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## The Role of Leadership in Improving Educator Performance at Subulussalam Islamic Boarding School Tulungagung

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### ABSTRACT:

Education quality in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) is strongly influenced by the leadership of the caregiver (kiai), particularly in shaping educator performance. Previous studies have largely examined leadership in formal school settings or discussed pesantren leadership in general terms, without explicitly explaining how leadership, innovation, and supervision are operationalized simultaneously in improving educator performance. This study addresses this research gap by exploring how a pesantren caregiver enacts these three roles in an integrated manner at Subulussalam Islamic Boarding School, Tulungagung. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. The findings show that the caregiver performs a strategic leadership role by motivating educators and strengthening discipline, an innovation role by introducing technology-based learning and professional development, and a supervisory role through systematic evaluation supported by reward and sanction mechanisms. These findings contribute new empirical insight into the multidimensional leadership model of pesantren caregivers and demonstrate how spiritual authority can be transformed into effective educational management to enhance educator performance.

**Key words:** *Educational Leadership; Educator Performance; Islamic Boarding School*

## INTRODUCTION

Education plays a central role in national development because it directly affects the quality of human resources and social progress.<sup>1</sup> In Indonesia, Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) occupy a distinctive position as institutions that integrate religious, moral, and academic education. Within this context, the caregiver (kiai) functions not only as a spiritual authority but also as an educational leader responsible for managing educators and ensuring instructional quality.

Empirical conditions at Subulussalam Islamic Boarding School Tulungagung indicate that educator performance has not always met institutional expectations, as reflected in issues of discipline, limited instructional innovation, and uneven pedagogical initiative.<sup>2</sup> These conditions

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<sup>1</sup> A Kadir and Umiarso, "The Effectiveness of Leadership, Coaching Systems, and Organizational Climate on the Work Effectiveness of Boarding School Caregivers," *International Journal of Instruction* 16, no. 3 (2023): 655–76, [https://www.e-iji.net/dosyalar/iji\\_2023\\_3\\_35](https://www.e-iji.net/dosyalar/iji_2023_3_35).

<sup>2</sup> A W Zaini and M A F Sanjani, "Improving Islamic Religious Education Teachers' Performance Through Effective School Leadership," *AFKARINA: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 2024, <https://ejournal.unuja.ac.id/index.php/afkarina/article/view/5331>.

highlight the importance of leadership practices that go beyond symbolic authority and extend into concrete managerial and supervisory actions. Understanding how caregivers exercise leadership to address these challenges is therefore crucial for strengthening Islamic education management.

Previous studies have demonstrated that leadership significantly influences educator performance, particularly through motivation, supervision, and innovation.<sup>3</sup> However, most existing research focuses on formal schools or examines pesantren leadership in a fragmented manner, emphasizing either spiritual authority or administrative roles separately. Few studies have systematically analyzed how caregivers simultaneously function as leaders, innovators, and supervisors within a pesantren environment that blends traditional and modern educational systems.

This study aims to fill this gap by examining the integrated leadership roles of the caregiver at Subulussalam Islamic Boarding School Tulungagung. Specifically, it investigates: (1) how the caregiver performs leadership functions in motivating and managing educators, (2) how innovation is introduced to improve teaching practices, and (3) how supervision is implemented to maintain and enhance educator performance. By doing so, this research highlights the novelty of a multidimensional leadership model rooted in Islamic values and practical management.<sup>4</sup>

## Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach using phenomenological research design to capture the lived experiences of the pesantren caregiver and educators in improving educator performance.<sup>4</sup> Phenomenology was selected to explore how leadership, innovation, and supervision are perceived, interpreted, and enacted by research participants within their natural educational context.

The phenomenological procedure was conducted in several stages: (1) identifying key informants who directly experienced the leadership practices of the caregiver, (2) collecting rich descriptive data through in-depth interviews and participant observation, (3) bracketing researcher assumptions to focus on participants' experiences, (4) coding and categorizing significant statements, and (5) synthesizing these meanings into core themes representing leadership, innovation, and supervision.

Sampling was carried out using purposive selection, with the caregiver and selected educators chosen based on their direct involvement in teaching and institutional management. This strategy was justified because these participants possessed experiential knowledge relevant to the research focus. Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation analysis. Data credibility was ensured through source triangulation and iterative comparison across data types.

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<sup>3</sup> Z A B Siregar et al., "Islamic Boarding School Leadership and Work Environment on Teacher Performance," *Nashruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 6, no. 3 (2023): 420–35, <https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v6i3.4065>.

<sup>4</sup> N P Sari, H Muhammad, and N Aini, "Leadership Style and Work Motivation: Driving Performance of Islamic Boarding School," *Jurnal Darussalam: Jurnal Pendidikan, Komunikasi Dan Pemikiran Hukum Islam* 14, no. 2 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.30739/darussalam.v14i2.1945>.

## **Result**

### **A. The Role of Caregivers as Leaders in Improving Educator Performance**

Based on the findings obtained through field observations and in-depth interviews at the Subulussalam Islamic Boarding School, Tulungagung, it was found that the caregiver, Kiai Ahmad Zainal Abidin, demonstrated strong leadership characterized by charisma, firmness, and openness in communication. He regularly conducted coordination and evaluation meetings every semester to discuss teaching performance and curriculum achievements. Data from interviews with educators revealed that caregivers often motivate teachers by emphasizing the importance of commitment, discipline, and devotion in their work, as well as by directly supervising classroom activities.

Data analysis revealed that the caregiver exercised leadership through motivational guidance, discipline enforcement, and open communication. Educators reported that regular coordination meetings and direct classroom supervision encouraged responsibility and commitment. One educator stated that the caregiver's consistent presence and personal example strengthened their sense of accountability. These findings indicate that leadership emerged as a theme through repeated references to motivation, evaluation, and role modeling.

### **B. The Role of Caregivers as Innovators in Improving Educator Performance**

The research data revealed that the Subulussalam Islamic Boarding School has implemented several educational innovations initiated by the caregiver. These include training on the latest teaching methodologies, utilization of technology such as projectors and Wi-Fi in classrooms, and the introduction of digital media for learning. Interviews with both educators and students revealed that these innovations significantly enhanced the effectiveness of teaching and increased the enthusiasm of educators. The caregiver also facilitated the development of a library accessible to all educators, enhancing their knowledge and teaching materials.

The innovation theme was derived from data related to instructional change and professional development. Educators described the introduction of technology-based learning tools, teaching workshops, and improved access to learning resources. Interview data showed that these innovations enhanced teaching confidence and student engagement. This demonstrates that innovation was not incidental but systematically implemented to respond to contemporary educational demands.

### **C. The Role of Caregivers as Supervisors in Improving Educator Performance**

The study found that supervision is carried out intensively by the caregiver through periodic evaluations, direct class observations, and performance assessments every semester. Interviews and documentation data revealed that Kiai Ahmad Zainal Abidin provided both guidance and sanctions depending on the educators' performance outcomes. Teachers who excel were given appreciation, while those who underperformed received coaching or disciplinary feedback. Additionally, supervision included checking lesson plans, ensuring punctuality, and maintaining discipline in the classroom.

Supervision emerged as a dominant theme through accounts of regular evaluations, feedback mechanisms, and reward–sanction systems. Educators emphasized that supervision was conducted in a supportive manner, combining firmness with guidance. These findings confirm that supervision functioned as developmental support rather than mere control, contributing to sustained improvement in educator performance.

Comparatively, these findings extend recent studies on pesantren leadership by demonstrating how integrated leadership roles operate in practice, thereby highlighting the originality of this research contribution.

<b>Role</b>	<b>Key Activities</b>	<b>Observed Impact</b>
<b>Leader</b>	Motivating, holding evaluation meetings, fostering open communication	<b>Increased educator discipline, motivation, and performance consistency</b>
<b>Innovator</b>	Providing training, technology integration (Wi-Fi, projector), digital library	<b>Enhanced teaching effectiveness, creative learning methods</b>
<b>Supervisor</b>	<b>Regular evaluations, guidance, sanctions and rewards</b>	<b>Improved professionalism, accountability, and performance quality</b>

**Table 1. Leadership Roles and Impacts**

## Discussion

### A. Caregivers as Leaders in Enhancing Educator Performance

The findings reveal that Islamic boarding school caregivers play a pivotal role as leaders who direct, motivate, and model professionalism among educators. Kiai Ahmad Zainal Abidin, as the caretaker, demonstrates leadership through personal example, continuous supervision, and motivation. His efforts to recruit competent educators and foster open communication between teachers and students create a positive working culture that strengthens teaching responsibility and discipline. This aligns with Mulyasa's (2007) theory, which posits that effective educational leadership is characterized by empowerment, collaboration, and consistent guidance.<sup>5</sup>

The cause-and-effect relationship indicates that consistent leadership practices—such as providing clear goals and regular evaluation—directly influence educators' intrinsic motivation and accountability. Strong leadership stimulates educators' commitment to institutional goals, transforming abstract vision into measurable outcomes.<sup>6</sup>

The implication is that Islamic boarding school leadership should not only focus on religious authority but also managerial competence. Leadership training for caregivers can enhance educators' pedagogical quality and institutional performance, ensuring that Islamic boarding school education remains competitive and sustainable in a modern context.<sup>7</sup>

### B. Caregivers as Innovators in Improving Teaching Practices

As innovators, the caregivers implement creative approaches to improve instructional quality. The study shows that Kiai Ahmad Zainal Abidin introduces teaching method workshops, integrates technological tools such as projectors and Wi-Fi, and provides access to academic resources like the Islamic boarding school library. These initiatives represent a paradigm shift from traditional rote learning to a more dynamic and technology-assisted pedagogy. The findings

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<sup>5</sup> Siregar et al., "Islamic Boarding School Leadership and Work Environment on Teacher Performance."

<sup>6</sup> A Kurniawan, "Leadership Learning for Students through Strengthening Organizational Empowerment in Islamic Boarding Schools," *Evaluasi: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam* 7, no. 2 (2023), <https://e-journal.staima-alhikam.ac.id/evaluasi/article/view/1438>.

<sup>7</sup> M Fathoni, "Transformational Leadership in Islamic Boarding Schools during and after COVID-19: Strengthening Institutional Governance in Times of Crisis," *Journal of Social Education and Research*, 2024, <https://idm.or.id/JSER/index.php/JSER/article/view/891>.

support Abas (2017) and Mulyasa (2014), who emphasized that innovation in Islamic boarding school management is key to adapting to societal and technological changes.<sup>8</sup>

Innovation arises from the caregiver's awareness of external educational challenges—such as digital transformation and students' diverse learning needs. The introduction of new media and interactive techniques enhances student engagement and educator adaptability, leading to improved teaching effectiveness.<sup>9</sup>

The implication of this innovation is the modernization of the Islamic boarding school learning culture without losing Islamic values. When caregivers act as innovators, they bridge traditional religious education with 21st-century skills, preparing both educators and students to thrive in broader educational and social environments.<sup>10</sup>

### C. Caregivers as Supervisors in Maintaining Quality and Accountability

In their supervisory role, caregivers perform regular class observations, offer professional coaching, and conduct semesterly performance evaluations. The research identifies a balanced supervision approach combining control with mentoring rewarding high-performing educators and providing remedial guidance to those who underperform. This pattern mirrors Purwanto's (2012) supervision model, emphasizing that adequate supervision fosters reflective practice rather than punishment.<sup>11</sup>

The causal link lies in the feedback mechanism established through structured evaluation and mentoring. When educators receive continuous performance input, they develop self-awareness and align their teaching with institutional standards. The implication is that supervisory systems in Islamic boarding school should evolve toward developmental supervision rather than hierarchical inspection.<sup>12</sup> By framing supervision as professional support, Islamic boarding school can create a culture of quality assurance that motivates continuous improvement and reinforces institutional credibility.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that the caregiver's integrated roles as leader, innovator, and supervisor play a decisive role in improving educator performance at Subulussalam Islamic Boarding School.<sup>6</sup> The study's main contribution lies in demonstrating that charismatic-spiritual

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<sup>8</sup> A Sulaiman, "Learning Innovation in Islamic Boarding Schools in East Java: Technology's Role in Enhancing Teaching Effectiveness," *Tarbiya Journal of Education in Muslim Society*, 2025, <https://journal2.uinjkt.ac.id/index.php/tarbiya/article/view/45642>.

<sup>9</sup> H Mubarok, "Technology-Based Education Management in Salaf Islamic Boarding Schools," *Evaluasi: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam*, 2024, <https://e-journal.staima-alhikam.ac.id/evaluasi/article/view/2406>.

<sup>10</sup> L Rahmawati, "Transformation of Boarding School Management Models in Enhancing Student Accessibility and Educational Quality," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 2024, <https://ejournal.uin-suka.ac.id/tarbiyah/jpai/article/view/v21i1.8632>.

<sup>11</sup> N Hapsari, "Enhancing Teacher Performance through Participatory Supervision in Indonesian Islamic Schools," *Jurnal Edukasi Kemenag*, 2025, <https://jurnaledukasi.kemenag.go.id/edukasi/id/article/view/2351>.

<sup>12</sup> F Alim, "Implementation of the Supervisory Function in Improving Teacher Competence at Madrasah Aliyah Modern Pesantren IMMIM Putera Makassar," *Fikrotuna*, 2024, <https://jurnalalkhairat.org/ojs/index.php/fikrotuna/article/view/795>.

authority, when combined with systematic management practices, produces a sustainable leadership model in Islamic boarding schools.

Despite its strengths, this research is limited by its single-institution focus and qualitative scope, which restrict the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the absence of longitudinal data limits the ability to assess long-term leadership impact. Future research should involve comparative and mixed-method studies across multiple pesantren to further validate and expand these findings.

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