

An Epistemological Study of Islamic Education Management Practices in the Islamic Boarding School

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Abstract

Keywords:

Epistemology;
Islamic Education
Management;
Boarding School.

This study aims to examine the practice of Islamic education management at the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School from an epistemological perspective, with a focus on integrating Islamic values with modern management theory. The main problem studied is how management in Islamic Boarding Schools functions not only as an administrative instrument but also as a manifestation of the Islamic scientific paradigm based on monotheism. The research method uses a phenomenological qualitative approach, drawing on document studies, observations, and in-depth interviews with Islamic Boarding School managers. The results of the study show that the management practice at the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School is grounded in Islamic epistemology, which emphasizes the balance between rational and spiritual aspects. The contribution of this research lies in strengthening the epistemological framework for the study of Islamic education management and in offering relevant management models for the development of Islamic education in Indonesia. Islamic boarding schools have the potential to develop a management system that balances worldly and ukhrawi goals, as well as to serve as centers for moral and spiritual strengthening.

Abstrak

Kata kunci:
Epistemologi;
Manajemen
Pendidikan Islam;
Pesantren.

Penelitian ini bertujuan menelaah praktik manajemen pendidikan Islam di Pesantren Dar Al-Ma'arif dari perspektif epistemologis, dengan fokus pada integrasi nilai-nilai Islam dan teori manajemen modern. Permasalahan utama yang dikaji adalah bagaimana manajemen di pesantren tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai instrumen administratif, tetapi juga sebagai manifestasi paradigma keilmuan Islam yang berlandaskan tauhid. Metode penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif fenomenologi melalui kajian dokumen, observasi, dan wawancara mendalam dengan pengelola pesantren. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa praktik manajemen di Pesantren Dar Al-Ma'arif dibangun atas fondasi epistemologi Islam yang menekankan keseimbangan antara aspek rasional dan spiritual. Kontribusi penelitian ini terletak pada penguatan kerangka epistemologis dalam studi manajemen pendidikan Islam serta tawaran model manajemen yang relevan untuk pengembangan pendidikan Islam di Indonesia. Pesantren ditunjukkan memiliki potensi melahirkan sistem pengelolaan yang seimbang antara tujuan duniawi dan ukhrawi, sekaligus pusat penguatan moral dan spiritual.

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INTRODUCTION

In the world of Islamic boarding schools today, there are still many who carry out educational management practices without a clear epistemological basis (Huda, 2024). In fact, management is often carried out traditionally, based on the habits or experiences of the previous *kiai* and managers (Karim et al., 2025a). Without a systematic formulation of the source and scientific principles. This leads to a lack of clarity as to whether the policies and management systems implemented are really derived from Islamic values and epistemology, or simply the result of the adoption of a pragmatic conventional management model (Alamolhoda, 2024). On the other hand, Islamic boarding schools that have begun to adopt a modern management system and do not critically examine the values brought by the system, so that it has the potential to cause a clash between Islamic values and secular management principles (Faizin, 2024). This condition shows that there is a gap between managerial practices in Islamic boarding schools and the epistemology of Islamic education itself, and raises big questions about the authenticity and sustainability of Islamic values in the education management system in Islamic boarding schools.

The management of Islamic education in Islamic boarding schools has been the concern of a number of academics, although the approaches are diverse. Some previous studies have highlighted more practical aspects, such as *kiai* leadership patterns, curriculum management strategies, and the relationship between *pesantren* and the surrounding community. For example, research conducted by Ziemek (1986) and Dhofier (1994) emphasizes the role of the *kiai* as a central figure in the management of Islamic boarding schools, where Islamic values are internalized through example and charismatic leadership. Furthermore, the research of Mastuhu (1994) and Bruinessen (1999) shows how *pesantren* adapt to modern developments, especially in managing the curriculum to be relevant to the needs of the times without losing their Islamic identity. On the other hand, more recent studies, such as the research of Hidayat (2011) and Hasanah (2018), have begun to examine *pesantren* management practices with modern theoretical approaches, such as quality-based management theory, participatory management, and transformational leadership. However, studies that place the management of *pesantren* education in an epistemological perspective are still limited. Most studies tend to emphasize operational and functional aspects, while the epistemological side that highlights the integration between managerial rationality and monotheistic values has not been explored much.

The specific purpose of this study is to analyze the practice of Islamic education management in the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School from an epistemological perspective by emphasizing the integration between Islamic values and modern management theory. In particular, this research is directed to reveal how education management in Islamic boarding schools is not only understood as an administrative instrument, but also as a manifestation of the Islamic scientific paradigm based on monotheism. Through this analysis, the research seeks to describe the pattern of integration between rational aspects sourced from modern management theory and spiritual aspects supported by Islamic values in the management of educational institutions. Thus, this study aims to contribute conceptually in the form of strengthening the epistemological framework in the study of Islamic education management, as well as offering a management model that can be used as a reference for the development of Islamic education in Indonesia so that it remains balanced between worldly and *ukhrawi* orientations.

This study offers novelty in its approach and focus of study compared to previous studies that generally only reviewed Islamic education management practices from the operational, structural, or normative side. Most previous research has been more oriented towards managerial practices or the technical effectiveness of boarding school management, but has not explicitly examined the epistemological basis underlying these practices. Meanwhile, other research does touch on Islamic values in education management, but it is still limited to philosophical aspects or has not comprehensively integrated the four epistemological dimensions: theological, rational, empirical, and theoretical. The novelty of this research lies in the epistemological approach by examining how the basics of knowledge sourced from revelation (theological), reason (rational), experience (empirical), and scientific theory (theoretical) together form the framework of thinking and practice of Islamic education management in Islamic boarding schools. This research not only examines managerial practices on the surface, but also traces the roots of knowledge and the underlying value system, as well as connecting it to empirical realities in the field.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research is a qualitative study with a phenomenological approach with an epistemological framework of thinking that aims to understand and examine the foundation of knowledge behind the practice of Islamic education management at the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School. (Creswell & Poth, 2016) The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the meaning, values, and structures of thought that underlie managerial actions in a contextual and subjective manner. As well as critically analyzing it based on the four pillars of epistemology, namely: theological, rational, empirical, and theoretical. This approach is important to capture the integration between Islamic values and real management practices in Islamic boarding schools. This research was carried out at the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School, an Islamic educational institution that combines salafiyah and khalafiyah systems. This boarding school was chosen as the research location because it has implemented various dynamic and systematic education management models, and has a reputation as a reference institution at the regional level. These characteristics make the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School a representative location to examine in depth the epistemological dimension in the managerial practice of Islamic education.

The data sources used in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through in-depth interviews with various key informants such as boarding school caregivers, madrasah heads, deputy heads of curriculum, senior teachers, and administrative staff (Hashimov, 2015). Meanwhile, secondary data is collected from Islamic boarding school institutional documents such as the vision and mission of the institution, organizational structure, annual work program, evaluation report, and other relevant documents. In addition, the researcher also uses scientific literature related to epistemology and Islamic education management as a material to strengthen the analysis. Data collection techniques were carried out through three main methods, namely in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation studies. Interviews are conducted in a semi-structured manner to provide a flexible space for the informant to express their views and reflections. Observations are carried out directly on managerial activities at the boarding school, such as academic planning, management meetings, curriculum implementation, and learning evaluation. Documentation studies are used to examine various archives and documents that reflect the management systems and patterns run by Islamic boarding schools.

The data analysis in this study uses the Miles and Huberman interactive analysis model which includes three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. Data reduction is carried out to filter information relevant to the epistemological focus, data presentation is carried out in the form of descriptive and thematic narratives, while conclusion drawing is carried out inductively based on patterns that emerge from the field (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Furthermore, the analysis is also carried out critically on the four dimensions of epistemology. To maintain the validity of the data, this study uses a triangulation technique. Source triangulation is carried out by comparing data from various informants, technical triangulation is carried out by combining data from interviews, observations, and documentation.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Revelation Value-Based Management: Theological Pillars in Managerial Practice at the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School

The Dar Al Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School, located in Basilam Baru Hamlet, Soopan Village, Kotapinang District, South Labuhanbatu Regency, which was established by Syeh Abdullah Efendi Siregar, in 1992 AD. The history of the establishment of the Dar Al Ma'arif Basilam Baru Islamic Boarding School was officially established in 1992 AD, where in that year Sheikh Abdullah Efendi Siregar as the first founder and leader of the Dar Al Ma'arif Basilam Baru Islamic Boarding School, At that time he invited the community to build an educational institution (madrasah) and small cottages. In the past, the students always tried and never gave up and the students also really wanted to study knowledge. In 2005 M. Sheikh Abdullah Efendi Siregar was replaced by Sheeh H. Ahmad Rifai Siregar as the second leader of the Dar Al Ma'arif Basilam Baru Islamic Boarding School and at that time a permanent building began to be built. Sheikh H. Ahmad Rifai Siregar served until 2011 AD. Then in 2011 AD the Dar Al Ma'arif Basilam Baru Islamic Boarding School was led by Prof. Dr. H. Ibrahim Siregar, MCL until now, where Prof. Dr. H. Ibrahim Siregar, MCL is also the Rector of the State Islamic University (UIN) Padangsidempuan.

The vision of the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School is the realization of the Dar Al Ma'arif Basilam Baru Islamic Boarding School as a "center for the study, development and application of Islamic sciences for the welfare of mankind". Its mission is to carry out education, teaching, research and community service. Implementing Islamic da'wah outside and inside the school. Provision of human resources for nation development. Revelation-based value management is a very relevant approach in the management of Islamic educational institutions, including in the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School. As an educational institution rooted in Islamic scientific traditions and community service, this boarding school not only positions the Qur'an and Hadith as a guideline for worship and morals, but also as an epistemological and operational basis in managerial governance. Within this framework, all planning, implementation, and evaluation of programs at the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School are directed to be in line with transcendental values, namely making the pleasure of Allah as the final orientation. Thus, the management in this boarding school is not only technical-administrative, but also loaded with theological and spiritual meaning (*Observation*, 2024).

As a theological pillar, the value of revelation provides direction for caregivers, managers, and all elements of the boarding school to build a management system based on trust, justice, sincerity, and responsibility (Sawula, 2024). The principle of trust, for

example, can be seen in the way the boarding school managers manage student education and infaq funds with full transparency. The value of justice is reflected in the division of duties between ustaz, senior students, and administrators which is carried out proportionally without discrimination. Meanwhile, the principle of sincerity is the basis for educational services that do not solely pursue material gains, but emphasize the value of devotion and da'wah. In this way, the value of revelation is not only present at the level of ideas, but is completely internalized in the daily managerial practice of the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School.

The manager of the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School revealed that the value of revelation is understood as a theological pillar that provides direction for all parties, both caregivers, managers, and students, in building a pesantren management system. One of the administrators emphasized that the mandate is the main principle that is used as a handle. This is evident in the management of education funds and student infaq which is carried out with full openness. This transparency is not only intended to maintain the trust of the guardians of the students, but also a form of moral responsibility to Allah. In further interviews, it was also explained that the value of justice is manifested in the division of duties between ustaz, senior students, and administrators which is carried out proportionally. The manager emphasized that there is no discrimination in this process; Each individual acquires a role according to his or her ability and capacity. According to them, this practice makes all elements of the pesantren feel appreciated and at the same time strengthens the sense of togetherness in carrying out educational and coaching tasks (*Interview with Mudir Dar Al-Ma'arif, 2023*).

Furthermore, the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School also shows how revelation-based management is able to integrate the spiritual dimension with professionalism. Curriculum management, recruitment of teaching staff, and facility development are carried out taking into account the needs of the times, but are still rooted in the tradition of boarding school education that emphasizes morality, depth of religious knowledge, and strengthening Islamic character. The success orientation is not only measured in terms of academic achievement or the growth of the number of students, but also from the success of the boarding school in forming individuals who are religiously obedient, have noble character, and are ready to serve the community.

The Head of Curriculum explained that the curriculum, recruitment of teaching staff, and facility development are carried out taking into account the needs of the times, such as technological skills and modern academic demands. However, despite various innovations, boarding school still adhere to the tradition of classical education that emphasizes moral strengthening, deepening religious knowledge, and the formation of Islamic character. Furthermore, the interview emphasized that the success orientation of boarding school is not measured solely by quantitative indicators such as academic achievement or the increase in the number of students. According to the manager, the real success is when the boarding school is able to produce individuals who are religiously obedient, have noble character, and have the readiness to serve the community. With this perspective, the management at Dar Al-Ma'arif combines a transcendental dimension with professional demands, so that the boarding school is not only relevant to the times, but also remains firm in maintaining its Islamic identity and mission (*Interview with head of curriculum, 2024*).

From an academic perspective, managerial practices at the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School reflect the existence of a synthesis paradigm between modern management theory and the value of revelation. Contemporary management theories of transformational leadership and participatory governance can be found in the pattern of deliberation, involvement of senior students, and inclusive division of roles in Islamic boarding schools (Karim et al., 2025b). However, all of these things are framed by theological values that come from revelation, thus distinguishing boarding school from secular educational institutions. Thus, the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School is a concrete example of how revelation-based value management is not only a normative concept, but an operational reality that supports the sustainability and development of Islamic educational institutions.

Rationality in Tradition: The Role of *Ijtihad* in Education Management in the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School

In Islamic education, management is interpreted as the process of managing educational resources, both human, material, and spiritual, which is carried out in a directed, planned, and responsible manner (Nurjanah & Hermawan, 2025). Based on Islamic values, to achieve the goal of Islamic education, which is to form human beings who have faith, knowledge, and noble character (Maidugu & Isah, 2024). In a sense, management in Islamic education is not only an administrative technical aspect, but also includes the dimension of monotheism (the oneness of Allah) as the core of all activities (Mahmudhassan, 2024). In fact, Islamic education management is built on four main foundations that complement each other, namely theological, rational, empirical, and theoretical foundations (Adiyono et al., 2024). Theological reliance refers to the texts of revelation as the primary basis that is sacred and becomes an authoritative source of managerial decision-making and policy.

This leads to the belief that the messages that come from revelation are absolute truth because they come directly from God (Dockery & Yarnell, 2024). Furthermore, rational reliance is based on the thoughts and words of the Prophet's companions, scholars, and Muslim scholars who rely on reason and logic as a tool to understand and interpret the principles of management in the context of Islam (Hashi, 2024). The concept of rationality in the Islamic tradition finds its significant form through the practice of *ijtihad*, which is an intellectual effort that aims to explore the law and normative principles from sharia sources in order to answer the needs of the times. In the context of educational management in the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic boarding school, *ijtihad* is not solely understood as an individual *fiqhiyah* activity, but also as an epistemological and praxis mechanism that allows institutions to integrate traditional values with the demands of modernity. boarding school as a traditional Islamic educational institution is rooted in the authority of the text of revelation, the tradition of classical scholars, and the cultural values of the Muslim community. However, the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School shows that the tradition is not static, but dynamic and productive when combined with rational reasoning through *ijtihad* (*observation*, 2024).

From a managerial perspective, *ijtihad* in the Dar Al-Ma'arif boarding school functions as an adaptive instrument that reformulates institutional practices to remain oriented to Islamic values. This is reflected in deliberation-based decision-making, the preparation of a curriculum that combines *turāth* books with modern science, and innovations in the institutional financing sector. For example, the deliberation forum of students and administrators is not just a cultural practice, but is positioned as a form of deliberative rationality that provides space for collective participation while ensuring the legitimacy of managerial decisions. Similarly, the curriculum of Islamic boarding schools is no longer limited to the transmission of religious texts, but is expanded through pedagogical *ijtihad* by adding entrepreneurship, technology, and social skills materials so that students are able to answer global challenges.

The Head of Madrasah Aliyah explained that the decision-making process at the pesantren is carried out through deliberation involving students, ustaz, and managers. This deliberative forum is not only seen as a cultural tradition, but also as a form of deliberative rationality that provides space for collective participation while strengthening the legitimacy of managerial decisions. In this way, pesantren present a participatory leadership model that is in line with the spirit of *sūrā* in Islam. In addition, the interview also revealed that the curriculum at Dar Al-Ma'arif was designed through a pedagogical form of *ijtihad* that combined classical *turāth* books with modern science. According to the manager, this approach is intended so that students are not only strong in the foundation of religious science, but also have broad insights that are relevant to global challenges. Therefore, the curriculum material is expanded to include entrepreneurship, technology, and social skills learning. This step is seen as an important strategy so that boarding school graduates are able to play an active role in society, while maintaining a strong Islamic identity (*Interview with head of Madrasah Aliyah, 2024*).

Epistemologically, *ijtihad* in the management of education at the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic boarding school can be positioned as a form of dialectic between *turāth* (traditional heritage) and *tajdīd* (renewal). By using a rationality rooted in tradition, this boarding school managed to avoid two extremes: first, a rigid textualism attitude that rejected change; and second, radical modernism that tends to ignore traditional values. Thus, the management of education at the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School shows a pattern of "rationality in tradition" that places *ijtihad* as a theological as well as methodological instrument to maintain the relevance of Islamic education in the midst of social transformation.

One of the caregivers emphasized that the boarding school tries to use rationality rooted in tradition to avoid the two extreme poles that often hinder the development of Islamic education. On the one hand, they rejected the rigid attitude of textualism that closed themselves off from change, while on the other hand they also avoided the currents of radical modernism that tended to ignore traditional values. In further explanation, the manager stated that this approach allows Dar Al-Ma'arif to remain consistent with the identity of the boarding school as an institution that maintains the authenticity of the *turāth*, while being able to present updates that are relevant to the demands of modern society. *Ijtihad* is seen not only as a methodological tool for interpreting new realities, but also as a theological instrument that affirms the commitment of Islamic boarding schools to Islamic values. Through this pattern, education management in Dar Al-Ma'arif shows the model of rationality in tradition, which is an effort to develop an education system

that remains based on Islamic traditions, but does not lose its adaptive power in the midst of social transformation (*Interview with caregiver, 2024*).

Empirical Reflection: Management Practices Based on Real Experience at the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School

Empirical reflection in Islamic education management finds its real manifestation in the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School, where managerial practice is not only based on normative theory, but is also firmly rooted in the real experiences faced by Islamic boarding school managers, students, and the surrounding community. In the context of the epistemology of Islamic education, experiences born from the daily dynamics of Islamic boarding schools are seen as a source of knowledge as well as an evaluative means that allow the preparation of managerial strategies to be more contextual. Thus, the experience of the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School is not only accumulated as empirical data, but also interpreted critically and theologically so as to give birth to management practices that are more adaptive and relevant to the needs of the times.

The real experience at the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School can be seen, for example, in the management of the curriculum. Instead of adopting a modern curriculum raw, the boarding school carried out an adaptation process by considering the reality of the needs of students and the expectations of the local community. The religious curriculum based on the yellow book remains the main pillar, but empirically supported by the addition of general scientific materials such as foreign languages, technology, and entrepreneurship. This decision was not only born from the theoretical demands of education management, but also the result of direct observation of the challenges faced by post-graduation students. Thus, the empirical experience in Dar Al-Ma'arif serves as a dialectical medium that brings together the demands of tradition and contemporary needs.

According to one of the *kiai*, Dar Al-Ma'arif does not necessarily adopt the modern curriculum in its entirety, but carries out an adaptation process by considering the reality of the needs of students and the expectations of the surrounding community. This is done through a thorough evaluation of the challenges faced by alumni after completing their education at the pesantren. The manager explained that the curriculum based on the yellow book is still used as the main pillar of education, because that is where the identity and strength of the pesantren tradition lies. However, in response to the demands of the times, the curriculum is equipped with general science materials, such as foreign languages, technology, and entrepreneurship. The addition of this material is not only a theoretical demand in education management, but also born from empirical observations about the real needs that students must face after graduation (*Interview with a kiai, 2024*).

Empirical reflection also functions as an internal evaluation instrument at the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School. Evaluation is not only measured through formal academic achievements, but also through the transformation of students' behavior and spirituality in daily life (Paul, 2024). The success of education management is measured by the extent to which students are able to internalize moral values, build discipline, and make a real contribution to society. This qualitative indicator confirms that direct experience is the main parameter in assessing the managerial effectiveness of Islamic boarding schools.

A *kiai* emphasized that the measure of educational success in this pesantren is not only seen from formal academic achievements, but also from changes in the behavior and spirituality of students in daily life. According to him, academic achievement is indeed important, but more important is the extent to which the moral values taught can be internalized and manifested in the real actions of the students (*Interview with kiai*, 2024).

From a philosophical perspective, the empirical reflection at the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School can be read as a manifestation of integration between practice rationality and transcendental values. The experience gathered in the dynamics of daily life does not stop at the technical level, but is interpreted through a framework of revelation that provides normative direction (Serafinelli, 2024). This shows that the management of education in Dar Al-Ma'arif is not only trial and error, but also a theological praxis that places experience as a path to benefit. Thus, real-life experience-based management practices at the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School are not only adaptive strategies, but also epistemological reflections that strengthen the authenticity of the Islamic education management model.

Implementation of Management Theory: Integration of Modern Concepts in the Islamic Context in the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School

The implementation of management theory in the context of the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School shows that there is a dynamic dialectical process between the concept of modern management and Islamic values which are the normative foundation. Islamic boarding schools as traditional educational institutions cannot be separated from their historical and cultural roots, but at the same time are faced with the demands of adapting to the times. Within this framework, the integration of modern management concepts such as planning, organizing, leading, and controlling is carried out by contextualizing them into the framework of revelation values and boarding school traditions. This integration creates a distinctive management model that is not only technically efficient, but also loaded with moral and spiritual dimensions (*Observation*, 2024).

At the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School, the concept of planning is not only interpreted as the preparation of short-term and long-term work programs, but also as an effort to formulate a vision and mission that is in harmony with the protection of religion, soul, intellect, descendants, and property. This makes boarding school planning more than just a technocratic activity, but a theological process that ensures that the direction of institutional policy remains within the corridor of divine values. Furthermore, the organizing function is adapted into the institutional structure of the boarding school with a collegial pattern, where the roles of *kiai*, *ustadz*, senior students, and administrators are interconnected in a system that prioritizes the principle of deliberation (*shūrā*). Thus, the modern concept of task division and coordination is institutionalized without eliminating the characteristics of charismatic and science-based boarding school leadership.

A teacher emphasized that planning is positioned as an effort to formulate a vision and mission that is in harmony with protect religion, soul, intellect, descent, and property. Thus, every strategic step that is set is not just technical-administrative, but also a theological process that ensures that the policy of the boarding school remains in the corridor of divine values (*Interview with a teacher*, 2024).

In the aspect of leadership, the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School integrates transformational leadership theory with Islamic exemplary principles. *Kiai* and the caregivers not only function as directing managers, but also as moral and spiritual

examples for all Islamic boarding school residents. With this approach, leadership is not solely instructive, but transformative that inspires students to internalize Islamic values in their daily lives. Meanwhile, the control function is applied through an evaluation mechanism that not only emphasizes academic achievements, but also on the moral and spiritual dimensions of students. This mechanism emphasizes that the standard of success in boarding school is not only measured quantitatively, but also qualitatively in the form of character strengthening and social contribution.

An administrator added that although modern management with division of duties and coordination has been adopted, it does not eliminate the distinctive character of pesantren leadership: that is, the combination of kiai charisma and the authority of knowledge. Charisma-based leadership remains central, but it is enriched with an organized organizational system so that managerial processes run more effectively. Thus, the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School has succeeded in integrating the concept of modern management with traditional Islamic values without causing conflict (*Interview with administrator, 2024*).

Thus, the implementation of management theory at the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School presents an epistemological synthesis between modern management theory that emphasizes efficiency and productivity and the Islamic value framework that emphasizes blessings, justice, and benefits. This synthesis shows that boarding school are not only able to adapt to the development of contemporary management science, but also offer conceptual contributions in the form of a management model based on revelation values. At this point, the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School is not only an object of application of management theory, but also a subject that enriches the discourse of Islamic education management through integrative practices that are contextual, innovative, and rooted in Islamic scientific traditions.

Discussion

Four Epistemological Pillars in the boarding school Management System

From a theological perspective, the management of Islamic education has a solid foundation in divine values (*ilahiyyah*) sourced from the Qur'an and Hadith (Holid et al., 2025). This foundation emphasizes that the entire management process, both in the fields of education, organization, and social, must not be separated from the orientation of worship and the achievement of Allah's pleasure. Therefore, a managerial is not just an administrative leader, but also functions as a moral and spiritual figure who gives direction for all boarding school residents to adhere to divine values. This shows that the management of Islamic education cannot be separated from the moral example dimension of its leaders. In addition to monotheism, the theological foothold of boarding school management is also seen in the concept of *caliphate* (human caliphate on earth) (Lahmar, 2024).

This concept emphasizes the role of humans as managers who are mandated to optimize resources responsibly. In the context of boarding school, this mandate is realized through management practices that emphasize the importance of efficiency, effectiveness, and ethics (Campbell, 2026; Zinnah et al., 2025). In practice, this theological principle encourages that the distribution of duties and responsibilities in Islamic educational institutions takes place proportionately, that services to boarding school residents are equal, and that every individual has the same opportunity to develop. In this way, boarding school are able to present a harmonious and fair social climate, so that it not only educates students in the scientific aspect, but also instills the value of

social justice as an integral part of religious life (Miftahuddin et al., 2024; Utama & Salim, 2024; Yanto et al., 2025).

From the perspective of rationality, the management of Islamic education cannot be separated from the view of the essence of reason (*al-'aql*) and revelation (*al-wahy*). Islamic philosophy, since the era of Al-Kindī, Al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, to Al-Ghazālī and Ibn Rushd, has always placed reason as a fundamental instrument in understanding reality, as well as a means of managing social life in an orderly manner (Hoseiny et al., 2024). The management of Islamic education based on rationality, thus, reflects the realization that the human mind does not only function as a regulator of technical affairs, but also as part of the caliphate's mandate in maintaining the order of life. Rationality here is not interpreted as secularization, but as an attempt to balance revelation as a source of absolute value and reason as a means to actualize these values in managerial practice.

This rational principle is in line with Al-Fārābī's view which emphasizes the importance of governance of society based on order (*al-niẓām*) and moral goals (Daiber, 2024). Islamic education, which is carried out within a rational managerial framework, must have a clear vision of the formation of human beings, namely human beings who are knowledgeable, moral, and beneficial to society. Therefore, systematic planning, structured organization, and objective evaluation are not merely the application of modern management theory, but the embodiment of the principle of cosmos order believed in Islamic philosophy. Just as the universe runs with rational laws set by Allah, so Islamic educational institutions are also required to be managed with rational principles that are in harmony with *sunnatullah* (Bhat & Bisati, 2025; Radhi et al., 2025). Furthermore, Islamic philosophy also emphasizes that the rationality of education management should not neglect the ethical dimension. Ibn Miskawayh, emphasized the importance of morality as the foundation of social management. In the context of Islamic education management, this means that efficiency and effectiveness must go hand in hand with justice, honesty, and responsibility (Mukti et al., 2021). Rationality that merely emphasizes the achievement of quantitative results will lose its meaning if it is not accompanied by moral values. In other words, Islamic philosophy teaches that rationality should be directed towards benefit, not just pragmatic gain.

The concept of human resource development in Islamic education can also be analyzed through the framework of Ibn Khaldūn's philosophy, which emphasizes the importance of education as a means of civilization (*'umrān*). According to him, the success of an educational institution is highly determined by the quality of the human resources involved in it, both educators and students (Albert et al., 2025; Razak et al., 2020; Rosdiana et al., 2024). This perspective is in line with the rational principles of modern management that emphasize competency development through continuous training and evaluation. However, Islamic philosophy adds a spiritual dimension, namely that the development of intellect and skills must be directed to strengthening faith and forming a noble personality. Rationality becomes a methodological instrument to bring about measurable, systematic, and efficient management, while revelation remains the normative foundation that directs educational goals. The synergy between the two results in the management of Islamic education that is not only responsive to the challenges of modernity, but also consistent with a transcendental vision (Haryanto et al., 2024; Salim & Aditya, 2025; Srinio et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the principle of empiricism in Islamic education management is understood as a system that must be analyzed and developed based on data, experience, and observable reality. The empirical approach emphasizes that the effectiveness of management is not sufficiently supported by normative-theological foundations and

rational-philosophical frameworks alone, but must also be proven through real practice, field research, and continuous evaluation (Aziz et al., 2024; Wale, 2024; Yuliana et al., 2023). In other words, the empirical perspective emphasizes that the success of Islamic education management can be measured objectively through performance indicators, learning outcomes, and the social impact it causes. This empirical foundation is in line with the principle that science in Islam is born from the integration of revelation, reason, and sensory experience (Desmiati et al., 2023; Ningsih et al., 2025; Nurdi & Ahmad, 2025). In the context of education management, empirical experience is an important instrument to assess the extent to which a policy or management strategy is able to achieve the goals of Islamic education (Kartiko et al., 2025; Rusdinal et al., 2024). Therefore, the empirical approach encourages Islamic educational institutions to always conduct trials, action research, and data-based innovations to ensure that the applied management theory is truly relevant to the needs of the field.

Furthermore, theoretical principles are a fundamental dimension in the management of Islamic education because they function as a conceptual foundation that directs the entire management process of educational institutions (Sahin, 2018). Without the existence of solid theoretical principles, managerial practice risks fragmentation and loss of direction, so that it can move away from the normative vision of Islamic education itself (Yuliana et al., 2023; Zamroni & Barnoto, 2024). Theoretical principles not only serve as a framework for organizing institutional activities, but also as a normative standard that ensures that policies, strategies, and management implementations are always consistent with transcendental Islamic values. In other words, theoretical principles in the management of Islamic education play a dual role, as an epistemological framework that guides the managerial thinking process and as a normative compass that maintains the spiritual and moral integrity of educational institutions.

In an academic framework, theoretical principles can be understood as the result of a dialectic between revelation, reason, and empirical experience. These three elements form an epistemological matrix that is typical of Islamic science. Revelation serves as a source of absolute value that directs the purpose of education to the achievement of the pleasure of Allah (an ul Mustafa et al., 2023). The intellect, through its analytical and critical abilities, plays a role in structurally and rationally arranging conceptual tools to achieve these goals. Meanwhile, empirical experience provides real verification of the theory that is built, as well as a space for correction of the managerial practices that are implemented. Thus, the theoretical principles of Islamic education management cannot be reduced solely to the adoption of modern management theory, but must be understood as a creative synthesis between religious paradigms and scientific paradigms in the Islamic scientific tradition.

CONCLUSIONS

Research on Epistemological Studies of Islamic Education Management Practices in Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding Schools shows that education management practices in Islamic boarding schools cannot be understood only through a modern management framework, but must be seen in the horizon of Islamic epistemology that integrates the dimensions of knowledge, values, and religious praxis. The Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School presents an integrative management model, which combines managerial rationality with Islamic spirituality, so that the entire process of leadership, planning, implementation, and evaluation does not stop at pragmatic goals, but is directed to achieve transcendental meaning.

From an epistemological perspective, the management system built is rooted in the monotheistic paradigm. This paradigm is the main foundation in formulating education policies and strategies, as well as being a normative framework that guides every step of management. Thus, management practices at the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School not only emphasize the aspects of efficiency, effectiveness, and productivity as emphasized in conventional management theory, but also maintain moral values, and the welfare of students.

The implication of these findings is that boarding school have a distinctive epistemological capacity in developing a holistic Islamic education management model. This model is not only able to maintain relevance to the times through the application of modern managerial principles, but also remains faithful to the identity, traditions, and Islamic values that are the spirit of the Islamic boarding school. With a strong epistemological foundation, the Dar Al-Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School is able to present an education system that is oriented towards moral, intellectual, and spiritual strengthening, while making a significant contribution to the development of Islamic education management in Indonesia more broadly.

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