

Negotiating Tradition and Change: Transformational Leadership Practices in a Diversifying *Pesantren*

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Abstract

Existing accounts of *pesantren* leadership tend to examine the *kiai* in isolation and rarely explain how religious tradition and institutional expansion are held together once a *pesantren* operates several formal units and several leadership actors at once, leaving open the question of how such institutions avoid eroding their religious identity while they grow. This study addresses that gap by examining how the leadership of a *kiai* (Islamic boarding school caregiver) negotiates the tension between preserving *pesantren* tradition and pursuing institutional diversification at Pondok *Pesantren* Bustanul Falah, Banyuwangi, East Java, an institution that has expanded from religious instruction (*ngaji*) alone into an integrated system comprising a kindergarten (TK), a Quran-science junior high school (SMP Sains Quran), and a vocational senior high school (SMK). Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews with five key actors occupying different structural positions in the institution: the *kiai*/caregiver, the *bu nyai* (the *kiai*'s spouse and co-caregiver), the SMK principal, a teacher, and a *pesantren* administrator (*pengurus*). Data were analyzed thematically with reference to the full-range transformational leadership framework of Bass and Avolio. The findings show that leadership at Bustanul Falah operates through a negotiated boundary: values regarded as non-negotiable (religious devotion, *akhlak*, Qur'anic learning, adab, and worship habituation) are firmly preserved, while delivery methods, curricula, technology use, and organizational structure are opened to selective, deliberated adaptation. This negotiation is distributed across actors: the *kiai* supplies idealized influence and inspirational motivation for institutional expansion, the *bu nyai* anchors character formation as a counterweight to formal-academic pressures, the SMK principal exercises delegated technical authority within value-bound coordination, teachers are given space for pedagogical innovation, and administrators adopt technology selectively according to institutional benefit. The study concludes that transformational leadership in this *pesantren* functions less as unilateral top-down change and more as an ongoing, multi-actor negotiation that keeps tradition and innovation mutually accountable, offering a contextual elaboration of transformational leadership theory for Islamic educational institutions undergoing structural diversification.

Keywords: *Transformational Leadership, Pesantren, Tradition Negotiation, Educational Leadership, Islamic Boarding School.*

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INTRODUCTION

Pesantren occupy a distinctive position in Indonesia's educational landscape: institutions that predate the modern nation-state, yet continue to reproduce themselves under conditions of rapid social and technological change, historically organized around the moral and intellectual authority of the *kiai*.¹ Institutions once described as guardians of "traditional" Islamic learning have, over the past two decades, diversified at a pace that complicates any simple opposition between "traditional" *pesantren* and "modern" schooling:² a growing body of case studies shows many *pesantren* now operate kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, and vocational units alongside their core religious curriculum, a pattern recent studies describe as gradual, contextual, and value-based transformation rather than wholesale modernization.³ This pattern is clearly visible at Pondok *Pesantren* Bustanul Falah, Banyuwangi, East Java, which, alongside its core religious activities (*ngaji*), has established a kindergarten (TK), a Quran-science junior high school (SMP Sains Quran), and a vocational senior high school (SMK), a trajectory shared by other *pesantren* in the same regency responding adaptively to the demands of Society 5.0 and the digital era.⁴ Such structural diversification, however, is not leadership-neutral: it multiplies the actors and units a single *kiai* must coordinate, raising the question of how *pesantren* leadership holds religious authority and managerial expansion together.

What remains less well understood is how a *pesantren*'s leadership actually manages the internal tension this expansion produces, between the pastoral, values-centered authority historically embodied by the *kiai* and the managerial, outcome-oriented demands of running several formal educational units at once. Classical accounts of *pesantren* management have long described a "mono-management, mono-administration" pattern in which authority is concentrated in a single figure and delegated sparingly to subordinate units.⁵ More recent scholarship, drawing on Burns's original theory of transformational leadership and its elaboration by Bass and Avolio into the Full Range Leadership Model, argues that *kiai* leadership increasingly exhibits transformational characteristics: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration that together allow *pesantren* to pursue institutional change without abandoning religious authority.⁶ A parallel body of empirical

¹ Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren: Studi Pandangan Hidup Kyai Dan Visinya Mengenai Masa Depan Indonesia*; Hosaini, "Kepemimpinan Dan Budaya Organisasi Di Pesantren"; Fealy and Bush, "The Political Decline of Traditional Ulama in Indonesia: The State, Umma and Nahdlatul Ulama."

² Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren: Studi Pandangan Hidup Kyai Dan Visinya Mengenai Masa Depan Indonesia*; Zuhdi, "Challenging Moderate Muslims: Indonesia's Muslim Schools in the Midst of Religious Conservatism."

³ Puspita W et al., "Transformasi Pesantren Di Era Globalisasi Digital: Inovasi Pendidikan Islam Dan Adaptasi Kelembagaan"; Hasna, Salsabila, and Hibatullah, "Strategi Adaptasi Pesantren Salaf Dalam Menghadapi Era Society 5.0: Studi Pada Pondok Pesantren Di Banyuwangi."

⁴ Hasna, Salsabila, and Hibatullah, "Strategi Adaptasi Pesantren Salaf Dalam Menghadapi Era Society 5.0: Studi Pada Pondok Pesantren Di Banyuwangi."

⁵ Ramli, "Manajemen Dan Kepemimpinan Pesantren: Dinamika Kepemimpinan Kiai Di Pesantren"; Kompri, *Manajemen Dan Kepemimpinan Pondok Pesantren*.

⁶ Burns, *Leadership*; Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations*.

work, much of it situated in Indonesian Islamic education, corroborates the broader organizational benefits associated with transformational leadership.⁷

Research on the wider family of *pesantren* leadership actors has begun to complicate the *kiai*-centric picture. The *bu nyai* has been shown to exercise a complementary form of authority focused on character formation and daily pastoral care,⁸ while studies of madrasah and *pesantren*-based schools point to the delegation of technical authority to school principals as institutions grow in structural complexity.⁹ These studies confirm that transformational leadership in Islamic education is rarely the property of one actor alone, even where the *kiai* remains its most visible center.¹⁰

Despite this expanding literature, three gaps remain. First, most studies of transformational *kiai* leadership examine a single actor, typically the *kiai* himself, in isolation, rather than tracing how leadership is distributed and negotiated across the several role-holders (*kiai*, *bu nyai*, school principal, teachers, administrators) who jointly manage a diversified *pesantren*. Second, studies of *pesantren* modernization tend to describe institutional change in general or literature-based terms,¹¹ without grounding the analysis in the everyday language actors themselves use to draw the line between what may change and what must not. Third, while Banyuwangi-specific studies exist,¹² none has yet examined a *pesantren* that simultaneously operates early-childhood, junior-secondary, and vocational units under one integrated leadership structure, a configuration that intensifies precisely the tension between tradition and change this article investigates. The picture is further complicated by the fact that curricular breadth in Islamic institutions is increasingly framed as a multicultural and civic imperative in its own right,¹³ that vocational and entrepreneurial skill formation is now treated as continuous with, rather than opposed to, a *pesantren*'s religious mission,¹⁴ and that the expansion of *pesantren*

⁷ Bashori, "Kepemimpinan Transformasional Kyai Pada Lembaga Pendidikan Islam"; Wahrudin and Maunah, "Kepemimpinan Transformasional Di Pondok *Pesantren*"; Burhanudin and Falah, "Kepemimpinan *Kiai* Dalam Peningkatan Kualitas Pendidikan Di Pondok *Pesantren* Hudaya Diwék Jombang"; Indrawati, "Management by Inspiration: Implementation of Transformational Leadership on Business at Pondok *Pesantren* Sunan Drajat."

⁸ Ningrum and Mursidi, "Kuasa Perempuan: Peranan Dan Kedudukan '*Bu nyai*' Dalam Memimpin Pondok *Pesantren* Di Kabupaten Banyuwangi"; Amalia and Arifin, "Kepemimpinan Nyai Dalam Memelihara Kajian Kitab Kuning Di Ma'had Aly Nurul Jadid Probolinggo"; Nawafi, Uhbiyati, and Sholihah, "Peran *Bu nyai* Dalam Meningkatkan Mutu Hafalan Al-Qur'an Santri Putri Pondok *Pesantren* Al-Hikmah Pedurungan Lor Semarang."

⁹ Harsoyo and Alim, "Subjek Dan Karakteristik Kepemimpinan Transformasional Dan Peran Strategisnya Di Lembaga Pendidikan Islam"; Khoirunnisaa' and Maunah, "Karakteristik Kepemimpinan Transformasional Di Lembaga Pendidikan Islam Tradisional Dan Modern."

¹⁰ Bashori, "Kepemimpinan Transformasional Kyai Pada Lembaga Pendidikan Islam"; Wahrudin and Maunah, "Kepemimpinan Transformasional Di Pondok *Pesantren*."

¹¹ Puspita W et al., "Transformasi *Pesantren* Di Era Globalisasi Digital: Inovasi Pendidikan Islam Dan Adaptasi Kelembagaan."

¹² Hasna, Salsabila, and Hibatullah, "Strategi Adaptasi *Pesantren* Salaf Dalam Menghadapi Era Society 5.0: Studi Pada Pondok *Pesantren* Di Banyuwangi"; Ningrum and Mursidi, "Kuasa Perempuan: Peranan Dan Kedudukan '*Bu nyai*' Dalam Memimpin Pondok *Pesantren* Di Kabupaten Banyuwangi."

¹³ Sumarni. S et al., "Urgency of Multicultural Islamic Education on Modern Indonesian Education"; Fajri and Abdulghani, "Symbolic Interactionism Between Students and Caregivers in *Pesantren*."

¹⁴ Hamzah, "Santripreneur: A Model of Islamic Economic Management through *Pesantren*-Based Entrepreneurship Education."

into formal, market-oriented education carries a recognized risk of religious commodification that leadership must actively manage.¹⁵ Outside the Indonesian context, comparable evidence indicates that transformational leadership styles are positively associated with organizational commitment and citizenship behavior in educational institutions more broadly, lending further theoretical weight to the framework adopted here.¹⁶

This study addresses these gaps by asking how transformational leadership at Pondok *Pesantren* Bustanul Falah negotiates the boundary between tradition and change across its five principal leadership actors. Conceptually, the study treats “negotiation” not as compromise or dilution but as an active, ongoing process through which core religious values are reaffirmed precisely by being distinguished from the managerial and pedagogical methods opened to adaptation. Empirically, the study contributes a multi-actor, single-case account of how transformational leadership functions in a *pesantren* undergoing formal-educational diversification, extending existing *kiai*-centric accounts of transformational leadership in Islamic education with attention to distributed authority and value-boundary maintenance.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study design, specifically a single-case embedded design in the sense outlined by Yin, in which Pondok *Pesantren* Bustanul Falah as a whole constitutes the single bounded case, while the five leadership positions examined, the *kiai*, the *bu nyai*, the SMK principal, a teacher, and a *pesantren* administrator, together with the institution’s constituent units (the core *pesantren*, TK, SMP Sains Quran, and SMK), serve as embedded units of analysis nested within that case.¹⁷ This embedded design was chosen because it allows patterns to be compared across units and actors while still treating the *pesantren* as a single, bounded, purposively selected case.¹⁸ Pondok *Pesantren* Bustanul Falah in Kabupaten Banyuwangi, East Java, is an information-rich instance of a traditional *pesantren* that has diversified into formal early-childhood, junior-secondary, and vocational education while continuing to operate its core religious (*ngaji*) activities, and is therefore a suitable site for examining how tradition and institutional change are negotiated in practice.

Data were generated through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with five informants selected to represent the principal structural positions through which leadership at the *pesantren* is exercised: the *kiai/pengasuh* (caregiver and highest religious authority), the *bu nyai* (the *kiai*’s spouse and co-caregiver, with particular responsibility for character formation), the head of SMK (representing delegated managerial authority over a formal unit), a teacher/*ustadzah* (representing the

¹⁵ Hidayah, “*Pesantren* for Middle-Class Muslims in Indonesia (Between Religious Commodification and Pious Neoliberalism).”

¹⁶ Al-Mamary, “The Impact of Transformational Leadership on Organizational Citizenship Behaviour: Evidence from Malaysian Higher Education Context.”

¹⁷ Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*.

¹⁸ Yin; Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*.

pedagogical front line), and a member of the *pesantren*'s administrative board, *pengurus* (representing the technical-administrative function, including decisions on technology adoption). This deliberate variation in informant position served as a form of source triangulation, allowing statements from one role to be read against and corroborated by statements from another.¹⁹

Interviews were conducted around four thematic areas identified as central to the *pesantren*'s leadership practice: (1) the rationale and management of institutional expansion into formal education; (2) the encouragement of pedagogical innovation among teaching staff; (3) the selective adoption of information technology in administration and learning; and (4) the negotiation between elements of *pesantren* tradition considered non-negotiable and those considered open to contextual adaptation. Interview transcripts were analyzed using an interactive, thematic procedure involving data condensation, categorization by informant role and theme, and iterative comparison across informants to identify convergent and divergent patterns, consistent with standard qualitative analysis procedures for case study research.²⁰ The credibility of the analysis was supported through source triangulation across the five informant roles and through peer discussion of emergent themes during the coding process, procedures commonly used to establish the trustworthiness of qualitative case study findings.²¹

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Across the five informants, three empirical patterns converge and corroborate one another, which together justify treating institutional expansion as deliberate, a specific set of values as genuinely non-negotiable, and the five informants' understanding of both as consistent rather than coincidental. First, deliberateness of expansion: the *kiai* and the SMK principal, occupying different structural positions, independently describe the founding of the TK, SMP Sains Quran, and SMK not as one-off reactions but as a continuing institutional program, "*bagian dari ikhtiar pendidikan*" (part of an educational endeavor) and "*tidak mungkin ditangani langsung oleh Abah*" (no longer possible for Abah to handle directly), language that signals sustained intent rather than an isolated event. Second, a bounded non-negotiable core: the *kiai* and the *bu nyai* independently name an overlapping list of elements, *aqidah*, *akhlak*, Qur'anic learning, *adab*, and *ibadah* habituation, as things that "*tidak boleh hilang*" (must not be lost) or must "*tetap menjadi dasar*" (remain the foundation), and both evaluate institutional success by whether this core survives rather than by academic output alone. Third, cross-role consistency: the teacher, the *pengurus*, and the school principal each independently reproduce the same benefit-and-fit test, "*dibicarakan dulu, apa manfaatnya*" (discussed first, for its benefit), "*kita mengambil yang bermanfaat*" (we take what is beneficial), and

¹⁹ Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*; Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*; Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*.

²⁰ Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*; Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*.

²¹ Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*.

coordination limited to “kebijakan dan nilai lembaga” (institutional policy and values), when explaining how they treat new ideas, technology, and delegated authority, indicating that the boundary articulated by the *kiai* and *bu nyai* functions as a shared interpretive frame rather than a top-level pronouncement alone. Table 1 summarizes the structural position and principal leadership function associated with each informant; the sections that follow present and discuss this evidence in detail.

Table 1. Profile of Key Informants and Observed Leadership Functions

No.	Informant	Structural Position	Principal Leadership Function Observed
1	<i>Kiai / Pengasuh</i>	Highest religious and institutional authority	Idealized influence; inspirational motivation
2	<i>Bu nyai</i>	Co-caregiver; character-formation authority	Individualized consideration; value guardianship
3	Vocational High School Principal	Head of the vocational school unit	Delegated, bounded technical authority
4	Teacher / <i>Ustadzah</i>	Classroom teacher	Intellectual stimulation; deliberated innovation
5	<i>Pengurus</i>	<i>Pesantren</i> administrator	Selective, benefit-based technology adaptation

Expanding the *Pesantren* While Anchoring Its Core: The *Kiai*’s Idealized Influence and Inspirational Motivation

The clearest expression of the *kiai*’s transformational leadership emerges in how he frames the *pesantren*’s expansion into formal education. Rather than presenting the establishment of the TK, SMP Sains Quran, and SMK as a departure from the *pesantren*’s mission, the *kiai* frames it as a continuation of the same mission under new conditions:

“Pesantren niku kedah berkembang. Kalau masyarakat membutuhkan pendidikan yang lebih lengkap, pesantren nggih kedah mampu menjawab kebutuhan niku. Tapi berkembang bukan berarti meninggalkan apa yang menjadi dasar pesantren. Kegiatan ngaji, pendidikan agama, akhlak dan pembentukan karakter tetap menjadi dasar.”

[The pesantren must develop. If society needs more complete education, the pesantren must be able to answer that need. But developing does not mean abandoning what is foundational to the pesantren. Religious study, religious education, akhlak, and character formation remain the foundation.]
(*Kiai/Pengasuh*)

This statement performs a clear inspirational motivation function: it articulates an appealing and legitimating vision, the *pesantren* “answering the needs of society,” that gives followers, teachers, administrators, and parents alike, a shared reason to support institutional expansion.²² Whether the same statement also constitutes idealized influence, being identified with and trusted as a role model, cannot be established from the *kiai*’s own words alone, since idealized influence is properly evidenced by how

²² Bass and Avolio, *Improving Organizational Effectiveness through Transformational Leadership*.

followers respond to the leader rather than by the leader's self-description. Corroborating evidence for this dimension appears elsewhere in the data: the SMK principal's willingness to bind technical decisions to the *kiai*'s coordination on policy and values (discussed below), the teacher's deference to the *kiai*'s reminders that "*guru juga harus berkembang*" (teachers, too, must develop), and the *pengurus*'s independent reproduction of the same benefit-based reasoning the *kiai* articulates, together indicate that staff across structural positions orient their own practice around the *kiai* as a value-setting reference point, which is the behavioral signature of idealized influence rather than an inference drawn from a single statement.²³ The *kiai* extends this framing when describing the specific units:

"TK, SMP SAINS Quran dan SMK itu kita lihat sebagai bagian dari ikhtiar pendidikan. Anak engkang ditipten bukan hanya membutuhkan ilmu agama, tapi nggih ilmu umum dan keterampilan. Yang penting semuanya tetap berada dalam nilai dan karakter pesantren."

[We see the TK, SMP Sains Quran, and SMK as part of an educational endeavor. The children entrusted to us need not only religious knowledge but also general knowledge and skills. What matters is that everything remains within the values and character of the pesantren.] (Kiai/Pengasuh)

This finding corroborates earlier observations that *kiai* leadership in contemporary *pesantren* increasingly exhibits transformational characteristics, mobilizing followers around an expanded institutional vision while retaining the religious authority that legitimizes it.²⁴ It also extends classical accounts of the *kiai* as guardian of tradition:²⁵ at Bustanul Falah, guardianship of tradition is not enacted through resistance to formal education but through insisting that formal education remain subordinate to, and framed by, *pesantren* values. This is consistent with recent findings that *pesantren* transformation in Indonesia is best understood as gradual, contextual, and value-based rather than as straightforward modernization or secularization.²⁶

The *Bu nyai*'s Counterweight: Individualized Consideration and the Guardianship of Character

If the *kiai*'s leadership supplies the vision and legitimacy for expansion, the *bu nyai*'s leadership supplies the counterweight that keeps that expansion from drifting into purely academic achievement. Her account foregrounds a concern largely absent from the *kiai*'s more institutional framing:

"Sekarang anak-anak menghadapi tantangan yang berbeda. Teknologi

²³ Bass and Avolio; Burns, *Leadership*; Arifin, "Authority of Spiritual Leadership at *Pesantren* Temboro Based on Jamaah Tabligh Ideology."

²⁴ Bashori, "Kepemimpinan Transformasional Kyai Pada Lembaga Pendidikan Islam"; Wahrudin and Maunah, "Kepemimpinan Transformasional Di Pondok *Pesantren*."

²⁵ Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren: Studi Pandangan Hidup Kyai Dan Visinya Mengenai Masa Depan Indonesia*.

²⁶ Puspita W et al., "Transformasi *Pesantren* Di Era Globalisasi Digital: Inovasi Pendidikan Islam Dan Adaptasi Kelembagaan."

berkembang, pergaulan juga berubah. Karena itu pendidikan harus mengikuti perkembangan. Tetapi jangan sampai anak-anak hanya pintar secara akademik. Akhlak dan kebiasaan baik tetap harus dibangun.”

[Children today face different challenges. Technology develops, social relations also change. Education therefore has to keep up with these developments. But children must not only be academically capable. Akhlak and good habits must still be cultivated.] (Bu nyai)

Read through the framework of individualized consideration, attention to the developmental and moral needs of learners rather than only institutional outcomes, the *bu nyai*'s statement performs a distinct leadership function: she translates the *kiai*'s abstract commitment to “character formation” into a standing critique of any expansion that would privilege academic competitiveness over moral formation.²⁷ Her second statement makes this translation explicit at the level of institutional design:

“Anak yang masuk di lembaga kita harus mendapatkan pendidikan yang menyeluruh. Di sekolah mendapatkan ilmu dan keterampilan, sedangkan nilai-nilai pesantren menjadi pembiasaan dalam kehidupan sehari-hari.”

[Children who enter our institution must receive holistic education. At school they gain knowledge and skills, while pesantren values become habituated in daily life.] (Bu nyai)

Here the *bu nyai* articulates a division of educational labor, formal schools deliver knowledge and skills while the *pesantren* environment delivers habituated values, that functionally protects the *pesantren*'s religious identity from being absorbed into its formal units. This finding supports and extends previous studies documenting the *bu nyai*'s leadership as a distinct, morally weighted authority within *pesantren* governance rather than a purely symbolic or derivative position.²⁸ Where earlier studies have tended to describe the *bu nyai*'s role primarily in terms of *santri* discipline or religious instruction within a single residential unit,²⁹ the present case shows her occupying a structurally significant position within a multi-unit institution: she functions as an institutional conscience that keeps formal-academic and *pesantren*-value logics in productive tension rather than allowing one to dissolve into the other.

The *bu nyai*'s emphasis on listening to children's needs and cultivating character rather than directing from above also resembles servant leadership, in which the leader's authority rests on serving followers' growth.³⁰ This division of labor also invites a more critical reading. The pattern observed here, the *kiai* fronting institutional vision and external legitimacy while the *bu nyai* is responsible for character and the internal moral

²⁷ Bass and Avolio, *Improving Organizational Effectiveness through Transformational Leadership*.

²⁸ Ningrum and Mursidi, “Kuasa Perempuan: Peranan Dan Kedudukan ‘*Bu nyai*’ Dalam Memimpin Pondok Pesantren Di Kabupaten Banyuwangi”; Amalia and Arifin, “Kepemimpinan Nyai Dalam Memelihara Kajian Kitab Kuning Di Ma'had Aly Nurul Jadid Probolinggo.”

²⁹ Nawafi, Uhbiyati, and Sholihah, “Peran *Bu nyai* Dalam Meningkatkan Mutu Hafalan Al-Qur'an Santri Putri Pondok Pesantren Al-Hikmah Pedurungan Lor Semarang.”

³⁰ Solikin, Fatchurahman, and Supardi, “Pemimpin Yang Melayani Dalam Membangun Bangsa Yang Mandiri”; Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*.

atmosphere, closely follows the conventional gendered structure of *pesantren* leadership, in which public, institution-facing authority is normatively coded male and domestic, character-facing authority is coded female.³¹ Read this way, what appears as complementary distributed leadership could equally be described as a division of leadership labor along existing gender lines within the *pesantren*, rather than a symmetrical sharing of authority: the *bu nyai*'s authority, however substantively significant, remains bounded to the character-and-habitation domain and was not observed to extend to the institutional or financial decisions that define the *kiai*'s and the school principals' authority. The interview data available for this study cannot adjudicate between these two readings, since no informant was asked directly whether the *bu nyai*'s authority is regarded as equal to the *kiai*'s. Distinguishing a functionally distributed but formally asymmetrical leadership structure from a genuinely shared one is therefore treated here as a limitation of the present analysis and a specific direction for future research, discussed further in the Conclusion.

Delegated Authority: Structural Adaptation and Bounded Autonomy at the School Level

As the *pesantren*'s formal units multiplied, authority historically concentrated in the *kiai* was necessarily redistributed. The SMK principal describes this redistribution as a practical response to organizational complexity rather than a deliberate governance reform:

“Dengan adanya beberapa unit pendidikan, pengelolaannya memang semakin kompleks. Tidak mungkin semua persoalan ditangani langsung oleh Abah. Karena itu sebagai kepala sekolah dan pengurus diberikan tanggung jawab untuk mengelola unit masing-masing.”

[With several educational units now in operation, management has indeed become more complex. It is not possible for Abah [the kiai] to handle every matter directly. That is why, as school principals and administrators, we are given responsibility to manage our respective units.] (Vocational High School Principal)

This account echoes long-standing critiques of *pesantren* governance as a “mono-management, mono-administration” system in which authority is not delegated to subordinate units.³² At Bustanul Falah, however, institutional growth has pushed leadership toward a more differentiated structure without severing the principal's accountability to the *pesantren*'s central authority:

“Kami tetap melakukan koordinasi dengan pesantren, terutama untuk hal-hal yang berkaitan dengan kebijakan dan nilai lembaga. Tetapi untuk persoalan teknis sekolah, kami diberikan ruang untuk mengambil keputusan.”

[We still coordinate with the pesantren, especially on matters related to

³¹ Ningrum and Mursidi, “Kuasa Perempuan: Peranan Dan Kedudukan ‘Bu nyai’ Dalam Memimpin Pondok Pesantren Di Kabupaten Banyuwangi.”

³² Kompri, *Manajemen Dan Kepemimpinan Pondok Pesantren*; Arifin et al., “Islamic Crash Course as a Leadership Strategy of School Principals in Strengthening School Organizational Culture.”

institutional policy and values. But for technical school matters, we are given room to make decisions.] (Vocational High School Principal)

This is a clear illustration of functional delegation bounded by centrally retained authority over policy and values, a pattern of decentralization that increases operational efficiency while preserving strategic and normative control at the center. In transformational leadership terms, this delegation itself functions as a form of individualized consideration extended not to individual learners but to subordinate leaders: the *kiai* signals trust in the principal's competence while remaining the final arbiter of value-laden decisions.³³ This pattern of delegated, bounded authority is consistent with what the distributed leadership literature describes as leadership practice stretched across multiple actors rather than held by one position alone.³⁴ The pattern is consistent with findings that *pesantren* institutional adaptation typically proceeds through more professionalized and flexible organizational structures that nonetheless preserve the *kiai*'s central role as guardian of values and moral authority.³⁵

Intellectual Stimulation Among Teachers: Deliberated, Not Unrestrained, Innovation

Delegation of managerial authority is accompanied by a parallel, if more circumscribed, opening for pedagogical innovation among teachers. A teacher at the *pesantren* described the *kiai*'s expectations directly:

"Abah selalu mengingatkan bahwa guru juga harus berkembang. Anak sekarang berbeda dengan anak dahulu. Karena itu cara mengajar juga perlu menyesuaikan. Guru diberi kesempatan untuk mencoba metode yang lebih menarik."

[Abah always reminds us that teachers, too, must develop. Children today are different from children in the past. Teaching methods therefore need to adjust. Teachers are given the opportunity to try more engaging methods.] (Teacher)

This encouragement corresponds closely to intellectual stimulation, the dimension of transformational leadership in which followers are invited to question established practice and experiment with new approaches.³⁶ Yet a second teacher's account shows that this stimulation operates within a deliberative rather than unrestrained process:

"Kalau ada ide baru, tidak langsung ditolak. Biasanya dibicarakan dulu, apa manfaatnya dan apakah sesuai dengan kondisi sekolah dan pesantren."

[If there is a new idea, it is not immediately rejected. It is usually discussed first, what benefit it offers and whether it fits the conditions of the school and the pesantren.] (Teacher/Ustadzah)

³³ Bass and Avolio, *Improving Organizational Effectiveness through Transformational Leadership*.

³⁴ Spillane, *Distributed Leadership*.

³⁵ Puspita W et al., "Transformasi *Pesantren* Di Era Globalisasi Digital: Inovasi Pendidikan Islam Dan Adaptasi Kelembagaan."

³⁶ Bass and Avolio, *Improving Organizational Effectiveness through Transformational Leadership*; Burns, *Leadership*.

New ideas at Bustanul Falah are neither reflexively rejected, which would indicate a closed, tradition-bound leadership style, nor automatically adopted, which would indicate an uncritical embrace of change. Instead, they pass through an informal but consistent deliberative filter that assesses both benefit and institutional fit. This finding refines accounts of *kiai*-led innovation in Islamic education that describe intellectual stimulation mainly in terms of individual encouragement,³⁷ by showing that, at the institutional level, that encouragement is embedded in a collective, value-checking process rather than left to individual teacher initiative alone.

Selective Technology Adoption: The Logic of Institutional Benefit

The same deliberative logic governs the *pesantren*'s approach to information technology, an area frequently identified in the literature as a flashpoint between *pesantren* tradition and digital modernity.³⁸ The *pengurus* responsible for administrative technology described the *pesantren*'s stance as principled selectivity rather than either resistance or uncritical adoption:

“Teknologi memang sudah menjadi kebutuhan. Administrasi, komunikasi dan pembelajaran sekarang banyak menggunakan teknologi. Tetapi penggunaannya tetap harus diarahkan. Tidak semua yang baru otomatis kita terapkan.”

[Technology has indeed become a necessity. Administration, communication, and learning now widely use technology. But its use must still be directed. Not everything new is automatically applied.] (Pengurus)

He further specified the principle underlying this selectivity:

“Prinsipnya kita mengambil yang bermanfaat. Kalau teknologi membantu pendidikan dan administrasi, kita gunakan. Tetapi kegiatan yang menjadi ciri pesantren tetap dijaga.”

[The principle is that we take what is beneficial. If technology helps education and administration, we use it. But activities that are characteristic of the pesantren are still protected.] (Pengurus)

This benefit-based criterion, *mengambil yang bermanfaat* (taking what is beneficial), closely resembles the classical Islamic legal principle of *maslahah* (public benefit) as a basis for adjudicating permissible innovation, and it converges with recent findings that *pesantren* digitalization in Indonesia proceeds through selective, ethically filtered adoption rather than wholesale technological transformation.³⁹ Framed in transformational leadership terms, this represents a distributed enactment of idealized influence at the administrative level: the *pengurus* applies the same value-boundary logic that the *kiai* articulates for the institution as a whole, suggesting that the *kiai*'s framing of

³⁷ Bashori, “Kepemimpinan Transformasional Kyai Pada Lembaga Pendidikan Islam.”

³⁸ Puspita W et al., “Transformasi *Pesantren* Di Era Globalisasi Digital: Inovasi Pendidikan Islam Dan Adaptasi Kelembagaan”; Hasna, Salsabila, and Hibatullah, “Strategi Adaptasi *Pesantren* Salaf Dalam Menghadapi Era Society 5.0: Studi Pada Pondok *Pesantren* Di Banyuwangi.”

³⁹ Puspita W et al., “Transformasi *Pesantren* Di Era Globalisasi Digital: Inovasi Pendidikan Islam Dan Adaptasi Kelembagaan”; Hasna, Salsabila, and Hibatullah, “Strategi Adaptasi *Pesantren* Salaf Dalam Menghadapi Era Society 5.0: Studi Pada Pondok *Pesantren* Di Banyuwangi.”

change has been internalized, and is independently reproduced, by leaders operating at some structural distance from him.

Drawing the Line: Negotiating What May Change and What Must Not

The preceding themes converge on a single, explicitly articulated boundary between what may change and what may not. The *kiai* states this boundary most directly:

“Ada hal yang memang prinsip dan tidak boleh hilang teng pesantren. Nilai agama, akhlak, Al-Qur’an, adab kepada guru, dan pembiasaan ibadah harus tetap. Tapi cara menyampaikan dan cara mengelolanya saget menyesuaikan kalih zaman.”

[There are things that are indeed principled and must not be lost from the pesantren. Religious values, akhlak, the Qur’an, adab toward teachers, and the habituation of worship must remain. But the way of delivering and managing them can adjust to the times.] (Kiai/Pengasuh)

The *bu nyai* reinforces this boundary from a different angle, evaluating success not in terms of institutional growth but in terms of whether the *pesantren* atmosphere survives that growth:

“Kalau sekolah formalnya semakin maju tetapi karakter pesantrennya hilang, menurut saya itu bukan keberhasilan. Anak-anak harus tetap merasakan suasana pesantren meskipun mereka belajar di sekolah formal.”

[If the formal schools become more advanced but the pesantren’s character is lost, in my view that is not success. Children must still feel the pesantren atmosphere even while studying in the formal school.] (Bu nyai)

Consistent with studies describing how *kiai* across different *pesantren* maintain organizational culture by protecting a core set of practices even as they modernize institutional management,⁴⁰ taken together, the statements above articulate what can be described as a negotiated boundary model of institutional change: a fixed, non-negotiable core (aqidah, *akhlak*, Qur’anic learning, adab, and ibadah habituation) is explicitly distinguished from an adaptable periphery (delivery methods, management structures, curricula, and technology). Negotiation, in this model, does not mean that the core itself is bargained over; rather, it means that every proposed change is actively tested against the core before being classified as belonging to the adaptable periphery. This pattern parallels findings on the deliberate preservation of specific ritual traditions, where traditional institutions similarly draw a firm line around ritual content while adapting its social organization,⁴¹ and it is consistent with classical Qur’anic pedagogy, in which the learning environment itself, not only its content, is treated as formative of the learner’s character.⁴² The adab-centered relationship between teacher and student invoked by both the *kiai* and the *bu nyai* further echoes recent re-readings of classical exegetical sources

⁴⁰ Mardiyah, “Kepemimpinan *Kiai* Dalam Memelihara Budaya Organisasi.”

⁴¹ Dewi and Utari, “The Role of Traditional Institutions in Preserving the Al-Barzanji Tradition.”

⁴² Aminah, “Educational Environment in the Quran.”

on the ethics of the teacher-student bond.⁴³ This distinguishes the present findings from accounts of *pesantren* modernization framed primarily as a historical shift from tradition toward modernity,⁴⁴ and instead supports a more dialectical reading in which *pesantren* treat modernity as material to be evaluated and incorporated on their own terms rather than as an external force to be simply accommodated or resisted.⁴⁵

Toward a Model of Negotiated Transformational Leadership

Figure 1 synthesizes the preceding findings into a single model.

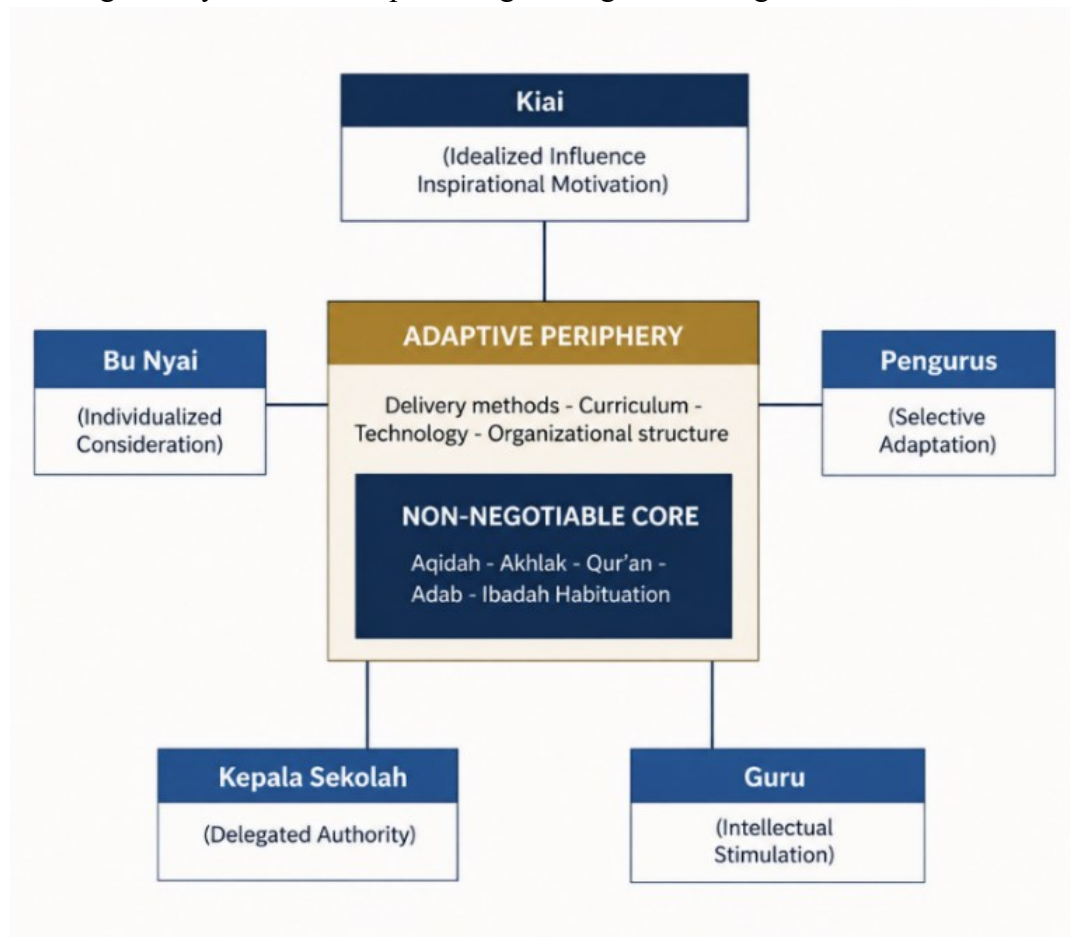


Figure 1. Model of Negotiated Transformational Leadership at Pesantren Bustanul Falah

At the center sits the non-negotiable value core that the *kiai* and *bu nyai* jointly guard. Surrounding it is the adaptable periphery, delivery methods, curriculum, technology, and organizational structure, opened to change through delegated and deliberated leadership at the school, teacher, and administrative levels. The five actors examined in this study each occupy a distinct position in this model: the *kiai* and *bu nyai* anchor the value core and authorize expansion (idealized influence, inspirational

⁴³ Rangkuti, Shunhaji, and Tahir, "Management of Acceptance and Regard in Educational Relationships: A Study of Hamka's Perspectives in Tafsir Al-Azhar."

⁴⁴ Fealy and Bush, "The Political Decline of Traditional Ulama in Indonesia: The State, Umma and Nahdlatul Ulama."

⁴⁵ Puspita W et al., "Transformasi *Pesantren* Di Era Globalisasi Digital: Inovasi Pendidikan Islam Dan Adaptasi Kelembagaan."

motivation, individualized consideration), while the school principal, teachers, and administrators operate the adaptable periphery under conditions of bounded autonomy and deliberative filtering (delegated authority, intellectual stimulation, benefit-based selectivity).

This model both confirms and extends existing transformational leadership scholarship in Islamic education. It confirms that the four dimensions of transformational leadership are clearly present in *kiai* leadership.⁴⁶ It extends that scholarship, however, by showing that these dimensions are not exercised by the *kiai* alone but distributed across a small leadership constellation whose members reproduce, at their own structural level, the same value-boundary logic the *kiai* articulates at the institutional level. It also refines classical portraits of the *kiai* as the singular custodian of *pesantren* tradition:⁴⁷ at Bustanul Falah, custodianship of tradition is a distributed and continuously negotiated achievement, not a static property vested in one office. Finally, it offers a Banyuwangi-specific contribution to a growing regional literature on *pesantren* adaptation, showing that the selective-adaptation strategy identified in other Banyuwangi *pesantren* operates not only at the level of technology or curriculum policy but as a general leadership grammar spanning institutional vision, human-resource delegation, pedagogy, and administration alike.⁴⁸

CONCLUSION

This study examined how transformational leadership at Pondok *Pesantren* Bustanul Falah negotiates the tension between preserving *pesantren* tradition and pursuing institutional diversification into early-childhood, junior-secondary, and vocational education. Across the five informants, this negotiation appeared as an ongoing, distributed process rather than unilateral command or passive accommodation: the *kiai* and *bu nyai* jointly guard a bounded core of religious values, *akhlak*, Qur'anic learning, adab, and worship habituation, while delivery methods, management structures, curricula, and technology are opened to delegated, deliberative adaptation at the school, teaching, and administrative levels. In informants' own accounts, each instance of change was tested for benefit and fit against this value core before being accepted. These findings offer a context-bound extension of transformational leadership theory: its four core dimensions appear here as a leadership grammar distributed across several actors rather than as attributes of one charismatic leader, though, as a single-case, interview-based study, this should be read as a grounded hypothesis rather than a generalized finding.

Three limitations qualify this conclusion. First, the study relies on one interview per informant role rather than repeated or triangulated observation, so it reflects

⁴⁶ Bashori, "Kepemimpinan Transformasional Kyai Pada Lembaga Pendidikan Islam"; Wahrudin and Maunah, "Kepemimpinan Transformasional Di Pondok *Pesantren*"; Bass and Avolio, *Improving Organizational Effectiveness through Transformational Leadership*.

⁴⁷ Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren: Studi Pandangan Hidup Kyai Dan Visinya Mengenai Masa Depan Indonesia*.

⁴⁸ Hasna, Salsabila, and Hibatullah, "Strategi Adaptasi *Pesantren* Salaf Dalam Menghadapi Era Society 5.0: Studi Pada Pondok *Pesantren* Di Banyuwangi."

informants' own framing of their practice rather than independently verified behavior. Second, the *kiai*'s and *bu nyai*'s authority were not measured against an explicit standard of formal equality, leaving open whether their division of labor reflects genuinely shared authority or a gendered structural division, as discussed above. Third, the single-case design, while suited to an in-depth account of one *pesantren*, limits how far the proposed model can be generalized beyond Bustanul Falah.

Future research involving a larger number of *pesantren*, additional informant groups such as santri and parents, and longitudinal observation of how the value boundary is renegotiated over time would help address these limitations and further test the model proposed here.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

In the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) used an AI language model (ChatGPT) to assist with organizing interview data, drafting narrative sections, and formatting the manuscript in accordance with the journal template. All AI-assisted output was subsequently reviewed, verified against the original interview transcripts, and revised by the author(s), who take full responsibility for the content, interpretation, and conclusions of this publication.

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