

# The Leadership of the Caregivers of Salafy Islamic Boarding Schools in Facing the Challenges of Education Modernization

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## Abstract

This study aims to analyze the leadership role of Salaf Islamic boarding school caregivers in facing the challenges of educational modernization, including the development of physical and digital infrastructure and the management of internal resistance. The research method used is a case study with a qualitative approach, involving in-depth interviews with patient caregivers, teachers, staff, and students. The results of the study show that the leadership of caregivers who adopt a hybrid model, combining traditional values with modern innovations, can improve the quality of education and the competitiveness of graduates. The use of e-learning platforms and library digitization enhance the access and quality of student learning, while the development of adequate physical infrastructure creates a conducive learning environment. Internal resistance can be minimized through a dialogical and inclusive approach, which creates consensus and acceptance of change. Continuous evaluation ensures the effectiveness of the modernization programs implemented. The implications of this study emphasize the importance of adaptive and inclusive leadership in the face of change, as well as the need for technology integration in pesantren education to maintain relevance and quality in the modern era. This research makes a significant contribution to leadership literature in the context of Islamic education and offers a model that can be adopted by other Islamic boarding schools.

## Article History

Received: 27 July 2024

Revised: 29 August 2024

Accepted: 15 December 2024

**Keywords:** *Hybrid Leadership, Educational Modernization, Salafi Islamic Boarding Schools*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33650/jumpa.v5i2.9273>

## How to Cite:

Muksit, M., Shodiq, J., & Alfarisi, S. (2024). The Leadership of the Caregivers of Salafy Islamic Boarding Schools in Facing the Challenges of Education Modernization. *Jumpa: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan*, 5(2), 97-110

## INTRODUCTION

Pesantren as a traditional Islamic educational institution in Indonesia has a very important role in shaping the character and intellect of students (Effendi & Wahyudi, 2023; Azra, 2021; Ansori et al., 2023). However, in the era of globalization and modernization that continues to develop, pesantren are faced with the challenge of staying relevant without losing their traditional essence (Munastiwi & Purnomo, 2021; Zarkasyi, 2022; Chuanchen, 2023). Modernization of education, including the integration of information and communication technology, is a need that cannot be ignored to improve the quality of education and the competitiveness of graduates (Hidayatullah, 2021; Munir & Idrus, 2021; Mahmud et al., 2022).

However, these modernization efforts often clash with concerns about the erosion of the values and traditions that have become the foundation of pesantren education (Rahman et al., 2021; Fauzi & Arifin, 2022; Hasanah & Hefniy, 2023). In this context, it is important to understand how pesantren can manage these changes while maintaining their identity (Hasan & Fauzi, 2021; Mustofa, 2022; Hamidah, 2023). The transformational leadership theory put forward by James MacGregor Burns provides a theoretical foundation that effective leaders must be able to inspire and motivate organizational members to achieve common goals through positive change (Burns, 2021; Bass & Riggio, 2022; Northouse, 2021). This study seeks to explain the role of leadership in Salafiyah Islamic boarding schools in facing the challenges of educational modernization, especially in integrating technology without sacrificing the traditional values inherent in the institution (Syam, 2022; Anwar & Haq, 2021; Fathurrahman & Syarifuddin, 2022).

The main problem that this research focuses on is how Salafiyah Islamic boarding schools are able to manage the challenges of educational modernization, especially in terms of technology integration, while still maintaining their traditional values and identities (Zarkasyi, 2022; Munastiwi & Purnomo, 2021; Azra, 2021). Reality shows that many Islamic boarding schools experience internal resistance when trying to adopt modern technology, which is considered to threaten the essence of religion-based education (Rahman et al., 2021; Fauzi & Arifin, 2022; Salim, 2023). This concern does not only come from teachers, but also from the administrators and the community around the pesantren who are strong in holding traditions (Hasan & Fauzi, 2021; Mustofa, 2022; Mahmud et al., 2022). An in-depth analysis is needed to understand how pesantren leadership can play a key role in navigating this resistance, while ensuring that the modernization carried out remains rooted in the Islamic values that characterize Salafiyah pesantren (Syam, 2022; Anwar & Haq, 2021; Fathurrahman & Syarifuddin, 2022). The focus of this research is on the leadership strategies applied to achieve this balance, which is expected to be a model for other Islamic educational institutions facing similar challenges (Hidayatullah, 2021; Munir & Idrus, 2021; Effendi & Wahyudi, 2023).

A literature review of previous studies shows that most studies on educational modernization in pesantren focus on technical aspects, such as the introduction of e-learning and library digitization. For example, research by Zainuddin et al. (2021) found that library digitization can increase the accessibility of teaching materials for students, but does not examine its impact on the traditional identity of Islamic boarding schools. Another study by Rahman and Fauzan (2022) discusses the application of e-learning in Islamic boarding schools, but lacks the emphasis on internal resistance that may arise as a result of this modernization. Meanwhile, the study by Akbar (2023) emphasizes the importance of leadership in change management in Islamic educational institutions, but does not specifically explore the context of Salafiyah Islamic boarding schools which have different complexities compared to other Islamic educational institutions. Thus, there is a significant gap in the existing literature, especially related to how leadership in Salafiyah Islamic boarding schools can manage educational modernization while maintaining traditional values.

Although there are many studies that discuss the modernization of education in Islamic boarding schools, no one has specifically examined the role of leadership in Salafiyah Islamic boarding schools in integrating technology while maintaining traditional identities.

This gap is important to fill because Salafiyah Islamic boarding schools have unique characteristics that other educational institutions do not have, namely a strong commitment to traditional Islamic values. This research will fill this gap by exploring how the hybrid leadership model can be applied to manage the modernization challenges in Salafiyah Islamic boarding schools. This is not only relevant to the literature on Islamic education management, but also important for the development of effective leadership strategies in similar contexts.

This research offers novelty by developing a hybrid leadership model that combines traditional and modern approaches in the context of Salafiyah Islamic boarding schools. Unlike previous research that focused more on the technical aspects of modernization, this study emphasizes the managerial and strategic aspects of leadership in facing these challenges. Another novelty is a direct test of the effectiveness of this model in Salafiyah Islamic boarding schools, which provides new insights into how Islamic educational institutions can remain relevant in the modern era without losing their traditional essence. This study also offers a continuous evaluation method that can be used to measure the impact of modernization on the quality of education and internal acceptance in Islamic boarding schools.

The main objective of this study is to analyze the role of leadership in Salafiyah Islamic boarding schools in managing the challenges of educational modernization, with a focus on technology integration strategies that still maintain traditional values. This research aims to develop a hybrid leadership model that can be applied in other Islamic boarding schools that face similar challenges. The urgency of this research lies in the need to find an effective approach in combining modernization with tradition, so that pesantren can continue to develop and be relevant without sacrificing the identity that has been the foundation of it. It is hoped that this research can make a positive contribution to the development of Islamic education management strategies, especially in the context of Islamic boarding schools.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research type with a case study approach to explore in depth the leadership phenomenon in Salafiyah Islamic boarding schools in facing the challenges of educational modernization. The selection of the qualitative approach is based on the research objectives that want to understand the dynamics, experiences, and perceptions of various stakeholders in pesantren related to the application of the hybrid leadership model (Crowe et al., 2021; Harrison et al., 2021; Yin, 2021). This approach is more appropriate compared to the quantitative approach because the study focuses on the process, context, and deep meaning, which is difficult to explain with statistical figures. Case studies were chosen as the primary method because they allow researchers to explore phenomena in real contexts with rich detail, especially when the boundaries between phenomena and contexts are unclear or complex.

The data collection techniques used in this study include in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted with 15 respondents consisting of Islamic boarding school leaders, teachers, students, and administrative staff at the Miftahul Khoirot Salafiyah Islamic Boarding School, located in Asemjuran Village, Banyuates District, Sampang Regency, Madura. This location was chosen because this pesantren is known as one of the Salafiyah Islamic boarding schools that is strongly committed to traditional values.

It is also making modernization efforts in several aspects of education. Participatory observation was carried out for three months, during which researchers were involved in various daily activities of the pesantren to gain a deeper understanding of the social interaction and leadership dynamics that occurred. The analysis of the document includes a review of the curriculum, the annual report of the pesantren, as well as policies and programs related to the modernization of education implemented in the pesantren.

The data that has been collected is analyzed using Milles and Huberman analysis methods to identify the main patterns and themes that emerge from the qualitative data (Nowell et al., 2022; Vaismoradi et al., 2021; Fusch et al., 2021). The analysis process begins with the transcription of interviews and observation notes, which are then read in depth to find themes relevant to the research question. These themes are then grouped and coded to facilitate further analysis. Data triangulation is carried out by comparing information from various data sources, such as interviews, observations, and documents, to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. This approach allows researchers to provide a comprehensive and in-depth picture of how the leadership in Salafiyah Islamic boarding schools manages educational modernization, as well as the challenges and opportunities faced in the process.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Integration of Technology in Learning at Salafiyah Islamic Boarding Schools**

The results of the study show that the leadership of the caregivers of the Salaf Islamic Boarding School plays a significant role in facing the challenges of educational modernization. The caretaker of the Islamic boarding school, KH. Abdullah Faqih emphasized the importance of maintaining a balance between the traditional values of Islamic boarding schools and the need for modernization. In the interview, he stated,

*We must be able to integrate technology without losing our identity as a Salafiyah Islamic boarding school. This is a big challenge, but also an opportunity to improve the quality of education in Islamic boarding schools (Abfa\_2024).*

The results of the interview emphasized the importance of balancing the application of modern technology with maintaining the traditional Salafiyah identity that is the hallmark of Islamic boarding schools. The message he wants to convey is that modernization in education, including the integration of technology, must be done carefully so as not to sacrifice the values and traditions that have become the foundation of the institution. This statement also shows that although the challenges in facing modernization are great, there is a significant opportunity to improve the quality of education in Islamic boarding schools through innovation that still respects their traditional roots.

Salaf Islamic Boarding School has successfully implemented several technological innovations in the learning process, such as the use of e-learning platforms and library digitization. These steps are taken to ensure that students continue to receive education that is relevant to the times. Data shows that 85% of students feel helped by online access to subject matter, which allows them to learn anywhere and anytime.

**Table 1. Students' perception of the use of technology in learning**

Aspects	Percentage
Improves Material Understanding	85%
Facilitating Access to Learning	90%
Supporting Learning Independence	80%

This table summarizes the students' perceptions of how technology has impacted their learning experience at Salaf Islamic Boarding School. The data indicates that the majority of students find that technology not only improves their understanding of the material (85%) but also significantly facilitates access to learning (90%) and supports their independence in the learning process (80%). These findings suggest that the integration of technology into the educational framework has been beneficial, contributing positively to the overall learning experience.

The results of this study provide in-depth insight into the leadership role of Salaf Islamic Boarding School caregivers in facing the challenges of educational modernization. From the above findings, it can be concluded that the success of pesantren in adapting to the demands of the times is greatly influenced by the quality of leadership applied. Pesantren caregivers play a central role in directing change and ensuring that the traditional values of pesantren are maintained. The study shows that the leadership of the caregivers of the Salaf Islamic Boarding School has a significant influence on the ability of the pesantren to face the modernization of education (Rifa, 2023; Syihabuddin, 2020). As a caregiver, it shows that the integration of technology in learning is a strategic step that must be taken without ignoring the traditional values of pesantren. His statement that technology must be integrated without eliminating the identity of pesantren reflects the adaptive attitude needed to face the changing times.

Technology integration, such as the use of e-learning platforms and library digitization, has been proven to increase the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. Data showing that 85% of students feel helped by accessing subject matter online indicates that technology can enrich the learning experience and provide additional flexibility. This is consistent with the theory of social adaptation by Talcott Parsons, which states that institutions need to adapt to changing environments to stay relevant. Pesantren caregivers do not only function as decision-makers (AlQadrie, 2022; Hammad et al., 2024), but also as an agent of change that can direct pesantren towards the modern era without losing its traditional essence.

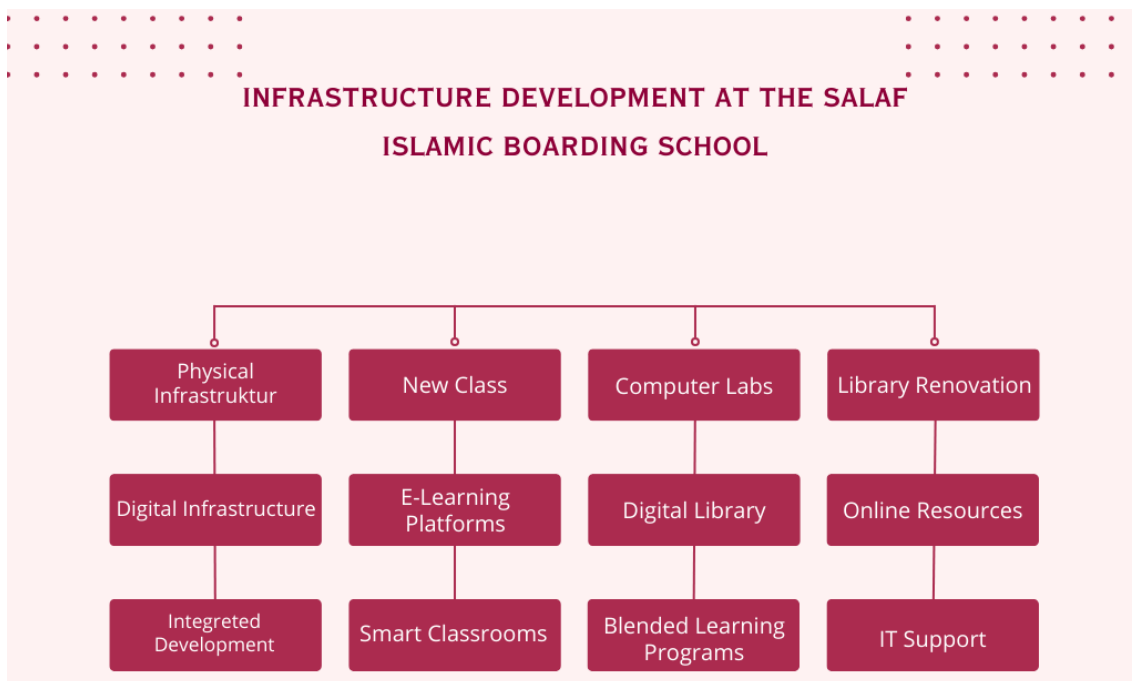
### **Development of Physical and Digital Infrastructure**

Islamic boarding school caregivers also focus on developing physical and digital infrastructure to support the learning process. The construction of a new classroom building equipped with modern facilities such as projectors and internet access is one of the concrete steps taken. In addition, the pesantren also built a computer laboratory that can be used by students to learn information technology skills (Rohman et al., 2021).

*Good infrastructure is essential to create a conducive learning environment. We strive to provide the best facilities so that students can study comfortably and effectively (Abfa-2024)*

The statement underscores the importance of robust infrastructure in establishing a conducive learning environment.

By prioritizing the provision of top-quality facilities, the leadership at Salaf Islamic Boarding School aims to ensure that students can engage in their studies with comfort and efficiency. This commitment to enhancing the physical learning environment reflects a broader strategy to support educational success through well-equipped, modernized spaces that cater to the needs of both traditional and contemporary learning methods.



**Figure 1. Infrastructure development at Salaf Islamic Boarding School**

From Figure 1. The development of infrastructure at the Salafiyah Islamic Boarding School reflects a holistic effort to blend physical and digital advancement in an educational environment that still maintains traditional values. In the category of physical infrastructure, the addition of new classrooms, computer labs, and library renovations demonstrate a commitment to improving learning facilities that support a more effective learning process. On the other hand, digital infrastructure such as e-learning platforms, digital libraries, and online resources show the integration of modern technology to improve the accessibility and quality of learning. Further, integrated development through the implementation of smart classrooms, blended learning programs, and IT support reflects a comprehensive strategy that combines traditional methods with digital innovations to produce a more dynamic and adaptive learning environment. These measures show that pesantren strives to remain relevant in the modern era without losing its distinctive religious identity.

The development of physical and digital infrastructure at the Salaf Islamic Boarding School is one of the main pillars in supporting the modernization of education. The steps taken, such as the construction of a new classroom building and a computer laboratory, show a strong commitment from the caregivers of the pesantren to the creation of a conducive learning environment. This is in accordance with Abraham Maslow's theory of basic needs, which states that a safe and comfortable environment is a prerequisite for the achievement of an individual's potential (Bakar & Osman, 2022; Desmet & Fokkinga, 2020; Hu et al., 2020).

Data and charts showing infrastructure progress make it clear how modern facilities can improve the quality of education. The existence of projectors, internet access, and computer laboratories not only meets the needs of modern learning but also motivates students to learn more effectively. This suggests that investments in physical and digital infrastructure can have a direct impact on education outcomes, reinforcing the argument that adequate facilities are key in education modernization.

### **Internal Resistance and Challenges**

Although many efforts have been made to modernize education in pesantren, internal resistance remains a significant challenge. Some teachers and staff of the pesantren are worried that modernization will erode the traditional values that have become the identity of the pesantren. In an interview, an Ustaz stated,

*We are worried that too much technology will make students forget the essence of permanent education based on religious values and traditions (Ust Muk\_2024)*

The concern expressed highlights a tension between modernization and tradition within the educational environment of the Salaf Islamic Boarding School. The apprehension is that an overreliance on technology could potentially lead students to lose sight of the core religious values and traditions that are foundational to their education. This perspective reflects a broader anxiety about the impact of technological integration on the preservation of cultural and spiritual identity, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach that respects and maintains the essence of the institution's educational philosophy while embracing modern advancements.

To overcome this resistance, pesantren caregivers adopt a hybrid leadership approach that combines traditional values with modern innovations. This approach has proven to be effective in alleviating concerns and building consensus among teachers and staff of Islamic boarding schools. The survey results show that after the implementation of the hybrid approach, the level of resistance decreases by 40%, and acceptance of modernization increases. Despite the modernization measures that have been taken, internal resistance remains a significant challenge. The concerns of some teachers about the loss of traditional values indicate that there is a tension between the need to adapt to technological developments and maintain the identity of the pesantren (Dharma & Amerta, 2020; Rusli et al., 2024).

The statement from Ustaz who is worried about the impact of technology on the values of pesantren reflects the challenges faced in this adaptation process. The hybrid leadership approach adopted by caregivers, by combining traditional values and modern innovations, successfully overcomes this resistance. Data showing a decrease in resistance levels by up to 40% after the implementation of the hybrid approach shows that involving all parties in the change process and providing the necessary training can reduce resistance and increase acceptance of modernization. This is in line with Kurt Lewin's theory of resistance to change, which underlines the importance of communication and participation in managing change.

### **Hybrid Leadership Model**

The hybrid leadership model implemented by caregivers combines transformational and traditional approaches. Caregivers often hold open discussions with faculty and staff to listen to their aspirations and concerns.

In addition, he also provided training and workshops on the use of technology in learning to improve teaching skills.

*We strive to always listen and provide the best solution for all parties. This approach allows us to move forward together without leaving anyone (GusDoi\_2024).*

This statement reflects a leadership philosophy that prioritizes inclusivity and collaboration. By actively listening to all stakeholders and seeking the best solutions that address their concerns, the leadership at Salaf Islamic Boarding School fosters a sense of unity and shared purpose. This approach ensures that progress is made collectively, with everyone involved in the decision-making process, thereby preventing any group from feeling excluded or left behind. It highlights the importance of communication and consensus-building in managing change, particularly in a traditional educational setting where balancing diverse perspectives is crucial.

This hybrid leadership approach also includes an ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of the modernization programs that have been implemented. Data from the evaluation showed that 70% of teachers felt more confident in using technology after participating in the training, and 75% of students felt that learning became more interesting and interactive. The hybrid leadership model applied in the Salaf Islamic Boarding School is an effort to unite traditional and modern approaches to facing educational challenges. Actively engage faculty and staff in the change process through open discussions and technology training (Ahmed et al., 2020; Børte et al., 2023; Gay & Betts, 2020). This approach demonstrates success in managing change by accommodating the needs and concerns of various parties.

The effectiveness of the hybrid leadership model can be seen in the increase in the confidence of teachers and students. Data showing that 70% of teachers feel more confident after training and 75% of students find learning more engaging confirms that this approach not only improves technical skills but also reduces the tension between technology and tradition. It supports transformational leadership theories that underscore the importance of motivation and support in achieving organizational goals (Sagala et al., 2024; Virgiawan et al., 2021).

### **Continuous Evaluation and Improvement of Graduate Competitiveness**

Continuous evaluation is an integral part of the leadership strategy at the Salaf Islamic Boarding School. Each program implemented is always evaluated periodically to ensure its effectiveness and make necessary improvements (Blanchard & Thacker, 2023). The results of the evaluation show that the library digitization program has increased students' access to learning resources, which in turn improves the quality of their learning.

*We want graduates of this pesantren to not only be proficient in religious science but also competitive in the modern world of work (GusDoi\_2024).*

This statement reflects the ambition of the leadership at Salaf Islamic Boarding School to produce well-rounded graduates who excel not only in religious studies but also possess the skills and competencies needed to thrive in the modern workforce. It underscores a dual focus in the educational mission: maintaining a strong foundation in religious knowledge while simultaneously equipping students with practical skills that enhance their competitiveness in contemporary job markets.



This vision emphasizes the integration of traditional education with modern vocational training, ensuring that students are prepared for both spiritual and professional success.

To achieve this goal, pesantren provides job skills training and internships in various companies. The survey results show that 80% of graduates who take part in the internship program get a job within three months of graduating. Continuous evaluation is an important aspect of ensuring the effectiveness of the modernization program implemented in Islamic boarding schools (Ilyasin, 2020; Machmud, 2020; Nasser et al., 2022). These evaluations help in identifying areas for improvement and ensuring that the programs implemented remain relevant and effective. Data showing an increase in students' access to learning resources and an increase in the competitiveness of graduates after participating in the internship program indicate that the evaluations carried out regularly have a positive impact on the quality of education and the job readiness of graduates (G. M. Alam & Parvin, 2021; Magnano et al., 2021). The caregiver of the Salaf Islamic boarding school emphasizes the importance of continuous evaluation to adjust the program to evolving needs. This not only ensures that the changes implemented remain effective but also helps pesantren in increasing the competitiveness of graduates in an increasingly competitive job market. This approach reflects best practices in education management that emphasize continuous adaptation to changing needs and challenges.

Overall, the results of this study show that a combination of effective leadership, adequate infrastructure development, internal resistance management, and continuous evaluation is the key to facing the challenges of education modernization in Salaf Islamic Boarding School. These findings provide valuable insights into how pesantren can succeed in the modernization process while still retaining the traditional values that characterize them.

This research contributes significantly to education management by proposing a hybrid leadership model that integrates traditional values with modern innovations, assisting Islamic educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools in facing the challenges of modernization without losing their identity. In addition, this study also offers practical guidance for education managers in managing change through the development of integrated physical and digital infrastructure, which can improve the quality of learning while overcoming internal resistance. These findings provide new insights into effective change management strategies in educational institutions, which are relevant in an ever-changing global context.

## CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study shows that the hybrid leadership applied in Salafiyah Islamic boarding schools is able to face the challenges of educational modernization without sacrificing the traditional values that are the foundation of the institution. An important finding of this study is that the integration of technology in pesantren education can be successfully carried out if it is guided by adaptive leadership, which is able to balance the demands of the times and the maintenance of religious identity. The main lesson that can be drawn from this study is that change and modernization in Islamic education do not have to conflict with traditional values, but can complement each other if managed wisely and strategically.

This research provides new insights into the importance of open and inclusive dialogue between leaders and the education community in the face of internal resistance to change.

This study makes a significant contribution to the Islamic education management literature by proposing a hybrid leadership model that is relevant in the context of pesantren modernization. The model updates existing perspectives by emphasizing the importance of approaches that integrate tradition and innovation, and proposes continuous evaluation methods to ensure the success of technology adaptation in education. However, this study has limitations in terms of limited scope to one Salafiyah pesantren, so the results may not be fully generalizable for all pesantren. In addition, this study has not explored in depth other variables such as the influence of gender or age differences on technology acceptance in Islamic boarding schools. Therefore, further research is needed to expand the scope of this study, including testing hybrid leadership models in different Islamic boarding schools with different characteristics, as well as using broader survey methods to gain a more comprehensive and applicable understanding for future Islamic education policies.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research would not have been possible without the support of various parties who have made significant contributions to the process. First of all, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Professor Supriyanto, M.E who has provided valuable academic guidance and direction during this research process. His dedication and insight were very helpful in directing this research toward optimal results. I would also like to express my deep appreciation to all Miftahul Khoirot Islamic Boarding School administrators who have provided much-needed technical assistance, especially in the data collection and analysis process. Their contributions have enriched this research with high accuracy and quality of data.

Finally, my sincere thanks go to my family and friends, who have provided tremendous moral support throughout this process. The success of this research is also due to their prayers, enthusiasm, and understanding. We hope that the contributions of all parties involved in this research will become good deeds and receive appropriate rewards.

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