Navigating Modernity through Adaptive Leadership in Indonesian Islamic Boarding School Education

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyze the forms and characteristics of adaptive leadership at the Darussalam Islamic Boarding School in Blokagung, Banyuwangi, in responding to the challenges of modernity. Employing a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, including leaders, administrators, teachers, and students; participant observation; and the analysis of institutional documents such as policies, curricula, and archival records. Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, encompassing data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification, with trustworthiness ensured through the triangulation of sources, methods, and observers. The findings indicate that adaptive leadership contributes significantly to the development of Islamic education management by balancing tradition and modernity through pedagogical innovation, the integration of digital technology, and the strengthening of students' soft skills. In practical terms, the adoption of digital media, the promotion of entrepreneurship through *pesantren* - based business units, and the establishment of the Darussalam Economic Cooperation (DASSCO) have enhanced institutional autonomy while generating tangible benefits for the welfare of the surrounding community and alumni. Moreover, the flexibility of the LBKD caregiving system represents an important innovation in fostering a more humanistic and context-sensitive educational environment. Despite these contributions, this study is limited by its lack of in-depth exploration of internal challenges, such as resistance to change and unequal access to digital resources among santri. Future research is therefore recommended to examine international collaboration, the sustainability of *pesantren* -based enterprises, and the long-term impact of adaptive leadership on the character formation of santri. Overall, this study contributes to the development of a hybrid leadership model that preserves traditional Islamic values while promoting innovation, thereby enabling Islamic boarding schools to remain relevant and globally competitive.

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis bentuk dan karakteristik kepemimpinan adaptif di Pondok Pesantren Darussalam Blokagung Banyuwangi dalam menghadapi tantangan modernitas. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif jenis studi kasus, data diperoleh melalui wawancara mendalam dengan subjek penelitian pimpinan, pengelola, ustadz, dan santri, observasi partisipan, serta dokumentasi kebijakan, kurikulum, dan arsip kelembagaan. Analisis data mengikuti model interaktif Miles dan Huberman, meliputi reduksi, penyajian, dan penarikan kesimpulan, dengan keabsahan dijamin melalui triangulasi sumber, metode, dan pengamat. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan kepemimpinan adaptif berkontribusi

pada pengembangan manajemen pendidikan Islam dengan menyeimbangkan tradisi dan modernitas melalui inovasi pembelajaran, pemanfaatan teknologi digital, serta penguatan soft skills santri. Secara praktis, penerapan media digital, kewirausahaan melalui unit usaha pesantren, dan pembentukan Darussalam Economic Cooperation (DASSCO) memperkuat kemandirian pesantren sekaligus berdampak nyata pada kesejahteraan masyarakat dan alumni. Fleksibilitas sistem pengasuhan LBKD juga menjadi inovasi penting dalam membangun pendidikan humanis dan kontekstual. Keterbatasan penelitian ini adalah belum mendalami tantangan internal, seperti resistensi terhadap perubahan dan keterbatasan akses digital santri. Untuk penelitian selanjutnya, disarankan mengkaji kolaborasi internasional, keberlanjutan usaha pesantren, serta dampak jangka panjang kepemimpinan adaptif terhadap pembentukan karakter santri. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan model kepemimpinan hibrida yang menjaga nilai tradisional Islam sekaligus mendorong inovasi agar pesantren tetap relevan dan berdaya saing global.

Keywords:
Adaptive Leadership, Islamic Boarding Schools, Modernity, Educational Transformation.

Introduction

Pesantren are currently undergoing a significant paradigm shift in leadership, transitioning from predominantly authoritarian–traditional models to more adaptive leadership styles that are participatory and responsive to societal change (Abidin, Ta'rifin, Hanif, Aini, & Rakhmawati, 2024; Dian, Hidayatulloh, Riyanti, & Aripin, 2024; Salim, Zaibi, Ikhsan, & Aslindah, 2024). This shift is largely driven by the pressures of globalization and the rapid penetration of digital technologies, which require santri (students in Islamic boarding schools) to possess not only strong foundations in Islamic knowledge but also social and technological competencies. Empirical evidence of this transformation can be observed in the growing number of kiai who have integrated digital platforms into instructional and da'wah practices, including e-learning systems, YouTube-based religious outreach, and application-based santri information systems. These developments indicate that adaptive leadership is no longer optional but has become a strategic necessity for Islamic boarding schools seeking to remain relevant and competitive in addressing the challenges of modernity (Abdurrahman, Baharuddin, & Hady, 2025; Faizin, 2024).

Concurrently, the *pesantren* curriculum has evolved beyond an exclusive emphasis on the mastery of classical Islamic texts to incorporate general knowledge and twenty-first-century skills (Yolanda, Gunarhadi, & Efendi, 2025; Efendy, Rahman, & Karim, 2023; Jannah, Rodliyah, & Usriyah, 2023). This curricular transformation is motivated by the need to prepare santri to actively engage in the global community while maintaining a strong Islamic identity. Concrete manifestations of this shift include the integration of subjects such as entrepreneurship, information technology, and character education into contemporary *pesantren* learning systems. These changes demonstrate that adaptive leadership has enabled Islamic boarding schools to navigate modernity through curriculum reformulation that balances religious values with future-oriented competencies.

In *pesantren* that adopt adaptive leadership practices, santri are no longer positioned as passive recipients of education but are increasingly recognized as active participants in educational decision-making processes (Maksum, Muflih, Rohman, Injaz, & Sanrego, 2025; Nantongo, Kalubanga, Ntayi, Bagenda, & Nyakeishiki, 2024). Awareness of the contextual insights held by younger generations, particularly regarding social, economic, and technological challenges (Harianto & Listyani, 2025; Irviana, Feranita, & Ge, 2025), has encouraged the establishment of deliberative forums such as *santri* councils and internal student organizations. These platforms function as channels for articulating ideas and aspirations, reflecting a broader shift toward participatory governance. The involvement of *santri* in educational leadership thus constitutes clear evidence of social transformation within the *pesantren* environment, resulting from the implementation of adaptive and democratic leadership models.

Pesantren , which were historically characterized by relatively insular orientations, are increasingly opening themselves to broader societal engagement through a range of community empowerment initiatives, government collaboration, and partnerships with non-*pesantren* institutions. This transformation is driven by a growing awareness of *pesantren* 's expanded social responsibility as institutions of both spiritual guidance and social change within their communities (Huda, 2024; Zubaidi, Sadidah, & Umam, 2024). Empirical evidence of this shift can be observed in *pesantren* involvement in community-based training programs, social welfare initiatives, and local economic development projects, particularly those organized through cooperatives or micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). These developments suggest that adaptive leadership enables Islamic boarding schools to function not only as educational institutions but also as agents of inclusive and sustainable community empowerment.

A growing body of literature indicates that Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia are confronting the challenges of modernization while simultaneously striving to preserve traditional values through adaptive leadership and innovative management practices. *Pesantren* leaders increasingly adopt hybrid leadership models that integrate traditional pedagogical and organizational approaches with modern innovations, such as the use of digital technologies and multilingual education, to enhance learning quality and graduate competitiveness (Dos Santos Jesus, Galdamez, Lemos Cotrim, & Leal, 2025; Temimi, Rebai,

Aldamen, Souki, & Amiri, 2025). In addition, visionary, democratic, and spiritually grounded leadership styles are employed to cultivate inclusive institutional environments that encourage collaboration and innovation (Ramasamy Velar & Kee, 2025).

Despite the persistent tension between tradition and modernity, several *pesantren* have demonstrated the capacity to incorporate technological advancements into their curricula without undermining core Islamic principles (Amrullah & Zuhriyah, 2025; Salim, Zaibi, Brantasari, Ikhsan, & Aslindah, 2024). Complementary innovations, such as the integration of general and religious education, the implementation of character education, and the strengthening of collaborative partnerships, have also been introduced to address evolving societal demands while maintaining Salafi values (Basori, Raharjo, Prihatin, & Yulianto, 2023; Intan & Sirozi, 2025). Nevertheless, a notable gap remains in the literature regarding how these leadership and management models concretely foster sustainable innovation ecosystems within *pesantren*, as well as the extent to which technology–tradition integration can be achieved without generating internal resistance.

The urgency of this study stems from the pressing need to understand how Islamic boarding schools, as the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, can survive and thrive amid rapid and increasingly complex processes of modernization (Aimah, Nasih, Wafiroh, & Fakhruddin, 2024a). *Pesantren* face substantial challenges in preserving traditional Islamic values while simultaneously responding to contemporary demands, including technological literacy, multilingual competencies, and global engagement. Although adaptive leadership plays a pivotal role in this transformative process, in-depth empirical studies examining how *pesantren* leaders construct leadership models capable of bridging tradition and innovation remain limited. This research seeks to address this gap by offering both theoretical and practical contributions to the development of leadership and management strategies in Islamic education that are relevant, contextual, and sustainable. Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the forms and characteristics of adaptive leadership employed by *pesantren* leaders in responding to the challenges of modernity.

Building on this objective, the study offers a novel perspective by illuminating the dynamics of navigating modernity within the *pesantren* context through the lens of adaptive leadership. In this framework, adaptive leadership is conceptualized not merely as a reactive response to modernization, but as a transformative strategy that integrates Islamic vision with socio-educational innovation. In contrast to previous studies that have tended to focus separately on technological integration or institutional collaboration, this research emphasizes the interconnections among visionary, spiritual, and democratic leadership styles and innovative educational management practices in Islamic boarding schools (Abedi, 2024; Kulkov, Kulkova, Rohrbeck, Menvielle, Kaartemo, & Makkonen, 2024). The analytical approach adopted in this study is informed by Basori, Raharjo, Prihatin, and Yulianto, (2023), who demonstrate how *pesantren* leaders develop hybrid leadership models that combine traditional Salafi values with inclusive, participatory, and progressive organizational cultures.

Furthermore, the originality of this study lies in its examination of adaptive leadership as a catalyst for shaping *santri* character in ways that are responsive to contemporary socio-cultural complexities, an aspect that has received limited attention in prior research. By doing so, this study extends the understanding of *pesantren* institutional transformation beyond mere adaptation, positioning Islamic boarding schools as proactive agents of social change grounded in enduring Islamic values.

Research Method

The selection of Darussalam Islamic Boarding School in Blokagung, Banyuwangi, as the research site was informed by its reputation as one of the largest and most influential *pesantren* in Indonesia, particularly in its ability to respond to the challenges of modernity without abandoning its traditional foundations (Aimah, Nasih, Wafiroh, & Fakhruddin, 2024a). This *pesantren* is widely recognized for its strong, adaptive, and visionary leadership, as well as for its implementation of various curricular innovations, including the integration of religious and general education, the strengthening of character education, and the incorporation of information technology into teaching and learning processes (Huzali, Aimah, & Sidique, 2025). Furthermore, Darussalam has established extensive partnerships with national educational institutions, reflecting its openness to cross-institutional collaboration, such as comparative studies conducted with *Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School*. The *pesantren*'s ability to manage change in a harmonious and sustainable manner renders it a relevant and representative site for examining the dynamics of adaptive leadership in contemporary *pesantren* education.

A qualitative case study approach was adopted in this research due to its suitability for capturing the complexity and depth of adaptive leadership practices within Islamic boarding schools (Abukalusa & Oosthuizen, 2025). This approach facilitates an in-depth exploration of leadership manifestations, including shifts in communication patterns, participatory decision-making processes, curriculum adjustments, and the continuous, contextual, and holistic integration of traditional and modern values within the *pesantren* environment, particularly at *Darussalam Islamic Boarding School*, Blokagung, Banyuwangi. Case studies are especially effective in uncovering leadership processes, patterns, and strategies shaped by local values, religious traditions, and multifaceted contemporary challenges (Alsharari & Aljohani, 2023). Moreover, this methodological approach is well suited to capturing contextual managerial practices and educational innovations that are not readily measurable through quantitative methods (Cinar, Simms, Trott, & Demircioglu, 2024). Accordingly, the qualitative case study design is considered the most appropriate framework for examining how Islamic boarding schools navigate change through flexible, adaptive, and progressive leadership.

The use of both primary and secondary data sources in this study was intended to obtain a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of adaptive leadership practices at Darussalam Blokagung Islamic Boarding School. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with key informants, including *pesantren* caregivers, madrasah principals, and leaders of educational units, who possess strategic authority and in-depth knowledge of institutional policy directions and innovation initiatives. In addition,

supporting informants, such as teachers, senior *santri,* and administrative staff, provided operational insights and first-hand experiences regarding the implementation of leadership practices in daily institutional activities. Secondary data were derived from institutional policy documents, curricula, activity reports, scholarly articles, and relevant publications, which served to contextualize the findings historically and to strengthen the analysis of organizational policies and leadership dynamics. Overall, the study involved a total of 15 informants, comprising leaders, administrators, teachers, and students, whose perspectives collectively contributed to a holistic understanding of adaptive leadership within the *pesantren* context.

Table 1. Informants

No	Informants	Gender		Code/Quantity
		Man	Woman	
1	Islamic Boarding School Leader	1	1	Pim./2
2	Islamic Boarding School administrators	3	2	Pen./5
3	teachers	3	3	Tch./6
4	Students	1	1	Std./2
Amount				15

The use of in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentary analysis is particularly appropriate for this study, as these methods enable a comprehensive exploration of adaptive leadership practices within the *pesantren* context. In-depth interviews facilitate an in-depth examination of the perspectives, values, strategic orientations, and reflective experiences of Kiai Ahmad Hisyam Syafa'at as the *pesantren* leader in responding to social, technological, and contemporary cultural transformations. Participant observation, in turn, allows the researcher to directly observe the enactment of adaptive leadership in everyday practices, including decision-making processes, interactions with *santri* and teachers, and the implementation of innovative *pesantren* programs. Documentary analysis further substantiates the empirical findings through the examination of institutional archives, policy documents, vision and mission statements, and program records that reflect adaptive strategies in navigating modernity. The integration of these three data collection techniques enables the study to generate a holistic understanding of adaptive leadership, encompassing both its conceptual dimensions and its manifestation within the institutional and cultural realities of the *pesantren*.

Data analysis in this study follows the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which enables systematic and in-depth analysis through three interrelated stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Wibowo, Suryatama, & Siswanto, 2025). This analytical framework is particularly suitable for examining the dynamics of adaptive leadership in navigating modernity within one of the largest Islamic boarding schools in Banyuwangi Regency, as it facilitates the identification of salient information, the organization of emerging patterns, and the interpretation of

findings within their specific contextual settings. The iterative nature of this model supports reflective and comprehensive analysis that aligns with the complexity inherent in qualitative case study research.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study employs triangulation of sources, methods, and observers (Morgan, 2024). Source triangulation enables the comparison and corroboration of data obtained from multiple informants (Hanson-DeFusco, 2023), while method triangulation enhances the consistency of findings across interviews, observations, and documentary evidence. Observer triangulation further minimizes interpretive bias by involving more than one researcher in the data analysis process (Morgan, 2024). Collectively, these triangulation strategies strengthen the credibility, objectivity, and rigor of the study's findings in examining adaptive leadership at the Islamic boarding school, which was established on January 15, 1951 (Aimah, Nasih, Wafiroh, & Fakhruddin, 2024b).

Results and Discussion

Adaptive leadership at Darussalam Islamic Boarding School in Blokagung, Banyuwangi, is manifested through a set of interrelated and complementary strategic practices. The central role of the kiai is particularly evident in curricular adaptation, which deliberately integrates enduring Islamic traditions with the evolving demands of modernity. The strategic use of technology functions as a critical enabler of pedagogical innovation, facilitating learning models that are responsive to the needs of digitally oriented generations. Furthermore, the systematic development of students' soft skills and entrepreneurial capacities promotes economic self-reliance and enhances their preparedness to engage with global challenges. At the institutional level, the expansion of external collaborative networks contributes to strengthening the *pesantren*'s sustainability and social relevance, while the flexibility of the caregiving system fosters a more humanistic, inclusive, and context-sensitive educational environment.

The Central Role of the *Kiai* in Curriculum Adaptation

The central role of the kiai in curriculum adaptation at Darussalam Blokagung Islamic Boarding School in Banyuwangi is evident through his visionary and responsive leadership in addressing contemporary educational demands. The kiai functions not only as a spiritual authority but also as a key architect of institutional educational policy, capable of integrating long-standing *pesantren* traditions with the evolving requirements of modern education. Under his leadership, the *pesantren* curriculum remains firmly grounded in classical Islamic scholarship while simultaneously embracing innovations such as enhanced digital literacy, entrepreneurship education, and context-based learning approaches. This curricular adaptation has enabled the *pesantren* to maintain its relevance and competitiveness amid processes of modernization without compromising its identity as a values-based Islamic educational institution.

Adaptive leadership exercised by the kiai and the *pesantren* leadership structure constitutes a critical mechanism for balancing tradition and modernity (Dian,

Hidayatulloh, Riyanti, & Aripin, 2024; Salim, Zaibi, Brantasari, Ikhsan, & Aslindah, 2024). This leadership orientation is reflected in policies that integrate classical religious curricula with general education, strengthen students' digital competencies, and develop technology-based *pesantren* business units to support institutional and student economic independence (Ilyasin & July, 2025; Halimah, Yusuf, & Safiudin, 2024). In this regard, Darussalam Blokagung demonstrates adaptive leadership through concrete efforts to harmonize traditional religious instruction with contemporary pedagogical practices, ensuring that santri remain deeply rooted in Islamic values while remaining responsive to the dynamics of modern society.

Moreover, the leadership of Darussalam Blokagung, one of the largest Islamic boarding schools in Banyuwangi Regency, has effectively mobilized alumni networks and broader community resources to reinforce the *pesantren*'s role as an inclusive and socially relevant educational center. This strategy is manifested in innovations in learning systems, instructional methods, and digital media that are integrated with widely used platforms and applications favored by Generation Z learners. Such initiatives indicate that curriculum adaptation at Darussalam Blokagung extends beyond a pragmatic response to change, representing instead a visionary and strategic approach that positions the *pesantren* as a model of Islamic education capable of continuous transformation while preserving its traditional identity (Hidayati, MUis, & Ubaidillah, 2025). These findings are based on an in-depth interview with the Deputy Head of Education and Teaching at Darussalam Blokagung Islamic Boarding School, whose identity has been anonymized for ethical considerations.

> "At this Islamic boarding school, we strive to adapt to the times without abandoning tradition. The classical Islamic texts remain the core of our curriculum, but we also incorporate general subjects, science, and digital training. This is important so that our students are prepared to face the modern world. Of course, all curriculum decisions are discussed and receive direct guidance from the kiai. He always emphasizes that modernity must be directed towards strengthening the values of the *pesantren*, not the other way around". (Pen, 28 Juli 2025).

The foregoing discussion indicates that adaptive leadership in this Islamic boarding school is not exercised unilaterally, but rather operates through collaborative mechanisms that nonetheless remain anchored in the authoritative role of the kiai. The integration of the *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic texts) with modern subjects and digital skills training reflects a dual orientation: the preservation of religious tradition alongside the systematic preparation of students with competencies relevant to global challenges (Asmayawati, Yufiarti, & Yetti, 2024). This synthesis demonstrates how adaptive leadership enables *pesantren* to negotiate continuity and change in a balanced and strategic manner. Further illustration of the modernization of adaptive leadership practices in Islamic boarding schools is presented in the following image:
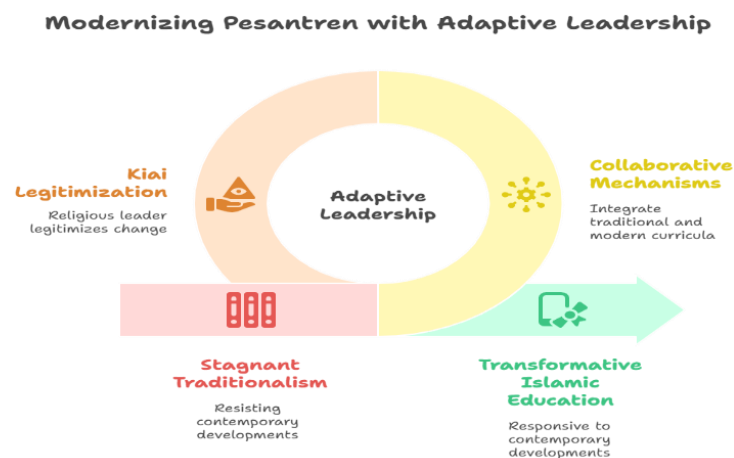
Figure 1. Modernization of Adaptive Leadership in Islamic Boarding Schools (Salim, Zaibi, Brantasari, Ikhsan, & Aslindah, 2024)

The figure illustrates that the kiai's guidance constitutes a central source of institutional legitimacy, as curricular changes within the *pesantren* are more readily accepted when they are grounded in strong religious authority and cultural continuity (Jaenullah, Utama, & Setiawan, 2022; Latif & Hafid, 2021). This finding is consistent with adaptive leadership theory, which underscores leaders' capacity to navigate complex processes of change while remaining firmly anchored in core values and shared meanings (Abukalusa & Oosthuizen, 2025; Chughtai, Syed, Naseer, & Chinchilla, 2024; Kuluski, Reid, & Baker, 2021). From this perspective, modernity is not construed as a disruptive threat but as a strategic opportunity that can be consciously managed to reinforce the identity of Islamic boarding schools as transformative Islamic educational institutions that are both value-driven and responsive to contemporary developments.

The Use of Technology as a Learning Tool

The use of technology as a learning tool at this Islamic boarding school, established on January 15, 1951, reflects a significant transformation in the *pesantren* educational system toward greater adaptability in the digital era. Under the leadership of Kiai Ahmad Hisyam Syafa'at, technology has been strategically employed to enhance the teaching and learning process through the utilization of digital devices, e-learning platforms, and interactive media designed to improve instructional effectiveness. Within this framework, students are not only guided to engage with religious knowledge through classical pedagogical methods but are also systematically trained to develop digital competencies as preparation for contemporary and future challenges. Importantly, the integration of technology remains firmly guided by Islamic values, ensuring that learning becomes more contextual and creative while preserving the core ethos of *pesantren* education.

The incorporation of technology into *pesantren l*earning practices has increasingly become an essential component of educational support without undermining the institution's traditional identity (Faizin, 2024; Hanafi, Taufiq, Saefi, Ikhsan, Diyana, Thoriquttyas, & Anam, 2021). The use of instructional tools such as projectors, computers,

and digital learning applications facilitates more interactive and efficient comprehension of learning materials, particularly in general subjects and Qur'anic or scriptural studies that benefit from visualization. In addition, digital platforms play a strategic role in disseminating information and showcasing student activities and achievements through the *pesantren*'s official website and social media channels, including Instagram and Facebook. Nevertheless, the adoption of technology is guided by selective and value-based principles to ensure that it does not compromise Islamic values, discipline, or the moral culture characteristic of *pesantren* life. Overall, the use of technology encourages *santri* to become more adaptive to societal changes, strengthens their digital literacy in response to global demands, and enhances the competitiveness of *pesantren* graduates amid the challenges of modernity. The specific forms of technology utilization in this *pesantren* are outlined as follows:

Table 2. Utilization of Learning Technology in Islamic Boarding Schools

Aspect	Benefits
Utilization of technology in learning	Supports the educational process while preserving the traditional identity of Islamic boarding schools.
Use of digital devices (e.g., projectors, computers, and learning applications)	Facilitates faster, more interactive, and engaging comprehension of learning materials.
Selective application aligned with *pesantren* values	Ensures the preservation of core Islamic values, ethical conduct (*adab*), and institutional discipline characteristic of *pesantren* life.
Integration into general subjects and scriptural studies	Provides visual and contextual learning experiences that deepen students' understanding of both religious and general knowledge.
Strengthening students' digital skills	Develops *santri* who are adaptable to technological change and responsive to contemporary societal developments.
Alignment with global competencies	Enhances the competitiveness of *pesantren* graduates in addressing the challenges of modernity and global engagement.

The use of technology in Islamic boarding schools extends beyond a mere process of modernization, representing instead an adaptive strategy that remains firmly anchored in the traditional values of *pesantren* education (Faizin, 2024; He, Zaremohzzabieh, Rahman, Ismail, & Bin-Qiang, 2024). Instructional technologies such as projectors, computers, and digital learning applications not only enhance the efficiency and accessibility of learning, but also foster more interactive and engaging pedagogical experiences, both in general subjects and in the study of classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*) (Dey & Munshi, 2025; Wang & Liu, 2024; Zulfiqar, Raza, Khan, Arif, Alvi, & Alam, 2023). Importantly, the implementation of these technologies is guided by selective and value-based principles to ensure that the distinctive Islamic identity, discipline, and moral culture of *pesantren* are preserved, thereby maintaining a balanced integration of tradition and modernity. Moreover, the strategic incorporation of technology equips *santri* with digital competencies aligned with global demands, enabling them to complement strong religious

foundations with the skills necessary to remain competitive in contemporary socio-economic contexts. An illustration of the use of technology as a learning medium in Islamic boarding schools is presented in the following figure:

Figure 2. Utilization of IT as a Learning Medium

The integration of technology into learning at the Darussalam Islamic Boarding School Vocational Training Center (BLK) in Blokagung, Banyuwangi, represents not merely an effort to modernize educational facilities, but a visionary strategy grounded in adaptive leadership to address global and technological challenges. This adaptive leadership is reflected in the *pesantren* leadership's proactive decision to incorporate digital devices, online applications, and automation-based machinery into the educational system. Such initiatives indicate a paradigm shift in the positioning of Islamic boarding schools, from institutions primarily focused on religious instruction to multifaceted educational centers capable of producing highly skilled and competitive human resources (Julhadi & Mahyudin, 2023; Lundeto, Talibo, & Nento, 2021). Through the application of adaptive leadership, the *pesantren* has successfully transitioned from a predominantly traditional educational model to a learning system that is responsive to the demands of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 (Halimah, Yusuf, & Safiudin, 2024; As'ad, 2021). Moreover, this leadership approach creates opportunities for *santri* to enhance their technical competencies while simultaneously cultivating innovation and entrepreneurial mindsets. As a result, graduates are equipped not only with strong religious foundations but also with the capacity to navigate and contribute meaningfully to contemporary socio-economic environments.

Soft Skill Development and Entrepreneurship

The development of soft skills and entrepreneurship within *pesantren* demonstrates that Islamic boarding schools do not focus solely on the transmission of religious knowledge, but also place strong emphasis on the cultivation of life skills relevant to contemporary societal and economic challenges. *Santri* are systematically equipped with competencies such as communication, leadership, teamwork, and problem-solving through a range of organizational and extracurricular activities, including participation in

pesantren committees, student organizations, and structured leadership training programs (Rohmad, Muawanah, Ju'subaidi, & Hidayah, 2024; Badrun, 2024). In addition, initiatives aimed at nurturing students' interests and talents, such as foreign language programs and writing workshops, serve as strategic efforts to further enhance their soft skill development. Alongside soft skill formation, the cultivation of an entrepreneurial mindset constitutes a key component of *pesantren* education. This is implemented through various *pesantren* -based business units, including cooperatives, student bazaars, printing and convection enterprises, and digitally oriented businesses such as online stores, which are managed by *santri* under the guidance of the kiai and *ustadz*. These initiatives are designed to foster independence, creativity, and adaptability among students, ensuring that *pesantren* graduates are not only grounded in religious values but also prepared to compete in the labor market and to generate their own entrepreneurial opportunities. Furthermore, Darussalam Blokagung Banyuwangi Islamic Boarding School has institutionalized these economic empowerment efforts through the establishment of the Darussalam Economic Cooperation (DASSCO). This initiative serves as a strategic platform to strengthen *pesantren* economic independence, empower alumni, and reinforce alumni networks, while also contributing tangibly to community welfare. The documentation of awards presented below provides empirical evidence of the *pesantren* 's achievements in developing students' soft skills through sustained dedication and collective effort:

Figure 3. 2nd Place in the East Java English Poetry Competition

The development of soft skills among *santri* constitutes a strategic initiative in preparing a generation that is not only intellectually and religiously grounded, but also socially and emotionally competent (Yoshehira, Arbarini, & Siswanto, 2025; Rochmat, Yoranita, & Putri, 2022). Participation in organizational activities, leadership training, and community engagement provides *santri* with structured opportunities to cultivate essential competencies, including effective communication, conflict management, teamwork, and inclusive leadership (Traver-Marti, Ballesteros-Velazquez, Beldarrain, &

Maiquez, 2023; Aboramadan, Dahleez, & Farao, 2021). These practices indicate a broader transformation within *pesantren* education, from a primary emphasis on the transmission of religious knowledge toward a more holistic approach to character formation that aligns with the demands of contemporary society. Consequently, *santri* are prepared not only for roles as religious scholars or educators, but also as emerging leaders, entrepreneurs, and professionals characterized by integrity, empathy, and high levels of competitiveness in an increasingly globalized context. An illustration of a *santri* bazaar as a form of entrepreneurial learning in an Islamic boarding school is presented in the following image.

Figure 4. Grand Bazaar of Santri *Pesantren* Darussalam Blokagung

The development of entrepreneurship in Islamic boarding schools reflects a significant transformation from traditionally oriented educational institutions into centers of Islamic value–based economic empowerment (Mariyono, 2025; Qizam, Berakon, & Ali, 2024). The entrepreneurship programs implemented not only aim to enhance students' practical and managerial competencies, but also function as socio-economic laboratories that integrate religious principles into contemporary business practices (Kyambade, Namatovu, Namubiru, & Muganzi, 2024; Anggadwita, Dana, Ramadani, & Ramadan, 2021). This institutional transformation is closely linked to the role of adaptive leadership within *pesantren*, which enables leaders to interpret evolving societal needs and respond to global challenges through innovation, digitalization, and the expansion of business networks. Through adaptive leadership, *santri* are prepared not only to assume roles as future religious leaders, but also to become resilient, ethical, and socially responsible entrepreneurs. Consequently, entrepreneurship at *pesantren* Darussalam is positioned not merely as an economic activity, but as an integral educational strategy that synthesizes spirituality, ethical values, and economic self-reliance. In this way, *pesantren* graduates are equipped with a dual capacity: preserving Islamic scholarly traditions while simultaneously acting as agents of socio-economic development within the wider community.

Collaboration Network with External Institutions

Darussalam Blokagung Islamic Boarding School has established an extensive network of collaborations with a wide range of external institutions at the local, national, and international levels. These partnerships encompass cooperation with universities, government agencies, religious organizations, and international partners engaged in education, social development, and community empowerment initiatives. Through such collaborative networks, the *pesantren* not only enhances the quality of its curriculum and instructional practices but also expands students' access to broader learning opportunities. These include academic exchanges, skills development programs, economic partnerships, health initiatives, and pathways to higher education through scholarship schemes, often facilitated in collaboration with government bodies, community stakeholders, and alumni networks. Beyond their practical benefits, these collaborations function as an adaptive strategy that enables the *pesantren* to respond effectively to the challenges of modernity while sustaining its institutional relevance. By engaging in cross-sectoral and cross-institutional partnerships, Darussalam Blokagung reinforces its role not only as a center of religious education and *da'wah*, but also as a hub of social transformation and community empowerment in the context of globalization. The following table outlines the key collaboration networks established between the *pesantren* and external institutions.

Table 3. National and International Partners

No.	Description	Outcomes
1	Collaboration with universities in academic and research domains	Enhancement of curriculum quality, teaching methodologies, and opportunities for collaborative research involving academic staff
2	Partnerships with local and national government agencies	Support for capacity-building and training programs, regulatory strengthening, and increased access to educational and social assistance
3	Cooperation with religious organizations	Reinforcement of *da'wah* values, development of Islamic-based curricula, and expansion of religious and social networks
4	Engagement with external partners in education and community development	Provision of global skills training programs and expanded access to student scholarship opportunities
5	Cross-sectoral collaboration as an adaptive strategy for addressing modern challenges	Sustained relevance of *pesantren* as centres of education, *da'wah*, and community empowerment

The collaboration networks developed by *pesantren* play a strategic role in reinforcing their function as centers of education, *da'wah*, and community empowerment (Aziz & Huda, 2024; Mariyono, 2024). Through adaptive leadership, *pesantren* are able to establish productive partnerships with universities to enhance curriculum quality and pedagogical practices, thereby providing *santri* with more comprehensive and integrative learning experiences. Collaboration with government agencies facilitates access to

regulatory support, capacity-building initiatives, and educational assistance programs, while cooperation with religious organizations strengthens spiritual values and supports the development of Islamic-based curricula (Taufik Syamlan, Wahyuni, Heruwasto, & Hamsal, 2025; Razali, Sundana, & Ramli, 2024). Furthermore, adaptive leadership enables *pesantren* to engage in international partnerships that expand opportunities for student exchanges, scholarship schemes, and global skills training, thereby enhancing students' competitiveness in the context of globalization (Tiron-Tudor, Deliu, & Ndou, 2025; Ul Hassan, Murtaza, & Rashid, 2025). These cross-sectoral collaborations demonstrate the capacity of Islamic boarding schools to adapt to the demands of modernity while maintaining institutional continuity and producing graduates who are globally competitive yet firmly grounded in Islamic identity (Faizin, 2024).

Flexibility in the Student Care System

The student care system in *pesantren* exhibits a high degree of flexibility, as reflected in caregivers' capacity to adjust guidance and supervision strategies in accordance with the individual needs, maturity levels, and personal characteristics of *santri.* This flexibility is evident in the implementation of regulations that are not rigidly applied but are instead adapted to contextual factors such as changing social conditions, students' developmental stages, and the dynamics of daily *pesantren* life. For instance, *santri* who hold specific academic, organizational, or leadership responsibilities are granted a degree of flexibility in time management and scheduling, while remaining within the overarching framework of *pesantren* discipline. Such adaptive arrangements include the contextual adjustment of rules, schedules, and sanctions based on students' needs, situational factors, health conditions, interests, and psychosocial considerations. These efforts are further supported by structured student assistance services provided through the Darussalam Guidance and Counseling Institute (Lembaga Bimbingan dan Konseling Darussalam - LBKD), which responds to both individual challenges and broader socio-cultural developments. Consequently, this student care model functions not merely as a mechanism of social control, but as an educational space that balances regulatory discipline with opportunities for creativity and self-development. Through this approach, *santri* are encouraged to cultivate independence, responsibility, and adaptive capacity in navigating contemporary challenges. Further illustration of the *pesantren* student care system is presented in the following figure.
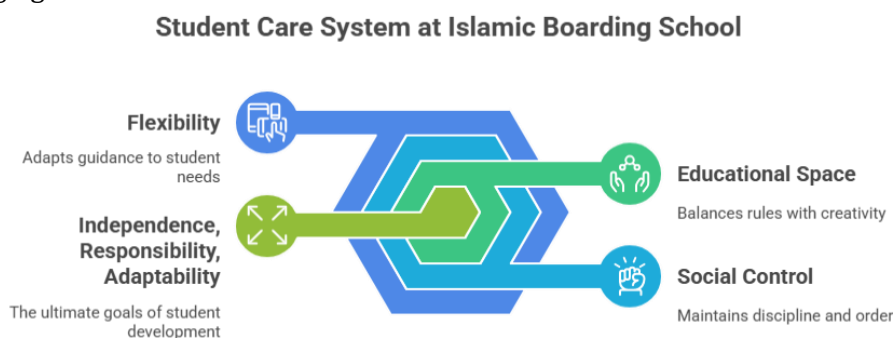

Student Care System at Islamic Boarding School

Flexibility
Adapts guidance to student needs

Independence, Responsibility, Adaptability
The ultimate goals of student development

Educational Space
Balances rules with creativity

Social Control
Maintains discipline and order

Figure 5. Student care system at the Darussalam Blokagung Islamic Boarding School

The student care system implemented in this *pesantren* reflects a more progressive approach when compared to conventional boarding school models (Mariyono, 2025; Jaenullah, Utama, & Setiawan, 2022). The flexibility embedded within this system does not imply a relaxation of discipline; rather, it reframes institutional rules as instruments of contextual and humanistic education (Li, 2025; Zhou, 2025). Guided by adaptive leadership, such flexibility is strategically aligned with students' academic and organizational responsibilities, thereby fostering the development of independence and personal accountability while maintaining the overarching framework of collective discipline. This caregiving model serves a dual function: as a mechanism of social control that ensures order and cohesion in *santri* life, and as a developmental space that nurtures individual potential (Elmesky & Marcucci, 2023; Skinner, Rickert, Vollet, & Kindermann, 2022). Through adaptive leadership, *santri* are cultivated as individuals who remain committed to *pesantren* traditions while simultaneously possessing the adaptive capacities required to navigate social transformation and the challenges of modernity (Mujahid, 2021). This balanced approach is fundamental to the formation of a generation of *santri* characterized by integrity, discipline, creativity, and independence.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that adaptive leadership at Darussalam Islamic Boarding School in Blokagung, Banyuwangi, makes a significant theoretical contribution to the field of Islamic education management, particularly by elucidating leadership patterns capable of balancing tradition and modernity through pedagogical innovation, the strategic integration of digital technology, and the systematic development of students' soft skills. From a practical perspective, the findings indicate that the utilization of digital media, the promotion of entrepreneurship through *pesantren*-based business units, and the establishment of the Darussalam Economic Cooperation (DASSCO) have effectively strengthened institutional autonomy while generating tangible benefits for the welfare of both the surrounding community and alumni.

Furthermore, this study confirms that flexibility in the student care system, as operationalized through the Darussalam Guidance and Counseling Institute (LBKD), constitutes a key innovation in fostering a more humanistic and context-sensitive educational environment. Nevertheless, this research is subject to certain limitations, notably the absence of in-depth analysis of internal challenges such as resistance to change among some stakeholders and unequal access to digital resources among *santri*. Accordingly, future research is encouraged to examine models of international collaboration involving Islamic boarding schools, assess the sustainability of *pesantren*-based enterprises in the context of global competition, and investigate the long-term effects of adaptive leadership on *santri* character formation. Overall, the study successfully achieves its objective of comprehensively analyzing the forms and characteristics of adaptive leadership employed by *pesantren* leaders in responding to the challenges of modernity.

Ethical Statement

The research was undertaken in compliance with established ethical guidelines aimed at safeguarding the rights, well-being, and security of all participants. Prior to the commencement of the study, all relevant ethical approvals and authorizations were obtained. Throughout the research process, ethical practices were implemented in line with institutional policies and international standards to maintain research integrity and transparency.

CRediT Authorship Contribution Statement

- **Author 1**: Conceptualization; Methodology; Investigation; Writing – Original Draft.
- **Author 2**: Conceptualization; Supervision; Review & Editing; Formal Analysis.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this article.

Data Availability

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are available upon reasonable request

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