

THE DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF PESANTREN: STRUCTURAL OPPORTUNITIES AND POLICY CHALLENGES

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Abstrak : *Pembentukan Direktorat Jenderal Pesantren berdasarkan Peraturan Presiden Nomor 18 Tahun 2026 merupakan reformasi kelembagaan yang signifikan dalam tata kelola pendidikan keagamaan di Indonesia. Dari perspektif kebijakan publik, restrukturisasi kelembagaan berfungsi sebagai instrumen tata kelola untuk memperkuat kapasitas kebijakan, koordinasi, dan efektivitas implementasi, sekaligus mengatasi fragmentasi yang telah lama terjadi dalam administrasi pesantren (Dunn, 2003; Howlett, Ramesh, & Perl, 2020). Dengan lebih dari 42.000 pesantren terdaftar yang melayani jutaan santri, reformasi ini mencerminkan peran strategis pesantren yang kian berkembang dalam sistem pendidikan nasional (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2025). Studi ini menggunakan desain penelitian kepustakaan kualitatif dengan memanfaatkan dokumen kebijakan, peraturan pemerintah, buku akademis, dan artikel jurnal yang telah melalui telaah sejawat yang dipilih secara purposif. Data dianalisis melalui analisis konten kualitatif, pengodean tematik, dan analisis kebijakan komparatif, sementara triangulasi sumber digunakan untuk menjamin kredibilitas temuan. Hasil studi menunjukkan bahwa Direktorat Jenderal tersebut menciptakan peluang bagi koordinasi kelembagaan yang lebih kuat dan integrasi kebijakan, namun juga dapat memunculkan tantangan terkait ekspansi birokrasi, tumpang tindih kewenangan, ketimpangan fiskal, dan adaptabilitas kelembagaan. Studi ini berargumen bahwa efektivitas kebijakan tidak hanya bergantung pada restrukturisasi organisasi, melainkan juga pada kualitas tata kelola yang diwujudkan melalui pengambilan keputusan yang adaptif, pelibatan pemangku kepentingan secara partisipatif, serta alokasi sumber daya dan implementasi kebijakan yang berkeadilan bagi berbagai kategori pesantren.*

Kata kunci:

Tata Kelola Pesantren, Reformasi Kebijakan, Institusionalisme, Kesenjangan Fiskal, Transformasi Digital.

Abstract: The establishment of the Directorate General of Pesantren under Presidential Regulation No. 18 of 2026 represents a major institutional reform in Indonesia's religious education governance. From a public policy perspective, institutional restructuring serves as a governance instrument to strengthen policy capacity, coordination, and implementation effectiveness while addressing long-standing fragmentation in pesantren administration (Dunn, 2003; Howlett, Ramesh, & Perl, 2020). With more than 42,000 registered *pesantren* serving millions of *santri*, this reform reflects the growing strategic role of pesantren within the national education system (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025). This study employs a qualitative library research design using purposively selected policy documents, government regulations, academic books, and peer-reviewed journal articles. Data were analyzed through qualitative content analysis, thematic coding, and comparative policy analysis, while source triangulation ensured the credibility of the findings. The results suggest that the Directorate General creates opportunities for stronger institutional coordination and policy integration but may also generate challenges related to bureaucratic expansion, overlapping authority, fiscal inequality, and institutional adaptability. This study argues that policy effectiveness depends not merely on organizational restructuring but on governance quality, operationalized through adaptive decision-making, participatory stakeholder

engagement, and equitable resource allocation and policy implementation across diverse categories of *pesantren*.

Keywords:

Pesantren Governance, Policy Reform, Institutionalism, Fiscal Equity, Digital Transformation.

Introductions

Indonesia's Islamic education system is undergoing fundamental institutional change. Official statistics from the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs indicate that the country has more than 42,000 registered Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) educating millions of *santri* nationwide. This extensive network positions *pesantren* as a central pillar of Indonesia's Islamic education system and an increasingly important actor in educational reform and community development. (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2025). Despite their significant contribution to Indonesia's education system, the governance of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) has long been characterized by institutional fragmentation. Prior to the establishment of the Directorate General of Pesantren, responsibilities for policy formulation, educational quality assurance, infrastructure development, community empowerment, and funding were distributed across several organizational units within the Ministry of Religious Affairs and coordinated with other government institutions. This multi-agency arrangement frequently created overlapping administrative responsibilities, inconsistencies in policy implementation, and coordination challenges across national and regional levels, as identified in previous studies on Islamic education governance (Azra, 2019; Lukens-Bull, 2010; Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025). These institutional conditions provide an important policy rationale for establishing a more integrated governance framework for *pesantren*, a lack of integrated policy coordination, and persistent funding gaps between Islamic boarding schools and other formal educational institutions (Tilaar & Nugroho, 2009). Initial observations and questionnaire data collected from 120 Islamic boarding school administrators in East Java, Central Java, and South Sulawesi in 2025 indicated that 78% of respondents experienced difficulties accessing administrative services because of unclear coordination channels among organizational units within the Ministry of Religious Affairs. This finding suggests that fragmented administrative arrangements extend beyond procedural inefficiencies and directly affect institutional governance. Unclear lines of authority may delay licensing, funding disbursement, reporting processes, and access to government support programs, thereby increasing administrative burdens and reducing institutional responsiveness. These coordination constraints also limit policy consistency across regions, create uncertainty in decision-making, and weaken the capacity of *pesantren* to implement government initiatives effectively. From a public policy perspective, the findings indicate that improving organizational coordination is not merely an administrative concern but a prerequisite for enhancing governance effectiveness, service quality, and equitable policy implementation across Islamic boarding schools. Meanwhile, in-depth interviews with five heads of regional offices of the Ministry of Religious Affairs confirmed that there has been no dedicated directorate that comprehensively handles Islamic boarding school affairs across functions (Junaidin, 2026; Basnang Said, 2026). This situation prompted the issuance of Presidential Regulation Number 18 of 2026, which mandates the establishment of the Directorate General of Islamic Boarding Schools as an autonomous echelon I entity an unprecedented, transformative step in the history of Indonesian Islamic education policy (Prabowo Subianto, 2026).

Research on Islamic boarding schools and Islamic education policy in Indonesia has

grown significantly over the past decade. In the 2014-2016 period, early studies were dominated by historical and sociological approaches that explored the role of Islamic boarding schools as socio-religious institutions (Steenbrink, 1986; Dhofier, 2015). A review of the literature published between 2017 and 2019 indicates a growing shift in scholarly attention from the traditional functions of *pesantren* toward curriculum reform, institutional modernization, and the integration of religious and general sciences. This trend was influenced by the broader national education reform agenda and strengthened by the enactment of Law No. 18 of 2019 on *Pesantren*, which formally recognized *pesantren* as an integral component of Indonesia's national education system. During this period, studies increasingly examined curriculum integration, educational quality improvement, graduate competencies, and the institutional adaptation of *pesantren* to national educational standards while maintaining their religious identity (Azra, 2019; Tan, 2014; Lukens-Bull, 2010). Collectively, these studies demonstrate a gradual transition from viewing *pesantren* primarily as traditional religious institutions to analyzing them as dynamic educational organizations responding to policy reform and contemporary governance challenges (Rusdiana, 2015; Arwildayanto et al., 2018). The years 2019-2021 were marked by academic enthusiasm for Law Number 18 of 2019 concerning Islamic Boarding Schools; a number of studies analyzed the policy implications and institutional opportunities opened by the law, although these were still descriptive-normative in nature (Anisa et al., 2022; Purba, 2021). The post-COVID-19 technological acceleration prompted researchers to examine the governance and digital transformation of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) more intensively. This growing scholarly interest reflects fundamental institutional challenges, including the rapid digitalization of educational services, increasing stakeholder expectations for accountability and efficiency, limited digital management capacity within many *pesantren*, and the need to sustain educational quality during and after the pandemic. Consequently, digital transformation has emerged not merely as a technological adaptation but as a strategic response to broader organizational and governance challenges facing Islamic educational institutions. (Lailatussaadah & Mustika, 2024; Miles et al., 2020). However, nearly all of these studies encountered a similar gap: none analyzed the Directorate General of Islamic Boarding Schools as a complex governance reform that simultaneously integrated the perspectives of policy analysis, institutionalism, fiscal equity, and digital transformation (Yusri, 2024). This gap represents the primary contribution of this study.

This study aims to critically analyze the Directorate General of Islamic Boarding Schools as a form of public policy intervention designed to address structural fragmentation in Islamic boarding school governance in Indonesia. Specifically, this study seeks to: (a) identify the structural opportunities and challenges posed by the establishment of the Directorate General of Islamic Boarding Schools; (b) examine the dynamics of fiscal equity and its implications for the sustainability of Islamic boarding schools; and (c) formulate evidence-based policy recommendations for adaptive, inclusive, and equitable Islamic boarding school governance.

This study contributes theoretically to the institutional hybridity literature by proposing an analytical framework that explains how *pesantren* negotiate the coexistence of religious traditions, state educational policies, and contemporary governance demands. Rather than treating institutional hybridity as a static organizational characteristic, the study conceptualizes it as a dynamic process shaped by interactions among religious authority, policy adaptation, and organizational innovation. This framework expands the application of institutional hybridity theory to Islamic educational institutions in developing-country contexts, where multiple institutional logics operate simultaneously. The novelty of this study is the

development of an integrated analytical framework that links policy analysis and institutional governance to explain the transformation of *pesantren*. Unlike previous studies that examine these perspectives separately, this framework demonstrates how policy processes and governance practices jointly shape institutional adaptation in Islamic educational settings (Dunn, 2003), new institutionalism (Rusdiana, 2015), educational fiscal equity (Purba, 2021), and digital adaptive governance (Miles et al., 2020) into a cohesive analytical whole something that has not been done by previous studies.

Theoretically, this research rests on four pillars of a conceptual framework. First, public policy analysis theory views every state intervention as a response to systemic coordination failures that cannot be addressed by existing mechanisms (Dunn, 2003). Second, the new institutionalism perspective emphasizes that structural reforms do not operate in a vacuum but interact with the norms, routines, and values entrenched within an organization (Rusdiana, 2015; Tilaar, 2008). Third, the educational fiscal equity framework highlights that resource allocation is not simply determined by technical needs but is shaped by power relations and historical biases (Purba, 2021; Tilaar & Nugroho, 2009). Fourth, the concepts of adaptive governance and digital transformation emphasize the importance of an institution's ability to respond to environmental changes without losing its core identity (Miles et al., 2020; Lailatussaadah & Mustika, 2024). The integration of four theoretical perspectives provides a complementary analytical framework for examining the establishment of the Directorate General of Pesantren. Policy analysis theory is used to assess the rationale, objectives, implementation processes, and potential policy consequences of institutional restructuring. Governance and institutionalism explain how organizational structures, authority distribution, and coordination mechanisms shape institutional performance and policy implementation. Fiscal equity theory is employed to evaluate whether the reform promotes fair and transparent resource allocation across different categories of *pesantren*. Digital transformation theory examines the organizational capacity required to modernize administrative services, strengthen data governance, and improve institutional responsiveness. By combining these perspectives, the analysis moves beyond a descriptive account of institutional reform toward an integrated interpretation of how policy design, governance arrangements, fiscal mechanisms, and organizational capacity interact to influence the effectiveness of the Directorate General of Pesantren.

Based on the above explanation, this study hypothesizes that the establishment of the Directorate General of Islamic Boarding Schools has the potential to significantly improve the efficiency of Islamic boarding school governance and fiscal equity if and only if its operational mechanisms are designed in a participatory manner, are regulatory flexible, and supported by sustained political commitment. Conversely, if the Directorate General operates solely as an instrument of bureaucratic centralization without room for institutional adaptation, this reform risks creating a new layer of control that actually hinders the autonomy and uniqueness of Islamic boarding schools as community-based educational institutions (Hidayat Nur Wahid, 2025–2026). This hypothesis will be examined through comparative policy analysis supported by the triangulation of evidence from the literature review, field data, and relevant regulatory documents. This approach enables the study to evaluate the consistency of findings across multiple sources and to strengthen the validity of the policy analysis.

Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with a policy study research type. This approach was selected based on the principle of methodological fit rather than a dichotomous preference for qualitative inquiry. The study aims to explore how educational policies are formulated, interpreted, and implemented within complex institutional settings, where governance processes are shaped by interactions among organizational, cultural, and regulatory factors. A qualitative approach is therefore considered the most appropriate for generating an in-depth understanding of these contextual dynamics, while recognizing that alternative methodological designs, including mixed-methods approaches, may be equally valuable for addressing different research objectives of public policy namely Presidential Regulation Number 18 of 2026 concerning the establishment of the Directorate General of Islamic Boarding Schools which is inherently contextual, interpretive, and cannot be reduced to numerical data alone. The research design is structured in three sequential stages: first, the pre-field stage which includes the study of regulatory documents, the preparation of research instruments, and the determination of informants; second, the field data collection stage through interviews, questionnaires, and observations conducted from January to April 2026; third, the analysis and writing stage which took place from May 2026. All stages were carried out systematically to ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings.

The scope of this research covers three main dimensions: (a) the policy dimension, namely the analysis of regulations and official documents underlying the establishment of the Directorate General of Islamic Boarding Schools; (b) the institutional dimension, namely the response and adaptation of Islamic boarding schools to the new governance framework; and (c) the fiscal and digital dimension, namely the pattern of funding distribution and readiness for information technology transformation in the Islamic boarding school environment. The objects of the research are Islamic boarding schools under the coordination of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in three provinces, namely East Java, Central Java, and South Sulawesi, which were selected purposively based on the representation of Islamic boarding school typologies *salafiyah*, *khalafiyah*, and integrated and variations in institutional scale (small, medium, and large). A total of 30 Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) were purposively selected from East Java, Central Java, and South Sulawesi to capture diverse institutional contexts rather than to achieve statistical representativeness. These provinces were chosen because they represent different geographical regions, historical traditions of *pesantren*, and variations in institutional development and governance. The selected *pesantren* also reflected variation in institutional size, organizational characteristics, educational orientation, and affiliation, enabling comparative analysis across different governance settings. Accordingly, the sample was intended to provide analytical rather than statistical generalization by identifying patterns, similarities, and contextual differences relevant to the study of institutional governance and policy implementation..

The research data sources consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through three techniques. First, in-depth interviews were conducted with 18 key informants, including: five heads of regional offices of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, seven Islamic boarding school leaders (*kiai*/caretakers), three officials from the Directorate of Early Childhood Education and Islamic Boarding Schools, and three members of Commission VIII of the Indonesian House of Representatives (DPR RI) involved in policy discussions. The interview guide was developed based on four analytical dimensions: policy coordination, fiscal equality, institutional autonomy, and digital readiness. Each interview session was recorded with the

informants' consent, then transcribed and validated through. The credibility of the study was strengthened through member checking, in which participants reviewed the interpreted data and preliminary findings to verify their accuracy and contextual appropriateness. This validation procedure minimized potential researcher bias and enhanced the trustworthiness of the qualitative analysis. Second, a structured questionnaire was distributed to 120 Islamic boarding school administrators ($n = 120$; 40 Islamic boarding schools per province) with 32 items covering the following aspects: accessibility of administrative services, perceptions of institutional coordination, the institution's fiscal condition, and adoption of digital technology. The questionnaire instrument was tested for content validity by two Islamic education policy experts and its reliability was tested using the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient ($\alpha = 0.87$). Third, passive participant observation conducted during field visits to 12 selected Islamic boarding schools focused on observing administrative infrastructure, digital facilities, and daily governance practices. Field notes were used as supporting data to confirm or contrast interview findings. Secondary data were obtained from regulatory documents (Presidential Decree No. 18/2026, Law No. 18/2019), official statistics from the Ministry of Religious Affairs (2025), policy reports, and relevant scientific publications from the past ten years.

This study operationally defines four main variables that are the focus of the analysis. First, Islamic boarding school governance is operationalized as the pattern of administrative arrangements, policy coordination, and accountability mechanisms in effect between the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Islamic boarding schools, as measured by indicators: clarity of coordination channels, accuracy of administrative services, and consistency of policy implementation. Second, fiscal equality is operationalized as the proportion of state budget allocations received by Islamic boarding schools compared to equivalent formal educational institutions. In this study, fiscal equality is operationalized as the extent to which educational institutions receive fair and adequate financial support to achieve comparable educational outcomes. The concept is examined using indicators such as per-student funding allocation, equity in government budget distribution, access to operational assistance programs, institutional financial capacity, and the adequacy of resources for implementing educational policies, as well as their distribution mechanisms, as traced through DIPA documents and financial reports of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Third, institutional autonomy is operationalized as the capacity of Islamic boarding schools to determine curriculum, resource management, and the direction of institutional development without excessive regulatory intervention, as measured by the perceptions of Islamic boarding school leaders in a questionnaire instrument. Fourth, readiness for digital transformation is operationalized as the availability of technological infrastructure, the digital literacy level of educators, and the adoption of Islamic boarding school management information systems, as assessed through field observations and questionnaires.

Official statistics from the Ministry of Religious Affairs (2025), policy reports, and relevant scientific publications published over the past ten years were selected based on their relevance, credibility, and contribution to the study objectives. Qualitative data were analyzed using an iterative qualitative content analysis approach. The analysis began with document familiarization, followed by open coding to identify key concepts, thematic categorization to develop analytical themes, and comparative policy analysis to examine similarities and differences across regulatory documents, policy reports, and academic literature. The emerging themes were subsequently interpreted through the lenses of policy analysis, governance, institutionalism, fiscal equity, and digital transformation. To ensure the credibility and

dependability of the findings, the study employed source triangulation, researcher peer review of the coding process, and an audit trail documenting each stage of the analysis, thereby enhancing the transparency and trustworthiness of the analytical process. (2020), which includes four sequential components: data collection, data condensation, data presentation, and drawing and verifying conclusions. Interview data were coded thematically in two cycles: the first cycle used descriptive coding to identify initial themes, while the second cycle used pattern coding to find patterns and relationships between themes. Questionnaire data were analyzed descriptively using frequency distributions and percentages to describe trends in respondents' perceptions, then the results were triangulated with interview and observation data. Data validity was ensured through four strategies: (a) source triangulation comparing data from interviews, questionnaires, and documents; (b) method triangulation confirming qualitative findings with descriptive quantitative data; (c) member checking representing findings to key informants for verification; and (d) an audit trail through systematic documentation of the entire analytical decision-making process. Qualitative data were analyzed using NVivo 14 to ensure a systematic and transparent analytical process. The software was employed to organize the dataset, develop hierarchical coding structures, conduct thematic analysis, and compare patterns across interviews, documents, and observations. Although the interpretation remained the responsibility of the researchers, the use of NVivo 14 enhanced the auditability, consistency, and credibility of the qualitative findings.

Findings and Discussion

Finding 1: Fragmentation of Islamic Boarding School Governance and Response to the Establishment of the Directorate General

1.1. Policy Framework and Institutional Design

An analysis of the Directorate General of Islamic Boarding Schools as a policy reform requires a multidimensional theoretical lens encompassing institutional change, governance dynamics, and the political economy of education. This study employs theories of policy analysis, governance and institutionalism, and equity in education policy to examine the opportunities and structural constraints of educational reform. The framework also enables a critical assessment of previous policy shortcomings, including implementation gaps, weak governance coordination, institutional capacity constraints, and persistent inequities in resource allocation. These recurring challenges provide the analytical basis for explaining why policy outcomes often fall short of their intended objectives..

1.2. Policy Analysis and the Logic of Public Intervention

Essentially, the establishment of the Directorate General of Islamic Boarding Schools was a state-led effort to address deep-rooted systemic inefficiencies. From a policy analysis perspective, public regulations are created precisely to address problems that cannot be effectively addressed by existing frameworks (Dunn, 2003). In this regard, the fragmented governance of Islamic boarding schools presents a classic policy dilemma, characterized by overlapping jurisdictions, lack of coordination, and inconsistent service delivery.

The analytical framework for policy emphasizes that such interventions are never neutral; they are inherently influenced by competing interest groups, institutional constraints, and political agendas (Tilaar & Nugroho, 2009). Consequently, the creation of this new directorate should not be interpreted simply as a bureaucratic adjustment, but rather as a strategic maneuver that alters power dynamics in the broader educational landscape. Three key policy priorities that need to be strengthened include:

1. Policy alignment between institutional units under the Ministry of Religion

- a. Synchronization of regulations between the Diniyah Directorate and related units
 - 1) Formation of a cross-directorate coordination team
 - a) Establishment of joint standard operating procedures
2. Adequate policy implementation capacity at all levels
 - b. Strengthening human resources at the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion
3. Structured and ongoing evaluation and feedback mechanisms

Furthermore, the effectiveness of these interventions depends on policy alignment and implementation capacity. As observed by Arwildayanto et al. (2018), flawed coordination mechanisms often lead to redundant policies and overall inefficiency. Therefore, the effectiveness of the Directorate General should be evaluated not only on the basis of its formal mandate but also on its capacity to integrate fragmented functions into a coherent policy framework. This effectiveness may be assessed through several operational indicators, including: (1) the clarity of institutional roles and responsibilities across organizational units; (2) the effectiveness of inter-agency coordination mechanisms; (3) the consistency and timeliness of policy implementation across national and regional levels; (4) the transparency and equity of budget allocation and resource distribution; (5) improvements in the accessibility and quality of administrative services provided to *pesantren*; and (6) the extent to which governance arrangements enhance institutional responsiveness, stakeholder participation, and accountability. Together, these indicators provide an empirical basis for evaluating whether the Directorate General strengthens policy coherence and governance effectiveness rather than merely introducing a new administrative structure.

1.3. Governance and Institutionalism: Between Coordination and Control

From an institutional perspective, these reforms can be interpreted using the framework of new institutionalism, which emphasizes that while formal structures guide organizational behavior, they are simultaneously constrained by entrenched norms and established practices (Rusdiana, 2015). The creation of the Directorate General introduced a new institutional configuration intended to strengthen coordination and improve policy coherence across the *pesantren* sector. However, this institutional reform also raises an important governance trade-off between administrative coordination and institutional autonomy. While stronger coordination may enhance policy consistency, streamline administrative services, and reduce fragmentation, excessive centralization may constrain the capacity of *pesantren* to respond to their diverse educational, cultural, and regional contexts. The effectiveness of the new institutional configuration therefore depends on achieving an appropriate balance between these two governance objectives. This balance may be evaluated through the clarity of institutional mandates, the degree of decision-making autonomy retained by *pesantren*, the flexibility of policy implementation at the local level, the effectiveness of coordination mechanisms across administrative levels, and the extent of stakeholder participation in policy formulation and implementation. These indicators provide an analytical basis for assessing whether the Directorate General functions as a coordinating institution that strengthens governance while preserving the institutional diversity and autonomy that have historically characterized Indonesia's *pesantren* system.

This fundamental tension reflects the coordination-autonomy dilemma facing any institutional educational reform. Two extreme scenarios to avoid are:

1. Hypercentralization scenario: governance mechanisms are too rigid
 - a. Risk: stagnation of local innovation
 - 1) Impact: homogenization of diverse Islamic boarding school models

- a) Indicator: decline in the epistemological distinctiveness of traditional Islamic boarding schools
- 2. Hyperfragmentation scenario: governance mechanisms are too loose
 - b. Risk: fragmentation continues in different forms
 - c. Impact: service inefficiency and policy inconsistency

1.4. Fiscal Equality and the Political Economy of Education

The funding gap can be examined through the lens of educational equity and the political economy of public finance. The allocation of educational resources is not solely determined by need; rather, it is influenced by historical bias, institutional authority, and political bargaining (Purba, 2021).

Questionnaire data collected from 120 Islamic boarding school administrators in three provinces showed that most respondents perceived the existing coordination system as inadequate. Forty-three percent disagreed that the coordination channels between the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Islamic boarding schools were clear, while 53% expressed dissatisfaction with the consistency of administrative services between directorates (see Table 1).

Table 1

Islamic Boarding School Administrators' Perceptions of the Governance Coordination System
(n = 120)

Coordination Aspect	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Don't agree (%)
Clarity of coordination channels between the Ministry of Religion and Islamic Boarding Schools	22	35	43
Consistency of administrative services between directorates	18	29	53
Easy access to the latest regulatory information	31	27	42
Speed of response to Islamic boarding school applications	17	24	59
Satisfaction with the existing governance system	20	31	49

Source: Research questionnaire data, processed (2026)

Interview data further substantiates these findings. A head of the East Java regional office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs stated that before the formation of the Directorate General of Islamic Boarding Schools, Islamic boarding school affairs were divided across at least four different sub-directorates, requiring each operational permit application to navigate a lengthy and often asynchronous bureaucratic chain (Interview, February 12, 2026). This finding is consistent with previous studies that have identified fragmented governance and overlapping institutional mandates as persistent challenges in the administration of Islamic boarding schools

(*pesantren*). Yusri (2024) argues that overlapping responsibilities among organizational units within the Ministry of Religious Affairs have reduced the effectiveness of policy implementation and service delivery. Similar concerns are raised by Azra (2019), who emphasizes that the governance of *pesantren* has historically been characterized by institutional fragmentation and limited policy coordination. Likewise, Lukens-Bull (2010) notes that the institutional complexity of *pesantren* governance often complicates the alignment between government policies and local educational practices. These observations are further supported by the present study, in which interviews with regional Ministry of Religious Affairs officials and policy document analysis revealed recurring coordination gaps, overlapping administrative responsibilities, and inconsistencies in the implementation of *pesantren* policies across administrative levels. Collectively, this evidence suggests that strengthening institutional coordination remains a critical prerequisite for improving the effectiveness of *pesantren* governance.

1.5. Digital Transformation and Adaptive Capacity

The rapid development of digital technology presents a fourth dimension for analysis: institutional adaptability. In modern educational systems, digital transformation extends beyond the adoption of new technologies to encompass changes in the ways knowledge is created, disseminated, and accessed. Empirical studies have shown that the integration of digital platforms improves access to educational resources, facilitates collaboration among educators and learners, and supports more efficient institutional administration (Bond et al., 2021; OECD, 2023). In the context of *pesantren*, the findings of this study indicate that digital governance has the potential to enhance administrative efficiency, improve access to policy information and government services, and strengthen communication between educational institutions and the Ministry of Religious Affairs. However, these benefits remain contingent upon adequate digital infrastructure, institutional capacity, and the digital competencies of educational personnel (Lailatussaadah & Mustika, 2024). From this perspective, the Directorate General's responsibilities encompass four facilitation dimensions:

1. Provision of equitable digital infrastructure
 - a. Internet network development in remote areas
2. Human resource capacity building
 - b. Digital literacy training for educators
 - 1) Digital competency certification program for Islamic boarding school teachers
 - a) Cooperation with government technology training institutions
3. Digital-based pedagogical innovation
4. Adaptation of content to Islamic boarding school values and traditions (Miles et al., 2020)

Finding 2: Structural Opportunities of the Directorate General of Islamic Boarding Schools

2.1. Administrative Consolidation

Governance consolidation is the most immediate benefit of this new institutional framework. By integrating functions that were previously dispersed across multiple organizational units, the Directorate General is expected to improve administrative coordination and reduce procedural fragmentation. Evidence from policy document analysis and interviews with regional Ministry of Religious Affairs officials suggests that the existing governance structure has been characterized by duplicated administrative procedures, overlapping institutional responsibilities, and prolonged decision-making processes. These conditions have contributed to delays in licensing, funding administration, and institutional services for *pesantren*. Accordingly, the potential administrative benefits of consolidation may be evaluated through measurable indicators such as reductions in administrative processing time,

duplication of procedures, coordination delays, and the timeliness and accessibility of services provided to *pesantren*. These indicators provide an empirical basis for assessing whether institutional consolidation translates into greater administrative efficiency and improved governance performance. From a policy analysis perspective, this centralization can lower transaction costs for all parties and create a more accessible system (Dunn, 2003). The benefits of administrative consolidation are reflected in three measurable dimensions. First, administrative efficiency may be assessed through reductions in processing time, duplication of administrative procedures, and operational costs. Second, institutional coordination can be evaluated by the degree of policy consistency, inter-unit collaboration, and accountability mechanisms. Third, governance effectiveness can be examined through improvements in service delivery, resource utilization, and the timeliness of policy implementation. These indicators provide an empirical basis for evaluating the administrative outcomes of institutional consolidation include three main aspects:

1. Simplification of administrative procedures
 - a. Integration of one-stop licensing service system
 - 1) Reduction of accreditation application processing time
 - a) Target: maximum 30 days from application to decision
2. Minimize redundancy of tasks and functions between directorates
3. Improving policy consistency across all types of Islamic boarding schools

2.2. Restructuring Fiscal Policy

Raising the governance level of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) to echelon I significantly increases their importance during national budget negotiations. This change opens up the possibility of addressing the persistent funding gap between Islamic boarding schools and other educational institutions. Documented data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs' Financial Report shows that the average budget allocation for Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) is only 34% of that for state madrasas of the same level (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2025). The fiscal profile of Islamic boarding schools based on institutional typology is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Profile of Islamic Boarding School Funding Sources Based on Institutional Typology (n = 120)

Islamic Category	Boarding School	<i>n</i>	Having APBN Funds (%)	Dependence on Independent Funds (%)
Salafiyah (traditional)		42	31.0	69.0
Khalafiyah (modern)		38	52.6	47.4
Integrated (combination)		40	47.5	52.5
Total / Average		120	43.6	56.4

Source: Questionnaire data and research documentation, processed (2026)

Discussions on fiscal equity have gained considerable momentum, particularly regarding the recommendation to separate the Islamic Boarding School Endowment Fund. To achieve substantial fiscal reform, three conditions must be met simultaneously:

1. Ongoing political commitment from the executive and legislative branches
 - a. Active advocacy of the Directorate General in the discussion of the State Budget
 - 1) Compilation of fiscal needs data based on Islamic boarding school typology
2. Transparent and verified budget distribution mechanism
3. Allocation formula that takes into account the differentiation of Islamic boarding school typologies (Purba, 2021)

2.3. Functional Integration

The consolidation of education, da'wah, and community empowerment under one institutional umbrella facilitates the implementation of more integrated policies as mandated by Law No. 18 of 2019. This strategic alignment has the potential to strengthen the significance of Islamic boarding schools as key players in both education and socio-economic fields. While integration enables systemic alignment, it requires adaptive governance to accommodate the inherent diversity among these institutions (Rusdiana, 2015).

Finding 3: Structural Challenges and Readiness for Islamic Boarding Schools' Digital Transformation

3.1. Fiscal Inequality as a Persistent Challenge

Despite their scale and social contributions, many Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) continue to face significant financial constraints. The establishment of a new directorate will not automatically address this gap. Without substantial funding increases and improved allocation mechanisms, institutional reforms may have limited practical impact (Purba, 2021). Salafiyah Islamic boarding schools historically the strongest foundation of the pesantren tradition are the most fiscally vulnerable, with 69% of their budgets coming from independent funds (see Table 2 above).

3.2. Standardization versus Institutional Autonomy

Efforts to improve quality often involve standardization, but excessive regulatory control can threaten the distinctive characteristics of Islamic boarding schools. Maintaining a balance between accountability and autonomy remains a major challenge (Rusdiana, 2015). There are three regulatory models the Directorate General can adopt, each with its own consequences:

1. Strict regulatory model: full standardization
 - a. Pros: high accountability and consistency
 - b. Weakness: risk of erosion of the uniqueness and autonomy of Islamic boarding schools
2. Regulated autonomy model: minimum standards + substantial flexibility
 - c. Advantages: maintaining distinctiveness while ensuring accountability (OECD, 2021)
 - d. Weakness: requires more complex monitoring capacity
 - 1) Establishment of negotiable minimum quality indicators
 - a) Involving Islamic boarding school representatives in the preparation of standards
3. Fully decentralized model: unlimited autonomy

3.3. Bureaucratic Overlap

The introduction of a new administrative structure raises concerns about potential overlap with existing institutions. Without a clear separation of roles, bureaucratic inefficiencies could persist in different forms (Yusri, 2024). Mitigating measures that need to be implemented immediately include:

1. Remapping the authority of all units in the Ministry of Religion
 - a. Preparation of the RACI matrix (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed)

2. Establishment of binding inter-directorate coordination protocols

3.4. Readiness for Islamic Boarding Schools' Digital Transformation

This study found that Islamic boarding schools face a significant digital divide, not only in terms of physical infrastructure, but also in human resource capacity and organizational cultural readiness. Questionnaire data showed that more than half of the respondents (53.3%) had not yet managed student data digitally, while 50% did not yet have a functional Islamic Boarding School Management Information System (SIMP) (see Table 3).

Table 3

Level of Readiness for Digital Transformation of Islamic Boarding Schools (n = 120)

Digital Readiness Indicators			Ready (%)	Develop (%)	Not ready (%)
Adequate internet availability	network		38.3	31.7	30.0
Islamic Boarding School Management Information System (SIMP)	Information System		21.7	28.3	50.0
Digital literacy of educators			25.0	35.0	40.0
Utilization of online learning platforms	learning		28.3	30.0	41.7
Digital-based management	student data		20.0	26.7	53.3

Source: Data from questionnaires and field observations of research, processed (2026)

Field observations at 12 selected Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) showed that in seven of the twelve visited, student attendance recording was still done manually. A pesantren caretaker in South Sulawesi described the dilemma: his institution was willing to adapt to digital systems, but lacked competent personnel to operate them and had not received adequate training from government agencies (Interview, March 18, 2026). Differences in digital readiness across pesantren typologies were caused by four factors:

1. Availability of operational budget for Islamic boarding schools
2. The epistemological orientation and pedagogical traditions of each typology
 - a. Salafiyah Islamic boarding schools: resistance based on values, not technical incompetence
 - 1) Concerns about the erosion of the halaqah-based pedagogical model
 - a) The need for a digitalization approach that respects the sanad tradition
3. Geographic access to network infrastructure
4. Technical support and training from the government (Miles et al., 2020)

Discussion

Institutional Reform: Between Coordination and the Risks of Centralization

The three findings provide empirical support for the study's analytical proposition that the establishment of the Directorate General of Islamic Boarding Schools offers significant

opportunities for institutional transformation. Nevertheless, the extent of this transformation depends on contextual governance conditions, institutional capacity, and the effectiveness of policy implementation. This study goes beyond the optimistic arguments of Dunn (2003) and Arwildayanto et al. (2018) With respect to institutional centralization, the findings indicate that administrative consolidation may reconfigure, rather than eliminate, the concentration of decision-making authority. The extent to which this reconfiguration contributes to institutional effectiveness appears to be shaped by the design, implementation, and contextual operation of internal governance mechanisms. By integrating the perspective of new institutionalism (Rusdiana, 2015), this study finds that the tension between hierarchical control and value-based autonomy is a crucial dimension. The first theoretical contribution of this study is to expand the analytical model of institutional reform by incorporating cultural-institutional compatibility as a key success factor, a factor that has been absent from the Indonesian Islamic education policy literature.

Fiscal Equality: Between Formal Recognition and Substantive Redistribution

The second finding updates Purba's (2021) argument regarding the relationship between institutional status and access to public resources. The analysis indicates that institutional upgrading does not necessarily translate into greater fiscal equality. Instead, the realization of equitable fiscal outcomes appears to depend on the transparency of resource allocation, governance arrangements, and the effectiveness of implementation mechanisms, even after echelon I status has been achieved. Furthermore, Table 2 reveals that fiscal inequality is structured by institutional typology: Salafiyah Islamic boarding schools are the most fiscally vulnerable. This means that the Islamic Boarding School Endowment Fund program must consider a differentiated distribution formula—an original empirical finding that has not been discussed in previous Islamic boarding school policy literature. Practical implications include:

1. Preparation of allocation formula based on Islamic boarding school typology and scale
 - a. Higher weight for Salafiyah Islamic boarding schools with independent funding dependence above 60%
2. Strengthening transparency of verification mechanisms and disbursement of funds
3. Implementation of a digital-based integrated financial reporting system (World Bank, 2022)

Digital Transformation: From Technical Challenges to Epistemological Transformation

Unlike previous studies that addressed the digitalization of Islamic boarding schools primarily as an infrastructure issue (Lailatussaadah & Mustika, 2024), this study argues that the greatest challenge is epistemological: how to reconcile efficiency-oriented digital logic with the relational, teacher-authority-based tradition of Islamic boarding school scholarship (*sanad*). Field observations consistently show that resistance in Salafiyah Islamic boarding schools is not due to technical incompetence, but rather to concerns about the erosion of the *halaqah*-based pedagogical model. These findings expand on Miles et al.'s (2020) adaptive governance framework by adding the dimension of epistemological readiness as a prerequisite prior to technical readiness. The analysis proposes a conceptual framework for digital transformation in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). Rather than treating digitalization as a technology-driven process, the framework emphasizes its institutional, organizational, and governance dimensions. An effective digital transformation strategy is therefore characterized by the integration of strategic leadership, transparent governance, organizational capacity building, stakeholder participation, and the alignment of digital innovation with the educational mission and religious values of the institution criteria:

1. Based on a dialogue between Islamic boarding school values and technological logic
 - a. Involvement of kiai and ulama in designing digital platforms for Islamic boarding schools
 - 1) Technology as a tool, not a substitute for the halaqah tradition
2. Adapted to the local capacity and context of each typology
3. Supported by ongoing training programs (UNESCO, 2023)

Synthesis: Towards an Adaptive-Participatory Governance Model for Islamic Boarding Schools

Overall, the three findings and their discussion support the synthetic argument that the success of the Directorate General of Islamic Boarding Schools cannot be measured by the complexity of its organizational structure, but rather by the extent to which it operates as an enabling institution rather than a controlling institution. This study proposes adaptive participatory governance as the conceptual model most capable of supporting the effective implementation of the Directorate General of *Pesantren*. The model conceptualizes governance as a dynamic process that balances policy coordination with institutional autonomy. It comprises four interrelated dimensions: adaptiveness, reflected in the capacity of institutions to respond to changing policy and educational contexts; participation, reflected in the meaningful involvement of *pesantren* leaders, regional governments, and other stakeholders in policy formulation and implementation; accountability, reflected in transparent decision-making, performance monitoring, and equitable resource allocation; and collaboration, reflected in effective coordination among government agencies and *pesantren* institutions. These dimensions may be assessed through indicators such as policy responsiveness, stakeholder engagement, inter-agency coordination, transparency of funding mechanisms, service delivery performance, and institutional satisfaction. Operationally, the model is implemented through collaborative policy formulation, decentralized implementation with clear governance standards, integrated digital information systems, and continuous monitoring and evaluation. Accordingly, adaptive participatory governance is presented not merely as a normative principle but as an analytical framework for evaluating how institutional restructuring can strengthen policy effectiveness while preserving the diversity and autonomy of Indonesia's *pesantren* system governance: a model that combines negotiable minimum accountability standards with substantial flexibility for Islamic boarding schools to determine their own institutional development paths. This model is a synthesis of regulated autonomy (OECD, 2021), collaborative governance (Ansell & Torfing, 2021), and adaptive governance (Miles et al., 2020) with contextual adaptations specific to the Indonesian Islamic boarding school ecosystem. Rather than presenting multiple independent recommendations, the operational implications of this study are organized into three interrelated strategic priorities: (1) governance reform to improve institutional accountability and adaptive capacity; (2) organizational development through leadership strengthening, digital transformation, and human resource capacity building; and (3) policy alignment to ensure coherence between national educational reforms and the institutional identity of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). This synthesis highlights the interdependence of governance, organizational capacity, and policy implementation while providing a more analytically coherent framework for institutional reform. Its operational implications include six strategic priorities:

1. Promote participatory and inclusive policy-making processes
 - a. Structured consultation, typology advisory board, iterative feedback system (Ansell & Torfing, 2021)

2. Building a transparent and targeted funding framework
 - b. Islamic Boarding School Endowment Fund with a differentiated allocation formula (World Bank, 2022)
3. Ensuring regulatory flexibility while maintaining quality standards
 - c. Regulated autonomy model with negotiable minimum standards (OECD, 2021)
4. Accelerating digital capacity building initiatives
 - d. Holistic approach: infrastructure + training + pedagogical innovation + content adaptation (UNESCO, 2023)
5. Strengthening institutional human resources
 - e. Bureaucratic capacity and educational capacity simultaneously (OECD, 2021)
6. Expanding inter-sectoral collaboration (economy, health, private sector, international)

Thus, this study contributes not only to empirical discussions on Islamic boarding school policy but also to broader debates on educational governance in hybrid institutional contexts – where traditional systems interact with modern state structures. The adaptive-participatory governance framework formulated in this study can be further tested in future research, both in Indonesia and in tradition-based education systems in other countries (Schleicher, 2022).

Congclusions

This study demonstrates that the establishment of the Directorate General of *Pesantren* constitutes a significant institutional reform with both opportunities and governance challenges. The analysis of policy documents, official statistics, and empirical evidence collected from 30 *pesantren*, questionnaires administered to 120 administrators, and interviews with regional Ministry of Religious Affairs officials consistently indicates three principal findings. First, the existing governance system has been characterized by fragmented institutional responsibilities, overlapping administrative mandates, and inconsistent coordination, which have reduced the effectiveness of policy implementation and service delivery. Second, the proposed Directorate General has the potential to strengthen policy coordination, administrative integration, and institutional capacity, provided that governance mechanisms remain transparent, adaptive, and responsive to the diversity of *pesantren*. Third, the findings suggest that institutional restructuring alone is insufficient to improve governance outcomes unless it is accompanied by effective coordination, equitable resource allocation, meaningful stakeholder participation, and robust implementation capacity. These findings support the proposition that the effectiveness of the Directorate General depends less on its formal organizational status than on the quality of its governance arrangements. Accordingly, the study recommends an adaptive participatory governance model that integrates policy coordination with institutional autonomy, accountability, and equitable resource distribution as a framework for ensuring that the reform delivers measurable improvements in *pesantren* governance and educational services.

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