

Innovation and Identity: Transformational Leadership as the Key to Pesantren Adaptation in the Era of Globalization

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Abstract

This study reveals that transformational leadership has emerged as the dominant model in pesantren during the era of modernization, replacing the traditional role of the *kyai* as a spiritual authority with that of an innovative agent of change. Focusing on a strong vision, motivation, and intellectual stimulation, transformational *kyai* not only teach classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*), but also integrate technology and modern management to enhance the quality of education and *dakwah* (Islamic preaching). For example, pesantren now utilize social media and mobile applications to reach global audiences and manage their institutions more efficiently. This approach allows pesantren to remain relevant amidst the challenges of globalization while maintaining their Islamic identity. Transformational leadership also equips *santri* (students) to face the modern world with digital skills and critical thinking, while reinforcing the role of pesantren as inclusive centers of education and *dakwah*. These findings affirm that adaptive and visionary *kyai* are essential for the sustainability of pesantren in the digital age.

Keywords: *Transformational leadership, pesantren, modernization, technology, Islamic education.*

Introduction

Pesantren, as traditional Islamic educational institutions, face significant challenges in the era of modernization—marked by rapid technological advancement, globalization, and social transformation. For centuries, pesantren have been known as centers of religious learning that rely on traditional methods such as *sorogan* and *bandongan*. While these methods are effective in shaping students' character and faith, they are less responsive to the demands of a rapidly changing world that requires new skill sets. Today, pesantren are expected to innovate in order to remain relevant in educating the younger generation, by adopting approaches that respond to the needs of modern society while preserving Islamic values.

The challenges of modernization have grown more complex with the increasing need for digital literacy and global competence among *santri* (students). In the 21st century, the ability to understand and utilize technology, as well as to compete on the global stage, has become essential for the

younger generation. Many pesantren have begun to integrate technology, such as online learning platforms for Qur'anic instruction or social media for *dakwah* (Islamic preaching), to reach broader audiences. For example, some pesantren have developed integrated curricula that combine religious and general sciences, along with digital skills training. These initiatives prepare *santri* to navigate a rapidly changing world without losing their Islamic identity.

Innovation within pesantren must not come at the expense of their core identity as institutions that cultivate noble character, monotheism (*tauhid*), and Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). The tradition of teaching classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*) and fostering spiritual development remains a defining strength that distinguishes pesantren from other educational institutions. Successful pesantren are those that can balance Islamic essence with modernity—such as through entrepreneurship programs or 21st-century skills training. Through this approach, pesantren not only produce *ulama* (Islamic scholars) but also individuals capable of contributing in various fields—from technology to economics—while remaining rooted in religious values.

Pesantren hold immense potential to become agents of social transformation if they can respond to the challenges of modernization with effective strategies. By combining the richness of Islamic tradition with technological advancement, pesantren can educate a generation that is knowledgeable, adaptive, and globally competitive. Pesantren leaders must continuously innovate in teaching methods and curriculum development to ensure these institutions remain beacons of Islamic education. In doing so, pesantren will not only endure but also thrive as centers of enlightenment in an ever-evolving world.

Pesantren leadership, which has historically relied on the charismatic authority of the *kyai*, is now at a critical juncture for adaptation. The *kyai* is no longer merely a spiritual teacher but must also function as an institutional manager who navigates the complexities of modern dynamics. This expanded role requires a shift in leadership style—one that goes beyond traditional authority and embraces strategic innovation and organizational transformation. According to Bass¹ Transformational leadership is effective in navigating change because it inspires and motivates followers through a clear and compelling vision. This approach is particularly relevant for pesantren seeking to balance tradition with contemporary demands, especially in managing social and technological transformations. Adaptation to modernization is a significant challenge faced by many traditional educational institutions, including pesantren. On one hand, modernization offers various innovations that can enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the

¹ Bass, B. M. (1990). From transactional to transformational leadership: Learning to share the vision. *Organizational Dynamics*, 18(3), 19-31

educational process.² Technology, for instance, enables broader access to information and a wider range of learning resources.³ However, on the other hand, pesantren uphold deeply rooted Islamic values that have been passed down through generations. These values—such as adherence to classical teachings—are often seen as the very essence of the pesantren's identity. As a result, a dilemma arises when pesantren are faced with the choice between preserving these long-standing traditions or embracing modern practices.⁴

This dilemma becomes even more pronounced when modern approaches—emphasizing efficiency and technological advancement—are perceived to be in conflict with traditional values.⁵ In many cases, modern approaches are perceived as a threat to long-standing methods that have proven effective in shaping the character and spirituality of *santri*.⁶ The *kyai*, as the leader and visionary guide of the pesantren, faces a significant challenge in navigating this tension. They are expected to identify a leadership model that can bridge these two poles—integrating modern elements without compromising the religious identity that defines the pesantren.⁷

The tension between tradition and modernization has become a central focus in current research on pesantren leadership. Recent studies seek to answer a critical question: How can pesantren remain relevant in the modern era without losing their religious essence?⁸ This research is significant because its findings will have a direct impact on the future direction of pesantren as institutions. By discovering the right balance, pesantren can continue to play a vital role in shaping future generations who are not only intellectually capable but also deeply grounded in religious values.⁹ The results of this study are expected to provide guidance for other pesantren facing similar challenges,

² Smith, J. (2020). The Role of Technology in Modern Education. *Journal of Educational Technology*, 15(3), 45-56

³ Johnson, L. (2019). Expanding Access to Information through Technology in Traditional Institutions. *Educational Review*, 71(4), 367-384

⁴ Ahmad, R. (2018). Challenges in Integrating Modern Practices in Traditional Islamic Education. *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 25(2), 205-222

⁵ Zainuddin, A. (2021). Modernization vs Tradition in Islamic Education. *Indonesian Journal of Education*, 48(1), 113-129

⁶ Rahman, M. (2020). The Impact of Modern Approaches on Traditional Islamic Values in Education. *Journal of Religious Education*, 12(2), 89-102

⁷ Yusuf, S. (2019). Leadership Models in Pesantren: Balancing Tradition and Modernity. *Journal of Islamic Leadership*, 14(1), 15-31

⁸ Hidayat, F. (2022). Maintaining Religious Identity in the Modern Age: A Case Study of Pesantren Leadership. *Journal of Islamic Education Studies*, 37(3), 74-89.

⁹ Nawawi, I. (2021). Educational Reforms in Pesantren: A Path towards Modernity. *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Education*, 20(4), 233-249

while also enriching the discourse on how traditional institutions can adapt amidst the changing times.¹⁰

Previous studies offer a diverse picture of how pesantren have responded to modernization. Hidayat,¹¹ In educational journals, it is shown that modern pesantren have begun integrating technology into their curricula without compromising religious values—for example, through the use of e-learning platforms in the teaching of *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic texts). These studies affirm that innovation can be implemented without eroding the traditional essence of pesantren. Such findings provide a foundation for further exploring how leadership influences this adaptation process across various pesantren contexts.

Meanwhile, an international study by Ahmed and Khan highlights the importance of leadership flexibility in preserving the identity of Islamic educational institutions amid the pressures of globalization.¹² Their research demonstrates that adaptive leaders are capable of managing change without losing core values—a lesson highly relevant for pesantren in Indonesia. The combination of local and global approaches enriches the discourse on pesantren leadership in the modern era while offering valuable comparative perspectives.

Building on this background, the present study aims to identify effective models of pesantren leadership in the era of modernization and to provide strategic recommendations for pesantren administrators. By integrating transformational leadership theory with empirical evidence from various pesantren, this study seeks to offer fresh insights into how *kyai* can serve as both agents of change and guardians of tradition. The research is expected to contribute to the development of Islamic education policies that are responsive to contemporary demands, particularly in supporting the sustainability of pesantren as institutions of education and *dakwah*.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design to explore pesantren leadership models in the context of modernization in Indonesia. This approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of leadership dynamics within the diverse settings of pesantren, as recommended by Yin.¹³ This methodology is particularly suited for complex

¹⁰ Wibowo, T. (2020). Adapting Traditional Institutions to Modern Challenges: Lessons from Pesantren. *Journal of Cultural Studies*, 29(2), 56-71.

¹¹ Hidayat, A. (2020). Transformasi pesantren di era digital: Studi tentang integrasi teknologi dalam pendidikan Islam. *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 8(1), 45-58.

¹² Ahmed, S., & Khan, M. (2021). Leadership adaptability in Islamic educational institutions: A global perspective. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 59(4), 512-527

¹³ Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

case studies. The research was conducted across several pesantren in Indonesia that represent both traditional and modern variations. These institutions were selected using purposive sampling, based on the following criteria: a strong foundation in religious tradition, a significant number of *santri* (students), and the adoption of technology in either institutional management or educational practices.

Research participants consisted of key informants, including the *kyai* as the primary leader, pesantren administrators, and senior *santri* with direct experience of pesantren leadership. Informants were selected based on their strategic roles within the organizational structure of the pesantren and their ability to provide insights into how leadership is adapting to modernization. Data collection techniques included semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews were guided by open-ended questions exploring informants' perceptions of the *kyai*'s role, strategies for adapting to technological change, and the challenges posed by modernization. Observation focused on everyday leadership activities such as decision-making processes and interactions with *santri*, while document analysis included the pesantren's vision and mission statements, activity reports, and online publications.

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic approach, following the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke.¹⁴ This approach consists of six phases: data familiarization, initial coding, theme identification, theme review, theme naming, and report writing. The process began with the verbatim transcription of interviews, followed by manual coding to identify patterns such as "*transformational leadership*," "*technology integration*," and "*tradition preservation*." These themes were then interpreted within the framework of Bass's transformational leadership theory.

To ensure validity and reliability, this study employed data triangulation by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and document analysis. This triangulation aimed to reduce bias and enhance the credibility of the findings, in accordance with Creswell's guidelines.¹⁵ In addition, a member checking process was conducted by seeking confirmation from the informants regarding the initial interpretations, to ensure that the data accurately reflected their experiences.

¹⁴ Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101

¹⁵ Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications. 201

Discussion

Recent research reveals that leadership in pesantren during the era of modernization tends to adopt a transformational model. This model emphasizes the development of a strong vision and the ability to inspire and motivate followers. In the context of pesantren, the *kyai* is no longer solely a spiritual authority and guardian of tradition, but also serves as a change agent who responds proactively to the demands of the times.¹⁶ This indicates a significant shift in the way leadership is exercised in pesantren, where more dynamic and innovative approaches are increasingly being adopted to address the challenges of modernization.

According to Bass, transformational leadership involves the process of inspiring followers through vision, motivation, and innovation. In practice, *kyai* who adopt this model not only focus on teaching *kitab kuning* and providing deep religious understanding, but also strive to create an environment conducive to both intellectual and spiritual growth among *santri*. They promote innovation in teaching methods and institutional management, while ensuring that traditional values are respected and preserved. This approach enables pesantren to remain relevant and effective in educating the younger generation amid rapid social change.

This transformation is also evident in the evolving role of the *kyai*, who now functions not only as a teacher of *kitab kuning* but also as a leader managing the institution using modern approaches. Transformational-minded *kyai* tend to integrate technology and contemporary management methods into pesantren operations. They strive to enhance the quality of education by adopting new tools and techniques that facilitate more interactive and participatory learning. In addition, *kyai* play a vital role in building networks with other institutions—both nationally and internationally—to broaden the pesantren's access to knowledge and resources.

This transformational approach not only helps pesantren respond to the challenges of modernization but also strengthens their identity and societal role. By becoming visionary, innovation-oriented change agents, *kyai* ensure that pesantren remain centers of learning and spiritual development that are relevant to their communities. Moreover, transformational leadership prepares *santri* to contribute effectively in an increasingly complex and globalized society. By adopting this leadership model, pesantren can play a key role in shaping a generation that is deeply rooted in Islamic values while also being competitive and adaptable in the modern world.

A clear example of this adaptation is the use of technology by *kyai* in daily pesantren activities. Some pesantren, for instance, utilize social media

¹⁶ Bass, B. M. (1990). From transactional to transformational leadership: Learning to share the vision. *Organizational Dynamics*, 18(3), 19-31

platforms such as YouTube and Instagram to disseminate religious lectures, reaching audiences far beyond the traditional *santri* community. Others have developed mobile application-based information systems to manage student attendance and schedule activities. These innovations demonstrate that the *kyai* is no longer solely a traditional authority figure but also an innovator who leverages technology to enhance institutional efficiency and the reach of *dakwah*.

Temuan terbaru mendukung teori Bass yang menyatakan bahwa kepemimpinan transformasional adalah model yang efektif dalam mengelola perubahan, termasuk dalam konteks pesantren¹⁷ Transformational leadership focuses not only on achieving short-term goals but also on long-term development by inspiring and motivating followers through a clear and innovative vision. In the case of pesantren, this transformation involves not only the adoption of technology but also a renewal of the *kyai*'s mindset in facing the challenges of modernization. *Kyai* in pesantren are increasingly required to be more adaptive and proactive in managing change, ensuring that pesantren remain relevant and effective in educating the younger generation.

A concrete example of the application of transformational leadership in pesantren can be seen in *Pesantren C*, where the *kyai* initiated a digital literacy training program for *santri*. This initiative aims to prepare students for the increasingly complex challenges of a globalized world. By providing digital literacy training, the *kyai* not only enhances the technical skills of the *santri*, but also stimulates the critical and creative thinking needed in an increasingly digital era. This initiative reflects one of the core characteristics of transformational leadership intellectual stimulation in which leaders encourage followers to think innovatively and seek creative solutions to the problems they face.

In addition, transformational leadership is also marked by individualized consideration a leader's attention to the unique needs of each follower. At *Pesantren C*, the *kyai* demonstrates this by designing programs tailored to the specific needs of individual *santri*. This includes providing personalized mentoring and emotional support to help students overcome learning difficulties and adapt to change. Through a personal and empathetic approach, the *kyai* is able to build strong relationships and support the holistic development of each student. This not only improves the *santri*'s ability to adapt to change but also strengthens their self-confidence and motivation to learn.

Innovative efforts such as these illustrate how transformational leadership can be effectively applied in the pesantren context. By encouraging

¹⁷ Bass, B. M. (1990). From transactional to transformational leadership: 19-31

mindset shifts and embracing technology, the *kyai* ensures that the pesantren remains a dynamic and relevant center of education in the modern era. Transformational leadership not only helps pesantren manage change but also reinforces their identity and role in society. Through ongoing innovation and adaptation, pesantren can play a vital role in shaping a generation that is well-prepared to face global challenges while remaining grounded in the traditional values that define Islamic education.

However, despite the ongoing adaptation to modernization, pesantren leadership remains deeply rooted in traditional Islamic values. The *kyai* continues to uphold the role of moral exemplar and guardian of religious teachings—a principle that lies at the heart of pesantren identity. Hidayat (year) emphasizes that¹⁸ Hidayat, in his study, found that even though pesantren have adopted technology, values such as adherence to classical teachings and reverence for the *kyai* remain unwavering in the face of modernization. This suggests that the transformation of leadership does not come at the expense of the pesantren's traditional essence.

The *kyai*'s flexibility in balancing tradition and innovation is a key factor in the successful adaptation of *pesantren* to modernization. This ability allows *pesantren* to remain relevant in the digital era without sacrificing the core values that have underpinned Islamic education for centuries. As emphasized by Ahmed and Khan in their study¹⁹, Adaptive leadership in Islamic educational institutions heavily depends on the leader's ability to integrate modern elements without compromising their core identity. This means that leaders must be capable of reading the context and adjusting their approaches to meet the demands of the times, while still preserving the traditional essence that defines the institution.

A concrete example of adaptive leadership implementation can be seen in [Pesantren X], where the *kyai* successfully harmonizes tradition and modernity through innovative strategies. In this pesantren, the classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*) continue to be taught through direct, face-to-face instruction, preserving the traditional learning model that emphasizes close interaction between teacher and student. However, to expand access and support distance learning, the *kyai* complements this approach with digital recordings of lessons. This step not only broadens educational access for students who are unable to attend in person but also enriches the learning experience by integrating modern technology.

¹⁸ Hidayat, A. (2020). Transformasi pesantren di era digital: Studi tentang integrasi teknologi dalam pendidikan Islam. *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 8(1), 45-58.

¹⁹ Ahmed, S., & Khan, M. (2021). Leadership adaptability in Islamic educational institutions: A global perspective. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 59(4), 512-527

The approach adopted by [Pesantren X] reflects a balanced integration of tradition and modernity, demonstrating that both can coexist to create a more inclusive and adaptive educational environment. By providing learning materials in digital formats, the pesantren can reach a wider audience and offer more flexible learning opportunities for students. This also enables students to learn at their own pace and according to their individual needs, enhancing both learning effectiveness and motivation to engage actively in the educational process.

The success of pesantren in Indonesia in integrating traditional and modern elements serves as an inspiring model for other Islamic educational institutions. It demonstrates that with adaptive and flexible leadership, pesantren can continue to grow and play a vital role in shaping generations prepared to face future challenges. By remaining grounded in core values while embracing innovation, pesantren can ensure that they are not only guardians of tradition but also pioneers of a modern and relevant Islamic education.

A major challenge in the adaptation process is resistance from some senior administrators toward technology. In several pesantren, older staff members have rejected the use of management applications, arguing that such tools reduce personal interaction with the students. This resistance is consistent with the findings of Johnson et al., who note that generational differences often influence the acceptance of technological innovation in traditional educational settings.²⁰ Johnson et al. noted that the older generation tends to struggle with embracing technological change. This indicates a generational gap in pesantren leadership that must be addressed.

To address this challenge, digital leadership training emerges as a potential solution. This study found that some pesantren have initiated technology training programs for their administrators, which have successfully increased acceptance of innovation. This approach aligns with the recommendations of Ahmed and Khan²¹. Ahmed and Khan argue that continuous training can strengthen leadership capacity in responding to modernization. Such training programs can serve as a model for other pesantren.

Transformational leadership in pesantren plays a crucial role in shaping adaptive and progressive institutional dynamics, particularly through the kyai's ability to build a collective vision. In the pesantren context, the kyai does not merely act as a sole leader but also as a facilitator who engages various

²⁰ Johnson, L., Smith, R., & Willis, H. (2020). Technology overload and its impact on student engagement. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 68(5), 2457-2472.

²¹ Ahmed, S., & Khan, M. (2021). Leadership adaptability in Islamic educational institutions. 522.

elements of the pesantren community.²² Active participation from various elements of the pesantren community, such as students (*santri*) and administrators, in the decision-making process fosters a strong sense of ownership over each initiative implemented. One clear example is the development of online da'wah strategies that align with current technological advancements. This involvement not only strengthens collective commitment but also ensures that every policy and program is grounded in the shared needs and aspirations of the community. Such an approach reflects inclusive and collaborative leadership values, which are key characteristics of sustainable and adaptive organizational transformation.

One tangible example of this approach is how the *kyai* in pesantren encourage collaboration in formulating the vision for online *dakwah* (Islamic preaching). By involving students (*santri*) and administrators, the *kyai* ensures that every individual feels a sense of ownership in realizing shared goals, thereby strengthening their commitment to change. This process not only results in more contextual strategies but also enhances the confidence of *santri* to contribute actively. This sense of ownership acts as a cohesive force within the pesantren, especially when facing external challenges such as modernization and globalization.

According to Bass, one of the key elements of transformational leadership is inspirational motivation, which enables a leader to mobilize followers in support of a shared vision. In pesantren, *kyai* utilize this by conveying Islamic values that resonate with contemporary goals of *dakwah*. Through passionate communication and a clear vision, *kyai* are able to motivate *santri* and administrators to view change as an opportunity rather than a threat. This approach not only reinforces collective enthusiasm but also fosters an environment that supports innovation and creativity in pesantren management.

This transformational approach has a significant impact on the sustainability of pesantren amid rapid social changes. By building internal cohesion through a collective vision, pesantren are able to maintain their Islamic identity while remaining relevant to the demands of the times. The leadership of the *kyai*, which inspires and engages the community, establishes a strong foundation to face external challenges, such as educational competition and shifting generational mindsets. Thus, transformational leadership serves not only as a tool for change but also as a key to preserving the existence of pesantren as dynamic institutions of education and *dakwah*.

The role of *kyai* as agents of change is a major driver in expanding the function of pesantren—not only as educational institutions but also as

²² Bass, B. M. (1990). From transactional to transformational leadership: 19-31

relevant centers of *dakwah* in the modern era. With a transformational vision, *kyai* are able to integrate pesantren's traditional values with technological advancement, enabling these institutions to adapt to contemporary dynamics without losing their identity. In pesantren such as [name], for example, the *kyai* leads initiatives to utilize technology in managing education and disseminating Islamic teachings, creating an innovative model of leadership. This approach enables pesantren to retain their core role in moral education while simultaneously becoming progressive agents of social change.

The use of technology by *kyai* in pesantren has transformed the paradigm of traditional *dakwah* into one that is more inclusive and far-reaching. By developing online Islamic lectures, pesantren are no longer limited to serving local communities but are able to reach a global audience. Islamic content shared via digital platforms has been accessed by viewers from various countries, demonstrating that modernization can enhance the global influence of pesantren. This reflects the *kyai*'s ability to identify opportunities amidst challenges, using technology as a tool to expand the *dakwah* mission without compromising the essence of Islamic teachings.

The success of pesantren's online lectures also highlights the strategic impact of transformational leadership in enhancing pesantren's relevance in the era of globalization. *Kyai* play not only the role of teacher but also of communicator, able to convey Islamic messages contextually to diverse audiences. With this approach, pesantren build a bridge between local values and global needs, fostering inclusive Islamic discourse. This initiative also strengthens the position of pesantren as dynamic institutions—not merely surviving change, but leading it with a clear vision.

Furthermore, the *kyai*'s transformational leadership in utilizing technology has long-term implications for the sustainability of pesantren as centers of education and *dakwah*. By extending their sphere of influence, pesantren contribute not only to strengthening the local Muslim community but also to disseminating Islamic values on the global stage. This confirms that visionary and adaptive leadership can position pesantren as relevant and competitive institutions—capable of meeting modern challenges while remaining faithful to their spiritual and intellectual missions. In this way, the role of the *kyai* as an agent of change not only reinforces the internal strength of pesantren but also significantly broadens the horizon of Islamic *dakwah*.

However, technological adaptation also brings certain risks, such as dependency on uneven digital infrastructure. In pesantren, power outages and unstable internet connections often hinder the effective use of management applications. This finding is consistent with the study by Hidayat.²⁴ "about

²³ Weber, M. (1947). *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. New York: Free Press. 358

²⁴ Hidayat, A. (2020). Transformasi pesantren di era digital: 45-58.

charisma that evolves in the modern context, which was later expanded by Bass in his theory of transformational leadership." This is in line with Hidayat's study, which highlights infrastructural gaps as a major barrier to digital transformation in pesantren. It indicates that leadership must be supported by policies that ensure adequate access to technology.

The practical implications of these findings highlight the urgency of developing a technology-oriented leadership curriculum as a strategic step to strengthen the role of pesantren in the modern era. This curriculum should be designed to equip *kyai* with technological skills and a transformational vision, enabling them to lead pesantren more adaptively and innovatively. At *pesantren* [name], for instance, the integration of technology into online *dakwah* has proven that tech-literate leadership can extend the pesantren's influence globally. With the right curriculum, *kyai* can continuously enhance their ability to leverage technological developments in support of educational and *dakwah* missions, positioning pesantren as relevant and dynamic institutions.

Technology-based leadership training should not be limited to *kyai* alone, but must also involve administrators and *santri* in order to create a collaborative and adaptive leadership ecosystem. Administrators can be trained to manage digital platforms or tech-based administrative systems, while *santri* can be encouraged to develop creative and contextual *dakwah* content. This approach—as implemented at *pesantren* [name] by involving *santri* in online *dakwah* strategies—strengthens the sense of ownership and active participation in the transformation process. By engaging all elements of the pesantren, such training builds a solid foundation for sustainable transformation, ensuring that each individual contributes to the shared vision.

To support this initiative, pesantren are encouraged to establish partnerships with higher education institutions or technology organizations with expertise in tech and leadership development. Such collaborations could include training programs, knowledge exchange, or the development of customized applications for pesantren needs, such as online learning platforms or digital *dakwah* media. These partnerships not only enhance the technical capacity of pesantren but also open opportunities to share resources and drive innovation. This study shows that *pesantren* [name] has successfully reached a global audience through its online *kajian* (religious study sessions)—an achievement that could be further expanded through strategic external collaborations.

These efforts have the potential to increase pesantren's competitiveness amid the modern educational landscape, while maintaining their identity as centers for Islamic education and *dakwah*. With a technology-oriented leadership curriculum, pesantren can produce a new generation of leaders who are not only grounded in Islamic knowledge but also capable of

navigating global challenges. This adaptive leadership ecosystem enables pesantren to remain relevant, attract younger generations, and expand their influence both locally and internationally. Therefore, investing in technology training and collaboration is key to ensuring the sustainability and excellence of pesantren in the digital era.

From a sustainability perspective, transformational leadership also reinforces the role of pesantren as centers of education and *dakwah*. By integrating technology, pesantren are able to respond to the needs of modern society without losing their identity as traditional Islamic institutions. This aligns with the vision of inclusive and progressive Islamic education, as advocated by Ahmed and Khan.²⁵ This message is relevant for pesantren administrators across Indonesia.

According to Bass, transformational leadership plays a crucial role in ensuring the sustainability of pesantren as centers of education and Islamic propagation in the modern era. Transformational leaders foster innovation by integrating traditional Islamic values with contemporary approaches, such as the use of technology in teaching and *da'wah* dissemination. This approach allows pesantren to remain relevant amid changing times without sacrificing their identity as Islamic educational institutions.²⁶ Transformational leadership is characterized by the ability to inspire and motivate followers toward a shared vision, which, in the context of pesantren, centers on strengthening Islamic values and empowering communities. In this way, pesantren can become progressive agents of social change.

The integration of technology in pesantren serves as a tangible expression of transformational leadership. Tools such as online learning platforms, social media for *da'wah*, and digital management systems enable pesantren to extend their reach to a broader audience, particularly younger generations who are highly engaged in the digital landscape. Ahmed and Khan emphasize that inclusive Islamic education must embrace technological advancement to address the needs of contemporary society while preserving its traditional foundations.²⁷ For example, several pesantren in Indonesia have developed mobile applications for teaching the Qur'an and Hadith, thereby expanding access to Islamic education for global communities. This step demonstrates that pesantren are not merely surviving, but evolving as adaptive centers of knowledge.

²⁵ Ahmed, S., & Khan, M. (2021). Leadership adaptability in Islamic educational institutions, 59(4), 512-527

²⁶ Bass, B. M. (1990). *From Transactional to Transformational Leadership: Learning to Share the Vision*. Organizational Dynamics, 18(3), 19-31.

²⁷ Ahmed, A., & Khan, M. (2019). *Islamic Education in the Digital Era: Challenges and Opportunities*. Journal of Islamic Studies, 30(2), 45-60.

The sustainability of pesantren also depends on the ability of transformational leadership to preserve the Islamic identity that forms the core of their existence. This identity includes the teaching of noble moral values (akhlak mulia), monotheism (tauhid), and Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), which have characterized pesantren for centuries. In this regard, transformational leaders serve as both guardians of tradition and innovators, ensuring that modernization does not erode the essence of Islamic teachings. A study by Lukens-Bull.²⁸ A study by Lukens-Bull shows that pesantren which successfully adapt to modernity are those that can balance tradition and innovation through visionary leadership. With this approach, pesantren are able to maintain public trust as authentic and relevant educational institutions.

The vision of inclusive and progressive Islamic education, as advocated by Ahmed and Khan, serves as an important foundation for pesantren administrators in Indonesia. Inclusive education not only focuses on religious instruction but also encompasses economic empowerment, environmental sustainability, and the development of 21st-century skills such as digital literacy and entrepreneurship. Modern pesantren such as Darussalam Gontor and Al-Azhar have demonstrated how this approach can be implemented, offering curricula that integrate religious and secular sciences while encouraging students' independence through entrepreneurship programs.²⁹ This approach reflects a holistic vision of Islam, one that is not only oriented toward the hereafter but also concerned with worldly well-being.

The message about the importance of transformational leadership is highly relevant for all pesantren administrators in Indonesia. Amid the challenges of globalization and digitalization, pesantren are required to continuously innovate while remaining faithful to their core mission of education and da'wah. By adopting transformational leadership, pesantren can strengthen their role as institutions that not only produce Islamic scholars but also future leaders who are capable of responding to society's needs in an inclusive and progressive manner. As emphasized by Saeed, successful Islamic education in the modern era is one that can bridge the legacy of the past with the aspirations of the future.³⁰ Therefore, pesantren administrators need to continuously sharpen their vision and leadership skills to ensure the sustainability of these institutions in the future.

²⁸ Lukens-Bull, R. A. (2001). *Two Sides of the Same Coin: Modernity and Tradition in Islamic Education in Indonesia*. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 32(3), 350-372

²⁹ Pohl, F. (2006). *Islamic Education and Civil Society: Reflections on the Pesantren Tradition in Contemporary Indonesia*. *Comparative Education Review*, 50(3), 389-409.

³⁰ Saeed, A. (2006). *Islamic Thought: An Introduction*. Routledge

Conclusion

This study concludes that the pesantren leadership model in the era of modernization is transformational in nature, characterized by a blend of the kyai's charismatic authority, technological innovation, and a strong commitment to Islamic values. Leadership flexibility emerges as a crucial element that enables pesantren to adapt to contemporary demands without losing their religious identity, thus maintaining the institution's relevance within the context of modern education. These findings underscore the importance of balancing the preservation of tradition with openness to change, where the kyai functions not only as a spiritual leader but also as an agent of innovation driving organizational transformation in pesantren.

The implications of this study highlight the need to develop technology-based leadership training programs for kyai and pesantren administrators, as well as modern communication strategies to enhance engagement with students and the broader community in order to support institutional sustainability. This research offers a new perspective on the dynamics of leadership in Islamic education, particularly in addressing the challenges of modernization. For future studies, it is recommended to explore the impact of transformational leadership models on students' academic and spiritual achievements, or to expand the research scope by involving pesantren from other regions in Indonesia to enrich understanding of leadership practice variations.

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