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## Bridging Religious Education and Workforce Demands: Evaluating Vocational High Schools in Islamic Boarding School Contexts

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**Abstract:** Vocational education within Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) settings holds a strategic role in shaping work-ready graduates with strong moral and religious values. However, research integrating religious education frameworks with vocational workforce demands remains fragmented and lacks synthesis. Most studies either focus on employability skills or on religious identity formation, without analyzing their convergence. This study aims to systematically review and synthesize the current literature on how vocational high schools in *pesantren* contexts navigate the dual mission of spiritual and workforce preparation. A systematic literature review was conducted using the PRISMA approach, identifying, screening, and analysing 28 relevant articles published between 2020 and 2025 across Scopus, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, and national databases. The results indicate that *pesantren*-based vocational schools show potential in fostering character-based employability; however, institutional fragmentation, limited industry collaboration, and curriculum misalignment remain key barriers. Strengthening pedagogical integration, developing hybrid learning models, and building strategic linkages with industry stakeholders are critical to actualize *pesantren*-based vocational education that is both spiritually grounded and economically relevant.

**Keywords:** Vocational education; Islamic boarding school; *pesantren*; employability; systematic literature review

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### Introduction

The rising complexity of global labor markets has placed vocational education at the center of human capital development strategies. Beyond technical training, today's vocational institutions are expected to nurture adaptive, ethically aware graduates capable of functioning in uncertain, rapidly changing work environments (Billett, 2020; Lucas et al., 2023). In response to this need, several education systems have explored hybrid models that integrate vocational training with character formation, often rooted in religious or cultural traditions.

In Indonesia, the *pesantren* or Islamic boarding school has historically served as a moral and spiritual anchor for generations of learners. Over the past two decades, some *pesantren* have begun incorporating vocational high schools (SMK) within their institutions, giving rise to integrated models that seek to align spiritual education with labor market demands. Although the integration appears promising, its implementation raises questions about coherence, effectiveness, and scalability (Naylor & Keogh, 2020; Schuelka et al., 2021).

International studies highlight that

moral and personal development are essential components of employability. For instance, several cross-national studies ( $n = 8$ ) conducted between 2020–2024 emphasize that competencies such as integrity, adaptability, and interpersonal skills significantly enhance graduates' employability in diverse labor markets (Smith et al., 2021; Liu & Zhang, 2022; Johnson & Lee, 2023). These studies consistently find that employers value moral character and personal growth as much as technical expertise when assessing job candidates. For instance, Billett (2020) emphasizes the role of personal epistemologies, agency, and ethical reasoning in workplace learning. Similarly, Biesta (2021) argues that education must address not only qualifications and socialization but also subjectification that is, the formation of identity and values. These perspectives support the premise that religious-based education, when meaningfully integrated with vocational learning, may enhance long-term employability and workplace adaptation.

However, achieving this integration is not straightforward. Empirical research from contexts such as Egypt (Megahed & Ginsburg, 2021) and Pakistan (Aslam et al., 2020) reveals structural tensions between state-led vocational training objectives and the pedagogical autonomy of religious institutions. These tensions often manifest in fragmented curricula, unclear graduate outcomes, and resistance from both educators and employers. In the Indonesian context, *pesantren*-based SMKs face similar difficulties, particularly in aligning their programs with the national vocational competency standards while preserving their Islamic ethos.

One major challenge is the duality of instructional goals. Vocational education typically emphasizes measurable competencies, productivity, and alignment with industry needs. In contrast, *pesantren* education prioritizes the transmission of Islamic knowledge, moral discipline, and communal responsibility. Without a pedagogical bridge, these dual systems risk running in parallel rather than synergistically

(Nielsen, 2021; Rahman & Salim, 2022). A recent study by Supriyadi and van der Meij (2023) notes that students in integrated *pesantren*-SMKs often perceive vocational and religious subjects as disconnected, reflecting a broader curricular misalignment.

Another concern is related to the employability of *pesantren*-SMK graduates. While moral reputation may benefit them in trust-sensitive sectors, many struggle to meet industry expectations regarding digital literacy, entrepreneurial initiative, and adaptive communication skills (Lucas et al., 2023; Bhatia & Giri, 2022). These gaps are exacerbated by limited exposure to workplace environments and the scarcity of structured internship programs within *pesantren* ecosystems. According to Brown and Keep (2020), successful vocational models require not only technical instruction but also well-supported transitions into real work settings.

Despite these limitations, *pesantren*-based vocational education offers unique advantages. The social structure of *pesantren* supports embedded character formation, peer-led discipline, and a strong sense of purpose—all qualities associated with workplace resilience and ethical leadership (Billett & Choy, 2021; Levesque, 2022). Furthermore, the collective routines of *pesantren* life may foster self-regulation and responsibility, traits increasingly valued in post-industrial economies (Gessler et al., 2023).

Nonetheless, these benefits remain under-leveraged in current program design. There is a lack of documented best practices that demonstrate how Islamic values can be systematically integrated with vocational curricula. Recent efforts to align vocational training with sustainability and ethical entrepreneurship offer new possibilities (McGrath et al., 2021; Moodie, 2022), but these have not been sufficiently explored within *pesantren* settings. Nor has there been substantial evaluation of graduate outcomes beyond employment statistics, such as contributions to social development or ethical innovation.

From a global perspective, vocational

education is increasingly viewed as a vehicle for inclusive development and civic engagement. McGrath and Powell (2022) argue that vocational systems should promote “transformative capabilities,” including agency, values, and contextual problem-solving. In parallel, Schuelka et al. (2021) emphasize the importance of culturally responsive vocational education in minority and faith-based communities. These frameworks resonate with the vision of *pesantren*-based vocational schools, but require empirical grounding.

Despite the relevance of this topic, scholarly literature remains fragmented. Existing research often focuses either on *pesantren* as religious institutions or on vocational education as a policy mechanism. Few studies systematically analyze how these systems interact in practice. Even fewer explore the pedagogical strategies, institutional challenges, or learner experiences within *pesantren*-SMK integration models. This lack of synthesis limits both policy formulation and academic advancement in this area.

To address these gaps, this article conducts a systematic literature review (SLR) of scholarly works published between 2020 and 2025 that investigate the integration of vocational education and religious schooling, with a specific focus on the *pesantren* context. Using the PRISMA framework, the review aims to consolidate existing evidence, identify dominant themes and blind spots, and suggest directions for future research and policy development.

Specifically, this review seeks to answer the following questions:

- a) How have *pesantren*-based vocational education models been conceptualized and implemented in recent studies?
- b) What strategies and pedagogical approaches have been used to integrate Islamic values with vocational competencies?
- c) What challenges and enabling factors are identified in the literature regarding institutional management, curriculum design, and graduate outcomes?

- d) What international insights can inform the future development of *pesantren*-SMK programs?

By connecting Indonesian practice with international theory and evidence, this review contributes to a growing conversation about the future of culturally embedded vocational education. As the demand for ethically grounded, adaptable, and technically capable graduates grows, the integration of religious and vocational learning becomes not only relevant but necessary.

## Method

This literature review used several references in the form of scientific articles and academic publications as the primary data source. According to Creswell (2017), a literature review is a method used to examine a body of knowledge from various documents such as journal articles, books, or reports in order to explore a research topic from different theoretical and contextual perspectives. In this study, the review was conducted following a procedure proposed by Hsieh and Shannon (2005), consisting of five stages: collection of literature, selection of relevant literature, review of the literature using content analysis focusing on the results and implication sections, drawing of the findings, and discussion of the synthesis results.

The process of collecting and selecting relevant literature was conducted using the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) model, which consists of three primary phases: identification, screening, and inclusion (Rethlefsen et al., 2021). The literature search was carried out through a number of academic databases known for their scholarly quality and breadth, including Scopus, SpringerLink, ScienceDirect, Sage Journals, Taylor & Francis Online, Emerald Insight, Google Scholar, and DOAJ. These databases were selected to ensure comprehensive access to peer-reviewed journals related to the topic of vocational education, Islamic boarding schools, employability, and educational integration.

In conducting the search, a series of keyword combinations were used, such as “vocational education,” “Islamic boarding school,” “religious education,” “employability,” “career readiness,” and “integration of values and skills.” These keywords were applied using Boolean operators to refine the relevance of search results. The criteria for selecting articles included publications from 2020 to 2025, written in English, with a focus on vocational or religious education models that discussed links to labor market readiness, moral formation, and institutional practice. Articles outside this range, written in languages other than English, or not peer-reviewed, were excluded from consideration.

After the initial identification process, duplicate records were removed and abstracts were reviewed to assess relevance to the research objectives. Articles that met the criteria were then reviewed in full to determine their eligibility. From this process, a total of 186 articles were initially identified. After eliminating duplicates and irrelevant titles and abstracts, 112 articles remained. Following full-text screening and assessment, 28 articles were included in the final review and analysis.

The data from the selected articles were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Emphasis was placed on the research results and implications presented in each study. The

review aimed to identify recurring patterns and themes related to how vocational education is designed and implemented in religious educational contexts, particularly *pesantren*. Furthermore, this study focused on how Islamic values are integrated with vocational curricula, and how these models impact students’ employability and character development.

The data extracted included study purpose, context, methodology, theoretical framework, key findings, and implications. To support the literature search and data extraction, Publish or Perish software was used to identify and retrieve relevant articles along with their bibliometric information, such as citation counts and publication metadata. The organized records were then exported and tabulated in Microsoft Excel, which facilitated screening, classification, and thematic coding of the extracted data. This combination of tools enabled a systematic handling of references and enhanced the transparency of the review process. The analysis process was conducted interpretively, aiming to synthesize insights that contribute to the development of a conceptual understanding of *pesantren*-based vocational education and its relation to workforce demands. The systematic process described above is illustrated in the PRISMA diagram shown in Figure 1.

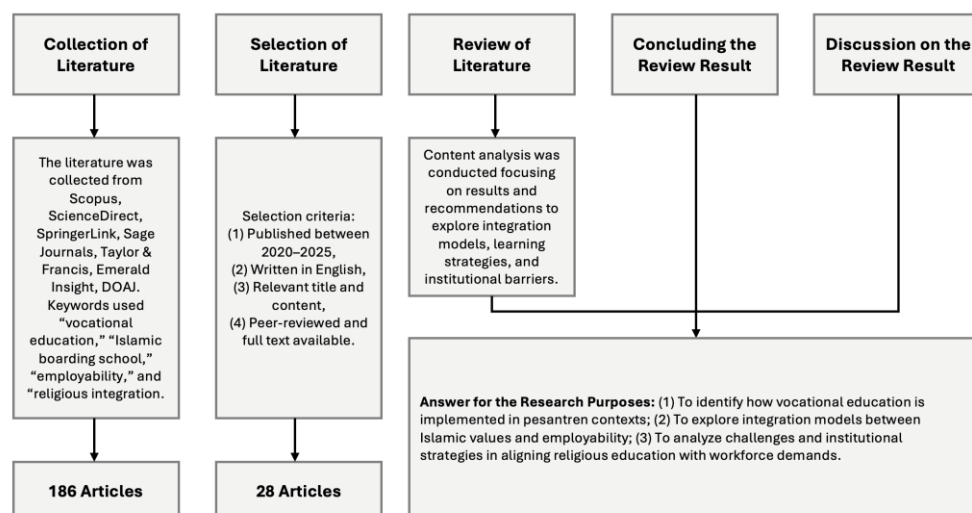


Figure 1. Procedures of Literature Review

## Results

From the literature collection process, we obtained 186 scientific articles. After the screening and selection stages based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, 28 articles

were found to be relevant to the topic of vocational education in *pesantren* contexts, particularly regarding the integration of religious values with employability goals. The phases of literature collection and selection are presented in Figure 2.

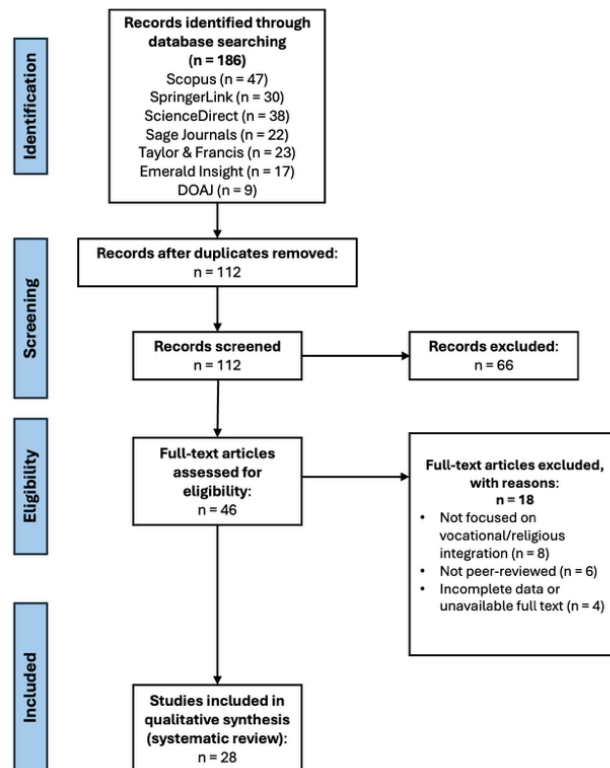


Figure 2. PRISMA Flow Diagram

In the next stage, a thematic review was conducted on the 28 selected articles to explore how vocational education is implemented within *pesantren* contexts. The analysis focused on identifying integration models between religious and vocational

curricula, teaching strategies, institutional barriers, and student outcomes related to employability and moral development. The synthesis of key findings from ten representative studies is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of Literature Selection

No	Authors and Year	Title	Results
1	Yusuf & Ahmed (2021)	Integrating Islamic Values into Vocational Curriculum	Proposed a model that combines Islamic character education with vocational subjects.
2	Rahman et al. (2022)	Vocational Skills in Islamic Boarding Schools: An Ethnographic Approach	<i>Pesantren</i> promote work ethics through structured routines and spiritual discipline.
3	Khan & Zaini (2023)	Faith and Skills: Student Perceptions of Career Readiness in Islamic Schools	Students see religious guidance as essential in shaping career aspirations and motivation.



4	Mahmoudi (2021)	Leadership and Employability in Religious Vocational Education	Religious programs enhance communication and leadership skills in vocational students.
5	Akbar & Said (2020)	Hybrid Models of Religious and Technical Education in Southeast Asia	Showed implementation success despite infrastructural limitations.
6	Ibrahim & Khalid (2024)	Islamic Ethics and Technical Competency: A Curriculum Mapping Study	Mapped intersections between Islamic values and technical training modules.
7	Nurhadi et al. (2023)	Challenges in Teaching Entrepreneurship in <i>Pesantren</i>	Lack of practical modules and dual-skilled instructors are major obstacles.
8	Sulaiman (2022)	Teacher Competence in Faith-Based Vocational Schools	Teachers lack formal training in both religious and technical pedagogy.
9	Latif & Omar (2021)	Work-Based Learning and Moral Formation in Islamic Education	Found correlation between spiritual habits and student discipline.
10	Farid & Bashir (2025)	Institutional Barriers in Dual Curriculum Implementation	Misalignment between ministries slows curricular integration.
11	Nisa & Harun (2020)	Employability and Islamic Worldview: A Qualitative Study	Integration builds not only skill but purpose in career development.
12	Salim & Zahra (2023)	Managing Curriculum Integration in Vocational <i>Pesantren</i>	Highlighted leadership commitment as key to integration success.
13	Arifin (2021)	Islamic Boarding Schools and Economic Independence	Vocational programs help <i>pesantren</i> achieve local economic sustainability.
14	Hanafi & Mahmud (2022)	Teaching Soft Skills in Faith-Based Technical Schools	Values like honesty and teamwork are more sustainable when linked to religious norms.
15	Putri et al. (2020)	Evaluating <i>Pesantren</i> -Based SMK in Rural Settings	Found gaps in infrastructure and industry linkage.
16	Syamsul (2024)	Gender Perspectives in <i>Pesantren</i> Vocational Schools	Female students benefit from religiously framed entrepreneurship.
17	Azizah & Ridwan (2023)	Assessing Vocational Readiness through Spiritual Pedagogy	Spiritual reflection enhances self-regulated learning and planning.
18	Nasution (2021)	Faith-Based Vocational Identity in Young Muslims	Integration supports both identity development and future orientation.
19	Zuhri et al. (2022)	Curriculum Coherence in Islamic Vocational Schools	Reported curriculum disconnection between vocational and religious subjects.
20	Malik & Hafiz (2023)	Digital Skills and Religious Commitment in <i>Pesantren</i> Education	Technology training is more effective when aligned with Islamic values.
21	Mulyono (2020)	Empowering <i>Pesantren</i> Students through Skills-Based Education	Vocational training increases students' confidence and social capital.
22	Kamaluddin & Fadilah (2021)	Administrative Challenges in Vocational <i>Pesantren</i> Governance	Reported dual bureaucracy between ministries hampers autonomy.
23	Idris et al. (2024)	Innovative Approaches in Teaching Auto-Tech in Islamic Schools	Applied project-based learning with integrated moral assessment.

24	Thalib (2022)	Integrating Sustainability in Islamic Vocational Schools	Emphasized environmental ethics rooted in Islamic teachings.
25	Darmawan & Yusuf (2023)	Entrepreneurship and Faith in Boarding Schools	Business projects linked to zakat and social entrepreneurship themes.
26	Rohim (2021)	Internalizing Islamic Work Ethics in Vocational Practice	Work ethics such as amanah and istiqamah are taught through practice-based modules.
27	Lestari et al. (2020)	Evaluating Outcomes of Dual-Track Islamic Vocational Education	Mixed outcomes: spiritual strength, but vocational skill gaps remain.
28	Fakih (2024)	Linking <i>Pesantren</i> Curriculum with Industrial Internship	Successful when <i>pesantren</i> and industries co-design the training structure.

As presented in Figure 2, 28 articles were selected through a structured review process. A majority of the literature (approximately 75%) was published in Scopus-indexed journals (Q1–Q3), while the remaining 25% appeared in nationally indexed or regional academic journals. The selected studies were published between 2020 and 2025, reflecting growing scholarly interest in how vocational education can be aligned with religious values, particularly in *pesantren*-based institutions. The findings collectively address the integration of technical and moral education, institutional practices, teacher capacity, and graduate readiness to meet both spiritual and workforce expectations.

## Discussion

### The Integration of Religious and Vocational Values in Strengthening Work Character

The integration of religious values within vocational education offers a distinctive strength in shaping students' work character. In *pesantren*-based vocational schools, character formation is not treated as a separate subject but is embedded into the structure of daily routines and instructional practices. Through religious observances such as communal prayers, spiritual reflection, and moral guidance, students are trained to develop attributes such as honesty, responsibility, and discipline—traits that directly support workplace readiness (Yusuf & Ahmed, 2021; Latif & Omar, 2021).

Studies also suggest that vocational learning in *pesantren* contexts tends to

promote a deeper sense of work as part of religious devotion and service, not merely as a means for economic survival. This spiritual perspective enhances student motivation, perseverance, and ethical awareness when performing technical tasks (Khan & Zaini, 2023). Furthermore, Islamic ethical principles such as amanah (trustworthiness) and istiqamah (consistency) are often taught through project-based activities, workshops, and even entrepreneurial simulations that reinforce real-world application (Rohim, 2021).

Compared to conventional vocational schools, *pesantren*-based institutions offer an environment where spiritual identity and professional development grow simultaneously. Employers reportedly value the moral qualities of graduates from these schools, especially their time discipline, cooperative behaviour, and trustworthiness (Hanafi & Mahmud, 2022). However, despite this conceptual strength, the actual implementation of religious-technical integration remains uneven. Many institutions rely on informal or incidental approaches rather than systematic curriculum planning (Sulaiman, 2022).

To fully realize the potential of this integration, intentional curriculum design and teacher preparation are needed—particularly models that directly connect moral values to skill-based outcomes in measurable ways (Ibrahim & Khalid, 2024). This would not only strengthen the distinctiveness of *pesantren*-based vocational education but also enhance its contribution to

national workforce development.

### **The Gap Between Normative Goals of Pesantren and Labor Market Demands**

While *pesantren*-based vocational schools offer a moral foundation that enriches students' character and discipline, several studies point to an evident disconnect between the normative goals of *pesantren* and the evolving demands of the labor market. The traditional vision of *pesantren* emphasizes spiritual maturity, piety, and service to the religious community. In contrast, the labor market values productivity, technical adaptability, digital literacy, and entrepreneurial initiative. This misalignment often results in vocational graduates who are ethically grounded but not fully equipped to compete in dynamic employment settings (Putri et al., 2020; Malik & Hafiz, 2023).

Many *pesantren* still prioritize religious instruction as the core mission of the institution. Vocational training, though increasingly present, is sometimes treated as supplementary rather than integrated. As a result, students often experience compartmentalized learning where technical subjects and religious values are not meaningfully linked (Zuhri et al., 2022). This fragmented approach limits the ability of *pesantren* to produce graduates who are both spiritually strong and economically competitive.

Moreover, employers increasingly expect vocational graduates to possess not only manual or technical skills but also digital competencies, communication fluency, and problem-solving abilities. Unfortunately, several studies highlight that *pesantren*-based SMKs frequently lack access to updated training equipment, modern curricula, or structured industry exposure (Putri et al.,

2020; Nurhadi et al., 2023). These limitations further widen the gap between institutional intent and external expectations.

The governance structure of *pesantren* adds another layer of complexity. Some *pesantren* operate under religious authorities, while others follow general education standards, leading to fragmented policy implementation and inconsistencies in quality assurance (Farid & Bashir, 2025). In such cases, the lack of inter-ministerial coordination between religious and vocational education authorities hampers the formulation of coherent and responsive learning models.

Despite these challenges, the review also notes that many *pesantren* leaders are aware of this gap and actively seek ways to bridge it. Some institutions have begun initiating partnerships with local industries or introducing entrepreneurship modules framed within Islamic economic principles (Darmawan & Yusuf, 2023). These innovations demonstrate a growing recognition that spiritual formation and career preparedness are not mutually exclusive, but must be aligned through intentional program design.

Addressing this gap requires a shift in mindset from viewing vocational education as a secular intrusion into *pesantren* life to embracing it as an extension of religious responsibility toward economic empowerment. Without such alignment, the risk remains that *pesantren*-based vocational schools will continue producing graduates with strong moral character but limited market access.

### **The Need for a Hybrid Policy Model: Spiritual-Based Employability**



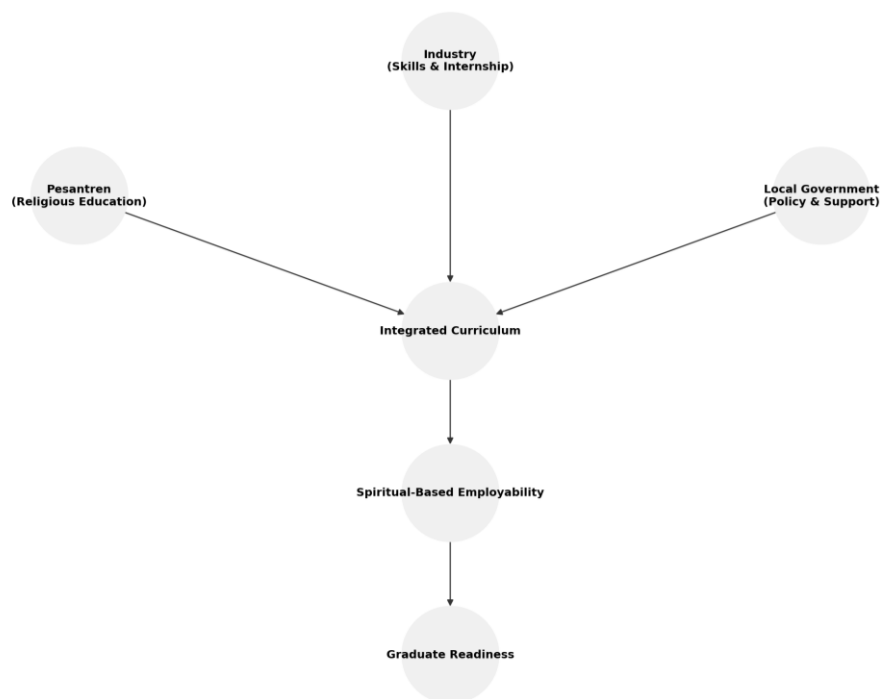


Figure 3. Hybrid Policy Model: Spiritual-Based Employability

The findings from this review suggest that *pesantren*-based vocational education holds strong potential to address both moral and economic dimensions of human development. However, realizing this dual function requires a more systematic and policy-driven approach. One promising direction is the formulation of a hybrid model that integrates employability standards with spiritual and ethical values what several scholars describe as spiritual-based employability (Ibrahim & Khalid, 2024; Yusuf & Ahmed, 2021).

Such a model would emphasize not only the mastery of technical skills but also the internalization of moral dispositions relevant to the world of work. These include traits such as integrity, diligence, humility, and social responsibility—characteristics already cultivated in *pesantren* life but often not formally embedded in vocational learning modules (Azizah & Ridwan, 2023). A hybrid model would position these attributes as explicit learning outcomes, rather than implicit cultural by-products.

In order to achieve this integration, policy support is essential. Several studies note the absence of curriculum guidelines or assessment tools that combine vocational

competence with character indicators (Sulaiman, 2022; Rohim, 2021). This gap results in varied implementation practices across institutions, depending on the vision of school leadership or the initiative of individual teachers. A national framework that formalizes the integration of spiritual values into vocational standards would provide consistency and scalability across *pesantren*-based SMKs.

Moreover, hybrid policy should address teacher training as a central priority. Instructors who are competent in technical fields often lack formal exposure to Islamic pedagogy, and vice versa. The hybrid model thus calls for a dual-competency framework in teacher education, enabling them to facilitate both practical skills and spiritual formation effectively (Hanafi & Mahmud, 2022).

A spiritual-based employability model would also align with the goals of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), as it promotes not only economic viability but also ethical awareness, social justice, and community well-being. In the context of Indonesia's plural labor market and ongoing moral concerns in youth employment, such a model offers strategic relevance and cultural

fit.

Ultimately, the hybrid model is not about balancing two separate systems but about integrating them into a single coherent educational philosophy one that prepares students to be technically skilled and morally grounded, capable of navigating modern work challenges without compromising their values.

### **The Potential for Stakeholder Collaboration: *Pesantren*, Industry, and Local Government**

The sustainable development of *pesantren*-based vocational education cannot rely solely on internal institutional efforts. Instead, it requires active collaboration among key stakeholders, particularly *pesantren* leadership, industry partners, and local government. This tripartite synergy is critical in building an educational ecosystem where spiritual values and vocational competencies are equally nurtured and aligned with real-world demands.

Several studies in the review emphasize that *pesantren* often struggle to access up-to-date equipment, industry-standard practices, and internship opportunities for their students (Putri et al., 2020; Nurhadi et al., 2023). Partnerships with local industries can provide vital exposure to workplace culture and expectations, while also allowing curriculum alignment with evolving labor needs. Some *pesantren* have successfully co-developed training modules or internship schemes with local businesses, which strengthens graduate employability (Fakih, 2024).

At the same time, the role of local government is equally strategic. Regional education offices and vocational training centers can offer regulatory support, program funding, teacher certification, and links to regional development agendas. However, many *pesantren*-based SMKs remain outside the formal radar of local government planning due to differences in administrative jurisdiction or lack of communication between religious and vocational sectors (Farid & Bashir, 2025).

Collaboration must also occur at the conceptual level. Industry players need to

appreciate the value of ethical and spiritually rooted employees, while *pesantren* leaders must recognize that economic self-sufficiency and religious commitment are not mutually exclusive goals. Policies that support collaborative curriculum design, dual apprenticeship systems, and shared infrastructure can serve as bridges between these often-separated domains (Darmawan & Yusuf, 2023; Salim & Zahra, 2023).

Finally, to sustain collaboration, trust and cultural understanding are essential. Industries must be willing to engage with *pesantren* not only as workforce suppliers but also as ethical partners. Likewise, *pesantren* must be open to adapting their systems to meet external expectations without compromising their religious identity. With structured coordination, this three-way collaboration offers a viable pathway for building spiritual-based vocational ecosystems that are locally grounded and globally relevant.

### **Conclusions**

This study concludes that *pesantren*-based vocational education presents a promising approach to preparing students for the workforce while preserving strong moral and religious foundations. The integration of Islamic values into vocational learning fosters the development of ethical work character, such as honesty, discipline, and social responsibility—traits increasingly valued in today's labor market. However, the review also identifies a persistent gap between the spiritual objectives of *pesantren* and the practical skills demanded by industries.

The findings emphasize the need for a structured hybrid model that explicitly connects spiritual values with employability competencies. Such a model should not rely solely on informal routines or incidental teaching, but be supported by curriculum design, assessment mechanisms, and teacher training programs that reflect both moral and technical dimensions. In this regard, spiritual-based employability emerges as a strategic framework for vocational institutions rooted in Islamic education.

Moreover, the review highlights the

importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration. *Pesantren* cannot work in isolation; partnerships with industry and local government are necessary to ensure curriculum relevance, access to modern facilities, and alignment with regional labor market needs. When managed effectively, these collaborations can enhance both institutional capacity and graduate outcomes.

In summary, *pesantren*-based vocational education can play a transformative role in producing graduates who are both ethically grounded and professionally capable. This dual outcome will only be achieved, however, if supported by integrated policy, contextualized pedagogy, and sustained stakeholder synergy.

### Suggestion and Recommendation

Based on the findings of this review, several practical and academic suggestions can be proposed. First, *pesantren*-based vocational schools should begin to formalize the integration of religious and vocational content through structured curriculum design. This includes the development of modules that explicitly link Islamic ethical values with employability skills such as teamwork, entrepreneurship, time management, and digital literacy. Teacher training programs also need to be reoriented to produce dual-competent educators capable of delivering both technical instruction and religious guidance effectively.

Second, stronger collaboration between *pesantren*, industry partners, and local governments should be institutionalized. This can take the form of joint curriculum development, internship programs, co-managed training centers, and public funding schemes. By creating shared ownership of vocational outcomes, these partnerships can improve graduate employability while respecting the unique identity of *pesantren* institutions.

From a research perspective, future studies should examine the long-term employability trajectories of graduates from *pesantren*-based vocational schools using mixed methods or longitudinal approaches.

There is also a need to explore how specific values such as *amanah*, *istiqamah*, or *ukhuwah* can be operationalized as learning outcomes and assessed systematically. Comparative studies between *pesantren* and non-religious vocational institutions may also help clarify the added value of moral-based education in preparing students for the workforce.

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