



## KYAI'S LEADERSHIP IN IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF SALAFIYAH PESANTREN EDUCATION

**Anis Fauzi<sup>1</sup>, Agus Gunawan<sup>2</sup>, Himayatul Mu'minin<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1,2</sup>UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten, Banten, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>MTs Negeri 2 Serang, Banten, Indonesia

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### Abstract

There is a tendency for Salafiyah Pesantren to experience a decrease in the number of students, and many are facing a decline in the scientific quality of their alums and current students. Culturally, the erosion of Salafiyah traditions has become increasingly apparent, ranging from the weakening sense of *ta'zhim* toward the *Kyai*, reduced learning persistence accompanied by *tarikat* rituals—fasting, *wirid*, and others—to diminishing belief in *karomah* and *barakah* once deeply embedded among students. This study aims to explain the leadership and management patterns employed by the *Kyai* in enhancing the educational quality of the Cidanghiang Salafiyah Pesantren. The research employed a qualitative approach in which data were collected through interviews, observations, documentation, field notes, and triangulation. The findings indicate that the *Kyai* of the Cidanghiang Salafiyah Pesantren exercises charismatic informal authority combined with managerial competencies, demonstrating not only innate leadership talent but also a strategic and future-oriented vision for advancing Salafiyah-based educational services. In practice, the *Kyai* fulfills managerial roles involving planning, organizing, implementing, evaluating, and controlling the core academic and non-academic processes of the pesantren.

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### Corresponding Author:

**Anis Fauzi**

UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten, Banten, Indonesia

Address: RSS Complex, Serang City Regional Government, Banten, Indonesia

[anis.fauzi@uinbanten.ac.id](mailto:anis.fauzi@uinbanten.ac.id)

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## INTRODUCTION

As a very essential element of the Pesantren (*Islamic Boarding School*), a *Kyai* in his duties and functions is required to have broad policies and insights, be skilled in religious sciences and be a good leader, even the existence of a *Kyai* is often associated with a 'supernatural' phenomenon of power, namely a

Kyai is considered as the heir of prophetic treatises, so that the existence of Kyai is almost associated with a figure who has a close relationship with God (Madjid, 1997). This centrality of the Kyai is reinforced by studies showing that Kyai serve simultaneously as charismatic leaders, educators, cultural guardians, and managers of traditional Islamic institutions (Alam, 2018; Fitria, 2023). Thus, the development of an Islamic boarding school is highly dependent on the personal ability of its Kyai (Dhofier, 1994), especially in the 21st century, which requires reliable and visionary leadership. In this context, contemporary research describes Kyai leadership as increasingly transformative, combining charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration to navigate modern educational challenges (Noor et al., 2022).

Nowadays, observers and education practitioners are shocked by the phenomena that occur in Pesantren, including: (1) the number of Islamic boarding schools that have undergone transformation so that some have included public educational institutions, a trend widely recognized as part of pesantren's broader modernization to maintain relevance in the national education landscape (Noor et al., 2022); (2) the number of Islamic boarding schools that have been displaced since the launch of Islamic education modernization in various regions of the Muslim world and some Islamic boarding schools are unable to survive (Azra, 2019), a condition also noted by researchers who argue that traditional pesantren must adapt structurally to avoid marginalization (Fitria, 2023); (3) The number of pesantren that have experienced a decrease in public interest has resulted in a decrease in the number of students after self-adjustment by adopting more or less general education content and methodology, a phenomenon linked to competition with formal educational institutions perceived to offer better economic and social mobility (Alam, 2018); (4) some pesantren are reluctant to make changes by rejecting the inclusion of policies of the Ministry of Religion and the Ministry of Education and Culture because they are worried about losing the cultural character of the pesantren that is already established and trusted by the community, a concern consistent with findings that many Kyai act as conservative gatekeepers who protect the authenticity of salafiyah traditions from external intervention (Fitria, 2023).

Along with the number of pesantren that have transformed themselves by adopting and establishing public schools, this is none other than an effort to improve the quality of education, which is increasingly challenging and complex. The quality of pesantren education is currently a serious concern, lest the current era of intense competition erode it. On that basis, the vision and mission of Islamic boarding schools in the future must focus on improving the quality of their education, not on quantity, but on the quality of their coveted output. Several studies emphasize that improved quality in pesantren must be supported by leadership capable of integrating tradition with innovation, ensuring that students become competitive while maintaining religious depth (Suharya et al., 2018).

Salafiyah Islamic boarding schools, as traditional Islamic educational institutions, also face several challenges. Externally, pesantren must compete with other academic institutions that are financially promising for the future. Let alone expanding the reach of its consumer base by promoting the advantages of its models and teaching materials, Salafiyah Pesantren faces many difficulties in maintaining its consumer base. This situation is consistent with research indicating that traditional pesantren often struggle to meet the expectations of modern parents seeking institutional pathways to higher education and employment (Noor et al., 2022). Facts show that in some areas, alums of the Salafiyah Pesantren no longer entrust the education of their sons and daughters to the Salafiyah Pesantren of their alma mater. This seems to give the impression that they are alumni of Salafiyah Pesantren, feeling *kapok mondok*. Because, by going to Salafiyah Islamic boarding schools, they think that their future is not as bright as if they studied in public schools and colleges, so they do not want their children to experience the same thing. Similar concerns are documented in recent studies showing that pesantren graduates increasingly prioritize formal credentials associated with modern schooling to improve socioeconomic prospects (Alam, 2018; Suharya et al., 2018).

## METHOD

This study uses a qualitative case study design to understand in depth the practice of leadership management in improving the quality of education at the Cidanghiang Salafiyah Pesantren, whose address is at Barugbug, Padarincang, Serang Regency, Banten Province. This approach was chosen because it allows exploration of meaning, processes, and social dynamics in a natural setting, with the researcher serving as the primary instrument for collecting and interpreting data. The analysis was inductive and interpretive, following the guidelines of Creswell and Poth (2018) and Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014).

The data for this research were obtained through key informants purposively selected, including pesantren leaders, managers, students, alums, and the community. The list of informants includes: (1) K. H. Thoif Djauhari, the head of the Islamic boarding school; (2) Ahmad Damimin, village head of 'Ām; (3) Hadi, general secretary; (4) M. Luthfi, general treasurer; (5) M. Irfanuddin, Ash-Shogir rayon head; (6) M. Romli, village head of Al-Anshori rayon; (7) M. Thoyib, student representative; (8) Ust. Sohari, an alumnus of the Islamic boarding school, and (9) H. Aan, community representative.

Data collection techniques include participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies. Observations were conducted in a descriptive, focused, and selective manner to obtain a comprehensive picture of the management system and strategies to improve the quality of education. The interviews were conducted in both structured and unstructured formats to explore informants' views, experiences, and reflections on managerial practices in Islamic boarding schools. Documentation is used to collect supporting data

from official archives, activity reports, meeting notes, and relevant educational documents (Moleong, 2019).

Data analysis was carried out simultaneously from the beginning of data collection, following the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) model, which included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion withdrawal and verification. The validity of the data is maintained through triangulation of sources and methods, member checks, and the application of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

## RESULTS

K.H. Thoif al Jauhari founded this Pesantren in Cidanghiang village, Barugbug village, Padarincang district. Since its establishment in 1997, the pesantren has experienced significant progress. Currently, in terms of quantity, it has approximately 500 students, up from the original 4 to 7 students. An increase in the number of students, which is relatively large for a Salafiyah Islamic boarding school, is strong evidence of the need to maintain a consumer base in several other Salafiyah Pesantren along the Palima-Pabuaran-Ciomas-Pedarincag-Cinangka road. Primarily, these students are not obtained through the maturity of interpersonal communication, which is strengthened by the network of friendships among students and alums who maintain a sense of solemnity and *tabarruk* toward the Kyai and pesantren, by conveying to each other and inviting their relatives to come to this pesantren. Since 2003, this pesantren has graduated its students who memorize the book of *'Amil, Matan Bina, Juru Miyah, Alfiyah*, and *Fathul Mu'in* as the characteristics of its pesantren graduates (Observation, 2023). In terms of infrastructure, this pesantren is expanding every year (4 hectares, three large complexes). This development makes this pesantren one of the Salafiyah Pesantrens able to survive in the current era of global education competition.

Recitation activities at the Cidanghiang Salafiyah Pesantren are divided into three models: *balagan*, *pasaran*, and *sorogan*. This *balagan* activity is usually taught directly by the Kyai for the *kitab kuning* of dawaman (the main books that define the boarding school), namely: *'Amil, Juru Miyah, Alfiyah*, and *Fathul Mu'in*. This activity is routinely attended by all students in the morning until the time of dzuhur. During the day, from around 14.00 until the time of Asr, and at night, *Ba'da Isha* until 22.00 WIB, on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, while on Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday are used for extracurricular activities, student skill activities, and community activities (Interview with Ahmad Damimin). The *balagan* recital activity is also conducted by the Kyai as part of the local community's routine recitation, with students and alums, every Friday after Friday prayers.

*Pasaran* activities are activities of reciting the *kitab kuning* that use the *balagan* method for books that are not dawaman; the time limit is not determined, meaning that once the entire content of the book is completed, it is replaced by another book (Interview, Ahmad Damimin, 2023). Based on the time of activity, *pasaran* studies are divided into two activities: routine *pasaran*,

carried out in the morning every day (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday), and mandatory recitation after completing the material of the main books. The books studied are *tafsir* texts such as *Tafsir al Munīr*, *Tafsir Ibn Abbas*, and *Tafsir al Maraghiy*. The periodic *pasaran* is to recite additional *kitab kuning* in *Balagan* only in certain months, namely *Rabiul Awwal* (Mulud) and *Rajab*. In the month of Mulud, the books studied are *fann* (branch of science) and *manthiq* (Islamic theology/philosophy), the book *Sulamu al Munawwaroh*; while in the month of Rajab, it is usually recited *fann balaghoh* (Arabic literature), the book *Jawhar al Maqnun* ([Interview, Ahmad Damimin, 2023](#)).

*Sorogan* activities are carried out every day after the completion of the *balagan* until the time of *dzuhur*. During the day after lunch until the time of *Asr*. The students carry out this activity: they read and try to lecture (explain the contents of the book) what they wrote in the activity of reciting the main books of the pesantren to the *asātidz* whom Kyai has appointed. These *asātidz* also serve concurrently as block village heads at the management level of the Islamic boarding school. In addition, the recitation activity is carried out as part of the routine obligatory recitation of the Qur'an after the congregational *maghrib* prayer, from the *ibtida* students to their respective rayon village heads ([Interview, Ahmad Damimin, 2023](#)).

The interesting thing during the research at the Cidanghiang Salafiyah Pesantren is the independence of the pesantren leaders from affiliating with any community or political organization, even though there are many invitations and offers. In fact, on the contrary, some of the Central Management of *Mathla'ul Anwar*, the most prominent Islamic mass organization in Banten Province, are staying at his pesantren ([Interview, K. H. Thoif Djauhari, 2023](#)). The independence of the leader of the Cidanghiang Salafiyah Pesantren is also reflected in his reluctance to affiliate with the government, although it is not uncommon for government officials to visit him. This is evidenced by the fact that the name of the Cidanghiang Pesantren is not recorded in the list of names of Islamic boarding schools in Banten Province in 2007-2008, belonging to the Ministry of Religion of the Banten Provincial Regional Office, nor is it recorded as a member in the records of the Banten Province Islamic Boarding School Gathering Forum.

The simplest, but very important, thing is the naming of the pesantren, which only pins the name of the village. When the writer asked and tried to advocate naming his pesantren so the public could easily recognize it, he jokingly invited anyone to suggest a name. However, the crowd was already familiar with the name of the pesantren which is now as revealed in the interview below: "If it's a name problem, please just give me any name, but people have already fallen in love with the current name of the pesantren and Alhamdulillah, there are also my students who come from outside the region such as Aceh, Lampung, Cirebon, Cianjur, and Central Java" ([Interview, K.H. Thoif Djauhari, 2023](#)). Naming as a symbol of identity, which in *pasaran* management can be a brand mark, for the leaders of the Cidanghiang Salafiyah Pesantren is not an important issue, because the Cidanghiang Salafiyah

Pesantren is a name, and its students now reach 300 boys and 200 girls from various regions in the archipelago. The graduates can understand and memorize *Alfiyah Ibn Malik* and *Fathul Muin* well.

Kyai's principle is only concentrated on developing the Salafiyah education model in the Cidanghiang Salafiyah Pesantren is also seen in his reluctance to participate in managing formal religious education with legal entities such as Madrasah Diniyah, Madrasah Tsanawiyah, Madrasah Aliyah, or the literacy and equality programs of the Ministry of Religion Wusthó and Úlā as done by several other Salafiyah pesantren as done by several other Salafiyah Pesantren. He conveyed this in the interview below: "... There are many children today who will be intelligent scholars in schools and madrasas, but there are still few who want to tafaqquh fiddin (delve into religious sciences)" ([Interview, Ahmad Damamin, 2023](#)).

## DISCUSSION

### Quality Planning of Salafiyah Cidanghiang Pesantren

In terms of planning the quality of education in Islamic boarding schools, the leaders of the Salafiyah Islamic Boarding School in Cidanghiang uphold the principle of independence. This emphasis on autonomy is consistent with the characteristics of salafiyah pesantren that prioritize self-reliance, minimal bureaucratic intervention, and a strong Kyai-centred leadership pattern ([Bruinessen, 2015; Wahid, 2018](#)). The principle of autonomy is also reflected in the recruitment pattern of students, in which the Kyai do not allow prospective students to pursue other learning activities – such as attending formal school – while studying at the pesantren. This aligns with findings that salaf pesantren often maintain exclusivity in their learning processes to preserve concentration on kitab kuning studies and to avoid dilution of traditional learning identity ([Azra, 2019; Hidayat & Rohman, 2020](#)).

Students at the Cidanghiang Pesantren are therefore strictly focused on reciting the kitab kuning and studying religious sciences. Historically, the establishment of this pesantren began with the strong intention of K.H. Thoif al Jauhari, who founded the institution in 1997 to elevate the image of salafiyah pesantren education, which at that time was perceived by some as outdated or poorly managed. Similar motivations have been documented in other pesantren revitalization efforts where Kyai attempt to transform community perceptions through reforms in discipline, facilities, and academic orientation ([Nurcholish, 2017](#)). This intention was strongly supported by his family and the community of Cidanghiang Village, Barugbug Village, and Padarincang District ([Interview, H. Aan, 2023](#)), reflecting the communal nature of pesantren development described by many scholars ([Arifin, 2013](#)).

The planning of the quality of education at the Cidanghiang Salafiyah Pesantren is divided into five essential components as conveyed by the village head: (1) providing Islamic religious education integrated with Indonesian moral values; (2) providing skills education as life independence provision; (3) determining graduation criteria for students; (4) holding *walimah al-tafarruq* as a

formal graduation ceremony; and (5) organizing scientific *rihlah* and *wali* pilgrimage activities regularly ([Interview, Ahmad Damimin, 2023](#)). These components illustrate a holistic concept of quality planning consistent with pesantren-based quality assurance models that emphasize academic mastery, moral formation, and social embeddedness ([Suyatno et al., 2019](#)). Such planning also reflects the broader framework of Islamic education quality standards, which integrate cognitive, affective, and spiritual outcomes ([Hashim & Langgulung, 2020](#)).

### **Organizing the Quality of Education of Salafiyah Cidanghiang Pesantren**

In organizing the quality of education, the ability of leaders to share policy authority with the administrators of the students as in the following interview: "Kyai appoints one of the students (usually the most senior; length of residence and depth of religious knowledge) to be used as the general village head, then the general village held a deliberation with all students to form a student management organization, at the specified time it was inaugurated and ratified by Kyai" ([Interview, Ahmad Damimin, 2023](#)). This structure reflects the traditional pesantren governance model in which leadership is both hierarchical and communal, with senior students (*santri sepuh*) receiving delegated authority as part of the pesantren's internal management system ([Dhofier, 2011; Madjid, 1997](#)). Such delegation of authority is typical in salafiyah pesantren, where leadership aims to foster discipline, autonomy, and moral responsibility among students ([Zarkasyi, 2015; Wahid, 2018](#)).

The student dormitory is divided into three large complexes: the *landeuh* complex (north), the central complex (*santriwati*), and the *girang* complex (south) ([Interview, Ahmad Damimin, 2023](#)). The northern complex consists of eight blocks (*rayon*), namely: *Ash Shoghir, Sukalila, al Anshori, Malibari, Sukasalamah, Tangerang, Lampung, and Pandeglang*. Each of these northern complexes contains 12 rooms, each with 4 or 5 students. The *santriwati* complex comprises four blocks (*rayon*): the *Indonesia* block, the *Sarawa* block, the *Mafaroja* block, and the *Qotrunnada* block. Each block contains 15 rooms, each with 4 to 5 students. The southern complex consists of five blocks, namely: *RDP, RDS, Kalimaya, Cibaliung, and Andalas*. Each block contains 12 rooms, each with 4 to 5 students. The spatial organization of santri housing in pesantren traditionally reflects not only logistical needs but also pedagogical and hierarchical patterns, where grouping students promotes peer supervision, discipline, and collective religious routines ([Bruinessen, 1995; Steenbrink, 1986](#)).

Each block (*rayon*) of the three complexes has a village head that has the following primary duties and functions: Responsible for the existence and daily activities of students; Ensuring the running of discipline and discipline of students in their environment; Becoming an *asātidz* in the activity of reciting sorogan junior students in his group; Becoming an *asātidz* in routine recitation activities of the Qur'an in each group; and Becoming a coordinator of Islamic boarding school activities such as *ziyaroh auliya, rihlah ilmiyah, khataman*, and so on. At the level of authority of the pesantren, the village head of this block is under the supervision and responsible to the general village head, which, in

turn, leads to the policy of the pesantren leadership. This tiered leadership structure mirrors the pesantren's traditional administrative framework, where responsibilities are distributed among santri seniority levels to maintain order, discipline, and continuity of religious transmission (Abdullah, 2019).

In fulfilling his teaching duties, Kyai also exercised his authority by entrusting the teaching of light *kitab kuning* to students of the *Ibtida* class (Interview, M. Romli, 2023) using the *sorogan* method to the *asātidz*, who were also the block heads. The use of the *sorogan* model is consistent with the classical pesantren pedagogy, emphasizing individualized tutoring, mastery learning, and the cultivation of *adab* (ethics) between santri and teacher (Azra, 2019). In contrast, the authority to teach the *kitab kuning* was considerable and was considered heavy for students in the non-*ibtida* class (Interview, M. Romli, 2023). As explained in the interview below: "In improving the quality of education in this Islamic boarding school, I am directly involved as a teacher of certain *kitab kuning* that are considered quite heavy by the students in a competitive manner, in addition to representing the village heads (*asātidz*) to teach other books" (Interview, K.H. Thoif Djauhari, 2023). The same thing was also conveyed by Ahmad Damimin in the interview below: "For books that are considered heavy, they are given in *balagan* (direct lecture to Kyai for all students)" (Interview, Ahmad Damimin, 2023). This distinction between *sorogan* (individualized recitation) and *bandongan/balagan* (collective lectures) reflects two primary modes of *kitab kuning* transmission commonly documented in pesantren studies (Zamakhsyari, 2011).

## **Implementation of the Quality of Education of Salafiyah Cidanghiang Pesantren**

### **1. Teaching of the Kitab kuning in *balagan*, *pasaran*, and *sorogan***

The activity of reciting *balagan* as conveyed by the resource person to the researcher is the activity of reciting the *kitab kuning* by: Kyai reading the book, the students write the meaning, or in the term of the Salafiyah pesantren "nyoret" (nge-lughot), Arabic is interpreted into Javanese, then Kyai explains the content of the book in Sundanese, accompanied by students who listen and write Kyai's explanation (Interview, Ahmad Damimin, 2023). This method closely aligns with what scholars describe as the *bandongan* model, a pedagogical tradition in pesantren allowing mass transmission of classical Islamic texts while maintaining Kyai-centered authority (Bruinessen, 1995).

This activity is usually taught directly by Kyai for the *kitab kuning* of *dawaman* (the main books that mark Islamic boarding schools), namely: *Āmil*, *Juru Miyah*, *Alfiyah*, and *Fathul Mu'in*. This activity is routinely attended by all students in the morning until the time of dzuhur. During the day from around 14.00 until the time of Asr, and at night Ba'da Isha until 22.00 WIB on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. Meanwhile, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Sundays are usually used for extracurricular activities, student skills activities, and community activities (Interview, Ahmad Damimin, 2023). Such structured scheduling reflects the pesantren's tradition of integrating worship, study, and

discipline into a unified daily rhythm, a pattern emphasized in studies on pesantren learning culture ([Steenbrink, 1986](#)).

*Pasaran* recitation is an activity of reciting the *kitab kuning* that uses the *balagan* method for books that are not *dawaman*. The time limit is not determined; once the entire content of the book is finished, it is replaced by another book ([Interview, Ahmad Damimin, 2023](#)). Based on the timing of activity, *pasaran* studies are divided into two types: routine *pasaran* and periodic *pasaran*. Routine *pasarans*, carried out every morning (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday), usually after completing the material on the main books. The books studied are usually *tafsir* texts such as *Tafsir al Munir*, *Tafsir Ibn Abbas*, and *Tafsir al Maraghi*. Historically, *pasaran* has functioned as a seasonal intensive program designed to accelerate *kitab* mastery, particularly during sacred months or holidays ([Fauzi, 2012](#); [Zarkasyi, 2015](#)).

The periodic *pasaran* is to recite additional *kitab kuning* in *balagan* only in certain months, namely Rabiul Awwal (Mulud) and Rajab. In the month of Mulud, the book studied is *fann manthiq* of the book *Sulamu al Munawwaroh*, while in the month of Rajab, the *fann balaghoh* of the book *Jawhar al Maqnun* ([Interview with Ahmad Damimin](#)). Then, the pattern of *kitab kuning* teaching activities at the Cidanghiang Salafiyah Pesantren is *sorogan*. The *sorogan* recitation activity in the morning is usually held after the Kyai *balagan* until the time of dzuhur. In the afternoon, after lunch, the students until the time of ashar. The *sorogan* method, emphasizing one-on-one supervision, is widely recognized as the backbone of pesantren pedagogy for ensuring accurate reading (*qirā'ah*) and deep understanding of texts ([Azra, 2019](#)).

## 2. Additional education services (extracurricular) and habituation of life skills

The Cidanghiang Salafiyah Pesantren also facilitates knowledge enrichment activities (co-curricular) and life skills (extracurricular) for students. Although it is not mandatory or required for students' graduation, this activity can reduce their boredom with the routine of reciting the *kitab kuning*. Research on pesantren modernization notes that co-curricular and life skills programs strengthen student adaptability and economic resilience without undermining pesantren identity ([Mujani, 2020](#)).

This knowledge enrichment activity is intended only for female students, guided directly by *ummi* (the common call of students to Kyai's wife), who are indeed competent in the field of *tahfizh*. The involvement of *Nyai* (female religious leader) in training female students reflects the complementary gendered leadership model in pesantren, historically recognized in Indonesian Islamic scholarship ([van Bruinessen, 1999](#)).

In addition to the knowledge enhancements above, the Cidanghiang Salafiyah Pesantren also facilitates the education of skills and life skills. These activities aim to equip students with skills and provide a foundation for their independence and readiness for the future after graduating from Pesantren Islamic boarding schools. Life skills-based education has increasingly become an essential aspect of pesantren reform to meet contemporary socioeconomic challenges ([Rosidin, 2021](#)).

Regarding the rules, the author observes several interesting points from the first point, namely: routine reciting activities and *pasaran* cannot be determined in advance. This is because sometimes Kyai is not at the Islamic boarding school to fulfil invitations to give lectures outside the city or for other important needs. However, Kyai will still do his *qodho* after returning from the invitation. This consistent commitment of Kyai to teaching duties aligns with descriptions of the centrality of Kyai charisma, authority, and exemplary discipline in sustaining pesantren continuity (Dhofier, 2011). This proves Kyai's full commitment and sense of responsibility to fulfil his teaching duties and does not give the teaching authority to *badal* or *asātidz* to replace him. "The students will be better able to obey the rules because when they leave the boarding school, our Kyai may return without their knowledge...". Studies repeatedly highlight that such unpredictability reinforces student discipline and emotional attachment to pesantren traditions (Wahid, 2018).

### **3. Determining the graduation criteria of students**

Each educational institution, in this case a boarding school, has its own graduation criteria for students. This is done in the context of controlling or standardizing the quality of education, which will distinguish Pesantren and make it stand out as having characteristics and advantages. Standardization of graduation criteria is recognized as a form of internal quality assurance in pesantren, ensuring consistent competency and character-building outcomes (Fauzan, 2020).

The Cidanghiang Salafiyah Pesantren determines graduation criteria, such as mastery of core texts, service (*khidmah*), and compliance with ethics and rules. The emphasis on mastery of *kitab kuning* mirrors the classical pesantren epistemology in which textual proficiency, memorization, understanding, and practice form an integrated competency framework (Zarkasyi, 2015). The evaluation time interval of one month is a form of scheduled evaluation activities, while evaluation activities take place every week through Kyai small talk with devotees and administrators. Periodic evaluation and informal consultation (*musyawarah*) are key mechanisms of pesantren governance and have been documented as effective for maintaining institutional harmony and quality control (Hasan, 2015).

Violations are addressed through community reports, warnings, parental involvement, and potential expulsion. Such sanction systems are characteristic of pesantren moral governance, emphasizing corrective discipline, community responsibility, and character purification (*tazkiyatun nafs*) (Zamakhsyari, 2011). The description above demonstrates that Kyai at the Cidanghiang Salafiyah Pesantren has carried out his leadership and management functions effectively. This aligns with research describing Kyai as simultaneously serving roles as spiritual guide, educator, administrator, and moral exemplar (Azra, 2019).

### **Supporting Factors for Kyai's Leadership in Improving the Quality of Education at the Salafiyah Cidanghiang Pesantren**

Improving the quality of education in an Islamic boarding school environment depends not only on institutional policies but also on the strength

of leadership and the ecosystem that supports it. In this context, Kyai leadership becomes a central axis that determines the direction, culture, and sustainability of pesantren transformation. The researchers affirm that Kyai leadership is a decisive element in maintaining the quality of education, as it integrates moral, spiritual, and managerial authority in a single respected figure (Bruinessen, 2015; Wahid, 2018). From this standpoint, supporting factors become crucial indicators that strengthen the Kyai's capacity in managing institutional improvement.

The support received by the Kyai at the Salafiyah Cidanghiang Pesantren can be categorized into personal and interpersonal support, forming a holistic reinforcement toward leadership effectiveness. The literature on Islamic education management emphasizes that the effectiveness of leadership is greatly influenced by the leader's personal traits and interpersonal capital (Suyatno & Haryanto, 2020). These two domains strengthen the Kyai's optimism and resilience in striving to improve educational quality.

### **1. Personal Support**

Personal support consists of intrinsic and extrinsic attributes that the Kyai possesses. This includes intellectual depth, spiritual capital, integrity, and financial independence. The moral foundation—intentions, prayers, internal motivations, principles, personality, and breadth of knowledge—is a crucial intangible resource. Studies on pesantren education say that the spiritual and scientific capital of a Kyai is a source of legitimacy that drives the obedience of students and the trust of the community (Azra, 2019; Dhofier, 2011). Meanwhile, material support includes property, finances, and assets that allow the Kyai to manage the pesantren independently without heavy reliance on external sponsors. The financial independence of pesantren leaders is known to increase their capacity to maintain the authority and consistency of the institution's vision (Fauzi, 2021).

### **2. Interpersonal Support**

Interpersonal support refers to the social, moral, and material reinforcement emerging from the Kyai's interactions with the surrounding community, teachers, students, and family. This support is critical for sustaining the pesantren ecosystem. Recent research shows that the social network of Islamic boarding schools—the relationship between the community and alums—is a very strategic factor in strengthening the sustainability of the institution (Ridwan, 2022). In the case of Cidanghiang, the most fundamental support comes from parents, teachers, and the community, reflected in prayers, trust, and encouragement. The Kyai's long educational path, spanning sixteen years across several pesantren, demonstrates deep scholarly preparation, which becomes a strong personal resource. The depth of scientific sanad is the main characteristic of pesantren leadership, which is considered legitimate by the traditional Islamic community (Dhofier, 2011).

Material support from family inheritance, community waqf, and the Kyai's own work further reinforces institutional development. Interestingly, his narrative about using students' carpentry wages and rejecting externally

sponsored workers reflects a principle of self-reliance. This is in line with the character of salaf pesantren, which emphasizes the ethos of independence, modesty, and mutual cooperation as the pillars of organizational culture (Abdullah, 2020). This reinforces his leadership capacity, allowing flexible land expansion and infrastructure development, supported by high community trust. Social trust has proven to be the most influential social capital in the development of traditional Islamic educational institutions (Putnam, 2000).

### **Kyai's Leadership Problems in Improving the Quality of Education at the Salafiyah Cidanghiang Pesantren**

Problems are inevitable obstacles that weaken an educational institution's efforts to enhance its quality. The education management literature confirms that the quality of institutions is greatly influenced by the ability of their leaders to identify and deal with obstacles systematically (Bush, 2011). Based on field findings, several issues emerged during the research—related to management, student discipline, and personal limitations of the pesantren leadership.

The first issue concerns the management of the boarding school. The shortage of devoted *asātidz* who serve as Kyai's *badal* in conducting sorogan for junior students disrupts learning continuity and reduces supervision. Research on traditional Islamic boarding schools shows that the lack of competent educators is one of the most significant factors that hinder the effectiveness of learning the *kitab kuning* (Rahman, 2019). The absence of adequate supervision often triggers students to skip sessions and reflects a limited awareness of the importance of learning.

Balagan and routine pasaran recitations also experience irregularity when the Kyai must attend external events as invited speakers. Even though there is a tradition of *qodho ngaji*, the outcomes are not always optimal. In the context of Salafiyah Islamic boarding schools, the full dependence on the figure of the Kyai as the centre of scientific and spiritual authority makes the continuity of learning very vulnerable when the Kyai is not present (Dhofier, 2011). This structural dependence becomes a leadership challenge that requires strategic adjustments. Another recurring problem involves organizational stagnation. Some boarding school administrators are senior individuals whose roles have not been renewed, resulting in limited regeneration. Studies of educational institution leadership show that the lack of management regeneration has a direct impact on the low innovation and adaptability of the institution (Yukl, 2013; Suyatno & Haryanto, 2020). This situation slows administrative modernization and weakens strategic execution within the pesantren. Additionally, some co-curricular and skills programs cannot run optimally due to inadequate teaching staff—for example, calligraphy classes previously conducted by alums who are now occupied with obligations outside the pesantren. The lack of diversification of educators makes enrichment activities difficult to sustain, so that the quality of education services cannot develop comprehensively (Abdullah, 2020).

## CONCLUSION

The study concludes that *Kyai* leadership at the Cidanghiang Salafiyah Pesantren represents a hybrid model in which traditional charismatic-informal authority converges with managerial functions that directly influence educational quality. The *Kyai*'s natural legitimacy, visionary orientation, and spiritual authority enable him to shape institutional direction, while his role in planning, organizing, implementing, evaluating, and supervising demonstrates compatibility between pesantren leadership traditions and modern educational management. Quality improvement is supported by both moral (community trust and cultural legitimacy) and material factors (resources and operational support). Yet, it remains hindered by structural challenges such as the *Kyai*'s frequent external obligations, the limited number of competent *asātidz* to maintain instructional continuity, and the shortage of professional staff capable of delivering skills-based programs. These findings suggest that effectiveness in pesantren leadership depends not only on personal authority but also on institutional capacity, delegation mechanisms, and community engagement. Strengthening human resources, enhancing administrative renewal, and optimizing task distribution are therefore essential for ensuring sustainable quality improvement while preserving the distinctive religious-educational identity of the pesantren.

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