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FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY MODELS IN ISLAMIC SCHOOLS: A STUDY AT SD PLUS INTAN AL-SALI BANDUNG

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ABSTRACTS

This study is motivated by the urgency to strengthen the financial sustainability of Islamic educational institutions amid the dynamic changes in funding environments and the growing operational demands of schools. The main issue examined is the dependence of SD Plus Intan Al-Sali Bandung on fluctuating funding sources, particularly community donations and foundation subsidies, which may create long-term financial instability. The purpose of this study is to formulate a relevant, measurable, and implementable financial sustainability model for Islamic-based schools by considering the characteristics of philanthropy, governance, and educational management. This research employs a qualitative approach using data collection techniques comprising in-depth interviews, direct observations, and document analysis, which are then examined through thematic analysis to identify funding patterns, financial governance effectiveness, and institutional risks. The findings reveal that the school's funding structure, which consists of parental contributions, BOS funds, RMP assistance, foundation subsidies, and community donations, has not yet ensured long-term stability due to insufficient income diversification and limited school autonomy in budget decision-making. The analysis also shows that the absence of productive business units and the continued reliance on manual financial administration constitute significant barriers to strengthening governance. This study concludes that a hybrid funding model integrating Islamic philanthropy with educational entrepreneurship is a strategic approach to enhancing the school's financial resilience. The study further recommends the need for comparative research across various Islamic educational institutions and an in-depth exploration of financial digitalization as a modern instrument for strengthening institutional independence.

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A. INTRODUCTION

Islamic education constitutes one of the essential foundations of Indonesia's national education system, as it plays a role not only in transmitting knowledge but also in shaping students' character and moral values. In recent years, the demand for improving the quality of Islamic education has continued to grow in line with social change and society's need for schools that excel not only academically but are also capable of nurturing students' integrity and ethical conduct. This situation has encouraged Islamic educational institutions to continually innovate, both in policy and quality-improvement programs, in order to produce graduates who are not only highly competitive but also embody Islamic values (Zuriati, Nasroh, and Sobry 2025).

However, one of the most significant and persistent challenges faced by Islamic schools is the issue of financial sustainability. This challenge arises because most Islamic schools operate within a complex funding ecosystem that heavily depends on student tuition fees, support from foundations, government assistance, and community donations all of which tend to fluctuate over time. Without an effective and adaptive financial sustainability model, Islamic schools risk encountering difficulties in fulfilling their operational needs, ranging from teacher salaries, maintenance of facilities and infrastructure, financial aid for underprivileged students, to curriculum development and learning innovations. Costs represent a crucial input for enhancing education quality and fulfilling the role of education in developing human resources (Ekowati, Sunandar, and Nyoman 2019).

In this context, the need for a more comprehensive understanding of financial sustainability models in Islamic schools has become increasingly urgent. Although various studies have examined funding approaches in Islamic education from the utilization of philanthropic sources such as alms (*infak*), voluntary charity (*sedekah*), and productive *waqf*, to entrepreneurial strategies through the establishment of institutional business units most of these studies focus on pesantren based institutions.

Pesantren play a strategic role not only as religious educational institutions but also as agents of social change promoting solidarity and justice within society (Pamungkas, Hamidah, and Purnomo 2024). However, these dynamic faces new challenges with the rising cost of education in many pesantren. Increasing costs restrict access for students from low income families (Pallais and Turner 2006; Hidayah 2021), particularly in pesantren that have adopted modernized learning systems and infrastructure development, which require higher operational expenses.

Meanwhile, research specifically examining Islamic elementary schools remains limited. The scarcity of academic attention toward this level of education highlights the urgent need to explore how Islamic elementary schools manage financial resources, maintain education quality, and respond to societal demands. This research gap underscores the importance of studying financial sustainability models in Islamic schools, including SD Plus Intan Al-Sali Bandung, as a scholarly and practical contribution to the development of Islamic educational institutions at the elementary level.

Additionally, financial dynamics at the elementary school level differ from those of secondary or higher education institutions due to simpler organizational structures yet a higher reliance on parental contributions and foundation support. The absence of standardized financial management frameworks further complicates these dynamics, leading many Islamic schools to develop situational funding patterns dependent on

each foundation's capacity. Therefore, in shaping quality human resources, effective and efficient budget management is essential to producing competent individuals capable of functioning optimally (Riinawati 2022).

Within this framework, this study becomes highly relevant. This research situates the inquiry within the real-world context of an Islamic elementary school to understand how financial sustainability models operate in practice. Based on interviews with the school management, SD Plus Intan Al-Sali Bandung faces financial dynamics that reflect the typical conditions of many other Islamic schools. Its funding sources are mixed and unstable, consisting of student fees, financial aid for underprivileged students, RMP funds, cross-subsidies from the foundation, and donations from benefactors.

However, donations are fluctuating and cannot serve as a long-term funding source, while reliance on foundation subsidies poses risks if the foundation experiences a decline in revenue. The school is also strongly committed to supporting students from low-income families, requiring special budget allocation for scholarship programs, which further increases financial needs. Although annual budget planning is conducted, the foundation retains strong authority in determining priorities and approving budgets, limiting the school's financial autonomy. Moreover, the school has not yet established business units capable of generating alternative income, although several business development ideas have been discussed.

These realities demonstrate the urgent need to map more systematic financial sustainability models so Islamic schools can reduce reliance on unstable funding sources. The literature highlights two major approaches often debated in the context of financial sustainability for Islamic educational institutions. The first is the Islamic philanthropy model, which emphasizes utilizing *zakat*, *infak*, *sedekah*, and productive *waqf* as long term funding sources. This approach assumes that the Muslim community possesses strong philanthropic potential which, when professionally managed, can support sustainable educational financing. Culturally, such philanthropic practices are rooted in long standing habits of providing assistance to friends, family, and neighbors in need (Kaulika 2023).

The second approach is the educational entrepreneurship model, which stresses the importance of schools developing business units or commercial services as sources of recurring income. In this model, financial independence is considered more realistic because schools are not dependent on donation fluctuations or foundation policies. These two approaches are often contrasted in the literature, leading to competing hypotheses regarding whether Islamic educational institutions achieve greater stability through maximizing philanthropy or developing independent business enterprises.

Although previous studies have explored foundation level entrepreneurship strategies for increasing education funding, these works remain largely limited to pesantren business units and have not adequately compared alternative financing models. Prior research tends to emphasize pesantren based business development as a source of revenue but insufficiently explores the effectiveness of other models such as productive *waqf*, public private partnerships, or school based social enterprises. This lack of comparative studies has prevented the emergence of a comprehensive understanding of which financing model is most suitable and effective across Islamic educational institutions with varying characteristics (Zaman 2022).

Research on Islamic elementary schools is still scarce, leaving a gap in empirical mapping of how financial management functions at the elementary level. There is also an absence of studies examining the relationship between foundation structures and school financing practices comprehensively. Moreover, hybrid approaches that integrate Islamic philanthropy with educational entrepreneurship remain understudied in the elementary school context, despite their potential as long-term solutions. Therefore, this research aims to fill these gaps by presenting a comprehensive overview of the financial dynamics at SD Plus Intan Al-Sali Bandung and evaluating financial sustainability models relevant to the school's context.

This study also presents several significant novelties compared with previous research. The first novelty lies in the use of primary data obtained through in-depth interviews with school management, generating information that is current, contextual, and reflective of actual conditions. The second novelty lies in the analytical approach that integrates Islamic philanthropic models with educational entrepreneurship models within a unified framework of financial sustainability. The third novelty is the proposed hybrid financial framework, which does not prioritize a single model but considers how various funding sources can be integrated according to the school's needs and capacity.

Therefore, this research aims to identify the financing models used at SD Plus Intan Al-Sali Bandung, analyze their challenges as well as strengths and weaknesses, and formulate the most relevant and implementable financial sustainability strategies for the school. Based on field observations and the literature, there is a tendency indicating that no single model can fully guarantee the financial sustainability of Islamic schools. Instead, financial sustainability requires a combination of strategies that encompass governance.

B. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design, as its focus is to gain an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of financial sustainability at SD Plus Intan Al-Sali Bandung. The qualitative approach is chosen to explore the underlying meanings of the phenomenon, observe directly the school's financial management processes, and understand how various resources, foundation policies, and operational needs interact with one another. The qualitative research approach is used to comprehend a phenomenon within its natural context, positioning the researcher as the key instrument (Abdussamad 2021). This research is directed toward examining real life contexts comprehensively; therefore, the data obtained are not merely numerical but also include narratives, perspectives, and experiences that accompany financial decision-making processes within the school. Thus, the purpose of this research is not to produce statistical generalizations, but rather analytical generalizations based on an in depth understanding of the educational unit under study.

The research site was determined to be SD Plus Intan Al-Sali Bandung because the school possesses characteristics that are highly relevant to issues of financial sustainability. The school relies on various funding sources such as student fees, assistance for underprivileged students, subsidies from the foundation, as well as fluctuating donor support. In addition, the school has not yet established a business unit capable of generating long term alternative income, while its commitment to supporting students from low-income families require specific budget allocations.

These conditions make SD Plus Intan Al-Sali Bandung an important case to be examined. The informants include the school principal, treasurer, foundation representatives, teachers, and administrative staff, as they are directly involved in managerial processes and possess a comprehensive understanding of the school's financial dynamics, both administratively and practically.

The data collection techniques in this research refer to the framework proposed by Sugiyono, who states that data can be obtained through several methods, namely observation, interviews, documentation, and the application of triangulation (Sugiyono 2016). Semi structured interviews were conducted with the school principal, treasurer, foundation representatives, and several teachers to gather information on funding sources, challenges in financial sustainability, budgeting processes, relationships with the foundation, and development strategies planned or implemented by the school. Direct observation was carried out to understand the school environment, including financial administrative mechanisms, facility conditions, and activities related to managing assistance programs or school operations. Documentation techniques were used to obtain factual data such as the school budget plan (RAPBS), financial reports, data on scholarship recipients, meeting minutes, and other relevant documents. Meanwhile, in the process of data collection, triangulation is viewed as an approach that integrates various techniques and utilizes multiple relevant data sources.

The data obtained derives from two categories: primary data and secondary data. Primary data include information collected directly through interviews, observations, and interactions with informants, whereas secondary data represent information that is not obtained directly by the researcher but through other parties who have previously gathered and recorded it (Maisaroh 2019). Both data sources complement each other and provide a comprehensive picture of the school's financial realities.

Data analysis was conducted interactively following the Miles and Huberman model, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Zulfirman 2022). In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected essential information, categorized the data based on themes, and formulated analytical codes related to financing models, financial challenges, the role of the foundation, and sustainability strategies. In the data display stage, information was organized in the form of narratives, tables, or funding flow diagrams to help identify patterns and relationships among categories. Conclusion drawing was conducted gradually and remained tentative until verified through processes such as data triangulation and member checking to ensure the validity of the findings.

The credibility of the data was strengthened through several techniques, namely source triangulation, technique triangulation, prolonged engagement, and member checking. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing information obtained from different informants, while technique triangulation involved cross-checking data from interviews, observations, and documentation. Prolonged engagement was conducted by returning to the field to confirm the alignment between the data and actual conditions, and member checking was implemented by asking informants to review the findings to ensure they accurately reflected their experiences.

Although this study is qualitative in nature, certain parts of the analysis may involve scientific formulations such as calculating the percentage distribution of income and expenditures, identifying trends in annual financial data, or examining simple relationships between student numbers and funding stability. These formulations are

used solely to strengthen the understanding of the school's financial dynamics and do not alter the study's qualitative case study orientation.

Overall, the research procedures began with a preliminary study, obtaining research permits, collecting data, analyzing data, preparing the research report, and validating the findings. All stages were carried out systematically to produce a comprehensive description of the financial sustainability model implemented at SD Plus Intan Al-Sali Bandung. With such a methodological design, this study is expected to contribute both scientifically and practically to the development of financial management strategies in Islamic education, particularly at the elementary school level.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Financial Management Strategies Implemented at SD Plus Intan Al-Sali

SD Plus Intan Al-Sali Bandung adopts a diversified financial management strategy to ensure institutional sustainability while maintaining accessibility for students from varied socio-economic backgrounds. As a non-elite Islamic private school, the institution intentionally avoids reliance on a single funding source and instead integrates parental contributions, government assistance, foundation-based support, and community trust into its financial structure.

The respondent explained that the heterogeneity of parents' economic capacity makes a uniform tuition system impractical, prompting the school to implement a flexible fee structure. Tuition (SPP) and development fees (DSP) vary across student cohorts based on the year of enrollment, allowing gradual financial adjustment without imposing abrupt burdens on families. This approach reflects Islamic educational finance principles emphasizing fairness (*'adl*) and social inclusion (Mulyani et al. 2025).

Public funding constitutes an important supplementary source through the School Operational Assistance (BOS) program. Although BOS utilization is regulated by strict expenditure rules, the respondent noted that compliance with these regulations enhances transparency and accountability in school financial governance. Previous studies from (Saely, Ulupui, and Pahala 2024; Rafsanjani, Mukti, and Haprilwanti 2025) suggest that regulated public funding can strengthen financial discipline in private educational institutions when integrated with internal controls.

In addition, the school benefits from the Regional Education Assistance Program (RMP), which supports students from low-income households. However, the number of beneficiaries has declined due to stricter eligibility criteria based on Integrated Social Welfare Data (DTKS). To mitigate this reduction, the foundation provides internal scholarships to ensure that economically vulnerable students can continue their education. This internal compensation mechanism aligns with Islamic philanthropic values, particularly the institutional responsibility to protect access to education (Dewi and Zaenurrosyid 2023).

A central pillar of financial sustainability at SD Plus Intan Al-Sali is cross-subsidization within the foundation network. The respondent emphasized that surplus funds from financially stronger units are redistributed to support schools experiencing short-term constraints, particularly for teacher salary payments. This mechanism proved effective during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the school was able to maintain regular salary disbursement despite broader economic disruption. Such institutional solidarity has been identified in the literature from (Al-Mursal, Karim, and Azhari 2025;

Jinan, Syapiuddin, and Nasri 2024) as a key resilience factor in faith-based education systems.

Financial planning is conducted through the Annual School Budget Plan (RKAS), formulated through internal deliberations involving teachers and staff and finalized in coordination with foundation leadership. Importantly, the parents' committee is involved in approving budget plans related to additional parental contributions. This participatory approach strengthens transparency and trust between the school and its stakeholders. Stakeholder engagement in budgeting has been widely recognized as a determinant of sustainable school financial management (Rohayanah and Suryaman 2025; Ginanjar and Purwanto 2022).

Overall, the financial management strategies at SD Plus Intan Al-Sali reflect a hybrid sustainability model that integrates market-based funding, public subsidies, and Islamic institutional solidarity. This combination enhances financial resilience while preserving the school's inclusive educational mission.

SWOT Analysis of Financial Management at SD Plus Intan Al-Sali

The SWOT analysis provides a structured assessment of internal and external factors influencing the financial sustainability of SD Plus Intan Al-Sali. The analysis draws on empirical interview data and highlights key strategic conditions shaping the school's financial management.

Internally, the school's primary strength lies in its diversified revenue structure. The integration of parental fees, government assistance, foundation support, and community donations reduces dependence on any single funding source and enhances financial stability. Another significant strength is the cross-subsidization mechanism within the foundation network, which ensures continuity of operations and salary payments during periods of financial stress. In addition, the foundation's leadership, dominated by individuals with business and financial backgrounds, contributes to effective financial decision-making and resource allocation. Financial competence at the governance level has been identified as a critical factor in sustainable educational management (Nurdin and Munastiwi 2023).

Despite these strengths, several internal weaknesses remain. Financial administration is still partially manual, particularly in tuition collection and salary payments, which limits efficiency and increases administrative risk. Furthermore, reliance on cross-subsidization, while beneficial in the short term, creates interdependence among foundation units and may constrain long-term financial autonomy if not accompanied by clear independence strategies.

Externally, SD Plus Intan Al-Sali benefits from strong community trust and philanthropic support rooted in the legacy of the foundation's founder. Donors frequently provide support for infrastructure development without formal solicitation, reflecting the role of trust-based philanthropy and waqf in Islamic education financing (Sihaloho 2024; Zakia, Sabrina, and Syahputra 2024). Continued access to public funding through BOS and regional assistance programs also represents an important opportunity to supplement school income.

However, the school faces external threats related to policy uncertainty and economic volatility. Changes in eligibility criteria for social assistance programs, particularly RMP, have reduced funding predictability and pose challenges for schools serving disadvantaged students. In addition, broader economic shocks may weaken parental payment capacity, potentially affecting tuition-based revenue streams. Such

vulnerabilities have been widely documented in studies of private school sustainability (Mulyani et al. 2025).

A summary of the SWOT analysis is presented in Figure 1.

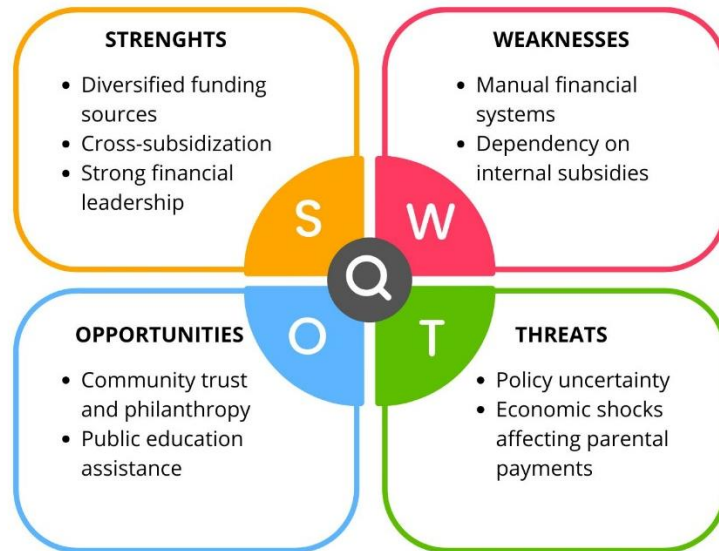


Figure 1. SWOT Analysis of Financial Management at SD Plus Intan Al-Sali

Taken together, the findings from the SWOT analysis indicate that the financial sustainability of SD Plus Intan Al-Sali is best understood through a hybrid financial sustainability model are illustrated in Figure 2. This model integrates three interrelated components: (1) diversified operational funding derived from parental contributions and government assistance, (2) institutional solidarity through foundation-based cross-subsidization, and (3) trust-based Islamic philanthropy supporting infrastructure and social access. Rather than relying on a single dominant funding mechanism, the model emphasizes adaptive integration among formal, philanthropic, and organizational resources. The interaction among these components allows the school to balance financial stability, social inclusivity, and ethical accountability. Importantly, the model also reveals structural vulnerabilities, particularly related to administrative inefficiencies and policy uncertainty, which necessitate short-term strategic interventions.

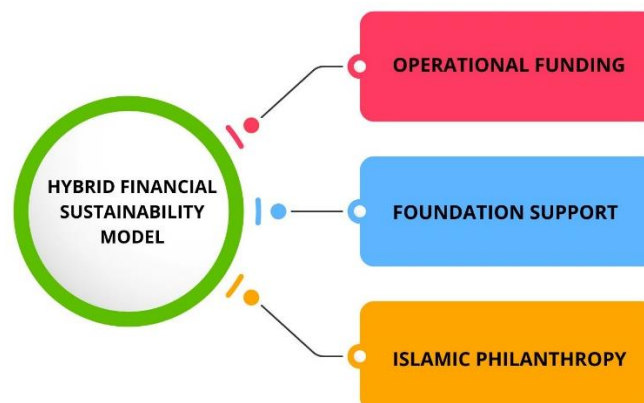


Figure 2. Hybrid Financial Sustainability Model

Short-Term Financial Development Plan Based on SWOT Findings

Based on the SWOT analysis, SD Plus Intan Al-Sali has formulated several short-term financial development plans aimed at strengthening efficiency, stability, and

institutional resilience. These plans are primarily designed to address identified internal weaknesses while leveraging existing strengths and external opportunities.

One key short-term priority is the gradual transition toward a more structured and digitalized financial management system. The respondent acknowledged that the current reliance on partially manual payment and salary disbursement systems limit administrative efficiency and transparency. In response, the school has initiated cooperation with Islamic banking institutions to facilitate non-cash salary payments and improve the traceability of financial transactions. Previous studies suggest that digital financial systems enhance accountability and reduce operational risks in school management, particularly in private educational institutions (Rusmiyati et al. 2025; Saputra et al. 2025).

Another important short-term plan focuses on strengthening cash flow management through improved tuition collection mechanisms. The school applies a financial trigger strategy, whereby student participation in certain academic activities, such as mid-semester assessments, is linked to tuition compliance. The respondent explained that this mechanism encourages timely payments while avoiding coercive enforcement. This approach reflects a balance between financial discipline and ethical sensitivity, which is particularly relevant in Islamic educational contexts emphasizing mutual responsibility and fairness (Setiawan 2024; Jinan, Syapiuddin, and Nasri 2024).

In addition, SD Plus Intan Al-Sali plans to reduce overdependence on cross-subsidization by consolidating its internal financial planning. Following the completion of major infrastructure development projects, the foundation intends to shift its focus toward operational consolidation and branding of financial management practices. According to the respondents, this phase aims to minimize the deficit covering cycle among foundation units and strengthen each school's operational self-sufficiency. Such consolidation is consistent with recommendations in the literature that emphasize the importance of financial autonomy for long-term sustainability in multi-unit educational organizations (Hong 2023; Amirudin, Mujahidin, and Andriana 2025).

Finally, short-term development plans also include maintaining strong relationships with parents and the broader community through transparent communication of financial plans. The continued use of annual budgeting schedules and early notification of school activities allows parents to prepare financially and reinforces trust between stakeholders. Community trust has been widely recognized as a strategic asset in Islamic school financing, particularly when philanthropic support complements formal revenue streams (Junita, Dasuki, and Al-Haj 2023). Overall, these short-term financial development plans demonstrate the school's proactive response to internal and external challenges, positioning SD Plus Intan Al-Sali to strengthen financial sustainability while preserving its inclusive educational mission.

Strategic Recommendations for Strengthening Financial Sustainability

Drawing on the SWOT findings and short-term development plans, several strategic recommendations are proposed to strengthen the financial sustainability of SD Plus Intan Al-Sali. These recommendations prioritize practicality, ethical considerations, and alignment with Islamic educational values while remaining responsive to policy and economic uncertainty.

First, the school should institutionalize digital financial governance as a core operational standard. The planned transition to bank based salary payments and improved tuition billing systems should be complemented by simple digital reporting

dashboards accessible to school leadership and the foundation. Such systems would enhance transparency, reduce administrative risk, and support timely decision-making. Evidence from the interview indicates that manual processes remain a constraint. Therefore, incremental digitalization represents a low-risk, high-impact intervention. Prior research confirms that digital financial management improves accountability and efficiency in private schools (Usman, Syaharuddin, and Maujud 2024; Hidayah, Fauzi, and Mustofa 2025; Raharjo et al. 2024).

Second, the school is advised to formalize a contingency reserve policy to reduce reliance on ad hoc cross-subsidization. While cross subsidy has proven effective particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic long-term sustainability would benefit from the establishment of modest reserve funds at the unit level. This approach would preserve the strengths of institutional solidarity while enhancing financial autonomy, as recommended in studies of multi-unit educational governance (White 2025).

Third, philanthropic and waqf-based contributions should be strategically integrated into a medium-term financing framework. Interview findings highlight strong community trust and voluntary donor support, especially for infrastructure development. Formalizing these contributions through transparent earmarking such as maintenance funds or scholarship endowments could transform episodic donations into more predictable support. Islamic education literature emphasizes that structured waqf management can significantly enhance sustainability when aligned with institutional accountability (Siregar 2024; Fatmawati et al. 2024; Usman and Ab Rahman 2022).

Finally, continued stakeholder engagement should remain central to financial strategy. The involvement of parents' committees in budget approval and early communication of activity schedules has strengthened trust and payment compliance. Sustaining and refining these participatory practices will be critical in mitigating external threats related to economic volatility and policy changes affecting social assistance programs (Tilbury and Wortman 2008).

In sum, these recommendations emphasize consolidation rather than expansion: improving systems, formalizing reserves, structuring philanthropy, and deepening stakeholder trust. Together, they offer a coherent pathway for strengthening the financial sustainability of SD Plus Intan Al-Sali while safeguarding its inclusive mission as an Islamic educational institution.

D. CONCLUSION

This study examined financial sustainability practices at SD Plus Intan Al-Sali Bandung and contributes to the growing body of literature on Islamic education finance at the elementary school level. The findings examined financial sustainability practices at SD Plus Intan Al-Sali Bandung and contributes to the growing body of literature on Islamic education finance at the elementary school level.

Further analysis shows that financial governance has not been fully effective, as manual administrative processes still exist and the school has yet to establish any productive business units that could serve as alternative funding sources. Therefore, the most relevant financial sustainability model for the school is a hybrid approach that integrates the potential of Islamic philanthropy with educational entrepreneurship

strategies. This approach is considered capable of strengthening revenue diversification and reducing the risks associated with relying on a single source of funding.

In line with these findings, this study recommends several strategic measures, including strengthening financial digitalization, establishing a reserve fund as a risk-mitigation mechanism, and utilizing structured philanthropic instruments such as productive waqf for long-term financing. Future research is encouraged to conduct cross-institutional comparisons among Islamic educational institutions to more comprehensively assess the effectiveness of the hybrid model, and to further explore the implementation of financial digitalization as an emerging strategy for supporting schools' financial independence.

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