



Leadership Strategies of Pesantren Caregivers in Building a Positive Work Environment: Efforts to Enhance Teachers' Achievement Motivation

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ABSTRACT :

The leadership of *pesantren* caregivers plays a strategic role in creating a harmonious work environment and fostering teachers' achievement motivation. Studies on educational leadership have often focused on formal school principals, while the unique strategic role of *pesantren* caregivers who combine spiritual and managerial authority in shaping work culture has received limited empirical attention. This gap is important to address, considering the central role of caregivers in enhancing teachers' motivation amid the modernization of education. This study aims to analyze the leadership strategies of *pesantren* caregivers in building a positive work environment that encourages increased teacher motivation and performance. The research employs a descriptive qualitative approach, with data collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Data analysis was conducted through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and data verification. The findings indicate that: (1) the caregivers' leadership strategies integrate Islamic values (*uswah hasanah*, *shura*, and *ta'dib*) with transformational leadership characteristics; (2) a positive work environment is formed both physically and psychologically through spiritual guidance, open communication, and a fair reward system; and (3) this conducive work climate effectively promotes teachers' achievement motivation to innovate and develop their professionalism. This study contributes to the development of an Islamic educational leadership model that emphasizes the integration of spiritual and managerial values to strengthen a productive work culture.

Key words: *Islamic leadership, Pesantren caregiver, Positive work environment, Teacher achievement motivation, Islamic education.*

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a crucial element in determining the success of educational institutions. In the *pesantren* context, caregiver leadership becomes a decisive factor in shaping character, morality, and the work culture within the institution. Caregivers serve as spiritual role models as well as managerial leaders who influence teachers' work behavior and professionalism.¹

Previous studies have shown that Islamic leadership styles, which integrate spiritual and professional values, contribute significantly to enhancing teacher loyalty and motivation..² The

¹ Muhaimin, *Paradigma Pendidikan Islam* (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2012). 44

² Rafik I. Beekun, *Islamic Business Ethics* (Herndon: IIIT, 2012). 25

findings of Al-Kandari and Al-Hajri (2021) reveal that spiritual value-based leadership positively affects job satisfaction and teachers' organizational commitment in Islamic institutions.³ Similarly, Alghamdi (2023) notes that ethical and moral dimensions of leadership foster positive workplace relationships and create a harmonious school environment.⁴

In modern educational settings, transformational leadership theory, introduced by Bass and Avolio, emphasizes that inspirational leaders can transform the values, motivation, and behavior of their subordinates through idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.⁵ This aligns with the Islamic concept of *uswah hasanah*, where exemplary behavior becomes the core instrument of leadership.

However, most prior studies tend to focus on principals or madrasah leaders. The role of pesantren caregivers-who function as both spiritual and managerial leaders-remains underexplored, particularly regarding how their leadership shapes positive work environments and enhances teachers' achievement motivation.⁶ Moreover, limited research investigates how Islamic values are operationalized within contemporary management practices.

There is a clear research gap. Most studies tend to focus on the leadership of school or madrasah principals, while the strategic role of Islamic boarding school administrators as central figures in creating a positive work environment and motivating teachers to achieve has not received much empirical research. Specifically, the research question is: what are the strategic mechanisms by which Islamic boarding school administrators implement Islamic leadership values amidst the demands of modern educational management to build a conducive work environment.

This research took place at the Nurul Faizah Islamic Boarding School (IBS), a unique institution that integrates formal and traditional education, incorporating Quran memorization programs, foreign language learning, and digital technology. The caretakers at this institution play a dual role: maintaining spiritual traditions and leading educational innovation. This makes this institution an attractive research location to understand the application of Islamic and transformational leadership in building a positive work environment.

³ Abdullah Al-Kandari and Fatimah Al-Hajri, "Islamic Values and Teacher Commitment," *Journal of Educational Administration* 59 no. 3 (2021). 301

⁴ Saleh Alghamdi, "Ethical Leadership in Islamic Schools," *Education and Society Journal* 40 no. 1 (2023). 67

⁵ Bernard M. Bass and Bruce J. Avolio, *Improving Organizational Effectiveness through Transformational Leadership* (Thousand Oaks: sage, 1994). 19

⁶ Ahmad Zubaidi, "Islamic Leadership and School Climate in Pesantren," *Journal of Islamic Education* 6 no. 2 (2022). 213

Methods

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a single case study design. The main data sources consisted of the pesantren caregiver, the school principal, and eight permanent teachers. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Data analysis followed the Miles & Huberman model, which included data reduction (sorting interview transcripts and field notes related to leadership behavior), followed by data presentation in narrative and matrix form to see patterns of relationships between variables, and concluded with drawing conclusions/verification.⁷ Data validity was tested through source triangulation (comparing statements from caregivers and teachers), technical triangulation, and member checking of key informants.⁸

Result

Leadership Strategy: Integration of Islamic and Transformational Values

The caregiver implements a combination of Islamic leadership values and transformational leadership principles. Core Islamic values such as *uswab hasanah* (exemplary behavior), *syura* (consultation), and *ta'dib* (moral education) form the foundation of teacher behavioral expectations. This aligns with Beekun's assertion that true Islamic leadership requires balancing organizational goals with spiritual principles.⁹ Teachers consistently emphasized that the caregiver's discipline, integrity, and personal involvement became a moral driver for their work ethic. As one teacher noted: "We feel more motivated because the caregiver shows real examples, not only giving instructions."¹⁰

The caregivers' exemplary discipline and responsibility have been shown to be a powerful source of intrinsic motivation. As one teacher put it, "We feel motivated because the caregivers not only provide direction, but also serve as concrete examples of perseverance and commitment to work." This finding confirms the concept of Islamic leadership that balances organizational goals and spiritual values, and aligns with Afsar et al.'s finding that spiritual role models can enhance innovative behavior through psychological empowerment.

Furthermore, the open and participatory communication style adopted by the caregiver reflects the characteristics of transformational leadership. This approach successfully fosters a sense of trust and collective responsibility among teachers. This aligns with the findings of Al-

⁷ Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1994).¹⁰

⁸ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* (California: Sage Publications, 2018). 203

⁹ Beekun, *Islamic Business Ethics*. 33

¹⁰ Wawancara, 18 Maret 2025

Husseini and Elbeltagi, who explained that transformational leaders are able to foster creativity and innovation through the emotional and intellectual engagement of subordinates.¹¹

Building a Positive Work Environment: Physical and Psychological

The caregiver's strategy successfully builds a positive work environment through two aspects: physical and psychological. The physical aspect includes providing comfortable facilities, adequate workspace, and technology to support learning. The psychological aspect is realized through open communication, appreciation, and regular spiritual guidance..

This finding is consistent with Robbins's work environment theory, which asserts that a positive organizational climate increases employee job satisfaction and productivity.¹² Collie's research also confirms that emotional support and a positive social environment enhance teacher well-being and motivation.¹³

Observations show that teachers are more open in meetings, help each other with learning activities, and are more active in school activities. This demonstrates the creation of psychological safety, or a feeling of security to express opinions without fear of criticism. This supports the theory that a positive organizational climate and emotional support are crucial for improving teacher well-being, job satisfaction, and productivity.¹⁴

Strengthening Teachers' Achievement Motivation

A positive work environment fosters achievement motivation among teachers at this Islamic boarding school through two main channels: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is reflected in a spirit of dedication and a sense of moral responsibility, while extrinsic motivation is demonstrated through awards, incentives, and career development opportunities.

The administrators give teachers the freedom to innovate in teaching methods and openly recognize their contributions in formal and informal forums. "We feel appreciated when our ideas are implemented in madrasah activities," said a general studies teacher.¹⁵ From an Islamic

¹¹ Sawasn Al-Husseini and Ibrahim Elbeltagi, "Transformational Leadership and Innovation: A Cross-Sector Study," *Management Decision* 58 no. 9 (2020): 1832, <https://doi.org/10.1108/MD-09-2020-0962>.

¹² Stephen P. Robbins, *Organizational Behavior* (Jakarta: Salemba Empat, 2015).69

¹³ R.J. Collie, "Teacher Social-Emotional Competence: Predictors and Implications for Well-Being and Motivation," *Educational Psychology Review* 34, 2022, 1251, <https://doi.org/DOI:10.1007/s10648-022-09655-3>.

¹⁴ Amy Edmondson, "The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 65 no. 1 (2021): 28, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839238820056>.

¹⁵ Wawancara dan observasi, April 2025

perspective, this motivation is interpreted as *ihsan*—working as well as possible out of spiritual awareness

Furthermore, Anshori and Hidayat's study confirms that the implementation of Islamic work ethics impacts teacher performance by increasing spiritual and professional motivation. Thus, Islamic-based leadership not only impacts discipline but also fosters a drive for achievement oriented toward quality and dedication.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the leadership strategies of the caretakers integrate modern spiritual and managerial values, significantly impacting teacher motivation and performance. This approach empirically supports the theories of transformational and spiritual leadership emerging in contemporary educational literature. According to Bass and Avolio, transformational leaders influence their subordinates through four main dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.¹⁶ These four aspects are reflected in the actions of the Islamic boarding school caretakers: providing role models, encouraging learning innovation, providing consultation, and providing personal attention to teachers.

This approach aligns with Fry's concept of spiritual leadership, where leadership based on spiritual values shapes the meaning and purpose of work (calling and membership).¹⁷ Weekly spiritual guidance provided by caregivers serves as a means of internalizing moral values and fostering teachers' awareness that their work is part of worship. Furthermore, Edmondson's psychological safety theory supports the finding that teachers who feel safe expressing their opinions and innovating are more motivated to achieve.¹⁸ Interviews and observations indicate that the *shura* forum led by caregivers provides an open space for teachers to express ideas without fear of criticism.

Furthermore, the implementation of performance-based rewards reflects the principle of positive reinforcement in modern organizational behavior theory.¹⁹ Teachers who receive recognition for their work demonstrate increased participation in training programs and learning innovations. From an Islamic perspective, this also aligns with the concept of *ihsan*, working to

¹⁶ Bass and Avolio, *Improving Organizational Effectiveness through Transformational Leadership*.28

¹⁷ Louis W. Fry, "Spiritual Leadership and Organizational Outcomes," *Frontiers in Psychology* 11, 2020, 245., <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00245>.

¹⁸ Edmondson, "The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace," 35

¹⁹ Robbins, *Organizational Behavior*.72

the best of one's ability due to a spiritual awareness of God's supervision.²⁰ Thus, Islamic leadership fosters not only hierarchical relationships but also creates a spiritual bond that strengthens teacher loyalty and motivation. Therefore, a positive work environment in Islamic boarding schools is not simply a result of the organizational structure but a direct reflection of the fosters' leadership values, which prioritize a balance between spiritual and professional aspects.

A significant contribution of this research is that caregiver leadership not only builds hierarchical relationships but also creates spiritual bonds. This bond, strengthened by a positive work environment, is a key factor in increasing teacher loyalty and performance in Islamic boarding schools.

Conclusion

Based on the discussion, several conclusions can be drawn:

1. The leadership of Islamic boarding school administrators has been proven effective in increasing teacher achievement motivation through strategies that integrate Islamic values (uswah hasanah, syura) with transformational leadership principles.
2. Key strategies include moral role models, open communication, regular spiritual guidance, empowering teacher autonomy, and a performance-based reward system.
3. A positive Islamic boarding school work environment is formed from a balance between adequate physical facilities and psychological aspects such as a sense of psychological safety and appreciation, which directly increase teacher enthusiasm and commitment.

This research provides a theoretical contribution that the effectiveness of Islamic educational leadership is measured not only by administrative capabilities, but also by the ability to build spiritual meaning into the work process. Practical implications: Capacity development of Islamic boarding school administrators needs to focus on strengthening the balance between spiritual, moral, and modern managerial dimensions to create a quality-oriented work culture.

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²⁰ Muhaimin, *Paradigma Pendidikan Islam*.56

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