

The Influence of *Kiai* Leadership and *Pesantren* Culture on Quality and Competitiveness as Mediating Variables

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Abstract:

This research aims to identify and analyze the influence of *Kiai* leadership and *Pesantren* culture on quality and competitiveness as mediating variables. The quantitative research method employs an explanatory research approach with a survey method. The questionnaire was designed based on the research variables, which include leadership, motivation, organizational culture, employee work discipline, and organizational commitment. Data was collected from 97 employees through random sampling. The data analysis utilized multiple regression analysis and the Sobel test. The results indicate that *Kiai* leadership significantly influences quality, meaning that the higher the *Kiai* leadership, the higher the quality; *Pesantren* culture significantly influences quality; *Kiai* leadership significantly influences competitiveness; *Pesantren* culture significantly influences competitiveness; competitiveness significantly influences quality, meaning that the higher the competitiveness, the higher the quality. Competitiveness can mediate the relationship between *Kiai* leadership and quality, indicating that an increase in competitiveness impacts the enhancement of *Kiai* leadership, thereby improving quality; and also acts as a mediating variable between *Pesantren* culture and quality, indicating that an increase in competitiveness enhances *Pesantren* culture, which in turn improves quality.

Keywords: *Kiai Leadership, Pesantren Culture, Quality, Competitiveness*

Abstrak:

Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengidentifikasi dan menganalisis pengaruh kepemimpinan *Kiai* dan budaya *Pesantren* terhadap kualitas dan daya saing sebagai variabel mediasi. Metode penelitian bersifat kuantitatif, menggunakan pendekatan penelitian penjelasan dengan metode survei. Kuesioner dirancang berdasarkan variabel penelitian, yang meliputi kepemimpinan, motivasi, budaya organisasi, disiplin kerja karyawan, dan komitmen organisasi. Data dikumpulkan dari sampel 97 karyawan melalui pengambilan sampel acak. Analisis data menggunakan analisis regresi berganda dan uji Sobel. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan *Kiai* secara signifikan mempengaruhi kualitas, artinya semakin tinggi kepemimpinan *Kiai*, semakin tinggi kualitasnya; Budaya *Pesantren* sangat mempengaruhi kualitas; Kepemimpinan *Kiai* secara signifikan memengaruhi daya saing; Budaya *Pesantren* secara signifikan mempengaruhi daya saing; Daya saing secara signifikan mempengaruhi kualitas, artinya semakin tinggi daya saing, semakin tinggi kualitasnya. Daya saing dapat memediasi hubungan antara kepemimpinan *Kiai* dan kualitas, menunjukkan bahwa peningkatan daya saing berdampak pada peningkatan kepemimpinan *Kiai*, sehingga meningkatkan kualitas; dan juga bertindak sebagai variabel mediasi antara budaya dan kualitas

Pesantren, yang menunjukkan bahwa peningkatan daya saing meningkatkan budaya Pesantren, yang pada gilirannya meningkatkan kualitas.

Kata Kunci: *Kepemimpinan Kiai, Budaya Pesantren, Kualitas, Daya Saing*

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership is essential within an organization because it enables leaders to implement innovations and effectively coordinate the company's functions (Alateeg & Alhammadi, 2024; Mukhlisin et al., 2021; Zaki et al., 2022). A leader is a role model who has the responsibility and duty to provide personal protection and support, as well as to manage activities to achieve the predetermined goals (Chatzipanagiotou & Katsarou, 2023; Farcas et al., 2021; Ogunfowora et al., 2021). Every leader has their style of leading a group or subordinates. A leader's leadership style significantly determines the level of work success among the employees they manage; the better the leadership style, the higher the level of employee work success (Antonopoulou et al., 2021; Fries et al., 2021; Gameda & Lee, 2020). A leader who can act pretty without discriminating based on ethnicity or race and does not prioritize personal interests is needed.

The leader of a pesantren in Indonesia is called a *Kiai*. Typically, a *Kiai* is the owner, manager, and teacher at the pesantren they lead. *Kiai* leadership is considered central, serving as the controlling and determining force for everything within the pesantren (Dakir & Umiarso, 2022). The presence of a *Kiai* as the leader of a pesantren plays a crucial role in advancing the educational institution they lead. As a leader, the *Kiai* is critical in achieving high-quality education, making the institution more attractive to the community (Secules et al., 2021). Based on this, the progress or decline of a pesantren is, in part, influenced by the leadership of the *Kiai* and its quality.

The main problem in this study is how the leadership of the *Kiai* affects the quality of education among students in Islamic boarding schools. This phenomenon is significant because data shows that the quality of education in Islamic boarding schools is often considered low compared to other formal educational institutions. Using a quantitative approach, this study aims to measure the extent to which *Kiai* and Pesantren culture leadership affects the quality of education. Therefore, this research problem is relevant and crucial in providing a more profound and data-driven understanding of the phenomenon.

Based on the literature review conducted, several related studies are relevant to the variables in this study. For example, research by Hanafi et al. (2021) found that *Kiai* leadership significantly influences the quality of education in Islamic boarding schools. This study uses qualitative methods to explore the role of *Kiai* in decision-making and implementation of education policies. Likewise, research by Idris et al. (2022) shows that organizational culture in Islamic boarding schools contributes to increasing the competitiveness of institutions. Although these studies provide valuable insights, there is a significant gap in quantitative analysis of the influence of *Kiai* leadership on the quality of education, indicating the need for further research focusing on these variables.

Although studies have addressed similar topics, research gaps remain, especially in the quantitative analysis of the relationship between *Kiai* leadership and pesantren culture and the quality of education. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the relationship between these variables in a broader context. By using more structured quantitative methods and representative data, this research is expected to significantly contribute to a more in-depth understanding of the dynamics of leadership and Pesantrens.

The novelty of this study lies in the use of multiple regression analysis to analyze the quantitative influence of *Kiai* leadership and pesantren culture on the quality of education. This approach has not previously been applied thoroughly in the context of Islamic boarding schools. With this approach, this study seeks to reveal more evident and significant patterns in the relationships between these variables and introduce more sophisticated analysis methods to understand their impact in greater depth and measurable.

This study aims to answer the question of how the leadership of *Kiai* and Pesantren cultures affects the quality of education and competitiveness among students. This study uses quantitative analysis to systematically measure the influence of these two variables and the role of competitiveness as a mediating variable. Using a structured approach, this study provides a deeper understanding of the factors that affect the quality of education in Islamic boarding schools. This study's results are expected to significantly contribute to the development of Islamic education and provide data-based recommendations for policy improvement in Islamic boarding school educational institutions.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study seeks empirical evidence and develops theories on *Kiai* leadership, pesantren culture, quality, and competitiveness. Given the issues and objectives of the research, a quantitative research approach is employed. With the survey approach (Tian & Xiang, 2024), This study is categorized as causal associative research using quantitative data. Causal associative research aims to analyze the relationship between one variable and another or how one variable influences another variable. This study examines the influence of *Kiai* leadership and pesantren culture on quality and competitiveness as mediating variables. According to Sekaran, quantitative research is a type of research that typically uses structured questions to collect data, usually through questionnaires. This type of quantitative research also implies research that can measure outcomes (Mohajan, 2020). Quantitative descriptive research can be used to demonstrate the influence of *Kiai* leadership and pesantren culture on quality and competitiveness as mediating variables at the Modern Darul Hikmah Islamic Boarding School in Tulungagung.

The chosen research design is a causal study demonstrating the influence of *Kiai* leadership and pesantren culture on quality and competitiveness as mediating variables at the Modern Darul Hikmah Islamic Boarding School in Tulungagung. A causal study is designed to illustrate that essential variables interact with each other within a phenomenon or issue (Briganti et al., 2024; Mohajan, 2020; Wilms et al., 2021). Geerlings-Batt and Sun (2022) state that there are currently two

quantitative research programs: causal-comparative and correlational design. Causal-comparative research involves studying two or more groups based on observed cause-and-effect relationships. On the other hand, correlational design aims to describe the relationship between two or more variables. The subjects of this study are all educational and academic staff, totaling 79 respondents.

Data analysis uses multiple linear regression. Multiple linear regression is employed to determine the magnitude of one variable's direct and indirect effects on another. To facilitate the analysis of multiple regression, the researcher uses SPSS 22.0 for Windows. Additionally, hypothesis testing for mediation is conducted using the Sobel test.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The results of this study included prerequisite tests for regression, including a normality test to determine whether the data for the tested variables are typically distributed and suitable for statistical analysis using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The criteria are as follows: If Sig < 0.05, the data distribution is abnormal. If Sig > 0.05, the data distribution is normal. The results of the normality test can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Normality Test

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test		Unstandardized Residual
N		76
Normal Parameters ^b	Mean	.0000000
	Std. Deviation	3.31974738
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.070
	Positive	.050
	Negative	-.070
Test Statistic		.070
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.200 ^{c,d}
a. Test distribution is Normal.		
b. Calculated from data.		
c. Lilliefors Significance Correction.		
d. This is a lower bound of the true significance.		

Based on the data analysis results, the asymptotic significance (2-tailed) value from the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for Asymp Sig. (2-tailed), leading to the conclusion that the standardized residuals are normally distributed or the data is typically distributed.

The Multicollinearity Test detects and identifies a robust linear relationship among independent variables in the calculation. High multicollinearity makes it challenging to distinguish and separate the effects of each independent variable on the dependent variable. One way to assess this relationship is by examining the covariance matrix of the data. The larger the covariance coefficient, the higher the multicollinearity, indicating a stronger relationship between the independent variables.

Table 2. Multicollinearity Test

Coefficients ^a		Collinearity Statistics	
		Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)		
	Leadership of <i>Kiai</i>	.543	1.840
	Culture of Pesantren	.394	2.539
	Competitiveness	.381	2.621

a. Dependent Variable: Quality

Based on the Table 2, two parameters detect multicollinearity: the tolerance value and the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). The tolerance value should be > 0.10 , and the VIF should be < 10 . From the calculations, the tolerance value is > 0.10 , and the VIF value is not less than 10.00, indicating that multicollinearity is not detected.

Multiple linear regression is used to determine the extent of the impact of differences in one variable on other variables. The results of the multiple linear regression test can be seen in the coefficients Table 3.

Table 3. Results of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Coefficients ^a		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.688	4.580		.369	.714
	Leadership of <i>Kiai</i>	.397	.169	.290	2.356	.021
	Culture of Pesantren	.572	.147	.480	3.897	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Quality

Table 3 shows the results of the multiple linear regression analysis that measures the influence of *Kiai* leadership and pesantren culture on quality. The regression coefficient for the leadership variable of *Kiai* (Leadership of *Kiai*) is 0.397 with a significance value (Sig.) of 0.021, which shows that *Kiai* leadership has a positive and significant influence on quality. Meanwhile, the coefficient for the Pesantrens (Pesantren) is 0.572 with a significance value of 0.000, which shows that the Pesantrens also have a positive and significant effect on quality. The standardized beta value for *Kiai* leadership is 0.290, and for Pesantren culture, it is 0.480, indicating that Pesantren culture has a more significant influence on quality than *Kiai* leadership. These results show that both variables contribute significantly to improving quality in the educational institutions studied. The results of the multiple linear regression test can be seen in the coefficients Table 4.

Table 4. Results of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Coefficients ^a		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	10.135	3.949		2.567	.012
	Leadership of <i>Kiai</i>	.362	.145	.329	2.494	.015
	Culture of Pesantren	.375	.126	.391	2.967	.004

a. Dependent Variable: Competitiveness

Table 4 presents the results of multiple linear regression analysis with the dependent variable of competitiveness. This model shows that *Kiai's* leadership has a coefficient of 0.362 and is significant at the level of 0.015, which means that every increase of one unit in *Kiai's* leadership is expected to increase competitiveness by 0.362 units. Meanwhile, the Pesantrens shows a coefficient of 0.375 with a significance at the level of 0.004, indicating that every increase of one unit in Islamic Boarding School culture is expected to increase competitiveness by 0.375 units. The standardized beta value for *Kiai* leadership is 0.329, and for Islamic boarding school culture, it is 0.391, indicating that both positively and significantly influence competitiveness. Overall, these results show that the leadership of *Kiai* and the Pesantrens contributed to the increase in competitiveness in the context of this research.

Table 5. R Square Result

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.725 ^a	.526	.513	4.02925
a. Predictors: (Constant), Leadership of <i>Kiai</i> , Culture of Pesantren				
Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.676 ^a	.457	.442	3.47371
a. Predictors: (Constant), Leadership of <i>Kiai</i> , Culture of Pesantren				

Based on Table 5, the R-value is 0.725, indicating a strong correlation or relationship between independent variables, which include *Kiai* leadership and *pesantren culture*. The R Square value is 0.526, meaning that the influence of the independent variable (*leadership of Kiai* and *pesantren culture*) on the dependent variable, quality, is 52.6%. In contrast, other factors influence the remaining percentage. In addition, Table 5 shows an R-value of 0.676, showing a strong correlation or relationship between independent variables (*Kiai* leadership and *pesantren culture*). The R Square value is 0.457, which means that the influence of the independent variable (*leadership of Kiai* and *pesantren culture*) on the dependent variable, quality, is 45.7%, with the remaining percentage influenced by other factors.

Table 6. Simultaneous Significance Test (F Test) 1

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1315.379	2	657.690	40.511	.000 ^b
	Residual	1185.147	73	16.235		
	Total	2500.526	75			
a. Dependent Variable: Quality						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Leadership of <i>Kiai</i> , Culture of Pesantren						

Based on Table 6, the F-statistic value is 40.511, more significant than the F-table value of 3.12, with a significance level 0.000. This indicates that the regression

model is suitable for predicting the impact of *Kiai* leadership and *Pesantren* culture on quality, or it can be stated that there is a simultaneous effect of *Kiai* leadership and *Pesantren* culture on quality.

Table 7. Simultaneous Significance Test (F Test) 2

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	740.241	2	370.120	30.673	.000 ^b
	Residual	880.865	73	12.067		
	Total	1621.105	75			

a. Dependent Variable: Competitiveness
b. Predictors: (Constant), *Kiai* Leadership, *Pesantren* Culture

Based on Table 7, the F-statistic value is 30.673, more significant than the F-table value of 3.12, with a significance level of 0.000. This indicates that the regression model is suitable for predicting the impact of *Kiai* leadership and *Pesantren* culture on competitiveness, or it can be stated that there is a simultaneous effect of *Kiai* leadership and *Pesantren* culture on competitiveness.

The t-statistic test shows the extent to which each explanatory or independent variable individually explains the variation in the dependent variable. Based on the analysis, the results are as follows;

Table 8. T-Test

t_{hitung}	t_{tabel}	Sig.
2.356	1.66571	0.021
3.897	1.66571	0.000
2.494	1.66571	0.015
2.967	1.66571	0.004
10.328	1.66571	0.000

The following analysis results are obtained from the data above: The t-value for *Kiai* leadership (X1) is 2.356, whereas the t-table value is 1.66571; thus, the t-value > t-table. The significance level for the t-value of the *Kiai* leadership variable (X1) is 0.020, which is < 0.05. Based on these results, H0 is rejected, and Ha is accepted, indicating that *Kiai* leadership significantly affects quality (Y). The t-value for *pesantren* culture (X2) is 3.897, whereas the t-table value is 1.66571; thus, the t-value > t-table. The significance level for the t-value of the *pesantren* culture variable (X2) is 0.002, which is < 0.05. Based on these results, H0 is rejected, and Ha is accepted, indicating that *pesantren* culture significantly affects quality (Y). The t-value for *Kiai* leadership (X1) is 2.494, whereas the t-table value is 1.66571; thus, the t-value > t-table. The significance level for the t-value of the *Kiai* leadership variable (X1) is 0.034, which is < 0.05. Based on these results, H0 is rejected, and Ha is accepted, indicating that *Kiai* leadership significantly affects competitiveness (Z). The t-value for *pesantren* culture (X2) is 2.967, whereas the t-table value is 1.66571, thus the t-value > t-table. The significance level for the t-value of the *pesantren* culture variable (X2) is 0.006, which is < 0.05. Based on these results, H0 is rejected, and Ha is accepted, indicating that *pesantren* culture significantly affects competitiveness (Z). The t-value for competitiveness (Z) is

10.328, whereas the t-table value is 1.66571; thus, the t-value > t-table. The significance level for the t-value of the competitiveness variable (Z) is 0.000, which is < 0.05. Based on these results, H0 is rejected, and Ha is accepted, indicating that competitiveness significantly affects quality (Y).

Path analysis is used to test the influence of intervening variables. Path analysis is an extension of multiple linear regression, or path analysis involves using regression analysis to estimate causal relationships between variables (causal models) that have been established based on theory.

First, the SPSS output for multiple regression provides a standardized beta value for *Kiai* leadership in regression equation (1) of 0.362, which is significant at 0.021, indicating that *Kiai* leadership affects quality. The unstandardized beta coefficient of 0.362 represents the path value or path p2. In the regression equation (2) output, the unstandardized beta values for *Kiai* leadership are 0.572, and for competitiveness, they are 0.954, both of which are significant. The unstandardized beta for *Kiai* leadership of 0.362 represents the path value p1, and the unstandardized beta for competitiveness of 0.954 represents the path value p3.

The e1 value = $\sqrt{1-0.526} = 0,68847$, e2 = $\sqrt{1-0.457} = 0,736885$.

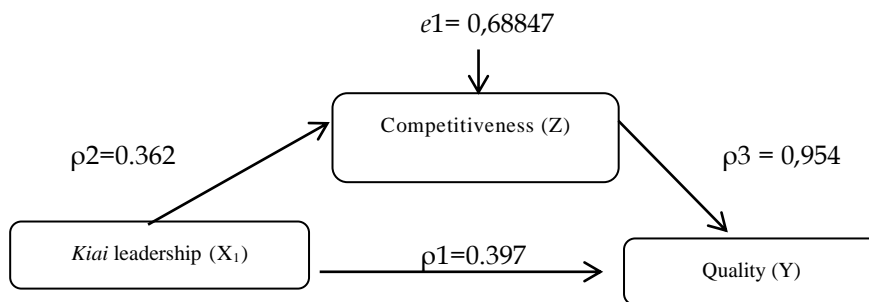


Figure 1. Structure of X1, Z, and Y Influences
Source: processed data, 2024

The results of the first path analysis indicate that *Kiai* leadership can directly influence quality and have an indirect effect, namely from *Kiai* leadership to competitiveness (as a mediator) and then to quality. The magnitude of the direct effect is 0.429. In contrast, the magnitude of the indirect effect must be calculated by multiplying the indirect coefficient, which is $(0.362) \times (0,954) = 0,345348$ or total the effect of *Kiai* leadership on quality = $0,397 + (0.362) \times (0,954) = 0.742348$.

The significance of the mediation effect proposed by the multiplication of coefficients ($p2 \times p3$) is tested using the Sobel test as follows:

Calculate the error standard from the indirect effect coefficient ($Sp2p3$)

$$Sp2p3 = \sqrt{p3^2 Sp2^2 + p2^2 Sp3^2 + Sp2^2 Sp3^2}$$

$$Sp2p3 = \sqrt{0.022726} = 0.150751$$

Based on the results of $Sp2p3$, we can calculate the t-statistic value for the mediation effect using the following formula:

$$t = \frac{p2p3}{Sp2p3} = \frac{0,34821}{0,150751} = 2.309835$$

Since the count = 2.309835 is greater than the critical value table of 1.66571 at a significance level of 0.05, it can be concluded that the mediation coefficient of 0.742348 is significant, indicating the presence of a mediation effect. Therefore, competitiveness can serve as a mediating variable between *Kiai* leadership and quality.

Second, the SPSS output for multiple regression shows that the standardized beta coefficient for *Kiai* leadership in regression equation (1) is 0.572 with a significance level of 0.000, indicating that pesantren culture affects quality. The unstandardized beta coefficient of 0.572 represents the path coefficient p2. In the output of regression equation (2), the unstandardized beta values for pesantren culture (0.375) and competitiveness (0.954) are both significant. The unstandardized beta for *Kiai* leadership (0.572) represents the path coefficient p1, and the unstandardized beta for competitiveness (0.954) represents the path coefficient p3. The e1 value amount is $= \sqrt{1-0.526} = 0,68847$, e2 = $\sqrt{1-0.457} = 0,736885$.

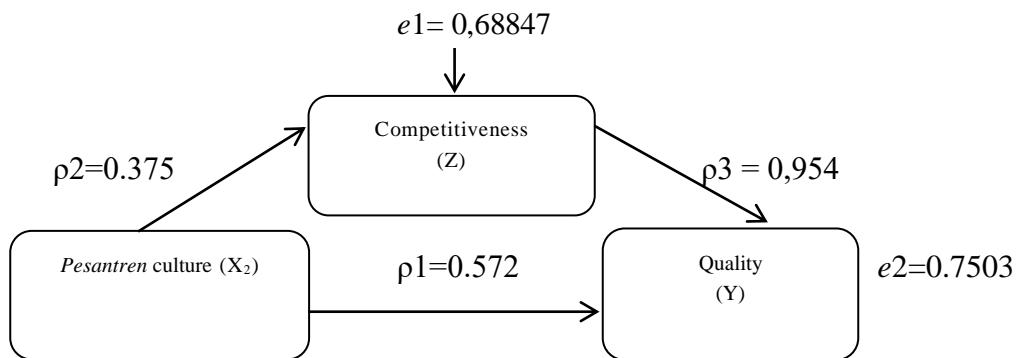


Figure 2. Effect Structure of X_2 , Z , and Y
Source: processed data, 2024.

Table 10. The Direct and Indirect Effects of Pesantren Culture on Quality through Competitiveness as a Mediating Variable

Variable	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect
<i>Pesantren</i> culture on quality	0,572	
<i>Pesantren</i> work culture on competitiveness		0.375
Competitiveness on quality		0,954

The results of the path analysis indicate that pesantren leadership can directly influence quality and has an indirect effect, specifically from pesantren culture to competitiveness (as a mediator) and then to quality. The direct effect is 0.572, while the indirect effect is calculated by multiplying the indirect coefficients: $(0.375) \times (0.954) = 0.35775$. Therefore, the total effect of pesantren culture on quality is $0.572 + (0.375 \times 0.954) = 0.92975$.

The significance of the mediation effect, as determined by the multiplication of coefficients ($p_2 \times p_3$), is tested using the Sobel test as follows:

Calculate the error standard from the indirect effect coefficient (Sp_{2p3}).

$$Sp_{2p3} = \sqrt{p_3^2 Sp_{2^2} + p_2^2 Sp_{3^2} + Sp_{2^2} Sp_{3^2}}$$
$$Sp_{2p3} = 0.127028$$

Based on the Sp_{2p3} results, we can calculate the t-statistic for the mediation effect using the following formula:

$$t = \frac{p_2 p_3}{Sp_{2p3}} = \frac{0,888252}{0,127028} = 2.816308$$

Since the calculated t-count = 2.816308 is greater than the critical t-table of 1.66571 at a 0.05 significance level, it can be concluded that the mediation coefficient of 0.92975 is significant, indicating the presence of a mediation effect. Therefore, competitiveness can serve as a mediating variable between the Pesantrens and quality.

Discussion

The research results indicate that the leadership of the *Kiai* has a significant effect on quality; this means that the higher the leadership quality of the *Kiai*, the higher the quality outcomes achieved. This study aligns with the findings of Kiwanuka et al. (2021), which demonstrated that leadership positively impacts quality. Similarly, the research by Arar et al. (2022) highlighted the role of *Kiai* leadership in enhancing the quality of education through formulating the vision, mission, and objectives of the pesantren; designing programs to improve educational quality; recruiting teachers from pesantren graduates; conducting comparative studies related to the management and quality improvement of pesantren education; and utilizing technological advancements to develop the pesantren further.

The research results indicate that pesantren culture influences quality. This finding is supported by research by Alzahrani et al. (2021), which shows that organizational culture positively impacts educational quality. Additionally, Mishra and Otaiwi's (2020) study found a significant effect of organizational culture on educational quality. Therefore, pesantren must establish an influential organizational culture to provide high-quality education. Within the pesantren is an interdependent interaction between individuals and their physical and social environment. The research results indicate that pesantren culture has an impact on competitiveness. The positive effect on competitiveness demonstrates that creating a competitive advantage in a pesantren requires understanding customer demands for the desired educational services.

The research results show that competitiveness affects quality. This finding aligns with the study by Hart & Rodgers (2024), which stated that improving program quality and service provision enhances the competitiveness of higher education institutions. This is further supported by the study of Cheng et al. (2022) which found that the competitiveness of higher education is closely linked to the institution's ability to demonstrate superior performance and outcomes that are in

demand by educational stakeholders. Competitiveness is defined as productivity, which refers to the output generated by the workforce (Cicarelli et al., 2023). The competitive advantage of the pesantren determines competitiveness and relies heavily on the relative level of resources it possesses, commonly referred to as competitive advantage.

The research findings indicate that increased competitiveness impacts *Kiai* leadership and enhances quality. This study is supported by previous research by Maljugić et al. (2024), Ogutu et al. (2023), and Taraza et al. (2023), which found that *Kiai* leadership and culture influences quality, indicating that improved competitiveness also raises pesantren culture, thus enhancing quality. The positive impact of competitiveness demonstrates that *Kiai* leadership and pesantren culture contribute to creating competitive advantage, as a pesantren must understand customer demands for desired educational services.

This research makes significant theoretical and practical contributions to Islamic education management. Theoretically, this study enriches the literature on *Kiai* leadership and pesantren culture by presenting empirical evidence about the influence of education on quality and competitiveness. The results of this study support the theory of transformational leadership, which emphasizes the importance of leaders in motivating and inspiring followers to achieve common goals. From a practical perspective, pesantren managers can use these findings to develop more effective managerial strategies to improve the quality of education. Islamic educational institutions can formulate better policies in human resource management and curriculum development by understanding how *Kiai* leadership and pesantren culture contribute to quality. In addition, this study also provides recommendations for decision-makers in the Islamic education sector to strengthen aspects of leadership and organizational culture in order to increase the competitiveness of Islamic boarding schools in the era of globalization.

CONCLUSION

Integrating spiritual values into the school curriculum is becoming increasingly important as students face challenges and struggles. This comprehensive approach improves academic achievement and promotes emotional and social welfare. Parents and society recognize the importance of spirituality in preparing future generations. However, many educational institutions face difficulties effectively incorporating these values due to the absence of clear guidelines and resources. Some schools have successfully established programs that respect the diversity of their student body, paving the way for a more inclusive and holistic educational experience.

This research significantly affects school character education through the in-depth integration of spiritual values. Leadership and community involvement emerged in the study as the main factors to which they gave additional weight, developed a positive and supportive learning environment for the students, and made the curriculum more inclusive and comprehensive. Consequently, this research crowns the learners as the ones who are not only brilliant in the academic area but also embody the virtues of a developed character, a well-formed ethical conscience, and an authentic spiritual life.

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