

## Strategy of Boarding School (*Pesantren*) Education in Dealing With the Covid-19 Pandemic

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### Abstract

*This study aims to analyze the strategies and roles of Islamic boarding schools in achieving educational programs amidst the threat of the spread of the Covid-19 epidemic. This research uses qualitative research with a case study research approach. The research was conducted at the Pesantren Border Aceh Tenggara as one of the pesantren assisted by the Aceh Province Islamic Boarding School Education Office. The results showed that the strategic management process carried out by the pesantren consisted of three interrelated processes, namely the formulation process, the implementation process (execution), and the strategic process (control). The last process is needed to provide input (feedback) for the next management process. The results of this study have implications for strategic management in pesantren management, namely: 1) the pesantren has managed to survive and strived to achieve the set academic program targets; 2) Islamic boarding schools as covid-19 prevention facilitators at the entrance to the provincial borders as a central place for health checks for immigrants who enter through the borders of Aceh province; 3) transformation of the learning system from traditional models to technology-based learning; and 4) the community is able to objectively assess educational institutions that are good in terms of management so as to allow a clear relationship between rewards and performance.*

**Keyword:** *Strategic management, educational institutions, boarding school, Covid-19 pandemic*

### Abstrak

*Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi dan peran pesantren dalam mencapai program pendidikan di tengah ancaman penyebaran pandemic covid-19. Penelitian ini menggunakan jenis penelitian kualitatif dengan pendekatan penelitian studi kasus. Penelitian dilakukan di pesantren perbatasan Aceh Tenggara sebagai salah satu pesantren binaan Dinas Pendidikan Pesantren Provinsi Aceh. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan proses*

*manajemen strategi yang dilakukan pesantren terdiri dari tiga proses yang saling terkait, yakni proses perumusan (formulasi), proses implementasi (eksekusi), dan proses (pengendalian) strategis. Proses yang terakhir diperlukan untuk memberikan masukan (feedback) bagi proses pengelolaan berikutnya. Hasil penelitian ini berimplikasi pada manajemen strategi pada pengelolaan pesantren yaitu: 1) pesantren berhasil survive dan berusaha mencapai target program akademik yang ditetapkan; 2) pesantren sebagai fasilitator pencegahan covid 19 di pintu masuk perbatasan provinsi sebagai tempat sentral pemeriksaan kesehatan bagi masyarakat pendatang yang masuk melalui perbatasan provinsi Aceh; 3) transformasi sistem pembelajaran dari model tradisional kepada pembelajaran berbasis teknologi; dan 4) masyarakat mampu menilai secara objektif lembaga pendidikan yang baik dalam hal pengelolaan sehingga memungkinkan hubungan yang jelas antara penghargaan dan kinerja.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Manajemen strategi, lembaga pendidikan, pesantren, pandemic Covid-19*

## **Introduction**

The Corona virus that has spread throughout the country is designated as a pandemic (www.kompas.com). The spread of the Covid-19 virus pandemic is right to focus the attention of policy makers to save people's lives (Wenzel et al., 2020). So that the official designation of Covid-19 as a dangerous infectious disease encourages all elements, both government, related agencies and aid organizations around the world to change efforts to contain lockdowns (*containment*) be mitigating (WHO, 2020; Wang et al., 2020). As a result, these policies have an impact on the economic, political and educational sides on a global scale (Wang et al., 2020).

Meanwhile, Indonesia falls into the category of a national disaster. The education aspect was affected by the Corona outbreak, so the Ministry of Education (Kemendikbud) by Nadiem Makarim as Minister decided that the rest of the learning process was carried out at home using the online method (Kemdikbud, 2020). Likewise, based on a Ministry of Religion circular letter, for the 2019/2020 even semester learning process that the learning process is carried out independently, this policy is a challenge for Islamic education institutions. Directly, as many as 45.3 million students are currently hampered by their school activities around the world and may be threatened with their education rights in the future.

On a micro scale, the Aceh Government through the Dayah Education Office (*pesantren*) has established several strategic policies related to the implementation of

education in pesantren (Fazzil, 2020). Islamic-based education service providers react differently, some deactivate learning activities by repatriating their students, and others continue the teaching and learning process while implementing a number of anticipatory steps (CNN Indonesia, 2020).

This research was conducted at one of the Darul Amin Islamic boarding schools owned by the Aceh government. Unlike other provinces, Aceh Province through the autonomy policy established the Pesantren Education Office which currently has 4 boarding schools under the guidance of the Aceh-Sumatra border area. These Islamic boarding schools are located in the districts of Aceh Tamiang, Aceh Tenggara, Aceh Singkil and the city of Subulussalam.

In general, the general public (education managers) have important misconceptions about Covid-19, correcting this misconception should be targeted in information campaigns organized by government agencies, provision of information by doctors to their patients, and media coverage (Geldsetzer, 2020).

Through the consideration of the safety of human life, Darul Amin's leadership set a policy to send students home and carry out the learning process from home. This policy can be called a strategic policy if the managerial decisions made involve top management. In this case the leadership involves senior teachers based on the direction of the head of the Dayah office as coaches at the provincial level. This study aims to determine the managerial activities of pesantren, especially the strategic policies of the leadership in maintaining the stability of the pesantren.

In the midst of the corona epidemic, every individual is active, creative and innovative for educational institutions to behave. Actualization is carried out through strategic management so as to encourage organizational community behavior in achieving organizational goals. This behavior includes an increased sense of belonging sense of responsibility, and sense of participation (Xiang et al., 2020). Teachers and employees collaboratively participate in accordance with their respective positions, authorities and responsibilities. Thus, the potential for excellence of an educational institution will get more increased.

In accordance with existing thus phenomena, this research was conducted in order to analyze and explore strategic management and the role of Islamic boarding schools in achieving educational programs amid the threat of the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, the challenges of educational institutions in the presence of a pandemic have forced Islamic education institutions to be able to survive in achieving a goal, namely; educating the next generation of the nation for a more advanced Indonesia.

Although there are quite a lot of research related to Covid-19, both in terms of impact and handling as research results Permana et al., (2020), Kahfi & Kasanova (2020), Prawoto et al., (2020), Prasetya & Fahmi (2020) and Ya'cub (2020), but all of Yadi's research is still focused on discussing literature studies. In addition, previous research has also focused on the structure of strategic management discussions in tertiary institutions and the role of pesantren leadership. There is one research study that is almost close to this research, namely the results of research by Kahfi & Kasanova et al., (2020), however this research is still focused on general management studies. Thus, the fundamental difference between this research issue and previous research is that this research discusses strategic management which is the main key to implementation in a boarding school in dealing with a pandemic.

### **Literature Review**

Strategic management is a managerial process that is not only at the planning stage, but also manages all strategic resources at the action and evaluation level (Bush & Coleman, 2003; Ackermann & Eden, 2011). Strategic management is a process for planning, implementing and controlling strategies for organizations to deal with their ever-changing external environment (Robbins & Judge, 2010). Strategic management seeks to ensure that the strategic plans that have been formulated can be implemented properly so that strategic objectives can be realized.

The implementation of strategic management in an educational organization has an impact on the achievement of organizational goals (Silva et al., 2019). Strategic management can also reduce uncertainty over the complexity of planning as an articulation of the management function (Bush & Coleman, 2003).

The use of strategic management in pesantren educational institutions or organizations provides many benefits. The strategic approach encourages pesantren to always be aware of changes that occur suddenly. Strategic Management also functions to unite the attitude that success is not just for top management (Darling et al., 2019), but it is a mutual success at the overall fabric of the organization and even for the communities it serves.

Based on the description of the advantages and benefits of Strategic management above, it is necessary to understand that implementation in an educational organization is not a guarantee of success, however success depends on human resources or the implementer not on Strategic Management as a means (Pasaribu, 2016). Human resources as executors must consist of professional personnel, have broad insight and most importantly have a high commitment to morals and/or ethics not to use strategic management for the benefit of themselves or groups.

## **Method**

This research uses qualitative research methods with descriptive analysis model. As a source of informants in this study were leaders, teachers and employees of the Aceh government's pesantren. Meanwhile, the determination of informants uses a model of *snowball exponential discriminative* or a chain of references (Lincoln & Guba, 2003). *Snowball* is selected by researchers in the process of determining informants, so that in taking referencing informants, where not all informants are selected by researchers, and researchers have needs according to research data in selecting the next informant to the level of data redundancy or data saturation.

The data collection method in this research is to use the method of observation, interviews and documentation, in other words the methodical procedure is also a data analysis strategy itself. (Cresswell, 2008; Bungin, 2018; Engkizar et al., 2018; Syafril et al., 2020). The data validity test was carried out by using the data triangulation method and theory (Moleong, 2011).

## **Findings and Discussion**

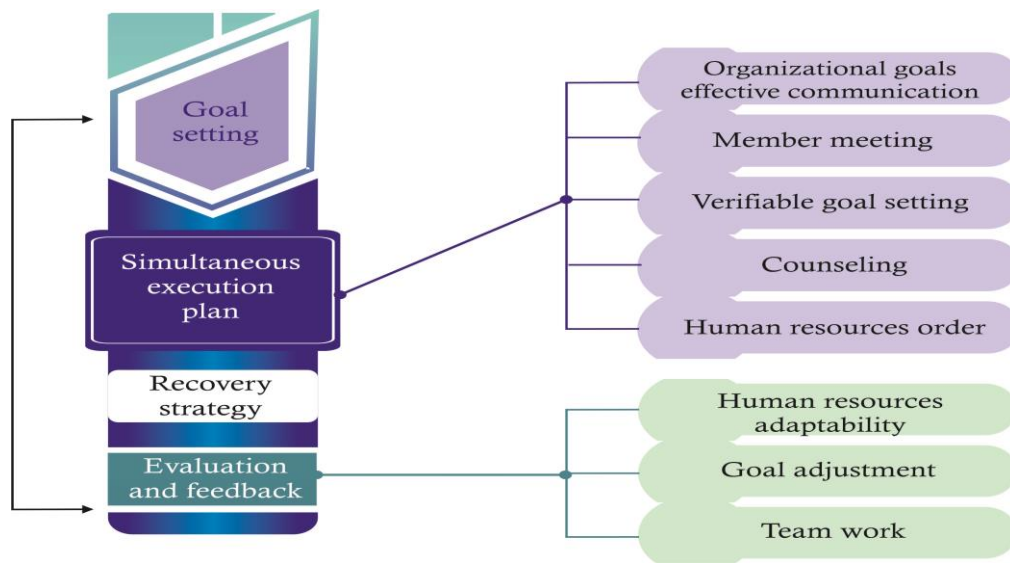
Apart from the pros and cons of society towards government policies, pesantren managers are affected. As a pesantren under the auspices of the government, Darul Amin follows the government's decision to deactivate the education and teaching process until an undetermined time limit.

Unlike the majority of other pesantren which have private status or belong to foundations, they are able to determine their own policies by not repatriating their students and continuing to carry out the educational process. The lockdown policy is an effort of the pesantren leadership with various considerations based on the conditions of the pesantren.

In practice, the components of the pesantren management strategy are carried out in accordance with the order of functions and management principles, namely planning, implementation and evaluation. Methodologically, the management strategy consists of three interrelated and continuous processes, namely the formulation process, the implementation process (execution), and the strategic process (control). The last process is needed to provide output (feedback) for the next management process. In strategic management, each of these stages is related to one another, nothing should be missed. The following is a brief explanation of the main stages in the strategic management process.

### **Formulation process (formulation)**

The Covid-19 epidemic is a threat to every organization because it cannot be predicted with certainty, but to deal with this uncertainty, a strategic plan needs to be made (Zhang et al., 2020). The planning and evaluation steps also apply to the pesantren's vision and mission components. This process does not apply to the pesantren's environmental components (stakeholders) because it is outside the pesantren's control. Schematically, the strategic management component can be seen in the figure 1.



**Fig 1. Educational Strategy Management Formulation Stage**

Redesigning the pesantren program due to this case based on the academic calendar. The series of annual activities is divided into several priority scales, the first is academic activities that have the potential to be implemented, namely: year-end exams and new student admissions, postponed to the end of the school year. Second, among the canceled activities such as final student judicium and comparative studies

The plans should be as verifiable as possible, and they are usually stated in writing. Then the leader talks to his subordinates about how to "attack" these goals. Finally, both parties reach an agreement on what resources are needed by the subordinates to achieve these objectives.

In the process of working towards the achievement of these goals, they organize occasional meetings to see how progress they have made. It is possible that it may be necessary to adjust resources, or modify objectives, in case the subordinate experiences problems. Of course, ideally there is no need for modifications.

At the end of the stipulated period (target of 6 months) the leadership, teachers and employees hold a meeting to evaluate the degree of achievement of the goal. So in this relationship the teachers and employees get rewarded as a function of achieving goals and after that the next new target is set. The most crucial factor

for the success of the program is the full support of the top management. Lower level management will usually pay less attention to a program. Another requirement is that the objectives set must be acceptable for both the manager and the implementer. According to David, goal achievement needs to be rewarded, high performance, without being given any reward, will not be repeated in the future (David, 2011).

In its purest form, strategy is a process, in which goal setting is carried out jointly between a leader and his subordinates. The idea behind this concept is shared goal setting, provided that future feedback will depend on how successful it is to achieve these objectives.

There are two basic assumptions that underlie the planning of the strategy, 1) the purpose of traversing the organization from top to bottom. Objectives start at the top of the organization (leadership) then they are transferred to each of the following levels up to the lowest structure; 2) through the cooperation process, teachers and employees are more "committed" in terms of achieving organizational goals. They will participate in setting their own goals, and they will be rewarded for their success in attaining them.

### **Implementation Process**

An important stage after the strategy formulation is completed is strategy implementation. This stage is a critical stage because many organizations are able to formulate good strategies but are unable to implement them properly. Implementation is the process by which plans are realized. Implementation requires different managerial skills from the strategy formulation process.

The implementation process in the context of strategic policy is execution. Programs that have been compiled must be executed immediately. In this case it is not just any execution but how the execution must be carried out effectively and efficiently (Mukhtar et al., 2020). The implementation of strategic management needs to identify and utilize the strengths or strengths and overcome the barriers or weaknesses of the organization (Levenson, 2015).



The learning process stops does not mean that the teacher stops moving, referring to the value of *"moving in fact in every movement is a blessing."* They continue to act in another role which essentially returns to achieving the vision of the pesantren. The teachers and employees believe that the pesantren is always protected by God, so there is no reason to be passive (Zarkasyi, 2016). *Santri* at home does not mean the pesantren has stopped operating. The assumption that contradicts the previous assumption states that a preference for leisure is considered more important for many individuals in the organization.

Some examples of assumptions regarding the nature of work that are formed in the pesantren culture are i) there is cohesiveness related to work, especially in a productive organizational framework; ii) teachers and employees appreciate their work and move on the calling; iii) most other people like their free time compared to their working time, but not at the pesantren they are used to full time work patterns, education and teaching at the pesantren are mobile for 24 hours so that it creates a dynamic and flexible work system; iv) in the current difficult situation, the role of administrative workers is increasingly crucial compared to technical workers. The effectiveness of reporting, monitoring, online learning, online payment depends on the administrative operator.

The policies made by the leaders of the pesantren are an anticipatory safeguard. The effort is for the good of the pesantren and its students. This situation is very effective because the leadership who immediately takes over command strongly the students and teachers just have to obey it. The assumptions put forward will clearly have a major influence on views of motivation and performance, as well as on managerial philosophy in general.

In the following table are the results of research related to the program implementation process carried out at the pesantren. The table coverage describes current conditions and predictions of future situations, so that the form of strategy implementation runs realistically.

**Table 1. Program Implementation Process Carried out at the Pesantren**

Actual Conditions		Prediction of Future Conditions -recovery-	
Purpose and content of decisions			
The problems include			
(1) Implementation of the PBM process;		(1)Innovations in learning systems, e-learning;	
(2) Limitations of sarpras;		(2)Procurement of supporting facilities;	
(3) Geographical conditions;		(3)Effectiveness of program socialization;	
(4) Islamic boarding school finance;		Annual safety fund priority;	
Techniques and Decision Processes			
(1) Following a letter of direction from the Aceh pesantren education office;		(1) Pressure on anticipation, rational analysis, techniques for dealing with new decisions.	
(2) Deliberation is limited to the teacher council;			
Organizational Structure and Design			
(1) Terminating of the PBM process;		(1) Continuous and simultaneous pressure on efficiency, productivity and innovation related to technology;	
(2) Making SOPs for implementing online learning;		(2)Emphasis on adaptive and flexible reactions;	
(3) Teachers and permanent employees at Islamic boarding schools;			
(4) Emphasizing on the best assignment in certain organizational structures such as security guards in confining guests;			
Information and Communication			
(1) The daily routine reports of students to the homeroom teacher		(1) A formal system for anticipatory information about the external environment;	
(2) Homeroom report to Teaching sections;		(2) an interactive two-way communication channel that connects leadership-teacher-employees;	
(3) Report to Teaching to leaders' sections;		(3) emphasizing on sustainability planning;	
(4) Leadership reports to the head of the Pesantren education office;		(4) Development of control system resources based on cost-benefit forecasts.	
(5) Information flow is one-way from bottom to top;			
Human, Leadership and Organization			
(1) Strategic policies adjust government decisions		(1) Leaders cover managerial competence;	
(2) Preparing the pesantren in admitting new students;		(2) Administrative planning as a form of reporting accountability;	
(3) Optimization of online reports for formal education levels, junior high schools (SMP) and senior high schools (SMA);		(3) Exploratory planning as a form of monitoring the learning process;	
		(4) Entrepreneur program as a form of Islamic boarding school financial stability protection;	

The implementation of the program after each party has reached an agreement to implement a number of objectives collectively. Such cooperation begins with communication about the agreed program (Kehinde & Osibanjo, 2013). Optimizing information in the form of directions as a first step to minimize impact.

Pesantren through leadership creates a balanced work value system between planning and action so as to form a conducive organizational climate (Susanto, 2018). Leaders with transformational leadership style characteristics are able to manage strategically and variatively. Four common themes emerged from interviews with personnel at all levels in pesantren regarding strategy implementation, namely i) increasing the value of teamwork, leading to task-oriented organizational flexibility; ii) entrepreneurial encouragement, or commitment to realizing something based on the five souls of the pesantren, namely the spirit of independence; iii) open communication, not preservation of confidentiality; and iv) shared belief that pesantren is a guarantee for their own future, even though it is vulnerable to being determined by winds of environmental change.

The manifestation of the value of struggle that exists in pesantren is due to the integration of Islamic-based education. Individuals who have lived in the pesantren for a long time are good people (willing to cooperate and be fair). It can be stated the following indicators i) teachers and employees are generally responsible and they exercise self-control when carrying out their work; ii) position status is a secondary factor to motivate; iii) money is not the only real motivator for most teachers and employees who are accustomed to moving due to summons.

The implementation process is able to run effectively by eliminating negative narratives, developing positive communication, conducting emergency research, collaborating for professional assistance, and hierarchical information-based teaching.

### **Strategic evaluation (control) process**

Strategy evaluation is a process aimed at ensuring whether the strategic actions taken by schools are in accordance with the formulation of strategies that

have been made or established. Evaluation is the last process needed to provide input (feedback) for the next management process. Analysis, currently, pesantren are very vulnerable to not having adequate economic resilience as an independent boarding school. If the pesantren stops operating, the source of income decreases while the operation is still on progress.

In connection with the technical monitoring of learning, the pesantren makes a reporting system for student learning activities starting from the guardian of *santri* reporting to the homeroom teacher as coordinator, then recapitulated by the teaching department to make daily reports to the leadership and the Pesantren Office. The learning process carried out through online has proven ineffective considering the area of origin of *santri* which is difficult to signal, does not have adequate equipment. The low quality of education makes it difficult for the general public to understand the extent of the dangers that threaten them. That is, the factor of awareness affects the policies made by the leadership.

Apart from the academic aspect, the influence is also felt on the economic aspects of the pesantren. Pesantren are currently experiencing financial difficulties because several sources of income have been reduced. In this case, the primary source of paid pesantren which is routine in nature (meal allowance) is reduced as is the pesantren business unit. The weakening of business unit income can be seen from the santri cooperative and canteen which rely on internal consumers-santri- have now stopped operating. Several business units such as agriculture and fisheries (bio flock) continue to operate but are less than optimal.

The ability of the pesantren to back up the economy of the affected teachers and employees was also carried out. The pesantren provided basic salaries to teachers and employees even though the learning process was eliminated; provide temporary income support for teachers who are married to affected families; prepare emergency food security so that they are ready to supply each other independently, in this case teachers are still facilitated to eat at the pesantren.

However, the economic rewards achieved from pesantren productivity are not the only basic motivation for organizational participation. The following

assumptions are related to the manifestation of sincerity in the management of pesantren as an example; i) all activities do not count as workloads that require payment; ii) as an organization that is thick with religious struggle values, individual goals run linearly with the pesantren's social objectives; iii) the pesantren program must run even though it is limited.

The effectiveness of strategic management involves all elements in the organization both in the formulation and implementation processes. This situation allows communication between elements which is the key to a successful strategy implementation (Grundy, 1994). Financially, strategic management encourages independence so that pesantren continue to have high performance.

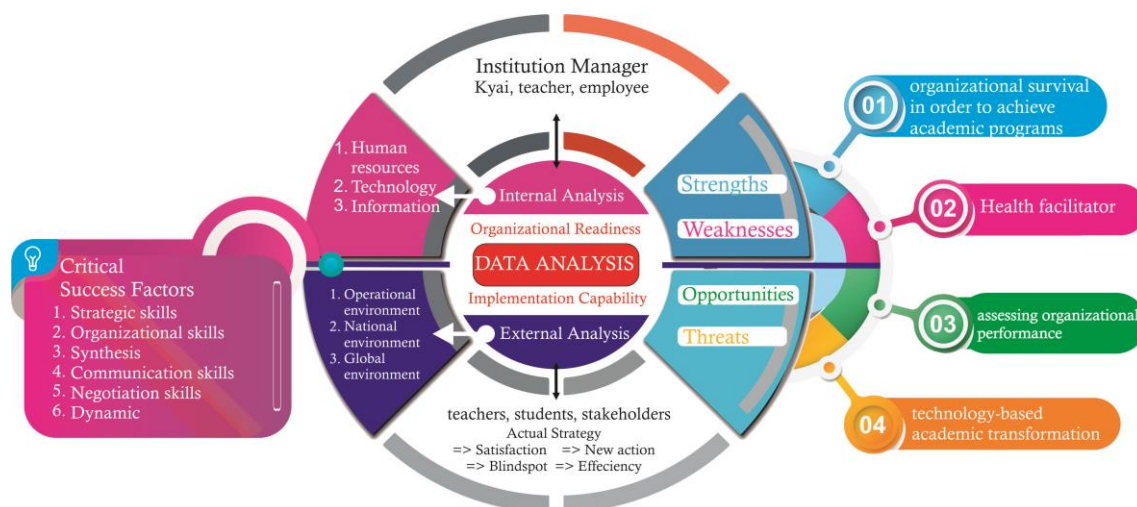
Strategic management provides financial and non-financial benefits such as increasing awareness of external threats (Grundy, 1993). The pesantren understands the potential for change due to this disaster, with the help of online learning media the pesantren makes improvements, in a concrete way a digital learning mechanism is built under the coordination of the homeroom teacher.

In addition, in order to minimize the emergence of resistance to changes that occur due to COVID, the pesantren program continues to run on a priority scale. This case makes the pesantren able to see change as an opportunity. While the majority of pesantren are adamant about implementing the traditional learning process (face-to-face), currently they are transforming using technology. As a result of this disaster also allows a clear link between rewards and performance, the assessment of society is increasingly objective in assessing competent institutions, established in the education and teaching system.

As part of strengthening efforts, the leadership continues to provide support to the pesantren community, starting from teachers, employees and students. In addition, it is necessary to strengthen values, namely, i) optimistic, believe in God; ii) find a way out and stop blaming the condition; iii) obeying policies established by the government.

In the control process includes internal and external dimensions. The internal dimension is the current condition of the pesantren, in the form of strengths,

weaknesses, opportunities and obstacles that must be precisely identified, including aspects of human resources, technology and information. For this reason, it is necessary to carry out self-evaluation activities, among others by using quantitative analysis supported by qualitative data. The external dimension includes analysis of the operational environment, national environment and global environment, which includes various aspects or conditions, including socio-political, social, economic, socio-cultural conditions in its development of the Covid-19 cases.



**Fig 2. Novelty of research**

As a construct of discussion, the following model is the result of strategic management research. Determining the essence of the program, its strategic plan, and its critical success factors, which are oriented towards factors that have the potential to cause high effectiveness. In the formulation stage, it is carried out through a SWOT analysis which is based on internal and external data collection. Internal data includes human resources, technology and information. External data includes conditions of the operational environment, national and global environments.

At the implementation stage, operational implementation is influenced by the critical success factors of strategic capabilities, organizational capabilities, synthesis abilities, communication skills, negotiation skills and dynamics. Pesantren by teachers and employees, strived to get their commitment to change and identify the team, what should be done and how to do it.

The process of identifying evaluation by measuring process performance, in this case every planning and policy priorities the health aspect. The education process continues online with gradual monitoring via online. The success of the program by creating a cohesive and formalized work system. In implementing the standardization of data collection, it was followed up with meetings with teachers and employees, in this case teachers and employees with strategic positions remained domiciled in the pesantren, making it easier for follow-up participation.

Determination of applicable performance gaps, and identify opportunities for improvement. In this case the pesantren is required to implement decisions that are contrary to the existing reality, such as limited access to information, signals, tools or resource competence. As an alternative, pesantren emphasizes the effectiveness of interpersonal communication to "re-target" if there are programs that are running less effectively. In this case the pesantren classified priority i) important and urgent; ii) important is not urgent; iii) not urgent; and iv) insignificant and non-urgent. Determination of priority programs based on the approval of deliberation results with the implementation plan and implementation schedule.

This form of monitoring and evaluation seeks to maximize the necessary resources, and carry out special actions to smooth the entire process. Carry out monitoring, and making reports to assess progress based on performance or performance targets. Pesantren can also calibrate the effectiveness of program implementation. These results are then integrated into a strategic policy which is implemented in the existing pesantren system.

Although the pesantren is in an unstable economic condition, the pesantren continues to operate even though it is limited, some teachers and employees continue to work even though they are in other roles. As an effort to prevent Covid-19, the aspect of cleanliness has become a priority program for pesantren, concrete efforts that have been made are mutual cooperation, environmental hygiene, application of social distancing, personal hygiene and maintaining spirituality (Buana, 2013; Canady, 2020).

Due to its strategic location in the border area, the Regency Government has made Islamic boarding schools a place to prevent the Covid-19 virus. The pesantren acts as a health facilitator for the examination of all communities entering Aceh province through the Southeast Aceh border. The strategy is able to run optimally because of the support of the work culture that is formed in the pesantren. Assumptions about the nature of work have something to do in pesantren with what is known as ethics of struggle and sincerity. The basic idea is that work that begins with sincere intentions will bring blessings to the perpetrator. The awareness factor plays a fundamental role in the implementation of the strategy and is the essence of the success of the programs established by the pesantren, in this case both santri and santri guardian are inconsistent in reporting their child's learning process to the pesantren.

### **Conclusion**

Policy is an effort to anticipate, for that, in the midst of the limited movement of pesantren due to the Covid-19 epidemic, Islamic boarding schools continue to operate even though on a limited scale. The strategic management process consists of three main stages, namely strategy formulation (formulation), strategy implementation (execution), and strategy evaluation and control, starting with environmental observation and ending with providing input (feedback). As a form of accountability, the leadership reports vertically to the Dayah Education Office. This accountability covers the learning progress of the students in their respective homes. So far the report has not been effective due to several reasons, students living in border areas have limited information facilities; parental awareness in the tutoring process from home; awareness of students who tend to take advantage of the situation for vacation.

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