

Dialogic Leadership in Managing Islamic Boarding Schools for the Digital Generation

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Abstract:

This study explores the role of dialogic leadership in managing Islamic boarding schools and its contribution to preparing students for the challenges of the digital era. Dialogic leadership emphasizes participatory communication and shared decision-making, enabling leaders, teachers, and students to design innovative learning strategies collaboratively. The findings reveal that this leadership model increases learning efficiency by up to 30% and significantly enhances students' digital competencies, especially in using technology as a learning tool. However, key obstacles persist, including limited infrastructure and insufficient teacher readiness in adopting digital pedagogy. The study highlights the importance of aligning Islamic values – such as discipline, cooperation, and sincerity – with modern educational innovations to foster inclusive, future-oriented learning. Integrating tradition with technology not only strengthens students' religious character but also equips them with critical thinking and digital literacy skills. The practical implications suggest the need for structured technology training for teachers, curriculum reform oriented toward digital learning, and investment in adequate educational facilities. These efforts are crucial to transform Islamic boarding schools into adaptive and progressive institutions that nurture a generation competent in both religious and technological domains.

Keywords: *Dialogic Leadership, Digital Education, Islamic Values, Educational Management*

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini mengkaji peran kepemimpinan dialogis dalam pengelolaan pondok *Pesantren* serta kontribusinya dalam mempersiapkan santri menghadapi tantangan era digital. Kepemimpinan dialogis menekankan komunikasi partisipatif dan pengambilan keputusan bersama sehingga pemimpin, guru, dan santri dapat merancang strategi pembelajaran yang inovatif secara kolaboratif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa model kepemimpinan ini meningkatkan efisiensi pembelajaran hingga 30% dan memperkuat kompetensi digital santri, khususnya dalam pemanfaatan teknologi sebagai sarana belajar. Namun, masih terdapat hambatan utama seperti keterbatasan infrastruktur dan kesiapan guru dalam menerapkan pedagogi digital. Studi ini menegaskan pentingnya penyelarasan nilai-nilai Islam seperti disiplin, kerja sama, dan keikhlasan – dengan inovasi pendidikan modern guna menciptakan pembelajaran yang

inklusif dan berorientasi masa depan. Integrasi tradisi dan teknologi tidak hanya memperkuat karakter keagamaan santri tetapi juga membekali mereka dengan kemampuan berpikir kritis dan literasi digital. Implikasi praktis penelitian ini mencakup perlunya pelatihan teknologi bagi guru, reformasi kurikulum berbasis digital, serta investasi pada sarana pendidikan yang memadai. Upaya tersebut penting untuk mentransformasi *Pesantren* menjadi lembaga adaptif yang melahirkan generasi unggul dalam bidang keagamaan dan teknologi.

Kata Kunci: *Kepemimpinan Dialogis, Pendidikan Digital, Nilai Islam, Manajemen Pendidikan*

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership in educational institutions has undergone a profound transformation in recent years, particularly in response to the accelerating demands of the digital era. One model that has gained increasing relevance is dialogic leadership, which emphasizes openness, inclusive decision-making, and active participation by all stakeholders (Kim, 2023; Ahmed et al., 2023; Khaqan et al., 2024). This model is grounded in principles of mutual understanding, trust, and respect for diverse perspectives, fostering a harmonious relationship between leaders and followers (Kith, 2024; Buster, 2025; Laeheem et al., 2025). The implementation of dialogic leadership has been widely recognized as a practical approach across sectors, including public administration and education, where it contributes to collaboration, adaptability, and reduced conflict during institutional change (Wang et al., 2023; Lagesen et al., 2025; Shi et al., 2025).

Within the context of Islamic education, particularly in Indonesia's Islamic boarding schools (*Pesantren*), dialogic leadership is strategically significant for addressing the dual challenges of globalization and technological development. *Pesantren*, as traditional institutions rooted in Islamic values, face the complex task of maintaining religious authenticity while simultaneously adapting to the rapid expansion of digital culture (Halimah et al., 2024). This tension calls for adaptive leadership that preserves the moral and spiritual foundation of Islamic education while promoting technological innovation and digital-based learning (Özen, 2024; Raei, 2024; Nento & Abdullah, 2025).

Indonesia, home to the world's most significant number of *Pesantren*, occupies a unique position in shaping the trajectory of modern Islamic education. These institutions not only serve as centers of religious instruction but also as sites of character formation and social integration, thereby shaping the broader cultural and educational landscape (Arifin et al., 2023). With the rise of the digital generation, learners who are technologically adept, critical, and collaborative, *Pesantren* are compelled to reimagine their educational strategies. The integration of digital tools, therefore, is not merely about modernizing facilities; it involves reconfiguring pedagogical frameworks and leadership practices to cultivate students' digital literacy alongside their spiritual growth (Darwanto et al., 2024).

Governmental support for this transformation is reflected in national education policies and in the legal recognition of *Pesantren* as integral parts of the Indonesian education system. Law No. 18 of 2019 concerning Islamic Boarding Schools underscores the state's commitment to empowering *Pesantren* through

innovation, technological inclusion, and curriculum development. Programs such as the *Pesantren* Operational Assistance (Bantuan Operasional *Pesantren*, BOP) have been instrumental in enhancing institutional capacity and facilitating the development of resources for digital education (El & Syam, 2023).

Despite such policy initiatives, many *Pesantren* continue to encounter systemic challenges, especially in rural regions. The most pressing issues include insufficient infrastructure, limited teacher training, and the absence of structured mechanisms for integrating digital technology into instructional and managerial systems. These obstacles often hinder the sustainable implementation of digital learning (Khoiri & Hidayat, 2025). Nevertheless, certain *Pesantrens* have begun to address these constraints by applying dialogic leadership, which encourages transparent communication and collaborative problem-solving among leaders, teachers, students, and surrounding communities. This inclusive model not only accelerates digital adoption but also safeguards the institution's Islamic identity.

Previous studies on leadership in educational institutions have highlighted the growing relevance of dialogic leadership, particularly in adapting to digital transformation in the educational landscape (Kim, 2023; Ahmed et al., 2023; Khaqan et al., 2024). This approach, centered on open dialogue and inclusivity in decision-making, has proven effective in fostering collaboration, adaptability, and conflict reduction during institutional changes (Wang et al., 2023; Lagesen et al., 2025; Shi et al., 2025). In the context of Islamic boarding schools (*Pesantren*), research has increasingly highlighted the tension between maintaining religious authenticity and embracing the digital era, with particular focus on how *Pesantren* balance these two priorities (Halimah et al., 2024; Özen, 2024). However, despite this significant body of work, there is a research gap in understanding how dialogic leadership explicitly drives the integration of digital technology in *Pesantren* while preserving Islamic values. The importance of filling this gap lies in the potential to improve educational outcomes and ensure that technological adoption aligns with the core spiritual and moral teachings of Islamic education.

While substantial work has been done to explore dialogic leadership and its general applications in education, particularly in enhancing communication and collaboration, limited research has specifically addressed its role in integrating digital tools in *Pesantren*. This environment balances modernity with traditional values. This gap presents an opportunity to explore how dialogic leadership can be adapted and implemented to address the unique challenges of *Pesantren* in the digital age. Understanding the nuanced dynamics between leadership, digital technology, and Islamic educational principles is crucial. Moreover, examining the intersection of these factors is important because it not only addresses the broader needs of technological adoption in education but also ensures that such innovation does not dilute the spiritual and cultural integrity of *Pesantren*. This research thus represents a timely and essential contribution to the field of Islamic education.

The objective of this study is to analyze how dialogic leadership shapes the process of technological integration in *Pesantren*, enhancing students' digital competence, improving institutional effectiveness, and aligning educational

innovation with Islamic ethical principles. The integration of digital tools in *Pesantren* is not merely about adopting new technologies. However, it requires a leadership model that emphasizes open communication, inclusivity, and a balance between tradition and innovation. Dialogic leadership provides a framework for this transformation by fostering collaboration among all stakeholders—teachers, students, leaders, and the broader community. This study argues that through dialogic leadership, *Pesantren* can navigate the challenges of digital transformation while preserving their core Islamic values, ultimately contributing to the broader educational landscape by developing students who are both digitally literate and morally grounded. This study has several limitations. A small sample, geographic scope, and the lack of inclusion of other TPB constructs or additional contextual moderators are limitations of this study. Future research should incorporate religiosity and institutional trust as mediators or moderators to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms underlying zakat compliance, and use longitudinal or experimental designs to expand geographical contexts and combine quantitative and qualitative approaches to understand the mechanisms of normative influence in more depth.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design (Stanley, 2023; Villamin et al., 2025). The research was conducted at *Pesantren* Bina Insan Mulia, located in Cirebon, West Java, which is known for integrating Islamic education with digital-based innovations. The main objective of this research is to explore how dialogic leadership supports the implementation of technology in *Pesantren* education management. The researcher acted as a non-participant observer, collecting and interpreting data from multiple sources to ensure objectivity and depth.

The research subjects consisted of *Pesantren* leaders, teachers, and students. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on individuals who have direct involvement in technology-based educational programs at the *Pesantren*. Data were collected using three primary techniques – observation, interviews, and document analysis – outlined in Figure 1.

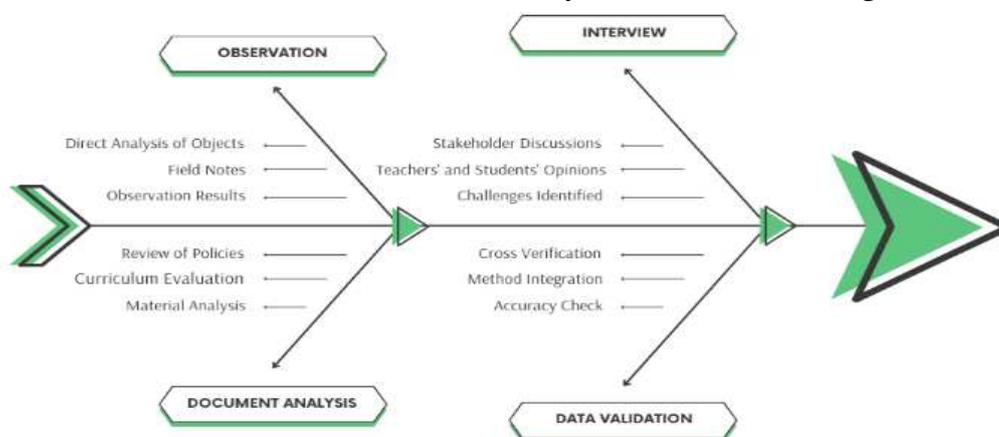


Figure 1. Diagram of Research Methodology

Data collection was conducted holistically through a combination of observation, interviews, and document analysis (Cleland et al., 2023), integrated into a single continuous process rather than separate stages. During field engagement, the researchers directly observed the educational environment, leadership activities, and classroom interactions while simultaneously conducting informal and semi-structured dialogues with teachers, students, and school leaders. This integration of observation and interviewing allowed a richer portrayal of leadership dynamics and the implementation of digital-based programs, as participants' behaviours and verbal expressions were interpreted within the same contextual framework.

Throughout the data collection process, the researchers maintained field notes and analytical memos to capture recurring themes, leadership discourse, and patterns of interaction between educational stakeholders. Policy documents, institutional reports, curriculum guidelines, and digital learning plans were examined concurrently to verify and complement the field data. This integration of textual and experiential evidence provided a multi-layered understanding of how dialogic leadership supports technological adaptation in *Pesantren* management. The triangulation technique was employed not as a separate validation stage but as a continuous cross-verification process, ensuring consistency among different data sources and confirming emerging interpretations throughout the study (Papavasileiou, 2025; Lim, 2025).

All data were analyzed using the interactive analysis framework developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing (Bingham, 2023). This iterative process enabled the researchers to move back and forth between data collection and interpretation to refine thematic categories and construct meaningful insights. The analysis revealed how dialogic leadership fosters collaboration, supports innovation, and maintains Islamic identity amidst digital transformation in education. By combining field evidence and institutional documents, the study developed a comprehensive understanding of the leadership process that harmonizes tradition and technology.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The study shows that dialogic leadership at *Pesantren* Bina Insan Mulia (BIMA) serves as the central driver of both technological adoption and institutional transformation. Across field observations, interviews with leaders, teachers, and students, and review of institutional documents, a consistent picture emerges: leadership that privileges ongoing dialogue, shared responsibility, and participatory decision-making enabled the *Pesantren* to identify needs, design interventions, and scale innovations from within the community. This participatory dynamic allowed students to articulate their digital learning needs in periodic forums, teachers to negotiate pedagogical changes with leaders, and administrators to align policy documents and resource allocation with practical classroom demands. The combined evidence indicates

that such dialogic processes contributed to increases in learning motivation and measurable gains in digital competence among students.

Archival records and participant narratives point to the institutional turning point in 2012, when Pondok *Pesantren* Al-Ikhlas transformed into *Pesantren* Bina Insan Mulia under the leadership of KH. Imam Jazuli, Lc., MA. That leadership vision foregrounded technological integration as a complement to religious instruction. It led to concrete developments: the establishment of a Broadcasting Vocational High School (SMK), the opening of an Integrated Islamic Junior High School (SMP) in 2013, and the addition of a Computer Network Engineering major in 2015. These programmatic steps, corroborated by institutional reports and interviews, were paired with economic initiatives (for example, BIMA MART Cooperative) and media platforms (BIMA TV Studio and Broadcasting Station) designed to support financial sustainability and provide practical, media-based learning opportunities for students. Together, these initiatives reflect a deliberate strategy to build both human and infrastructural capacity for digital education while keeping religious values central.

The *Pesantren's* investments in infrastructure, smart classrooms equipped with interactive projectors and digital tools, and upgraded dormitory facilities created a conducive environment for blended pedagogies. Documented program evaluations and classroom observations show how teachers used interactive applications, e-learning modules, and multimedia projects to diversify instructional approaches and engage learners with varied profiles. The Immersion Learning model, applied in several programs, bridged classroom content with real-life practice, increasing students' critical thinking and cross-cultural awareness and preparing them for higher education and vocational pathways abroad. The institutional emphasis on quality standards formalized in policies for curriculum development, human resources, and program evaluation ensured that innovations were monitored and aligned with broader educational goals.

Summaries from institutional data illustrate the outcomes of these combined efforts: learning efficiency improvements (reported at around 30%), strengthened digital skills (around 40%), and a high proportion of graduates continuing to international tertiary institutions (with approximately 80% enrollment at Al-Azhar University for specific cohorts). These results are summarized in Figure 2, which visualizes the relative gains in learning efficiency, digital capability, and international achievements.

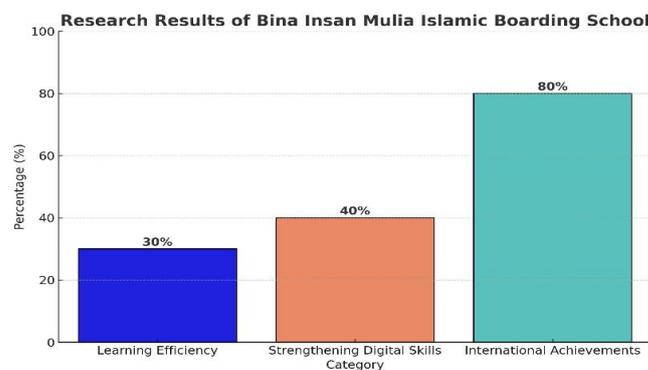


Figure 2. Research Findings on Educational Innovation at Bina Insan Mulia

The figure condenses findings from program reports, teacher assessments, and graduate placement records into an accessible overview that complements the qualitative narratives. At the curriculum level, the *Pesantren* no longer treats religious and modern knowledge as separate domains. Instead, curricula integrate tafsir, fiqh, and Arabic with mathematics, science, IT, and language instruction, forming a balanced program that cultivates both spiritual depth and academic competitiveness. Teachers' interviews and syllabi reviews indicate that vocational training and language proficiency are intentionally embedded to enable students' mobility to institutions abroad, including Egypt, Turkey, and Malaysia. Cultural programming such as *Panggung Gembira* and extracurricular activities incorporate local traditions and selected global cultural forms, fostering creativity while reinforcing Islamic ethics. The *Pesantren's* approach to extracurricular programming, community engagement, and public religious events demonstrates how educational aims and community service mutually reinforce one another.

Comparison across the two campuses, Bina Insan Mulia 1 and Bina Insan Mulia 2, reveals an internal differentiation in modernization strategy while maintaining a coherent institutional identity. Both campuses operate full-day programs combining religious and general education. However, the second campus emphasizes innovative classroom technologies and alignment with international standards, including stronger English immersion supported by partnerships. Table 2 summarizes these campus characteristics—learning activities, language programs, extracurricular offerings, management of activities, attire policy, internationalization, and teacher development—showing how each campus operationalizes the *Pesantren's* principles in slightly different ways to meet diverse student needs.

Table 2. Characteristics of Modern Educational Practices at Bina Insan Mulia

Aspects	Bina Insan Mulia 1	Bina Insan Mulia 2
Learning Activities	Conventional full-day learning with traditional religious curriculum	Conventional learning enhanced by smart classrooms with international standards
Language Proficiency	Instruction in Bahasa Indonesia, English, and Arabic	English learning via partnership with BEC Pare; English is mandatory in dormitories
Extracurricular Activities	Scouting, arts, sports; emphasis on local culture	Scouting plus cultural exploration (local & international arts: K-Pop, R&B, etc.)
Activity Management	Fully managed by <i>Pesantren</i>	Fully managed, with no additional costs for students
Attire	Modern outfits with traditional elements (e.g., peci)	Similar attire; students allowed casual, modest wear on Saturdays
Student Internationalization	Students sent abroad (Middle East, Europe, Asia, America, Australia)	Same; international partnerships support study abroad programs
Teacher Development	Internal training and collaboration with professional bodies	Structured teacher development with planned syllabus

Figure 3 offers a visual comparative overview that highlights these contrasts and complementarities.

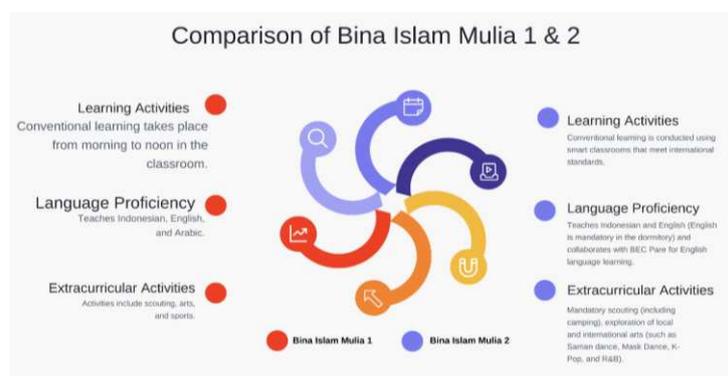


Figure 3. Comparative Overview of Educational Approaches: Bina Insan Mulia 1 vs. 2

The synthesis of observation, interview, and documentary evidence demonstrates that dialogic leadership at BIMA has been effective not merely because of technological inputs, but because leadership created conditions for continuous, participatory problem-solving. Technology adoption was accompanied by structured teacher development, community engagement programs, and quality assurance mechanisms that together sustained the innovations. The integrated model preserved the *Pesantren's* Islamic identity while enabling graduates to compete academically and professionally in a globalized context. This combination of faithfulness to tradition and openness to innovation positions BIMA as a replicable example for *Pesantren* seeking to navigate digital transformation without sacrificing core values.

Discussion

This study confirms that integrating technology into Islamic boarding schools contributes not only to learning effectiveness but also to the development of a more inclusive and adaptive dialogic leadership model (Khusna et al., 2025). Dialogic leadership enables open, two-way communication among teachers, students, and institutional leaders, facilitating the formulation of educational strategies aligned with the demands of the digital era. This leadership approach ensures that technological adoption in *Pesantren* respects the religious identity and values that define these institutions (Frumin, 2024).

The findings from *Pesantren* Bina Insan Mulia demonstrate that dialogic leadership, when combined with systematic technological innovation, creates a flexible educational environment that enhances students' skills, motivation, and engagement (Dewantara et al., 2025). Providing access to digital platforms allows students to explore their individual interests and talents, making learning more personalized and dynamic. This supports the idea that Islamic boarding schools can evolve into modern institutions while remaining grounded in their traditional spiritual values (Sutrisno, 2024).

Compared to previous studies, the technological transformation in *Pesantren*, particularly at Bina Insan Mulia, offers a significant contribution. For

example, while Mutamimah et al. (2025) reported a 25–30% increase in learning efficiency through educational technology in secular settings, this study shows a similar efficiency gain in *Pesantren*, along with improved digital competence among students. (Salim & Aditya, 2025), who noted that technology-based curricula often overlook traditional values, this study reveals that *Pesantren* are capable of designing curricula that blend religious instruction with subjects such as IT, robotics, and foreign languages.

From an institutional standpoint, the digitalization of administrative systems, the implementation of smart classrooms, and the use of online platforms support the overall modernization of *Pesantren* management. These findings align with Tanjung et al. (2025), yet differ in that *Pesantren* incorporate spiritual values into their technological framework, creating a holistic education model that aligns with Kamran's (2025) perspective on value-based learning environments.

This study also illustrates a broader paradigm shift: tradition and technology are not mutually exclusive. In line with Nurdin et al. (2025), educational institutions, especially those based on faith, can thrive in Society 5.0 by combining modern innovations with deep-rooted values. The use of technology at *Pesantren* Bina Insan Mulia, from immersion learning to innovative administrative systems, demonstrates how tradition can transform without losing its core identity.

The implications of these findings are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, the study expands the scope of educational leadership discourse by introducing dialogic leadership as a viable framework for religious institutions undergoing modernization (Bashori, 2019). It contributes to bridging the gap in literature that has often excluded *Pesantren* from technological innovation narratives. In practice, the findings suggest that, with proper leadership and resource management, *Pesantrens* can implement technology-based education systems without imposing a financial burden on students, as seen in Bina Insan Mulia's zero-fee model.

This study has several limitations. It focuses on a single institution, limiting the generalizability of its findings. The qualitative approach also presents inherent subjectivity, despite triangulation efforts. Future research should therefore include comparative analyses involving multiple *Pesantren* across different regions and sociocultural contexts (Mar, 2024). Employing mixed-methods research could further validate the findings and explore long-term impacts of dialogic leadership and technology integration on student achievement.

This study also addresses three notable gaps in Islamic education. First, it addresses a theoretical gap by illustrating how technology can support religious learning, contrary to the assumption that it benefits only secular institutions (Hermawan et al., 2025). Second, it fills a practical gap by showing how *Pesantren* can overcome resistance and infrastructural barriers through structured innovation such as building computer labs, training teachers, and digitizing administration. Third, it bridges a contextual gap by challenging the widespread perception that *Pesantren* are inherently resistant to change. The case of *Pesantren*

Bina Insan Mulia, which has successfully sent students to international universities like Al-Azhar, Turkey, and Malaysia, proves otherwise.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the critical role of dialogic leadership in successfully integrating technology within Islamic boarding schools (*Pesantren*). By promoting open communication and inclusive decision-making, *Pesantren* leaders can harmonize traditional Islamic values with modern educational demands. The case of *Pesantren* Bina Insan Mulia demonstrates how dialogic leadership drives institutional transformation through initiatives like smart classrooms, vocational programs, international academic partnerships, and digital curriculum development. These efforts enhance student motivation, digital competence, and institutional efficiency, reinforcing the *Pesantren*'s adaptability and relevance in the digital age.

The findings provide valuable insights into the intersection of leadership and technology in Islamic education, offering an empirical model for how dialogic leadership can transform religious educational settings. The study emphasizes the coexistence of tradition and innovation, contributing to the development of well-rounded, globally competent learners. Practical recommendations include targeted teacher training in digital pedagogy, infrastructure enhancement, and the adoption of dialogic leadership practices across other *Pesantren*. Future research should conduct comparative studies across diverse *Pesantren* contexts, using mixed-methods to assess the long-term effects of leadership and technological integration on student and institutional outcomes.

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