Research Article

Commercialization of Pesantren: Challenges and Opportunities in Preserving the Authenticity of Islamic Education in Indonesia

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Article Info	Abstract
	This study explored the impact of commercialisation on *pesantren* education in Java, particularly in maintaining the authenticity of its traditional values. *Pesantren* face the challenge of modernisation that encourages the adoption of the national curriculum and cooperation with the private sector, which may reduce the focus on religious education. This study used the literature study method to analyse the challenges and opportunities faced by *pesantren*. The findings revealed that while commercialization could erode traditional values and widen educational inequality, it also presents opportunities for *pesantren* to innovate in curriculum development, enhance facilities, and integrate modern teaching methods. In conclusion, with the right strategies, *pesantren* can maintain their identity while adapting to market demands, thus remaining relevant in the changing social and economic context.

INTRODUCTION

Pesantren in Java has a long and rich history in the context of Islamic education in Indonesia. Since its establishment in the 15th century, *pesantren* has become one of the central pillars in the dissemination and teaching of religious knowledge across the archipelago (Hasan, 2015). *Pesantren* serves not only as an educational institution but also as a center for character formation and moral development for its *santri* (Rohmah, 2023). With its traditional boarding school system and methods of instruction, *pesantren* has made a significant contribution to the creation of religious scholars and community leaders who are committed to Islamic values and integrity (Zuhriy, 2011; Zahidi, 2017).

However, in recent decades, *pesantren* in Java has faced new challenges arising from modernization and commercialization processes. The modernization of education in *pesantren* includes the integration of the national curriculum with *pesantren*'s own curriculum, the use of technology in teaching, and the increasing role of *pesantren* in empowering the community economically (Wasehudin, 2023; Thoha, 2024). While this

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modernization is necessary to ensure the relevance of *pesantren* in the changing social and economic context, it also raises concerns about the potential loss of traditional values that have been the foundation of *pesantren* education for centuries (Bahri, 2019).

On the other hand, commercialization of education refers to the phenomenon where educational institutions, including *pesantren*, are increasingly treated as entities that must operate efficiently and be market-oriented. This commercialization can be seen in various forms, from rising tuition fees, partnerships with the private sector, to the development of financially profitable programs (Hogan et al., 2017). While commercialization may provide additional resources needed to enhance the quality of education in *pesantren*, it also presents risks of unequal access and a decline in educational quality if the focus is too heavily placed on profitability (Rangel et al., 2015; Burhanuddin, 2020).

Thus, the modernization and commercialization of *pesantren* education in Java present complex challenges for *pesantren* in maintaining the authenticity of their education. On one hand, *pesantren* need to adapt to the demands of modernization and the market to remain relevant and sustainable. On the other hand, they must ensure that the traditional values and core educational goals of *pesantren*—namely, character development and spirituality for students—are not overlooked in this process.

Based on the above background, this study was designed to answer the main question: What are the challenges and opportunities faced by *pesantren* in Java in dealing with commercialization? This question focuses on how *pesantren* can manage the challenges arising from commercialization while utilizing the existing opportunities to preserve and even enhance the quality of education they offer.

The primary objective of this study was to identify and analyze the challenges and opportunities faced by *pesantren* in Java in the context of commercialization. It is hoped that this study will provide valuable insights into how *pesantren* can maintain the authenticity of their education amidst rapid social and economic changes. Additionally, the study aimed to propose strategies that *pesantren* can adopt to manage these challenges, ensuring that they remain relevant and continue to contribute positively to society.

This study applied a comprehensive literature review and an analysis of relevant secondary data. Through this approach, this study would provide a detailed insight of the dynamics of modernization and commercialization in *pesantren* education and their impact on the sustainability of *pesantren* as traditional educational institutions in Indonesia.

METHOD

This study was conducted using a literature review method as the primary approach to examine the challenges and opportunities of commercialization in preserving the authenticity of *pesantren* education in Java. A literature review is an effective approach for understanding complex phenomena such as the commercialization of education, especially when primary data is difficult to obtain or when the phenomenon under study has a broad scope (Parsons & Gallagher, 2016).

The data used were gathered from various relevant literature, including books, journal articles, study reports, and other academic sources discussing modernization, commercialization, and *pesantren* education. These literatures were critically analyzed to understand various perspectives on how commercialization and modernization affect the *pesantren* education system, as well as how *pesantren* can maintain the authenticity of their values in this context (Li, 2022).

By utilizing the literature review approach, the researcher was able to explore different theories and findings from previous studies, which were then used to build an analytical framework for understanding the dynamics of commercialization in *pesantren*. The review also included literature discussing modernization theory, which was relevant for analyzing how social and economic changes can affect the structure and practices of *pesantren* education (Przeworski & Limongi, 1997; García, 2021).

The analysis in this study was conducted using a qualitative approach, where data obtained from the literature was categorized and interpreted to identify key themes related to the challenges and opportunities of commercialization in *pesantren*. These themes were then analyzed to understand how *pesantren* can respond to the challenges they face, while also capitalizing on opportunities to enhance the quality and relevance of their education (Hadden, 2017). n the analytical process, the researcher also explored the social and cultural context that influences the practice of commercialization in *pesantren*, as well as how the traditional values upheld by *pesantren* can be preserved amidst the changes occurring. This approach helped the researcher not only to understand the phenomenon of commercialization descriptively but also to examine the normative implications of the process for the sustainability of *pesantren* education (Lloyd et al., 2008). To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, this study used data triangulation, where data obtained from various literature sources were compared and contrasted to identify consistency and variation in the findings. This technique allowed the researcher to obtain a more holistic view of the phenomenon under study and reduce any biases that may arise from using a single type of data source (Chen et al., 2022).

The literature review method used in this study provided a solid foundation for understanding the challenges and opportunities of commercialization in *pesantren* education. By critically examining existing literature, this study could identify strategies that can be implemented by *pesantren* in Java to preserve the authenticity of their education amidst the commercialization process. This approach also helped the researcher to integrate various theoretical and empirical perspectives, leading to a comprehensive and relevant analysis for the development of future *pesantren* education policies.

RESULTS

The commercialization of *pesantren* education in Java had brought significant changes in the operational aspects of these educational institutions. This study found that commercialization had impacted various aspects, ranging from funding sources, curriculum, to *pesantren* management. These transformations not only affected the way *pesantren* carry out their educational functions but also changed the internal dynamics of *pesantren*, including the relationships between *santri*, *kiai*, and *pesantren* management.

Funding Sources and Their Impact on Pesantren Operations

One of the most noticeable changes identified in this study was the shift in funding sources for *pesantren*. Traditionally, *pesantren* in Java relied on support from the local community, including donations from alumni and congregants, as well as the proceeds from businesses managed by the *pesantren* itself (Zuhriy, 2011). However, many *pesantren* had now turned to alternative funding sources, such as partnerships with the private sector and the rise in educational fees (Hogan et al., 2017).

Partnerships with the private sector often took the form of collaborations in infrastructure development or educational programs. For example, some *pesantren* had formed partnerships with companies to build modern facilities, such as computer laboratories or vocational training centers. While these partnerships provided benefits in the form of improved facilities and access to greater resources, they also created dependency on external funding, which could affect the autonomy of *pesantren* in determining their educational direction (Setiawan et al., 2020).

In addition, the increase in educational fees had become one of the strategies used by *pesantren* to increase their revenue. However, this raised issues of unequal access, where only *santri* from affluent families could enjoy better facilities, while those from less privileged backgrounds might struggle to stay in *pesantren* (Burhanuddin, 2020). The rise in educational fees could lead to exclusivity within *pesantren*, which is contrary to the original mission of pesantren as inclusive institutions open to all social classes.

Impact of Commercialization on the Curriculum and Teaching Methods

The curriculum in *pesantren* had also undergone changes due to commercialization. This study found that many *pesantren* had started integrating the national curriculum with the *pesantren* curriculum to meet market demands and enhance the competitiveness of *santri* in the job market (Wasehudin, 2023). The national curriculum, which is more focused on market needs, often emphasizes practical skills and general knowledge, while the *pesantren* curriculum remains focused on religious studies.

Although this integration aims to provide more holistic education, there are concerns that the traditional values at the core of *pesantren* education may be eroded (Bahri, 2019). For instance, with greater emphasis on general subjects, time that was traditionally used for teaching *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic texts) or other religious activities had been reduced. This may diminish the intensity and quality of religious education received by *santri*, which in turn could affect their understanding of the Islamic values taught at *pesantren*.

Furthermore, commercialization also affected the teaching methods in *pesantren*. With the pressure to produce graduates who are competitive in the job market, some *pesantren* had begun adopting more modern teaching approaches, including the use of technology in the learning process (Kuznetsova, 2021). However, the adoption of technology had not always been smooth, as many *pesantren* were still struggling to balance between traditional memorization-based teaching methods and newer, more interactive, technology-based approaches (Mishra, 2023).

Pesantren Management in the Era of Commercialization

Commercialization had also influenced *pesantren* management, particularly in terms of decision-making and resource management. This study found that in many *pesantren*, management was now more focused on operational efficiency and stricter financial management. This included the implementation of modern management practices that were more outcome-oriented and performance-driven (Hogan et al., 2017).

However, this management approach often created tensions between the *kiai* (spiritual leaders) and the management team. The *kiai*, who traditionally held the highest authority in decision-making, now had to share power with management, which was more focused on profit and efficiency (Samudera, 2023). These tensions could affect the internal dynamics of the *pesantren*, including the relationship between the *kiai*, management, and *santri*.

Additionally, market-oriented management may lead *pesantren* to become more selective in accepting *santri*. *Pesantren* that were once open to all layers of society may now prefer *santri* who can afford to pay higher education fees or those who have the potential to contribute financially in the future (Burhanuddin, 2020). This could potentially change the character of *pesantren* as institutions that are inclusive and closely connected to the community. To provide a clearer picture of the various challenges and opportunities faced by *pesantren* in the era of commercialization, the following table and diagram illustrate the main findings of the study.

No	Operational Aspects	Challenges Faced	Opportunities Available
1	Funding Sources	Dependence on external funds, increased education costs	Collaboration with the private sector, diversification of funding sources

2	Curriculum	Erosion of traditional values, declining quality of religious education	Integration of the national curriculum, development of practical skills
3	Management	Tension between the *kiai* and management, selectivity in accepting *santri*	Improved operational efficiency, better financial management

The diagram above illustrates how various operational aspects of *pesantren* are influenced by commercialization, as well as the opportunities that can be leveraged to improve the quality of education in *pesantren*.

Based on the context above, several aspects related to the phenomenon of *pesantren* with varying levels of commercialization can be identified, including:

1. Impact on the Authenticity of Educational Values at *Pesantren*

   This study found that commercialization provided a significant impact on the authenticity of educational values at *pesantren*. One of the greatest impacts was the potential erosion of traditional values that have been the foundation of *pesantren* education. With the increasing pressure to adopt the national curriculum and modern teaching methods, traditional values such as the teaching of *kitab kuning* and the development of religious character in *santri* may be diluted (Bahri, 2019).

   Furthermore, commercialization could cause *pesantren* to become more profit-oriented, which could potentially overlook important aspects of education that cannot be measured financially, such as the development of character and spirituality (Rangel et al., 2015). This could alter the essence of *pesantren* education, which has traditionally focused on the moral and spiritual development of *santri*.

2. Inequality of Access and Education Quality

   This study also found that commercialization tended to exacerbate inequality in access and the quality of education at *pesantren*. The increase in education costs and the selectivity in accepting *santri* may cause *pesantren* to become more exclusive, which, in turn, can limit access for *santri* from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Burhanuddin, 2020). Additionally, the shift in focus toward profitability may lead to a decline in the quality of religious education traditionally offered at *pesantren*.

3. Opportunities for Innovation and Economic Empowerment

   Despite presenting various challenges, commercialization also provided opportunities for *pesantren* to innovate and empower both their *santri* and the surrounding community. For example, integrating the national curriculum with the *pesantren* curriculum could provide *santri* with skills that are more relevant to market needs, helping them better prepare for challenges in the workforce (Wasehudin, 2023). Moreover, partnerships with the private sector can provide much-needed additional resources to enhance facilities and improve the quality of teaching at *pesantren* (Setiawan et al., 2020).

4. Balancing Tradition and Modernization

   The final finding from this study was the importance of finding a balance between tradition and modernization in *pesantren* education. *Pesantren* need to develop strategies that allow them to remain relevant amidst social and economic changes, without sacrificing the traditional values that have been their hallmark for centuries (Kholish et al., 2022). In this way, *pesantren* can continue to contribute significantly to social and educational development in Indonesia, while maintaining their identity as authentic Islamic educational institutions.

Overall, this study showed that the commercialization of *pesantren* education in Java has a complex and multidimensional impact. While commercialization can bring benefits in terms of resource enhancement and

innovation in teaching, it also presents major challenges in maintaining the authenticity of *pesantren* educational values. Therefore, *pesantren* must develop appropriate strategies to manage these challenges so that they can continue to fulfill their mission of shaping the character and spirituality of *santri* amidst the changing times.

DISCUSSION

Analysis of Challenges

The commercialization of *pesantren* education in Java led to significant challenges, particularly in maintaining the authenticity of the values that have long been the hallmark of *pesantren* education. One of the primary challenges was the potential erosion of traditional values within the *pesantren* curriculum. As more *pesantren* integrate the national curriculum, which is more market-oriented, there are concerns that the focus on religious education and the moral development of *santri* will diminish (Bahri, 2019). While the national curriculum is crucial for providing a holistic education, it often demands substantial time allocation for general subjects, thereby reducing the time traditionally dedicated to the teaching of *kitab kuning* (Islamic texts) or other religious activities.

Moreover, commercialization created challenges regarding access and inclusivity in education. With the rising costs of education, driven by *pesantren*'s efforts to increase revenue, only *santri* from wealthier families could afford access to high-quality facilities and instruction (Burhanuddin, 2020). This contradicted the original mission of *pesantren* as inclusive institutions open to all social classes. This inequality can create a gap in the quality of education received by *santri*, which in turn may undermine the integrity of *pesantren* as a grassroots and egalitarian educational institution.

Another significant challenge was the tension between the modern management approach focused on efficiency and profitability and the traditional *pesantren* emphasis on the spiritual authority of the *kiai* (religious leader). In many cases, *kiai*, as the spiritual leader of *pesantren*, must share power with management that is more focused on the market, leading to conflicts in decision-making regarding the direction of education and operational management (Samudera, 2023). This tension can disrupt the internal dynamics of *pesantren* and cause instability in their management.

Analysis of Opportunities

Despite the challenges, commercialization also presents opportunities for *pesantren* to evolve and improve the quality of their education without losing the authenticity of traditional values. One of the main opportunities is the integration of the national curriculum with the *pesantren* curriculum. Although there are concerns about the erosion of traditional values, this integration can equip *santri* with skills that are more aligned with market demands, By developing a curriculum that balances religious education and general education, *pesantren* can remain relevant amidst modernization without sacrificing their identity as Islamic educational institutions.

Collaboration with the private sector also presents an opportunity that *pesantren* can leverage. Through strategic partnerships with companies, *pesantren* can access additional resources necessary to enhance their facilities and the quality of instruction (Setiawan et al., 2020). For instance, *pesantren* can collaborate with the private sector to develop vocational training programs or integrate technology into the teaching and learning process. These partnerships not only provide financial benefits but also help *pesantren* improve the employability of their *santri* in the job market.

Furthermore, commercialization can encourage innovation in teaching methods and *pesantren* management. With the pressure to produce competitive graduates, *pesantren* can adopt more modern and interactive teaching approaches, which can improve the quality of education and attract more *santri* (Kuznetsova, 2021). *Pesantren* management can also seize this opportunity to enhance operational efficiency and financial management, which in turn can strengthen the sustainability of *pesantren* in the future.

Comparison with Literature

The findings of this study align with existing literature on the commercialization of education, particularly within the context of Islamic education. For instance, previous study had shown that commercialization tends to pose challenges in preserving traditional values, especially when educational institutions are compelled to adopt more market-oriented approaches (Rangel et al., 2015). These findings are consistent with concerns raised in this study, where the integration of the national curriculum with the *pesantren* curriculum is perceived as potentially reducing the focus on religious education.

However, unlike some studies that take a more pessimistic view of the impact of commercialization, this study also revealed the opportunities that *pesantren* can leverage to grow amid modernization. Previous literature had often emphasized the negative aspects of commercialization, such as increasing inequality in access to and quality of education (Burhanuddin, 2020). This study, on the other hand, suggested that with the right strategies, commercialization can serve as a tool to strengthen *pesantren* and enhance their relevance in an evolving social and economic landscape.

Furthermore, this study enriched the literature by emphasizing the importance of balancing tradition and modernization. These findings align with arguments made by several researchers who highlight that traditional educational institutions, such as *pesantren*, must find ways to adapt to change without compromising their core values (Kholish et al., 2022). In this regard, *pesantren* in Java can serve as a model for other Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia and even globally in managing commercialization while remaining true to their mission and fundamental values.

Ultimately, this discussion demonstrates that while commercialization presented significant challenges, it also offerred valuable opportunities for *pesantren* to grow and strengthen their position as relevant and competitive educational institutions. By adopting a balanced and inclusive strategy, *pesantren* could preserve the authenticity of their values while adapting to the demands of the times.

CONCLUSION

This study had demonstrated that the commercialization of *pesantren* education in Java had a complex impact, encompassing both challenges and opportunities. The initial hypothesis that commercialization may threaten the authenticity of *pesantren*'s educational values while also creating opportunities for innovation and quality improvement had been proven valid. The findings indicated that while commercialization could lead to the erosion of traditional values, particularly in terms of curriculum and access to education, it also provided *pesantren* with opportunities to grow and adapt to rapid social and economic changes. Thus, there is a clear connection between the hypothesis and the study results, suggesting that despite its challenges, commercialization can be managed with the right strategies to support the sustainability of *pesantren*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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