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Personalization versus Systematization of Values: A Dual-Path Model of Kiai Spiritual Leadership in Indonesian Islamic Boarding Schools.

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between personal guidance and institutional governance in transmitting spiritual values in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) remains insufficiently conceptualized. This study examines kiai spiritual leadership and develops a dual-path model based on Pondok Pesantren Safinatun Najah and Bina Insan in Pangkalan Bun, Central Kalimantan, Indonesia. Using a qualitative multi-site case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation involving 12 purposively selected participants: two kiai/habib, two administrators, four ustaz/ustazah, and four senior santri. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Interview information increasingly repeated established themes, and data collection was discontinued when no substantively new themes emerged. Findings identify two complementary pathways of spiritual leadership. Value personalization operates through exemplary conduct, the cultivation of adab, direct guidance, and relational engagement. Value systematization embeds spiritual values in worship routines, mentoring, caregiving, evaluation of daily religious practices, and institutional governance. The study contributes a context-grounded dual-path model that explains how personal and organizational practices can work together to sustain spiritual values without imposing a rigid traditional–modern dichotomy. The model requires further examination in other pesantren contexts.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) are educational institutions in which religious learning, character formation, communal life, and institutional governance are closely interconnected. Within these institutions, the kiai serves not only as a religious teacher but also as a moral exemplar and a leader whose authority shapes educational practices and organizational culture (Darojat, 2019; Kartika

et al., 2023; Rozaq et al., 2022; Zakaria & Yusmaliana, 2023) . The transmission of Islamic values therefore extends beyond formal instruction to include exemplary conduct, interpersonal relationships, religious habituation, and institutional arrangements. Previous studies have examined kiai leadership in character development, educational management, and pesantren culture (Dian et al., 2024; Fatah et al., 2023; Kurniawan et al., 2022; Rozaq et al., 2022). However, an important question remains: how are the spiritual values embodied by a kiai communicated through personal relationships and sustained through institutional practices?

This question is particularly relevant as pesantren respond to changing educational and organizational demands while maintaining their religious identities. Personal guidance and exemplary conduct may help students understand and experience Islamic values through everyday interactions. Meanwhile, structured worship routines, mentoring, and institutional procedures may support the continuity of religious and educational practices. Nevertheless, personal influence and organizational arrangements do not necessarily produce the same outcomes. Personal guidance may depend on the leader's continued involvement, whereas institutional routines may ensure regular participation without necessarily demonstrating that students have internalized the values underlying those practices. Understanding spiritual leadership therefore requires attention to both the personal enactment of values and the organizational mechanisms through which they are maintained.

Spiritual leadership theory provides an important conceptual foundation for examining this relationship. Fry (2003) conceptualizes spiritual leadership through vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love, supported by an inner spiritual life. These dimensions explain how meaningful purpose, faith, and concern for others can contribute to a sense of calling, membership, and organizational commitment. Fry et al. (2005) further examine the theory's application and measurement, while Fry & Cohen (2009) discuss its relevance to organizational transformation. Egel & Fry (2017) extend the discussion by interpreting spiritual leadership in relation to Islamic leadership. Their perspective is relevant to pesantren, where leadership is grounded in religious commitments and expressed through moral example, guidance, care, and responsibility (Jufrizen et al., 2019; Lasawali, 2023; Sapta et al., 2021) . However, applying spiritual leadership theory to pesantren also requires examining how religious values move beyond the leader's personal commitments and become embedded in recurring educational practices and institutional arrangements (Saputra et al., 2026; Tobroni, 2010, 2015) .

Research on educational and faith-based leadership reinforces the importance of contextualizing leadership practices. Perumal & Edwards (2017) examine spiritual leadership in relation to social justice in education. M. C. Brooks & Ezzani (2022) develop a framework of critical spirituality for Islamic school leadership, emphasizing the importance of understanding leadership through its religious and social context. J. S. Brooks & Brooks (2022) examine spiritual and religious capital in school leadership in the southern Philippines, while Sum (2022) investigates school leaders' perceptions of religion and spirituality in Bangladesh. Research on faith-based schools also explores leadership through servant-leadership and instructional-leadership perspectives (Martin, 2018; Shula et al., 2022). More broadly, Leithwood et al. (2020) emphasize the importance of leadership practices and organizational conditions in successful school leadership. Subhaktiyasa et al. (2023), through a systematic literature review, identify varied conceptualizations of spiritual leadership in educational organizations. Collectively, these studies provide a basis for examining religiously informed leadership as a context-dependent process. However, further conceptual clarification is needed regarding how personal value enactment and institutional practices interact in Islamic boarding schools.

A complementary perspective can be drawn from Weber et al. (1978) discussion of charismatic authority and the routinization of charisma. This perspective helps frame the relationship between authority associated with a leader's personal qualities and the regularized arrangements through which social practices are maintained. In pesantren, the kiai's personal guidance may coexist with established

routines, mentoring arrangements, and governance procedures. Nevertheless, this relationship should not be interpreted as evidence of a linear transition from personal authority to bureaucracy. Personal influence and institutional organization may operate simultaneously, with personal guidance helping preserve the religious meaning of institutional practices and organizational arrangements supporting continuity beyond individual encounters. Weber's perspective therefore offers a complementary interpretive lens rather than a predetermined explanation of how either pesantren develops (Cocker & Cronin, 2017; Masuwd et al., 2026; Nagel, 2026).

Despite these theoretical and empirical contributions, the relationship between the personal enactment of spiritual values and their institutional continuity remains insufficiently integrated in the context of pesantren. Studies of kiai leadership, character formation, and institutional management provide relevant insights, but the present study focuses specifically on the pathways through which spiritual values are communicated and maintained across different institutional settings. To address this issue, it distinguishes between value personalization and value systematization. Value personalization refers to the enactment and transmission of spiritual values through the kiai's exemplary conduct, interpersonal relationships, cultivation of adab, consultation, and direct guidance. Value systematization refers to the incorporation of spiritual values into recurring religious practices, mentoring, caregiving, activity schedules, evaluation, and institutional governance. These concepts are proposed as complementary analytical pathways rather than mutually exclusive categories.

This distinction also provides a basis for examining pesantren without imposing a rigid traditional–modern dichotomy. Differences in institutional characteristics may influence how spiritual leadership is organized, but they do not necessarily determine the exclusive presence of either pathway. Personal example can operate within structured programs, while institutional routines can reinforce values communicated through interpersonal relationships. The analytical focus is therefore on how the two pathways are manifested and related within specific educational contexts.

Against this background, the study examines kiai spiritual leadership at Pondok Pesantren Safinatun Najah and Pondok Pesantren Bina Insan in Pangkalan Bun, Central Kalimantan, Indonesia. It pursues three objectives: (1) to identify the spiritual values and leadership orientations underpinning practices at both sites; (2) to examine how these values are enacted through personal relationships, educational practices, religious habituation, and institutional governance; and (3) to develop a dual-path conceptual model based on cross-site analysis. The study's contribution lies in integrating value personalization and value systematization into a framework for understanding how spiritual values are communicated through personal leadership and sustained through organizational practices. By examining these complementary pathways across two pesantren, the study offers a context-grounded contribution to spiritual leadership theory while recognizing that the proposed model requires further examination in other Islamic educational settings.

2. METHODS

Research Design and Sites

This study employed a qualitative approach within a constructivist paradigm, using a multi-site case study design to examine kiai spiritual leadership in two Islamic boarding schools (pesantren): Pondok Pesantren Safinatun Najah and Pondok Pesantren Bina Insan in Pangkalan Bun, Central Kalimantan, Indonesia. The qualitative approach was appropriate because the study sought to understand participants' experiences, interpretations, and practices rather than statistically measure relationships between variables. The multi-site design enabled an examination of leadership practices within each institutional context, followed by a cross-site analysis of similarities, differences, and emerging patterns.

The two sites were purposively selected because they represent different institutional characteristics relevant to the research objectives. Safinatun Najah places greater emphasis on scholarly traditions and Islamic studies, whereas Bina Insan integrates pesantren education with formal schooling, applied learning, and structured residential care. These differences provided a basis for examining how shared Islamic spiritual values are expressed through personal guidance, educational activities, religious habituation, and institutional governance.

Participants and Data Adequacy

The study involved 12 purposively selected participants with direct involvement in or relevant knowledge of spiritual leadership practices at the two pesantren. They comprised two kiai or habib, two administrators or educational support staff, four ustaz or ustazah, and four senior santri. The kiai or habib provided information about leadership values, spiritual orientations, character formation, and institutional direction. Administrators contributed perspectives on organizational arrangements and management practices, while ustaz and ustazah described the implementation of leadership values in educational activities and relationships with santri. Senior santri provided accounts of their experiences of spiritual guidance, exemplary conduct, religious practices, and institutional expectations.

The selection of participants was guided by the relevance of their knowledge and experiences to the research questions rather than statistical representativeness. Interviews lasted approximately 30–90 minutes and could be repeated when clarification or further exploration was needed. The number of participants was considered in relation to the focused research objectives, the diversity of participant roles, and the depth of information obtained. During data collection and analysis, accounts increasingly repeated established themes concerning exemplary conduct, religious guidance, discipline, mentoring, worship practices, and institutional routines. Data collection was discontinued when the information obtained no longer generated substantively new themes relevant to the study's analytical focus. This recurrence was treated as an indication of data adequacy for the focused comparison of the two cases, rather than as evidence that all possible perspectives had been exhausted (Martin, 2018; Miles et al., 2014; Muazza, 2021).

Data Collection

Data were collected over approximately five months, from January to May 2025, using in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. These techniques enabled the researcher to examine spiritual leadership from complementary perspectives and compare participants' accounts with observed practices and institutional records.

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews explored participants' understandings and experiences of kiai leadership, spiritual values, santri character formation, religious practices, and pesantren governance. Observation focused on everyday educational and religious activities, including the kiai's exemplary conduct, interactions among kiai, educators, and santri, worship routines, mentoring, character formation, and decision-making practices. Documentation provided additional information through available institutional records, including organizational structures, activity schedules, educational programs, curricula, codes of conduct, and character development materials. The combination of these techniques supported a contextual understanding of how spiritual values were expressed in personal relationships and institutional life.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

Data analysis was conducted alongside data collection using the interactive model described by Miles et al. (2014), comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. During data condensation, interview accounts, observation records, and documentary

information were selected, organized, and interpreted in relation to the research questions. Relevant information was grouped into categories and themes concerning spiritual values, exemplary conduct, interpersonal guidance, religious habituation, mentoring, and institutional governance. The data were then organized into thematic narratives and comparative displays to facilitate interpretation within each site and across the two sites.

Within-site analysis examined the configuration of leadership practices at each pesantren. Cross-site analysis subsequently compared similarities, differences, and variations in how spiritual values were communicated and maintained. This comparison informed the development of the dual-path conceptual model of value personalization and value systematization. Conclusions were reviewed against the available empirical material to maintain consistency between the evidence and the resulting interpretations.

Trustworthiness was supported through source and methodological triangulation, participant clarification, and contextual description, drawing on guidance from Creswell (2018). Source triangulation involved comparing accounts from kiai or habib, administrators, educators, and senior santri. Methodological triangulation involved examining interview data alongside observational and documentary evidence. Participant clarification was used to check the meaning of information when necessary, while contextual description provided details about the institutional settings in which leadership practices occurred.

Researcher Reflexivity

The researcher recognized that the kiai and habib occupied positions of substantial religious and moral authority that could influence participants' accounts and the interpretation of leadership practices. Accordingly, leaders' statements were examined alongside the perspectives of other participants and the available observational and documentary evidence. The analysis remained attentive to differences and inconsistencies in accounts, including variations in santri responses to religious routines and institutional expectations. This reflexive approach treated participants' accounts as contextually situated perspectives rather than assuming that leadership practices were uniformly experienced or accepted. The findings were consequently interpreted as context-grounded understandings of spiritual leadership in the two pesantren, not as statistically generalizable conclusions.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Spiritual Values and Leadership Practices Across the Two Pesantren

The findings indicate that spiritual leadership at Pondok Pesantren Safinatun Najah and Pondok Pesantren Bina Insan is grounded in Islamic values, including tawhid, sincerity, compassion, discipline, and exemplary conduct. Across both sites, the kiai or habib occupies a central position in guiding religious and educational life. However, these shared values are expressed through different emphases in interpersonal relationships, educational activities, religious habituation, and institutional governance.

At Safinatun Najah, spiritual leadership is more prominently manifested through exemplary conduct, the cultivation of adab, relational closeness, and consultation (musyawarah). Religious study sessions, halaqah, dhikr, and the teaching of classical Islamic texts form part of the educational environment in which the kiai's conduct and interactions communicate expectations concerning appropriate behavior. The family-like relationships within the pesantren provide a context for direct guidance and everyday interaction. These practices indicate that spiritual values are communicated through both formal religious learning and the daily relationships among members of the pesantren community.

At Bina Insan, spiritual leadership is more visibly expressed through structured formative activities. These include tahajjud, dhikr, Qur'anic recitation, mentoring, caregiving, the evaluation of amal yaumiyah, and programs intended to develop santri independence. Activity schedules, organizational structures, divisions of responsibility, codes of conduct, and character development programs support the implementation of these activities. The findings indicate that spiritual values are incorporated into recurring educational practices and institutional arrangements.

The comparison reveals different emphases rather than mutually exclusive leadership patterns. Safinatun Najah places greater emphasis on personal guidance and relationships embedded in scholarly and communal traditions, whereas Bina Insan demonstrates a more structured organization of spiritual and formative activities. Both institutions nevertheless integrate religious learning, character formation, and the kiai's leadership into everyday pesantren life.

Personalization of Spiritual Values

The first pattern identified in the cross-site analysis is value personalization, through which spiritual values are communicated through exemplary conduct, direct guidance, interpersonal relationships, the cultivation of adab, and consultation. This pathway is particularly visible at Safinatun Najah, where the kiai's involvement in religious learning and everyday community life provides a context for the transmission of Islamic values.

The reported practices include religious study sessions, halaqah, dhikr, the teaching of classical Islamic texts, and personal interactions among the kiai, ustaz, and santri. The emphasis on relational closeness and family-like relationships indicates that the educational environment provides opportunities for students to encounter religious values through everyday conduct and guidance. The cultivation of adab is consequently reflected not only in formal instruction but also in the relationships and practices of the pesantren community.

At Bina Insan, personalization is also present through the kiai's involvement in religious formation, mentoring, caregiving, and guidance. These activities take place alongside more structured educational programs. Thus, the evidence does not support treating personalization as exclusive to Safinatun Najah. Rather, the two sites differ in the relative visibility and organization of practices through which personal guidance is exercised.

The findings establish the presence of exemplary conduct and relational guidance as features of spiritual leadership. However, they do not establish that all santri interpret these practices in the same way or internalize the associated values to the same extent.

Systematization of Spiritual Values

The second pattern is value systematization, referring to the organization of spiritual practices through recurring activities, mentoring, caregiving, evaluation, and institutional governance. This pathway is more visibly expressed at Bina Insan, where worship routines and formative activities are organized through schedules, programs, and divisions of responsibility.

The activities identified in the study include tahajjud, dhikr, Qur'anic recitation, mentoring, caregiving, and the evaluation of amal yaumiyah. Institutional documentation concerning activity schedules, educational programs, organizational structures, codes of conduct, and character development systems provides additional information about how these practices are organized. The findings indicate that spiritual values are incorporated into the routines and administrative arrangements of pesantren life.

At Safinatun Najah, institutional arrangements also support religious learning and communal activities, although the observed pattern places greater emphasis on scholarly traditions, personal

relationships, and everyday guidance. Systematization is therefore not absent from this institution; its expression differs in emphasis and form.

The findings also distinguish the implementation of spiritual activities from the internalization of spiritual values. The presence of scheduled worship, mentoring, or evaluation demonstrates that formative practices are organized, but it does not independently establish the depth of students' understanding or acceptance of the values underlying them.

Cross-Site Synthesis: The Dual-Path Model

The cross-site analysis identifies two complementary pathways through which spiritual values are communicated and maintained in the two pesantren. Value personalization emphasizes exemplary conduct, interpersonal engagement, the cultivation of adab, and direct guidance. Value systematization emphasizes recurring religious practices, mentoring, caregiving, evaluation, and institutional arrangements.

The comparison shows that Safinatun Najah places greater visible emphasis on personal guidance and relational engagement, whereas Bina Insan places greater visible emphasis on structured formative programs and institutional organization. These differences coexist with a shared commitment to Islamic spiritual values and the integration of religious learning, character formation, and educational governance.

The findings do not indicate that either pathway operates exclusively at one site. Instead, they provide the empirical basis for representing personalization and systematization as complementary analytical dimensions. The resulting model summarizes the principal patterns identified across the two cases while remaining grounded in their specific institutional contexts.

The cross-site synthesis identifies a conceptual sequence through which spiritual values are expressed and sustained in pesantren leadership. Transcendent values provide the foundation, while the kiai's exemplary leadership connects these values with personal guidance and institutional practices. These two pathways—personalization and systematization of values—have a complementary relationship and may support value internalization and leadership outcomes. Figure 1 presents the proposed model, which is grounded in the findings from the two pesantren studied.

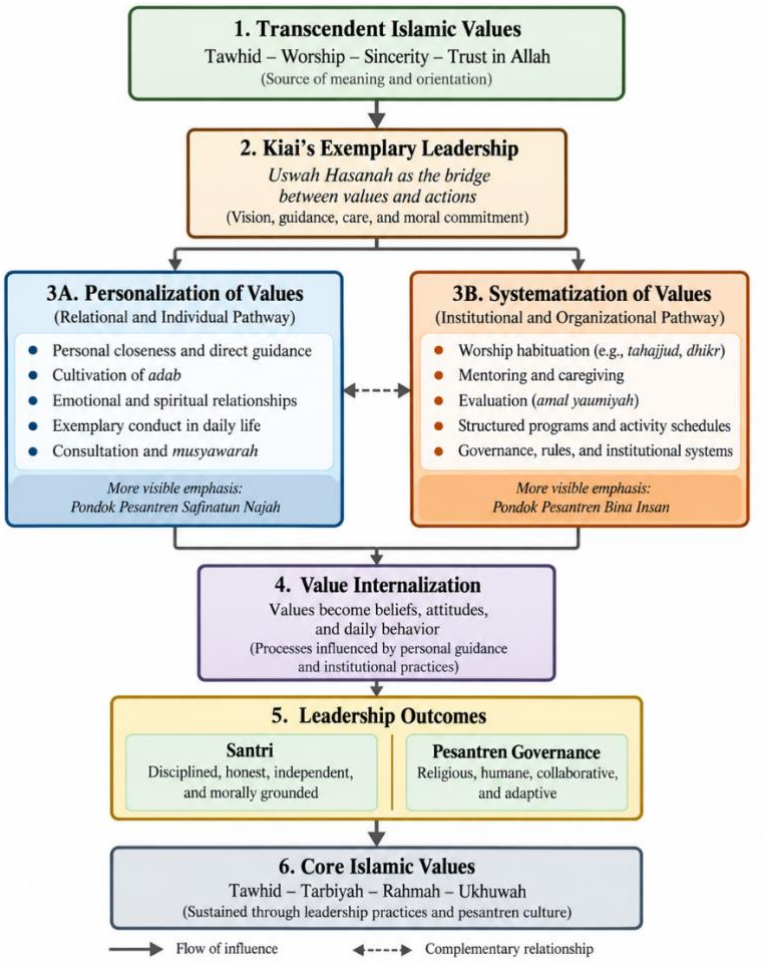

Figure 1. A Dual-Path Model of Kiai Spiritual Leadership in Pesantren

Source: Developed by the author based on the cross-site findings from Pondok Pesantren Safinatun Najah and Pondok Pesantren Bina Insan.

Discussion

Reinterpreting Spiritual Leadership Through Two Complementary Pathways

The findings suggest that spiritual leadership in pesantren can be understood through two complementary pathways: value personalization and value systematization. The first emphasizes the interpersonal transmission of values through exemplary conduct, relational closeness, direct guidance, and the cultivation of adab. The second emphasizes the institutional embedding of values through worship routines, mentoring, caregiving, daily-practice evaluation, and organizational arrangements. The contribution of this distinction is not to separate personal leadership from institutional governance, but to explain how spiritual values can be expressed through different yet interconnected practices.

This interpretation is consistent with Fry (2003) spiritual leadership theory, which emphasizes vision, altruistic love, and hope/faith as dimensions of spiritual leadership. (Fry et al., 2005; Monanisa et al., 2024) further examined the model in relation to organizational performance and employee well-being. However, the present findings indicate that spiritual leadership in pesantren should also be interpreted through religiously situated relationships, Islamic ethical concepts, and established educational practices. In this context, the kiai's leadership is expressed not only through the articulation of a shared spiritual vision but also through personal example and the organization of everyday religious life (Anwar, 2010; Bruinessen, 1999; Fithriah, 2018; Sulaiman et al., 2023) .

The findings therefore extend the discussion of spiritual leadership by distinguishing between the interpersonal expression of values and their institutional embedding. This distinction is analytical rather than categorical. Personalization does not occur outside organizational structures, and systematization does not operate independently of the people who interpret and enact institutional rules. Rather, the two pathways illuminate different emphases through which spiritual values are communicated and maintained in pesantren life.

This interpretation also resonates with research on spiritual and religious leadership in educational settings. M. C. Brooks & Ezzani (2022) emphasize the importance of critical spirituality in understanding Islamic school leadership, while J. S. Brooks & Brooks (2022) demonstrate the relevance of religious and spiritual capital to leadership in a Muslim educational context. These perspectives support an understanding of leadership in which religious meaning, ethical relationships, and institutional practices are considered in relation to their specific contexts. The present study contributes a focused conceptual distinction by identifying personalization and systematization as two pathways through which spiritual values are expressed in the two pesantren examined.

Value Personalization: Exemplary Conduct, Adab, and Relational Authority

The first pathway, value personalization, highlights the role of the kiai's exemplary conduct and direct relationships with members of the pesantren community. At Safinatun Najah, the visible emphasis on personal example, the cultivation of adab, consultation, religious learning, and relational closeness suggests that spiritual values are communicated through everyday interactions as well as formal religious activities. In this setting, leadership is not limited to issuing instructions. It is also expressed through the consistency between religious teachings and the leader's conduct, which provides a practical reference for how values may be enacted.

The concept of uswah hasanah helps explain this process. Exemplary conduct makes ethical principles observable in daily life, while direct guidance and interpersonal engagement create opportunities for those principles to be discussed, interpreted, and practiced. The cultivation of adab is particularly important because it concerns not only knowledge of appropriate conduct but also the formation of relationships and dispositions within a religious educational environment. These practices offer a contextual interpretation of spiritual leadership in which the leader's moral credibility and relational presence are central to the communication of values.

This interpretation is compatible with Fry (2003) emphasis on altruistic love and a shared spiritual vision. Nevertheless, the findings should not be taken to mean that the kiai's personal example automatically produces internalized values among santri. Observed practices and reported experiences can indicate how values are communicated, but they cannot establish that all students interpret or internalize those values in the same way. Value personalization is therefore best understood as a pathway that creates opportunities for ethical learning and spiritual guidance rather than as a guaranteed mechanism of character formation (Fikriyah et al., 2021; Karim & Afnan, 2020; Khasanuri, 2022; Mardiyah, 2012) .

The findings also reinforce the importance of context in interpreting religious leadership. The significance of personal example in a pesantren cannot be reduced to a generic leadership technique because it is embedded in Islamic understandings of moral responsibility, religious learning, and the relationship between teachers and students. This contextual dimension complements scholarship on Islamic school leadership that calls for attention to the religious and ethical foundations of educational practice (M. C. Brooks & Ezzani, 2022). The present study consequently positions personalization as an important dimension of spiritual leadership while recognizing that its meaning and influence depend on the relationships and circumstances in which it is enacted.

Value Systematization: Embedding Spiritual Values in Institutional Practices

The second pathway, value systematization, highlights how spiritual values are incorporated into recurring activities, mentoring arrangements, caregiving practices, daily-practice evaluation, and institutional governance. At Bina Insan, the more visible emphasis on structured worship, scheduled activities, amal yaumiyah evaluation, and organizational arrangements indicates that spiritual values are supported through practices that recur beyond individual encounters with the kiai. These arrangements can make religious expectations more explicit and provide a recognizable framework for daily life within the pesantren.

This pathway draws attention to the organizational dimension of spiritual leadership. Shared values are not maintained solely through statements of principle; they may also be reflected in schedules, routines, responsibilities, and practices through which members participate in institutional life. In this sense, systematization describes how a pesantren organizes opportunities for religious practice and ethical development. It does not imply that institutional rules alone can produce spiritual commitment or that compliance with a routine necessarily demonstrates sincere internalization.

This distinction is important when interpreting activities such as scheduled worship and amal yaumiyah evaluation. Such practices can support continuity, provide guidance, and make expectations more transparent. At the same time, visible participation should not be treated as conclusive evidence of inner belief, sincerity, or moral transformation. The relationship between institutional practice and personal meaning remains interpretive and may vary among santri. This qualification is consistent with spiritual leadership scholarship that considers spiritual values in relation to organizational practice rather than treating them as interchangeable phenomena (Egel & Fry, 2017; Fry & Cohen, 2009).

Systematization also offers a way to understand the relationship between spiritual purpose and institutional governance. Mentoring, caregiving, and organizational routines may provide continuity when leadership activities extend across different people, situations, and times. However, formalization must remain connected to the ethical purposes it is intended to support. If routines become detached from guidance, care, and reflection, the presence of institutional procedures alone cannot establish that a pesantren's spiritual aims have been achieved. The findings therefore suggest that systematization is most usefully interpreted as an organizational pathway for sustaining spiritual practices, not as a substitute for personal example or relational leadership.

The Complementarity of Personalization and Systematization

The central conceptual contribution of this study is the proposition that value personalization and value systematization are complementary pathways of kiai spiritual leadership. The cross-site findings indicate different emphases in the two pesantren: personalization is more visible at Safinatun Najah, whereas systematization is more visible at Bina Insan. These emphases should not be interpreted as exclusive characteristics. Personal example and relational guidance remain relevant to institutional routines, just as interpersonal learning takes place within the broader organization of pesantren life.

The dual-path model provides a way to analyze this relationship without imposing a rigid traditional–modern dichotomy. Institutional identity may shape how leadership practices are organized, but it does not determine that a pesantren uses only one pathway. The model instead directs attention to the relative visibility of particular practices and to the ways in which personal relationships and organizational arrangements can reinforce, complement, or potentially diverge from one another.

This conceptualization is consistent with the view that spiritual leadership involves both individual and collective dimensions. Fry (2003) framework links spiritual values with shared vision and organizational life, while Egel & Fry (2017) discuss the relevance of spiritual leadership to ethical and public-oriented organizational contexts. The present study does not replace these frameworks; rather, it offers a context-grounded distinction that may help researchers examine how spiritual values

are expressed in faith-based educational institutions. Personalization directs analytical attention to the leader's conduct and relationships, whereas systematization directs attention to the institutional practices through which values are organized and maintained(Jahandar et al., 2017) .

The complementary relationship also raises an important interpretive question: how do personal guidance and institutional arrangements relate to one another in practice? The current data support the identification of both pathways and their different emphases across the two sites. They do not, however, establish a universal sequence in which personalization and systematization necessarily produce internalization and then specific leadership outcomes. The model should therefore be read as a conceptual synthesis of observed patterns, with the relationship among its components remaining open to further empirical investigation.

Theoretical Contributions and Practical Implications

The study offers three principal contributions. First, it develops a dual-path conceptualization of spiritual leadership in pesantren by distinguishing the interpersonal transmission of values from their institutional embedding. This distinction provides a focused analytical vocabulary for examining leadership practices that might otherwise be discussed under the broad category of spiritual leadership.

Second, the model connects the personal and organizational dimensions of spiritual leadership without treating them as competing approaches. The findings suggest that understanding kiai leadership requires attention to exemplary conduct, adab, and relational engagement as well as worship routines, mentoring, evaluation, and governance. This integrated perspective complements scholarship on Islamic educational leadership by emphasizing how religious and ethical commitments are enacted in both relationships and institutional practices (J. S. Brooks & Brooks, 2022; M. C. Brooks & Ezzani, 2022).

Third, the study contributes a context-specific account of leadership across two pesantren with different institutional profiles. Rather than classifying one site as exclusively personal and the other as exclusively systematic, the model identifies differences in emphasis while preserving the possibility that both pathways may operate in each setting. Its value lies in offering a framework for comparative analysis, not in claiming universal validity from two cases.

For pesantren leaders, the findings suggest the value of considering personal example and institutional arrangements together. Leaders may reflect on whether religious routines are accompanied by explanation, mentoring, and opportunities for ethical reflection, and whether personal guidance is supported by clear and consistent institutional practices. These implications are recommendations derived from the conceptual interpretation rather than interventions whose effectiveness was tested in this study. They should therefore be adapted to each pesantren's educational aims, organizational capacity, and community context.

For researchers, the dual-path model provides a basis for further comparative work. Studies in additional pesantren could examine how the visibility of each pathway varies across leadership traditions, institutional structures, and educational settings. Longitudinal research could also investigate how santri interpret and respond to personal guidance and institutional routines over time. Such research would be necessary to determine whether, how, and under what conditions the pathways are associated with sustained changes in beliefs, attitudes, behavior, or governance.

Limitations and Directions for Further Research

The findings must be interpreted in light of the study's scope. The research examined two pesantren in Pangkalan Bun through a qualitative multi-site case study involving 12 purposively selected participants. This design enabled an in-depth examination of leadership practices in their local contexts, but it does not support statistical generalization to all pesantren. The identification of two

pathways represents a context-grounded conceptual interpretation rather than a universally validated model.

Furthermore, the study identifies patterns in leadership practices and institutional arrangements; it does not establish causal relationships between those practices and the internalization of spiritual values. The presence of worship routines, mentoring, exemplary conduct, or governance procedures should not be interpreted as direct proof of particular psychological or moral outcomes. Further research could investigate how different participants understand these practices and whether their interpretations correspond with observed behavior over time.

Future studies could also examine the interaction between the two pathways in a wider range of pesantren, including institutions with different leadership structures and educational orientations. Comparative and longitudinal designs would help assess the model's explanatory usefulness, identify additional contextual factors, and clarify the conditions under which personalization and systematization complement one another. Such work would extend the present study while preserving the distinction between a conceptual contribution grounded in qualitative findings and a model whose broader applicability requires further investigation.

4. CONCLUSION

This study examined kiai spiritual leadership in Pondok Pesantren Safinatun Najah and Pondok Pesantren Bina Insan in Pangkalan Bun, Central Kalimantan, and developed a dual-path conceptual model of value transmission in pesantren. The findings identify two complementary pathways: value personalization, expressed through exemplary conduct, the cultivation of adab, direct guidance, and relational engagement; and value systematization, expressed through worship routines, mentoring, caregiving, daily-practice evaluation, and institutional governance.

The study's main contribution is to conceptualize spiritual leadership as an interaction between the interpersonal expression of Islamic values and their institutional embedding. Safinatun Najah showed a more visible emphasis on personalization, whereas Bina Insan showed a more visible emphasis on systematization. These differences represent contextual emphases rather than mutually exclusive leadership types. The proposed model provides an analytical framework for understanding how personal example and organizational practices may complement one another in sustaining spiritual values in pesantren.

Practically, the findings encourage pesantren leaders to consider exemplary conduct and relational guidance alongside consistent institutional routines and supportive governance. However, the study does not establish that these practices necessarily produce uniform value internalization or specific leadership outcomes. Because the research involved two pesantren and 12 purposively selected participants, the model should be interpreted as a context-grounded conceptual contribution rather than a universally validated framework. Further comparative and longitudinal research is needed to examine its applicability across diverse pesantren and to investigate how the two pathways relate to santri experiences, ethical development, and institutional practice over time.

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