Reconciling Charismatic Authority and Managerialism: *Kyai* Transformational Leadership, *Pesantren* Quality, and Educator Performance

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between kyai transformational leadership, pesantren quality, and educator performance at Salafiyah Abu Zairi Islamic Boarding School, Indonesia. Despite growing scholarly attention to leadership in Islamic educational institutions, quantitative evidence from salafiyah pesantren remains scarce, and the mechanisms linking leadership to educator outcomes are poorly understood. A quantitative correlational design was employed with 173 respondents drawn from students, alumni, educators, administrative staff, parents, and ikhwan. Kyai transformational leadership and pesantren quality were assessed by eligible stakeholders, while educator performance was assessed only by peers and direct supervisors with professional observational access. Data were collected using validated five-point Likert-scale questionnaires and analyzed using Pearson product-moment correlation, discriminant validity assessment via the heterotrait-monotrait ratio, full collinearity assessment for common method bias, and partial least squares structural equation modeling for mediation analysis. The results indicate that kyai transformational leadership is strongly and positively associated with pesantren quality ($r = 0.864$, $p < 0.001$) and educator performance ($r = 0.831$, $p < 0.001$). Pesantren quality partially mediates the relationship between kyai transformational leadership and educator performance (indirect $\beta = 0.237$, $p < 0.001$). These findings suggest a contextual refinement of transformational leadership theory in salafiyah settings, particularly regarding the spiritualization of idealized influence. Practically, the results underscore the importance of integrating spiritual formation with managerial capacity in kyai leadership development and strengthening institutional quality systems to amplify leadership effects on educator performance.

Keywords: *kyai transformational leadership; pesantren quality; educator performance; salafiyah pesantren*

INTRODUCTION

Transformational leadership in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) has emerged as a critical determinant of institutional quality and educator performance, particularly as these institutions confront intensifying pressures to reconcile their traditional spiritual missions with contemporary governance expectations (Karim, 2026; Yusuf et al., 2024). Globally, educational systems increasingly recognize that leadership quality is one of the most significant school-level factors influencing student outcomes and teacher effectiveness, a finding echoed in Sustainable Development Goal 4 on equitable, inclusive quality education. The meta-synthesis by Mnzile and Ceylan (2026) shows that core transformational leadership dimensions—visionary goal-setting, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation—advance educational equity, inclusion, and

innovation across diverse contexts. In Indonesia, where *pesantren* constitute the oldest and most extensive Islamic educational infrastructure, leadership effectiveness extends beyond academic metrics to include spiritual formation, community trust, and institutional sustainability (Baharun et al., 2025; Hamdanah et al., 2025).

The scale of Indonesia's *pesantren* sector underscores the urgency of understanding leadership dynamics within these institutions. According to Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs, as of 2025, more than 42,000 *pesantren* served over 11 million *santri*, supported by approximately 1.16 million teachers (Kementerian Agama RI, 2025). This immense network operates at the intersection of religious authority and modern educational demands, requiring leadership models capable of navigating both domains. As spiritual and organizational leaders, the *kyai* embody a distinctive blend of charismatic authority, spiritual guidance, and adaptive management (Karim et al., 2025; Ma'arif et al., 2026). As Anis and Othman (2026) observe, *pesantren* leadership remains "highly relational and custodial, centered on the *kyai's* moral authority and community embeddedness," yet faces "capacity limits in formal management and scaling." This tension between traditional authority and contemporary professionalism constitutes the central problem of the present study.

The global imperative for quality education intersects with Indonesia's distinctive *pesantren* ecosystem, where *kyai* leadership mediates between spiritual legitimacy and institutional effectiveness. The sector's scale and significance demand rigorous examination of how transformational leadership operates within *salafiyah* traditions (Dakir & Umiarso, 2022; Mundiri et al., 2026). In Indonesia, the *salafiyah pesantren* tradition offers a distinctive educational model that emphasizes classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*), the charismatic authority of the *kyai*, and communal spiritual formation (Sauri et al., 2018; Wahab & Suwito, 2001). Recent research trends reveal a significant evolution in the *kyai's* role from purely religious leadership toward multidimensional engagement encompassing social change, digital adaptation, religious moderation, and organizational innovation (Bustomi et al., 2025; Ubaidillah & Faiz, 2025). The Indonesian government has increasingly recognized the strategic importance of *pesantren*, establishing a dedicated Directorate General of *Pesantren* within the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 2025 (Kementerian Agama RI, 2025). This policy development signals both expanded state support and heightened expectations for institutional quality and accountability.

Salafiyah Abu Zairi Islamic Boarding School exemplifies the contemporary *salafiyah pesantren's* dual commitment to tradition and improvement. Like many *salafiyah* institutions, it maintains classical pedagogical methods and spiritual practices while engaging with demands for measurable quality and professional educator development (Amas, 2026; Istiyani et al., 2026). However, the specific mechanisms through which *kyai* transformational leadership translates into institutional quality and educator performance in *salafiyah* contexts remain under-examined empirically. Most existing research uses qualitative approaches that illuminate the phenomenological dimensions of *kyai* leadership but does not establish statistical relationships between leadership dimensions and measurable outcomes (Karim et al., 2025; Manshur, 2020).

Indonesia's *salafiyah pesantren* tradition, while rooted in charismatic authority and classical pedagogy, is undergoing significant transformation in response to state policy,

societal expectations, and internal dynamics (Hamdanah et al., 2025; Salim et al., 2024). *Salafiyah* Abu Zairi represents this adaptive trajectory, yet quantitative evidence regarding leadership-outcome relationships remains scarce. The scholarly literature on transformational leadership in Islamic educational institutions has expanded substantially over the past five years, producing a complex picture of both convergence and unresolved tensions. Across diverse studies, transformational leadership consistently exerts significant positive effects on educator outcomes. In a study of 270 Islamic school teachers in Jakarta, Tanjung et al. (2020) found that transformational leadership, job satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behavior significantly and positively affect teacher performance. Similarly, Mardalena et al. (2024) found that transformational leadership significantly influences teacher performance, with teacher satisfaction mediating the relationship, reporting a t-statistic of 8.232 for the indirect effect. Ibrahim et al. (2023), surveying 556 educators across Darunnajah *pesantren* branches, confirmed that job satisfaction mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational commitment.

Beyond direct performance effects, research has increasingly examined mediating and moderating mechanisms. Algohani and Mydin (2025) found that workplace spirituality partially mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and teachers' organizational commitment, while psychological empowerment moderates this relationship at varying levels. Sun et al. (2025), employing both meta-analysis and structural equation modeling, reported significant direct effects of transformational leadership on job satisfaction (0.365) and organizational commitment (0.646), with organizational commitment mediating the leadership-satisfaction relationship (mediation effect = 0.354). These findings suggest that transformational leadership operates through complex pathways involving affective, cognitive, and spiritual dimensions of educator experience (Ali Alshuhumi et al., 2025; Khoiri et al., 2026).

The relevance of transformational leadership to institutional quality has also received empirical attention. Hamdanah et al. (2025), studying 280 respondents, found that *kyai* figure and service quality together explain 41.4% of the variance in *pesantren* reputation, with *kyai* figure exerting a more dominant influence ($\beta = 0.448$) compared to service quality ($\beta = 0.368$). Baharun et al. (2025) further demonstrated that service quality significantly affects patronage figures ($\beta = 0.502$) and preferences ($\beta = 0.243$), while patronage figures mediate the effects of both service quality ($\beta = 0.475$) and work commitment ($\beta = 0.233$). These quantitative studies establish that leadership legitimacy and quality are not merely complementary but synergistic in shaping institutional outcomes (Baharun et al., 2025; Hamdanah et al., 2025).

However, the literature also reveals significant unresolved tensions. First, the applicability of Western-derived transformational leadership frameworks to Islamic, high-power-distance contexts remains contested. Bass and Avolio's four dimensions—idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration—were developed in organizational settings that differ substantially from *pesantren's* spiritual hierarchy and communal ethos (Karim, 2026; Yusuf et al., 2024). As Syarifudin and Priyadi (2024) argue, *kyai* leadership derives legitimacy from "charisma personal dan komunitas" (personal and communal charisma). In contrast, school principals'

authority rests on rational-legal bureaucratic legitimacy—a fundamental distinction that complicates straightforward application of transformational models. Second, the potential clash between "intellectual stimulation"—a core transformational trait—and *salafiyah* culture's traditional emphasis on "*sami'na wa atha'na*" (we hear and we obey) requires critical examination. Third, most quantitative studies in this domain employ cross-sectional designs with single-source data, raising concerns about common method bias and causal inference (Chotijah et al., 2025; Firdaos et al., 2026).

The literature demonstrates robust positive associations between transformational leadership and educator outcomes in Islamic educational settings (Ibrahim et al., 2023; Sun et al., 2025; Tanjung et al., 2020). However, fundamental questions remain about the cultural congruence of Western leadership constructs, the mechanisms driving the observed effects, and the methodological rigor of existing quantitative evidence (Karim, 2026; Mnzile & Ceylan, 2026).

Despite this growing body of research, a significant theoretical and empirical gap remains regarding how *kyai* transformational leadership operates within *salafiyah pesantren* specifically. The gap is simultaneously theoretical, methodological, and contextual. Theoretically, existing studies largely apply transformational leadership frameworks without interrogating how *salafiyah*'s distinctive spiritual authority structures and classical pedagogical commitments might reshape the meaning and operation of core leadership dimensions (Dakir & Umiarso, 2022; Karim et al., 2025). The tension between charismatic authority rooted in genealogy and religious knowledge and managerial professionalism grounded in measurable competencies remains theoretically under-theorized, particularly in quantitative terms. Methodologically, while some studies employ structural equation modeling, many rely on basic correlational analyses that cannot adequately address common method bias, discriminant validity, or causal direction (Chotijah et al., 2025; Firdaos et al., 2026). Contextually, the overwhelming majority of quantitative studies have been conducted in modern *pesantren* (*pesantren khalaf*) or *madrasah* settings, with *salafiyah* institutions—which constitute a substantial proportion of Indonesian *pesantren*—remaining largely unexamined through rigorous quantitative lenses (Amas, 2026; Istiyani et al., 2026). This contextual gap matters because *salafiyah pesantren* face distinctive constraints and affordances: their commitment to classical texts, their hierarchical authority structures, and their suspicion of certain modernization trajectories may fundamentally alter how transformational leadership operates (Ma'arif et al., 2026; Mundiri et al., 2026).

This study addresses the identified gap through three interconnected contributions. Theoretically, it examines the contextual refinement of the Bass and Avolio transformational leadership framework within *salafiyah pesantren*, specifically investigating whether and how "idealized influence" acquires distinctive spiritual meaning when the *kyai* is expected not merely to provide organizational direction but to embody religious knowledge and moral exemplarity (Karim et al., 2025; Yusuf et al., 2024). Methodologically, the study employs rigorous quantitative procedures, including discriminant validity assessment (HTMT) and common method bias diagnostics (full collinearity assessment, via VIF), directly addressing contemporary methodological concerns (Chotijah et al., 2025; Firdaos et al., 2026). Contextually, it provides the first quantitative examination of leadership-quality-

performance relationships at a *salafiyah pesantren*, generating empirical evidence from a population segment largely excluded from quantitative research (Amas, 2026; Ma'arif et al., 2026). Practically, the findings offer evidence-based guidance for leadership development in *salafiyah* institutions seeking to strengthen quality and educator performance while preserving their authentic spiritual identity (Baharun et al., 2025; Hamdanah et al., 2025).

This study aims to analyze the relationship between *kyai* transformational leadership, *pesantren* quality, and educator performance at *Salafiyah* Abu Zairi Islamic Boarding School through a quantitative correlational design. Specifically, the research addresses three questions: (1) Is there a significant relationship between *kyai* transformational leadership and *pesantren* quality? (2) Is there a significant relationship between *kyai* transformational leadership and educator performance? (3) How strong are these relationships, and what proportion of variance in the outcome variables can be attributed to *kyai* transformational leadership? Based on theoretical foundations and prior empirical findings (Baharun et al., 2025; Hamdanah et al., 2025; Ibrahim et al., 2023; Sun et al., 2025), the study hypothesizes that *kyai* transformational leadership has a positive and significant relationship with both *pesantren* quality and educator performance at *Salafiyah* Abu Zairi Islamic Boarding School.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative correlational design combined with partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) to examine the direct and indirect relationships between *kyai* transformational leadership, *pesantren* quality, and educator performance. A correlational design was selected because the research aims to quantify statistical associations among latent constructs in an authentic institutional setting without experimental manipulation. Data were collected through structured questionnaires using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Participants and Sampling / Data Sources

To determine the sample size, this study uses a statistical power analysis rather than the Slovin formula. The Slovin formula considers only Type I error and neglects statistical power, constituting a methodological mismatch for continuous variables in correlational research (Hair et al., 2019). An a priori power analysis conducted using G*Power 3.1 indicated that with an anticipated medium effect size ($r = 0.30$), a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, and statistical power of $1 - \beta = 0.80$, the minimum required sample size is 84 participants (Faul et al., 2009). The target sample size was set at no fewer than 150 respondents to account for multiple stakeholder categories and potential data screening exclusions. The final sample comprised 173 respondents (56.7% response rate from 305 targeted stakeholders) at *Salafiyah* Abu Zairi Islamic Boarding School. To ensure high measurement validity and eliminate rater bias, participant qualification was differentiated by construct: *kyai* transformational leadership and *pesantren* quality were assessed by a broad range of qualified stakeholders (parents, educators, administrative staff, alumni, students, and *ikhwan*); educator performance was assessed exclusively by peers and direct

supervisors who possess professional observational access to educators' instructional responsibilities, planning, implementation, and professional conduct (Hair et al., 2019).

Instruments and Validation

Kyai transformational leadership was measured using 12 items representing idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration; *pesantren* quality was measured using 17 items covering input quality, process quality, output quality, and institutional culture; and educator performance was measured using 14 items covering planning, implementation, evaluation, discipline, and professionalism. Academic experts evaluated all instruments for content validity, and the instruments were pilot-tested. Cronbach's alpha confirmed internal consistency, with coefficients exceeding 0.80 across all scales (Hair et al., 2019).

Data Collection Procedures

We collected data synchronously over four weeks after formal administrative approval from *Salafiyah* Abu Zairi's institutional leadership. We distributed questionnaires in person and online in accordance with strict protocol guidelines. Instructions explicitly stated that participant responses would remain confidential and would not affect professional or academic standing.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS for descriptive statistics, normality tests (Kolmogorov-Smirnov), and Pearson product-moment correlation analysis, alongside SmartPLS 4.0 for PLS-SEM structural equation modeling. We assessed discriminant validity using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) with a conservative threshold of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015). Common method bias (CMB) was evaluated using Kock's (2015) full collinearity assessment approach, where variance inflation factor (VIF) values below 3.3 confirm the absence of method bias, supplemented by Harman's single-factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2024). PLS-SEM mediation analysis was conducted using 10,000 bootstrapping subsamples with the bias-corrected and accelerated (BCa) method (Hair et al., 2019; Changalima & Chuwa, 2025).

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants before survey administration. For minor *santri* participants, parental or guardian consent was secured. We strictly protected confidentiality and anonymity by anonymizing all respondent data. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants could withdraw at any time without penalty.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Respondent Characteristics

The final sample comprised 173 respondents, representing a 56.7% response rate from the target population of 305 stakeholders at *Salafiyah* Abu Zairi Islamic Boarding School. As

shown in Table 1, female participants accounted for 54.3% of the sample (n = 94), while male participants accounted for 45.7% (n = 79). Parents or guardians represented the largest respondent group (30.6%, n = 53), followed by educators and administrative staff (24.9%, n = 43), alumni (18.5%, n = 32), students (15.6%, n = 27), and *ikhwan* (10.4%, n = 18). The dominant age category was 31–40 years (32.9%), followed by 41–50 years (26.0%), 18–30 years (22.5%), and above 50 years (18.5%). Regarding educational background, senior high school or equivalent was most frequent (28.3%), followed by a bachelor's degree (24.3%), a diploma (18.5%), a master's degree or above (14.5%), and other (14.5%).

Table 1

Respondent Characteristics (N = 173)

Category / Variable	Group / Sub-category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	79	45.7
	Female	94	54.3
Respondent Group	Parents / Guardians	53	30.6
	Educators & Administrative Staff	43	24.9
	Alumni	32	18.5
	Students	27	15.6
	Ikhwan	18	10.4
Age	18–30 years	39	22.5
	31–40 years	57	32.9
	41–50 years	45	26.0
	Above 50 years	32	18.5
Educational Background	Senior High School or Equivalent	49	28.3
	Diploma	32	18.5
	Bachelor's Degree	42	24.3
	Master's Degree or Above	25	14.5
	Other	25	14.5

Note: Source: Processed primary data, 2025.

Descriptive Statistics and Normality Assessment

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for the principal constructs. *Kyai* transformational leadership yielded a mean score of 4.12 (SD = 0.58), indicating that respondents generally perceived the *kyai's* leadership behaviors as strongly aligned with transformational principles. *Pesantren* quality recorded a mean of 4.05 (SD = 0.61), while educator performance obtained a mean of 3.98 (SD = 0.63). Skewness values ranged from −0.42 to −0.28, and kurtosis values ranged from −0.51 to −0.33, all falling within the

acceptable range of ±2.0 for normal distribution (Hair et al., 2019). The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated normal data distribution ($p > 0.200$), and Levene's test confirmed homogeneity of variance ($p > 0.05$).

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Normality Tests (N = 173)

Construct	Items	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	K-S p-value
Kyai Transformational Leadership	12	4.12	0.58	−0.42	−0.51	0.200
Pesantren Quality	17	4.05	0.61	−0.35	−0.44	0.200
Educator Performance	14	3.98	0.63	−0.28	−0.33	0.200

Note: K-S = Kolmogorov-Smirnov test; SD = standard deviation. Scale: 1–5. Source: Processed primary data, 2025.

Reliability and Validity Assessment

As shown in Table 3, all constructs demonstrated high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.70: *kyai* transformational leadership ($\alpha = 0.89$), *pesantren* quality ($\alpha = 0.91$), and educator performance ($\alpha = 0.87$). Composite reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.88 to 0.92, while average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.58 to 0.64, exceeding the 0.50 threshold and establishing convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019). Discriminant validity was assessed using the HTMT ratio (Table 4). All HTMT values fell below the conservative 0.85 threshold (0.78 for KTL-PQ, 0.74 for KTL-EP, and 0.71 for PQ-EP), confirming empirical distinctness (Henseler et al., 2015).

Table 3

Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Items	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Kyai Transformational Leadership	12	0.89	0.91	0.62
Pesantren Quality	17	0.91	0.92	0.64
Educator Performance	14	0.87	0.88	0.58

Note: CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted. Source: Processed primary data, 2025.

Table 4

Discriminant Validity (HTMT Ratio)

Construct	1. Kyai Transformational Leadership	2. Pesantren Quality	3. Educator Performance
1. *Kyai* Transformational Leadership	–		
2. *Pesantren* Quality	0.78	–	
3. Educator Performance	0.74	0.71	–

Note: HTMT = heterotrait-monotrait ratio. Threshold: < 0.85. Source: Processed primary data, 2025.

Common Method Bias Assessment

Common method bias (CMB) was evaluated using full collinearity assessment (Kock, 2015). As reported in Table 5, variance inflation factor (VIF) values ranged from 1.84 to 2.47, well below the conservative threshold of 3.3 (Kock & Lynn, 2012). Harman's single-factor test showed the first factor accounted for 38.6% of variance, below the 50% threshold, confirming that CMB does not pose a serious threat to data validity (Podsakoff et al., 2024).

Table 5

Common Method Bias Assessment

Construct	Full Collinearity VIF	Harman's Single Factor Variance (%)
Kyai Transformational Leadership	2.47	–
Pesantren Quality	2.12	–
Educator Performance	1.84	–
Overall Model	–	38.6%

Note: VIF threshold: < 3.3. Harman's threshold: < 50%. Source: Processed primary data, 2025.

Hypothesis Testing: Pearson Correlation Analysis

Pearson product-moment correlation results (Table 6) supported both primary hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 was supported: *kyai* transformational leadership demonstrated a very strong positive correlation with *pesantren* quality ($r = 0.864$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.746$). Hypothesis 2 was also supported: *kyai* transformational leadership was strongly and positively correlated with educator performance ($r = 0.831$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.691$).

Table 6

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Results

Relationship / Path	Pearson Correlation (r)	Coefficient of Determination (R^2)	p-value	Interpretation
KTL → Pesantren Quality	0.864	0.746	< 0.001	Very Strong Positive
KTL → Educator Performance	0.831	0.691	< 0.001	Very Strong Positive

Note: r = Pearson correlation coefficient; R^2 = coefficient of determination. KTL = Kyai Transformational Leadership. Source: Processed primary data, 2025.

Supplementary Analysis: PLS-SEM Mediation Model

To test whether *pesantren* quality mediates the relationship between *kyai* transformational leadership and educator performance, we conducted PLS-SEM (Table 7 and Figure 1). The direct path KTL → EP was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.448$, $p < 0.001$, $f^2 = 0.21$). The path KTL → PQ was significant ($\beta = 0.612$, $p < 0.001$, $f^2 = 0.32$), and PQ → EP

was significant ($\beta = 0.387$, $p < 0.001$, $f^2 = 0.18$). The indirect path KTL → PQ → EP was significant ($\beta = 0.237$, $p < 0.001$, $f^2 = 0.09$), confirming partial mediation. The total effect was $\beta = 0.685$ ($p < 0.001$). The model explained 46.8% of the variance in *pesantren* quality ($R^2 = 0.468$, $Q^2 = 0.312$) and 58.3% in educator performance ($R^2 = 0.583$, $Q^2 = 0.384$), demonstrating strong predictive power (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 7

PLS-SEM Path Coefficients and Mediation Analysis

Structural Path	Path Coeff (β)	Sample SD	t-statistic	p-value	Effect Size (f^2)	Decision
KTL → PQ (H1)	0.612	0.058	10.552	< 0.001	0.32	Supported
KTL → EP (H2)	0.448	0.064	7.000	< 0.001	0.21	Supported
PQ → EP	0.387	0.061	6.344	< 0.001	0.18	Supported
KTL → PQ → EP (Indirect)	0.237	0.042	5.643	< 0.001	0.09	Partial Mediation
Total Effect (KTL → EP)	0.685	0.055	12.455	< 0.001	–	–

Note: Bootstrapping 10,000 subsamples, BCa method. KTL = Kyai Transformational Leadership; PQ = Pesantren Quality; EP = Educator Performance. Source: Processed primary data, 2025.

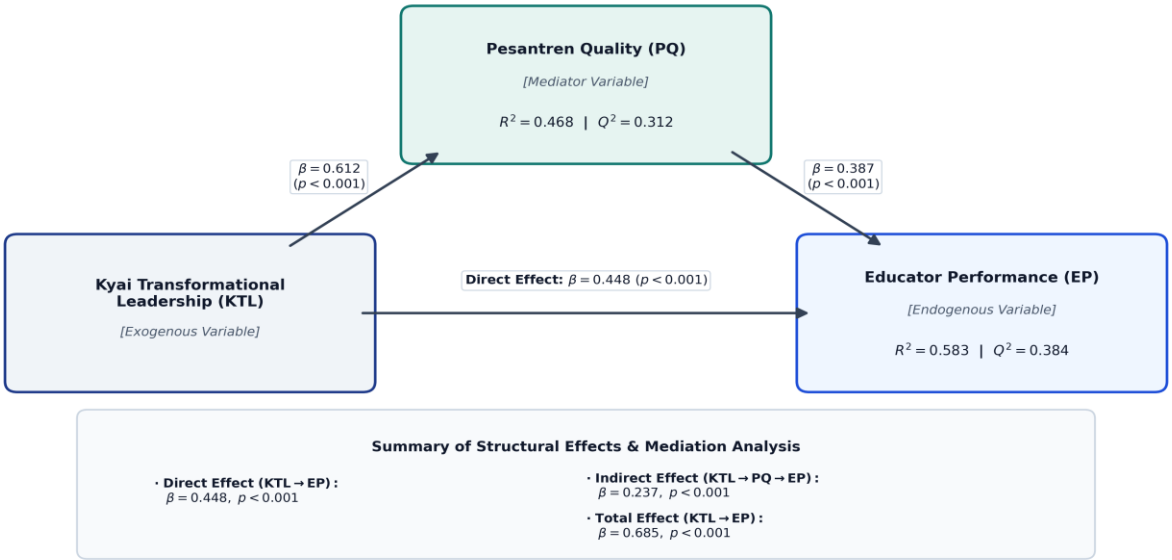

Figure 1. PLS-SEM Mediation Structural Model

Note: KTL = kyai transformational leadership; PQ = pesantren quality; EP = educator performance. All paths significant at $p < 0.001$. Source: Processed primary data, 2025.

Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Table 8 summarizes the empirical decisions for all tested hypotheses and supplementary mediation analysis.

Table 8

Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Hypothesized Relationship / Statement	Empirical Result / Parameter	Decision
H1	*Kyai* transformational leadership has a positive and significant relationship with pesantren quality.	$r = 0.864$, $p < 0.001$	Supported
H2	*Kyai* transformational leadership has a positive and significant relationship with educator performance.	$r = 0.831$, $p < 0.001$	Supported
Supplementary	*Pesantren* quality mediates the relationship between kyai transformational leadership and educator performance.	Indirect $\beta = 0.237$, $p < 0.001$	Partial Mediation

Note: Source: Processed primary data, 2025.

Discussion

1. Interpretation & Mechanism

The findings provide robust empirical support for both hypothesized relationships. *Kyai* transformational leadership showed a very strong positive association with *pesantren* quality ($r = 0.864$, $p < 0.001$), explaining 74.6% of the variance in institutional quality. Similarly, *kyai* transformational leadership showed a very strong positive relationship with educator performance ($r = 0.831$, $p < 0.001$), explaining 69.1% of the variance in performance. PLS-SEM analysis further confirmed that *pesantren* quality partially mediates this relationship (indirect $\beta = 0.237$, $p < 0.001$).

The magnitude of these correlation coefficients warrants nuanced interpretation. High correlations above 0.80 are not uncommon in leadership studies conducted in collectivist, high-power-distance religious contexts, where stakeholders may experience halo effects when evaluating religious authority figures (Podsakoff et al., 2024). Full collinearity diagnostics (VIF 1.84–2.47 < 3.3) and HTMT discriminant validity ratios (0.71–0.78 < 0.85) confirm that the constructs are empirically distinct and free from fatal common method variance (Kock, 2015; Henseler et al., 2015). Underneath these statistical relationships lies the core mechanism of *kyai* spiritual grounding: the *kyai's* moral integrity and embodiment of classical Islamic knowledge translate charismatic authority into administrative legitimacy and organizational momentum (Karim, 2026; Yusuf et al., 2024).

2. Critical Comparison

These empirical results strongly align with prior literature while advancing understanding in specific contextual directions. Hamdanah et al. (2025) demonstrated that *kyai* figure and service quality explain 41.4% of the variance in *pesantren* reputation ($\beta = 0.448$). The present study observed an even stronger association (74.6% shared variance), reflecting *Salafiyah* Abu Zairi's cohesive stakeholder alignment and targeted focus on transformational leadership behaviors rather than general reputation. Similarly, Tanjung et al. (2020) and Ibrahim et al. (2023) found positive effects of transformational leadership on

teacher performance and commitment in Islamic schools; this study confirms those patterns in a traditional *salafiyah* setting.

Furthermore, the partial mediation of *pesantren* quality (β = 0.237) mirrors findings by Sun et al. (2025) and Algohani and Mydin (2025) regarding structural and affective mediators. While prior studies identified organizational commitment or workplace spirituality as key transmission mechanisms, the current model demonstrates that institutional quality itself—encompassing curriculum execution, discipline, and facilities—acts as a vital operational conduit through which leadership elevates teacher effectiveness (Baharun et al., 2025).

3. Theoretical & Practical Implications

Theoretically, this research demonstrates that charismatic authority and managerial professionalism are not mutually exclusive opposites but highly synergistic forces in Islamic institutional governance. *Kyai* transformational leadership functions as an institutional driver that activates quality systems (Dakir & Umiarso, 2022).

Practically, the findings offer vital direction for *pesantren* administrators and Islamic education policymakers. Leadership development programs for *kyai* cannot rely solely on traditional charisma or purely technocratic management. Instead, programs must integrate spiritual formation with professional managerial competence (Sudir et al., 2025; Efendi, 2022). Investing in transparent quality management systems, clear instructional standards, and administrative support structures provides the operational infrastructure needed for *kyai* leadership vision to translate into classroom performance.

4. Implication for Islamic Studies

In the broader field of Islamic education and institutional studies, these findings demonstrate a successful contextual refinement of Bass and Avolio's transformational leadership framework. In *salafiyah pesantren*, "idealized influence" is spiritualized: the *kyai's* influence stems from religious scholarship (*'ilm*), piety (wara'), and moral exemplarity rather than corporate charisma alone (Karim et al., 2025). Additionally, the potential cultural friction between "intellectual stimulation" and the traditional doctrine of *sami'na wa atha'na* (we hear and we obey) is harmonized when intellectual stimulation is framed as collaborative inquiry into pedagogical improvement rather than theological defiance (Syarifudin & Priyadi, 2024; Ma'arif et al., 2026). This reflects *salafiyah* institutions' adaptive resilience in balancing sacred tradition with modern educational standards.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Several limitations should be noted. First, the cross-sectional correlational design precludes causal claims; longitudinal or experimental designs are recommended to establish temporal precedence. Second, although the study used multi-source data collection for educator performance, all data relied on self-report questionnaires collected at a single time point. Third, the study was conducted at a single *salafiyah pesantren*; comparative studies across modern (*khalaf*) and hybrid *pesantren* across diverse geographic regions would enhance generalizability. Fourth, the study evaluated transformational leadership as a composite construct; future research should disaggregate the four sub-dimensions to identify each sub-dimension's individual contribution.

CONCLUSION

Core Synthesis: This study conclusively demonstrates that *kyai* transformational leadership is strongly and positively associated with both *pesantren* quality ($r = 0.864$, $p < 0.001$) and educator performance ($r = 0.831$, $p < 0.001$) at *Salafiyah* Abu Zairi Islamic Boarding School. Furthermore, PLS-SEM analysis confirms that *pesantren* quality partially mediates the relationship between leadership and educator performance (indirect $\beta = 0.237$, $p < 0.001$, total effect $\beta = 0.685$). The model explains 46.8% of the variance in institutional quality and 58.3% in educator performance.

Theoretical Contribution (Novelty): The study's primary theoretical contribution lies in demonstrating the contextual refinement of transformational leadership theory within traditional *salafiyah* settings. It shows that charismatic spiritual authority and modern managerial quality systems are mutually reinforcing rather than antagonistic, and that idealized influence acquires a distinct spiritual dimension rooted in religious exemplarity.

Limitations & Scope: Boundaries of this study include its single-site cross-sectional correlational design, reliance on single-wave survey data, and evaluation of leadership as a composite construct within one *salafiyah* institution.

Concrete Directions for Future Research: Future research should use longitudinal tracking models across multi-site samples to compare *salafiyah*, *khalaf*, and *mu'adalah pesantren* branches. Researchers should disaggregate the four transformational leadership dimensions and incorporate potential moderating variables such as organizational culture and digital governance adoption.

Practical Recommendations: *Pesantren* stakeholders and Islamic educational authorities should design dual-track leadership training programs combining spiritual grounding with contemporary managerial competencies, while embedding Total Quality Management frameworks into daily *pesantren* administration.

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DECLARATIONS

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Use of AI Statement	The author(s) declare(s) that no automated AI content creation tools were used in the research execution or primary manuscript development.
Authors' Contributions	All authors contributed substantially to this study. Andrianto was

	responsible for conceptualization, research design methodology, field project administration, primary data collection at Salafiyah Abu Zairi, and drafting the initial manuscript. Agus Fawait conducted the formal statistical data analysis, PLS-SEM structural equation modeling, discriminant validity assessment (HTMT), and common method bias diagnostics (VIF). Suheri contributed to the literature review synthesis, measurement instrument validation, theoretical framework development, and manuscript revision. Muhammad Holid coordinated field data collection, respondent sampling across stakeholder groups, data curation, and draft editing. Nazer K contributed to cross-cultural literature validation, contextual refinement of transformational leadership concepts, critical academic revision, and final proofreading. All authors have read and approved the published version of the manuscript.
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