



Reconstruction of Kiai Management Based on Charismatic Leadership as a Model for Strengthening the Soft Skills of Abdi Ndalem Students in Islamic Boarding Schools

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ABSTRACT

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This research is motivated by the importance of strengthening soft skills in education, which has not been fully accommodated in the formal education system. Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) as value-based institutions have the potential to develop soft skills through the practice of student service. This study aims to reconstruct kiai management based on charismatic leadership as a model for strengthening the soft skills of student servants. The study used a qualitative approach with a case study design at the Al-Yasini Integrated Islamic Boarding School, through interviews, observations, and documentation. The results show that kiai management occurs culturally through values, role models, and interpersonal relationships, and that soft skills strengthening occurs through experiential learning in the practice of service. This study produces a conceptual model that integrates charismatic leadership, the service process, and soft skills strengthening. The contribution of this research lies in the development of a value-based Islamic education management model. It is concluded that kiai management is effective in shaping the character and social readiness of students in a sustainable manner.

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INTRODUCTION

Value-based education is an urgent need in an increasingly complex modern society, especially in facing the challenges of moral degradation and weak soft skills of the younger generation (Hayatunnisa et al., 2024). This phenomenon shows that educational success is no longer enough to measure from cognitive aspects alone, but also from interpersonal skills, adaptation, and social ethics (Diki Maulansyah et al., 2023; Muhammad Mahzum et al., 2022). This is important because individuals who have strong soft skills tend to be better able to survive and contribute to social and professional life (Habibi et al., 2026;

Nugraha et al., 2022). Various reports show that today's world of work places more emphasis on communication, cooperation, and leadership skills than just technical competence. Therefore, educational institutions are required to not only transfer knowledge, but also to form character (Nasution et al., 2023; Widat et al., 2023). In this context, pesantren have a strategic position because they integrate spiritual values and daily life practices (Darma & Siregar, 2022; Muali et al., 2021). Thus, research on pesantren education management is important to answer the community's needs for a holistic and sustainable educational model.

Nevertheless, the community still faces fundamental problems in the development of structured soft skills in the education system (Nugraha et al., 2022; Nurjanah & Mustofa, 2024). Many formal educational institutions tend to focus on academic achievement and leave less room for practical character formation (Sunaedi et al., 2023). This causes the graduates produced to be often less prepared to face social dynamics and the world of work that requires high adaptability. In addition, educational approaches that are too administrative often ignore the cultural and relational dimensions in the learning process (Adam et al., 2022; Anita et al., 2022). As a result, there is a gap between the knowledge possessed and the applicative ability in the field. This condition is an important background for exploring alternative educational models that are more contextual and experience-based. Islamic boarding schools as traditional educational institutions have great potential in answering this problem, especially through a distinctive pattern of parenting and leadership.

In the field, pesantren show a unique phenomenon in their educational practices, one of which is through the existence of *abdi ndalem* students. This type of student not only undergoes a formal learning process, but is also directly involved in service activities to *kiai* and the management of the Islamic boarding school. These activities include various tasks such as helping with daily needs, administration, and managing pesantren activities. This phenomenon implicitly shapes social skills, discipline, and student responsibility. However, this practice is often understood as a tradition of service without looking at the managerial and educational potential contained in it. In fact, intensive interaction between students and *kiai* is a very effective learning space in shaping character. Therefore, this phenomenon needs to be studied more deeply as part of the education management system that has a significant contribution to the development of students' soft skills.

A number of previous studies have examined the role of *kiai* leadership in shaping the culture of pesantren and the character of students. These studies confirm that *kiai* have a strong influence through example, moral authority, and close interpersonal relationships with students (S. Arifin et al., 2024; Fahmadia & Maulida, 2025; Hudori et al., 2024). In addition, research on soft skills in Islamic

education also shows that character formation is more effective through habituation and direct experience than through theoretical learning (Rochmat et al., 2022; Rodliyah et al., 2024). However, most of the research still separates aspects of leadership, management, and soft skill development as stand-alone variables. The approach used tends to be partial so that it has not been able to explain the integrative relationship between the three aspects in the context of pesantren. This shows that there are limitations in understanding the complexity of the pesantren education system as a whole.

Furthermore, other research that discusses pesantren management generally focuses on institutional and administrative aspects, such as curriculum management, human resources, and organizational systems (Baharun, 2025; Fahmadia & Maulida, 2025; Hudori et al., 2024). Meanwhile, the cultural dimension based on the charismatic leadership of the kiai is often not studied in depth as part of the management system (Nuri Aslami, 2022). In fact, charismatic leadership has a central role in driving all pesantren activities, including in shaping the behavior and attitude of students. In addition, the practice of service of abdi ndalem students has not been widely studied as part of a systematic education management strategy. This gap shows that research is still needed that is able to integrate aspects of charismatic leadership, pesantren management, and soft skill development in one complete conceptual framework. Thus, this research gap is important to be filled through a more comprehensive approach.

Based on this gap, this research offers novelty in the form of a reconstruction of kiai management based on charismatic leadership as a model for strengthening the soft skills of students of abdi ndalem. This approach sees kiai leadership not only as a cultural phenomenon, but also as a managerial system that has a clear structure, process, and goals. The novelty of this research lies in the effort to integrate the traditional practices of Islamic boarding schools with modern management concepts without eliminating their distinctive values. In addition, this study also places abdi ndalem students as active and strategic educational subjects in the process of building competencies. Thus, this research is expected to be able to make a theoretical contribution to the development of Islamic education management science, as well as a practical contribution to the management of Islamic boarding schools.

The urgency of this research is even stronger if it is associated with the need for an educational model that is able to produce graduates who are not only intellectually intelligent, but also emotionally and socially mature. In this context, pesantren have great potential to become an alternative educational model that is relevant to the needs of the times. However, this potential needs to be supported by a structured management system that can be accounted for academically. Therefore, the reconstruction of kiai management is a strategic step

to optimize the role of pesantren in developing students' soft skills. In addition, this research is also important to strengthen the academic legitimacy of traditional educational practices that have been poorly documented scientifically.

Based on this description, the formulation of the problem in this study is how the reconstruction of kiai management based on charismatic leadership can be a model for strengthening the soft skills of abdi ndalem students in Islamic boarding schools. The main argument in this study is that the charismatic leadership of the kiai not only functions as a cultural force, but also as a managerial mechanism that is able to form the soft skills of students systematically through the practice of service. Thus, this research contributes to building a new conceptual framework that integrates leadership, management, and character education in the context of Islamic boarding schools. The results of this research are expected to be a reference for the development of Islamic education management models that are more contextual and relevant to the needs of modern society.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study type. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to deeply understand the phenomenon of kiai management based on charismatic leadership in the natural context of the pesantren, especially in strengthening the soft skills of the students of abdi ndalem. The case study design is used because this research focuses on one specific case that has unique characteristics, namely the practice of student service in direct relationship with the kiai. Case studies allow researchers to explore the meanings, processes, and dynamics that occur holistically and contextually, so as to be able to produce a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

This research was carried out at the Al-Yasini Integrated Islamic Boarding School. The selection of the research location is based on several considerations. First, this pesantren has a management system that combines pesantren traditions with a modern managerial approach. Second, there is an active and structured practice of Abdi ndalem students, so that it is relevant to the focus of research. Third, the kiai as the leader of the pesantren has a strong charismatic influence in shaping the organizational culture and behavior of students. With these characteristics, this location is considered representative to examine the reconstruction of kiai management based on charismatic leadership.

The data collection technique in this study was carried out through three main methods. First, in-depth interviews were conducted with kiai, pesantren administrators, and students of abdi ndalem to obtain information related to their

experiences, perceptions, and managerial practices that took place. Second, participatory observation, where researchers are directly involved in pesantren activities to observe the interactions, leadership patterns, and service processes of students in real terms. Third, documentation, which includes data collection in the form of archives, activity records, organizational structures, and other relevant documents to support and strengthen the data from interviews and observations.

The data analysis in this study used an interactive model developed by Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, which consisted of four stages. First, data condensation, which is the process of selecting, simplifying, and transforming raw data obtained from the field. Second, data reduction, which is the process of sharpening the focus of research by grouping data based on certain themes that are relevant to the research objectives. Third, data display, which is the preparation of data in the form of narratives, matrices, or charts to make it easier for researchers to understand patterns and relationships between data. Fourth, verification or drawing conclusions, which is the process of interpreting data to find meaning and draw valid and accountable conclusions.

The validity of the data is checked to ensure the validity and credibility of the research results. The techniques used are source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation is carried out by comparing information obtained from various informants, such as kiai, administrators, and students of abdi ndalem. Meanwhile, triangulation techniques are carried out by comparing data obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation. In addition, the researcher also conducts a member check, which is reconfirming the findings to the informant to ensure the suitability of the data with the existing reality. Thus, the results of the research are expected to have a high level of trust and can be scientifically accounted for.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Construction of Kiai Management Based on Charismatic Leadership

The management of kiai based on charismatic leadership in this study is defined operationally as the management process of pesantren that does not rely on a formal administrative system, but on the internalization of values, examples, and interpersonal relationships between kiai and students. Sub-findings in the field show that the management functions of planning, organizing, implementing, and supervising are implemented culturally in the daily practices of Islamic boarding schools. Planning is reflected in the vision and values instilled

in the kiai, organizing takes place through the distribution of belief-based tasks, implementation is carried out through direct example, and supervision is manifested in emotional closeness that builds the intrinsic awareness of students.

The results of interviews with pesantren administrators show that kiai do not give formal instructions, but through recitation and daily examples that are used as guidelines in carrying out their duties. This confirms that the charismatic leadership of the kiai functions as the main source of legitimacy in pesantren management, where values and behavior are the main media in conveying direction. This finding was strengthened by interviews with abdi ndalem students who stated that they learned responsibility through tasks given without detailed explanations, but through direct observation of the kiai's attitude. The researcher's interpretation shows that the process of organizing and implementing in kiai management takes place flexibly based on trust, while example is the main means of learning. Thus, soft skills such as discipline, responsibility, and initiative develop through direct experience in the pesantren environment.

The results of the observation show that the interaction between kiai and students takes place close and informal, but is still full of educational value. Kiai is directly involved in daily activities, gives directions spontaneously, and conducts supervision through an emotional and moral approach without a formal system. Nevertheless, students still show a high level of compliance and responsibility, which shows the effectiveness of internal awareness-based supervision. Based on the overall data, it can be concluded that kiai management based on charismatic leadership is a management system that is internalized in values, relationships, and daily practices. The pattern that emerges shows that kiai leadership is the center of management with the characteristics of personal relationships, meaningful informal communication, and flexible distribution of responsibilities. This confirms that the cultural approach in pesantren management has high effectiveness in achieving educational goals and strengthening the character of students.

Table 1. Charismatic Leadership in Kiai Management

Informant Position	Interview Excerpts	Indicator
Islamic Boarding School Management	"The kiai's instructions are not formal, but they are the main guideline in carrying out their duties."	Internalization of values & vision
Stuttgart	"We learn responsibility from tasks without detailed instructions."	Responsibility & independence

Islamic Boarding School Management Stuttgart	"Kiai gave us full trust in managing the activities." "We directly imitate the attitude of the kiai in our daily lives."	Trust & organization Role model & social learning
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Based on the table above, it can be concluded that the charismatic leadership of the kiai has a significant influence in forming a management system of pesantren based on values and relationships, where the kiai not only plays the role of decision-makers, but also as a source of value that becomes a reference for all pesantren activities, so that the management that is formed is normative-cultural with values as the main foundation; In addition, the indicators of responsibility, trust, and exemplary show that the management process not only produces organizational order, but also contributes directly to the development of students' soft skills through the provision of trust that encourages independence and exemplary as an effective learning medium, so that charismatic leadership is not just a control tool, but a character education strategy; The data pattern also shows that there is an integration between management functions and character education that takes place organically through social interaction, where the stronger the emotional closeness between kiai and students, the higher the level of internalization of values and responsibilities, thus confirming that the effectiveness of pesantren management is more determined by the quality of interpersonal relationships than the formal system, and cultural approaches have a significant contribution to strengthening soft skills Scott.

Mechanism for Strengthening Soft Skills through Service Practices

The mechanism of strengthening the soft skills of abdi ndalem students in this study is defined as an experiential learning process that takes place through direct involvement in the daily activities of the pesantren. Findings in the field show that the practice of service is not only service, but also a culturally structured educational medium through habituation, example, and hidden curriculum. Students are actively involved in various tasks such as assisting in pesantren operations, serving the needs of kiai, and interacting with various parties, so as to gradually develop interpersonal communication skills, responsibility, adaptability, and problem-solving. The results of interviews with pesantren administrators confirmed that students are trained to be sensitive to

situations and able to act without always being commanded, which shows that learning takes place implicitly through direct experience.

Interviews with abdi ndalem students revealed that they often face various situations, so they are required to adjust and communicate with various people. This shows that the practice of service provides a dynamic and contextual learning space, where social interaction is the main means of developing soft skills. The observation results also strengthen the findings, where students are seen to be able to coordinate spontaneously, help each other, and make decisions in certain situations without rigid division of tasks. In addition, students imitate the way of communication and attitude of the kiai and pesantren administrators, which shows that example is an important factor in the learning process. The absence of a formal curriculum that explicitly teaches soft skills actually shows that these values are internalized naturally through daily practice.

Based on the overall data, it can be concluded that the strengthening of the soft skills of abdi ndalem students occurs through direct involvement in service practices based on experience, habituation, and social interaction. This process takes place organically without formal design, but it is still effective in shaping communication, adaptation, and problem-solving skills. The pattern that emerges shows that the higher the intensity of student involvement in service activities, the stronger the development of soft skills has. In addition, the example of kiai and pesantren administrators is the main reference in shaping student behavior. Thus, the mechanism for strengthening soft skills in Islamic boarding schools is contextual, sustainable, and based on real experience.

Table 2. Practice of Service to Strengthen Soft Skills

Position of Informant		Interview Excerpts	Indicator
Islamic School Management	Boarding	"students are trained to be sensitive and act without always being ordered."	Initiative & situational sensitivity
Stuttgart		"We learn to adapt to various situations every day."	Adaptability
Islamic School Management	Boarding	"They learn through habit, not just theory."	Habituation
Stuttgart		"We often communicate with many people in our daily tasks."	Interpersonal communication

Based on the table above, it can be concluded that the practice of service has a significant influence in shaping various aspects of students' soft skills,

especially in indicators of initiative and situational sensitivity that show that students not only carry out their duties mechanically, but are also able to read situations and take action independently. This emphasizes that experiential learning is the main mechanism in the learning process, where direct experience is the main source of competency formation. In addition, indicators of adaptability and interpersonal communication show that intensive social interaction plays an important role in strengthening soft skills, so that service practices not only function as service activities, but also as an effective educational strategy in shaping the character and social skills of students.

Furthermore, the data pattern shows that the strengthening of soft skills takes place through the integration of direct experience, social interaction, and example, where the absence of a formal learning system actually provides space for students to learn independently and contextually. In addition, there is a tendency that the more often students face various situations, the higher their adaptability and communication skills. This pattern emphasizes that real experience is a key factor in the formation of soft skills, so that the practice of service in pesantren can be understood as an effective, organic, and sustainable experience-based learning system.

Reconstruction of the Kiai Management Model

The reconstruction of the kiai management model in this study is defined as a conceptual framework that describes the systematic relationship between the charismatic leadership of the kiai, the process of student service, and the results in the form of strengthening soft skills and character formation. Findings in the field show that this model consists of four main components, namely input (charismatic leadership of kiai), process (devotion, habituation, and example), output (soft skills such as communication, responsibility, and adaptability), and outcome (character formation and social readiness of students). This model affirms that the practice of service is not just an additional activity, but an integral part of a value-based education management system that takes place culturally. The results of the interview with the pesantren management reinforce this, that all student activities are directed by kiai values even though they are not contained in the formal program, so that charismatic leadership plays a role as the main foundation in the implicit planning process.

Interviews with abdi ndalem students show that the daily activities they carry out directly shape the way of thinking, communicating, and solving problems. This shows that the process of devotion, habituation, and example is

the main mechanism in the formation of soft skills. Students not only carry out their duties, but also experience a continuous learning process through real experience. The results of observations also show that there is a strong relationship between kiai leadership, service activities, and changes in student behavior, where students who are active in service tend to have better communication skills, are more responsible, and more adaptive. In addition, the values instilled by kiai seem to be internalized in the attitudes and behaviors of daily students, which shows that the outcomes of this model include character formation and mature social readiness.

Based on the overall data, it can be concluded that the kiai management model based on charismatic leadership is a system that integrates values, processes, and results in a complete and sustainable unit. Kiai leadership as an input directs the process of devotion and habituation, which then produces soft skills as outputs and forms character as outcomes. The patterns that emerge show relationships that are not only linear but also cyclical, where each component influences and reinforces each other. In addition, the more intensive the involvement of students in the service process, the stronger the output and outcomes produced. This confirms that the kiai management model is dynamic, contextual, and effective in shaping the competence and character of students.

Table 3. Kiai Management Model

Jabatan Informan		Petikan Wawancara	Indikator
Islamic School Management	Boarding	"The value of kiai is the basis of all student activities."	Input: Charismatic leadership
Stuttgart		"Daily activities shape our way of thinking and behaving."	Process: Devotion & habituation
Islamic School Management	Boarding	"Active students are usually more independent and responsible."	Output: Responsibility
Stuttgart		"We are more prepared to face life outside of the pesantren."	Outcome: Social readiness

Based on the table above, it can be concluded that the kiai management model has a systematic influence on the formation of soft skills and character of students, where the charismatic leadership of the kiai as an input aspect is the main foundation that not only serves as a guideline, but also as a source of motivation that drives all student activities; Furthermore, in the aspects of process, output, and outcome, there is a strong causal relationship between the

involvement of students in service and the results obtained, where the process of service and habituation produces soft skills such as responsibility which then develops into social readiness, thus showing that this model is not only effective in organizational management, but also in the formation of non-academic competencies; The data pattern also shows the integration of values, processes, and results with the leadership of KAI as the center that connects all components, and emphasizes that the higher the intensity of student interaction and involvement, the stronger the internalization of values and the strengthening of soft skills, so that experience-based and exemplary management is proven to have high effectiveness in the context of pesantren education.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that the practice of devotion of abdi ndalem students not only functions as a cultural tradition, but also as an effective educational management mechanism in forming soft skills (Dinata et al., 2023; Rozi et al., 2023). These results are in line with experiential learning theory which emphasizes that the most effective learning occurs through hands-on experience (Magpiroh & Mudzafar, 2023). In this context, the involvement of students in the daily activities of the pesantren becomes an authentic and contextual learning medium. These findings also reinforce the view that the social environment has a significant role in the process of character formation. However, in contrast to some of the literature that places experiential learning in a formal and structured framework, this study shows that the process can take place naturally through daily practice without an explicit curriculum design (Munif et al., 2023, 2025; Tembrevilla et al., 2024).

In addition, the findings regarding the charismatic leadership of kiai as the center of pesantren management are in line with the theory of charismatic leadership that emphasizes the personal influence, exemplar, and moral legitimacy of leaders (Nuri Aslami, 2022; Wakidi, 2022; Wuryan et al., 2023). In the classical literature, charismatic leadership is understood as an individual's ability to influence followers through personal appeal and a strong vision (Adnan et al., 2024). The results of this study confirm that kiai not only play the role of spiritual leaders, but also as managerial actors who direct the entire educational process through values and interpersonal relationships. Nevertheless, this study expands on the concept by showing that charismatic leadership not only impacts follower loyalty, but also serves as a systemic mechanism in the management of value-based education.

Furthermore, the findings of this study are different from some studies of education management that tend to emphasize the importance of a formal administrative system in achieving organizational effectiveness. In the context of pesantren, management takes place culturally through habituation, example, and social interaction (Nur Efendi & Muh Ibnu Sholeh, 2023; Winarto et al., 2023). This suggests that management effectiveness does not always depend on formal structures, but can also be achieved through the internalization of values and strong interpersonal relationships (Siahan et al., 2024; Zebua & Anwar, 2022). Thus, this study provides a new perspective that culture-based management approaches have the same, even stronger, potential in shaping individual behaviors and competencies compared to conventional administrative approaches (Amalia & Anwar, 2024; Hermawansyah, 2021).

The theoretical implication of this research is the strengthening of the integrative concept between charismatic leadership, education management, and soft skill development in one complete framework. This research shows that these three aspects cannot be separated, but interact with each other in forming an effective education system. Meanwhile, the practical implication is that educational institutions, especially Islamic boarding schools, can optimize service practices as a systematic learning strategy to develop students' soft skills. In addition, the results of this study can also be a reference for education managers in developing a more contextual and value-based management model.

Overall, this discussion emphasizes that the practice of student service is an integral part of the pesantren education management system which has a significant contribution to the formation of character and social readiness. The charismatic leadership of the kiai has been proven to be able to integrate values, processes, and educational outcomes in a harmonious unit. These findings not only strengthen existing theories, but also offer new perspectives on understanding culture-based education management. Thus, this research makes an important contribution to the development of Islamic education management science, especially in the context of Islamic boarding schools.

CONCLUSION

The main conclusion of this study shows that kiai management in pesantren is a cultural practice based on charismatic leadership that is not only traditional, but also contains an effective managerial mechanism in strengthening the soft skills of abdi ndalem students through experience-based learning, habituation, and example; The lesson that can be taken is that the educational

process that is integrated into daily life is actually better able to form character, responsibility, communication, and adaptability naturally and sustainably. The strength of this research lies in its scientific contribution in presenting a conceptual model of Islamic education management based on pesantren that integrates charismatic leadership, devotional practices, and soft skill strengthening in one complete framework, while expanding the perspective of education management from an administrative approach to a values-based cultural approach. However, this study has limitations in scope that is limited to one location so that the generalization of findings is still limited, and there is no comparison across Islamic boarding schools; Therefore, further research is recommended to expand the object of study, use a comparative approach, and combine quantitative methods to obtain a more comprehensive and measurable understanding.

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