

Adaptive Leadership in Student Organizations: Cultivating Moral Spirit in an Islamic Boarding School

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Abstract. This study aims to examine the practice of adaptive leadership in the organization of students of the Nurul Ummahat Islamic Boarding School and its contribution to the formation of student behavior and morals. Adaptive leadership is seen as a relevant approach in responding to the increasingly heterogeneous and critical dynamics of students in the midst of rapid social change. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with student organization leaders (A1), student organization administrators (A2), and non-management students (A3), then analyzed using source triangulation techniques to maintain the credibility of the data. Uniquely, this leadership practice is not merely organizational or managerial, but is deeply rooted in pesantren values and influenced by the moral authority of the Kyai, which shapes leadership as a medium for internalizing Islamic moral values among students. This integration distinguishes adaptive leadership in pesantren from general organizational contexts. The results of the study show that adaptive leadership in student organizations is realized through a personal approach, deliberation, moral example, and openness in decision-making. This practice has a positive impact on improving discipline, collective responsibility, and the formation of a collaborative organizational culture rooted in pesantren values.

Keywords: Adaptive Leadership, Ghirah, Morality

Abstrak. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji praktik kepemimpinan adaptif dalam organisasi santri Pondok Pesantren Nurul Ummahat serta kontribusinya terhadap pembentukan perilaku dan moral santri. Kepemimpinan adaptif dipandang sebagai pendekatan yang relevan dalam merespons dinamika santri yang semakin heterogen dan kritis di tengah perubahan sosial yang cepat. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam terhadap pimpinan organisasi santri (A1), pengurus organisasi santri (A2), dan santri non-pengurus (A3), kemudian dianalisis menggunakan teknik triangulasi sumber untuk menjaga kredibilitas data. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan adaptif di organisasi santri diwujudkan melalui pendekatan personal, musyawarah, keteladanan moral, serta keterbukaan dalam pengambilan keputusan. Keunikan dari praktik ini terlihat pada integrasinya dengan nilai-nilai pesantren serta pengaruh otoritas moral Kyai, sehingga kepemimpinan tidak hanya bersifat organisatoris dan manajerial saja, tetapi juga menjadi media internalisasi nilai-nilai moral Islam bagi santri. Hal ini membedakan kepemimpinan adaptif di lingkungan pesantren dengan organisasi pada umumnya. Praktik tersebut berdampak positif terhadap peningkatan kedisiplinan, tanggung jawab kolektif, serta terbentuknya budaya organisasi yang kolaboratif dan mengakar pada nilai-nilai pesantren. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa kepemimpinan adaptif tidak hanya berfungsi secara teknis saja, tetapi juga sebagai media pendidikan karakter yang efektif.

Kata kunci: Kepemimpinan Adaptif, Ghirah, Moralitas

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INTRODUCTION

Adaptive leadership is no longer an option, but a necessity for educational institutions that want to remain relevant in a dynamic era. This approach demands the ability of leaders to respond to the dynamics of the times without sacrificing the fundamental principles of the organization. In the context of Islamic boarding schools, this challenge becomes more personal and essential. This is because the main mandate of Islamic boarding schools is not just to produce intellectually intelligent graduates, but to form human beings with noble character and strong moral commitment in the midst of modernity.

Research shows that the success of Islamic educational organizations relies heavily on a leadership model that is responsive and in harmony with the breath of religion. Leadership based on Islamic values is a key strategy to transform Islamic boarding schools from within. The real practice of the values of trust, *ihsan*, and *shura* not only facilitates administrative affairs, but becomes the main foundation in building a strong moral culture. The integration of these values has proven to be effective in creating an educational environment that is more integrity and quality-oriented (Pangestu et al., 2025). This is in line with research by In et al. (2024) which emphasizes that adaptive leadership in Islamic educational institutions is able to bridge the traditional values of Islamic boarding schools with the demands of modern management without losing the moral spirit of Islam. This approach does not only focus on administrative or performance achievements, but also emphasizes strong moral example and spiritual motivation among the management and members of the institution.

In the context of educational management and in the perspective of Adaptive Leadership, adaptive leadership does not merely direct students' behavior externally, but also fosters *intrinsic awareness* through reflection, participation, and value internalization. By creating dialogue, empowerment, and meaningful engagement, adaptive leaders encourage santri to understand and personally embrace Islamic values. As a result, *ghirah* emerges as an internal moral-spiritual drive that motivates discipline, responsibility, commitment to Islamic values, and active participation in educational and organizational activities. Ghirah is not merely understood as emotional enthusiasm, but is reflected in observable behaviors, such as consistency in adhering to rules, engagement in collective activities, and commitment to maintaining moral values in daily life.

Theoretically, adaptive leadership plays a significant role in shaping and strengthening student's *ghirah*. Adaptive leadership emphasizes leader's ability to understand contextual dynamics, engage members through participatory approaches, and foster dialogical communication that supports value internalization. Through its process, students are not only guided structurally but are also encouraged to develop intrinsic awareness of moral values. Furthermore, the practice of role modeling (*uswah hasanah*) within adaptive leadership serves as social stimulus that reinforces the development of *ghirah*. When leaders consistently embody the values they promote, students are more likely to internalize and actualize these values in their behavior. Therefore, adaptive leadership functions not only as a managerial strategy but also as a value transformation mechanism that cultivates *ghirah* as an internal moral force among students.

The role of adaptive leadership is also closely related to the character development of students as an integral part of the goals of Islamic education. Through leadership that involves the participation of all member elements, open communication, and a contextual approach to individual needs, the organizational climate becomes more conducive to the formation of strong and consistent character (Imadoeddin et al., 2025). Although leadership in Islamic boarding school is generally centered on the *Kyai*, students' daily dynamics largely occur within student organizations as spaces for interaction and character formation. From an educational management perspective, student organizations function as strategic mediums for value internalization through direct social experience (Mulyasa, 2011; Tilaar, 2002).

However, these organizations often face challenges such as heterogeneous backgrounds, horizontal conflicts and declining discipline and participation, indicating a gap between ideal values and actual practices (Pratiwi et al, 2023). In this context, adaptive leadership becomes relevant as it emphasizes flexibility, contextual understanding and participation. Unlike caregiver level leadership, student level leadership requires direct management of social dynamics, making it crucial in strengthening value internalization and students' *ghirah* (Muharriadi et al., 2025). This research focuses on exploring how adaptive leadership is carried out in the student organization of the Nurul Ummahat Islamic Boarding School and how the leadership practice contributes to the cultivation of *the moral spirit* of students.

Although much of the literature on leadership in Islamic education has been conducted, most research still focuses on the role of formal leadership of institutions or caregivers of Islamic boarding schools in managerial and institutional policy contexts. Meanwhile, the literature that specifically discusses adaptive leadership in student organizations is still relatively limited. In addition, research that links adaptive leadership practices to the formation of behaviors and organizational culture from the perspective of various internal actors of pesantren has also not been found.

The dynamics of students at Nurul Ummahat Islamic Boarding School have undergone significant changes, marked by increasingly diverse background, intensified social interactions and emerging challenges such as differences in perspectives, potential horizontal conflicts and fluctuations in discipline within organizational activities. These potential horizontal conflicts and fluctuations in discipline within organizational activities indicate the need for Adaptive Leadership, as adaptive leadership provides a strategic approach to fostering collaboration, strengthening intrinsic awareness, and maintaining organizational commitment among santri at Nurul Ummahat. These conditions are consistent with previous studies indicating that changes in student characteristic and social complexity influence interaction patterns and pose challenges for managing educational organizations (Maulana et al; 2024).

Based on preliminary field observations conducted during the pre research phase, these dynamics are also reflected in students' daily practices, particularly within student organizations as the primary space of interaction, where the internalization of pesantren values has not been fully optimized. These initial findings suggest that purely instructive and hierarchical leadership approaches are no longer sufficient to address the complexity of current student dynamics, as emphasized in adaptive leadership theory, which highlights the importance of contextual and responsive leadership (Hubbard et al; 2025). Therefore, this study tries to provide an overview of adaptive leadership practices that work in real life in the field. This research focuses not only on making leadership a technical tool to manage the organization, but more as a way to strengthen the character and moral values that have long been the identity of Islamic boarding schools.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method because the focus of the research is to understand in depth the practice of adaptive leadership in student organizations in the field. The qualitative approach was chosen because of its ability to dig deeper into the human side, ranging from meaning, experience, to real actions that cannot be measured only by numbers (Bunkar et al., 2024). This method feels very relevant to the phenomenon of leadership in Islamic boarding schools. In this study, leadership is not just a managerial affair, but a relationship that involves religious values, a distinctive internal culture, and emotional closeness between individuals in it. This research was carried out at the Nurul Ummahat Islamic Boarding School. The case study model was chosen because this study examines the "how" and "why" of adaptive leadership practices occurring in student organizations under real social conditions, thus providing a holistic description of the phenomenon being studied, not just generalizations (Bunkar et al., 2024).

The selection of Nurul Ummahat Islamic Boarding School as the research site is based on the unique characteristics of ust student organizational culture, which reflects a strong integration between formal student organizational structures and pesantren values, as well as the influence of the *Kyai's* moral authority in daily life. This condition positions student organizations not merely as administrative bodies but as spaces for value internalization and character formation. Therefore, Nurul Ummahat represents a relevant and distinctive case for examining adaptive leadership within a pesantren context.

Meanwhile, the subject of this reseanaarch was determined by *the purposive sampling technique*, namely selecting informants who were considered the most knowledgeable and relevant to the focus of the research. The participants consisted of 2 student leaders (A1), 2 administrators of student organizations, and 2 non-administrators (A3). Although the number of informants was limited, the data had reached saturation, as no significant new themes or findings emerged from the interviews. The validity or *trustworthiness* of research data is maintained through triangulation of data sources, namely by comparing data from leaders, administrators, and non-management students to ensure the consistency of findings and avoid bias from one perspective only. Triangulation is one of the important procedures in qualitative research to increase the credibility of data (Bunkar et al., 2024).

The study was conducted over approximately two months, covering pre-research, data collection, and initial analysis. Data were collected iteratively until data saturation was reached, supported by field notes to capture the social context. Semi-structured interviews were guided by a protocol based on the research objectives and adaptive leadership framework, covering leadership understanding, adaptive practices (personal approach, deliberation, role modeling, openness), strategies for addressing challenges, and their impact on behavior and organizational culture. Each interview lasted approximately 30–60 minutes and was documented for analysis. After the interviews were completed, the data were transcribed, organized, and coded systematically. The researchers then categorized recurring themes and patterns related to adaptive leadership and santri's *ghirah*. Furthermore, the data were interpreted through thematic analysis to identify meaningful relationships between leadership practices, intrinsic awareness, and students' organizational engagement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Adaptive Leadership Practices in Santri Organizations

Adaptive leadership is understood as the ability of leaders to adapt their styles, strategies, and interactions to the needs of members as well as the context of a dynamic environment (Hubbard et al., 2025). *Adaptive leadership* is not just a managerial technique, but a strategic approach that allows leaders to respond to the challenges of internal and external change wisely and effectively. Adaptive leaders not only act as decision-makers, but also as facilitators of shared learning that encourage members of the organization to collaborate to find solutions to common challenges (Muharriadi et al., 2025). Based on the results of interviews with the leaders of the student organization (A1), he explained that leadership at the Nurul Ummahat Islamic Boarding School is the art of understanding human character. A1 explained that leading students, especially those who are also students, presents its own challenges because of its heterogeneous background, high critical power, and diverse egos. In a situation like this, a rigid leadership style is no longer relevant. That is why a personal approach is the main solution in managing the organization there. This practice shows the real side of adaptive leadership, where a leader is required to be flexible in responding to the needs of his colleagues. Leadership here is no longer carried out through rigid instruction or pressure, but rather through the process of listening, adjusting, and building intense communication. Interestingly, this adaptive approach not only serves as a tool for controlling the organization, but also as a leadership laboratory for students to learn to be wise. This finding is

consistent with recent educational leadership studies which explain that adaptive leaders are more effective when they are able to diagnose contextual challenges and adjust their responses according to the needs of members (Bagwell, 2020). In the context of Nurul Ummahat, the personal approach does not merely function as a managerial strategy, but also as a relational mechanism to build trust, emotional closeness, and moral guidance among students.

In line with this, one of the administrators of the student organization (A2) views that the ideal leader figure is those who are able to be present as role models, prioritize participation, and remain based on Islamic values. For A2, the ability of the management to be sensitive to the needs of students is the key to the success of the organization. A2 emphasizes the exemplary aspect (*uswah hasanah*) in adaptive leadership practice. Example is seen as an important element to build trust and commitment of members to the organization's vision and mission. A2 states that effective leadership is not only about giving instructions, but how leaders can be a consistent moral example in speech, attitude, and daily behavior. A2's statement is in line with research showing that successful leaders are those who are able to instill moral values through concrete actions, not just formal statements (Muharriadi et al., 2025). It is also supported by international studies indicating that leadership credibility becomes stronger when leaders consistently model the values they expect from followers (Netolicky, 2020). In many educational institutions, exemplary conduct increases trust, discipline, and commitment among members. However, in the pesantren environment, role modelling has a deeper meaning because moral consistency is closely associated with Islamic integrity and religious responsibility.

Practically, adaptive leadership in student organizations is also seen in the way leaders handle conflicts or differences of views among members of the organization. A1 noted that conflicts that arise are often resolved through deliberation (*syura*) that actively involves the voices of members, so that every decision reflects a collective compromise while maintaining the values of the Islamic boarding school. This method shows that *adaptive leadership* does not mean that the leader submits to all the demands of the members, but is able to weigh which ones are in accordance with the fundamental values of the pesantren and the broader future of the organization (Prayoga et al., 2025). This finding is in line with participatory leadership theory which states that involving members in decision-making can increase ownership, reduce resistance, and strengthen collective responsibility. Based on the results of the interviews, it can be concluded that the practice of adaptive leadership in the student organization of the Nurul Ummahat Islamic Boarding School reflects the implementation of *integrative* adaptive leadership principles.

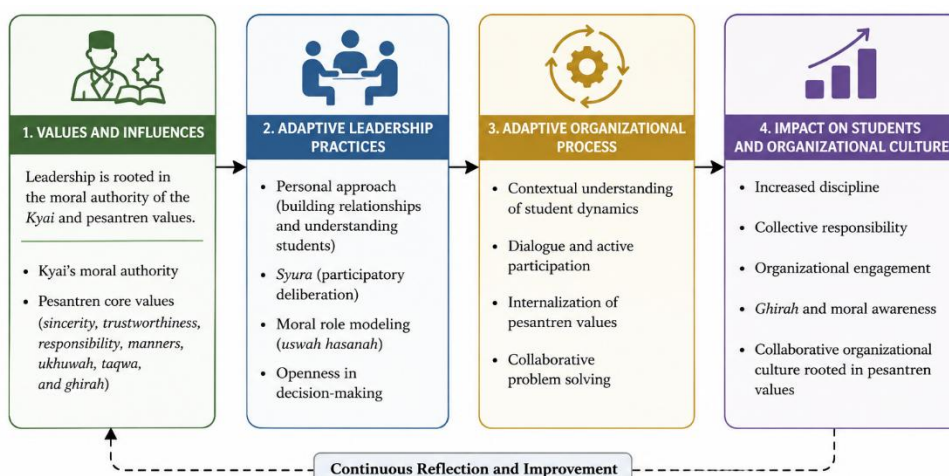


Figure 1. Adaptive Leadership Model at Nurul Ummahat Islamic Boarding School

Adaptive Leadership Strategies in Facing Challenges for Students

Adaptive leadership is a strategic approach that allows organizational leaders to respond to changing dynamics and challenges in a reflective and contextual way. Research has found that adaptive leadership is one of the important strategies in facing the challenges of the times, such as social changes, technology, and the needs of a Gen Z of students (Muharriadi et al., 2025). This argument is consistent with international studies showing that adaptive leadership is increasingly important in educational institutions. Adaptive leaders are considered more capable of maintaining institutional values while responding flexibly to new challenges and environmental complexity (Bagwell, 2020; Netolicky, 2020). The adaptive leadership strategy carried out by the leader of the student organization (A1) at the Nurul Ummahat Islamic Boarding School can be seen in the way he manages the students' differences in views and attitudes towards the institution's policies. In his view, A1 underlined that the leader's task is to bridge understanding so that students realize that every organizational policy is not the personal ambition of the administrator, but a direct derivative of the grand vision of the Islamic boarding school. Here, adaptive leadership finds its most proportionate form. It does not mean that leaders must always submit to every member's wishes, but rather be smart in choosing the right response.

Adaptive leadership strategies can also be seen from the way the student organization brings to life the value of openness through the tradition of deliberation (*syura*). For them, deliberation is not just a formal procedure, but to ensure that every aspiration of members is heard. It is important to distinguish *syura* in adaptive leadership from *syura* in conventional pesantren leadership. In conventional pesantren structures, *syura* often functions primarily as a consultative forum in which authority remains centered on senior leadership, while members mainly provide suggestions without broad involvement in decision-making. By contrast, *syura* in adaptive leadership becomes a collaborative learning space where members are encouraged to express concerns, discuss practical problems, and collectively understand institutional goals. At the same time, this moment is an opportunity for leaders to guide members to better understand the direction and grand goals of a policy. In conventional pesantren structures, *syura* often functions as a consultative forum in which authority remains centralized under senior leadership, while participants mainly provide suggestions.

By contrast, *syura* in adaptive leadership becomes a collaborative learning space where members are encouraged to express concerns, negotiate practical solutions, and collectively understand institutional goals. In addition, A1 added that the involvement of students in training or collaborative activities outside the boarding school such as citizen meetings or training from the Ministry of Religion is also carried out to expand the students' insight and social skills. By encouraging active engagement like this, organizations are actually implementing smart adaptive principles (Prayoga et al., 2025). This strategy is particularly relevant in responding to contemporary challenges such as gadget dependency, shortened attention spans, changing communication patterns, and increasingly critical attitudes among students. These conditions often reduce the effectiveness of purely hierarchical leadership models. In this sense, adaptive leadership does not merely solve organizational problems, but also prepares students to face modern realities without losing pesantren values.

From another perspective, A2 explained that adaptive strategies are carried out by attaching importance to moral exemplary as part of an adaptive response to changes in student behavior. From this perspective, an adaptive leader not only dwells on the formulation of technical strategies, but is also able to implement Islamic moral values into every policy when responding to social change. This finding supports previous leadership studies indicating that adaptive leadership is not limited to technical adjustment, but also includes moral and cultural guidance during periods of change. In religious educational institutions, leadership effectiveness is often determined by the ability to integrate strategic flexibility with ethical consistency (Netolicky, 2020). Based on the results of the interview analysis, it can

be concluded that the adaptive leadership strategy in the student organization of the Nurul Ummahat Islamic Boarding School runs through understanding the different student contexts, empowering member involvement in decision-making, and integrating Islamic moral values in every response to the challenges of the times.

The Impact of Adaptive Leadership on the Behavior and Culture of the Student Organization

Adaptive leadership has been shown to have a significant impact on individual behavior patterns and the formation of organizational culture in the educational environment, including Islamic boarding schools (Maulana et al., 2024). The results of the study show that adaptive strategies can make the quality of social relationships stronger, increase organizational flexibility, and encourage internal motivation of members to contribute more actively to organizational goals (Muharriadi et al., 2025). This finding is consistent with recent international studies indicating that adaptive leadership positively influences organizational commitment, member engagement, and behavioral responsibility in educational institution (Fernandez & Shaw 2020). Based on the results of interviews with the leaders of student organizations (A1), adaptive leadership has positively changed the behavior of students, especially in terms of discipline and moral responsibility. A1 stated that when students feel heard and involved through dialogical communication in decision-making, they tend to be more responsible for the organizational rules and norms of the pesantren. This opinion was strengthened by the management of the student organization (A2), who stated that the implementation of deliberation (*syura*) and the habituation of collective activities has fostered a culture of mutual respect and cooperation among students. A2 considers that an environment that respects members' input creates a stronger sense of belonging to the organization, which is then reflected in the daily behavior of students. The statements of A1 and A2 show that student discipline is more effectively developed when members feel psychologically involved rather than merely controlled through formal rules. This supports a research which explains that adaptive leadership increases rule compliance because members perceive policies as fair, participatory, and meaningful (Harris & Jones, 2020).

From the perspective of non-management students (A3), the impact of adaptive leadership is also seen in their involvement in pesantren activities and in moral value behavior. A3 said that administrators who implement adaptive strategies not only give instructions, but also provide real examples through example and communication that respects members. This makes non-management students feel appreciated and motivated to imitate these positive behaviors. Overall, the findings of interviews A1, A2, and A3 show that adaptive leadership in the student organization of the Nurul Ummahat Islamic Boarding School not only influences individual behavior, but also shapes the organizational culture to be more collaborative, responsive, and rooted in the values of the Islamic boarding school. This culture is reflected in the discipline of the students, active involvement in collective activities, and support for the moral values that are the foundation of the pesantren.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that adaptive leadership in student organizations at Nurul Ummahat Islamic Boarding School functions not merely as a managerial strategy to respond to organizational dynamics, but also as a mechanism for internalizing pesantren moral values. Adaptive leadership practices are manifested through personal approaches, dialogic and participatory deliberation (*shura*), moral role modeling (*uswah hasanah*), and openness in decision-making, all of which are deeply rooted in Islamic values and reinforced by the moral authority of the *Kyai*. The most distinctive finding reveals that adaptive leadership in the pesantren context extends beyond a contextual leadership approach into a value-embedded leadership model, where leadership simultaneously serves as a medium for value transmission and for cultivating *ghirah* as an intrinsic

moral drive among students. This is reflected in improved discipline, collective responsibility, and the emergence of a collaborative organizational culture grounded in pesantren values.

Practically, these findings highlight the importance of designing student leadership systems that integrate structural management with moral development, emphasizing role modeling, active participation, and contextual value internalization. Such an approach is proven to be more effective in fostering intrinsic awareness compared to purely formal and coercive control mechanisms. Nevertheless, this study is limited by its focus on a single pesantren with a relatively small number of participants. Future research is therefore recommended to expand the scope across diverse types of Islamic boarding schools, employ mixed-method approaches to better examine variable relationships, and develop more measurable operational indicators of ghirah. Additionally, longitudinal studies are needed to assess the sustainability of adaptive leadership's impact on students' character development over time.

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