monitoring, and student mentoring, while monthly observations aligned with the pesantren's larger programmatic evaluations. The two-month duration thus allowed the study to document at least two full management cycles, providing sufficient evidence to analyze patterns of planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation. While longer observation could have offered additional insights, the chosen period was appropriate for achieving depth within the scope of a qualitative case study and for ensuring data saturation relevant to the study's focus on management processes.

Conclusion of Methodological Approach

This methodological framework was chosen to construct a comprehensive and contextually grounded picture of life skills-based Islamic education management at Pondok Pesantren Al-Amin. By combining direct field observation, interviews, and documentation analysis, the study ensured methodological rigor and produced findings that reflect the practical realities of a rural pesantren while offering transferable insights for Islamic education reform.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Life Skill Program Planning at Pondok Pesantren Al-Amin

At Pondok Pesantren Al-Amin, the planning of life skills-based education is carried out through a structured process. The pesantren formulates a vision and mission that incorporate both religious values and practical competencies. Planning activities involve mapping students' needs and designing a curriculum that reflects the local context of the pesantren.

The initial stage of planning included Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with pesantren administrators, alumni, student guardians, and community leaders. These discussions identified several areas of interest for skill development, which were later confirmed through annual student surveys. Based on the data collected, three main skills emerged as priorities: organic farming, small-scale entrepreneurship, and digital literacy.

Table 1 presents the distribution of student choices regarding skill development programs. The majority of students selected organic farming (30%), followed by entrepreneurship (26%) and digital skills (22%). Other fields such as culinary arts, sewing (12%), and workshop/automotive skills (10%) were also represented, with a total of 250 student respondents.

Table 1. Mapping of Student Skill Needs

Type of Skill	Number of Students Choosing	Percentage (%)
Organic Farming	75	30%
Entrepreneurship (small business)	65	26%
Digital Skills	55	22%

Type of Skill	Number of Students Choosing	Percentage (%)
Culinary Arts and Sewing	30	12%
Workshop and Automotive	25	10%
Total	250	100%

The pesantren has prepared supporting facilities to accommodate these programs. Available infrastructure includes approximately two hectares of agricultural land, a computer laboratory equipped with ten devices, and basic equipment for sewing and culinary practice. Facility usage is scheduled rotationally so that all students have access.

In terms of trainer readiness, the pesantren cooperates with local institutions and practitioners to provide technical guidance for teaching staff. Alumni who have experience in relevant fields are also involved as mentors. These arrangements ensure that students receive practical exposure supported by available resources and human capital.

Organization of the Life Skill Program at Al-Amin Islamic Boarding School

The life skill program at Pondok Pesantren Al-Amin is organized through a structured management system. The management team consists of daily administrators, mentoring teachers, life skill coordinators, and external partners, each with specific duties and responsibilities (see Table 2).

Table 2. Management Structure of the Life Skill Program at Al-Amin Islamic Boarding School

Position	Duties and Responsibilities
Pesantren Leader	Determines policies and conducts final evaluations
Daily Administrators	Manages daily activities and administration
Life Skill Coordinator	Prepares programs, schedules, and activity evaluations
Mentoring Teachers	Implements field activities and supervises students
External Partners	Supports training and provides supporting facilities

Coordination is maintained through weekly meetings, where administrators and coordinators review activities and plan future programs. Students participate in decision-making through deliberation forums, while each skill unit is supervised by a designated person in charge.



Figure 1. Interview with the Head of the Life Skill Program

The program employs customized teaching modules for each skill unit, adjusted to the needs of students. Program execution is decentralized at the unit level but remains under the coordination of a central supervisor. Monitoring is assisted by senior students and alumni, who provide additional support for supervision.

To standardize implementation, each program is guided by a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) covering training duration, required tools and materials, and evaluation methods. SOPs are compiled in pocketbooks and displayed in training rooms to ensure consistency across activities.

Implementation of the Life Skill Program at Al-Amin Islamic Boarding School

The life skill program at Pondok Pesantren Al-Amin is implemented through structured training in three main areas: agriculture, entrepreneurship, and digital skills. Each training area follows a scheduled rotation system, which ensures that all students take part in every type of activity during the week. Training is supervised by designated mentors, while participation is supported by a reward mechanism to encourage active involvement.

Table 3. Life Skill Training Schedule by Field

Day	Time	Field	Main Activity
Monday	07.00–12.00	Agriculture	Planting and watering
Tuesday	14.00–16.00	Digital	Graphic design training
Wednesday	08.00–10.00	Entrepreneurship	Snack production
Thursday	07.00–10.00	Agriculture	Fertilizing and cleaning
Friday	08.00–12.00	Digital	Media content management
Saturday	07.00–12.00	Entrepreneurship	Product marketing simulation

Agricultural training activities include land cultivation, organic fertilizer usage, and horticultural care. Students are assigned small plots of land and supervised by agricultural teachers. The produce harvested from these activities is used to meet pesantren needs, particularly in food supply.



Figure 2. Student Entrepreneurship Practice in Tempe Production

Entrepreneurship training is carried out in the production and marketing of local products such as tempe, herbal soap, red ginger syrup, and Eid cookies. These units are managed with the involvement of senior students and alumni, with structured guidance on production processes, budgeting, and marketing.

Table 4. Featured Products Made by Students

Product Type	Main Ingredient	Selling Price (Rp)	Production Quantity/Month
Tempe	Soybeans	3,000	250 packs
Herbal Soap	Lemongrass oil	10,000	120 bars
Red Ginger Syrup	Ginger, palm sugar	15,000	80 bottles
Eid Cookies	Flour, eggs	20,000	60 jars

Digital training activities cover graphic design, video editing, and media writing. Students use commonly available software to practice and apply their skills. They have also been tasked with managing the pesantren's social media accounts and producing digital content.



Figure 3. Competency-Based Graphic Design Training for Students

This digital training is conducted in collaboration with government partners, focusing on the use of design software and project-based practice. Students are provided with modules that build both technical and organizational skills.

Evaluation of the Impact of the Life Skills Program on Students at Pondok Pesantren Al-Amin

The evaluation of the life skills program was conducted through observation, interviews, and documentation. The data collected highlight changes in four main aspects: behavioral patterns, independence, work ability, and creativity.

1. Behavioral Change

Observation indicated differences in student participation, discipline, responsibility, motivation, and environmental awareness before and after program involvement.

Table 5. Indicators of Students' Behavioral Change

Behavioral Aspect	Before the Life Skills Program	After the Life Skills Program
Participation in activities	Passive, waiting for orders	Active, volunteering and leading
Time discipline	Frequently late	Arrives early and prepares needs
Responsibility	Avoids collective tasks	Completes tasks independently
Learning motivation	Low, only religious lessons	High, enthusiastic about skill activities
Environmental awareness	Indifferent	Actively maintains cleanliness

The data show that students shifted from passive to active roles, with greater involvement in scheduled activities.

2. Independence

Interviews and documentation revealed a transition from mentor-led to student-led organization in planning, decision-making, and leadership roles. Data indicate that students began taking responsibility for organizational and financial aspects of activities.

Table 6. Comparison of Students' Independence Aspects

Independence Indicator	Before the Program	After the Program
Activity schedule planning	Fully determined by ustadz/ mentors	Organized collectively by students themselves
Decision-making	Waits for directions from mentors	Able to make independent decisions
Business financial management	None, reliant on the pesantren	Managed transparently by student teams
Technical problem solving	Awaits external help	Students seek solutions on their own
Leadership in groups	Mentor always acts as activity leader	Selected student becomes training coordinator

3. Work Ability

Documentation of program outputs recorded new skills, product portfolios, and collaborative practices. These results show concrete outputs in both technical and organizational work domains.

Table 7. Aspects of Students' Work Ability

Work Ability Aspect	Description of Observed Impact
Technical skills	Mastery of screen printing, organic farming, and food production
Work portfolio	Tangible products and digital designs
Teamwork and collaboration	Workgroups formed with distributed tasks
Professional communication	Negotiation and product presentations to pesantren guests
Work ethic and discipline	Attention to quality, time management, and production routines

4. Creativity

Field notes documented students' use of available resources and local materials in innovative ways. The documented activities highlight how creativity emerged across different domains, from resource-based innovation to digital and artistic projects.

Table 8. Dimensions of Students' Creativity

Creativity Dimension	Example of Application at Pesantren Al-Amin
Innovation from limitations	Plastic waste turned into bags, vases, souvenirs
Artistic and Islamic values	Digital designs with Quranic quotes in sticker/poster form
Local-based products	Cassava and banana processed into snacks
Product packaging design	Labels and packaging created by students
Collaborative projects	Murals with environmental and Islamic themes

Challenges and Solutions in the Implementation of the Life Skills Program

Data from interviews, documentation, and field observation revealed several challenges encountered during the implementation of the life skills program at Pondok Pesantren Al-Amin. These challenges primarily related to funding, human resources, and facility availability.

Table 9. Challenges and Solutions

Challenge	Solution
Limited training funds	Organize bazaars, sell students' products, and submit proposals to social institutions
Lack of skilled trainers	Internal training for teachers, collaboration with external trainers through partner institutions
Limited facilities and practice equipment	Utilize simple tools, modify used equipment, and cooperate with equipment donors
Dependence on external trainers	Develop internal trainers through a Training of Trainers (ToT) approach
Lack of business management experience	Receive mentoring from local MSMEs, conduct benchmarking visits to more established pesantren

The data indicate that limited funds were managed through revenue-generating activities such as bazaars and product sales, while support was also sought from external institutions. The shortage of skilled trainers was mitigated by providing in-house training and involving partners from outside the pesantren.

Observations also showed that constraints in facilities and equipment led to the adaptation of simple tools and reuse of available resources, supplemented by donations from supportive parties. To reduce dependence on external trainers, the pesantren

implemented a Training of Trainers (ToT) program to develop its own human resources. In terms of business management, students and staff received guidance from local MSMEs and conducted comparative studies at other pesantren with more developed programs.

Discussion

This study set out to analyze how Pondok Pesantren Al-Amin manages life-skills education across the four managerial stages planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation and what the apparent outcomes and constraints of that management are. The Results show a coherent, context-sensitive program (priority skills mapped to local needs, a clear management structure, a weekly rotation schedule, tangible student products and portfolios, and ad hoc solutions to resource gaps), and these empirical findings provide the basis for the interpretations below.

The pesantren's planning process FGDs with administrators, alumni, guardians and community leaders plus student surveys demonstrates explicit efforts to align program choices with local socio economic realities (e.g., organic farming chosen by 30% of students). This orientation toward local relevance supports theories of contextualized learning and community embedded education.

By privileging stakeholder input in needs mapping, Al-Amin operationalizes a demand-driven approach that several recent studies have recommended for pesantren reform (Kemenag RI 2021; Anggadwita et.al., 2021). In short, the planning stage functions less as a top-down curriculum imposition and more as a negotiated curriculum responsive to place-based opportunities and constraints.

The management architecture at Al-Amin formal roles (leader, coordinator, mentors), weekly coordination meetings, student deliberation forums, and SOP pocketbooks indicates deliberate institutionalization of practice. Where prior literature has pointed to weak managerial systems as a barrier to life-skills scaling in pesantren, Al-Amin's use of formal SOPs and delegated student mentors represents a practicable governance model: it reduces ad hoc dependence on single individuals, clarifies responsibilities, and creates routines that support reproducibility. The Training-of-Trainers (ToT) pathway and alumni involvement further show how human-resource constraints can be addressed through capacity building and social capital mobilization (Wibowo & Istiyani, 2021).

Implementation at Al-Amin centers on experiential, project-based activities agricultural plots, student-run production units (*tempe*, *herbal soap*), and competency-based digital modules organized in a rotation schedule that exposes every student to each domain. This pedagogical design mirrors adult and experiential learning frameworks Knowles, (2020) and aligns with project-based learning models documented in pesantren settings (Rohman, 2019). Notably, the pairing of low-cost agrarian enterprises with digital training addresses both local livelihood opportunities and the broader need for digital literacy (Latifa, 2021). The involvement of senior students and alumni as supervisors also creates apprenticeship-like learning pathways that reinforce transfer of tacit knowledge and leadership practice.

Evaluation at Al-Amin is predominantly formative and behavioral continuous observation, interviews, and documentation that register changes in participation, discipline, independence, and product outputs. Such informal, practice-based assessment is appropriate for capturing everyday competencies (teamwork, initiative,

production discipline). However, to enhance both internal and external validity, future applications of this model could incorporate more systematic quantitative measures. For example, pre and post-test designs could be employed to assess specific skill acquisition in agriculture, entrepreneurship, or digital literacy. Similarly, the use of standardized rubrics, competency checklists, or Likert-scale self-assessments would provide measurable indicators of student progress, allowing for stronger comparability across cohorts and institutions. Combining qualitative behavioral observations with these quantitative tools would yield a more comprehensive picture of student development over time.

The documented shifts from passive participation to student initiative, from mentor-led scheduling to student planning, and from no business practice to transparent student-managed enterprises indicate movement along key independence and employability dimensions. These outcomes replicate findings in studies that associate structured life-skills programming in pesantren with increased economic agency and resilience (Rahayu, 2020). The creative reuse of materials (e.g., plastic waste into products) and student-driven packaging/branding show emergent entrepreneurial thinking and design sensibility capacities that extend beyond technical competence into value creation and market orientation.

The challenges identified limited funds, shortage of skilled trainers, and constrained facilities are common in small and medium rural pesantren (Ghozali, 2020). Al-Amin's adaptive strategies (bazaars and product sales, ToT, partnerships with MSMEs and donors) illustrate pragmatic coping mechanisms that convert constraints into learning opportunities and revenue streams. These responses also illustrate how social networks (alumni, local enterprises, government partners) can be leveraged to fill capability and equipment gaps, supporting the argument that partnership ecosystems are essential for scaling life-skills education in resource-scarce contexts (Anggadwita et al., 2021).

Theoretically, the study foregrounds the management process itself (planning → organizing → implementing → evaluating) as a decisive factor for successful integration of life skills in pesantren an analytic emphasis that contributes to the nascent literature on pesantren management for vocational and life-skills education. Practically, the Al-Amin case provides a replicable template: stakeholder-led needs mapping, formalized SOPs, rotation-based experiential learning, ToT pipelines, and pragmatic income-generating actions. These elements together form a low-cost, scalable approach that preserves religious formation while expanding practical competencies.

This single-case study offers detailed contextual insight but has limited generalizability. The research period was relatively short and focused on qualitative indicators; future work would benefit from multi-site comparative studies, longitudinal tracking of graduate outcomes (employment status, business sustainability, or leadership roles), and mixed-methods designs that integrate quantitative measures of skill mastery. In particular, implementing outcome metrics such as standardized performance tests, productivity tracking (e.g., product output volume or digital content engagement rates), and financial literacy assessments could provide more robust evidence of the long-term impact of life skills-based management in pesantren. Evaluating which specific program elements (e.g., ToT, SOPs, or rotation schedules) most strongly predict sustained outcomes would also help refine practical models for replication.

For pesantren leaders and policymakers, the findings suggest actionable priorities: institutionalize participatory planning, formalize SOPs, invest in trainer development (ToT), and create mechanisms for local market linkages. At the ministry and regional level, support for small grants, technical assistance for digital infrastructure, and facilitation of pesantren-MSME partnerships would accelerate the type of place-based innovation documented here.

In sum, the Al-Amin case demonstrates that grounded in local needs, supported by clear roles and routines, and executed through experiential learning can integrate life skills into pesantren life without displacing core religious functions. The model provides both theoretical leverage (management as an explanatory variable) and concrete practices that other rural pesantren can adapt, while also pointing to the need for more systematic outcome measurement in future evaluations.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the management of life skills-based Islamic education at Pondok Pesantren Al-Amin, Indramayu, focusing on the processes of planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation. The findings show that life skills integration is achieved through participatory planning aligned with local socio-economic needs, structured organizational roles supported by SOPs, experiential learning activities in agriculture, entrepreneurship, and digital skills, and formative evaluation methods emphasizing behavioral and practical outcomes.

Implications

Theoretically, the study contributes by highlighting management processes as a decisive factor in successful life-skills integration within pesantren education, particularly in a rural and mid-sized institutional context that remains underrepresented in the literature. Practically, the Al-Amin model demonstrates that pesantren can combine religious formation with vocational competencies through resourcefulness, partnerships, and community engagement, providing a replicable template for other institutions. These implications suggest that pesantren leaders and policymakers should prioritize participatory planning, institutionalized SOPs, and partnerships with local enterprises to strengthen the integration of life skills.

Limitations and Recommendations

The main limitation of this study is its single-case design and short observation period, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Future studies could expand the scope through multi-site comparisons and longitudinal tracking of graduates to assess long-term impacts on employability and entrepreneurship. Incorporating quantitative outcome measures such as pre- and post-tests, productivity indicators, and financial literacy assessments would further enhance the validity of findings.

Overall, the research underscores that effective management can enable pesantren to maintain their religious identity while equipping students with the life skills necessary for independence, employability, and social responsibility.

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