



## Transforming Women's Leadership in Improving Service Quality in Islamic Boarding Schools

Muhammad Ainul Yaqin\*, I'if Hafidatuz Sholihah

Universitas Nurul Jadid, Indonesia

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### \*Correspondence Address:

[masainulyaqin@unuja.ac.id](mailto:masainulyaqin@unuja.ac.id)

### Abstract :

This research aims to analyze the transformation of women's leadership in improving service quality in the Islamic boarding school environment. Women's leadership in Islamic boarding schools still faces various challenges, both from cultural, structural and policy aspects. Therefore, this research seeks to reveal how women's leadership experiences transformation and contributes to improving the quality of educational services in Islamic boarding schools. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method at the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School. Data was collected through observation, in-depth interviews with women leaders, teaching staff, and students, as well as analysis of relevant documents. Data analysis was carried out using content analysis, discourse analysis and interpretative analysis to understand women's leadership patterns and their impact on improving the quality of services in Islamic boarding schools. The research results show that women's leadership at the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School has experienced a significant transformation, marked by increased women's participation in strategic decision making as well as the application of empathy-based, collaborative and innovative leadership approaches. The main factors that support this transformation are increasingly inclusive Islamic boarding school policies, increasing the competence of female leaders, as well as support from various parties, including students and teaching staff. However, cultural barriers and gender stereotypes remain challenges that need to be overcome. The implication of this research is the need to strengthen policies that better support women's leadership in Islamic boarding schools, as well as developing training and mentoring programs for prospective women leaders. In this way, women's leadership can further contribute to improving the quality of educational services and creating a more professional, inclusive and sustainable Islamic boarding school management system.

## INTRODUCTION

Women's leadership is the role and style of leadership carried out by women in various fields, such as politics, business, education and social affairs (Maheshwari, 2023; Phipps & Prieto, 2021). This leadership is often associated with characteristics such as empathy, collaboration, good communication, and an inclusive approach to decision making (Nishii & Leroy, 2022; Seijts & Milani, 2022). Women's leadership in the world of education, especially in the Islamic boarding school environment, experiences various challenges and complex dynamics. Theoretically, women's leadership is recognized as having a positive influence in improving the quality of educational services (service

quality), because their approach is more inclusive, collaborative and empathy-based (Lee & Lim, 2023; Sellars & Imig, 2021). However, in the context of Islamic boarding schools, especially those with traditional leadership systems, there is still resistance to the role of women as leaders. Social facts show that there is still a gap between the role of women in Islamic boarding school leadership and transformative leadership theory which emphasizes participatory and inclusive aspects. At the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School, women's leadership is starting to gain ground, but how this transformation contributes to improving service quality has not yet been studied in depth. Therefore, there needs to be an in-depth analysis of how women's leadership in Islamic boarding schools can improve the quality of educational services and form a management system that is more professional and responsive to the needs of students.

Several previous studies have highlighted women's leadership in the education sector, including Islamic boarding schools. For example, (Amatullah, 2024; Ezzani et al., 2023) researched the influence of women's leadership in Islamic education and found that a leadership approach based on empathy and effective communication contributed to increasing the motivation of teaching staff and students. (Islam et al., 2023; Lopes Cardozo & Srimulyani, 2021) examines the obstacles faced by female leaders in the Islamic boarding school environment and finds that patriarchal culture is still the main obstacle in accepting female leadership. (Alabdulhadi & Alkandari, 2024; Said et al., 2023) researched leadership strategies in modern Islamic boarding schools and found that applying moderation values in leadership can improve the quality of educational services. This research occupies a unique position because it focuses on how women's leadership at the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School is undergoing transformation and how this has an impact on improving the quality of educational services. Not only does this research highlight the challenges faced, it also examines the leadership strategies implemented in creating a more effective education system.

This research aims to answer the following key questions: How is the transformation of women's leadership at the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School? By answering these questions, we can understand how women's leadership at the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School is undergoing transformation

As a temporary answer to the research question, the argument underlying this study is that women's leadership in Islamic boarding schools can improve the quality of educational services through a more inclusive, empathy-based and collaborative approach. However, the effectiveness of this leadership is greatly influenced by the Islamic boarding school's organizational culture, internal policies, and the level of acceptance of women in leadership positions. By understanding the factors that support and hinder, Islamic boarding schools can formulate leadership strategies that are more progressive and inclusive, so as to improve the quality of education services in a sustainable manner.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to analyze the transformation of women's leadership in improving service quality at the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School. The unit of analysis in this research is the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School, which includes institutions, leadership activities, service quality improvement programs, as well as events relevant to women's leadership in the Islamic boarding school.

This research uses a qualitative approach with case study methods and grounded research to explore more deeply the phenomenon of women's leadership in the Islamic boarding school environment. Sources of information in this research include respondents, namely female leaders at the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School, students, and teaching staff. Apart from that, research informants include Islamic boarding school leaders, foundation administrators, and academics who understand the issue of women's leadership in Islamic boarding schools. This research also utilizes texts such as manuscripts, classical books, and online news that discuss women's leadership in Islamic boarding schools.

Data was collected through several techniques, including observation which involved direct observation of women's leadership activities and their impact on the quality of Islamic boarding school services. In-depth interviews were also conducted with female leaders, students, and teaching staff using interview guides that had been prepared previously. In addition, documentation is used to analyze Islamic boarding school documents that are relevant to leadership and improving service quality.

Data analysis was carried out through several stages, namely data reduction as a process of filtering information that is relevant to the research focus, data display as presenting information in descriptive form to understand women's leadership patterns in Islamic boarding schools, as well as drawing conclusions and verification based on research findings which are strengthened by other sources of information. The analytical methods used in this research include content analysis to examine texts and documents in understanding the narrative of women's leadership in Islamic boarding schools, discourse analysis to analyze how women's leadership is discussed and perceived in the Islamic boarding school context, as well as interpretive analysis to interpret the meaning of the phenomenon of women's leadership based on interviews and observations in the field.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

#### Changes in the Role and Legitimacy of Women's Leadership

The role of women in Islamic boarding school leadership has changed from simply being an administrative supporter to being a strategic decision maker. Whereas previously women's leadership was often less formally recognized, now they are starting to gain legitimacy through increased competence, more inclusive policies, and success in improving the quality of education. Even though they still face the challenges of patriarchal culture, acceptance of women's leadership is increasing, especially when they are able to bring positive change in Islamic boarding schools. The following is a table that summarizes the changing roles and legitimacy of women's leadership in improving service quality in Islamic boarding schools.

**Table 1. Legitimacy of Women's Leadership**

Observed Aspects	Observation Findings	Documentation
Role in Decision Making	Women are starting to be involved in strategic decisions, such as curriculum development and education policy.	Interviews with Islamic boarding school leaders and Islamic boarding school internal policy documents.
Leadership Legitimacy	Increased recognition of women's leadership despite cultural resistance.	Statements from Islamic boarding school leaders and senior students.

Leadership Strategy	Using a collaborative approach, open communication, and based on student needs.	Observation of discussion and decision-making activities in Islamic boarding schools.
Innovation in Management	Digitalization of administration and increasing transparency of Islamic boarding school services.	Administrative system digitization report and interviews with administrative staff.
Improved Service Quality	There are new policies that are more responsive to the needs of female students, such as leadership guidance and dormitory facilities.	Islamic boarding school policy data, interviews with students, and guidance program documentation.
Acceptance from the Environment	Islamic boarding school parents have more confidence in women's leadership after a better communication system is in place.	Interviews with santri guardians and Islamic boarding school communication program data.

This table illustrates how the transformation of women's leadership in Islamic boarding schools not only impacts their role structurally, but also brings real changes in policy, innovation and improving the quality of Islamic boarding school services. This finding is in line with the statement by the head of the Islamic boarding school, Nurul Jadid, who said that; "In the past, the role of women in Islamic boarding schools was mostly in the fields of female student education and administration. However, now we are starting to be given the trust to be involved in strategic decision making, such as curriculum development and educational policies. Even though there are still views that doubt women's leadership, we are trying to prove that women are also capable of leading well." (Hy\_24)

Furthermore, a statement by female students, final class: "I see big changes in female leadership in this Islamic boarding school. Now, there are many policies that pay more attention to the needs of female students, such as leadership guidance programs and special discussion rooms for women. This makes me even more convinced that women can also become strong and wise leaders." (Mz\_24)

The change in the role of women in Islamic boarding school leadership shows a significant development from just being an administrative supporter to being a main actor in strategic decision making. If previously their role was more limited to non-structural tasks, now women's leadership is starting to gain stronger recognition and legitimacy. This is driven by increased competence, more inclusive policies, as well as their real contribution in improving the quality of education in Islamic boarding schools. Even though they still face challenges from an entrenched patriarchal culture, acceptance of women's leadership continues to increase, especially when they are able to demonstrate a positive impact in the management of Islamic boarding schools. In line with these findings, the head of Islamic Boarding School Nurul Jadid emphasized that previously women's roles were more limited to the fields of female student education and administration. However, now they are starting to be trusted to be involved in strategic policies, such as curriculum development and Islamic boarding school management. Even though there are still doubts from some parties, they continue to strive to prove that women have equal capacity in leadership.

Furthermore, the perspective of final year female students also reflects this change. He revealed that policies in Islamic boarding schools now pay more attention to the needs of female students, such as leadership guidance programs and discussion rooms dedicated to women. This gives female students greater confidence that women have the potential to become strong and visionary leaders. Thus, the transformation of women's leadership roles in Islamic boarding schools not only has an impact on

managerial aspects, but also inspires generations of students to be more confident in carrying out leadership roles in the future.

### Women's Leadership Strategy in Improving Service Quality

Women's leadership applies strategies based on collaboration, active participation and decision making oriented towards improving service quality. They tend to use an empathetic approach and effective communication to build harmonious relationships between students, teaching staff and Islamic boarding school administrators. Apart from that, training and mentoring programs for teaching staff and students are part of the strategy to improve the quality of educational services in Islamic boarding schools.

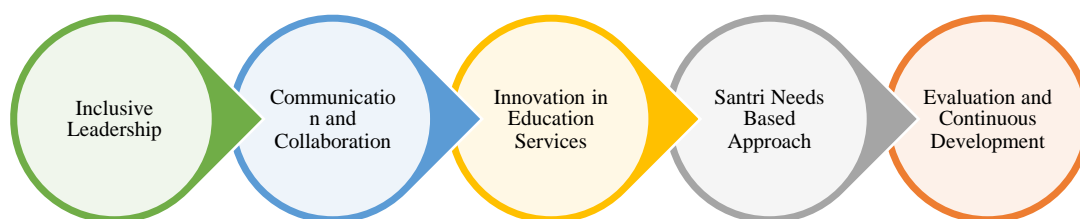


Figure 1. Women's Leadership Strategy in Improving Service Quality

This finding is in line with what was expressed by a senior Islamic boarding school teacher who stated that; "Women's leadership in this Islamic boarding school prioritizes open communication and a more personal approach towards students and teaching staff. For example, in improving the quality of teaching, we are given space to discuss and develop more innovative learning methods. This makes us more comfortable at work and more productive." (Mn\_24). Furthermore, a statement from the administrative staff stated that; "One of the women's leadership strategies that I see is how they ensure that all santri receive the same services, both in education and welfare. They are very responsive to the needs of the santri and often carry out evaluations to improve services, such as dormitory and health facilities." (Zm\_24)

Women's leadership in Islamic boarding schools tends to prioritize open communication and a more personal approach in building relationships with students and teaching staff. This leadership model not only creates a more inclusive environment, but also encourages constructive discussions to improve the quality of teaching. By being given space to develop more innovative learning methods, teaching staff feel more comfortable in carrying out their duties, which ultimately has an impact on increasing productivity and learning effectiveness. Apart from that, women's leadership strategies are also reflected in their efforts to ensure that every student receives equal education and welfare services. Responsiveness to the needs of students is one of the main characteristics of this leadership, which can be seen in their policy of regularly evaluating and improving the quality of facilities, such as dormitories and health services. This approach not only shows concern for the welfare of the santri, but also reflects the commitment of women's leadership in creating an Islamic boarding school environment that is fairer, more comfortable, and supports the optimal academic and spiritual development of the santri.

## **Application of the Transformative and Inclusive Leadership Model**

The transformative and inclusive leadership model applied by female leaders emphasizes changing the Islamic boarding school's organizational culture to make it more adaptive and responsive to the needs of students and teaching staff. Transformative leadership focuses on long-term vision, individual empowerment, and innovation in Islamic boarding school management. Meanwhile, an inclusive approach ensures that all elements of Islamic boarding schools, including women and minority groups, have equal opportunities to contribute and develop. This finding is in line with the statement expressed by the head of the education department who stated that; "The current leadership approach is more oriented towards long-term change. We are starting to implement more flexible policies in learning, adapting to the needs of students, and developing programs based on Islamic values that are more relevant to current developments. This is proof that women's leadership is capable of bringing about significant change." (Mn\_24)

Furthermore, what was expressed by the santri alumni stated that; "While I was studying at this Islamic boarding school, I saw how women's leadership was increasingly recognized. Many programs were more inclusive, such as skills training for female students and career guidance programs. This really helped us in preparing ourselves for the future after leaving the Islamic boarding school."(Un\_24)

Women's leadership in Islamic boarding schools is currently more oriented towards long-term change by implementing more flexible policies in learning. This approach allows adjustments to the curriculum and teaching methods to better suit the needs of students, while remaining based on Islamic values that are relevant to current developments. This transformation shows that women's leadership has a strategic role in creating innovations that are able to bring about significant changes in the Islamic boarding school education system.

In addition, recognition of women's leadership is increasing along with the implementation of more inclusive programs. This is reflected in various initiatives such as skills training for female students and career guidance programs that help them prepare for the future after leaving Islamic boarding school. The perspective of santri alumni shows that women's leadership not only has an impact on improving the quality of education, but also equips santri with the skills needed to face challenges outside the Islamic boarding school environment. Thus, women's leadership plays an important role in building Islamic boarding schools that are more adaptive, inclusive and ready to face the demands of the times.

## **Innovation in Education Management and Services**

Women's leadership in Islamic boarding schools brings innovation in education management and services, such as developing technology-based curricula, improving the welfare of students, and strengthening character education. Digitalization of Islamic boarding school administration, interactive learning methods, and the implementation of data-based management systems are also part of the innovations carried out to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of educational services in Islamic boarding schools. This finding is in line with the statement expressed by the Islamic Boarding School IT Team that: "One of the women's leadership innovations that is very noticeable is the digitalization of the Islamic boarding school administration system. Now, student attendance, learning schedules and student evaluations are based on an online system.

This is very helpful in increasing the efficiency and transparency of educational services in Islamic boarding schools." (Yn\_24)

Furthermore, the guardian of the students stated that; "In the past, it was difficult for us to get information about the progress of our children in Islamic boarding schools. However, now there is a better communication system, such as groups of student guardians, regular progress reports, and consultation services with ustadzah. This shows that women's leadership in Islamic boarding schools is increasingly innovative in providing the best service for students and parents." (Ak\_24)

One form of innovation that reflects the transformation of women's leadership in Islamic boarding schools is the digitalization of the administration system. Processes such as student attendance, learning schedules and evaluations have now shifted to an online system, which significantly increases efficiency and transparency in education services. This step not only makes it easier to manage Islamic boarding schools, but also ensures that all administrative processes can be accessed more quickly and accurately, thereby supporting the improvement of the overall quality of education.

Apart from that, innovation in communication between Islamic boarding schools and Islamic boarding school guardians is also clear evidence of more adaptive and responsive women's leadership. If previously santri guardians had difficulty obtaining information regarding their children's development, now Islamic boarding schools have provided various more effective communication channels, such as santri guardian groups, regular progress reports, and consultation services with ustadzah. The presence of this system provides a greater sense of comfort and confidence for parents in monitoring their children's education and welfare at Islamic boarding schools. In this way, women's leadership is increasingly showing its strategic role in presenting innovations that have a direct impact on improving the quality of Islamic boarding school services.

## Discussion

The transformation of women's leadership in improving service quality in Islamic boarding schools shows a significant shift in their role from mere administrative support to main actors in strategic decision making. (Abdullah et al., 2023; Sumarhum, 2023). This finding is in line with the concept of transformative leadership proposed by (Hidayah, 2023; Owusu-Agyeman, 2021; Qushwa, 2024), where effective leadership is able to inspire change and innovation within an institution. Several previous studies also show that women's leadership tends to be more collaborative and based on open communication (Madison et al., 2022; Schultheiss, 2021). However, in the context of Islamic boarding schools, this change still faces the challenge of deep-rooted patriarchal culture, as expressed by (Ataman et al., 2024; Baroudi & Hojeij, 2021; Isnaini et al., 2023), which states that the leadership structure of Islamic boarding schools is still dominated by traditional patterns that prioritize male leadership.

From the results of this research, it appears that women's leadership in Islamic boarding schools is starting to gain stronger legitimacy through increased competence and more inclusive policies. This finding is in line with research conducted by (Baroudi, 2022; Rohmad et al., 2024), who found that female leadership in Islamic educational institutions tended to be more responsive to student needs and more innovative in creating adaptive learning systems. In the context of Islamic boarding schools, women's leadership strategies are not only oriented towards managing students, but also improving the quality of services, such as digitalizing administration and strengthening

communication between Islamic boarding schools and student guardians. The main difference with existing literature is that in Islamic boarding schools, this transformation is still gradual and requires further support to achieve equality in leadership.

The implications of these findings indicate that women's leadership has a strategic function in improving the quality of education and services in Islamic boarding schools. A more open leadership structure allows for more flexible policy implementation, such as preparing a curriculum based on the needs of students and developing programs that are more relevant to the challenges of the times. However, in several aspects, dysfunction is still found caused by cultural resistance, where some groups still question the role of women in Islamic boarding school leadership. The correlation between acceptance of women's leadership and improving the quality of Islamic boarding school services shows that the stronger the legitimacy of women's leadership, the better the innovation that can be produced in Islamic boarding school governance.

Furthermore, this transformation also has an impact on increasing accessibility and transparency in Islamic boarding school services. Innovation in digital-based administration, which previously had not been widely implemented in Islamic boarding schools, is now one of the main factors in increasing efficiency and information transparency. This supports the findings of the research (Dian, 2024; Karim et al., 2025), which states that digitalization in Islamic boarding school management can increase the effectiveness of management and increase the satisfaction of students and guardians of students. However, the sustainability of this innovation still depends greatly on the readiness of human resources and broader policy support in Islamic boarding schools.

Thus, this research confirms that women's leadership is not only a symbol of gender representation, but also an agent of change in improving service quality in Islamic boarding schools. This change is not only about inclusivity, but also effectiveness in managing Islamic boarding schools as a whole. In the future, it is important to develop more leadership training for women in the Islamic boarding school environment and build a system that supports their continued innovation. If women's leadership continues to gain wider recognition, Islamic boarding schools can develop into Islamic educational institutions that are more modern, inclusive and highly competitive.

## CONCLUSION

The transformation of women's leadership in improving service quality in Islamic boarding schools shows that women no longer only play an administrative support role, but also as strategic decision makers who contribute to improving the quality of Islamic boarding school education and services. Women's leadership tends to be more inclusive, adaptive, and based on open communication, so that they are able to create innovation in Islamic boarding school management. Digitalization of the administration system, increased accessibility of services for students and guardians of students, as well as policies that are more responsive to the needs of students are clear evidence of the role of women in creating more modern and efficient Islamic boarding schools. However, challenges remain, especially cultural resistance and traditional leadership structures that often hinder this change.

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