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The Dialectics of Charismatic and Transformational Leadership in Islamic Boarding Schools: A Case Study of PPT Serambi Makkah, Muaro Jambi

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***Abstract**. This study explores the dialectical integration of charismatic and transformational leadership within the modern Islamic educational ecosystem, specifically focusing on Pondok Pesantren Terpadu (PPT) Serambi Makkah in Muaro Jambi. Utilizing a qualitative case study approach, the research investigates how traditional spiritual authority synergizes with modern managerial innovation to navigate the complex dynamics of a pluralistic transmigration society. The findings reveal that charismatic leadership, anchored in the spiritual legitimacy and moral exemplarity of the Kiai, fosters absolute loyalty and sociological stability through cultural manifestations like sami'na wa atha'na. Concurrently, transformational leadership acts as a strategic catalyst for organizational adaptation, driving intellectual stimulation, human resource empowerment, and curriculum modernization. Ultimately, this hybrid leadership model enables the pesantren to preserve its sacred traditional roots while proactively embracing progressive educational advancements. This synthesis provides a robust, sustainable framework for maintaining institutional relevance and academic excellence in contemporary multicultural environments.*

***Keywords**: Charismatic Leadership; Curriculum Modernization; Islamic Boarding School; Islamic Education; Transformational Leadership.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools, or *pesantren*, represent the oldest indigenous educational institutions in Indonesia, characterized by remarkable cultural resilience and a unique sociological framework. At the core of this system is the *Kiai*, who functions not merely as an educator but as a spiritual anchor and absolute authority. According to Maskur & Aunullah (2026), Mulyasa (2022), and Mundiri et al (2025), leadership in Islamic educational contexts is deeply rooted in moral and spiritual exemplarity, where the leader's authority is legitimized through profound religious knowledge and sacred lineage. This traditional dynamic aligns with charismatic leadership, fostering a culture of absolute loyalty and spiritual devotion among followers, which Anwar & Hafidh (2023) note is essential for internalizing Islamic character values within the educational ecosystem.

However, navigating the 21st century requires *pesantren* to transcend traditional boundaries and confront the demands of digital disruption, globalization, and public accountability. Relying solely on traditional charismatic authority is no longer sufficient to manage modern educational complexities, necessitating a shift toward transformational leadership. As highlighted by Arar et al (2022), Fahmi & Hidayat (2026), and Romlah et al (2025), contemporary educational leaders must bridge diverse cultural and religious paradigms while maintaining institutional relevance. Transformational leadership becomes imperative to convert organizational potential into tangible energy, driving innovation, empowering human resources, and elevating institutional quality beyond the status quo (Hairani & Mukhtar, 2022).

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The integration of charismatic and transformational leadership offers a robust framework for modern Islamic educational institutions. While charismatic leadership provides the spiritual legitimacy and emotional commitment necessary to preserve the institution's core identity, transformational leadership supplies the strategic vision and intellectual stimulation required for organizational adaptation. Peterson & Deal (2023) emphasize that shaping a resilient school culture requires leaders who can honor historical traditions while simultaneously catalyzing progressive change. This dialectical approach ensures that the *pesantren* maintains its sacred roots while embracing modern educational advancements to build a value-based superior institution (Siregar, 2024).

This leadership dialectic is particularly critical in heterogeneous and dynamic environments, such as the transmigration areas in Jambi. Integrated Islamic Boarding School (PPT) Serambi Makkah, located in Muaro Jambi, operates within a pluralistic society with complex socio-economic dynamics. Leading an institution in such a diverse demographic requires a leader who can act as a social mediator and spiritual guardian, while simultaneously implementing modern, inclusive management strategies to address the unique cultural and structural needs of the community (Hardiyanto & Rahmawati, 2024; Junaidi & Prasetyo, 2021). The geographical and sociological uniqueness of this locale presents a distinct challenge that demands a dual leadership approach.

Despite the growing discourse on educational leadership, empirical studies examining the synthesis of charismatic and transformational leadership in non-Javanese, heterogeneous *pesantren* contexts remain scarce. Therefore, this paper aims to analyze the application and dialectics of charismatic and transformational leadership at PPT Serambi Makkah, Muaro Jambi. By exploring how the leadership integrates spiritual authority with modern managerial innovation, this study seeks to fill the existing literature gap and provide strategic insights for sustaining the relevance and excellence of Islamic educational institutions in the modern era.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Leadership in the Islamic Educational Ecosystem

Leadership within the context of Islamic education transcends mere administrative management; it inherently encompasses spiritual, moral, and educational dimensions. Al-Attas (2022) asserts that the concept of Islamic education and leadership is rooted in the formation of *adab* (proper discipline and moral conduct) and the internalization of transcendental values, wherein the leader functions as an *uswatun hasanah* (exemplary role model). In the *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) ecosystem, leadership is inextricably linked to the figure of the *Kiai*, who occupies the absolute epicenter of the institution. Mulyasa (2022) explains that leadership

in Islamic educational contexts, particularly for headmasters or *pesantren* directors, demands the integration of modern managerial competencies with profound spiritual depth. Authority in these institutions is not solely based on bureaucratic rationality but is legitimized through scholarly lineage (*sanad*), noble descent (*nasab*), and divine blessings (*barakah*) collectively recognized by the students (*santri*) and the surrounding community (Lubis, 2022).

Charismatic Leadership: Theological and Sociological Foundations

Theoretically, the roots of charismatic leadership in organizational sociology were formulated by Max Weber, who defined charismatic authority as the extraordinary qualities of an individual perceived to possess supernatural powers or superior moral excellence, thereby eliciting absolute obedience from followers (Weber, 1946). Yukl (2013) expands on this theory by stating that charismatic leaders create an atmosphere of motivation based on the followers' emotional commitment to the leader's vision and philosophy.

In the context of *pesantren*, charismatic leadership manifests through the culture of *sami'na wa atha'na* (we hear and we obey) and the tradition of *tabarruk* (seeking blessings). Anwar & Hafidh (2023) note that the internalization of Islamic character values heavily relies on a leader who possesses strong spiritual and moral appeal. Charismatic leadership in *pesantren* serves to maintain sociological stability and traditional identity. However, as Siregar (2024) warns, an over-reliance on a single charismatic figure can create organizational vulnerability if not balanced with robust institutional systems, necessitating the transformation of charismatic values into a collaborative organizational culture.

Transformational Leadership: Dimensions and Paradigms of Change

Transformational leadership was first conceptualized by Burns (2023) as a leadership style capable of transforming (or elevating) the potential of followers into tangible energy, surpassing standard performance expectations. Bass & Riggio (2005) identified four primary dimensions (the 4 I's) of transformational leadership: 1) Idealized Influence: The leader acts as a role model who builds trust and respect. 2) Inspirational Motivation: The leader articulates a compelling and challenging vision of the future, communicating high expectations. 3) Intellectual Stimulation: The leader encourages innovation, creativity, and rationality among followers to challenge the *status quo*.4) Individualized Consideration: The leader provides personalized attention, mentoring, and support for the developmental needs of each follower.

In the context of modern educational management, Hairani & Mukhtar (2022) emphasize that transformational leadership is crucial for shaping an inclusive and conducive learning climate, as well as managing school culture to be adaptive to change. A transformational leader does not merely preserve tradition but proactively reconstructs systems to address the challenges of contemporary disruption without losing the institution's core identity.

The Dialectics of Charismatic and Transformational Leadership

The greatest challenge for traditional Islamic educational institutions like *pesantren* in the 21st century is how to adapt to the demands of modernity (accountability, technology, standardization) without losing their spiritual authenticity. Fahmi & Hidayat (2026) argue that leadership in a multicultural and disruptive era requires a figure capable of bridging traditional values (custom/religion) with modern management paradigms.

This is where the dialectics between charismatic and transformational leadership become urgent. Peterson & Deal (2023) assert that shaping a resilient school culture requires leaders who can honor historical symbols (charisma/tradition) while simultaneously acting as catalysts for progressive change (transformation). In this synthesis, charismatic authority functions as the moral and spiritual legitimacy that maintains social cohesion and internal loyalty, while the transformational style functions as the strategic instrument for curriculum innovation, human resource empowerment, and governance modernization. The integration of these two styles creates a hybrid leadership model, allowing the *pesantren* to remain steadfast in its traditional roots (*al-muhafazhah 'ala al-qadimi al-shalih*—preserving the good of the past) while being adaptive and excellent in facing global dynamics (*al-akhdu bi al-jadidi al-aslah*—adopting the better of the new).

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design with a descriptive case study approach to deeply explore the dialectics of charismatic and transformational leadership within an Islamic educational institution. The primary locus of this research is Integrated Islamic Boarding School (PPT) Serambi Makkah, located in the Sungai Bahar sub-district of Muaro Jambi Regency. This specific location was purposively selected due to its unique socio-cultural dynamics as a pluralistic transmigration area, which presents distinct challenges and opportunities for integrating traditional spiritual authority with modern educational management. The qualitative approach is deemed most appropriate for this inquiry, as it allows for a comprehensive, context-rich understanding of the leader's behaviors, the organizational culture, and the lived experiences of the academic community without reducing complex social phenomena to mere numerical data.

Data collection was conducted through methodological triangulation to ensure validity and depth, primarily utilizing in-depth semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Key informants included the central leader (*Pengasuh*), foundation administrators, teaching staff (*asatidz*), and senior students, providing multi-perspective insights into the daily leadership dynamics. Observational data focused on religious routines,

administrative interactions, and classroom environments, while documentary evidence encompassed institutional profiles, organizational charts, and program reports. The gathered data were subsequently analyzed using systematic thematic analysis, involving data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing, followed by cross-verification of sources to ensure the credibility, dependability, and trustworthiness of the research outcomes.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Contextualizing Leadership in a Pluralistic Transmigration Environment

Integrated Islamic Boarding School Serambi Makkah is strategically located in the Muaro Jambi Regency, specifically within the Sungai Bahar sub-district, which presents a unique educational landscape. This specific geographical position places the institution in a complex transmigration area characterized by a highly pluralistic, multicultural, and dynamically evolving society. The demographic composition consists of diverse ethnic groups with distinct socio-economic backgrounds, primarily driven by the expansive local plantation economy and agricultural activities. Consequently, the institutional leadership must continuously navigate intricate social dynamics while simultaneously maintaining its core Islamic educational mission and traditional values. The primary leader faces the formidable dual challenge of preserving authentic Islamic traditions while effectively addressing the modern, pragmatic needs of a highly heterogeneous community.

In such a dynamic and diverse environment, the leader cannot merely function as an administrative manager but must act as a central social mediator and cultural anchor. The sociological reality of the transmigration area demands a leadership approach that is deeply empathetic yet firmly visionary to maintain communal harmony. Ustadz Maskun Hadi, as the primary leader, recognizes that traditional authority alone is insufficient to manage the multifaceted expectations of the modern students and the broader community. Therefore, a paradigm shift is required to integrate the spiritual anchor of the institution with contemporary educational management strategies. This integration ensures that the pesantren remains relevant and highly responsive to the shifting socio-cultural landscape of the Jambi province.

The core finding of this research reveals a dialectical synthesis between charismatic and transformational leadership styles within the institutional framework. This hybrid approach allows the pesantren to leverage the deep-rooted spiritual loyalty of its community while simultaneously driving structural and academic innovations. The charismatic element provides the necessary moral legitimacy and social cohesion required to unite a diverse population. Meanwhile, the transformational element acts as the catalyst for modernizing the curriculum, empowering human resources, and expanding external networks. Ultimately, this dual

leadership model ensures the institutional sustainability and competitive advantage of the pesantren in the twenty-first century.

Manifestations of Charismatic Leadership: Spiritual Legitimacy and Cultural Synchronization

The charismatic leadership at the pesantren is fundamentally anchored in the spiritual legitimacy and unquestioned authority of the central figure. This authority is operationalized through the cultural principle of unconditional obedience, which translates to deep respect and compliance from the entire academic community. Every strategic decision, ranging from curriculum adjustments to the implementation of strict disciplinary codes, is accepted willingly by the staff and students. As one senior teacher noted during an in-depth interview, the spiritual presence of the leader makes the staff follow every rule with a sincere heart rather than through structural coercion. The compliance is driven entirely by the emotional and spiritual devotion that the community holds toward the leader.

Furthermore, the leader successfully synchronizes the traditional classical culture with the demands of a modern organizational structure. While the central figure retains absolute authority over the strategic and spiritual direction of the institution, daily operational management is professionally delegated. This delegation is executed through a structured foundation and dedicated madrasah heads who manage the formal national curriculum. This brilliant synchronization ensures that the pesantren maintains its classical Islamic identity while fully complying with the administrative standards of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The charismatic leader thus acts as the spiritual compass, while the modern structure functions as the operational engine.

Internalization of Values and External Network Optimization

The internalization of Islamic character values is achieved through the leader's consistent embodiment of the exemplary role model principle. The leader actively participates in daily congregational prayers, leads routine spiritual litanies, and provides moral guidance during classical sessions. This direct and continuous role modeling bridges the gap between theoretical religious teachings and practical daily applications. As a result, the students develop a deep emotional respect, which fosters a highly disciplined and harmonious learning environment. The internalization process is thus organic, stemming from genuine admiration rather than the fear of administrative punishment.

Beyond internal management, the charismatic capital of the leader is strategically utilized to optimize external social networks. The leader leverages his genealogical ties and scholarly lineage to establish strong affiliations with major Islamic networks, such as the Dayah MUDI Mesra in Aceh. A foundation member stated during an interview that his connections with the

Acehnese scholars and local government opened doors they never thought possible for facility development. Additionally, persuasive approaches are employed to build collaborative relationships with the local government bureaucracy in Jambi. These external connections significantly facilitate the accumulation of waqf funds, the expansion of physical boarding facilities, and the enhancement of the public image.

Figure 1. Strategic External Network Optimized Through The Charismatic Capital and Social Connections of The Leader

The diagram above visualizes the strategic external network optimized through the charismatic capital and social connections of the leader. It illustrates how the central figure leverages genealogical and scholarly ties to secure vital institutional support from various external stakeholders. The connections demonstrate a multi-directional flow of resources, ranging from spiritual affiliations to bureaucratic and community collaborations. This network optimization significantly accelerates physical development and enhances the overall public reputation of the pesantren. Consequently, the institution successfully transforms the personal charisma of the leader into a sustainable organizational advantage.

Transformational Leadership: Visionary Influence and Intellectual Stimulation

The transformational leadership style is prominently manifested through idealized influence and inspirational motivation directed at the entire academic community. The leader visualizes a grand vision of producing a generation that is both spiritually devout and intellectually competent, often referred to as the ideal balance of worship and knowledge. Through visionary communication, the leader establishes exceptionally high standards and instills a profound sense of optimism among the teaching staff. This narrative emphasizes the critical balance between mastering classical Islamic texts and excelling in the formal national curriculum. Consequently, the staff and students are motivated to overcome initial facility limitations with a shared sense of purpose and resilience.

Intellectual stimulation is another critical dimension where the leader actively challenges the status quo to foster continuous innovation. The leadership encourages teachers and madrasah heads to break free from rigid pedagogical patterns by participating in external competency workshops and scientific publication training. Specific innovative programs have been introduced, such as intensive Arabic language immersion in the dormitories and comprehensive character-building initiatives. These initiatives are specifically designed to

minimize deviant behaviors, including bullying, thereby creating a safer and more conducive learning environment. The intellectual stimulation effectively cultivates a culture of critical thinking and proactive problem-solving among the educators.

Empowerment and Individualized Consideration in Modernizing Governance

The principle of individualized consideration is profoundly applied in the empowerment of human resources within the organizational structure. The leader intentionally delegates operational academic authority to the foundation and madrasah heads in a proportional and strategic manner. This deliberate distribution of power is designed to mature the managerial capabilities and administrative adulthood of the appointed administrators. By trusting the staff with significant responsibilities, the leader fosters a deep sense of ownership and professional accountability. This empowerment strategy not only lightens the central administrative burden but also creates a robust pipeline for future leadership cadres.

Furthermore, individualized consideration extends to the personal and academic development of the students within the pesantren. The leader positions himself as a compassionate parent and a dedicated mentor who provides personalized emotional counseling to the students. A senior student shared in a focus group discussion that the leader always asks about personal struggles and pushes them to believe they can reach top universities. Continuous motivation and guidance are specifically provided to senior students to encourage them to pursue higher education at reputable institutions. This personalized attention ensures that the unique psychological and academic needs of each student are adequately addressed.

Discussion

The finding that charismatic leadership at PPT Serambi Makkah relies heavily on spiritual legitimacy and the internalization of Islamic character aligns strongly with recent literature on Islamic educational management. Qosim & Siri (2025) and Wahib (2025) emphasizes that leadership in Islamic contexts must be fundamentally rooted in Islamic character, where the leader acts as a moral compass and an exemplary figure (*uswatun hasanah*). This is further supported by Arifianto et al (2025), Iskandar et al (2026), and Nisak et al (2026), who argue that the internalization of Islamic character values is most effective when embedded within a strong religious culture actively fostered by the leader. Furthermore, Abdullah et al (2025), Mukhlis (2026), and Qurtubi (2025) posits that the core of Islamic education is the formation of *adab* (proper moral conduct), which requires a leader who embodies these transcendental values. Thus, the charismatic authority of the leader in this study is not merely a traditional relic, but a vital, active mechanism for moral and spiritual formation, corroborating contemporary theories on Islamic leadership.

Beyond traditional charisma, the study reveals a critical dialectic where transformational leadership is utilized to modernize governance without losing the pesantren's core identity. This hybrid approach resonates with the findings of Peterson and Deal (2023), who assert that shaping a resilient school culture requires leaders to navigate the paradoxes between honoring historical traditions and catalyzing progressive change. Similarly, Ilyas & Syahbani (2025), Pujianto et al (2025), and Susilo et al (2026) highlights that effective school culture management must strategically build a value-based superior institution that can adapt to modern demands. The leadership at PPT Serambi Makkah exemplifies this by delegating operational tasks to modern structures (transformational) while maintaining absolute spiritual authority (charismatic). This finding contrasts with older, rigid paradigms that view traditional and modern leadership as mutually exclusive, proving instead that they can be synergistically integrated to ensure institutional survival and relevance in the 21st century.

The geographical and sociological context of the pesantren, located in a pluralistic transmigration area, necessitates a leadership style that is highly inclusive and multicultural. The findings of this study strongly support the framework proposed by Hadi et al (2025) and Mohammed et al (2025), who emphasize the urgency of multicultural leadership in bridging customary and religious cultures within educational settings. Because the pesantren serves a heterogeneous demographic, the leader's transformational ability to foster an inclusive climate is paramount. This aligns with Hairani and Mukhtar (2022), who note that managing school culture to form an inclusive and conducive learning climate is a primary indicator of modern educational leadership. The pesantren’s success in managing diverse socio-economic backgrounds in Muaro Jambi validates the necessity of blending spiritual charisma with inclusive, transformational management strategies to maintain social cohesion.

Furthermore, the transformational leadership applied at PPT Serambi Makkah serves as a strategic countermeasure to the cultural and structural barriers prevalent in the broader Jambi region. Recent studies by Junaidi & Prasetyo (2021) highlight the severe structural and cultural obstacles faced in educating indigenous communities, such as the Suku Anak Dalam (SAD) in Jambi. Similarly, Hardiyanto & Rahmawati (2024) discuss the challenges of handling culture shock for indigenous minority students in inclusive schools, while Makarova et al (2020) and Sari & Putra (2025) point out the dilemmas of formal education integration for these marginalized communities. While these studies identify significant barriers and dilemmas in regional education, the findings of the current research offer a contrasting, successful model. By utilizing intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration, the pesantren’s leadership successfully integrates diverse populations into a structured, value-based educational ecosystem, thereby overcoming the structural hurdles identified in previous regional studies.

Ultimately, the synthesis of charismatic and transformational leadership at PPT Serambi Makkah facilitates a highly culturally relevant and responsive educational environment. The leader's ability to connect the pesantren's mission with the diverse aspirations of the community reflects the principles of culturally relevant pedagogy, which Ladson-Billings (2022) argues is essential for empowering students in diverse settings. Additionally, Gay (2021) emphasizes that culturally responsive teaching and leadership are critical for transforming educational policy and practice to meet the needs of a multicultural student body. The pesantren's leadership does not impose a rigid, monolithic culture but rather adapts its transformational strategies to respect and elevate the diverse backgrounds of its students. Therefore, the integration of these two leadership styles not only preserves the pesantren's spiritual heritage but also actualizes a modern, culturally responsive educational paradigm that is highly relevant to contemporary multicultural discourse.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

In conclusion, the leadership dynamics within traditional Islamic educational institutions are fundamentally shaped by a dual paradigm encompassing both charismatic and transformational leadership. Charismatic leadership in the *pesantren* context is deeply anchored in the spiritual legitimacy, profound religious scholarship, and noble lineage of the *Kiai*, which naturally cultivates absolute loyalty and sociological stability among followers through cultural manifestations such as *sami'na wa atha'na*. Conversely, transformational leadership operates as a modern managerial catalyst that transcends the status quo by transforming latent potential into tangible organizational energy. Driven by idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, this style empowers human resources and fosters continuous innovation, ensuring that the institution remains adaptive and progressive without compromising its core spiritual identity.

Empirically, the dialectical integration of these two leadership models at Pondok Pesantren Terpadu (PPT) Serambi Makkah in Muaro Jambi demonstrates a highly effective strategy for navigating the complexities of a pluralistic transmigration society. Under the guidance of Ustadz Maskun Hadi, charismatic authority is strategically utilized to enforce moral character, provide spiritual role modeling (*uswah hasanah*), and leverage external scholarly networks, such as the affiliation with Dayah MUDI Mesra Aceh. Simultaneously, transformational leadership is actively implemented to modernize institutional governance through the professional delegation of academic authority to the foundation, the introduction of intensive Arabic immersion programs, and the facilitation of scientific publication workshops for teachers. Ultimately, this harmonious synthesis ensures that the *pesantren* not

only preserves its sacred traditional roots but also successfully equips its students with the modern competencies required to thrive in a dynamic, multicultural environment.

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