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Visionary Leadership in Islamic Boarding Schools: Implications for Institutional Management within the Barakka Framework

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Abstract: Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) in Indonesia faced increasing pressure to modernize their institutional governance while preserving their religious identity and cultural values. Despite growing interest in educational leadership in Islamic contexts, limited research had examined how local spiritual frameworks such as the *Barakka* paradigm influenced institutional management practices. This study addressed that gap by investigating how visionary leadership, grounded in *Barakka*, a concept of divine blessing and moral authority, was translated into effective management strategies in pesantren settings. The research focused on the As'adiyah Sengkang Islamic Boarding School, a prominent pesantren in South Sulawesi known for its progressive yet tradition-based leadership model. The population for this study comprised key stakeholders within the pesantren community, including the lead *kyai*, senior administrators, Islamic teachers (*ustadz*), alumni in leadership roles, and senior students (*santri*). A total of 18 participants were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using three main instruments: in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observation conducted over three months, and document analysis of institutional records, classical texts (*kitab kuning*), and strategic plans. The data were analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis, which enabled the identification of core themes related to leadership experience and institutional change. The findings revealed that visionary leadership at As'adiyah operationalized the *Barakka* paradigm through strategic human resource placement ("the right person in the right place"), the shift from traditional to lean management systems, the

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adoption of digital technologies for data oversight, and the fostering of stakeholder collaboration. These leadership strategies improved coordination, enhanced institutional credibility, increased transparency and accountability, and opened new pathways for educational and *da'wah* (Islamic propagation) development. The study concluded that visionary leadership rooted in Islamic spiritual values significantly contributed to the modernization and professionalization of pesantren governance. It recommended that Islamic educational institutions consider integrating culturally embedded leadership frameworks with contemporary management principles to foster sustainable institutional growth.

Keywords: Visionary Leadership; Institutional Management; Islamic Boarding School; Barakka Paradigm; Educational Transformation

1. Introduction

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) have long served as cornerstone institutions in Indonesia's educational and religious landscape (Chotimah et al., 2025; Masturin, 2025), with historical roots stretching back centuries. These schools are not merely centers for Islamic instruction but have played a vital role in shaping national identity (Pribadi, 2022), fostering moral development (Islamic et al., 2024), and contributing to socio-political movements (Ibrahim et al., 2024; Sebastian & Alkaff, 2024), including Indonesia's struggle for independence.

The continued relevance and endurance of pesantren can be attributed to their institutional adaptability, which has allowed them to evolve from traditional religious schools into dynamic educational settings that integrate classical Islamic teachings with modern curricula (Patriadi, 2017). Even amid the pressures of globalization and educational reform, these institutions have retained their cultural and spiritual significance, producing graduates who serve in both religious and secular capacities (Darmini, 2021).

At the heart of this institutional vitality lies the leadership of the kyai – a religious scholar whose influence is derived not only from formal Islamic scholarship but also from deep spiritual authority and communal respect (Karim et al., 2025; Auliyah et al., 2025). The kyai serves multiple functions: as an educator, a spiritual guide, and most crucially, as a visionary leader who articulates and sustains the long-term direction of the institution (Alazmi & Bush, 2024). In the pesantren context, leadership is not merely administrative but is deeply rooted in Islamic cultural frameworks, with concepts such as baraka (divine blessing) and amanah (trust) playing central roles in legitimizing authority (Ruhullah & Ushama, 2025).

While leadership traits such as conflict resolution, humility, independent thinking, effective communication, and positivity are undoubtedly important and present in many kyai, this study placed greater emphasis on visionary leadership because of its pivotal role in navigating institutional transformation amid shifting educational landscapes. Visionary leadership was observed to have the most profound and far-reaching impact on institutional resilience, particularly in integrating religious traditions with modernization, fostering innovation, and

mobilizing long-term change. Unlike other leadership qualities that may address short-term interpersonal or organizational challenges, visionary leadership equips the kyai with the capacity to articulate a compelling future, mobilize resources around shared goals, and sustain institutional relevance in the face of evolving societal demands.

Recent studies have highlighted multiple leadership styles within the pesantren ecosystem, including participatory (Karim et al., 2025), transformation (Prasmiwardana et al., 2025), and visionary models (Hafidloh, 2025), each contributing to different aspects of institutional development. However, much of this research remains localized and often descriptive, lacking theoretical synthesis with broader models of educational leadership. There remains a significant gap in understanding how Islamic leadership paradigms—especially those grounded in spiritual legitimacy and long-term vision—can inform or enrich global discussions on school leadership and institutional innovation. This study, therefore, aims to foreground visionary leadership not as an isolated trait but as a culturally grounded, transformational force central to sustaining and modernizing Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia.

Despite the growing body of research on Pesantren leadership, critical gaps remain that this study seeks to address. First, while existing studies acknowledge the kyai's role in sustaining Pesantren, few have systematically analyzed how spiritual authority, particularly the concept of baraka, intersects with modern leadership models such as visionary leadership. Understanding this dynamic is crucial, as it reveals the mechanisms through which religious leaders balance tradition and innovation in an increasingly complex educational landscape.

Second, most studies on kyai leadership are context-specific and lack theoretical integration with global educational leadership discourse. This limits the applicability of findings beyond Indonesia and prevents comparative analyses with other faith-based educational systems. Third, the strategic use of baraka in institutional governance remains underexplored, despite its potential to enhance community engagement and organizational resilience.

This study addresses these gaps by investigating the visionary leadership of the kyai at As'adiyah Sengkang Islamic Boarding School (Halim, 2018; Jubba et al., 2022), where baraka is strategically employed to reinforce governance and community engagement. Visionary leadership, as conceptualized by Nanus (1995), involves future-oriented thinking, the articulation of a compelling institutional vision, and the mobilization of collective action toward shared goals. In the Pesantren context, this framework intersects with Islamic principles of leadership, where spiritual authority and communal responsibility are paramount. By examining how baraka enhances visionary leadership, this study provides a nuanced understanding of how religious and cultural values shape leadership effectiveness in Islamic education.

The significance of this research extends beyond the Indonesian context, contributing to global conversations on faith-based educational leadership. The

findings have theoretical implications for bridging Islamic leadership studies with organizational and educational management literature, while also offering practical insights for *pesantren* leaders seeking to balance tradition and innovation. By examining the interplay between *baraka* and visionary leadership, this study enhances our understanding of how religious educational institutions sustain relevance in an era of rapid socio-cultural transformation. Ultimately, this research underscores the importance of culturally grounded leadership models in fostering institutional resilience and long-term success. To achieve the abovementioned objectives, the researchers formulate the following research question

“How has the visionary leadership of Kyai Nasaruddin Umar mediated between traditional Islamic values and modern management principles to transform As’adiyah Sengkang Islamic Boarding School?”

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study centers on visionary leadership (Nanus, 1995; Khan et al., 2024) as it manifests within the unique context of Islamic boarding schools, particularly through the lens of the Barakka paradigm. Visionary leadership theory, as originally conceptualized by Nanus (1995), emphasizes a leader’s capacity to develop and articulate a compelling future vision, inspires collective action, and drives meaningful organizational transformation. However, when applied to traditional religious institutions like *pesantren*, this leadership model takes on distinctive characteristics that blend modern management principles with deeply rooted Islamic spiritual and cultural values. The integration of the Barakka paradigm - which recognizes divine blessing and moral authority as central to leadership legitimacy - creates a hybrid model of leadership that is simultaneously progressive and tradition-bound.

At the heart of this adapted visionary leadership model (Khan et al., 2024) is the recognition that *pesantren* operate within a sacred institutional framework where spiritual considerations fundamentally shape organizational decision-making. The *kyai*, as the spiritual and institutional leader, exercises visionary leadership not merely through strategic planning or future-oriented thinking, but by consistently framing modernization efforts as natural extensions of Islamic values rather than departures from tradition.

This approach is exemplified in the case of As’adiyah Sengkang, where significant organizational changes such as the implementation of competency-based staffing systems were justified through careful reference to Quranic principles and prophetic traditions. By rooting reforms in Islamic epistemology, the leadership successfully positioned what might otherwise be seen as disruptive changes as fulfillments of religious obligation, thereby securing broad-based institutional support.

The Barakka paradigm plays a pivotal role in legitimizing and facilitating visionary leadership within the *pesantren* context. Unlike conventional organizational settings where leadership authority derives primarily from formal position or professional expertise, the *kyai*’s influence stems fundamentally from their perceived spiritual stature and the divine blessing (*baraka*) believed to

accompany their leadership. This spiritual dimension creates a powerful mechanism for change management, as evidenced at As'adiyah Sengkang where potentially controversial innovations were consistently presented as *wasilah* (means) to attain greater *baraka* - whether through improved educational outcomes, enhanced institutional reputation, or expanded *da'wah* impact. The empirical results of this approach are striking, with the study documenting an 87% staff compliance rate for major reforms, significantly higher than the 52% average observed in comparable institutional transitions.

What emerges from this analysis is a leadership model that successfully synthesizes seemingly contradictory forces - tradition and modernity, spiritual authority and rational management, cultural preservation and organizational innovation. The *kyai's* visionary leadership at As'adiyah Sengkang demonstrates how classical Islamic educational values can coexist with, and even enhance, contemporary management practices. This is perhaps best illustrated in the institution's "one clicks one data" policy, which implemented comprehensive digital transformation while maintaining traditional pedagogical methods like *bandongan* (group text study). By presenting technological adoption as a tool to strengthen rather than replace traditional learning, the leadership successfully navigated the tension between preservation and progress that often challenges religious educational institutions.

The theoretical implications of this *Barakka*-infused visionary leadership model are significant. It challenges conventional Western leadership theories that frequently marginalize or overlook spiritual and cultural dimensions of organizational life. The As'adiyah Sengkang case demonstrates how indigenous concepts like *baraka* can serve as powerful resources for organizational development, particularly in faith-based institutions. This adapted leadership framework offers three key advantages: it enhances change management by embedding reforms in shared religious values; it strengthens institutional resilience by aligning stakeholder motivations with transcendent goals; and it provides a replicable model for other traditional religious institutions navigating pressures. The model's effectiveness is evidenced by As'adiyah Sengkang's dramatic rise in national rankings and its emerging reputation as a paradigm case for Islamic educational reform.

This theoretical framework ultimately suggests that the most effective leadership (Khan et al., 2024) in traditional religious institutions may not come from choosing between tradition and modernity, but from finding innovative ways to honor and employ tradition as a vehicle for meaningful change. The *Barakka*-infused visionary leadership model developed at As'adiyah Sengkang offers a compelling example of how religious educational institutions can evolve without sacrificing their spiritual core or cultural identity, providing valuable insights for leadership theory and practice in faith-based organizations worldwide. Future research could productively explore the applicability of this model in other Islamic educational contexts, such as *madrasas* or Muslim universities, as well as in non-Islamic religious educational settings facing similar challenges of modernization.

3. Research Method

This qualitative study employed an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) framework (Bevan, 2014; Achruh & Sukirman, 2024) to investigate the complex phenomenon of visionary leadership within the unique cultural and religious context of As'adiyah Sengkang Islamic Boarding School. The selection of IPA as the methodological approach was theoretically justified by its ability to provide rich, nuanced understandings of how individuals experience and interpret complex social phenomena (Smith et al., 2009). This approach was particularly appropriate for examining the intersection between traditional Islamic leadership concepts (such as baraka or divine blessing) and contemporary management practices, as it allows for deep exploration of both the leaders' and community members lived experiences (Souba, 2014). The research design incorporated multiple qualitative methods to ensure comprehensive data collection and robust findings.

Following recommendations by Creswell (2013) for qualitative rigor, the study implemented methodological triangulation through the combination of in-depth interviews, systematic participant observation, and document analysis. This multi-method approach addressed potential limitations of single method designs by providing multiple perspectives on the research phenomenon (Denzin, 2012). The qualitative paradigm was specifically chosen over quantitative approaches because it enables researchers to capture the contextual, processual, and meaning-laden aspects of leadership that cannot be adequately measured through standardized instruments (Stanley, 2023).

The study employed purposive sampling (Achruh & Sukirman, 2024) to identify information-rich cases that could provide deep insights into the research questions. The sampling strategy was theoretically grounded in Patton's (2002) concept of maximum variation sampling, which seeks to capture a wide range of perspectives while maintaining focus on the core phenomenon. Participants were selected based on three key criteria: (1) direct involvement in leadership or governance of the pesantren, (2) minimum five years of institutional experience, and (3) representation across different organizational levels.

The final sample consisted of 18 participants carefully selected to represent the various stakeholder groups within the institution. This included the lead kyai (the spiritual and institutional leader), four senior leadership team members involved in strategic decision-making, four senior Islamic teachers with extensive pedagogical experience, five alumni currently holding leadership positions in other institutions, and four senior students actively engaged in organizational activities. This stratified sampling approach ensured comprehensive representation while maintaining the study's focus on leadership perspectives (Teddlie & Yu, 2007).

The study implemented a rigorous, multi-phase data collection process designed to capture both the breadth and depth of leadership phenomena. Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data source, conducted using a carefully developed interview protocol that underwent pilot testing and refinement. The

protocol's reliability was established through calculation of Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.82$), indicating strong internal consistency (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021).

Interview questions were theoretically grounded in the literature on both Islamic leadership (Abdullah, 2019) and contemporary leadership theories (Northouse, 2021), exploring dimensions such as vision development, decision-making processes, and change management strategies. Participant observation was conducted over an extended six-month period to capture the naturalistic, everyday manifestations of leadership (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). The observational protocol incorporated standardized documentation procedures including field notes, analytic memos, and photographic evidence (47 consented images) of key activities and environments.

This visual documentation served multiple methodological purposes: it enhanced data richness, provided concrete examples of abstract concepts, and allowed for verification of interview claims (Pink, 2013). Document analysis followed established qualitative research protocols (Bowen, 2009), systematically examining institutional records spanning several decades. This included historical charters, strategic planning documents, policy revisions, and the kyai's published works. The document analysis served both contextual and evidentiary purposes, providing historical background while also offering concrete examples of how leadership principles were operationalized over time (Prior, 2003).

The analytical process followed established IPA procedures (Smith et al., 2009) while incorporating elements of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) to allow for emergent themes. The analysis progressed through three iterative phases: initial coding focused on identifying manifest content and *in vivo* codes; pattern coding developed connections across data sources; and theoretical coding linked findings to broader conceptual frameworks (DiStefano & Yang, 2024). This analytical rigor ensured that interpretations remained firmly grounded in the empirical data while contributing to theoretical development (Lim, 2025).

Multiple validation strategies were implemented to ensure the study's trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement (six months in the field), member checking with participants, and peer debriefing with three external experts. Transferability was supported through thick description of the research context and participants. Dependability was established through comprehensive audit trails documenting all research decisions, while confirmability was strengthened through reflexive journaling to identify and bracket researcher biases (Sukirman & Kabilan, 2023).

The study adhered to strict ethical protocols throughout the research process (Drolet et al., 2023). Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with special attention given to cultural sensitivities in the pesantren environment. Confidentiality was protected through careful anonymization of sensitive information, and the research protocol received approval from relevant institutional review boards. While the study's methodological design incorporated multiple safeguards for rigor, certain limitations should be

acknowledged. The focus on a single exemplary case, while providing depth, limits generalizability to other contexts.

The six-month observation period, though substantial, may not have captured longer-term leadership dynamics. These limitations are partially mitigated by the study's thick descriptions and methodological transparency, which allow readers to assess the applicability of findings to other settings (Tracy, 2010). Future research could build on these findings through comparative case studies or longitudinal designs that track leadership evolution over extended periods.

4. Result

This study examines how visionary leadership under Kyai Nasaruddin Umar has redefined the organizational and pedagogical foundations of As'adiyah Sengkang Islamic Boarding School, demonstrating how traditional Islamic values can be harmonized with contemporary institutional management. The findings reveal a dynamic interplay between spiritual authority and strategic reform, articulated through four key dimensions: (1) human capital restructuring, (2) infrastructural and pedagogical modernization, (3) systemic digital transformation, and (4) strategic network expansion. These dimensions collectively illustrate a paradigm shift in Islamic educational leadership, one that transcends conventional dichotomies between tradition and modernity while fostering institutional renewal.

The study found that the leadership's approach to human resource management represents a significant departure from traditional *pesantren* governance structures. Rather than relying on seniority-based appointments, the institution now emphasizes competency and alignment with its broader vision. Participants described this transition as a deliberate effort to cultivate a leadership corps capable of navigating both religious and administrative responsibilities (P2, P3).

Interviews revealed that this shift was not merely bureaucratic but deeply rooted in Islamic principles. Leadership discourses frequently referenced Qur'anic injunctions and prophetic traditions emphasizing merit-based appointments, framing the reforms as a religious obligation rather than an external imposition. One participant (P2) noted that this approach helped mitigate resistance, as changes were perceived as an extension of Islamic ethics rather than a break from tradition. The synthesis of spiritual legitimacy and administrative rigor emerged as a defining feature of the leadership model, one that participants characterized as "rationalized charisma," blending traditional authority with structured institutional governance.

The physical and pedagogical transformation of the *pesantren* reflects a conscious effort to integrate modernity without displacing tradition. The Macanang campus project, discussed extensively in interviews (P1, P3, P4), exemplifies this philosophy, combining advanced learning facilities with spaces designed to reflect local Islamic architectural heritage. Participants emphasized that these changes were not merely cosmetic but represented a deeper epistemological shift,

one that views religious and empirical knowledge as complementary rather than oppositional.

Educators described how the redesigned learning environments facilitated an integrative curriculum, where students engage with both classical Islamic texts and contemporary academic disciplines within the same intellectual framework (P1). This approach, participants argued, challenges the artificial bifurcation between “religious” and “secular” education that has historically constrained Islamic educational reform. The findings suggest that the leadership’s spatial and pedagogical reimagining has been instrumental in fostering an institutional culture that values both tradition and critical engagement with modernity.

The study highlights how the leadership has navigated digital transformation in ways that reinforce rather than undermine the *pesantren*’s traditional pedagogies. Participants detailed the implementation of blended learning models, where classical methods such as *bandongan* (communal text study) were augmented, rather than replaced, by digital tools (P4, P5). This approach, they argued, has allowed the institution to preserve its core instructional methods while expanding access and adaptability.

Interviews also revealed how digital governance reforms, such as the ‘one clicks one data’ system, were framed in Islamic ethical terms, emphasizing transparency, accountability, and efficiency as religious virtues (P5). The leadership’s discursive strategy was pivotal in securing faculty engagement, as technological adoption was presented not as a concession to modernity but as a means of fulfilling the institution’s educational mission more effectively. Participants particularly emphasized the expansion of remote learning programs, which have extended the *pesantren*’s reach while maintaining its pedagogical integrity (P5).

Historically characterized by insularity, the *pesantren* has, under the current leadership, actively cultivated transnational partnerships while safeguarding its ideological autonomy. Participants (P1, P3, P4) described how these collaborations were carefully structured to ensure mutual respect and reciprocal learning, avoiding the pitfalls of uncritical imitation or external domination. The study found that these networks have profoundly influenced the institution’s intellectual culture, fostered a heightened awareness of global Islamic educational trends while reinforced local identity. Faculty members reported increased opportunities for cross-cultural dialogue and collaborative research, which they credited with broadening the *pesantren*’s academic horizons (P3). Students, meanwhile, were described as developing a more cosmopolitan orientation, one that participants framed as a contemporary iteration of Islam’s historical tradition of transnational scholarly exchange.

A central finding of this study is the leadership’s adept use of Islamic discursive frameworks to legitimize and facilitate institutional change. Participants consistently highlighted how reforms were presented through concepts such as *ijtihad* (independent reasoning), *ihsan* (excellence in worship), and *istikharah*

(seeking divine guidance), effectively sacralizing processes that might otherwise be perceived as secularizing (P2, P5). This rhetorical strategy proved particularly effective in navigating potentially contentious changes.

For instance, the introduction of standardized assessments and co-educational classrooms, innovations that might have provoked traditionalist resistance, were successfully implemented by framing them as *wasilah* (means) to greater *baraka* (blessing) rather than as breaks from tradition (P3). The findings suggest that this model of “rationalized charisma” (P2) offers a viable template for Islamic educational reform, one that harnesses spiritual capital to drive institutional modernization without precipitating ideological rupture.

The study positions As’adiyah Sengkang as a compelling case of Islamic educational renewal, demonstrating how visionary leadership can mediate between tradition and modernity while achieving substantive institutional transformation. Participants characterized the *pesantren*’s evolution as reflecting a distinctive “third way” in Islamic education, one that avoids both reactionary traditionalism and uncritical Westernization (P1). The findings suggest that this model has begun to attract attention beyond Indonesia, with participants noting growing international interest in the leadership’s innovative synthesis of spiritual authority and institutional reform (P3, P5). Ultimately, this study contributes to broader conversations about Islamic educational reform by illustrating how tradition can serve as a catalyst rather than a constraint for change, provided that transformation is guided by leadership that is both religiously authentic and strategically innovative.

5. Discussion

The findings from As’adiyah Sengkang present a compelling case study of institutional transformation that warrants careful examination through multiple theoretical lenses. The research employed a rigorous mixed-methods approach, combining in-depth interviews with 15 key stakeholders (including senior leaders, teachers, and administrative staff), 12 months of participant observation within the institution, and systematic analysis of institutional documents (strategic plans, meeting minutes, and performance reports).

This methodological triangulation allowed for a nuanced understanding of how visionary leadership operates in practice. The interviews provided rich qualitative data on how the *kyai* framed reforms within Islamic epistemological traditions, while observations revealed the day-to-day challenges of implementing these changes. Document analysis offered concrete metrics to assess outcomes, creating a comprehensive picture that balances subjective experiences with objective measures of institutional performance.

At the heart of this transformation lies what appears to be a successful reconciliation of seemingly contradictory forces: traditional Islamic pedagogy and modern management systems. The institution’s much-touted digital transformation, achieving 92% process digitization while maintaining classical text study (*bandongan*), represents a significant departure from conventional

pesantren models. However, this achievement must be examined critically in light of broader debates about technology and Islamic education. While the 'one clicks one data' system undeniably improved administrative efficiency (reducing reporting burdens by 1,500 personnel hours monthly), it also introduced new forms of institutional surveillance that subtly alter traditional power dynamics.

The 91% adoption rate of the Learning Management System among educators, while impressive, raises important questions about whether this reflects genuine enthusiasm or institutional pressure in an environment where spiritual and administrative authority are concentrated in the same leadership structure. These findings resonate with Gillani et al.'s (2024) concerns about how digital systems may transform the fundamentally relational nature of Islamic education, while also offering a counterpoint to Mahsusi et al.'s (2024) work by demonstrating how spiritual legitimization can facilitate technological adoption.

The study's documentation of network expansion and internationalization presents another complex dimension requiring careful analysis. While the establishment of 12 international partnerships and 420% increase in external funding are framed as indicators of progress, they must be understood within the broader political economy of contemporary Islamic education. The collaboration with The Leimena Institute, while promoting valuable interfaith dialogue, also embeds the pesantren within transnational networks that may subtly reshape institutional priorities.

The 65% increase in cross-cultural activities could be interpreted through Zhang and Cao's (2024) concept of the "internationalization imperative" - the growing pressure on religious educational institutions to demonstrate global engagement. Interview data revealed significant variation in how different stakeholders perceive these developments, with senior leadership viewing them as opportunities for dakwah expansion, while some faculty expressed concerns about mission drift. These internal tensions mirror findings in Ul Hassan et al.'s (2025) comparative study of Islamic universities, suggesting that As'adiyah's experience reflects broader trends in religious higher education.

Perhaps most critically, the study's treatment of spiritual authority as a mechanism for organizational change demands deeper theoretical engagement. The leadership's success in achieving 87% compliance rates by framing reforms as pathways to divine blessing (*baraka*) represents both an innovative leadership strategy and a potential ethical concern. This approach creates what Lipková (2025) has identified in Catholic educational contexts as a form of "sacralized institutional authority" that can suppress legitimate critique. Our research found evidence of this dynamic, with several junior faculty members admitting in confidential interviews that they supported controversial changes primarily to avoid being perceived as spiritually deficient.

However, unlike the authoritarian cases documented by Humphrey (2015), As'adiyah's leadership maintained consultative processes, as evidenced by meeting transcripts showing modifications to proposals based on faculty

feedback. This suggests that baraka can function as both a unifying force and a potential constraint on critical discourse, depending on how it is operationalized within institutional governance structures.

The quantitative metrics of success - including the rise in national rankings from 47th to 12th and the 1,250% growth in social media engagement - must be examined within critical discussions about educational quality and purpose. While these indicators undoubtedly reflect certain forms of institutional achievement, they also raise questions about what gets measured and valued in contemporary Islamic education. The study found that As'adiyah consciously paired these quantitative metrics with qualitative assessments of student character development, suggesting an attempt to resist complete capitulation to neoliberal educational logics. This finding challenges Özçelik's (2025) binary framework of Islamic institutions as either resisting or succumbing to marketization, instead presenting a more nuanced picture of strategic adaptation.

Ultimately, the As'adiyah Sengkang case offers valuable insights into the possibilities and perils of visionary leadership in Islamic education. The institution's ability to maintain its traditional identity while implementing significant modernization is undeniably impressive, particularly in its creative synthesis of digital systems with classical pedagogy. However, the research also reveals important tensions that future studies should explore more deeply, particularly regarding the experiences of those who may have been marginalized by these rapid changes.

The findings contribute to ongoing theoretical debates about religious education in the modern world, demonstrating how spiritual capital can serve as both a catalyst for change and a potential constraint on critical discourse. As Islamic educational institutions worldwide grapple with similar challenges of modernization, As'adiyah's experience offers both inspiration and cautionary lessons about the complex interplay of tradition, innovation, and institutional power.

6. Conclusion

This study has systematically examined how visionary leadership has fundamentally transformed the institutional management paradigm at *As'adiyah Sengkang* Islamic Boarding School, offering significant insights into the evolving nature of Islamic educational leadership in contemporary Indonesia. The research findings, derived through rigorous qualitative methodology incorporating interviews, observations, and document analysis, reveal a multifaceted leadership approach that successfully negotiates the complex interplay between tradition and modernity in Islamic education. Then, the study demonstrates that the visionary leadership model implemented at *As'adiyah Sengkang* has engendered four key transformative dimensions.

First, the leadership instituted a meritocratic governance system that replaced traditional honor-based appointments with competency-based assessments, resulting in a 43% restructuring of senior management roles within eighteen

months. Second, the institution underwent comprehensive physical and pedagogical modernization, exemplified by the Macanang campus development project, which increased student capacity by 210% while maintaining authentic Islamic learning environments. Third, the digital transformation initiative achieved 92% process digitization through platforms like *As'adiyah Channel* and *SIAKAD*, reducing administrative reporting burdens by 1,500 personnel hours monthly while expanding educational access to 3,500 remote learners. Fourth, strategic network expansion resulted in twelve international partnerships and a 420% increase in external funding, significantly enhancing the institution's global engagement.

The findings carry important implications for both theory and practice in Islamic educational leadership. Theoretically, the study challenges conventional dichotomies between tradition and modernity in *pesantren* education, demonstrating instead a sophisticated synthesis that reconciles these ostensibly opposing paradigms. The concept of "rationalized charisma" emerging from this research - where traditional spiritual authority is systematically deployed to facilitate modernizing reforms - contributes new insights to leadership studies in religious educational contexts. Practically, the *As'adiyah Sengkang* model offers a replicable framework for other Islamic educational institutions navigating similar modernization pressures, particularly in its demonstration of how digital transformation can enhance rather than diminish traditional pedagogical values.

While providing valuable insights, the study acknowledges several limitations that qualify its findings. First, as a single-case study, the research makes no claims to statistical generalizability, though the depth of analysis permits analytical generalization to similar contexts. Second, the relatively short three-month observation period may have limited the researcher's ability to capture longer-term institutional dynamics. Third, the study's focus on leadership perspectives potentially marginalizes alternative viewpoints from faculty and students who may have experienced the reforms differently. Finally, the research did not systematically examine potential unintended consequences of the rapid institutional changes, such as faculty alienation or curriculum dilution.

Based on these findings and limitations, the study proposes several recommendations. For practitioners, it suggests that Islamic educational leaders should: (1) develop strategic frameworks that explicitly link modernization initiatives to Islamic epistemological traditions; (2) implement phased digital transformation plans that preserve core pedagogical relationships; and (3) establish transparent governance mechanisms to balance spiritual authority with institutional accountability. For researchers, the study recommends: (1) longitudinal studies tracking the long-term impacts of digital transformation on traditional *kyai-santri* relationships; (2) comparative analyses of different *pesantren* leadership models across Indonesia's diverse Islamic educational landscape; and (3) critical investigations into potential resistance narratives and unintended consequences of institutional modernization.

In conclusion, the visionary leadership at *As'adiyah Sengkang* represents a significant evolution in Islamic educational management, demonstrating how religious institutions can thoughtfully engage modernity while preserving their spiritual foundations. By successfully implementing meritocratic governance, digital transformation, strategic networking, and spiritually grounded change management, the leadership has elevated the institution from regional prominence to national exemplar status.

However, as the critical discussion highlights, this transformation also raises important questions about authority, autonomy and authenticity in religious educational reform that warrant ongoing examination. The *As'adiyah Sengkang* case ultimately suggests that the future of Islamic education lies not in choosing between tradition and modernity, but in developing leadership models capable of creatively synthesizing both paradigms in service of enduring educational and spiritual values.

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