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Strategic Partnership Management for Empowering Pesantren-Based Vocational Training Centers in Indonesia: A Systematic Literature Review

Lutfi Ariefianto [1], Ali Imron[2], Sri Wahyuni[2], Teguh Triwiyanto[2]

[1] Universitas Jember, Indonesia; lutfipls.fkip@unej.ac.id
[2] Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia; ali.imron.fip@um.ac.id, sri.wahyuni.fip@um.ac.id, teguh.triwiyanto.fip@um.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Community Vocational Training Centers (CVTCs) within pesantren play a strategic role in improving human resource capacity. Yet they face challenges related to limited resources, evolving labour market demands, and the need to remain aligned with Islamic boarding school values. This study aims to analyse strategic partnership management as a mechanism to strengthen institutional empowerment and enhance the effectiveness of vocational training in pesantren contexts. Using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) guided by PRISMA protocols, 54 peer-reviewed articles published between 2013 and 2024 were identified, screened, and synthesised. The review integrates empirical evidence, policy analyses, and conceptual studies related to partnership governance in vocational education. The findings reveal three major insights. First, well-managed partnerships, particularly with industry, government, academia, NGOs, and community actors, significantly enhance curriculum relevance, resource mobilisation, and graduate employability. Second, partnership governance mechanisms such as open communication, shared decision-making, and long-term commitment are essential for sustaining collaboration. Third, empowerment indicators, including financial independence, curriculum adaptability, teaching quality, and community legitimacy, are strongly shaped by the strength of partnership networks. Theoretically, the study demonstrates how Resource Dependence Theory and Institutional Theory jointly explain the centrality of partnerships in reducing external constraints and building institutional legitimacy. Practically, the findings highlight the need for supportive policies, stronger managerial capacity, and adopting a Quadruple Helix approach that integrates government, industry, pesantren, and community stakeholders.

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Corresponding Author: Lutfi Ariefianto
Universitas Jember, Indonesia; Lutfipls.fkip@unej.ac.id

INTRODUCTION

Pesantren represent a component within the country's educational framework, distinguished by its inherent Islamic attributes (Arif et al., 2025; Hidayati et al., 2025; Kadir et al., 2026; Miftahuddin et al., 2024; Muzayana, 2024). Community Vocational Training Centers at Pesantren (CVTCs at pesantren) play a very important role in modern society, especially in improving the quality of human resources (Z. Arifin et al., 2023; Rosdiana et al., 2024a, 2024b; Yusdiana et al., 2026). In addition, the use of digital technology in all activities related to the advancement of education is very important (Ulfatin, N., Putra, A. B. N. R., Heong, Y. M., Zahro, A., & Rahmawati, 2022). They provide specialised training that helps individuals develop industry-relevant skills (Hina Hermyn B., Magdalena Ngongo, 2022). This is crucial because the world of work is constantly evolving, and the demand for new skill sets continues to emerge. Through CVTCs at pesantren, learners obtain practical, focused education that meets labour market needs. The ability of CVTCs to bridge the gap between formal education and industry requirements is also significant (Lestari et al., 2022). Many formal education graduates are unprepared for work due to limited practical experience, and CVTCs help fill this gap by offering hands-on training and maintaining direct connections with companies. This positional advantage becomes more critical in Indonesia's diverse geographical landscape, where skill development opportunities vary significantly across regions.

The distribution of Vocational Training Institutions (VTIs) across 34 provinces in Indonesia, based on the 2023 Binalavotas Database of the Ministry of Labour, indicates a total of 5,390 institutions, reflecting the government's commitment to vocational education and workforce development. West Java (965 VTIs), Central Java (957 VTIs), and East Java (946 VTIs) dominate the distribution, accounting for more than half of the national total. This concentration aligns with population size, industrial density, and educational infrastructure. In contrast, eastern provinces such as West Papua (8 VTIs), North Maluku (16 VTIs), and Papua (17 VTIs) have the lowest number of institutions, illustrating regional disparities in vocational education access. Several non-Java provinces such as Lampung (221 VTIs), South Sulawesi (220 VTIs), and Banten (204 VTIs) show positive growth. However, regions like Central Kalimantan (31 VTIs) and Gorontalo (15 VTIs) require targeted capacity-building programs. Overall, the distribution pattern reveals Indonesia's uneven vocational training landscape. These disparities highlight the strategic importance of strengthening partnership-based empowerment models for CVTCs at pesantren, especially those operating in underserved regions. (Yulianti & Fitriansyah, 2024).

The role of partnerships in strengthening CVTC empowerment and independence is significant (Sopanah et al., 2023). Partnerships with companies, governments, and non-profit organizations allow institutions to access broader resources such as funding, technology, and expertise (Rathi et al., 2014). Companies may donate equipment or provide internship placements, enriching trainees' learning experiences and reducing institutional operational costs. Government support through policies and grants also enhances instructor development. Improved instructor professionalism directly affects training quality and institutional improvement programs (Wiyono & Imron, 2015). Instructor quality is crucial, as the intensity of performance-based learning correlates strongly with trainees' outcomes (Wiyono et al., 2021). Partnerships also strengthen institutional reputation through collaborations with reputable industry actors. Despite these advantages, partnership practices remain unevenly developed, and existing studies rarely address how such partnerships function strategically to empower CVTCs in sustainable ways.

Partnership management, however, faces several challenges. Aligning partner goals and missions remains a major concern (Triwahyudi, 2020). Divergent objectives between CVTCs and companies may lead to conflict if not managed effectively. Self-evaluation supports instructor motivation and institutional improvement (Daulay et al., 2024; Hafiiz & Abdurahman, 2026; Maqfirah et al., 2026; Sitepu et al., 2025; Wiyono, 2018). Differences in work culture and values between education and industry sectors can hinder collaboration. Therefore, effective and flexible partnership management strategies are essential. Teaching demonstration techniques correlate strongly with

instructor professionalism (Wiyono & Triwiyanto, 2018), and several supervision techniques—classroom action research, instructor working group meetings, structured training, and collegial seminars—significantly influence instructor competence (Amalia & Dzofir, 2026; S. Arifin et al., 2023; Husnaeni & Burga, 2024; Wiyono, B. B., Kusmintardjo, S., & Sucipto, 2017; Yulianto, 2024). These findings suggest that partnership success requires not only resource integration but also organizational alignment, instructional capacity-building, and strategically managed collaboration mechanisms.

However, despite extensive insights into partnership practices, existing research predominantly remains descriptive and fragmented. There is still no comprehensive analysis of how partnerships are strategically managed to empower CVTCs at pesantren, which possess unique cultural, religious, and organizational characteristics distinct from general vocational institutions. This creates a clear research gap that requires systematic synthesis to map current knowledge, classify partnership strategies, and identify enabling or inhibiting conditions. A systematic literature review (SLR) is therefore necessary to consolidate evidence and formulate a strategic partnership framework tailored to pesantren-based CVTCs

Trends in partnership management show increasing multi-sectoral collaboration (Dewi et al., 2023). The triple helix model—linking government, academia, and industry—has become prominent, leveraging each sector's strengths. Government contributes regulatory frameworks, industry aligns training with labour market needs, and academia provides theoretical and research foundations. Equal access to education services significantly improves learning quality (Romlah et al., 2023). Preparing workers for the 21st century requires integrating digital competencies such as communication, collaboration, and technological adaptability ('Alam et al., 2024), while fostering continuous learning, instructor development, and innovation (Arjanto P, I. Bafadal, A. Atmoko, 2023). These global trends underline the strategic relevance of multi-sector partnerships for strengthening vocational training, yet their implications for pesantren-based CVTCs remain underexplored.

Technological developments also expand partnership opportunities. Digital platforms and e-learning enhance training accessibility and flexibility (Callan et al., 2015; Hofmeister & Pilz, 2020). Remote collaboration facilitates international knowledge exchange. However, these innovations require institutions to maintain competent staff and adequate infrastructure. Government policies play an important role in shaping partnership ecosystems, yet bureaucratic barriers may hinder implementation (Kaufmann et al., 2018). Thus, CVTCs must communicate with policymakers and engage in advocacy to sustain partnerships (Sari et al., 2021). Effective partnership management is essential for enhancing institutional independence and training relevance, ultimately contributing to socio-economic development (Rinawati & Suriansyah, 2021); (Paul Dana, 2001). Yet, how these technological and policy trends intersect with the unique governance, culture, and educational mission of pesantren-based CVTCs is still not well understood.

Despite these developments, the existing body of research remains fragmented and predominantly descriptive, offering limited analytical insight into how partnerships are strategically designed, governed, and sustained within vocational training ecosystems—particularly those embedded in pesantren, which possess distinctive cultural, religious, and organizational characteristics. Current studies have not yet synthesized the diverse partnership models, mapped their contributions to institutional empowerment, nor identified the contextual challenges and enabling conditions that shape their effectiveness. This lack of integrative understanding underscores the need for a systematic literature review (SLR) capable of consolidating existing evidence and establishing a conceptual foundation for strategic partnership management in pesantren-based CVTCs. To address this gap, the present study is guided by the following research questions: (1) What strategic partnership models have been implemented in vocational training institutions, and which components or mechanisms are most emphasized in the literature? (2) How do partnerships contribute to the empowerment, independence, and organizational development of CVTCs, particularly those operating within pesantren contexts? (3) What challenges and enabling factors influence the effectiveness of partnership management in CVTCs, and how do these factors differ in pesantren-based vocational ecosystems? (4) What conceptual framework can be developed from existing evidence to guide strategic

partnership management for pesantren-based CVTCs in Indonesia?

METHODS

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to synthesize and critically assess the existing body of knowledge on strategic partnership management in empowering Community Vocational Training Centers (CVTCs) at pesantren in Indonesia. The SLR method was selected because it provides a comprehensive, transparent, and replicable process for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing relevant studies while minimizing bias and enhancing validity (Kitchenham & Charters, 2007; Snyder, 2019). This approach was also chosen to address the fragmented nature of previous findings and to construct an integrated understanding of partnership strategies within vocational training institutions. All review procedures were aligned with the research questions formulated in the introduction to ensure methodological coherence.

The review process followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocol, consisting of four main stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. Figure 1 presents the PRISMA flow diagram describing the sequential filtering of the reviewed literature.

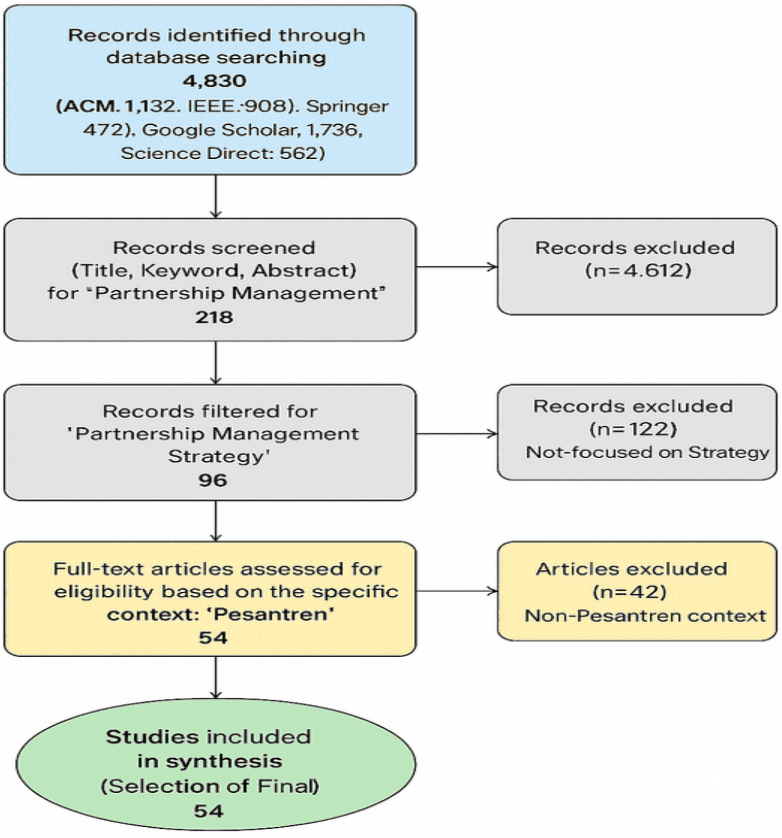


Figure. 1 The PRISMA Flow Diagram

Identification

An extensive search was conducted across five reputable databases—ACM Digital Library (1,132 records), IEEE Xplore (908), SpringerLink (472), Google Scholar (1,736), and ScienceDirect (562)—resulting in **4,830 total records**. Boolean operators and keyword combinations such as *"partnership management," "strategic partnership," "vocational education," "community empowerment,"* and *"pesantren"* were used. The publication window **2013–2023** was chosen to capture the post-2013 period marked by major transformations in vocational education, digitalization initiatives, and strengthened industry partnerships that significantly influenced vocational governance in Indonesia and globally. All

retrieved records were exported into reference management software for duplicate removal to ensure that each article was screened only once and to reduce potential selection bias.

Screening

Titles, abstracts, and keywords were screened for relevance to the research focus. Out of 4,830 initial records, **218 studies** remained after removing duplicates and irrelevant topics. A further **122 articles** were excluded during screening because they did not address the strategic management dimension of partnerships, yielding **96 articles** for full-text review.

Eligibility

A full-text evaluation was undertaken to determine methodological rigor, conceptual clarity, and contextual alignment. Articles that did not address pesantren or Islamic boarding school settings were excluded (**n = 42**), leaving **54 studies** that met the eligibility criteria. The inclusion criteria were: 1) Peer-reviewed journal articles published between **2013–2023**; 2) Written in English or Indonesian; 3) Focused on strategic partnership management in vocational or community-based education; and 4) Provided empirical or conceptual insights related to the empowerment of vocational training institutions. Exclusion criteria included: conference papers, non-peer-reviewed reports, studies with insufficient methodological transparency, or those lacking conceptual or empirical relevance to partnership mechanisms.

Data Synthesis

The final set of **54 studies** was analyzed using thematic content analysis to identify recurring patterns, strategic models, and critical success factors in partnership management within vocational training settings. Both inductive and deductive coding techniques were applied using NVivo software to enhance analytical rigor and ensure traceability of findings. Cross-study comparison was also conducted to map partnership mechanisms, enabling conditions, and systemic challenges across diverse contexts. This analytical process ensured that interpretations were grounded in systematic evidence rather than descriptive aggregation. The synthesis culminated in the development of an integrative conceptual framework outlining effective partnership governance, sustainability mechanisms, and collaborative strategies for strengthening CVTCs in pesantren. This framework directly responds to the research gap identified in the introduction and provides theoretical foundations for future empirical studies.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Analyse Of Publication

A total of 54 articles were identified and included in the data analysis phase after a rigorous selection process based on the established inclusion and exclusion criteria. These articles represent a wide range of perspectives and contexts related to partnership management in Community Vocational Training Centers (CVTCs), both within general community-based institutions and those affiliated with educational or religious organizations such as pesantren. The synthesis of these studies shows three dominant themes aligned with the research questions: (1) strategic partnership models implemented across vocational and faith-based training institutions, (2) governance mechanisms that enable partnership sustainability, and (3) enabling and inhibiting factors that influence partnership effectiveness. Across the reviewed studies, participatory approaches, shared governance structures, and open communication consistently emerge as fundamental mechanisms supporting collaboration among institutions, industries, local governments, and communities.

In addition, the literature highlights several challenges commonly faced in partnership management, including limited organizational resources, weak managerial capacity, and inadequate policy support. Conversely, studies documenting successful partnership practices emphasize the importance of strategic planning, long-term institutional commitment, and transparency in program implementation. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that partnership effectiveness is determined not merely by the existence of collaboration but by the strategic design, governance, and sustainability mechanisms underpinning such partnerships. Overall, the analysis provides a solid empirical

foundation for understanding how CVTCs can leverage partnerships to strengthen institutional capacity, improve training quality, and enhance organizational competitiveness.

Country Distribution of Published Articles (2013–2024)

Between 2013 and 2024, research on partnership management was contributed by various countries, as shown in Figure 2.

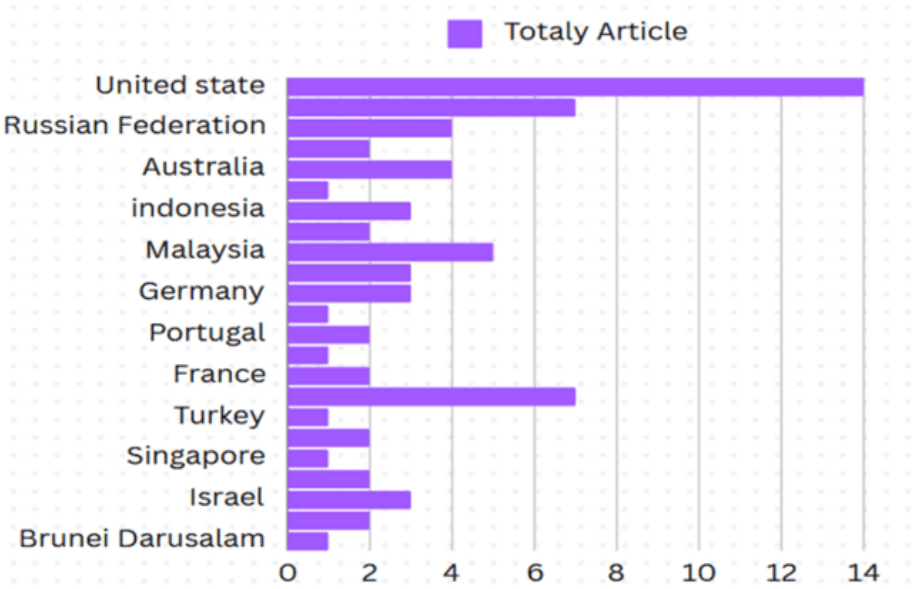


Figure. 2 Country Distributions Publishing Article on Partnership Management

Partnership management theories and models play a crucial role in explaining how relationships among diverse entities can be structured to achieve shared goals. Several theoretical perspectives are frequently applied in the literature. First, social network theory emphasizes the importance of relationships and interconnections among actors in a network (Ani'im Fattach, Eka Fais Wahyuli, Muhamad Imam Syairozi, 2021). According to this perspective, the strength and reach of a network, as well as the quality of communication and information flow within it, significantly influence the capacity of vocational training institutions to access diverse resources and enhance competitiveness (Tjahjani et al., 2019). Second, resource-based theory underscores the value of partnerships in enabling institutions to access external resources such as technology, knowledge, and financial support that they lack internally. Third, theories of trust and commitment highlight that strong partnerships rely on mutual trust and long-term commitment, which reduce transaction costs, facilitate decision-making, and support collaborative resilience.

The reviewed literature also identifies several partnership management models. The interorganizational collaboration model stresses the need for cross-sector cooperation, while the public–private partnership model widely applied in economic and workforce development—promotes shared responsibilities between government and industry (Thaha, 2020). The open communication model focuses on transparent information exchange to minimize conflict, the results-based partnership model prioritizes outcome-oriented collaboration (Sujanto, 2019), and the sustainable development model integrates social and environmental considerations into partnership practices (Asmahasanah et al., 2020). Across the eligible studies, these theories and models collectively provide the conceptual grounding for understanding the strategic partnership mechanisms addressed in the research questions. In vocational training contexts, these models are often reflected in programs that simultaneously develop job skills, strengthen local communities, and support broader sustainability goals (Hanung Eka Atmaja et al., 2021). By applying these theoretical principles, vocational training institutions can design more effective partnership strategies, enhance institutional self-reliance, and ensure that their training programs remain relevant and responsive to evolving market and community needs. In doing so, they

contribute not only to organizational development but also to wider socio-economic progress (Syarif et al., 2021).

Determinants of Partnership Success

The success of partnerships in vocational training institutions is determined by multiple interrelated factors requiring comprehensive attention. These include:

(1) Clarity of purpose and shared vision, which aligns the efforts of all partners and minimizes potential conflict (Suot, 2020);
(2) Effective communication, enabling partners to articulate expectations, resolve disagreements, and maintain transparency—thereby strengthening trust.
(3) Trust and commitment, which encourage information sharing, resource exchange, and long-term collaboration (Novie et al., 2020).
(4) Clear division of responsibilities, structured according to each partner's strengths and expertise, thus enhancing operational efficiency.
(5) Strong leadership and top management support, which ensure prioritization, adequate resource allocation, and institutional stability.
(6) Availability of resources, including finance, technology, and human capital, which directly affect the implementation and sustainability of partnership programs (Moita, 2022).;
(7) Flexibility and adaptability to external changes, allowing partnerships to remain relevant despite emerging challenges.
(8) Continuous evaluation and monitoring, enabling data-driven improvements and ensuring alignment with partnership objectives.
(9) A strong culture of collaboration, grounded in mutual respect and equality, which fosters innovation and shared achievement (Amaliah et al., 2019).

Relevant Strategic Partnerships in Community Vocational Training Center at Pesantren

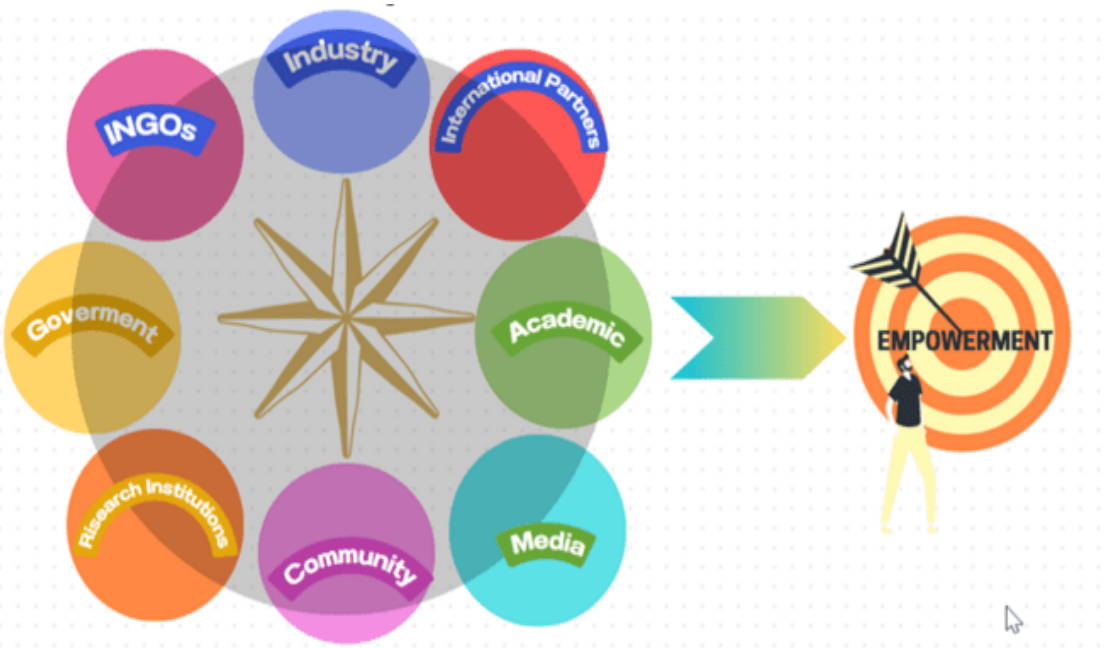


Figure. 3 Strategic Partnership for Empowerment CVTC at Pesantren

Community Vocational Training Centers at Pesantren engage with a variety of partners to support institutional growth and program relevance. Based on the reviewed studies, the following partnership categories represent dominant structures in CVTC empowerment:

Table. 1 Strategic Partnership in CVTC at Pesantren

No.	Partners	Descriptions
1	Industry	Industry partnerships, where vocational training institutions work with companies to design training programs that match the needs of the labor market. Through these partnerships, institutions can understand industry needs first-hand and provide skills that match industry demand. Such partnerships often involve internship agreements, job placements, or industry sponsorship of training programs.
2	Government	Government partnerships are also important in supporting the sustainability and success of vocational training institutions. Governments can provide financial support, regulations and policies that support the development and operation of vocational training institutions. Such partnerships may include subsidy programs, tax incentives or government-funded training programs for vulnerable groups.
3	Academics	partnerships with other institutions are also a relevant type of partnership, as they can provide access to additional resources and cross-disciplinary collaboration. For example, vocational training institutions may partner with colleges or vocational high schools to develop joint training programs or transfer credits between institutions. Such partnerships help to improve accessibility and quality of education and increase academic mobility for participants.
4	NGOs	partnerships with non-profit organizations or NGOs can also improve the accessibility and sustainability of vocational training institutions. These organizations often have extensive networks in the community and can assist in recruiting participants, providing support services or funding training programs. Such partnerships help expand the reach of vocational training institutions and ensure that their services reach those who need them.
5	International partnerships	International partnerships can also provide significant benefits to vocational training institutions. Through international partnerships, institutions can expand their reach, gain access to international resources, and improve the standards and quality of training programs. These partnerships often involve the exchange of students, staff or best practices in the management of vocational training; the need for international collaboration and knowledge sharing to advance areas of expertise. (Arjanto et al., 2023).
6	Small industries and micro-enterprises	By working with small businesses, vocational training institutions can help improve the skills and knowledge of businesses to manage their business more efficiently. Such partnerships may include providing specialized training for small businesses, technical assistance or access to financial resources.
7	Research and innovation institute	partnerships with research and innovation institutions can also improve the quality and relevance of training programs. Research institutions can provide insights into industry trends and emerging labor market needs, while innovation institutions can

No.	Partners	Descriptions
		help develop innovative and effective training methods. Such partnerships ensure that vocational training institutions remain at the forefront of responding to changes in the world of work.;
8	Media and online platforms	membantu lembaga pelatihan kerja dalam meningkatkan jangkauan dan accessibility of their programs. Through partnerships with the media, institutions can promote their programs to a wider audience and reach potential participants who may not have been reached before. Such partnerships may also include the use of online platforms to deliver remote training or digital learning materials to participants.
9	Professional organizations or trade unions	These organizations often have in-depth knowledge of the needs and expectations of workers in a particular industry, and can provide valuable insights into best practices in training and workforce development. Such partnerships can help ensure that training programs are in line with industry standards and expectations, and increase job placement opportunities for participants.

These nine categories of strategic partners reflect the partnership models most frequently cited in the eligible studies and directly address the research question related to identifying effective partnership structures within pesantren-based vocational ecosystems.

Discussion:

Empowerment in CVTC at Pesantren is the ability of the institution to operate independently and sustainably, and to make a significant contribution to human resource development and is designed to provide opportunities to productive members of society (Awuor Ogema et al., 2021). Indicators of empowerment (Figure 3). First, financial independence, which includes the ability of the institution to manage and diversify sources of income (Sunia et al., 2023). These can come from training fees, government support, sponsorship from industry, and other cooperative projects. Institutions that have diversified sources of income are better able to face financial challenges and remain operational in the long term (Langga & Se, 2022).

Second, the quality and relevance of the training programs offered. The empowerment of an institution can be seen from how well its training programs match the needs of the labour market and how quickly it can adapt its curriculum to technological and industrial developments. This reflects the core assumptions of Resource Dependence Theory (RDT), where institutional survival depends on the ability to acquire, integrate, and mobilize external resources. Regular evaluations and curriculum adjustments based on feedback from industry and alumni are signs that the institution is able to evolve in accordance with the dynamics of the labor market.

Third, the ability to attract and retain qualified teaching staff. In line with Institutional Theory, teaching quality becomes a source of institutional legitimacy and signals institutional credibility to stakeholders. Competent and experienced teaching staff can enhance the reputation of the institution and the quality of training provided (Moita et al., 2021). Training institutions that can provide ongoing training and development for their teaching staff demonstrate a commitment to improving the quality of education and an ability to adapt to changing training needs.

Fourth, the level of trainee satisfaction and the success of graduates in entering the workforce. A high level of satisfaction indicates that participants find the training they receive useful and relevant. In addition, high job placement rates among graduates reflect the effectiveness of the training program in preparing them for the job market. These outcome-based indicators strengthen institutional accountability and align with results-based management frameworks. Training institutions that continually monitor and improve satisfaction and job placement rates demonstrate empowerment in

fulfilling their mission.

Fifth, the ability to forge strong partnerships with industry and government. These partnerships can provide access to additional resources, such as new technologies, training facilities and internship opportunities for participants (Putri et al., 2023). Institutions with extensive and strong partnership networks are better able to provide relevant and high-quality training programs. In addition, good partnerships also help training institutions to anticipate and respond to changing labor market needs;

Sixth, flexibility and adaptability are also important indicators of the empowerment of vocational training institutions. Institutions that can quickly adapt their training programs and methods to changes in the industry or participants' needs demonstrate their ability to remain relevant and effective. This adaptability is central to RDT, which emphasizes responsiveness to external environmental pressures as a determinant of institutional resilience.

Within the pesantren ecosystem, the partnership configuration that best fits is a value-based Quadruple Helix model (government–industry–pesantren–community). This model is particularly suitable because pesantren possess strong internal social capital but face structural limitations in accessing industrial resources and regulatory incentives. Thus, a partnership model that integrates religious authority, market actors, regulatory institutions, and community actors enables a balanced distribution of resources and legitimizing forces. This hybrid model aligns naturally with pesantren's cultural norms, where community trust, moral authority, and collaboration are essential for sustaining empowerment.



Figure. 4 Indicators of Empowerment

Seventh, innovation and new program development. Institutions that are constantly looking for ways to improve and expand their services demonstrate vitality and a desire to remain at the forefront of education and training. For example, the development of new courses that match industry trends, the application of new technologies in teaching, or collaboration with other education and training institutions to create joint programs.

Eighth, good governance, including transparency in financial management, accountability in program implementation, and participatory and inclusive decision-making. Institutions with good governance tend to be more trusted by participants, industry partners and governments, making it easier to gain support and cooperation. Strong governance also helps institutions effectively manage risks and

meet challenges.

Ninth, community support and engagement are also important indicators of the empowerment of vocational training institutions. Institutions that have the support of the local community, including alumni and community organizations, demonstrate that they are successful in building strong relationships and providing significant value to the community (Yulianti, & Kharima, 2022). Community involvement also aligns with Institutional Theory's emphasis on societal legitimacy as an essential dimension of institutional sustainability (Arranguez & Arrieta, 2026; Aziz et al., 2025; Bahruddin et al., 2026). Community support also reflects that the institution is able to meet community needs and expectations, which is a sign of long-term success and empowerment.

As illustrated in Figure 3, each partnership type contributes distinct empowerment outcomes. Industry partnerships reinforce curriculum relevance, practical skills, and job placement—directly strengthening training quality and graduate success indicators. Government partnerships influence financial independence and governance legitimacy through regulatory support and targeted funding. Academic partnerships support instructor professionalism and curriculum innovation. NGO and community partnerships strengthen outreach, inclusivity, and social legitimacy, while international collaborations and research institutions foster innovation and adaptability. Together, these partnerships map directly onto the nine empowerment indicators and demonstrate how partnership diversity enhances institutional resilience.

Strategic Implications for CVTC Effectiveness

In order for CVTC at Pesantren to be effective, a well-thought-out and targeted strategy is required. One of the key strategies is needs mapping. This involves identifying the skills and knowledge required by the trainee to be successful in today's workforce (Masnu'ah et al., 2023). By understanding these needs, vocational training institutions can design programs that are relevant and in line with the demands of the labour market. *This aligns with strategic alignment theory, which stresses the congruence between institutional capabilities and external labor market expectations.*

Taken together, these indicators reveal that empowerment in CVTCs arises from the interaction between resource acquisition (RDT), legitimacy formation (Institutional Theory), and partnership governance. Partnerships supply critical resources, reduce institutional vulnerability, and introduce innovation, while legitimacy derived from community trust, regulatory compliance, and academic endorsement enhances institutional stability. Thus, empowerment functions as a dynamic system shaped by mutually reinforcing structural, relational, and institutional forces.

This process involves consultation with industry and other stakeholders to ensure that the training program can produce job-ready graduates. Here are some effective strategies in vocational training, including:

First, the use of diverse learning methods. Each individual has a different learning style, so it is important to utilize a variety of learning methods, including lectures, group discussions, practical projects and technology-based learning (Wiyono & Triwiyanto, 2018). By providing diverse learning experiences, vocational training institutions can increase participant engagement and improve retention of materials.

Second, regular monitoring and evaluation. Through careful monitoring of participants' progress and evaluation of training outcomes, institutions can identify areas where the program needs to be improved or adjusted. Evaluation helps ensure that the training program remains relevant and responsive to changes in industry needs.

Third, stakeholder engagement is another crucial strategy in making job training effective. It involves the active participation of industry, government and educational institutions in designing, implementing and evaluating training programs. By involving relevant stakeholders, vocational training institutions can ensure that their programs match the needs of the labour market and meet recognized industry standards.

Fourth, personalization, each individual has different backgrounds, experiences and needs. It is therefore important to tailor the training program according to the needs of each participant. The use of initial tests to assess participants' knowledge and skill levels, and providing individual guidance and

support throughout the course are examples of training programs.

Fifth, the use of technology can also improve the effectiveness of vocational training. Through online learning platforms, vocational training institutions can provide access to interactive and dynamic training materials, and facilitate self-directed and collaborative learning. Technology can also be used to facilitate communication between participants and instructors, and provide quick and continuous feedback (Rachmawati & Muhtadi, 2020).



Figure 5 Effective Strategies in Vocational Training

Sixth, consider inclusion and equity. Strategies that ensure fair and equal access to training for all individuals, including those from disadvantaged or minority backgrounds, will increase the overall effectiveness of the program. This involves providing additional support for participants who need it and creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment.

Seventh, partnerships with industry. By collaborating with companies and related industries, CVTC at Pesantren can ensure that their programs match the needs and demands of the labor market. These partnerships can also provide internship or direct work placement opportunities for participants, increasing their chances of gaining practical experience and expanding their professional networks.

Eighth, the sustainability strategy involves a long-term commitment from all relevant parties to continuously improve and develop training programs in line with changes in the industry and labour market needs. This long-term orientation is consistent with Institutional Theory, which stresses the role of stability, legitimacy, and continuity in institutional survival. By ensuring the sustainability of training programs, CVTC at Pesantren can ensure that their participants remain relevant and competitive in an ever-changing job market.

Comparatively, industry partnerships provide the strongest practical benefits, including hands-on training, technology transfer, and direct job-placement pipelines. Government partnerships contribute regulatory stability, policy alignment, and access to public incentives—supporting long-term empowerment structures rather than short-term skills development. Academic partnerships strengthen pedagogical quality and foster innovation, while NGO and community partnerships reinforce inclusivity, outreach, and social legitimacy. These comparative insights clarify how different partnership types complement one another and collectively support empowerment across financial, instructional, governance, and community dimensions.

Added Theoretical Integration Section

The synthesis of empowerment indicators and strategic partnership patterns identified in this review reveals deeper theoretical mechanisms that explain why partnerships play a decisive role in strengthening CVTC at pesantren. While the findings show practical dimensions such as financial diversification, curriculum relevance, instructor quality, governance, and community support, the underlying drivers can be more clearly interpreted through RDT and Institutional Theory.

From an RDT perspective, CVTC at pesantren operate under conditions where critical resources—funding, expertise, technology, networks—are externally controlled. Strategic partnerships reduce this dependency by widening access to essential resources, thereby strengthening empowerment indicators such as financial resilience, innovation capacity, and adaptive curriculum design.

From an Institutional Theory perspective, empowerment is also shaped by the institution's ability to conform to the normative expectations of its environment. Partnerships with reputable industries, government bodies, and academic institutions strengthen the legitimacy of CVTCs, improving stakeholder trust, community engagement, and long-term program sustainability.

Together, these theories explain the dual mechanism through which empowerment emerges: (1) resource acquisition and dependency reduction (RDT), and (2) legitimacy building and institutional alignment (Institutional Theory). This dual lens provides a stronger theoretical contribution compared with prior studies that focused mainly on descriptive partnership outcomes.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in articulating how empowerment in faith-based vocational institutions is jointly shaped by structural dependencies and institutional legitimacy pressures. Practically, this insight highlights the need for CVTCs to design partnership governance systems that deliberately target both resource flows and legitimacy gains.

CONCLUSION

Partnership management in CVTCs at Pesantren plays a crucial role in empowering these institutions and enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of their vocational training programs. Strong collaborations with industry, government, and related organizations enable vocational institutions to design curricula that align with labor market demands, expand access to resources, and increase employment opportunities for graduates. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the understanding of partnership management as an integrative framework that connects educational institutions with external stakeholders to achieve sustainable empowerment. It expands existing theories of collaborative governance and educational management by situating them in Pesantren-based vocational training environments. More importantly, the study advances theory by extending the conventional Triple Helix model (government–industry–academia) into a Quadruple Helix framework that includes pesantren and the wider community as essential actors in faith-based vocational ecosystems. This expanded model better captures the socio-religious dynamics and communal legitimacy that shape partnership effectiveness in CVTCs.

From a practical standpoint, the findings emphasize that effective partnership management requires structured coordination mechanisms, transparent communication, and continuous capacity-building among stakeholders. These insights can guide educational leaders and policymakers in developing partnership models that strengthen institutional performance and community impact. Practically, the proposed Quadruple Helix framework provides a more context-sensitive governance structure that institutions can adopt to improve resource mobilization, enhance program relevance, and build long-term sustainability—particularly in settings where religious authority and community engagement strongly influence institutional legitimacy.

However, this research has limitations, particularly in its literature coverage and its contextual focus on Pesantren-based CVTCs, which may not fully represent other types of community vocational institutions. Future research could expand the analysis by incorporating cross-country comparisons or by using mixed-method approaches to capture deeper empirical insights into partnership dynamics. Further theoretical testing of the Quadruple Helix model in different cultural or religious training institutions would also strengthen its generalizability and refine its conceptual boundaries.

Overall, the study underscores that continuous efforts to reinforce strategic partnerships, ensure inclusiveness, and align training programs with socio-economic needs are essential for realizing the transformative potential of vocational education in Pesantren contexts. By integrating resource acquisition (as conceptualized in Resource Dependence Theory) with institutional legitimacy strategies (as emphasized in Institutional Theory), this study provides a comprehensive explanation of how empowerment in CVTCs emerges as both a structural and institutional outcome of effective partnership governance.

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