

Kyai Leadership in Supporting Program Quality in a Madrasah-Integrated Islamic Boarding School: A Qualitative Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Leadership in madrasah-integrated Islamic boarding schools presents a distinctive challenge because religious authority, formal institutional governance, and daily student mentoring are distributed across different actors. This research examines how kyai leadership is enacted within such a governance structure and how it supports the quality of Islamic Boarding School (IBS) program implementation. A qualitative case study was conducted at IBS Darul Ulum, MAN 1 Kota Semarang, involving ten purposively selected informants representing institutional leadership, program management, mentoring, and student perspectives. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis, and were analyzed using the interactive model of data condensation, data display, and conclusion verification. The findings show that kyai leadership operates primarily through spiritual-pedagogical authority within a differentiated governance structure, while formal policy, program coordination, and daily supervision are undertaken by other institutional actors. Its contribution to program quality occurs through a translation mechanism linking religious direction with program coordination, mentoring, monitoring, assessment, and follow-up across tahfidz, classical Islamic text learning, and student discipline. The findings imply that leadership quality in integrated Islamic education depends less on centralized authority than on the effective institutional translation of religious-pedagogical guidance into coordinated program practices.

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's Islamic education sector operates at a scale that makes leadership and program quality a consequential institutional concern [1]. According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs' Education Management Information System (EMIS), Indonesia had 41,286 pesantren, 3,339,536 santri, and 284,662 educators and education personnel as of July 2024, illustrating the extensive social and educational reach of pesantren-based education [2]. At the same time, quality improvement remains an ongoing concern: Ministry data for pesantren-based equivalency education at the Ula level show that mean literacy performance in the National Assessment increased from 45.99 in 2021 to 49.03 in 2024, while numeracy increased from 33.71 to 44.12 over the same period, indicating measurable progress alongside continuing demands for stronger educational processes and institutional management [3]. These challenges become more complex in educational arrangements that integrate formal madrasah education with residential pesantren-based formation, because academic instruction, religious learning, character development, and students' everyday discipline must be coordinated within a single institutional environment. In such settings, educational quality depends not only on curriculum, facilities, or formal policy, but also on how leadership authority is exercised, responsibilities are distributed, and program objectives are translated into sustained practices of mentoring, supervision, and evaluation [4].

Existing scholarship has established the importance of leadership in sustaining the educational and cultural functions of pesantren. Studies of kyai leadership have traditionally emphasized the kyai's central position as a religious authority, educator, moral exemplar, and cultural figure, while more recent research has interpreted this leadership through transformational, charismatic, democratic, collective, and participatory perspectives [5]. Recent evidence, for example, shows that kyai leadership may combine transformational, charismatic, and collective dimensions, with moral legitimacy operating alongside collaboration and shared responsibility in sustaining educational programs [6]. Other contemporary studies similarly highlight dialogic and participatory leadership, institutional adaptation, and the need to reconcile traditional religious authority with increasingly professional forms of educational management. In parallel, research on integrated boarding education has demonstrated that the relationship between formal education and pesantren systems can assume different organizational forms and requires accountable management of curricula, resources, and educational services [7]. Together, these studies have significantly advanced understanding of both kyai leadership and the management of integrated Islamic educational institutions.

Nevertheless, the state of the art remains fragmented in an important respect. Much of the literature on kyai leadership continues to examine the kyai primarily as the central leader of a pesantren, whereas studies of boarding-school management tend to concentrate on institutional management, curriculum integration, principals' managerial roles, or specific educational programs rather than on the interaction among different sources of authority [8]. This distinction becomes particularly consequential in a madrasah-integrated Islamic Boarding School (IBS), where the kyai does not exercise authority within an autonomous pesantren structure but operates alongside a madrasah principal who holds formal institutional authority, an IBS Chairperson responsible for program coordination, and musyrif and musyrifah who undertake everyday student mentoring and supervision. The existing manuscript identifies precisely this multi-actor configuration at IBS Darul Ulum MAN 1 Kota Semarang, where tahfidz, classical Islamic text learning, and student discipline are implemented within an institutional arrangement that combines formal madrasah governance with pesantren culture. Consequently, a specific research gap remains concerning how the kyai's spiritual-pedagogical authority is enacted within such a distributed governance configuration and how that authority is translated into concrete mechanisms that support the quality of program implementation, rather than being treated simply as an individual leadership style or as an overarching source of institutional control.

The central problem addressed in this study is the insufficient explanation of how substantive religious authority and formal institutional authority interact in managing the quality of a madrasah-integrated boarding-school program [9]. Attributing program development primarily to the kyai risks obscuring the differentiated responsibilities through which institutional policy, program coordination, religious guidance, daily mentoring, supervision, and evaluation are actually performed, while focusing only on formal management risks overlooking the spiritual and pedagogical legitimacy through which pesantren values are sustained [10]. This problem is especially relevant to IBS Darul Ulum, where program quality is manifested through three distinct yet interconnected domains, Qur'an memorization (*tahfidz*), classical Islamic text learning (*kitab kuning*), and student discipline, and where the observable quality of implementation concerns the clarity of program standards, continuity of guidance, monitoring, assessment, and follow-up rather than a single measure of student achievement. The analytical challenge, therefore, is to explain leadership as a relational process in which the kyai's spiritual-pedagogical direction is connected to the institutional and operational functions performed by other actors, without assuming that the kyai directly controls or independently determines program outcomes [11].

Investigating this problem is urgent both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, examining kyai leadership within a madrasah-integrated IBS can extend the literature beyond leader-centered and leadership-style explanations by conceptualizing the kyai as a holder of spiritual-pedagogical authority embedded within distributed governance, thereby clarifying how differentiated forms of authority coexist and interact in Islamic educational institutions [12].

Practically, such an understanding is increasingly important for institutions that must preserve pesantren values while simultaneously meeting the managerial, accountability, and quality demands of formal education, particularly in a national context where millions of learners participate in pesantren and related Islamic educational systems. Accordingly, this study investigates the leadership practices of the kyai within the governance structure of IBS Darul Ulum MAN 1 Kota Semarang and examines how those practices support the quality of program implementation in tahfidz, classical Islamic text learning, and student discipline. By focusing on the mechanisms through which religious direction is translated into program coordination, mentoring, supervision, and evaluation, the study seeks to provide a more context-sensitive account of kyai leadership and to explain how spiritual-pedagogical authority functions within a formally structured, multi-actor educational organization.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Kyai Leadership and Distributed Governance in Islamic Education

Kyai leadership occupies a distinctive position within Islamic educational institutions because it is grounded not only in formal organizational responsibility but also in religious legitimacy, moral authority, pedagogical influence, and the cultural traditions of the pesantren [13]. In conventional pesantren settings, the kyai is commonly regarded as a central figure who provides religious instruction, determines the normative orientation of the institution, guides students' character formation, and serves as a moral exemplar whose authority is reinforced through sustained interaction with santri. Previous studies cited in this manuscript similarly emphasize the kyai's role in shaping institutional culture, strengthening religious values, supervising educational activities, and maintaining the continuity of pesantren traditions [14]. However, reducing kyai leadership to administrative control or to a particular leadership style risks overlooking the substantive basis of the kyai's influence. In the context of this study, the kyai's leadership is more appropriately understood as spiritual-pedagogical authority, referring to the capacity to provide religious direction, orient educational and character-development goals, reinforce pesantren values, and guide the meaning and purposes of student formation [15]. This conceptualization distinguishes the kyai's authority from formal bureaucratic authority while preserving the centrality of the kyai's religious and pedagogical role in Islamic education.

The relevance of this distinction becomes more evident in educational institutions that integrate pesantren culture with a formal madrasah structure, where leadership functions are not concentrated in a single actor. In a madrasah-integrated Islamic Boarding School, institutional policy, program coordination, religious guidance, and day-to-day student supervision may be exercised by different actors according to their respective responsibilities [16]. The perspective of distributed leadership is therefore useful for explaining how leadership practices emerge through interactions among formal leaders and other organizational actors rather than solely through the actions of one individual. Distributed leadership does not imply that authority is equally shared or that the role of the kyai becomes less significant; instead, it emphasizes the differentiated distribution of leadership functions across the organization [17]. Within the governance configuration examined in this study, the madrasah principal provides formal institutional direction, the IBS Chairperson coordinates the translation of institutional policies into operational programs, the kyai provides spiritual-pedagogical guidance, and the musyrif and musyrifah carry out daily mentoring and supervision. Leadership is thus enacted through complementary and interdependent responsibilities, in which different forms of authority coexist and contribute to the implementation of educational programs. This perspective shifts the analytical focus from identifying a single dominant leader toward understanding how leadership functions are configured, coordinated, and enacted across institutional roles [18].

Bringing kyai leadership into dialogue with distributed governance provides a more contextually appropriate framework for analyzing leadership in integrated Islamic educational institutions. The central analytical issue is not whether the kyai is the sole or primary leader, but how the kyai's spiritual-pedagogical authority operates alongside formal, coordinative, and operational forms of authority within the same institutional setting [19]. Such an approach

makes it possible to explain how religious values and pesantren culture are preserved without assuming that all managerial and supervisory functions are directly controlled by the kyai. It also recognizes that the effectiveness of leadership depends on the mechanisms through which substantive religious direction is communicated, translated into program arrangements, implemented through mentoring, and reviewed through supervision and evaluation. Accordingly, distributed governance in this study is understood as an arrangement of differentiated but interconnected authority, in which the kyai's substantive religious role remains significant while program implementation is carried out collaboratively through other institutional actors. This conceptual position provides the basis for examining kyai leadership as a relational and organizational practice rather than as an isolated personal attribute, and it enables a more precise analysis of how spiritual-pedagogical authority is embedded within the governance of a madrasah-integrated Islamic Boarding School.

Leadership Practices and Quality of IBS Program Implementation

Leadership practices in educational institutions are closely associated with the processes through which organizational goals are translated into coordinated actions, monitored implementation, and continuous improvement [20]. In the context of Islamic education, these practices extend beyond administrative management because educational leadership also involves the transmission of religious values, character formation, and the cultivation of institutional culture. To analyze such practices, this study draws on the educational leadership functions of planning, implementation, supervision, and evaluation as an initial analytical framework [21]. These functions are not employed to assume that the kyai performs all managerial responsibilities directly, nor to equate the kyai's position with that of a school principal. Rather, they function as sensitizing categories for identifying how the kyai becomes involved in setting educational direction, supporting program implementation, monitoring student development, and contributing to evaluation and follow-up within the broader governance arrangement of the Islamic Boarding School. This approach allows leadership to be examined as a set of practices embedded in institutional relationships rather than as a fixed attribute of a single leader.

Within this framework, the notion of quality is understood specifically as the quality of IBS program implementation rather than as a comprehensive measure of the overall educational quality of the madrasah. Program quality concerns the extent to which educational activities are implemented in accordance with their intended objectives through clear standards, sustained guidance, appropriate supervision, and systematic evaluation [22]. Such an understanding is particularly relevant to boarding-school education, where learning occurs not only through formal classroom instruction but also through residential mentoring, religious practice, character development, and structured daily routines. Consequently, the quality of an IBS program cannot be inferred simply from the existence of particular activities; it must also be examined through the regularity and coherence of implementation, the clarity of expectations, the continuity of mentoring, and the mechanisms used to monitor and evaluate student development [23]. In this sense, leadership contributes to program quality by helping to connect institutional objectives with operational arrangements and by ensuring that religious and pedagogical goals are consistently translated into everyday educational practices.

The present study examines program implementation through three empirically distinct but interconnected quality domains: Qur'an memorization (tahfidz), classical Islamic text learning (kitab kuning), and student discipline [24]. In the tahfidz domain, quality is reflected not merely in the quantity of memorized verses but also in the clarity of achievement targets, fluency, tahsin and tajwid, regular memorization submission, repetition through *murojaah*, and periodic assessment of students' progress. In the study of classical Islamic texts, quality concerns the continuity of learning, students' understanding and mastery of the material, and the availability of evaluative mechanisms such as written and oral examinations. Student discipline, meanwhile, represents the behavioral and character-formative dimension of program implementation and can be observed through participation in religious activities, adherence to

institutional rules, worship discipline, time management, responsibility, attendance monitoring, daily supervision, guidance, and disciplinary measures [25]. These three domains do not constitute a standardized measure of institutional quality; rather, they serve as contextual empirical areas through which the processes and mechanisms of IBS program implementation can be examined.

Taken together, leadership practices and program quality are conceptualized in this study as related through implementation mechanisms rather than through a simple causal relationship. The kyai's leadership contributes primarily by providing substantive spiritual-pedagogical direction, while the translation of that direction into program targets, mentoring arrangements, supervision, and evaluation occurs through interaction with the madrasah principal, the IBS Chairperson, and musyrif/musyrifah. Accordingly, the analytical focus is placed on how leadership practices are enacted through planning, implementation, supervision, and evaluation, and how these practices are manifested within the three domains of *tahfidz*, classical Islamic text learning, and student discipline. The framework therefore avoids treating student achievement as the direct product of kyai leadership and instead recognizes that program outcomes are also shaped by contextual conditions, including differences in students' initial abilities, the intensity of mentoring, institutional policies, available resources, and the time allocated for guidance. This perspective provides a more cautious and context-sensitive basis for examining how leadership supports the quality of IBS program implementation within a multi-actor institutional setting.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to examine how kyai leadership practices operate within the governance structure of a madrasah-integrated Islamic Boarding School (IBS). The study was conducted at Darul Ulum Islamic Boarding School, MAN 1 Kota Semarang, Indonesia, with the case bounded specifically around the kyai's leadership practices in supporting the quality of IBS program implementation. The unit of analysis was therefore not the kyai as an individual figure, but the leadership practices enacted through interactions among the kyai and other institutional actors within the integrated madrasah-pesantren setting. A case study design was considered appropriate because the research sought to understand leadership practices within their institutional, cultural, and organizational context rather than to establish statistical relationships or causal effects. The analysis focused on how these practices were manifested in the governance of the IBS program and how they related to three domains of program implementation: Qur'an memorization (*tahfidz*), classical Islamic text learning (*kitab kuning*), and student discipline.

Participant

Participants were selected through purposive sampling on the basis of their roles, direct involvement, experience, and knowledge of IBS governance and the leadership practices of the kyai. As in Table 1, a total of ten informants participated in the study, representing multiple perspectives across institutional leadership, program management, daily mentoring, and student experience. They consisted of the Head of Madrasah, the IBS Chairperson, the kyai, one *musyrif*, one *musyrifah*, and five santri comprising two male and three female students. This composition was intended to capture complementary perspectives on institutional policy, program coordination, spiritual-pedagogical guidance, day-to-day supervision, and students' experiences of program implementation. The number of participants was determined by the need to obtain sufficient role-based representation and information for comparing accounts across different positions within the IBS governance structure, rather than by an intention to achieve statistical representativeness.

Table 1. Research Informant Data

No	Informant	Gender	Position
1	KM	Male	Head of Madrasah
2	KIBS	Male	Chairperson of IBS
3	KY	Male	Kyai
4	MY	Male	Musyrif
5	MYH	Female	Musyrifah
6	SN1	Male	Santri 1
7	SN2	Male	Santri 2
8	SN3	Female	Santri 3
9	SN4	Female	Santri 4
10	SN5	Female	Santri 5

Instruments

The researcher served as the primary research instrument, as is characteristic of qualitative inquiry, and was supported by several supplementary instruments designed to facilitate systematic data collection. These included semi-structured interview guides, non-participant observation guides, audio-recording devices, field notes, and institutional documents relevant to IBS governance and program implementation. The interview guide addressed the kyai's leadership practices, particularly those related to planning, implementation, supervision, and evaluation, as well as program implementation within the domains of tahfidz, classical Islamic text learning, and student discipline. Questions also explored participants' perceptions of previous program conditions to enable retrospective comparison with practices observed during the study period. The instruments were used flexibly to allow participants to elaborate on their experiences while maintaining sufficient consistency across interviews to facilitate comparison among informants and data sources.

Data Collection Process

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, document analysis, and follow-up communication between 11 August 2025 and 23 June 2026. Seven informants were interviewed face-to-face in Indonesian, with each interview lasting approximately 40–60 minutes and being audio-recorded with the participant's consent, while three student informants were interviewed through WhatsApp using the same semi-structured interview framework; WhatsApp was also used to obtain clarification from participants who had previously been interviewed in person. Four sessions of non-participant observation were conducted, covering congregational prayer attendance, *murojaah*, classical Islamic text learning, and Qur'an memorization submission, with field notes documenting activities, interactions, mentoring practices, and relevant aspects of program implementation. Documentary sources included the IBS organizational structure, institutional vision and mission, congregational-prayer attendance records, weekly and annual activity schedules, and videos of program activities. Data from interviews, observations, and documents were compared across sources and methods to identify convergence, divergence, and contextual variation in participants' accounts of leadership practices and program implementation.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed manually using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which involves data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The analytical process combined deductive and inductive coding: planning, implementation, supervision, and evaluation were initially employed as sensitizing

categories derived from the study's conceptual framework, while inductive coding was used to identify additional meanings, patterns, and relationships emerging from the empirical data. Analysis proceeded iteratively from raw interview transcripts, written responses, observational notes, and documentary evidence to initial codes, broader categories, thematic patterns, and interpretive conclusions; for example, codes concerning the internalization of religious values, character formation, and discipline were grouped into broader categories concerning religious-value-based guidance and subsequently interpreted in relation to the kyai's spiritual-pedagogical authority. Trustworthiness was strengthened through triangulation across participants and methods, comparison of interview accounts with observations and documents, clarification with informants where necessary, peer debriefing with the supervising lecturer, consideration of negative cases such as differences in students' abilities and constraints on mentoring time, and maintenance of an audit trail encompassing transcripts, field notes, codes, categories, themes, and cross-source comparisons.

RESULTS

Kyai Leadership Practices within the Governance Structure of the Islamic Boarding School

The findings showed that leadership within IBS Darul Ulum was exercised through a multi-actor governance structure rather than through authority concentrated exclusively in the kyai. Interview data consistently distinguished the institutional position of the madrasah from the operational structure of the boarding program. The Head of Madrasah stated that authority over the IBS program "lies with the madrasah and the IBS management, because it was the madrasah that established it," while also emphasizing that the programs of the madrasah and the IBS were implemented in alignment with one another. When asked specifically about the position of the kyai, the Head of Madrasah explained that the kyai "carries out the programs of the madrasah and the boarding school itself," and distinguished this arrangement from an independent pesantren in which the kyai may hold broader institutional authority. Thus, the interview data placed the kyai within an existing institutional structure in which formal authority remained connected to the madrasah and program management was organized through the IBS administrative structure.

Program planning was conducted through organizational mechanisms involving several actors. The IBS Chairperson explained that program activities were organized through an annual program that set out the activities to be implemented during the academic year, including Qur'an halaqah, tahfidz, classical Islamic text learning, and student habituation activities. Program planning was not described as an individual decision of the kyai; rather, annual planning and subsequent evaluation involved the IBS management, musyrif and musyrifah, the kyai/pengasuh, and the Head of Madrasah. The Chairperson explained:

"When we hold a meeting, there is the program itself, and every month we also have an evaluation meeting. Those involved are clearly the boarding management together with the musyrif and musyrifah, and the Head of Madrasah is also involved." (KIBS)

The interviews further indicated that planning operated at more than one level. Broad program directions and annual activities were formulated within the IBS structure, whereas the implementation of specific activities was adjusted by the personnel responsible for students' daily guidance. The interview data also recorded that some larger institutional decisions could involve additional parties; for example, the Head of Madrasah described decisions concerning students' residential arrangements during school holidays as being discussed by IBS management with input from parents.

Within this structure, the kyai's involvement was most visible in providing direction concerning the purposes of education, students' intentions, religious commitment, and the need for consistency in the implementation of boarding activities. In describing what should underlie program improvement, the kyai emphasized that educational

arrangements could not rely solely on technical targets, but required a change in students' orientation and the collective commitment of those involved in the program. He stated:

"The intention has to change. We have to provide the students with a deeper understanding of that intention, so that an intention that initially seeks only worldly goals can also be directed toward the hereafter. Then the system must be firm; learning must be disciplined and continuous, and it must be supported by all elements—the teachers, the management, and the facilities. If only one person is moving, it will not work." (KY)

The kyai illustrated this collective process by comparing the institution to a large boat that could not move effectively if it were rowed by only one person. In another part of the interview, he described his role as providing encouragement not only to students but also to the ustadz and ustadzah responsible for their guidance, stating that students needed to be "guided properly" so that they remained motivated to study and memorize the Qur'an. These accounts showed that the kyai participated in program implementation primarily through guidance, motivation, and the reinforcement of educational direction rather than through the direct administration of every daily activity.

The distinction between the kyai's role and day-to-day operational supervision was particularly clear in interviews with musyrif and musyrifah. One participant described the IBS structure as beginning with the school and boarding management, followed by musyrif and musyrifah, who were the personnel most continuously engaged with students' daily activities. The informant stated:

"The musyrif and musyrifah are the ones who always know and follow all activities in the boarding school. There is also what we call the pengasuh. The pengasuh is positioned above the musyrif, but he does not participate in the students' daily routines." (MY/MYH)

This account differentiated the pengasuh's structural position from the routine responsibilities of residential supervision. The same interview indicated that musyrif and musyrifah were responsible for observing students' activities, identifying practical difficulties, and adjusting methods according to students' conditions. For example, the interview data showed that approaches to murojaah and memorization could differ according to the musyrif responsible for a particular group, while the institutional target remained defined at the program level. The data therefore showed that routine student monitoring was concentrated primarily among the personnel who lived with or regularly accompanied the students.

The IBS Chairperson occupied a coordinating position between institutional direction and daily implementation. When describing his role, the Chairperson stated, "My role is to coordinate those who are under my responsibility," adding that coordination was maintained through periodic evaluation and could also occur whenever emerging circumstances required immediate communication. He further explained that musyrif and musyrifah were important because they helped determine how halaqah and other daily activities were actually conducted. This division of responsibility was also visible in the tahfidz program: the IBS established the overall target of five juz over three years, while weekly memorization arrangements and the pace at which students progressed toward the target were managed by the responsible musyrif. The Chairperson explained that, although the program standard was established institutionally, "how the five-juz target is reached depends on the responsible musyrif," with the general expectation that students would progress by approximately one juz per semester.

Coordination was accompanied by regular monitoring and evaluation. The IBS Chairperson described a monthly process in which observations, complaints, and difficulties encountered during program implementation were collected and reviewed, particularly through information provided by musyrif and musyrifah. He explained:

"Each month we evaluate what we have observed in the program—whether what was planned has been implemented or not. The evaluation mainly concerns the observations of the musyrif and musyrifah, what they

need to do next, and the input or complaints received by the management, so that the same mistakes are not repeated.” (KIBS)

The evaluation process involved the IBS Chairperson, the Head of Madrasah, IBS administrators, and musyrif/musyrifah. The Head of Madrasah additionally reported broader monitoring involving vice principals, the madrasah committee, and parents in particular activities such as student assessment or *munaqosah*. These data showed that information concerning program implementation moved from actors involved in students’ daily activities toward those responsible for coordination and institutional oversight, after which follow-up actions were determined through the relevant management structure.

Kyai Leadership in Supporting the Quality of IBS Program Implementation

The findings showed that the quality of IBS program implementation was organized around three principal domains: Qur’an memorization (*tahfidz*), classical Islamic text learning (*kitab kuning*), and student discipline. These programs were implemented through scheduled learning activities, mentoring, monitoring, and periodic evaluation, while the kyai’s contribution was most visible in providing religious direction, strengthening students’ motivation, and reinforcing consistency in learning. The kyai emphasized that program implementation required more than technical arrangements because students’ commitment and the consistency of the supporting system were also necessary. He explained:

“The students’ intention must be strengthened. They need to understand why they are learning, so that their motivation is not limited to worldly goals but is also directed toward religious purposes. The system must also be firm: learning must be disciplined and continuous, and it must be supported by all elements, including the teachers, the management, and the available facilities.” (KY)

This emphasis on intention, discipline, and collective support was reflected in the daily organization of the IBS program, which combined Qur’anic learning, classical-text study, congregational worship, and residential guidance.

In the tahfidz domain, program implementation was structured around a minimum memorization target and a regular mentoring schedule. Tahfidz students were expected to complete at least five juz during their three years in the IBS, whereas regular boarding students were expected to memorize at least Juz 30. Qur’an halaqah was conducted after Asr, Maghrib, and Fajr, and students’ memorization progress was monitored through regular submission and *murojaah*. The IBS Chairperson described the arrangement as follows:

“Tahfidz students have a specific target. The minimum target that must be achieved during their three years here is five juz. They are expected to reach that target, whereas regular students do not have the same memorization target, although they are required to memorize Juz 30.” (KIBS)

The overall target was established at the program level, while the pace of progress was adjusted through the mentoring of the musyrif responsible for individual students. The Chairperson also indicated that, as a general calculation, students were expected to progress by approximately one juz per semester in order to reach the five-juz target within the designated period.

Monitoring of tahfidz implementation included weekly memorization submission, regular *murojaah*, monthly review, and periodic testing. The Chairperson explained that maintaining previously memorized material was treated as part of the program rather than focusing solely on adding new memorization. Formal tahfidz examinations could also involve cross-assessment, in which students were tested by an examiner other than their usual mentor, while *tasmi’* was conducted at particular stages of the program. He stated:

“The musyrif or tahfidz mentors must have clear targets for their students. The students should not be allowed to become too relaxed about their memorization. Memorization is closely connected with murojaah, so the expectation is that their progress continues while their murojaah is also maintained consistently.” (KIBS)

The interviews therefore documented both achievement-oriented and retention-oriented mechanisms in the tahfidz program, including target setting, submission, repetition, and periodic assessment.

Student accounts also provided evidence concerning changes in the intensity of tahfidz mentoring. One student reported that an additional tahfidz session was introduced after earlier cohorts had experienced difficulties in reaching the target, particularly among male students. According to the participant, the additional session increased the amount of time available for memorization and was followed by higher reported attainment within the subsequent cohort. The student explained:

“After the additional tahfidz session was introduced, some students in my cohort had already reached the five-juz target while they were still in the second year. Now some have reached six juz, and only one or two students are still below the target.” (SN)

At the same time, the interview data recorded variation in students' starting abilities. Some entered the program with established memorization, whereas others first required improvement in Qur'anic reading, pronunciation, and recitation before they could progress more intensively in memorization. These differences influenced the pace of mentoring and the time required to reach the program target.

In the classical Islamic text domain, learning was scheduled after Isha and organized according to students' grade levels. Students studied designated texts rather than selecting specialized subject streams, and the materials included areas such as hadith and fiqh. The intended outcomes included familiarity with the structure of classical Islamic texts, the ability to follow and read the material, and comprehension of the religious content being taught. The IBS Chairperson explained:

“At the very least, the students should understand what a classical Islamic text is like and how it is read. They are expected to understand it and to reach that level. The goal is also for them to understand and apply the religious rulings contained in what they study, especially in subjects such as fiqh.” (KIBS)

Assessment was conducted on a semester basis and included written tasks, Pegon-based questions, and reading texts that students had previously studied and annotated. Student interviews also indicated that summaries were commonly provided after *maknaani* to reinforce understanding of the material. The data nevertheless showed variation in mastery, with some students able to read the material more independently than others because of differences in their prior educational backgrounds.

Student discipline constituted the third quality domain and was implemented through daily routines, boarding regulations, monitoring, and graduated consequences for violations. The program emphasized responsibility for room cleanliness, punctuality in congregational prayer, compliance with learning schedules, appropriate dress, and proper conduct toward musyrif, musyrifah, ustadz, and ustadzah. The IBS Chairperson described the values promoted in the boarding environment as follows:

“The values we develop are responsibility, togetherness, discipline, and brotherhood. We train the students to be disciplined in learning, disciplined in worship, disciplined in following the rules, and disciplined in maintaining the cleanliness and order of the boarding environment.” (KIBS)

Congregational prayer attendance was monitored, and students were expected to arrive before the *iqamah*. Violations could lead to *takzir* in the form of cleaning duties or other agreed consequences, while repeated disciplinary issues could result in stronger sanctions. The kyai also reported that attendance records were used for the five daily

prayers and that residential mentors supported students not only in learning but also in their everyday conduct and responsibilities.

Supervision across the three domains was closely connected with the roles of *musyrif* and *musyrifah*, who interacted with students on a daily basis and provided information about their progress, difficulties, and compliance with program activities. The interviews showed that these supervisors were involved in Qur'an mentoring, memorization, classical-text learning, worship routines, and residential discipline, while the *kyai* and IBS management provided direction and follow-up based on information from daily implementation. The intensity and methods of mentoring were not identical across all groups; for example, individual *musyrif* could differ in how they organized *murojaah*, memorization submission, and student guidance. The findings also recorded practical constraints, including differences in students' initial abilities, competing school activities, limited mentoring time, and temporary disruptions related to facilities and construction. These conditions were reported as factors that affected the consistency and pace of program implementation across students and cohorts.

Evaluation functioned as the principal mechanism for reviewing these implementation conditions and determining subsequent follow-up. The IBS Chairperson reported that evaluation was conducted monthly and drew on observations, complaints, and reports from the personnel responsible for students' daily activities. He explained:

"Each month, we review the complaints and our observations of the program to see whether what was planned has actually been implemented. We mainly consider the observations of the musyrif and musyrifah, what they need to do next, and the input or complaints received by the management, so that the same problems are not repeated." (KIBS)

Across the three quality domains, the data therefore documented a combination of explicit *tahfidz* targets and memorization monitoring, scheduled and assessed *kitab kuning* learning, structured worship and residential discipline, and regular evaluation based on information from daily supervision. The *kyai*'s recorded contribution within these processes consisted primarily of reinforcing religious orientation, students' commitment, mentoring direction, and follow-up, while the routine execution of activities was carried out together with the IBS Chairperson, *musyrif*, *musyrifah*, and other program personnel.

DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that *kyai* leadership in a madrasah-integrated Islamic Boarding School is more accurately understood through the interaction between spiritual-pedagogical authority and distributed governance than through a conventional leader-centred model [26]. The *kyai* remains an influential figure, but his authority does not encompass the entire institutional chain of command. Formal policy remains attached to the madrasah, operational coordination is undertaken by the IBS Chairperson, and day-to-day mentoring is largely carried out by *musyrif* and *musyrifah*. What distinguishes the *kyai* is therefore not exclusive managerial control, but the authority to shape the religious orientation, educational purposes, and normative expectations underpinning the boarding program [27]. This finding qualifies earlier portrayals of *kyai* leadership that emphasize institutional centrality, charisma, or comprehensive control. In a formally integrated IBS, the centrality of the *kyai* persists, but it is better characterized as substantive rather than bureaucratic centrality. Such a distinction is important because it prevents religious legitimacy from being conflated with administrative power and provides a more institutionally precise account of how *kyai* authority operates in hybrid educational settings.

This pattern also requires a more critical reading of distributed leadership. The evidence does not indicate that leadership is equally shared among actors, nor does it suggest that authority becomes horizontal simply because several actors participate in program implementation [28]. Rather, what is distributed are particular leadership functions, while the sources and scope of authority remain differentiated. The Head of Madrasah derives authority from

the formal institutional structure, the IBS Chairperson from organizational responsibility for program coordination, the kyai from religious and pedagogical legitimacy, and musyrif/musyrfah from their continuous involvement in students' residential lives [29]. The distributed leadership perspective is therefore useful, but only if distribution is not interpreted as equivalence. The present case points instead toward differentiated authority within distributed governance, in which leadership is collectively enacted without erasing hierarchy, role boundaries, or asymmetries of influence [30]. This refinement matters theoretically because it explains how a kyai may remain normatively influential even when he is not the principal administrative decision-maker.

Seen from this perspective, the concept of spiritual-pedagogical authority becomes analytically more productive than conventional leadership-style classifications. Categorizing the kyai as charismatic, transformational, democratic, or visionary may describe certain behavioural characteristics, but such labels say relatively little about the institutional location of his authority or the mechanism through which that authority enters program practice [31]. The findings show that the kyai's role is particularly evident in reinforcing students' intentions, sustaining the religious meaning of tahfidz and kitab learning, encouraging discipline, and orienting the work of those responsible for mentoring. This form of authority is relational because it becomes operational only when recognized and translated by other actors. It is also pedagogical because it is directed toward the formation of students' religious understanding, habits, and conduct rather than merely toward organizational compliance [32]. Consequently, the findings extend previous studies that identify the kyai as a source of religious culture and character formation by showing that this authority can remain substantial even when it is institutionally mediated. The critical point is that the kyai's influence in an integrated IBS lies not in controlling every activity, but in shaping the normative framework within which those activities acquire educational meaning.

The findings further indicate that the relationship between kyai leadership and program quality should not be represented as a direct sequence in which stronger leadership automatically produces better student outcomes. A more empirically defensible explanation is a translation mechanism linking religious direction to program implementation [33]. The kyai articulates and reinforces substantive educational orientation; the IBS Chairperson converts this orientation into schedules, targets, coordination arrangements, and evaluation procedures; musyrif and musyrfah enact these arrangements through daily mentoring; and information generated from supervision is subsequently brought into evaluation and follow-up. This mechanism is more consistent with the evidence than a simple leadership-quality relationship because the kyai did not personally administer all tahfidz submissions, conduct all kitab assessments, or supervise every disciplinary routine [34]. His contribution became visible through the way religious-pedagogical direction was embedded in organizational processes. The analytical value of this finding is that it specifies how leadership can support implementation quality, rather than merely asserting that leadership matters. It also supports the use of planning, implementation, supervision, and evaluation as sensitizing categories, while demonstrating that these functions are organizationally distributed rather than individually performed by the kyai [35]. This relationship is best understood not as a direct causal link between kyai leadership and program quality, but as a translation mechanism through which spiritual-pedagogical authority is converted into concrete implementation practices across the IBS program.

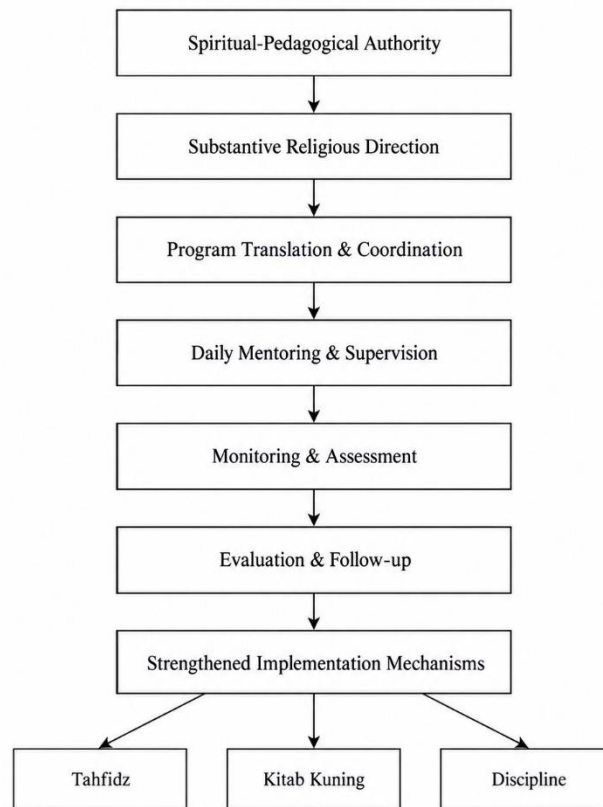


Figure 1. The Translation Mechanism of Kyai Spiritual-Pedagogical Authority into IBS Program Implementation

As illustrated in Figure 1, the contribution of kyai leadership becomes institutionally effective when spiritual-pedagogical authority is translated into program coordination, daily mentoring, monitoring, and evaluative follow-up, which together strengthen the implementation of tahfidz, classical Islamic text learning, and student discipline. This translation process is most visible in the tahfidz program, where substantive religious expectations were converted into an explicit five-juz target, scheduled halaqah, regular setoran, murojaah, cross-assessment, and periodic evaluation [36]. However, the analytical significance of these mechanisms lies less in the numerical target itself than in the institutionalization of a pathway through which memorization is guided and monitored. A five-juz benchmark creates direction, but by itself it does not establish quality; its value depends on whether students receive sufficient mentoring, whether previously memorized material is retained, and whether assessment captures more than the accumulation of new verses. The findings therefore support literature emphasizing repetition, monitoring, and continuity as essential components of tahfidz implementation, while also revealing a tension between standardized targets and differentiated student trajectories [37]. Students entered with unequal Qur’anic reading abilities and different levels of prior memorization, making identical expectations insufficient as the sole measure of program effectiveness. The additional tahfidz session reported by students further illustrates that changes in achievement may result from adjustments in instructional time and mentoring intensity, not simply from the existence of leadership direction. Accordingly, the strongest claim supported by the data is that leadership contributed to a more structured implementation environment, rather than that the kyai independently produced higher memorization outcomes [38].

A similar distinction applies to classical Islamic text learning and student discipline, although the mechanisms of quality differ substantially from tahfidz. In kitab kuning learning, program quality was expressed through continuity of instruction, grade-based material, *maknaani*, comprehension, and semester assessment rather than through a single quantitative achievement threshold [39]. This is consistent with literature that treats classical-text learning as involving access, understanding, interpretation, and application rather than mere participation. At the same time, the findings show that some students remained unable to read texts independently, indicating that the existence of scheduled

instruction and examinations should not be equated with homogeneous mastery [40]. Discipline presents an analogous issue: attendance monitoring, congregational prayer routines, room responsibilities, and graduated *takzir* demonstrate greater procedural structure, but procedural compliance is not synonymous with internalized discipline. The available evidence therefore supports a domain-specific conception of implementation quality in which tahfidz, kitab learning, and discipline require different forms of evidence and should not be collapsed into a single generalized indicator. This distinction strengthens the conceptual precision of the study because it locates quality in the robustness of implementation mechanisms while avoiding unsupported claims about uniform learning or behavioural outcomes.

The study also reveals that distributed governance creates both organizational capacity and implementation vulnerability. On the one hand, differentiated roles allow formal policy, religious direction, operational coordination, and residential mentoring to be performed by actors positioned closest to each function [41]. On the other hand, this same arrangement creates several points at which translation can weaken: the kyai's direction may be interpreted differently by program managers, musyrif may apply mentoring practices with varying intensity, school activities may reduce available boarding time, and students' initial abilities may require different levels of support. These contextual conditions are not peripheral limitations but part of the mechanism through which leadership is converted, or fails to be converted, into consistent practice. The findings therefore caution against romanticizing distributed governance as inherently collaborative or effective. Distribution can widen organizational reach, but it may also diffuse responsibility unless communication, role clarity, monitoring, and feedback are sufficiently institutionalized [42]. Monthly evaluation becomes important precisely because it provides a formal point at which dispersed information can be reassembled and implementation problems can be addressed. In this sense, the quality of distributed governance depends not on the number of actors involved, but on the reliability of the relationships connecting them.

Taken together, the study supports a relational model in which the kyai functions as a spiritual-pedagogical integrator within a differentiated governance structure. This formulation moves beyond two inadequate extremes: portraying the kyai as an all-encompassing institutional leader, or reducing him to an ordinary participant in a flattened distributed system. His authority remains distinctive because it supplies religious legitimacy and pedagogical orientation, yet its institutional consequences depend on how effectively that orientation is translated through coordination, mentoring, supervision, and evaluation [43]. Program quality, in turn, is best understood as emerging from this translation process through clearer standards, more regular guidance, structured assessment, and mechanisms for corrective follow-up across tahfidz, kitab kuning, and discipline. The findings do not support a causal claim that kyai leadership alone determines student achievement, nor do they demonstrate uniform improvement across all students. They instead identify a more theoretically defensible relationship: spiritual-pedagogical authority supports program quality when it is successfully embedded in organizational routines and enacted through interconnected actors. This provides a context-sensitive explanation of kyai leadership for madrasah-integrated boarding education and offers a stronger basis for understanding how traditional religious authority can operate within increasingly formalized educational governance

CONCLUSION

Kyai leadership in a madrasah-integrated Islamic Boarding School is best understood as spiritual-pedagogical authority embedded within a differentiated governance structure, rather than as centralized control over institutional and programmatic processes. Formal policy is retained by the madrasah, program coordination is undertaken by the IBS Chairperson, and daily mentoring is largely carried out by musyrif and musyrifah, while the kyai provides religious orientation, pedagogical direction, moral guidance, and reinforcement of pesantren values. The contribution of this authority to program quality operates through a translation mechanism in which substantive religious direction is converted into program coordination, daily mentoring, monitoring, assessment, and evaluative follow-up. Across the three domains examined, this mechanism is reflected in clearer tahfidz targets and more regular memorization

monitoring, structured learning and assessment in classical Islamic text study, and more systematic supervision and habituation in student discipline. The findings therefore position the kyai as a spiritual-pedagogical integrator whose influence becomes institutionally consequential through coordinated action among multiple actors, rather than through direct control over student outcomes.

Several limitations should nevertheless frame the interpretation of these findings. The evidence was generated from a single institutional case involving ten informants, making the conclusions context-dependent and unsuitable for statistical generalization to other pesantren, madrasah, or integrated boarding-school settings. Some comparisons with earlier program conditions relied on retrospective accounts and participant perceptions, which may be affected by recall and self-report bias, while the use of both face-to-face and WhatsApp interviews may also have produced different levels of narrative depth. In addition, the absence of systematic baseline data and individual longitudinal achievement records prevents quantitative assessment of changes in memorization, classical-text competence, discipline, or broader student development, and therefore does not permit causal attribution of program outcomes to kyai leadership. Future research should extend this line of inquiry through comparative multi-site designs, longitudinal observation, and mixed-method approaches that combine qualitative evidence on governance and leadership processes with measurable indicators of program implementation and student development.

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Author Contribution

The first author was responsible for designing the research, collecting and analyzing the data, interpreting the findings, and preparing the manuscript. The corresponding author supervised the research process, provided academic guidance, critically reviewed the manuscript, and approved the final version of the article before submission.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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