

# Leadership and Teacher Recruitment Strategies in Pesantren: Building a Sustainable Education System

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study aims to analyze the impact of visionary leadership and teacher recruitment quality on the sustainability of pesantren in the face of contemporary challenges. **Method:** Employing a qualitative approach with a case study method, the research involved in-depth interviews and observations at a pesantren. **Results:** The findings indicate that visionary leadership plays a crucial role in maintaining the relevance of pesantren, particularly through the integration of technology in education while preserving Islamic traditions. Additionally, selective teacher recruitment, focusing on both academic competence and moral character, significantly contributes to shaping students' character and enhancing the overall quality of education. Effective organizational communication is also essential in supporting the pesantren's vision and mission. **Novelty:** This research highlights the importance of developing adaptive leadership models and robust teacher recruitment systems to ensure pesantren's sustainability and competitiveness in a globalized era. It offers practical contributions for pesantren management and advances the literature on Islamic education management by emphasizing the balance between tradition and modernity.

## INTRODUCTION

Pesantren, as traditional Islamic educational institutions, play a pivotal role in shaping the character and personality of younger generations [1]. In Indonesia, pesantren not only serve as centers for religious learning but also as institutions fostering moral and ethical development among students [2]. Despite their enduring existence over centuries, pesantren now face various challenges arising from modern developments, social changes, and technological advancements. The sustainability of pesantren in the future heavily depends on their ability to manage two key aspects: visionary leadership and the quality of recruited teachers [3]. Strong leadership determines the direction and goals of pesantren education, while high-quality teachers are expected to transfer knowledge and religious values in ways that are relevant to contemporary needs [4].

Leadership theories in the context of Islamic education, especially in pesantren, emphasize exemplary and moral-based approaches rather than merely administrative aspects [5]. In this regard, value-based leadership theories, such as transformational leadership and servant leadership, are particularly pertinent. Additionally, effective recruitment theories that prioritize character, academic competence, and profound religious understanding serve as a foundational basis for ensuring the quality of teachers who can guide pesantren toward sustainability [6]. Thus, this study aims to explore how the integration of leadership and teacher recruitment influences the sustainability of pesantren.

The sustainability of pesantren, particularly in addressing modernization and globalization, requires a comprehensive evaluation of two critical elements: leadership and teacher quality [7]. A primary issue facing pesantren is how to preserve strong religious education traditions while adapting to modern demands [8]. Some pesantren struggle to find leaders with far-reaching visions capable of managing change and teachers who are not only proficient in religious knowledge but also adept at integrating technology into their teaching practices. Furthermore, challenges in the selection and recruitment of high-quality teachers hinder the overall progress of pesantren, as the quality of education largely depends on teachers' ability to educate and serve as moral role models for students. Therefore, this research focuses on how these two factors *leadership and teacher recruitment* collaborate to ensure the sustainability and development of pesantren in facing modern challenges.

Previous research on leadership in pesantren indicates that effective leadership greatly influences the quality of education in pesantren. A study by [9] found that pesantren leaders adopting transformational leadership styles inspire both students and teachers to perform better, fostering a more productive educational environment [10]. This study suggests that value-based and exemplary leadership is a critical factor in maintaining the quality of pesantren education.

Similarly, research by Faisal & Neliwati on teacher recruitment in pesantren emphasizes that rigorous teacher selection, focusing on religious understanding and good character, can enhance teaching quality and moral development among students [11]. Their study concludes that the sustainability of pesantren is highly influenced by the appropriate selection of teachers who not only excel in academic content but also effectively convey religious values.

In another study by Mesran, which examines the integration of technology in pesantren education, it was found that while many pesantren have attempted to incorporate technology into their learning processes, numerous pesantren leaders struggle to balance technological advancements with the need to preserve traditional religious education [12]. The study highlights the necessity for pesantren leaders to have clear visions regarding technology integration without compromising the traditional values of pesantren.

Although previous studies have addressed aspects of leadership and teacher quality in the context of pesantren, few have holistically examined how these two factors combine to influence pesantren sustainability in addressing modern challenges. Most studies focus on either leadership or teacher quality without exploring their interaction and contribution to pesantren sustainability comprehensively. Thus, this research fills that gap by examining the relationship between visionary leadership and quality teacher recruitment in the context of pesantren sustainability.

This study offers novelty by integrating value-based leadership theories, such as transformational and servant leadership, with recruitment theories emphasizing the selection of teachers proficient not only in academic aspects but also in deep religious understanding and exemplary behavior. Additionally, the research focuses on how these

two factors can work together to ensure that pesantren remain relevant and sustainable amidst rapid changes. Through an in-depth case study of pesantren that have successfully managed their sustainability, this study aims to provide new insights for pesantren managers and Islamic education leaders in designing better policies and strategies for the future of pesantren education.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the role of leadership and teacher recruitment in ensuring the sustainability of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) amidst the challenges of modernization [13]; [14]. A qualitative approach was chosen as it allows researchers to delve deeper into the perspectives, experiences, and views of various stakeholders involved in managing pesantren, including leaders, teachers, and students [15]. Through this approach, researchers can gather richer data on the factors influencing the sustainability of pesantren and how these factors interact to create improved educational conditions within the pesantren system.

The unit of analysis in this study consists of pesantren that have successfully maintained their sustainability despite facing the challenges of modernization and managing Islamic education [16]. The selected pesantren are considered representative in terms of demonstrating effective leadership and efficient teacher recruitment systems [17]. This selection aims to explore the experiences and best practices implemented by pesantren in overcoming various challenges, as well as to understand how leadership and human resource management contribute to their sustainability.

This study adopts a case study design with an exploratory approach, enabling the researcher to focus on phenomena occurring within a specific context, namely Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in Indonesia [18]. The purpose of this case study is to further explore the application of leadership theories, particularly transformational leadership and servant leadership, as well as how character- and faith-based teacher recruitment practices can positively impact the sustainability of pesantren [19]. By examining these phenomena, the study aims to provide new insights into the context of Islamic education, particularly regarding the factors influencing the sustainability of pesantren.

The data collection techniques employed in this research include in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis [20]. In-depth interviews were conducted with pesantren leaders, teachers, and several students involved in the educational processes within the pesantren [21]; [22]. These interviews aimed to gather information on their perspectives regarding pesantren leadership, teacher recruitment practices, and the challenges encountered in maintaining the sustainability of pesantren education. Observations were carried out by directly observing the management of education, interactions between leaders, teachers, and students, as well as daily activities within the pesantren [23]. Meanwhile, document analysis was used to examine documents related to pesantren management, such as internal regulations, curricula, and

annual reports, which provide an overview of the conditions and developments in the pesantren [24].

The data analysis in this study was conducted using thematic analysis techniques. The first step involved the transcription of interviews, carried out meticulously and systematically to ensure that all obtained information could be analyzed comprehensively [25]. Subsequently, the researchers categorized the collected data to identify key themes related to leadership, teacher recruitment, and the sustainability of pesantren [26]. Data obtained from observations and documentation were also analyzed to provide additional context to the findings derived from the interviews [27]; [14]. Relevant data were then coded and further analyzed to explore the relationships between various factors influencing the sustainability of pesantren and to identify emerging patterns and trends from the collected information [28]. The results of this analysis will be used to answer the research questions and provide actionable recommendations for the future management of pesantren.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

#### The role of leadership in Pesantren

The role of leadership in pesantren is crucial, as leaders are responsible for setting the direction and educational goals to be achieved [29]. Kyai Ushuluddin, the leader of Pondok Pesantren Al-Muntahy, emphasized that the primary responsibility of a pesantren leader is not merely administrative management but also serving as a role model for both students (santri) and teachers in their daily lives.

*The role of leadership in pesantren is very important because I am responsible for the direction and educational objectives we aim to achieve. As a leader, I must ensure that the pesantren operates in alignment with our vision and mission, which are firmly rooted in Islamic values (KU-20)*

According to him, leadership in pesantren places greater emphasis on setting an example in aspects of morality (akhlak), knowledge, and discipline, rather than merely asserting authority [30].

In fulfilling his role, Kyai Ushuluddin faces various challenges, particularly in maintaining a balance between the long-standing traditions of pesantren and the demands of modern times. He stated:

*The greatest challenge I face is how to maintain a balance between the long-established traditions of pesantren and the developments of the modern era. Pesantren must preserve its identity as a faith-based educational institution, but at the same time, we must also remain open to advancements in science and technology (KU-20).*

In addition, sustaining the pesantren with limited resources poses a significant obstacle, especially in terms of funding and facility management [31]. Kyai Ahmad emphasized that effective management and adaptability to contemporary developments are crucial to ensuring that pesantren remain relevant.

To ensure that the vision and mission of the pesantren are effectively implemented, Kyai Ushuluddin prioritizes open communication with the administrators and teachers.

*I always strive to maintain good communication with all administrators and teachers. Every month, we hold meetings to evaluate activities and plan future steps (KU-20).*

He also recognizes the importance of regular training for teachers to support their professional development and enable more effective teaching methods. By fostering harmonious relationships and leading by example, Kyai Ushuluddin aims for the pesantren to continue evolving as an adaptive educational institution while preserving its longstanding traditional values.

The recruitment process for teachers at Pondok Pesantren Al-Muntahy is conducted with great care to ensure that prospective teachers not only possess strong academic abilities but also demonstrate a firm commitment to religious education [32]. The selection process begins with an interview to assess the candidates' understanding of the pesantren's vision and mission, followed by a teaching demonstration to evaluate their ability to deliver material effectively to the students [33]. The primary criteria sought in prospective teachers include a deep understanding of Islamic teachings, particularly in fiqh, tafsir, and hadith [34]. Additionally, Kyai Ushuluddin emphasizes the importance of communication skills to ensure that teachers can convey knowledge in a way that is easily understood by the students.

*Recruitment opportunities are typically announced within the pesantren community, and alumni with teaching experience are often encouraged to apply. The pesantren also prioritizes teachers with strong character, who can serve as role models for the students and guide them not only academically but also in cultivating good moral values (KU-21).*

The dedication and readiness of teachers to work hard in advancing the pesantren are crucial aspects of the selection process. To ensure that newly recruited teachers can adapt to the pesantren's system and culture, the institution provides training and orientation programs for new teachers [35]. Kyai Ushuluddin stated that the adaptation process is continuously monitored through regular evaluations to assess whether the teachers meet expectations in terms of teaching performance and character-building for the students.

The main challenge in teacher recruitment lies in finding educators who not only master the subject matter but also possess the ability to integrate Islamic values into their teaching [36].

*We also conduct mentoring programs where experienced teachers guide new ones in classroom management and student interaction. Additionally, we frequently organize specialized training for our teachers, focusing on both teaching methodologies and deeper understanding of Islamic principles (KU-21).*

The institution hopes that recruited teachers will carry out their responsibilities with high levels of dedication and accountability, serving as role models in both knowledge and moral character [37]. Kyai Ushuluddin expressed his expectation that teachers would actively contribute to the development of the pesantren and consistently uphold Islamic values in every aspect of their teaching.

### **Integration of Leadership and Recruitment for Sustainability**

Observations on the integration of leadership and recruitment in pesantren reveal that these two aspects play a critical role in ensuring the sustainability of pesantren educational institutions [2], [38]. At Pondok Pesantren Al-Muntahy, under the leadership of Kyai Ushuluddin Abdul Mannan, the integration of visionary leadership and selective

recruitment strategies has been effectively implemented. Strong leadership ensures the achievement of the pesantren's vision and mission, while a rigorous recruitment process ensures that only teachers with high dedication and competencies aligned with the pesantren's values are selected to join.

Kyai Ushuluddin, who has led the pesantren for 15 years, employs an open communication system between administrators and teachers [39]. This approach not only fosters a conducive working environment but also ensures that every decision made prioritizes the sustainability of the pesantren's education system [40].

*We hold monthly meetings to evaluate and plan future steps. In these meetings, I provide guidance and listen to feedback from teachers. We also provide training and mentoring for new teachers to help them quickly adapt to the pesantren's established system (KU-22).*

This system ensures that every teacher feels involved in decision-making processes and develops a sense of responsibility for the pesantren's progress [41].

In terms of recruitment, this pesantren adopts a comprehensive strategy by prioritizing prospective teachers who not only possess strong academic knowledge but are also capable of integrating Islamic values into their teaching practices [42]. The selection process involves several stages, including interviews and teaching demonstrations, to ensure that recruited teachers meet the established standards [43]. This process also evaluates the candidates' ability to adapt to the pesantren's culture, which emphasizes a deeper approach to religious and character education [44].

Overall, these observations highlight that the integration of strong leadership and effective recruitment strategies is crucial for ensuring the sustainability of the pesantren [45], [46]. With leadership that not only manages but also sets an example, combined with recruitment that emphasizes quality and commitment to the pesantren's vision and mission, Al-Muntahy Islamic Boarding School can continue to thrive, preserve its traditions, and adapt to modern developments. The sustainability of this pesantren is maintained through continuous efforts to develop high-quality human resources and foster strong relationships among leaders, teachers, and students [47].

### **Challenges and solutions**

This in-depth interview was conducted with Kyai Ushuluddin Abdul Mannan, the leader of the Al-Muntahy Islamic Boarding School (Pondok Pesantren), who has led the institution for 15 years. Kyai Ushuluddin explained that the main challenge in managing a pesantren is maintaining a balance between the pesantren's traditions and the demands of contemporary developments [9]. According to him, the pesantren must continue to uphold the integrity of religious education and the moral character of the students, while also adapting to advancements in the fields of education and technology.

*As an Islamic boarding school, we must continue to preserve the integrity of religious education and the moral conduct of our students. However, on the other hand, we must also adapt to the developments in the educational world and technology (KU-23).*

Another challenge is finding teachers who not only possess a deep understanding of religion but are also able to convey knowledge effectively and in a manner that is easily understood by the students [48].

To address these challenges, Kyai Ushuluddin revealed that the pesantren focuses on an integrative approach between tradition and technology. The pesantren conducts training sessions for teachers on the use of digital media as teaching aids and provides

training for students to use technology in a safe and productive manner [49]. Furthermore, in its search for qualified teachers, the pesantren has developed a more selective and proactive recruitment system [50]. Kyai Ushuluddin also emphasized the importance of leadership in facing these challenges. He explained that a pesantren leader must possess flexible and visionary leadership.

*We try to integrate technology into the learning process in a positive manner. We frequently hold training sessions and workshops to improve our teachers' competencies, both in terms of teaching methods and strengthening their understanding of religion. As a leader, I must be able to understand the situation and provide appropriate guidance (KU-23).*

Leadership in the pesantren is not limited to administrative management but also includes setting a good example for both teachers and students [51]. Kyai Ushuluddin strives to encourage teachers to continuously develop and innovate in their teaching methods, as well as to build strong communication with students so they feel valued and engaged in the educational process.

In addressing various challenges, Kyai Ushuluddin emphasized the importance of open communication among the leadership, administrators, and teachers of the pesantren [39].

*We frequently hold meetings with the pesantren's administration and teachers to discuss the existing issues and collaboratively seek solutions (KU-23).*

He believes that with effective communication, the pesantren can overcome any challenges it faces. Overall, the challenges faced by Al-Muntahy Pesantren, both internal and external, can be addressed through strong leadership and innovative solutions, such as the integration of technology, enhancement of teacher competencies, and character development.

## **Discussion**

The discussion of the findings from this study reveals that the sustainability of the pesantren is significantly influenced by two main factors: visionary leadership and the quality of teacher recruitment. Visionary leadership is at the core of the pesantren's success in facing the ever-changing challenges of the times [52]. Leadership that functions not only as an administrative guide but also as a model of moral and intellectual integrity establishes a strong foundation for the pesantren to remain relevant in the modern era [53]. These findings reinforce the theory that visionary leadership is a key element in creating an organization capable of adapting to environmental dynamics without losing its core values [54], [55]. The success of the pesantren in blending tradition with modernity provides concrete evidence of how visionary leadership contributes to the sustainability of the institution.

The adaptive leadership of the pesantren to technological developments is also a critical point in this discussion. The integration of technology into the pesantren's educational process demonstrates that flexibility in responding to the demands of the times can be achieved without compromising Islamic principles [56]. This approach not only adds value to education within the pesantren but also ensures the institution's relevance in the global educational context. Pesantren that can strategically leverage technology while maintaining their traditional identity offer an exemplary model for managing change [57].

The quality of teacher recruitment is also a key focus of this discussion. A rigorous selection process to choose teachers who are not only academically competent but also possess high moral integrity is crucial for the success of education in the pesantren [58]. Teachers are not only responsible for delivering academic content but also play a central role in shaping the character of the students [59]. This aligns with educational theory, which positions teachers as role models who significantly influence the moral and intellectual development of students [60]. The findings of this study suggest that the sustainability of the pesantren is closely linked to the success of creating a conducive learning environment through the presence of high-quality teachers.

Furthermore, this discussion highlights the importance of effective communication between leaders, administrators, and teachers in fostering organizational harmony. Open communication allows for the alignment of the pesantren's vision and mission with its operational activities [57]. With a well-established communication system, every strategic decision can be made with a stronger foundation and focused on the institution's long-term sustainability [61]. These findings make a significant contribution to understanding how internal organizational dynamics affect the long-term success of the pesantren.

This study provides comprehensive insights, revealing that the sustainability of pesantren depends on the synergy between visionary leadership, the quality of teacher recruitment, adaptability to technology, and effective organizational communication. In an ever-changing era, pesantren that can preserve their traditional identity while strategically responding to external changes have a significant opportunity to survive and thrive. This research lays a strong foundation for developing more innovative and future-oriented strategies in pesantren leadership and management.

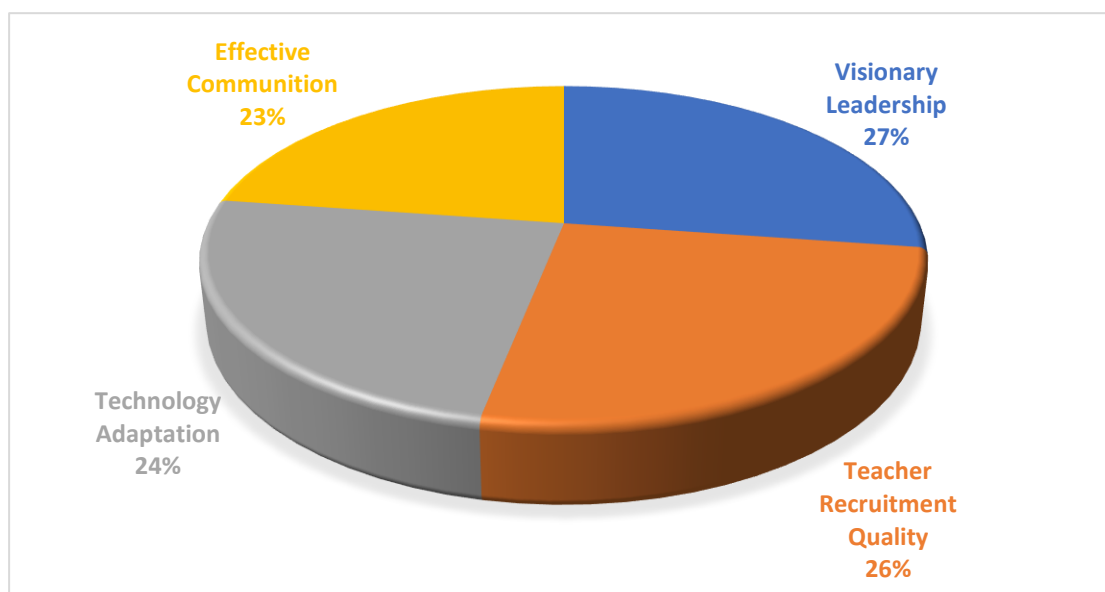
The following tables and charts are provided to support the discussion of the research findings:

**Table 1.** The influence of key factors on the sustainability of Pesantren

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Impact on Pesantren Sustainability</b>
<b>Visionary Leadership</b>	Key to addressing modern challenges while maintaining Islamic values.	Provides strong foundation for modern relevance.
<b>Teacher Recruitment Quality</b>	Selective process emphasizing academic competence and moral integrity.	Ensures conducive learning environment and character building.
<b>Technology Adaptation</b>	Strategic integration of technology in education without losing traditional identity	Maintains educational relevance in global context.
<b>Effective Communication</b>	Open communication aligns organizational vision with operational activities.	Enhances decision-making and organizational harmony.



The table illustrates four key factors influencing the sustainability of pesantren: visionary leadership, teacher recruitment quality, technological adaptation, and effective communication. Each factor is described in terms of its role in fostering a relevant and sustainable educational environment. Visionary leadership serves as the core of pesantren's success by providing clear direction and building a solid foundation. Teacher recruitment quality emphasizes the importance of rigorous selection processes to ensure that teachers are not only academically competent but also possess moral integrity, which contributes to shaping the students' character. Technological adaptation highlights how pesantren can maintain relevance without losing their traditional identity, while effective communication ensures alignment between the pesantren's vision and its operational implementation. These four factors synergistically create a positive impact on the sustainability of pesantren amidst the challenges of the modern era.



**Diagram 1.** Influence level of factors on Pesantren sustainability

The diagram above illustrates the influence levels of four key factors on the sustainability of pesantren: visionary leadership, teacher recruitment quality, technology adaptation, and effective communication. Each factor is represented as a proportional segment in the diagram, with visionary leadership showing the greatest impact.

## CONCLUSION

**Fundamental Finding :** This study finds that the sustainability of pesantren is significantly influenced by visionary leadership and the quality of teacher recruitment. Visionary leadership helps balance tradition with modern demands and supports the integration of technology in education. Moreover, selective teacher recruitment, focusing on both academic competence and moral character, enhances educational outcomes and student development. **Implication :** The findings suggest that pesantren should prioritize developing adaptive leadership models and robust teacher recruitment systems to ensure their long-term sustainability in the modern era. **Limitation :** The study's scope is limited to a single pesantren, which may not fully capture the broader variations in leadership and recruitment practices across different pesantren. **Future Research :** Future studies

should explore how pesantren can effectively integrate technology while preserving traditional values, investigate the role of internal communication in enhancing pesantren performance, and examine the impact of external support, such as government or community involvement, on the sustainability of pesantren.

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