

Kyai's Collective Collegial Leadership Model in Education Management

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Abstract:

Leadership in Islamic education is facing growing challenges that require a shift from single-authority systems toward more collaborative and participatory governance. This study aims to analyze how the collective-collegial leadership model of the *kyai* operates in managing Islamic educational institutions. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis involving *kyais*, administrators, and committee members. The findings reveal three major themes: distributed authority that balances moral legitimacy and administrative efficiency; collaborative governance that ensures transparency, shared responsibility, and policy sustainability; and collective leadership that institutionalizes a unified organizational vision through formal documentation. The study's novelty lies in integrating Islamic values of (deliberation), *ukhuwah* (brotherhood), and *amanah* (trust) into a structured model of participatory leadership. The results imply that leadership development in Islamic education should emphasize ethical collaboration, institutional documentation, and inclusive decision-making to achieve long-term organizational resilience.

Keywords: *Collective Leadership, Collegial Governance, Islamic Education, Participatory Management*

Abstrak:

Kepemimpinan dalam pendidikan Islam menghadapi tantangan yang semakin besar yang menuntut pergeseran dari sistem otoritas tunggal menuju tata kelola yang lebih kolaboratif dan partisipatif. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana model kepemimpinan kolektif-kolegial *kyai* beroperasi dalam mengelola lembaga pendidikan Islam. Dengan menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi lapangan, dan analisis dokumen yang melibatkan *kyai*, pengurus, dan anggota komite. Temuan penelitian ini mengungkapkan tiga tema utama: otoritas terdistribusi yang menyeimbangkan legitimasi moral dan efisiensi administratif; tata kelola kolaboratif yang menjamin transparansi, tanggung jawab bersama, dan keberlanjutan kebijakan; dan kepemimpinan kolektif yang melembagakan visi organisasi terpadu melalui dokumentasi formal. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada pengintegrasian nilai-nilai Islam berupa *ukhuwah*, dan *amanah* ke dalam model kepemimpinan partisipatif yang terstruktur. Hasil penelitian ini menyiratkan bahwa pengembangan kepemimpinan dalam pendidikan Islam harus menekankan kolaborasi etis, dokumentasi kelembagaan, dan pengambilan keputusan inklusif untuk mencapai ketahanan organisasi jangka panjang.

Kata Kunci: *Kepemimpinan Kolektif, Tata Kelola Kolegial, Pendidikan Islam, Manajemen Partisipatif*

INTRODUCTION

Educational leadership plays a central role in shaping the direction, culture, and quality of educational institutions. In the increasingly complex context of modern society, leadership is no longer based solely on authority but demands collaboration, dialogue, and collective participation. Islamic education, particularly in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), faces similar challenges in maintaining a balance between traditional values and the need for innovation (Hidayah, 2024; Iryana, 2023; Supriyanto et al., 2022). The *Kyai*, as the central figure in Islamic boarding schools, is not only a spiritual leader but also a manager, innovator, and strategic policymaker. When sole leadership is no longer able to address the complexities of institutional management, the need arises to develop a collective-collegial leadership model rooted in Islamic values and participatory (Ferris et al., 2021; Liu, 2024). Therefore, this research is important because it contributes to strengthening Islamic educational governance that is more adaptive, transparent, and equitable through a collaborative, collegial approach.

The fundamental problem facing Islamic educational institutions today is the weakness of a leadership system oriented toward collaboration and participation. Many institutions still rely on a single leadership model that tends to be hierarchical and does not allow for deliberation or a balanced division of roles (Ahumada et al., 2024; Bechrakis, 2024). As a result, various problems have emerged, such as overlapping policies, low managerial innovation, and minimal teacher and staff involvement in decision-making. In the context of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), the leadership style of the *kyai* (Islamic cleric) is often identified with absolute authority, even though the dynamics of modern education demand a more dialogical and collective approach (Ruiz, 2024; Shodikin et al., 2023). This issue is important to examine because centralized management has the potential to hinder the institution's efficiency and long-term development. Therefore, in-depth research is needed on the collective-collegial leadership model of the *kyais* to create a balance between charismatic values and institutional rationality.

Initial observations indicate that many Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) have transformed into formal educational institutions with various levels, yet their leadership systems remain monolithic. The *kyai* remains the primary decision-making figure, while the roles of teachers, *ustaz* (Islamic teachers), and educational administrators are often subordinate (Bricknell, 2024; Wan et al., 2024). Some Islamic boarding schools have begun to adopt collective practices such as the formation of teacher councils, deliberation meetings, or the division of leadership tasks based on specific areas, but their implementation is often not systematic. This phenomenon demonstrates the gap between the ideals of modern management and the reality of tradition-based leadership in Islamic boarding schools. On the other hand, several Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) that implement a collegial model have actually demonstrated increased

effectiveness in curriculum management, finances, and human resource development (Gupta, 2021). This fact demonstrates the need for a conceptual model that explains how the collective-collegial leadership of the *kyai* (Islamic boarding school) can be an effective alternative in the context of contemporary Islamic education.

Various studies have highlighted the role of leadership in Islamic education, but few have examined the collective and collegial aspects in depth. For example, a study by ElKaleh (2020) and Kılınc et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of transformational leadership in shaping organizational culture, while Lo et al. (2020), Siswanto et al. (2023) and Kauppila et al. (2022) outlined the relationship between leader morality and subordinate involvement. In the context of Islamic boarding schools, Mumtaz et al. (2024), Reyhan et al. (2023), and Firdausy (2022) highlighted the position of the *kyai* as the highest authority who influences all institutional policies. Meanwhile, Ihsan et al. (2021), Kusumaputri et al. (2023), and Hudori et al. (2024) pointed out the need to reconstruct Islamic boarding school leadership to be more responsive to the challenges of educational globalization. However, these studies tend to remain descriptive and fail to offer a management model capable of integrating collegial values with the traditional leadership structure of Islamic boarding schools. This is a research gap in the study of Islamic educational leadership.

The novelty of this research lies in the development of a *kyai* collective-collegial leadership model that combines spiritual, managerial, and social dimensions in the management of Islamic educational institutions. Unlike previous research that emphasized the charismatic or transformational character of the *kyai*, this study focuses on collaborative patterns that position the *kyai* as a participatory leadership figure. This research also seeks to reinterpret the values of *shura* and *ukhuwah* as the epistemological basis for collegial practices in the context of modern Islamic boarding schools. Thus, this research not only offers a new theoretical framework but also provides practical implications for the governance of Islamic educational institutions oriented toward sustainability, efficiency, and social justice. This approach is expected to bridge the gap between classical Islamic leadership traditions and the demands of contemporary educational professionalism.

The primary problem in this research is how the *kyais'* collective-collegial leadership model can be effectively implemented in the management of Islamic education in Islamic boarding schools. This research seeks to answer the question of how spiritual, social, and managerial values can be integrated into participatory leadership practices without diminishing the *kyai's* charisma as a central figure. The argument put forward is that the collective-collegial leadership model allows for a balance between authority and deliberation, between tradition and innovation, and between religious values and managerial rationality. Conceptually, this research is expected to enrich the literature on Islamic educational leadership and provide a practical contribution to strengthening the governance of Islamic boarding schools as values-based, collaborative, and adaptive educational institutions.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain a deep and holistic understanding of how the collective-collegial leadership model of *Kyai* is applied in the management of Islamic education within the Ma'had Aly environment. This approach was chosen based on the belief that the phenomenon of collegial leadership cannot be understood through numbers or quantitative variables, but rather through a deeper understanding of the underlying social, cultural, and religious context. Case studies allow researchers to deeply explore the reality of *kyai* leadership in real-life situations and examine the dynamics of interactions, values, and practices within the institutional management system of Islamic boarding schools (Sarfo et al., 2021).

The location of this research is the Ma'had Aly Lirboyo Islamic Boarding School in Kediri City, East Java. This location was chosen purposively because Lirboyo is one of the largest Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia, with a unique and collective leadership management system. Furthermore, Lirboyo has a clear institutional structure, with *kyai* actively involved in a forum called the Small Committee, a concrete example of collegial leadership practices in policy-making. The complexity of the organizational structure and the involvement of multiple actors within this institution make it a relevant location for exploring deliberation-based and collectivist leadership practices.

Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with *Kyai* (Islamic scholars) and Ma'had Aly administrators, such as the Mudir (Director), secretary, and members of the Small Committee, to explore their perceptions and practices regarding the collective-collegial concept. Interview data, such as that obtained from Mr. M. Syarif Subhan, M.Ag., and Mr. M. Rifa'i Bachrun, M.Ag., revealed that leadership mechanisms are implemented through regular deliberations among *kyai*, with equal distribution of responsibilities, while still recognizing the position of the Career as a more senior figure in strategic policy-making. Furthermore, observations were conducted of meetings, plenary sessions, and institutional activities to capture the social dynamics that occur. Documentation was conducted by reviewing the organizational structure, institutional handbooks, and policy archives as supporting data to strengthen the field findings.

Data analysis was conducted interactively using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) model, which includes four stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification (Kusumaputri et al., 2023). Data condensation was performed by selecting, focusing, and simplifying interview and documentation data to align with the research focus. The data was then presented in narrative form and a thematic matrix to facilitate interpretation of the emerging collective leadership patterns. Verification was conducted repeatedly to ensure alignment between the empirical data and conceptual findings, ensuring that the resulting interpretations were valid and consistent with the research context.

To maintain data validity, this study employed several strategies, namely triangulation of sources, techniques, and time. Source triangulation was

conducted by comparing interview results between various informants, such as the Caregiver, Mudir, and members of the Small Committee. Technical triangulation was conducted by combining interview results, observations, and documentation to ensure consistency of information. Temporal triangulation, meanwhile, involved collecting data on several different occasions to obtain a stable picture. In addition, member checking was conducted by confirming the interpretations with key informants to ensure the data accurately reflected the reality on the ground. This process was reinforced by audit trails and discussions with colleagues to increase the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the research results.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The following section presents the research findings derived from in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis conducted at Ma'had Aly Pondok *Pesantren* Lirboyo. These findings reveal how collective-collegial leadership among the *kyai* is manifested through distributed authority, collaborative governance, and the institutionalization of a shared organizational vision that sustains educational management and cultural continuity.

Distributed Authority Enhances Institutional Decision Dynamics

This sub-finding refers to the way leadership at Ma'had Aly Pondok *Pesantren* Lirboyo is exercised through a mechanism of equitable distribution of authority among the *kyais*. The distribution of authority here does not mean merely an administrative division of power, but rather a collective process in which each *kyai* has the space to express his or her opinion and participate in determining the direction of the institution's policies. The dynamics of decision-making are horizontal, placing deliberation as the primary instrument in organizational management. This concept is reflected in the practice of regular deliberations involving all members of the Small Committee, where responsibility is shared and decisions are made based on consensus, not a single command. Thus, the distribution of authority is fundamental to maintaining a balance between the *kyai*'s charisma and institutional efficiency.

One key informant explained that: "The leadership model at Ma'had Aly Lirboyo is implemented through regular deliberations among the *kyai* (Islamic scholars) gathered in a forum called the Small Committee. Each *kyai* has an equal role and responsibility, so the policy-making process is carried out horizontally, not vertically." From this statement, it can be interpreted that collective leadership at Ma'had Aly does not place a single figure as the center of power, but rather builds a coordinating system in which each member has relative autonomy in their respective areas. The deliberation mechanism ensures that decisions are not dependent on a single figure but are the result of collective agreements that reflect shared aspirations.

Meanwhile, the committee stated: "The Small Committee makes all decisions at Ma'had Aly, regarding management, curriculum, lecturers, and other policies. Decision-making within the Small Committee is through deliberation, but the Supervisor holds a higher position due to their extensive

experience and knowledge." The researcher's interpretation of this statement indicates that while collective principles are upheld, there is still recognition of the moral and intellectual hierarchy inherent in the figure of the Caretaker. Thus, the distribution of authority in Ma'had Aly is functional and proportional, not strictly egalitarian. This leadership structure creates a balance between spiritual authority and collective participation in the decision-making process.

Field observations indicate that each Sub-Committee meeting begins with the presentation of a shared agenda, followed by an open discussion in which each *kyai* has an equal opportunity to express his views. Decisions are made through consensus, and the results of the deliberations are then recorded in minutes, which serve as a reference for institutional policy. A restatement of this finding is that the decision-making dynamics at Ma'had Aly are deliberative, based on equal roles, while still respecting the Caretaker's seniority and scholarship as a source of moral legitimacy. From the overall data, the emerging pattern is one of collective leadership centered on the values of deliberation, equal responsibility, and respect for moral authority, thus creating harmony between the traditions of Islamic boarding school leadership and modern, participatory management practices.

Collaborative Governance Reinforces Educational Sustainability Framework

This sub-finding describes that the governance system in Ma'had Aly operates through a collaborative mechanism involving all institutional components. Collaborative governance in this context refers to a participatory decision-making process in which policy formulation, curriculum design, and institutional management are jointly carried out through structured deliberative forums. The collaboration extends beyond the *kyais* (spiritual leaders) to include lecturers, administrators, and academic coordinators, ensuring that every policy is grounded in collective legitimacy and shared accountability. Hence, collaboration becomes the central foundation that sustains the educational system by promoting transparency, inclusivity, and shared responsibility.

Table 1. Collaborative Governance Reinforces Educational Sustainability Framework		
Field Observation	Indicator	Observation Percentage
Regular committee meetings are conducted with active participation from all members.	Member engagement in decision-making processes.	90%
Task distribution among <i>Kyais</i> , Mudirs, and lecturers is clearly defined and complementary.	Clarity of roles and institutional coordination.	85%
Curriculum development is conducted through cross-disciplinary academic discussions.	Academic collaboration and equality of contribution.	80%
Policy evaluation is performed transparently and accepts feedback from members.	Transparency and participatory evaluation mechanism.	75%
Final decisions are always achieved through consensus after considering all viewpoints.	Consensus is the outcome of collective deliberation.	95%

Table 1 indicates that collaborative governance practices in Ma'had Aly are well-implemented, reflected by high levels of participation and cooperation

across institutional activities. The 90% engagement rate in committee meetings demonstrates a strong organizational culture that values inclusivity in decision-making. The 85% clarity of task distribution suggests effective coordination and structured division of labor, minimizing overlap in responsibilities. Academic collaboration during curriculum design (80%) shows interdisciplinary integration that reinforces curriculum relevance. Meanwhile, the 75% transparency score in policy evaluation reflects openness to critique, and the 95% consensus rate highlights that decisions are rooted in deliberation rather than hierarchy. Collectively, these findings reveal that shared governance has become a sustainable leadership pattern embedded in the institution's daily operations.

Based on the observations, it can be restated that decision-making within Ma'had Aly follows a participatory and consensus-oriented model. Every leader and member possesses equal opportunity to express opinions, negotiate perspectives, and contribute to the institution's strategic direction. The researcher interprets that this model thrives not merely because of formal structure but also due to the deep-rooted cultural norm of (deliberation) and *ukhuwah* (brotherhood) among the academic community. The observation demonstrates that authority is distributed rather than centralized, allowing policies to evolve through communicative rationality and mutual trust. Hence, sustainability in Islamic education here stems from collective accountability rather than administrative enforcement.

The data pattern reveals that institutional governance at Ma'had Aly is collaborative, deliberative, and egalitarian. The observed practices show a harmonious blend between traditional values of collective wisdom and modern management principles of transparency and participation. Leadership roles complement each other, creating a balance between moral authority and administrative functionality. This pattern reflects a distinctive model of Islamic educational governance where decision-making becomes not only an administrative act but also a moral engagement grounded in shared vision and institutional trust. Thus, collaborative governance proves instrumental in reinforcing the long-term sustainability of educational practices through cooperation, trust, and inclusive leadership.

Collective Leadership Constructs Shared Organizational Vision

This sub-finding explains that the concept of collective leadership within Ma'had Aly is formally institutionalized through a shared organizational vision written in various official documents. The term collective leadership refers to a governance model where multiple leaders, the *kyais*, Mudir, and committee members, share equal responsibility in defining and realizing the institution's goals. In practice, this shared vision is not merely conceptual but structurally embedded in the organizational documents, such as the institutional charter, leadership guidelines, meeting minutes, and academic development plans. These written materials explicitly articulate the institution's commitment to uphold collaboration, equality, and joint accountability as the essence of leadership in the educational context.

The documented flow of leadership in Ma'had Aly follows a structured

process beginning with the formulation of the institution's mission, which is collectively discussed in the Panitia Kecil meetings. This mission is then translated into the Guidelines for Institutional Governance, specifying the duties, responsibilities, and coordination mechanisms among the leaders. Subsequently, these elements are reinforced in meeting minutes that record every decision made through deliberation (). The researcher interprets that such an administrative flow reflects the institutionalization of the collective vision, where leadership is not centered on a single individual but dispersed across a collegial structure. Hence, the documentation portrays leadership not as authority but as a shared ethical responsibility for sustaining the institution's educational identity.

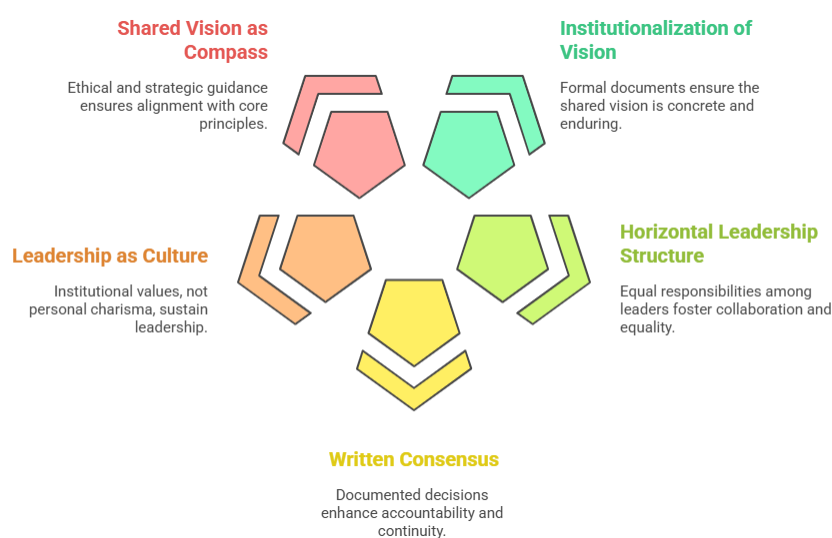


Figure 1. Foundations of Collective Leadership

The collected documents from Figure 2 is including the Institutional Statute of Ma'had Aly, Organizational Structure Chart, and Panitia Kecil Meeting Minutes, consistently indicate that decision-making processes are designed to maintain balance and inclusivity. The Institutional Statute emphasizes the principle of "shared responsibility and mutual supervision" among leaders. The Organizational Chart shows a horizontal structure where the *Kyais*, Mudirs, and lecturers coordinate without hierarchical dominance. Meanwhile, the meeting minutes illustrate how strategic decisions, such as curriculum development or leadership rotation, are concluded through consensus. The researcher interprets these records as evidence that leadership in Ma'had Aly is not symbolic but procedural, with written documentation serving as the medium that ensures accountability, transparency, and continuity of collective governance.

From the documentation, it can be restated that collective leadership is realized through an integrated system of written agreements, structured roles, and codified values. The written vision acts as a unifying reference that aligns all institutional actors under the same purpose, developing an educational environment based on equality, cooperation, and shared integrity. The researcher infers that the existence of these documents guarantees that leadership continuity is not dependent on individual charisma but on institutional culture. The shared

vision functions as a compass, guiding all activities and preventing fragmentation in decision-making.

The pattern emerging from the documentation demonstrates a formalized, value-based, and continuity-oriented leadership model. Leadership in Ma'had Aly is sustained by clear documentation that transforms abstract ideals into practical guidelines. The data show that every decision and structure is interconnected through written commitments that preserve institutional identity and prevent power centralization. Thus, collective leadership becomes not only a managerial concept but also a living system embedded in documents, policies, and daily governance practices, ensuring that the organizational vision remains shared, stable, and adaptive to future educational challenges.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that the leadership model at Ma'had Aly Pondok *Pesantren* Lirboyo operates through a framework of distributed authority, collaborative governance, and collective vision-building. This model aligns with the concept of transformational and participatory leadership proposed by Floyd (2022) and Phillips (2024), who argue that leadership effectiveness emerges from shared responsibility and collective engagement rather than hierarchical dominance. However, unlike Western-centric models that emphasize managerial rationality, the Ma'had Aly framework integrates spiritual and moral legitimacy, rooted in the *kyai's* charisma and the Islamic principle of deliberation. This distinction demonstrates that Islamic educational leadership develops its own contextualized form of collegial governance anchored not only in institutional efficiency but also in religious ethics and communal trust.

The comparison with existing literature on collegial leadership Mustafa et al. (2024), Sorkin et al. (2023) and Baba (2024) shows strong convergence in the idea of shared authority and collective decision-making. Yet, the Ma'had Aly model extends beyond administrative collegiality by embedding decision-making in a moral framework derived from *pesantren* culture. Whereas collegial leadership in secular contexts tends to rely on procedural consensus, leadership in Ma'had Aly integrates *ukhuwah* (brotherhood) and *amanah* (trust) as moral obligations guiding collective governance (Jameson, 2021; Suboticki, 2022). This fusion between moral-spiritual and administrative collaboration marks a theoretical contribution to the field of Islamic educational management, showing that organizational harmony can emerge from the synergy of spiritual legitimacy and participatory deliberation.

From a theoretical standpoint, the distributed and collective leadership model at Ma'had Aly contributes to expanding the understanding of educational governance in Islamic institutions. It provides an empirical illustration that leadership can be both charismatic and structural, both personal and institutional (Espinosa, 2023; Heidelmann et al., 2023). This model bridges the gap identified in prior research, which often separates individual leadership charisma from institutional sustainability (Herman et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2024). The study demonstrates that when charisma is balanced by institutionalized collaboration and documented vision, leadership becomes resilient, adaptive, and ethically

grounded. Hence, this research strengthens the theory of collective transformational leadership by showing that moral authority and administrative systems can coexist harmoniously within Islamic educational governance (Amin et al., 2024; White et al., 2023).

Practically, these findings carry significant implications for leadership development and management practices in Islamic higher education. The Ma'had Aly model emphasizes that leadership training should not only focus on managerial skills but also on cultivating ethical deliberation, shared accountability, and institutional documentation. The integration of deliberative forums, written governance frameworks, and transparent decision-making mechanisms ensures that leadership succession and policy continuity remain stable even amid personnel changes. Institutions adopting similar approaches can reinforce sustainability by codifying values of equality and cooperation into formal governance systems, thus reducing dependency on individual leaders.

In conclusion, the Ma'had Aly experience illustrates that distributed authority, collaborative governance, and collective vision are not merely idealistic constructs but operational realities in the Islamic education context. This integrated leadership system demonstrates how traditional *pesantren* values can adapt to modern educational governance frameworks while maintaining moral authenticity. Theoretically, it enriches the discourse on leadership hybridity merging tradition with organizational modernity while practically, it offers a replicable model for sustaining institutional excellence through ethical, participatory, and documented leadership practices.

CONCLUSION

The main findings of this study highlight that the collective-collegial leadership model of the *kyai* at Ma'had Aly Pondok *Pesantren* Lirboyo successfully integrates spiritual values, collegial participation, and institutional management into a coherent system of educational governance. The essence of leadership here lies in the balance between moral authority and administrative rationality, expressed through distributed power, deliberative decision-making, and shared vision formulation. The wisdom derived from this research is that leadership sustainability in Islamic education does not depend solely on individual charisma but on institutionalized collaboration and documented consensus. This model proves that Islamic values of (deliberation), *ukhuwah* (brotherhood), and *amanah* (trust) can be transformed into practical mechanisms that maintain harmony, accountability, and long-term educational resilience.

Scientifically, this study contributes to the development of Islamic educational leadership theory by bridging traditional *pesantren* culture and modern management paradigms. It expands the concept of collective-transformational leadership within Islamic contexts, demonstrating that ethical and participatory leadership structures can enhance institutional adaptability. However, the study's limitation lies in its single case-study focus at Ma'had Aly Lirboyo, which may not fully represent all *pesantren* governance models. Future research should adopt a multi-site or comparative design, integrating quantitative and longitudinal data to deepen the analysis of leadership effectiveness, cultural dynamics, and policy innovation within various Islamic educational institutions.

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