
LEADERSHIP SUCCESSION IN INDONESIAN PESANTREN: A CASE-BASED FRAMEWORK FOR CADRE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Leadership succession remains a challenge for Indonesian *pesantren*, where authority is often concentrated in the *kiai* and cadre systems are unevenly institutionalized. This study examines leadership cadre development at Pesantren Darul Muttaqin Bogor and develops a case-based framework. Using an interpretive intrinsic case study, data were collected from January to June 2025 through 18 interview sessions with 14 participants, 120 hours of participant observation, and analysis of 15 institutional documents. Reflexive Thematic Analysis produced five empirical themes: regeneration challenges, institutional architecture, leadership pipeline, collaborative ecosystem, and value internalization. The findings were synthesized into a six-dimensional framework comprising institutional prerequisites, selection, development, assessment, succession, and institutional outcomes. The case shows that professionalized governance can coexist with spiritual formation, but its sustainability is constrained by centralized authority, uneven selection transparency, gendered career mobility, and cadre workload. The framework is provisional and intended for analytical transfer rather than statistical generalization.

Keywords: cadre development, Islamic educational leadership, leadership succession, pesantren, regeneration

Abstrak

Regenerasi kepemimpinan menjadi tantangan bagi pesantren yang masih bergantung pada otoritas kiai dan belum memiliki sistem kaderisasi yang terlembaga. Penelitian ini menganalisis pengembangan kader kepemimpinan di Pesantren Darul Muttaqin Bogor dan merumuskan kerangka berbasis kasus. Penelitian menggunakan studi kasus intrinsik interpretif dengan data yang dikumpulkan pada Januari–Juni 2025 melalui 18 sesi wawancara dengan 14 partisipan, 120 jam observasi partisipatif, dan analisis 15 dokumen kelembagaan. Reflexive Thematic Analysis menghasilkan lima tema empiris: tantangan regenerasi, arsitektur kelembagaan, pipeline kepemimpinan, ekosistem kolaboratif, dan internalisasi nilai. Sintesis temuan menghasilkan kerangka enam dimensi yang mencakup prasyarat kelembagaan, seleksi, pengembangan, asesmen, suksesi, dan hasil kelembagaan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa profesionalisasi tata kelola dapat berjalan bersama pembentukan spiritual, tetapi keberlanjutannya masih dipengaruhi oleh sentralisasi otoritas, transparansi seleksi, mobilitas karier berbasis gender, dan beban kerja kader. Kerangka ini bersifat kontekstual dan ditujukan sebagai rujukan analitis, bukan generalisasi.

Kata kunci: kaderisasi, kepemimpinan pendidikan Islam, pesantren, regenerasi, suksesi kepemimpinan

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Introduction

Leadership succession is a persistent concern in educational institutions because poorly planned transitions can disrupt organizational continuity and long-term direction (Amanchukwu et al., 2015). Educational institutions also operate in increasingly complex environments and need a continuing supply of leaders able to respond to pedagogical innovation and socio-economic pressures (Oppong & Oduro-Asabere, 2025). Yet leadership transition is still handled reactively in many settings, producing succession gaps that affect operational stability. For this reason, structured regeneration and leadership development have become important concerns in educational management research (Mertkan & Gümüş, 2026).

These concerns become more complex in Islamic Educational Institutions (IEIs), where administrative professionalism is evaluated alongside spiritual and moral legitimacy. Conventional succession systems, including corporate-style talent pools, usually emphasize technical performance, structural role fulfilment, and managerial efficiency. Those dimensions remain relevant in faith-based education, but they do not fully capture the basis on which leaders gain institutional legitimacy. In IEIs, leadership acceptance can also depend on spiritual authority, ideological authenticity (*keikhlasan*), and community-based trust, dimensions that are difficult to reduce to conventional performance indicators (Arar et al., 2022; Hoque & Zheng, 2024).

Within Indonesian Islamic education, *pesantren* constitute a distinctive governance environment shaped by religious authority, community relations, and educational traditions (Lukens-Bull, 2019). In many traditional *pesantren*, governance historically centered on the charismatic authority of the *kiai*. This concentration can preserve social cohesion and doctrinal continuity, but it can also create structural vulnerability when leadership transition depends on informal appointment or hereditary succession. *Pesantren* governance, however, is not uniformly paternalistic or dynastic. Modern and hybrid *pesantren* increasingly operate through foundations, boards, and professional administrative structures that share responsibility for institutional expansion and daily management (Ta'rifin & Halid, 2021).

Research on *pesantren* governance therefore reflects a continuing tension between administrative formalization and the preservation of religious authority. Modernizing approaches emphasize professional management, clear procedures, and organizational sustainability, whereas culturally oriented studies stress the legitimacy of charismatic leadership and inherited institutional traditions (Hayadin et al., 2025). Both perspectives leave practical questions unresolved. Formal governance can become detached from the spiritual foundations that sustain internal legitimacy, while informal succession may obscure selection standards and create managerial friction. The central empirical problem is consequently how a *pesantren* can institutionalize cadre development and merit-based preparation without weakening the spiritual legitimacy that underpins its identity.

This problem can be examined by bringing together Leadership Succession Theory, Elite Theory, and Islamic Educational Leadership. Earlier studies have often treated these domains separately, focusing on individual *kiai* leadership styles, general succession planning, elite recruitment, or normative Islamic leadership principles. Their combination makes it possible to examine succession as an institutional process that includes recruitment, development, assessment, circulation of authority, and moral-spiritual legitimacy. This study therefore uses the three

perspectives as complementary analytical lenses for understanding leadership cadre development in a structured *pesantren* environment (Jackson & Allen, 2022).

Four interconnected questions guide this study. First, how are potential leadership cadres identified and selected within the institutional ecosystem of the *pesantren*? Second, what mechanisms and curricula are used to develop their academic-organizational capacity and spiritual character? Third, how does the institution assess cadre readiness across moral, spiritual, and managerial competencies? Fourth, how is leadership succession executed to support long-term institutional continuity while preserving spiritual legitimacy? These questions connect the operational stages of cadre development with the institutional values that determine whether a candidate is considered ready to lead.

Pesantren Darul Muttaqin Bogor was examined as an intrinsic case because its organizational structure combines modern administrative governance with established *pesantren* values and a multi-tiered cadre development system. The case is analytically useful for observing how formal procedures and traditional sources of legitimacy operate within the same institution. The study does not seek statistical generalization to all *pesantren*. Instead, it develops a provisional, case-derived framework that clarifies the mechanisms observed at Darul Muttaqin and provides an analytical reference that may be compared cautiously with other Islamic educational settings.

Method

Research Design and Site Selection Rationale

This study employs an interpretive qualitative approach with an intrinsic case study design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The design was selected because the objective is to understand the contextual uniqueness and internal operation of leadership cadre development within a bounded institutional system rather than to seek statistical generalization. The study was conducted at Pesantren Darul Muttaqin in Bogor, West Java, Indonesia. Site selection was based on three structural criteria: (1) the institution operates an integrated formal education system from primary to secondary levels alongside residential Islamic education; (2) it has a formal legal foundation (*yayasan*) responsible for institutional assets and administrative personnel; and (3) it maintains a multi-tiered administrative structure distinct from daily spiritual caretaking. These criteria describe the organizational characteristics required by the research questions rather than presume institutional success.

Participant Characteristics and Sampling

Participants were selected using purposeful sampling combined with maximum variation sampling to capture administrative and operational perspectives across the institutional hierarchy (Patton, 2015). Inclusion required at least five years of service and direct involvement in administrative governance, financial management, student caretaking, or cadre mentoring. Fourteen participants took part in the study: seven key decision-makers and administrators representing core institutional units and seven supplementary informants comprising cadre mentors and active trainees. Table 1 presents the structural characteristics of the seven key participants using anonymized codes and generalized role descriptions.

Table 1. Demographic and Structural Profile of Key Research Participants (N = 7)

Participant Code	Generalized Institutional Role	Service Tenure	Relationship to Founder/Kiai
P01	Senior Executive Administrator	25+ Years	Non-Familial
P02	Executive Administration	15+ Years	Non-Familial
P03	Human Resources Administrator	18+ Years	Non-Familial
P04	Male Student-Care Administrator	14+ Years	Non-Familial
P05	Female Student-Care Administrator	12+ Years	Non-Familial
P06	Administrative Unit Head	16+ Years	Non-Familial
P07	External-Relations Administrator	10+ Years	Non-Familial

Data Collection Period and Extent of Fieldwork

Data collection was conducted over six months, from January to June 2025. Three qualitative methods were used to develop a detailed account of cadre development. First, 18 audio-recorded semi-structured interview sessions were conducted with the 14 participants. Sessions lasted approximately 75–110 minutes and generated about 27 hours of audio. Interviews were conducted primarily in *Bahasa Indonesia*, with occasional Sundanese and Arabic educational terminology. Recordings were transcribed verbatim, and passages containing localized terminology were translated into English through a forward-backward translation procedure checked by a bilingual educational linguist.

The second method utilized participant observation to capture real-time institutional dynamics and behavioral practices. The primary researcher conducted 120 hours of structured field observation across various institutional settings, including monthly foundation coordination meetings, weekly cadre mentoring circles (*halaqah*), daily administrative routines, and student organizational leadership activities. To maintain descriptive accuracy and contextual depth, detailed field notes were generated immediately following each observation window.

The third method centered on document selection to corroborate interview narratives and observational findings. Institutional documents were purposively sampled based on their direct relevance to succession governance. Ultimately, fifteen key documents met the selection criteria, including the Foundation Charter (*AD/ART*), the 10-Year Strategic Plan (*Renstra 2020–2030*), HR Bureau evaluation rubrics, the cadre training curriculum, and historical records of past administrative appointments.

Analytical Process: Coding, Thematic Analysis, and Model Synthesis

Data analysis combined *Reflexive Thematic Analysis* (RTA) with theoretical synthesis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The analysis proceeded through three connected **phases**. In Phase 1, transcripts and field notes were read repeatedly and coded inductively using qualitative analysis software. Descriptive codes included "informal trust building," "competency gap in modern management," and "value alignment checking." The research team used reflexive notes alongside coding to record interpretive decisions and emerging assumptions.

In Phase 2 (Thematic Clustering), these inductive codes were mapped into higher-order sub-themes and systematically clustered into five empirical thematic dimensions: (1) leadership regeneration challenges, (2) institutional architecture of cadre development, (3) leadership pipeline mechanisms, (4) collaborative leadership ecosystem, and (5) value internalization.

In Phase 3, the five empirical themes were interpreted through a **succession-planning perspective**, Elite Theory, and Islamic Educational Leadership. This theoretical synthesis reorganized the empirical relationships into six dimensions: institutional prerequisites, selection, development, assessment, succession, and institutional outcomes. Operational practices such as talent identification, selection protocols, dual-track formation, mentoring, job rotation, multi-rater assessment, and formal handover were located within these broader dimensions. The six-dimensional structure is used consistently in the Results and Discussion to distinguish empirical themes from the conceptual framework derived from them.

Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

The researchers directly involved in fieldwork operated from an "outsider-informed" positionality. They held no formal employment, familial relationship, or institutional affiliation with Pesantren Darul Muttaqin. This external position supported critical distance during administrative observation, while familiarity with Islamic educational culture provided competence in interpreting *pesantren* etiquette and terminology. Reflexivity was treated as an ongoing examination of how researchers' backgrounds and assumptions shaped data generation and interpretation. Reflexive notes were written after each interview to record pre-understandings, emotional responses, and theoretical expectations, and these notes informed follow-up questioning and later analytical decisions.

Trustworthiness and Procedural Integrity

Trustworthiness was strengthened through four procedures that documented how interpretations were developed and challenged: 1) Member Checking: Draft interview transcripts and preliminary thematic maps were returned to eight participants (P01–P05, P08, P09, P12). Participants clarified that selection for administrative roles relied on formal performance portfolios rather than solely on *kiai* recommendations. This clarification prompted revision of the sub-theme "Selection Protocol" and helped distinguish documented procedures from informal perceptions of appointment practices; 2) Peer Debriefing: Three formal debriefing sessions were conducted with two external scholars in Islamic educational management. These sessions challenged the initial over-emphasis on formal bureaucracy, leading the researchers to refine the distinction between empirical findings and theoretical synthesis; 3) Data Source Comparison: Interview, observation, and documentary materials were compared to deepen interpretation and examine alternative readings of important findings. For example, accounts of cadre assessment were considered alongside written evaluation rubrics and field notes from foundation meetings. Comparison focused on convergence, tension, and contextual differences across data sources to deepen interpretation; 4) Audit Trail: An audit log documented raw data files, codebooks, analytical memos, reflexive notes, and decisions used in moving from coded material to empirical themes and then to the final conceptual

framework. This record was maintained to make the analytical progression transparent and reviewable within the research team.

Ethical Considerations and Identity Protection

The study followed established qualitative research ethics. Ethical approval was granted by the Ethics Committee for Humanities and Social Sciences Research at Universitas Negeri Jakarta (Protocol No. UNJ/ETH/HSS/2024/1108), and institutional permission was obtained from the Foundation Board of Pesantren Darul Muttaqin before field entry. All participants provided written informed consent covering the study objectives, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw without institutional consequences. Personal names were replaced with codes P01–P14, organizational roles were generalized where disclosure could enable identification, and sensitive accounts of earlier leadership transitions were anonymized. Audio files and encrypted transcripts were stored on password-protected cloud storage accessible only to the primary research team.

Results and Discussion

The empirical investigation identified three recurring problems in leadership regeneration at Pesantren Darul Muttaqin Bogor: continuing reliance on top-level authority, procedural gaps in formal succession rules, and competency mismatches among prospective cadres. Analysis of the 2018 Foundation Charter shows that general governance structures are codified, but specific executive succession procedures remain unwritten. High-level appointments therefore continue to depend largely on closed deliberation among senior foundation members and the founding family. This arrangement gives the institution a recognized decision center, but it also leaves executive transition dependent on relationships and practices that are not fully documented.

Participant accounts confirm that strategic coordination slows significantly when executive approval is pending. As a senior administrative officer noted:

"When strategic policies regarding land expansion or senior appointments are raised, operational teams must wait for the principal Kiai's personal review. Even with established bureaus, final authority remains centralized, which creates operational bottlenecks." (P02, Male, Senior Executive Administrator)

Dependence on the founding authority was interpreted differently across institutional levels. Senior leaders viewed centralized final approval as necessary for protecting spiritual integrity and ideological coherence. Mid-level administrators, however, described the same structure as an operational constraint when routine decisions required executive authorization. The contrast does not indicate a simple rejection of *kiai* authority; it shows that the same source of legitimacy can also slow administrative response when decision boundaries are not clearly delegated:

"In daily unit management, waiting for executive sign-off delays time-sensitive decisions, such as emergency repairs or immediate staff replacements in the formal schools." (P06, Male, Administrative Unit Head)

Fieldwork also revealed a dual-competency gap among potential cadres. The HR Bureau's 2023 Performance Review indicates that **fewer than one-third** of the staff included in that review held formal credentials in educational administration. Alumni cadres generally demonstrated strong mastery of classical Islamic learning (*kitab kuning*) and internal cultural literacy, but some lacked technical preparation in financial management, budgeting, and digital governance. External professionals showed a different pattern: they brought stronger technical skills but required time to understand *pesantren* etiquette (*adab*), informal authority, and traditional governance norms. The Head of HR described the difficulty of finding candidates who combine both sets of competencies:

"Finding candidates who balance deep Islamic scholarship with professional management skills is rare. Alumni often struggle with digital governance tools, whereas external recruits sometimes fail to navigate the spiritual dynamics expected by senior teachers." (P03, Male, Human Resources Administrator)

Career progression and selection equity generated additional concern. Interviews with younger cadre candidates (P12, P13) showed uncertainty about how candidates were recommended for postgraduate scholarships and executive development tracks. The issue was not the existence of formal criteria, but the perceived distance between written criteria and actual selection practice. Field records also documented unsuccessful cadre experiences: two former mid-level mentors withdrew from administrative tracks in 2023 after carrying full-time teaching, dormitory supervision, and administrative duties without clear compensation or defined promotion timelines. These accounts indicate that cadre retention depends not only on training opportunities but also on sustainable working conditions.

Institutional Architecture for Cadre Development

To reduce structural dependence and address competency gaps, Pesantren Darul Muttaqin established the Bureau of Human Resources (HR) and Cadre Development in 2021. The bureau operates under the Foundation Executive Board and is managed by a three-member professional administrative team. Its formal mandate covers three functions: designing standardized cadre training curricula, managing administrative performance records, and administering internal scholarship allocations. The establishment of this unit marked an effort to move parts of leadership development from informal personal recommendation toward documented organizational procedures.

The bureau implements two primary operational tracks: formal administrative training (encompassing financial governance, strategic planning, and university scholarship sponsorship) and non-formal organizational socialisation (centered on internal dorm-based mentorship and behavioral modeling). Candidate performance is tracked using a digital portfolio system established in late 2022. This system aggregates multi-rater 360-degree evaluations conducted semi-annually across four structured assessment pillars outlined in the HR Bureau Guidelines (2021):

Candidate performance is evaluated through four assessment pillars specified in the HR Bureau Guidelines (2021). Spiritual Depth (*Ruhaniyyah*) covers congregational prayer attendance, personal religious practice, and ethical conduct. Institutional Loyalty (*Wala'*) concerns

adherence to foundation directives, organizational commitment, and willingness to accept difficult internal assignments. Scholarly Competency (*Ilmiyyah*) includes academic qualifications, classical text comprehension, and professional certification. Managerial Proficiency (*Amaliyyah*) covers KPI achievement, administrative timeliness, and team leadership. Together, the four pillars show that readiness is defined through both professional competence and conformity with the institution's moral-spiritual expectations.

The 360-degree digital evaluation compiles ratings from four groups: the principal *kiai*, foundation supervisors, peer teachers, and subordinate staff or students. Interviews and field observations nevertheless showed that standardized indicators do not eliminate structural differences in career mobility. Female administrators described a particular gap between equal evaluation metrics and unequal access to executive foundation positions. Their accounts suggest that the assessment system can standardize how performance is recorded while leaving the boundaries of eligible leadership roles unchanged:

"Female staff excel in managing female educational units and health services, but executive foundation roles and final decision-making boards remain exclusively male. The evaluation metrics are identical, but promotional ceilings differ." (P05, Female, Student-Care Administrator)

Junior teachers also questioned how Institutional Loyalty (*wala'*) was interpreted in practice. Several described situations in which department heads treated loyalty as agreement with administrative decisions rather than commitment to the institution. When that interpretation prevailed, critical feedback about operational problems or resource allocation became more difficult to express. The issue therefore concerns the operational definition of *wala'*, not the legitimacy of institutional loyalty as a value.

Empirical Mapping of the Leadership Pipeline

Data analysis shows that cadre development at Pesantren Darul Muttaqin follows a recognizable sequence, but the final conceptual organization is better understood through six broader dimensions rather than as a set of equivalent sequential stages. Table 2 traces the analytical movement from raw extracts and field evidence to open codes, empirical themes, and the relevant framework dimension or operational component. This traceability is included to show how the conceptual framework was derived from the case rather than imposed in advance.

Table 2. Analytical Traceability Matrix: Data Extracts, Codes, Empirical Themes, and Framework Dimensions

Raw Data Extract (Participant Code & Source)	Open Codes	Empirical Theme	Framework Dimension & Operational Component
"The foundation established the HR Bureau in 2021 and set aside a dedicated scholarship fund to ensure we train our own future leaders systematically." (P03, HR Bureau Guidelines 2021)	Institutional mandate; Resource allocation; Dedicated unit creation	Institutional Architecture	Prerequisites: Institutional Commitment

Raw Data Extract (Participant Code & Source)	Open Codes	Empirical Theme	Framework Dimension & Operational Component
"Potential cadres are spotted early during their senior student years by tracking their activity in student government (OPDM) and daily prayer discipline." (P04, Interview & Observation Notes)	Early observation; Behavioral tracking; Merit-based screening	Leadership Pipeline	Selection: Talent Identification
"After passing a two-year teaching probation, selected candidates undergo formal evaluation before being assigned to junior administrative roles." (P02, Foundation Records)	Probationary testing; Formal screening; Role placement	Leadership Pipeline	Selection: Selection Protocols
"Candidates are sent for master's degrees in management, but must simultaneously live in dorms to maintain spiritual adab." (P12, Active Cadre Interview)	Dual-track education; Academic sponsorship; Value grounding	Institutional Architecture	Development: Dual-Track Formation
"Senior teachers mentor us daily through co-managing student discipline and weekly halaqah sessions." (P01, Field Observation)	Action modeling; Tacit knowledge transfer; Mentorship	Leadership Ecosystem	Development: Mentorship & Experience
"Every six months, our digital portfolio collects ratings from the Kiai, peers, and subordinates across four criteria." (P03, Digital HR Rubric)	Multi-rater evaluation; Portfolio tracking; 360-degree review	Institutional Architecture	Assessment: Multi-Rater Evaluation
"When a unit head transitions out, the candidate who passed all evaluation tiers is formally appointed by foundation decree." (P01, Historical Archives)	Formal appointment; Decree issuance; Transitional ritual	Leadership Pipeline	Succession: Formal Handover
"Ensuring leadership continuity without internal conflict keeps public trust and institutional vision intact over decades." (P07, Interview)	Organizational stability; Vision preservation; Public trust	Regeneration Challenges	Outcomes: Institutional Continuity

Field evidence shows that progression through the cadre *pipeline* is structured but not uniform. Foundation-funded postgraduate scholarships are limited and highly competitive. Informants reported that, although written criteria emphasize open competition, alumni status, familial connections, or direct recommendations from senior trustees could influence access to fully funded study. This perception generated friction among non-alumni professional staff who viewed postgraduate sponsorship as an important route into higher administrative responsibility. The tension illustrates a recurring gap between the institution's formalized selection instruments and the informal relationships that continue to shape opportunity:

"Scholarship allocations are limited to two candidates per year. While the criteria state open competition, priority in practice is often given to candidates who are alumni or recommended directly by senior board members." (P07, Male, External-Relations Administrator)

Leadership Ecosystem and Value Internalization

The cadre development process operates within an organizational ecosystem involving the executive board, academic principals, dormitory supervisors (*musyrif*), student government officers (OPDM), and alumni networks. Observation showed that administrative and spiritual knowledge transfer occurred primarily through daily co-management, behavioral modeling, and repeated participation in institutional routines. Formal courses therefore represented only one part of cadre

development; much of the practical knowledge needed for leadership was learned through situated work with more senior members of the institution.

In dormitory management, senior *musyrif* work alongside junior cadres to resolve student disciplinary issues and oversee evening study sessions. This interaction serves as an informal training ground where tacit organizational knowledge such as handling parent grievances, managing peer conflicts, and exercising authority with empathy is transmitted directly.

Document archives and interview transcripts identified eight recurring institutional values: *amanah* (responsibility), *qudwah* (modeling), moral integrity, discipline, *khidmah* (service), *ukhuwah* (brotherhood), professionalism, and accountability. Observational data showed that these values were reinforced through ordinary institutional routines rather than only through formal instruction. Senior administrators, for example, regularly joined junior staff in morning congregational prayers before executive meetings. Such practices made expected conduct visible and linked administrative participation with the spiritual routines of *pesantren* life.

However, observational field notes also capture instances of organizational tension. Conflict frequently arises between elder senior teachers who emphasize traditional pedagogical authority and younger, university-educated cadres who advocate for modern digital reporting and administrative standardization. A senior dormitory supervisor noted:

"Younger administrative cadres sometimes push for modern digital scheduling and rapid reporting without understanding the traditional rhythm of student caretaking. Efficiency is useful, but it should not replace personal relational presence." (P04, Male, Student-Care Administrator)

Similarly, alumni who return to serve at the institution after completing sponsored university degrees report experiencing transitional stress when attempting to introduce administrative reforms within departments accustomed to informal, verbal directives.

Analytical Reorganization of the Cadre Development Model

The empirical findings are consolidated into a provisional six-dimensional cadre development framework (Table 3). The six dimensions are institutional prerequisites, selection, development, assessment, succession, and outcomes. Within these dimensions sit the operational components identified in the case, including institutional commitment, talent identification and selection, dual-track formation, mentorship and experience, multi-rater evaluation, formal handover, and institutional continuity. This organization distinguishes broad analytical dimensions from the operational practices nested within them, allowing the framework to represent both institutional conditions and developmental processes.

Table 3. Provisional Six-Dimensional Cadre Development Framework

Framework Dimension	Conceptual Component	Operational Definition & Scope in Case Study
I. Prerequisites	Institutional Commitment	Establishment of formal policy mandates, HR Bureau infrastructure, and dedicated scholarship budgets by foundation leadership.

Framework Dimension	Conceptual Component	Operational Definition & Scope in Case Study
II. Selection	Identification & Selection	Systematic screening of potential candidates through behavioral tracking in student government and formal two-year probationary testing.
III. Development	Dual-Track Formation	Concurrent advancement of managerial-academic credentials (formal university degrees) and spiritual-character formation (dormitory residency).
	Mentorship & Experience	Planned job rotation across administrative units combined with structured co-management alongside senior mentors (<i>halaqah</i>).
IV. Assessment	Multi-Rater Evaluation	Semi-annual evaluation via digital portfolios tracking four criteria (<i>Ruhaniyyah</i> , <i>Wala'</i> , <i>Ilmiyyah</i> , <i>Amaliyyah</i>) across 360-degree feedback tiers.
V. Succession	Formal Handover	Structured administrative transition executed through formal foundation decree and public ceremonial commissioning.
VI. Outcomes	Institutional Continuity	Maintenance of administrative stability, preservation of core spiritual identity, and sustained community trust across leadership cycles.

The framework presents cadre development as an iterative organizational process in which institutional commitment and resources enable systematic selection, development, and assessment before formal succession. Its logic is broadly consistent with succession planning, but the case also shows that development occurs through shared practice. Job rotation, mentoring, and co-management expose cadres to tacit administrative knowledge that cannot be acquired through formal training alone (Nadeem, 2024). Recent research on Indonesian *pesantren* likewise suggests that formalized or distributed authority can operate alongside traditional leadership structures rather than simply replace them (Rofiqi et al., 2026).

Theoretical Integration and Comparative Analysis

The findings are interpreted through three complementary perspectives: a succession-planning perspective, Elite Theory, and Islamic Educational Leadership (Ahmed, 2023; Brooks & Mutohar, 2018). The first explains continuity and deliberate development of future leaders; the second helps interpret recruitment, circulation, and protection of organizational elites; and the third clarifies why managerial competence alone is insufficient for leadership legitimacy in a faith-based institution. Taken together, these perspectives explain both the formal structure of the cadre system and the informal sources of authority that continue to shape succession.

Succession-Planning Perspective: In educational administration literature, succession planning is treated as a systematic effort to ensure leadership continuity by identifying and developing internal talent (Rothwell, 2010; Fink, 2011; Fusarelli et al., 2018). The findings at Pesantren Darul Muttaqin align with core succession principles regarding talent pipelines, structured job rotation, and performance assessment. However, the case shows that these administrative approaches require contextualization in faith-based institutions. Here, managerial competence alone does not confer leadership legitimacy; candidate acceptability also depends on spiritual standing (*Ruhaniyyah*) and demonstrated alignment with institutional values (Alazmi & Bush, 2024).

Elite Theory and Cadre Circulation: Elite Theory posits that organizational stability relies on the structured selection and renewal of a governing minority. Empirical data from Pesantren Darul

Muttaqin illustrate a controlled mechanism of institutional elite reproduction. Rather than operating purely as an open meritocracy or an exclusive dynastic system, the institution exhibits a hybrid selection process. Elite circulation is structured through performance metrics managed by the HR Bureau, yet remaining executive appointments particularly at the highest foundation tier continue to be influenced by personal trust, historical service, and familial proximity to the founding Kiai. This reflects what may be characterized as a *guided institutional elite formation*, where administrative positions are accessible via meritocratic evaluation, while core ideological direction remains protected by a trusted inner circle (Kolvani & Nistotskaya, 2025).

Islamic Educational Leadership: Islamic educational leadership frameworks emphasize the integration of administrative duty (*amanah*), moral stewardship (*qudwah*), and spiritual accountability (Hamdanah et al., 2025; Aladwan, 2024). The empirical findings show how these normative principles are operationalized within daily organizational structures, particularly through the four-pillar evaluation rubric (*Ruhaniyyah, Wala', 'Ilmiyyah, Amaliyyah*). The inclusion of institutional loyalty (*wala'*) as an explicit evaluation criterion demonstrates how spiritual concepts can reinforce organizational cohesion and institutional alignment, while the findings also show why the practical interpretation of loyalty requires clear procedural boundaries.

Critical Analysis of Organizational Dynamics and Governance Limitations

The framework also exposes structural tensions that shape how the cadre system operates. First, centralized authority remains decisive. Establishing the HR Bureau in 2021 represents a significant move toward administrative rationalization, but ultimate authority continues to rest with the principal *kiai* and senior foundation trustees. In Weberian terms, the routinization of charisma remains incomplete (Weber, 1947). Formal procedures increasingly govern mid-level development and appointment, while top-level succession remains uncoded in foundation statutes. This imbalance creates a potential source of governance friction when a future executive transition requires decisions beyond the authority of existing administrative routines.

Second, Institutional Loyalty (*Wala'*) and Selection Transparency remain closely connected. *Wala'* provides a mechanism for maintaining ideological alignment, but the field data show that it can become ambiguous when loyalty is interpreted as administrative compliance. Such an interpretation may narrow the space for constructive criticism and make formal evaluation appear less open to cadres who question operational decisions. Perceptions surrounding scholarship allocation reinforce this concern. Organizational justice research similarly shows that procedural transparency and perceived fairness influence how members interpret institutional decisions (Assefa et al., 2026; Khan et al., 2023). The governance issue is therefore not whether loyalty should matter, but how it is defined, evidenced, and balanced with legitimate internal critique.

Third, Gender and Structural Career Mobility reveal a clear boundary within the *pipeline*. Female administrators manage significant educational, health, and caretaking responsibilities and are evaluated through the same formal criteria used elsewhere in the organization. Yet executive foundation governance and final strategic decision-making remain male domains. The cadre system therefore supports women's leadership development within operational units while placing a

structural ceiling on movement into the highest tier. This distinction is important because a standardized assessment system can appear formally equal even when the range of positions available to candidates differs by gender.

Fourth, Workload Pressures and Cadre Attrition affect the sustainability of the leadership *pipeline*. Cadres are often expected to combine teaching, residential supervision, mentoring, and administrative duties as part of their formation. The field evidence shows that this arrangement can become counterproductive when responsibilities accumulate without clear workload limits, compensation, or promotion pathways. The documented withdrawal of mid-level cadres indicates that succession planning can fail even when identification and training mechanisms are well designed. Retention conditions must therefore be treated as part of cadre development rather than as a separate personnel issue.

Overall, the cadre development system at Pesantren Darul Muttaqin has formalized substantial parts of mid-level leadership preparation through an HR unit, training pathways, digital assessment, mentoring, and documented appointment procedures. At the same time, its long-term resilience remains conditioned by four unresolved issues: top-level succession rules, transparency in selection and scholarship allocation, gendered career mobility, and workload sustainability. These tensions do not invalidate the framework; they define the institutional conditions within which it currently operates and identify where further governance reform would be required.

Theoretically, the findings illustrate how succession planning in a *pesantren* combines managerial competence with non-material dimensions of leadership legitimacy, particularly spiritual standing (*Ruhaniyyah*) and institutional value alignment (*Wala'*) (Alruwaili, 2018). This combination adds contextual nuance to conventional succession models that tend to prioritize competencies, performance, and organizational continuity. The case also refines the application of Elite Theory by demonstrating a hybrid form of guided elite formation. Formal administrative evaluation expands opportunities for participation in the leadership pipeline, while centralized ideological oversight continues to influence appointments at the highest level. Islamic leadership principles are therefore not merely expressed as normative values but are translated into organizational practices through multi-rater assessment, mentoring, residential formation, and recurring evaluation processes.

From a practical perspective, several institutional lessons emerge from this case. Dedicated HR structures can reduce dependence on informal succession practices by documenting performance and development trajectories. Leadership preparation is also strengthened when academic and managerial development is combined with experiential formation through mentoring, residential engagement, and organizational rotation (Day et al., 2021). At the same time, formal assessment alone does not guarantee procedural legitimacy. Criteria for scholarships, promotion, and leadership readiness must be communicated clearly if multi-rater evaluation is to reduce rather than reproduce perceptions of favoritism. Workload regulation and compensation are equally important because a leadership pipeline cannot remain sustainable if promising cadres leave before reaching succession stages.

These findings may also inform institutional capacity-building initiatives in the broader *pesantren* sector, although their policy relevance should be interpreted cautiously. Programs developed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and related agencies could benefit from recognizing that leadership preparation in *pesantren* involves both professional competence and institutionally embedded forms of moral and spiritual legitimacy. Scholarship and management-development schemes, for example, could incorporate criteria that recognize academic potential, managerial capacity, and sustained institutional service. Such initiatives should not impose a uniform governance model across diverse *pesantren*, but can provide adaptable instruments for transparent performance management and leadership development while respecting differences in organizational history, authority structures, and socio-religious traditions (Hallinger, 2018).

The interpretation of these findings is nevertheless bounded by the design of the study. Pesantren Darul Muttaqin is a single, modernizing, foundation-governed institution, and its leadership structure may differ substantially from traditional *salafiyah* pesantren, smaller family-owned institutions, female-led *pesantren*, or non-residential Islamic schools. Fieldwork was conducted over six months between January and June 2025. Although historical documents and retrospective accounts were used to reconstruct previous leadership practices, the study did not follow individual cadres across complete career trajectories or observe a major transition involving the principal *kiai*. Participant accounts may also have been influenced by social desirability or reluctance to criticize senior leadership, particularly among junior cadres whose institutional careers remained dependent on existing structures. Member checking, peer debriefing, and triangulation strengthened the interpretive process, but they do not eliminate these contextual limitations.

Future research should therefore examine whether the relationships identified in this case remain visible across different forms of *pesantren* governance. Comparative qualitative studies involving traditional (*salafiyah*), family-governed, modern, and female-led institutions would clarify which components of the framework are context-specific and which may have wider analytical relevance. Longitudinal studies following leadership cadres across several years would be especially valuable for examining promotion, attrition, skill development, and actual succession outcomes rather than relying primarily on institutional procedures and retrospective accounts. Quantitative testing should follow only after the framework's central constructs, particularly *Ruhaniyyah*, *Wala'*, managerial proficiency, and succession readiness, have been clearly defined and operationalized through valid indicators. Once those constructs are established, their relationships with cadre retention, organizational performance, or succession stability may be examined using SEM or other appropriate multivariate approaches. Cross-national comparison with Islamic educational institutions in settings such as Malaysia, Turkey, Egypt, and Muslim-minority societies could further determine how different regulatory environments and traditions of religious authority shape the relationship between leadership formation, institutional values, and organizational sustainability.

Conclusion

This intrinsic case study shows that leadership succession at Pesantren Darul Muttaqin Bogor is organized through six connected dimensions: institutional prerequisites, selection, development, assessment, succession, and institutional outcomes. Potential cadres are identified through student leadership and early-career performance, developed through formal study, residential formation, mentoring, and organizational experience, assessed through multi-rater criteria, and appointed through foundation procedures. Together, these mechanisms demonstrate that professionalization and spiritual formation operate as interconnected dimensions of leadership preparation, shaping who is considered technically capable, morally credible, and institutionally legitimate to assume leadership responsibility.

The operation of this framework also reveals persistent organizational friction. The Human Resources Bureau has strengthened documentation and standardized parts of cadre development, but executive succession is less codified than mid-level appointment. Scholarship decisions are not always perceived as transparent, female cadres face a structural ceiling in access to foundation-level leadership, and overlapping teaching, residential, and administrative duties can weaken retention. These findings indicate a form of guided succession rather than a fully open meritocracy: formal evaluation expands organizational rationality, while trust, lineage, long service, and spiritual authority continue to shape the final distribution of leadership legitimacy.

The main contribution of the study is therefore a provisional six-dimensional framework for analyzing leadership regeneration in a faith-based educational institution. Its analytical value lies in specifying the mechanisms through which modern HR practices and *pesantren* values coexist, including the points where those mechanisms create tension. The framework should not be treated as a universal model for Indonesian *pesantren*, because it derives from a single modernizing, foundation-governed institution. It can instead serve as a structured reference for comparison with traditional, family-owned, female-led, or differently governed *pesantren* and for examining how succession arrangements change across institutional settings.

Taken together, the study positions leadership succession in *pesantren* as an institutional process in which professional management, religious legitimacy, and organizational relationships remain closely intertwined. The six-dimensional framework is best understood as a case-derived analytical tool whose wider relevance depends on careful comparison across different governance settings.

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