



## Nyai as Caregivers: Their Role in Fostering Discipline and Moral Values in Islamic Boarding Schools

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.61987/jemr.v5i3.1966>

### ABSTRACT

#### Keywords:

Nyai Role; Student  
Caregiving; Character  
Education

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This study aims to analyze the role of nyai in the caregiving and character development of students in Islamic boarding schools. This research employs a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. Data were collected through observations, interviews, and documentation involving the nyai as the primary caregiver, along with selected students and administrators. The data were analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, while validity was ensured through source and technique triangulation. The findings reveal that: (1) the nyai plays a significant role in fostering students' moral development through role modeling, discipline enforcement, daily supervision, and religious guidance; (2) several challenges emerge, including students' lack of discipline, diverse backgrounds and personalities, and limited communication between students and caregivers; (3) to address these challenges, the nyai implements continuous guidance, persuasive approaches, improved communication, and strengthened supervision alongside positive habit formation. The study implies that the nyai holds a central role in shaping students' character, enhancing discipline, and internalizing religious values, highlighting the importance of adaptive caregiving strategies in Islamic educational settings.

#### Article History:

Received: December 2025; Revised: January 2025; Accepted: February 2026

#### Please cite this article in APA style as:

Herlina, Musli, & Purnama, B. Y. (2026). Nyai as Caregivers: Their Role in Fostering Discipline and Moral Values in Islamic Boarding Schools. *Journal of Educational Management Research*, 5(3), 2516-2525.

## INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools play a crucial role in shaping moral integrity, social responsibility, and spiritual awareness in Muslim societies. As one of the oldest educational institutions, pesantren are not merely centers for religious instruction but also function as comprehensive environments for character formation (Maulidy & Zaini, 2025; Susanti et al., 2025). The boarding system enables continuous interaction between caregivers and students, allowing values to be internalized through habituation, supervision, and exemplary conduct. This makes pesantren highly relevant in addressing contemporary moral challenges

among youth. In many societies, concerns about declining ethics, lack of discipline, and weakened spiritual awareness have become increasingly prominent. Evidence from educational and social studies indicates that formal schooling alone is often insufficient to instill strong moral character. Therefore, institutions like pesantren are essential in complementing formal education by integrating cognitive, affective, and behavioral development. In conclusion, the existence of pesantren is significant not only for religious education but also for broader societal stability and moral regeneration (Pangestu & Mulyo, 2022).

Despite their importance, Islamic boarding schools face various challenges in maintaining effective student development systems. One of the central problems lies in the inconsistency of caregiving practices and leadership quality within the boarding environment. Effective character education requires not only structured programs but also strong leadership that ensures discipline, supervision, and emotional support (Azizi et al., 2025; Zaini et al., 2025). However, differences in students' backgrounds, behavioral patterns, and levels of motivation often complicate the caregiving process. In addition, rapid social change and exposure to digital culture have influenced students' attitudes and expectations, making traditional approaches less effective. These challenges highlight a broader societal issue where educational institutions struggle to balance tradition with modern demands. Without adaptive leadership and effective caregiving strategies, the goals of moral and spiritual education may not be fully achieved. Therefore, understanding the dynamics of leadership within pesantren becomes essential to address these systemic challenges and improve the overall effectiveness of student development (Rasyidi, 2021).

Field observations reveal that caregiving practices in Islamic boarding schools are deeply influenced by the leadership of key figures, particularly female caregivers known as *nyai*. In practice, *nyai* are actively involved in supervising daily activities, guiding religious practices, and addressing students' personal issues. Their presence is not only administrative but also relational, creating a familial atmosphere within the boarding environment. However, discrepancies between expected and actual outcomes are evident. Some students demonstrate low discipline, such as tardiness in attending religious sessions and lack of responsibility in maintaining cleanliness. Additionally, communication between students and caregivers is not always open or effective, which can hinder problem-solving and emotional support. These conditions indicate that while the role of *nyai* is significant, its implementation is not without challenges. This phenomenon underscores the need for a deeper examination of how leadership is practiced in real contexts and how it affects the success of caregiving systems.

Previous studies have explored leadership and caregiving in Islamic education from various perspectives. Research by Pangestu and Mulyo (2022) emphasizes the strategic role of pesantren in character education, highlighting the importance of value internalization through structured programs. Similarly, Rasyidi (2021) argues that leadership is a determining factor in creating a conducive educational environment. Studies by Aviva and Ismail (2023) further highlight the interpersonal dimension of *nyai* leadership, describing it as culturally embedded and based on moral authority rather than formal power. Meanwhile, Hakim (2020) discusses the importance of systematic caregiving in shaping students' cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects. These studies collectively demonstrate that leadership and caregiving are central to the success of pesantren education. However, most of these works focus on general leadership roles without specifically examining the unique contributions of *nyai* as female leaders in caregiving contexts.

Furthermore, recent studies have begun to address contemporary challenges in pesantren leadership. Marlina (2021) highlights the impact of globalization and digitalization on student behavior, emphasizing the need for adaptive and communicative leadership. Usman et al. (2025) introduce the concept of value-based leadership, which integrates ethical principles with practical management strategies. While these studies provide valuable insights, they still lack in-depth empirical analysis of how *nyai* navigate daily caregiving challenges and implement leadership in real-life settings. In particular, there is limited research that connects leadership practices with specific caregiving outcomes such as discipline, communication, and character formation. This gap suggests that existing literature has not fully captured the complexity of *nyai* leadership in pesantren. Therefore, further research is needed to explore this area in a more comprehensive and contextualized manner.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the role of *nyai* as central figures in caregiving within Islamic boarding schools, particularly in addressing contemporary challenges. Unlike previous studies that emphasize general leadership or institutional frameworks, this research specifically examines the lived experiences, strategies, and challenges faced by *nyai* in their daily interactions with students. It integrates the concept of value-based leadership with practical caregiving approaches, providing a more holistic understanding of leadership in pesantren. Additionally, this study highlights the importance of communication, adaptability, and emotional engagement in effective caregiving. By doing so, it offers new insights into how traditional leadership roles can evolve to meet modern educational demands. This contribution is important not only for academic discourse but also for practical improvements in pesantren management and student development systems.

Based on the identified gaps and field phenomena, this study seeks to answer the following research questions: how does *nyai* leadership function in student caregiving, what challenges are encountered, and how are these challenges addressed? The study argues that effective *nyai* leadership is characterized by a balance between discipline and compassion, supported by adaptive communication and consistent supervision. It is hypothesized that such leadership significantly influences students' character formation and behavioral outcomes. By providing empirical evidence, this research contributes to the field of Islamic educational management, particularly in understanding female leadership roles in pesantren. Moreover, it offers practical implications for improving caregiving systems through more responsive and value-based leadership approaches. Ultimately, this study aims to strengthen the theoretical and practical foundations of pesantren education in responding to contemporary challenges.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design using a case study approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of *nyai* in student caregiving (Haq & Yasin, 2025; Råbu & Binder, 2025; Viera, 2023). The case study design was chosen because it allows for a comprehensive exploration of social phenomena within their real-life context, particularly in understanding leadership practices and interpersonal dynamics in Islamic boarding schools. The research was conducted at an Islamic boarding school selected based on its active implementation of *nyai*-centered caregiving practices. The subjects of the study included the *nyai* as the primary leader, students, and educators, who were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in the caregiving process. This sampling technique ensured that the participants had relevant knowledge and experience related to the research focus.

Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation to capture a holistic view of the caregiving practices and leadership roles. Observations were conducted to understand daily interactions and routines, while interviews provided deeper insights into participants' perspectives and experiences. Documentation supported the validity of the findings through written and visual records. Data analysis was carried out interactively through several stages, including data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. This process enabled systematic organization and interpretation of the data. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, data validity was maintained through source and technique triangulation, allowing cross-verification of information from multiple perspectives.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 1. Research on the Role of Nyai in the Care of Students**

No	Nyai's Leadership Role	General Findings	Information
1	The Leadership Role of Nyai as a Caregiver for Students	Educator, moral and spiritual guide, discipline supervisor, and motherly figure for students.	All of Nyai's leadership involvement in the care of the students has been carried out well.
2	Obstacles Faced by Nyai in Carrying Out Her Leadership Role	discipline, moral formation, as well as differences in background, character, and level of understanding of students	The differences in the characters of the students are the biggest obstacle for Nyai
3	Nyai's Efforts to Overcome Existing Obstacles	There are persuasive, educational and caring approaches	With a humanistic approach and consistent role model, Nyai can create a harmonious parenting atmosphere.

### **The Leadership Role of Nyai as a Caregiver for Students at the Nurul Iman Sebapo Muaro Jambi Islamic Boarding School**

Islamic educational institutions is a shared life that requires swift and precise action and action to achieve shared goals and maximize results. This requires leaders with a vision and mission that can mobilize the institution's entire management system quickly and accurately (Sayyid et al., 2021).

Leadership in Islamic boarding schools plays a crucial role in determining the success of the educational process and the development of students. In the Islamic boarding school system, leadership serves not only as an institutional manager who regulates the course of educational activities, nor is it merely a struggle for influence. It also involves how leadership can organize, manage, direct, and calm the hearts, minds, emotions, and behaviors of those led so that they wholeheartedly carry out their duties to achieve a common goal (Jannah et al., 2021).

A leader in an Islamic boarding school is expected to be able to provide good direction, motivation, and guidance to the students so that they not only develop in terms of knowledge, but also in the formation of good morals and personality. In an Islamic boarding school environment, leaders have a significant responsibility to instill Islamic values, discipline, and a sense of responsibility in their students through various ongoing educational and developmental activities. The presence of leaders who are exemplary, wise, and highly concerned with the needs and development of their students will

significantly influence the creation of a conducive, orderly, and harmonious educational atmosphere within the Islamic boarding school environment (Akmansyah et al., 2024; Karim et al., 2025). Through exemplary attitudes and behaviors, Islamic boarding school leaders can foster a spirit of learning, respect, and mutual appreciation among their students. With good leadership, the process of developing students can be directed, systematic, and sustainable, thus producing students who not only possess extensive knowledge but also noble character, independence, and responsibility in social life (Ansori et al., 2024; Dian et al., 2024).

At the Nurul Iman Sebapo Islamic Boarding School in Muaro Jambi, the leadership role in nurturing students is not only carried out by the kiai (Islamic teacher) as the primary leader of the boarding school, but also by the nyai (religious women), who hold a crucial role in the development of the students, especially the female students. The nyai act as both educators and caregivers, interacting directly with the students in various daily activities within the boarding school environment. Through this role, nyai not only provides guidance in terms of religious education, but also guides students in the formation of morals, discipline, and a sense of responsibility. Apart from that, nyai is also a place for students to consult and get advice in dealing with various problems they experience during their life at the Islamic boarding school. Thus, the presence of a nyai has a very important role in creating an atmosphere of caring care, continuous development, and an educational environment that supports the development of the character and personality of the students (Kyei, 2025; Musyoki et al., 2025).

Based on the results of observations and interviews conducted by researchers, it was found that the leadership of nyai in the care of students at the Nurul Iman Sebapo Islamic Boarding School was realized through several main roles, namely as; Educator, Moral and Spiritual Guide, Supervisor discipline, as well as a motherly figure for students.

### **Obstacles Faced by Nyai in Carrying Out Her Leadership Role as a Caregiver**

In carrying out their leadership roles as guardians of students, nyai are not free from various obstacles that can affect the effectiveness of the caregiving process within the Islamic boarding school environment (Siskandar et al., 2025; Azhari et al., 2024). This is because the process of fostering students involves various aspects, such as discipline, moral development, and supervision of the students' daily activities. Furthermore, differences in background, character, and level of understanding among the students also pose challenges in the caregiving process.

Based on research conducted at the Nurul Iman Sebapo Islamic Boarding School in Muaro Jambi, several obstacles are encountered in the implementation of student care, including student discipline, limited time for guidance, and various other factors that can affect the smoothness of the care process. These obstacles are part of the dynamics of care implementation at Islamic boarding schools that need to be addressed and overcome through various ongoing guidance efforts.

### **Nyai's Efforts to Overcome Leadership Obstacles as a Student Caregiver**

In carrying out her role as leader and caretaker of the students at the Nurul Iman Sebapo Islamic Boarding School in Muaro Jambi, the Nyai not only faces various obstacles but also makes various efforts to overcome them so that the care process continues effectively. The Nyai's efforts reflect a form of leadership that is not merely administrative but also prioritizes a coaching approach, leading by example, and strengthening religious values in the students' daily lives.

### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the results of research on the role of nyai in the care of students at the Nurul Iman Islamic Boarding School, the leadership role of nyai as a caregiver for students at the Nurul Iman Sebapo Islamic Boarding School is implemented through various forms of guidance that include spiritual, social, and disciplinary aspects of the students. Nyai acts as a role model, educator, and parent for students living in the Islamic boarding school environment. In daily care practices, nyai guide students through exemplary behavior in worship, provide advice, supervise daily activities, and instill moral values and responsibility. In addition, the nyai is also involved in fostering the discipline of the students by organizing worship activities, religious studies, and dormitory life activities so as to create a religious and conducive educational environment for the formation of the students' character.

In the implementation of student care, the nyai faces several obstacles. These obstacles include the persistence of students who lack a high level of discipline, such as being late to Islamic boarding school activities and a lack of concern for environmental cleanliness. Furthermore, differences in the students' backgrounds and characters also pose challenges in the guidance process. Incomplete communication between some students and their caregivers can also hinder the care process, requiring a more intensive and persuasive approach for effective guidance.

The efforts made by Nyai to overcome these various obstacles were carried out through a persuasive, educational and caring approach. Nyai provides direct guidance to santri through advice, routine coaching, and a personal approach to understanding the problems faced by santri. In addition, Nyai also strengthens supervision of students' activities and instills the value of discipline through the habituation of positive activities in the Islamic boarding school environment. With a humanistic approach and consistent role model, nyai plays an important role in shaping character, improving discipline, and creating a harmonious nurturing atmosphere at the Nurul Iman Sebapo Islamic Boarding School.

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