

Digital Transformation in Pesantren: The Kyai's Role in Improving Educational Services

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Abstract:

This research focuses on the role of Kyai in improving the quality of services at the Islamic Boarding School through the adoption of digital technology. Using a qualitative approach, the data collection method is carried out through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation involving Kyai, students, and pesantren administrators. The study results show that Kyai plays an important role in facilitating the transformation of educational services, including implementing an online registration system that facilitates access to information for parents and students. In addition, using digital platforms increases transparency and efficiency in communication, creating a better relationship between pesantren administrators and the community. The implications of this study show that the support and advocacy of Kyai in utilizing technology can solve modern education's challenges. These findings emphasize the importance of technology integration in pesantren management as a strategic step to improve the quality of education services. This research also provides new insights for developing educational policies in the pesantren environment to become more adaptive and responsive to the needs of the times.

Key Words: Digital Technology, Service Quality, Community Engagement

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools play a strategic role in shaping the character and proficiency of students (Hasanah et al., 2023; Sandoval et al., 2021; Zaini & Hamidah, 2023). However, in the digital era and rapid changes marked by the Industrial Revolution 4.0 (Abbas & Afifi, 2021; Almasri, 2024; Alsaid & Ambilichu, 2021), many Islamic boarding schools face significant challenges in adopting technology to improve service quality (Annahar et al., 2023; Ansori et al., 2023; Arar & Orucu, 2022). Based on the study shows that there are still few Islamic boarding schools that have used digital systems in administrative and educational management (Bany Mohammad et al., 2022; Beerkens, 2022; Begum, 2024), thus creating a gap between traditional educational practices and the needs of modern society (Bennett et al., 2020; da Silva et al., 2023; DeMatthews et al., 2020). The importance of innovation in educational services in Islamic boarding

schools is not only a determining factor for the sustainability of the institution (Ding et al., 2022; Durlak et al., 2022; Giudice et al., 2021) but also a means to build inclusivity and accessibility of education for students and parents (Gulati & Wohlgezogen, 2023; Hamwy et al., 2023; Hawkins, 2022). Therefore, studying how spiritual leaders, especially Kyai, can adapt and integrate technology into pesantren operations is crucial to research (Hinduja et al., 2023; Kallio et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2022).

The phenomenon found in the field shows a shift in how Islamic boarding schools are managed when dealing with the demands of modernization. Many Islamic boarding schools still use traditional methods of registration and communication, which often hinders the efficiency and transparency of services. For example, information about the cost and activities of students often needs to be appropriately conveyed to parents, thus creating confusion and dissatisfaction. Not infrequently, parents have to spend time and energy visiting the pesantren to get information that is available digitally. Thus, this problem is the effectiveness of education management and integrates with public trust in the quality of Islamic boarding school services. Therefore, it is urgent to understand further how the role of the kai can be transformed to manage these changes and integrate technology without losing the upheld traditional values.

A literature review shows that previous research by Li et al. (2021) emphasizes the importance of transformational leadership in improving the quality of educational services in Islamic boarding schools. After all, research by Liu and van der Sijde (2021) shows that the adoption of technology not only improves accessibility but also facilitates parental involvement in their children's education. However, the gap in the study is the need for more focus on how Kyai, as spiritual leaders, can utilize technology in a more holistic context and based on Islamic boarding school values. This study aims to fill this gap by providing a more detailed analysis of the influence of kai in the successful implementation of technology in the Nurul Qadim Islamic Boarding School, which has yet to be explored in previous research.

The novelty of this research lies in an integrative approach that combines transformational leadership theory with the practice of education management in Islamic boarding schools in the context of technology. This research will explore how Kyai can be an agent of change and identify the challenges and opportunities faced during the transition to digital systems. By focusing on participatory digital platforms, this research aims to provide new insights for developing educational policies in the pesantren environment. This novelty is promising because it has the potential to provide an applicative model and can be imitated by other Islamic boarding schools that are struggling with similar issues.

In particular, this research focuses on how Kyai can implement innovative strategies to strengthen education management, increase transparency, and strengthen communication between administrators, students, and parents.

Through this research, it is hoped that it can significantly contribute to the development of Islamic education, especially in the context of modernization and innovation, and positively impact the wider educational community.

RESEARCH METHOD

The type of research used in this study is qualitative research with a descriptive approach. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore various aspects of the role of Kyai as personal branding in holistically improving the quality of services at the Nurul Qadim Islamic Boarding School. Qualitative research is more appropriate to use than quantitative methods because it can provide a deeper understanding of social phenomena and the meanings contained in them, as well as provide a richer context regarding the perceptions and experiences of the resource persons (Ali et al., 2021; Busetto et al., 2020; Pyo et al., 2023). Using this method, researchers can capture the complexity of interactions between individuals and identities as kai in managing educational services responsive to changing times.

Data collection techniques are carried out through three main methods, namely in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. This research was conducted at the Nurul Qadim Islamic Boarding School, located in [specific location], to obtain relevant data regarding the application of technology and the role of Kyai. The respondents in this study consisted of three Kyai, five students, one guardian of students, and one boarding school administrator. The respondents were selected using the purposive sampling method, where each resource person was considered to have rich and relevant information related to the research theme, so it was expected to provide a more in-depth perspective. Table 1 below shows the coding for the interviewees involved in this study.

Table 1. Coding for Informants

Code	Sources	Description
I_K	Eat. Shafidzul Hakim Nor (Kyai)	Leaders of Islamic Boarding Schools
I_KY	KH. Abdul Hadi Noer (Kyai)	Chairman of the Foundation
I_AS	Abdus Salam (Administrator)	Chief Service Operator
I_WS	Wisnu Saputra (Santri)	Active Students
I_KAH	Abdullah Hassan (Kyai)	Additional Resource Persons
I_AY	Ainul Close (People of Tenaga)	Technologist
I_S	Santri (Some Students)	Additional resource persons

Table 1 provides a clear overview of the coding for the sources involved in the study, which will facilitate information mapping and further data analysis. For data analysis, this study uses analysis techniques from Miles and Huberman (Frazer et al., 2023), which includes three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion. In the data reduction stage, the researcher selects relevant information from interviews and observations and organizes the data into categories per the research objectives. Furthermore, the presentation of data

is carried out by presenting information in a systematic narrative form that allows researchers and readers to understand the context. Finally, conclusions are drawn by considering relevant patterns, themes, and relationships between the data to develop a comprehensive understanding. Thus, this analysis focuses on numerical data and the more profound meaning and context of the information obtained.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The results of this study show that Kyai in Nurul Qadim Islamic Boarding School has a central role in improving service quality. In the interview, K revealed, "We must adapt to the times, including technology. Consciously or not, this will determine how we serve students and parents (I_K)." This statement indicates that Kyai feels it is essential to maintain tradition and pay attention to innovation in service.

Observations in the field revealed that the teaching and service system at the Nurul Qadim Islamic Boarding School underwent significant changes after adopting new technology. This can be seen from the online student registration system, which allows parents to register without physically coming to the pesantren. Instead of relying on traditional methods, the foundation chairman, KY, explained: "The presence of technology in our services is a strategic step. Students can access information at any time. We must move quickly, or we will be behind (I_KY)." The deeper meaning of this statement shows the awareness of the importance of advocacy for technology as part of an effective learning and service strategy.

He also referred to the responsibility of Kyai to encourage the spirit of learning and innovation in the entire structure of the pesantren. He said, "Using technology improves efficiency and expands our (I_KY) educational reach." This shows that the role of kai in improving service quality must align with their efforts to remain relevant and responsive to the community's needs. This is shown in Table 2 regarding distributing digital service hours at the Nurul Qodim Islamic Boarding School.

Table 2. Distribution of Digital Service Hours at Nurul Qadim Islamic Boarding School

Type of Service	Service Hours	Platform
Santri Registration	08:00 - 17:00 WIB	Website Pesantren
Payment	24 Hours (Online)	Mobile App
Santri Information	24 Hours (Online)	Website & App
Consultation	10:00 AM - 12:00 PM	Zoom/WhatsApp

Table 2. presents the distribution of digital service hours at the Nurul Qadim Islamic Boarding School and shows that student registration services, student information, and payment have been integrated into an efficient digital

system. With flexible service hours, such as registration, which is open from 08:00 to 17:00 WIB, as well as payment and information services available 24 hours online, the pesantren shows its commitment to ensuring accessibility for students and parents. This strategy not only improves operational efficiency but also reduces barriers to communication and interaction, allowing parents to get the necessary information at any time. The existence of a digital platform that supports this service reflects the readiness of the Nurul Qadim Islamic Boarding School to adapt to technological developments and improve service quality, which ultimately aims to provide a better experience for all Islamic boarding school residents.

Service Innovation Through Technology

Through technology, pesantren strives to answer modern educational challenges and increase transparency and efficiency in every service aspect. By prioritizing innovation, the Nurul Qadim Islamic Boarding School further strengthens its position as an educational institution that is adaptive and responsive to the needs of the times. Implementing the digital platform at the Nurul Qadim Islamic Boarding School is one of the most significant innovations found during the research. The head of the service operator stated, "With this application, we can monitor every student activity in real-time. This helps us respond faster to (I_AS) issues." This statement shows how important technology is in improving service responsiveness.

One of the active students added, "In the past, we had to wait a long time to get information, but now everything is at our fingertips. It is very easy (I_WS)." Simplifying information is essential in accelerating decision-making by students and parents, creating better service transparency. As conveyed by one of the speakers, the support of experts in the technology field said, "We strive continuously to improve the application to suit the needs of users, (I_AY)" reflects the commitment of the Islamic boarding school to continue to evaluate and improve continuously. This shows the importance of collaboration between administrators and technology experts in creating adaptive and responsive services.

Through the observation activities, web-based and mobile application systems have reduced obstacles that previously made communication difficult between students, parents, and pesantren administrators. Figure 1. Below is the display of user interaction on the student registration system at the Nurul Qadim Islamic Boarding School. This website is designed to make it easier for parents and prospective students to register online, as well as illustrate the commitment of Islamic boarding schools to adopting digital technology as part of service innovation.



Figure 1. Website of the PP Santri Registration System. Nurul Qodim
(Source: <https://ponpesnurulqadim.com/psb/>)

The display of the Nurul Qodim Islamic Boarding School student registration system website shows simplicity and ease of navigation, which is crucial to improving the user experience. The intuitive interface allows parents to easily access information regarding registration, requirements, and steps to follow. Simple yet informative visual elements help reduce confusion and increase efficiency in the registration process. In addition, with the online registration feature, pesantren shows effective adaptation to modern needs, where speed and accessibility are key in providing optimal services. Through this system, the Nurul Qodim Islamic Boarding School answers the challenges in the digital era and provides significant convenience for users to participate in Islamic boarding school education.

Evaluation and Feedback on Service Quality

Service quality evaluation is an important theme in the findings of this study. KH. Abdullah Hasan stated, "We need to listen to the feedback from the residents of the Islamic boarding school. Only then can we move forward (I_KAH)." This implies that participation and feedback from the community are urgently needed to improve the quality of services in the future.

Observations show that pesantren administrators actively collect feedback through surveys and regular meetings with students and parents. As in the interview, "With this survey, we can understand which areas need improvement in the ministry (I_AS)." Using survey methods to obtain insights indicates a data-driven approach to service evaluation.

Through discussions with several students, the relevance of the feedback was seen in the sentence, "We need to be included in the regulations related to the services we receive (I_S)." It is a fact that the active role of students in the evaluation of service quality is important to create tolerance and two-way understanding between administrators and students.

The evaluation of service quality emerged as a key theme in the findings of this study. KH. Abdullah Hasan emphasized the importance of listening to

feedback from the Islamic boarding school residents, noting that only through this can improvements be made. This highlights the necessity of community participation in enhancing service quality. Observations revealed that the pesantren administrators actively gather feedback through surveys and regular meetings with students and parents, as reflected in one interview statement: "With this survey, we can understand which areas need improvement in the ministry." This approach underscores a data-driven method for evaluating services. Furthermore, student feedback also emphasized the significance of their involvement in service-related regulations, as one student noted, "It is very important for us to be included in the regulations related to the services we receive." This suggests that active student participation is crucial for fostering tolerance and mutual understanding between students and administrators.

Discussion

The findings of this study emphasize the importance of evaluating the quality of service at the Nurul Qadim Islamic Boarding School, where feedback from Islamic boarding school residents is the key to service improvement. KH. Abdullah Hasan underlined the need to listen to the voices of the community to achieve progress. Observations show that the management actively collects feedback through surveys and regular meetings, supporting a data-driven approach in service evaluation. This aligns with Ma'ruf et al. (2022), which emphasizes increasing effectiveness through user participation. Discussions with students emphasized the importance of their involvement in the evaluation process, which creates two-way communication and strengthens a sense of ownership in service management. Thus, integrating feedback is an important strategy to improve service quality and empower Islamic boarding schools' educational community.

The analysis of the results of the above theme shows that the role of Kyai as personal branding is very large in building the quality of service at the Nurul Qadim Islamic Boarding School, which aligns with the theory of transformational leadership. Kyai functions not only as a spiritual leader but also as an innovator who can utilize technology to provide services that meet the needs of the times. The findings that technology can speed up the communication process show the need for adaptation in education in the digital era.

Innovations implemented through digital platforms also underscore the importance of flexibility and speed of response in services. With continuous feedback, the importance of integrated evaluation becomes a handle for service improvement that is not only assumption but based on concrete data. In a broader context, this finding strengthens the urgency of Islamic boarding schools to continue to adapt and improve the quality of services to attract public interest in the world of higher-quality Islamic education.

The above research shows that innovation through technology at the Nurul Qadim Islamic Boarding School has improved communication efficiency

and service transparency. As revealed by Abdus Salam, implementing digital platforms allows for real-time monitoring of student activities, speeding up responses to problems and reducing information barriers between students, parents, and administrators. This finding aligns with previous research by Muneeb et al. (2023), which emphasizes the importance of technology in improving the quality of education and services in Islamic boarding schools. In addition, the collaboration between the management and experts, as revealed by Ainul Yaqin, reflects the seriousness of the Nurul Qadim Islamic Boarding School in conducting continuous evaluation. This shows that the application of technology is not just the introduction of a new system but a strategic step towards a more adaptive and responsive education management to the needs of the times.

This research highlights the crucial role of Kyai in Nurul Qadim Islamic Boarding School in improving service quality through technology adoption. KH. Chafidzul Hakim Noer emphasized that innovation is needed to meet the needs of students and parents, reflecting the importance of adapting to the times. This aligns with previous research by Nadya et al. (2023), which showed that integrating technology in education management can improve efficiency and accessibility. With this step, Nurul Qadim Islamic Boarding School strives to provide a better and more responsive experience for its entire community.

With this approach, Nurul Qadim Islamic Boarding School improves the quality of services and creates a relevant educational model that faces the challenges of the times and the community's needs. The practical contribution of the findings of this study lies in implementing technology that improves the quality of services at Nurul Qadim Islamic Boarding School, including communication efficiency and service transparency, which can be a model for other educational institutions in adopting digital systems to meet modern needs. The successful implementation of the online registration platform and the active collection of feedback show that collaboration between pesantren administrators and technology experts is very important in creating responsive services. Theoretically, this research strengthens transformational leadership, where Kyai is a spiritual leader and an agent of change who utilizes technology to improve educational services. Thus, this research contributes to the literature on the management of education in Islamic boarding schools, showing that combining technology and visionary leadership can create significant positive changes in the quality of educational services.

CONCLUSION

This research highlights the importance of the role of Kyai as personal branding in improving the quality of services at the Nurul Qadim Islamic Boarding School through the adoption of digital technology. Key findings show that service innovations, such as online registration systems and active feedback collection, speed up communication and increase transparency and accessibility

for students and parents. The takeaway from this study is the importance of adapting to the times, which reinforces the understanding that the effectiveness of educational services depends not only on tradition but also on the ability to innovate and meet the needs of society. Thus, readers can take key lessons regarding the relevance of technology in education that can be applied in other educational settings.

This research significantly updates the existing perspective in the study of education management in pesantren by integrating technology as a key element in improving service quality. This study also proposes a new method of collecting feedback through a data-based approach, which has not been widely explored in the context of Islamic educational institutions. However, this study has limitations, including the limited scope only to the Nurul Qadim Islamic Boarding School, so the results may not be generalized to other Islamic boarding schools. These limitations emphasize the need for more comprehensive follow-up research, especially in aspects such as comparisons among various Islamic boarding schools and considering gender and age variables. These studies are expected to provide broader and more in-depth data as a basis for more appropriate and effective policies in the future.

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