

The Leadership Strategy of Young Kiai in the Management of Establishing Islamic Educational Institutions at Darul Amanah Foundation, Bedono

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe and analyze the leadership strategy of Kiyai Ahmad Mustafidin in the establishment and development of Islamic educational institutions under the auspices of the Darul Amanah Foundation, located in Bedono, Jambu District, Semarang Regency. The phenomenon of young *kiyai* leadership, who not only fulfill spiritual and religious roles but also emerge as managerial and transformational actors, serves as the main background of this research. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed using a case study method. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. The data were analyzed inductively through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The main informant was Kiyai Ahmad Mustafidin, supported by teachers, foundation administrators, community leaders, and members of IPNU and IPPNU. The findings reveal that Kiyai Ahmad's leadership is visionary, transformational, and values-based. He successfully established the educational institution from the ground up by engaging various community elements and external partners. The strategies applied include long-term planning, strengthening of organizational structure, integration of digital technology, youth cadre development through IPNU-IPPNU, and the institutional embedding of pesantren values such as *adab* (ethics), *tarbiyah* (education), and *tadris* (teaching) within a modern management system. Moreover, his adaptive capacity in responding to challenges such as fire crises and clean water shortages demonstrates a resilient and responsive leadership model.

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1. INTRODUCTION

One of the foundational premises of this research lies in the understanding that education in Islam is a divine trust (*amanah ilahiyah*), encompassing both prophetic and social dimensions. From an Islamic perspective, the ideal educational leader is one who can balance three primary roles: *tadris* (instruction), *ta'dib* (character formation), and *tarbiyah* (nurturing development). As Pramita et al. (2023) assert, these three concepts form a comprehensive framework for Islamic education: *tadris* addresses the cognitive dimension, *tarbiyah* supports personal growth, and *ta'dib* cultivates moral integrity. The Qur'an provides a strong foundation for the importance of trustworthy and visionary leadership in managing community affairs, as illustrated in Surah Al-Baqarah [2]: 247, "Indeed, Allah has chosen Talut as your king and has increased him abundantly in knowledge and stature." This verse highlights that a leader must possess both knowledge and strategic capability. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) further emphasized that every leader is a shepherd (*ra'in*) responsible for their flock (Bukhari & Muslim, as cited in Ramayulis, 2010).

Nationally, the constitutional foundation of education is affirmed in Article 31(3) of the 1945 Constitution, which states, "The government shall endeavor and organize a national education system that enhances faith, piety, and noble character." In the context of Islamic education, Ministry of Education Regulation No. 1 of 2021 on the Establishment of Educational Institutions requires that the founding of educational institutions adhere to principles of good governance, efficiency, and relevance (Kemdikbud, 2021). Therefore, leadership in founding Islamic educational institutions is not merely a manifestation of spiritual idealism, but also demands managerial competence, academic integrity, and strategic community engagement.

This research contributes to the global discourse by enriching the body of knowledge on Islamic educational leadership through the lens of a young, visionary, and values-based *kiyai* leadership model, particularly in the context of founding Islamic educational institutions. While most literature focuses on senior figures and well-established institutions (Syam, 2018; Marzuki, 2021), this study offers a new perspective on the role of young Muslim leaders in institution-building through community engagement, spirituality, and professionalism. These findings have global relevance, especially for Muslim-majority countries facing the challenge of regenerating religious leadership (Assegaf & Wahid, 2023), and can serve as practical references for formulating policies on locally-rooted Islamic education empowerment at regional and international levels (Abdullah, 2020).

Transformational leadership theory — a model emphasizing a leader's ability to inspire change through vision, empowerment, and value-based motivation — is a central framework in this research. Iwan Kurniawan et al. (2024), in a quantitative study on Salafiyah boarding schools in Banten, found that visionary and transformational leadership significantly improves managerial satisfaction, which in turn positively impacts institutional quality. Additionally, Jasni et al. (2023), in a qualitative study of waqf institutions in Malaysia, emphasized that such leadership inspires followers while acting as value-based change agents. In this context, transformational leadership is highly relevant for analyzing the strategic actions of Kiyai Ahmad Mustafidin in formulating institutional vision, inspiring students and the community, and mobilizing resources to establish a holistic and sustainable educational institution.

Leadership in Islamic education involves not only managing established institutions but also initiating their founding — a process that demands Islamic vision, managerial skill, and social resilience. In Indonesia's pesantren tradition, *kiyai* figures have long played a central role in independently and communally establishing Islamic institutions rooted in religious values (Dhofier, 2011). However, recent generational shifts have introduced a transformation: the emergence of young *kiyai* taking prominent roles in pioneering and leading the establishment of Islamic educational institutions using more adaptive and contextual approaches (Syam, 2018).

This phenomenon is exemplified by Kiyai Ahmad Mustafidin, S.Pd., M.S.I., a young leader who, since 2021, has pioneered the establishment of an Islamic educational institution under the Darul Amanah Bedono Foundation, located in Jambu District, Semarang Regency. Despite his young age, he began from the ground up, with an initial endowment of approximately 500 m² of land and a semi-

permanent building used for a Qur'anic learning center (TPQ) and religious activities. He faced significant challenges, including limited human resources, inadequate infrastructure, and public skepticism regarding the leadership capacity of the younger generation.

Based on pre-research observation (June 2025), the foundation has shown rapid development. It currently operates formal educational units including a kindergarten/elementary school (RA/MI), a junior high school (MTs), and a senior high school (MA). MTs Darul Amanah received its operational permit in July 2023 (Decree No. 936/2023), while MA was officially established in June 2021 (Decree No. 592/2022) and has been accredited with an "A" rating. The institution now serves over 200 students. The journey has not been without setbacks: in October 2023, a fire destroyed three classrooms. Nevertheless, the crisis was overcome with support from BAZNAS and the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Water access also posed a challenge, addressed through the construction of a deep well with a 3 m³/hour flow rate in August 2022, made possible through collaboration with LAZNAS Nurul Hayat.

Kiyai Ahmad Mustafidin has also successfully built strategic partnerships with various institutions such as the Ministry of Religious Affairs, LAZNAS, BAZNAS, and other educational organizations. Flagship programs such as *murobbi* training, teacher cadre scholarships, and the "Darbe Football Cup" youth tournament demonstrate that his leadership goes beyond formal education to emphasize character development, community engagement, and public education (darulamanahbedono.com; researchgate.net).

From an academic standpoint, this research is important due to the current dominance of scholarly literature focusing on senior *kiyai* and well-established pesantren, rather than young *kiyai* involved in the foundational stages of institution-building. This reveals a significant research gap (Marzuki, 2021). Few studies explore how young *kiyai* construct educational management systems from scratch, navigate social challenges, and integrate traditional values with modern governance in the digital era. This research specifically investigates the leadership strategy of Kiyai Ahmad Mustafidin in managing the establishment of Islamic educational institutions under the Darul Amanah Bedono Foundation. His strategy encompasses strategic planning (legal permits, operational decrees, funding), community and stakeholder engagement, human resource development, and institutional crisis response.

The aim of this research is to provide a detailed description of the leadership strategies employed by Kiyai Ahmad Mustafidin during the founding process of the Islamic educational institution under the Darul Amanah Bedono Foundation. It also seeks to identify supporting and inhibiting factors — both internal and external — that affect the success of leadership during this pioneering phase. Furthermore, the study aims to formulate a relevant and contextual model of Islamic leadership that can serve as a reference for future generations of *kiyai* in sustainably establishing and managing Islamic educational institutions. This study's specific focus on the foundational phase of Islamic educational institution building rather than routine development or management — sets it apart from earlier works. It employs an integrative managerial approach that combines the spiritual and cultural foundations of pesantren tradition, modern management professionalism, and public engagement as a form of social empowerment.

Additionally, this study is based on authentic field data and official documents, thus offering both practical and theoretical contributions to the development of Islamic educational leadership studies, particularly within the context of leadership regeneration in Islamic institutions in Indonesia. Through this research, it is hoped that a contextual and sustainable Islamic leadership model can be discovered — one that serves as a strategic reference for young Muslim leaders in founding and managing value-based, community-rooted, and innovation-driven Islamic educational institutions

2. METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach is considered appropriate for exploring in depth the leadership process of Kiyai Ahmad Mustafidin in pioneering and managing the establishment of an Islamic educational institution at the Darul Amanah Bedono Foundation. A case study enables the researcher to examine the leadership phenomenon intensively within its real-life context, particularly the accompanying social, spiritual, and institutional

dynamics (Yin, 2018). The main subject of this research is Kiyai Ahmad Mustafidin as the central figure, supported by other informants such as foundation administrators, teachers, students (*santri*), parents, and institutional partners like LAZNAS, the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag), and BAZNAS. The subjects were selected purposively based on their direct knowledge and experience related to the founding and management of the institution (Sugiyono, 2022).

The research procedure began with a preliminary study to understand the contextual background, followed by the development of research instruments, data collection in the field, analysis, and validation of findings. The primary materials in this study consist of official foundation documents (decrees, program reports, online publications), empirical data from field observations, and in-depth narratives from informants. Data collection was conducted using three main techniques: (1) in-depth interviews with the main figure and key informants to explore leadership strategies and influencing factors; (2) participant observation of institutional, educational, and community-based social activities; and (3) documentation of official archives, event photos, websites, and relevant media coverage (Creswell, 2016). The main instrument in this research is the researcher as a human instrument, supported by open-ended interview guidelines, observation sheets, and document checklists to ensure traceability and consistency in field data collection. These instruments were developed based on indicators of transformational leadership, dimensions of Islamic educational management, and community-based approaches.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model by Miles and Huberman (2014), which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Analysis was carried out simultaneously with data collection, enabling each finding to be confirmed and reinforced by other sources. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources and techniques, member checking with key informants, and maintaining an audit trail throughout the analytical process. Through this systematic and triangulated approach, the study aims to authentically describe the leadership strategies of a young *kiyai* in building a value-based and community-rooted Islamic educational institution in the contemporary era. Ethical considerations were prioritized, not only in administrative matters but also in upholding moral values such as honesty, responsibility, and respect for the dignity of participants (Misbah et al., 2025).

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to describe the leadership strategies of Kiyai Ahmad Mustafidin in pioneering and establishing an Islamic educational institution under the auspices of the Darul Amanah Bedono Foundation. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation of various archives and official publications (Interview, Senior Teacher, June 14, 2025; Field Observation, June 17, 2025; Foundation Strategic Document, 2022–2026). The theoretical framework used to analyze the findings includes transformational leadership theory by Bass and Riggio (2006), which emphasizes that leaders must be able to inspire followers, articulate a clear vision of the future, and foster individual development. In addition, participative leadership theory by Northouse (2021) was used to examine how leaders engage communities and staff in decision-making processes. In the context of Islamic education, prophetic leadership theory, as explained by Ramayulis (2010), is also relevant, as it stresses the importance of spiritual, ethical, and social dimensions in leadership practice.

3.1 Leadership Strategies in Establishing the Institution

Observations indicate that Kiyai Ahmad Mustafidin demonstrated a visionary and transformational leadership style. He holds a long-term vision to develop the educational institution in Bedono into a center for character building and knowledge grounded in Islamic values. This vision is evident in his ability to inspire teachers, students (*santri*), and the community to participate in building infrastructure, organizing training programs, and forming strategic partnerships (Observation, Construction Activities, June 17, 2025). This leadership style aligns with Bass and Riggio's (2006) concept of transformational leadership, which portrays leaders as change agents capable of fostering collective commitment.

His leadership is marked by bold strategic decisions from the early stages of the foundation's establishment, such as acquiring waqf land and initiating the construction of TPQ facilities. These steps laid the groundwork for the institution's sustainability (Foundation Meeting Minutes, 2021). His vision is also reflected in the development of a curriculum that integrates spiritual values with contemporary learning approaches. Kiyai Ahmad Mustafidin employs an empowering approach by involving young teachers and future leaders in the foundation's management process. Their active participation reflects a planned leadership succession model. This strategy reinforces institutional sustainability through cadre development, consistent with Yukl's (2013) concept of empowering leadership, which encourages leaders to nurture new leaders through training and gradually increased responsibilities.

In an interview, a foundation board member stated: "Pak Kiyai always gives us space to express our opinions, even in technical matters such as assigning student duties and developing the foundation's business units" (Interview, Foundation Board Member, June 14, 2025). This reflects a participative leadership style as described by Northouse (2021), in which deliberative processes enhance a sense of institutional ownership. Kiyai Ahmad Mustafidin's communication strategy is also notably effective. He regularly shares institutional updates through Friday sermons, routine religious gatherings, and the foundation's social media channels. Documentation in the form of social media screenshots shows how he manages public perception and builds trust through transparent information sharing (Foundation Social Media Documentation, May 2025). This reinforces the role of the leader as the primary communicator, in line with Mintzberg's (2009) theory that communication is essential for maintaining the alignment between a leader's vision and actions.

3.2 Community Role and Social Participation

Interviews with community leaders and parents of students reveal a high level of public engagement. Local residents voluntarily contributed to the construction of buildings, the provision of clean water, and became regular donors to support the foundation's development (Interview, Community Leader RW 03, June 15, 2025). Community participation was not limited to material support but also encompassed spiritual involvement. Many local figures participated in religious activities and supported programs such as Qur'anic study groups (*pengajian*) and vocational training for students. This indicates that the institution has become a center of social and religious interaction within the community. During the process of establishing and developing the institution, community members were involved in consultative forums that bridged local educational needs with the foundation's vision. This level of involvement strengthened the community's sense of belonging to the institution.

Observations revealed that mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) was a regular practice in the institution's physical development. For instance, the construction of new classrooms in 2023 was funded through community donations collected via neighborhood (*RT*) savings groups (Monthly Financial Documentation of the Foundation, December 2023). Additionally, photographic documentation of community activities shows active participation in Islamic holiday celebrations, communal clean-ups, and parenting events for students' guardians. These activities reinforce the institution's identity as a shared community asset rather than a privately owned entity (Observation, Foundation Information System, June 17, 2025). This phenomenon aligns with Putnam's (2000) theory of social capital, which posits that social institutions become stronger when the community feels a sense of ownership in their continuity.

3.3 Crisis Management and Social Resilience

In the context of crisis leadership, Kiyai Ahmad Mustafidin's leadership style reflects elements of adaptive leadership theory, as developed by Heifetz et al. (2009), which emphasizes the ability to face challenges that lack immediate technical solutions. His prompt response to a fire incident and a clean water crisis demonstrates systemic and collaborative adaptability. This resilient leadership is further evident in his preventive and reconstructive measures, such as emergency response training and the installation of a security system. These actions support the view of Lengnick-Hall et al. (2011), which

suggests that resilient organizations are those that can learn from crises and emerge stronger through the implementation of improved systems. Documentation indicates that the foundation conducted emergency response training facilitated by LAZNAS volunteers following the fire (Emergency Response Training Documentation, November 2023).

The leadership model based on inter-institutional synergy—such as collaborations with BAZNAS and LAZNAS—also reflects an interdependent approach closely related to the concept of network governance, as described by Provan & Kenis (2008). This highlights the role of the leader as a network broker who manages strategic external relations. Field observations confirmed visits and collaborative actions with external parties during emergency response efforts (Field Observation, June 17, 2025).

From an ethical and trust-based perspective, the foundation's openness and transparency during the crisis demonstrated values-based leadership. In an interview, one of the teachers remarked: "The fire made us realize that the foundation is not just a building, but a unity of spirit. Our motivation even increased afterward" (Interview, MTs Teacher, June 14, 2025). Thus, Kiyai Ahmad Mustafidin's crisis management strategy was not only technical but also moral and relational, reinforcing the characteristics of strong, responsive, and solution-oriented Islamic leadership. This is also reflected in post-fire reports showing adjustments in security policies and participatory reconstruction programs (Rehabilitation Report Documentation, October 2023)

3.4 Managerial Professionalism

The management strategy of the foundation, rooted in accountability and a structured workflow, reflects the principles of modern educational management. This approach aligns with Mintzberg's (2009) theory, which states that leaders must simultaneously assume multiple managerial roles—namely, as symbolic figureheads, problem solvers, and innovators. The integration of digital technology in reporting and monitoring is also consistent with the concept of *e-leadership* proposed by Avolio et al. (2014), which emphasizes the use of digital tools to enhance communication, coordination, and evaluation within organizations.

Furthermore, the teacher development system, implemented through *murobbi* mentoring and cadre formation programs, illustrates the application of the *instructional leadership* model (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985), where leaders support the professional growth of educators to improve learning outcomes. The active involvement of teachers in evaluation meetings and program planning demonstrates the practice of *distributed leadership*, as defined by Spillane (2006), in which leadership responsibilities are shared across various members of the organization. This creates a collaborative, non-centralized organizational culture. Overall, Kiyai Ahmad Mustafidin's professional leadership model showcases the integration of modern governance structures with the ethical traditions of the pesantren, making him a figure of adaptive and progressive Islamic educational leadership.

This was affirmed by an IPNU advisor during an interview: "IPNU and IPPNU cadres are deliberately involved in the daily management of the foundation. They learn how to write activity reports, draft proposals, and document programs digitally. This provides them with essential skills for future leadership" (Interview, IPNU Advisor, June 14, 2025). The involvement of these young cadres further reinforces the principle of *distributed leadership*, fostering a participatory, community-based organizational culture. In its entirety, Kiyai Ahmad Mustafidin's professional leadership approach demonstrates a sustainable model through the integration of modern management practices, a structured IPNU–IPPNU cadre system, and the traditional ethics of pesantren life.

3.5 Integration of Traditional and Modern Values

Kiyai Ahmad Mustafidin's efforts to integrate the values of *adab* (etiquette), *tarbiyah* (education), and *tadris* (teaching) into a modern institutional system demonstrate an integrative Islamic leadership style. This approach reflects the perspective of Assegaf and Wahid (2023), who highlight the importance of harmonizing the transcendent values of Islam with the practical demands of modern organizational life. Additionally, the strengthening of organizational culture through the internalization of core values such as spirituality, responsibility, and communal unity resonates with

Schein's (2010) theory that effective leaders are those who successfully embed core values into everyday organizational practices.

Traditional pesantren practices such as *halaqah* (study circles), *tahfidz* (Qur'an memorization), and *amaliyah tadrīs* (teaching practicum) continue to be preserved as vital elements of institutional culture at the Darul Amanah Bedono Foundation. A notable example is the *Amaliyah Tadrīs* program conducted by the graduating students of MA Darul Amanah in January 2025, which serves as a platform for strengthening pedagogical skills grounded in Islamic values (darulamanahbedono.com, 2025).

The foundation's ability to adopt technological advancements without abandoning Islamic principles reflects a deep understanding of *ijtihad manajerial*—a concept in Islamic education that encourages innovation grounded in scriptural evidence and communal benefit (Abdullah, 2020). Moreover, the relationship between leaders and staff, built upon mutual trust and respect (*adab*), represents a model of *spiritual leadership*, in which work motivation stems from faith and moral responsibility (Fry, 2003). Thus, Kiyai Ahmad Mustafidin's leadership not only meets contemporary demands but also preserves the timeless values of Islam. His approach stands as a concrete example of contextual Islamic leadership that successfully bridges the gap between traditional foundations and future-oriented transformation.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion of this research, the researcher concludes the following:

4.1 Visionary, Transformational, and Cadre-Based

Leadership Kiyai Ahmad Mustafidin demonstrates a contemporary Islamic leadership style that is both visionary and transformational in the establishment of Islamic educational institutions under the auspices of the Darul Amanah Bedono Foundation. His leadership has successfully driven institutional transformation from the ground up by prioritizing spiritual, social, and self-reliance values. A participatory approach involving teachers, students (*santri*), parents, and external partners such as the Ministry of Religious Affairs, BAZNAS, and LAZNAS served as the main foundation for success. One of his key strategies is the empowerment of young cadres through the active involvement of IPNU and IPPNU as future leadership agents. These youth are empowered not only in educational and religious activities but also in institutional decision-making and management processes. This reflects a strong long-term commitment to building inclusive, progressive, and sustainable leadership.

4.2 Adaptive, Accountable, and Responsive Management

In responding to real-world challenges such as a fire incident and a clean water crisis, Kiyai Ahmad Mustafidin exhibited adaptive, solution-oriented, and collaborative leadership. His swift and transparent responses—coordinated in synergy with the local community and partner institutions—demonstrated both social resilience and managerial maturity. The foundation's management is rooted in the principles of transparency, accountability, and the integration of information technology, aligning with modern leadership practices. Programs such as *murobbi*-based teacher mentoring, regular institutional evaluations, and the inclusion of IPNU–IPPNU cadres in the organizational structure reflect an empowering leadership style that nurtures human resource potential and fosters a dynamic, productive organizational culture.

4.2 Integration of Traditional Values and Modern Innovation

One of the core strengths of Kiyai Ahmad Mustafidin's leadership lies in his ability to integrate the traditional values of *adab* (ethics), *tarbiyah* (education), and *tadrīs* (instruction) into a professional institutional system. Pesantren traditions such as *halaqah*, *tahfidz*, and *amaliyah tadrīs* are not abandoned but instead serve as the foundation for character development and student competency. The *Amaliyah Tadrīs* program conducted by the graduating class of MA Darul Amanah is a tangible example of pedagogical skill development rooted in Islamic values. On the other hand, the utilization of information technology for reporting, documentation, and internal communication highlights an innovative spirit that does not compromise Islamic principles. Leadership relationships are built on

trust, ethics, and moral exemplarity—rather than mere structural formality. Thus, Kiyai Ahmad Mustafidin represents a contextual Islamic leadership model: rooted in tradition, open to change, and grounded in noble values to address contemporary challenges sustainably. His leadership offers a progressive, contextually relevant model for Islamic education that can serve as a strategic reference for the next generation of *kiyai* in Indonesia and other Muslim-majority countries.

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