



Women's Leadership in *Da'wah* Management: As-Salmaniyah Islamic Boarding School, Mandailing Natal

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Abstract

This research examines women's leadership roles in enhancing dakwah program management at As-Salmaniyah Al-Yusufiah Tahfidz Islamic Boarding School, Mandailing Natal Regency, North Sumatra—the sole female-led pesantren among 270 institutions in the region. Despite persistent patriarchal cultural norms, women's leadership demonstrates substantial effectiveness in Islamic educational contexts through transformational approaches integrating participatory decision-making (*musyawarah*), exemplary behavior (*uswah hasanah*), and spiritual development (*tazkiyatun nafs*). This qualitative case study employed in-depth interviews with pesantren leadership, teachers, students, and community members, direct observations of dakwah program implementation, and document analysis of institutional records from March to June 2025. Findings reveal measurable impacts: student enrollment increased from 220 (2018) to 318 (2024), representing 44.5% growth; complete Qur'an memorization achievement rose from 8 students (3.6%) to 35 students (11%); Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an competition winners increased from 5 to 25 students; and 40% of alumni gained acceptance to State Islamic Universities. External collaboration generated IDR 500 million in waqf funding (300% increase) and expanded dakwah programs to 10 surrounding villages. While facing challenges including patriarchal resistance, limited resources, and dual domestic-professional roles, female leadership successfully employs adaptive strategies emphasizing Islamic role models, external partnerships, spiritual guidance, and economic empowerment. This research contributes theoretically by validating transformational leadership theory within Islamic boarding school contexts and practically by providing replicable best practice models for gender-inclusive pesantren management.

Keywords: Da'wah Program, Islamic Boarding School, Management, Tahfidz, Women's Leadership


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Introduction

Dakwah, as an activity of conveying Islamic teachings, constitutes the core of building civilized communities, encompassing not only the transmission of knowledge but also the spiritual, social, and moral dimensions of society. The success of dakwah is determined not solely by message content or delivery methods but depends critically on the quality and character of leadership exercised by those who implement it. In this context, women's leadership in religious institutions such as Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) represents a pertinent and increasingly relevant research topic, particularly in societies where patriarchal systems remain dominant, and women's leadership capacities are frequently underestimated. Leadership itself is defined as an individual's ability to influence, direct, and mobilize others toward achieving common goals.¹ In organizational management, leaders serve as the primary driving force. Within Islamic tradition, women's leadership possesses strong foundations derived from the Qur'an, prophetic hadith, and scholarly jurisprudence. As long as women exercise leadership with moral integrity, uphold justice, and fulfill leadership requirements including competence, piety, and commendable conduct, Islam does not prohibit women from assuming leadership positions.² While challenges persist—such as balancing leadership responsibilities with Islamic values, acquiring comprehensive religious knowledge, and securing community support—these factors do not constitute absolute barriers to women's leadership.

In Islam, women occupy strategic roles as primary educators within families, community leaders, and crucial elements in Islamic missionary institutions. However, female leadership in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools remains a statistically rare phenomenon. Among approximately 30,000 *pesantren* nationwide, only a small fraction operate under female leadership.³ Prominent examples include the *As-Salmaniyah* Islamic Boarding School led by Mrs. Sukma Hanum Nasution and the *Darut Thayyibah* Islamic Boarding School led by Mrs. Nyai Kholidah Thayyibah Baidawi. The *As-Salmaniyah Al-Yusufiah Tahfidz* Islamic Boarding School, located in Sikara-Kara III Village, Natal District, Mandailing Natal Regency, demonstrates unique dynamics in female leadership implementation. This *pesantren* extends beyond Al-Qur'an memorization programs to encompass diverse dakwah activities engaging surrounding communities. Mrs. Sukma Hanum Nasution's leadership as a *pesantren* caretaker introduces innovative approaches to dakwah that are inclusive, communicative, and responsive to local social conditions. In a society still characterized by patriarchal values, this strategic role not only challenges prevailing stereotypes but also demonstrates women's capacity for effective leadership in dakwah and Islamic education contexts.⁴

This phenomenon merits scholarly investigation, given that women's contributions to Islamic preaching frequently remain unrecognized. Female leadership at *As-Salmaniyah Al-Yusufiah* Islamic Boarding School illustrates that women possess capabilities extending beyond administrative management to enhancing dakwah quality through humanistic, participatory, and transformative approaches. Mrs. Sukma Hanum, for instance, has achieved

¹ Wahyosumidjo, *Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah Tinjauan Teoritik Dan Permasalahannya* (Jakarta: Grafindo Persada, 2019).

² L. Suryani, *Perempuan Dan Kepemimpinan Dalam Islam* (Bandung: Pustaka Setia, 2020).

³ Ministry of Religious Affairs Republic of Indonesia, "Statistical Data of Islamic Boarding Schools in Indonesia 2023" (Jakarta: Directorate of Islamic Education, 2023).

⁴ Elismayanti Rambe and S. Hasibuan, "Pelatihan Kepemimpinan Islam Di Era Digital Pada Santri Ponpes Darul Ikhlas Panyabungan Kabupaten Mandailing Natal," in *Prosiding Seminar Nasional ADPI Mengabdikan Untuk Negeri*, vol. 2, 2022, 156–63.

significant institutional development measurable through increased student enrollment, enhanced tahfidz program quality, and expanded social influence within the community.

Academic scholarship on women's leadership in Islamic boarding schools has developed substantially over the past five years. Yet, significant gaps persist regarding specific dakwah management strategies and transformational leadership implementation in female-led pesantren contexts. Hasanah (2022) examined the contributions of female Islamic boarding school leaders (nyai) in Indonesian pesantren, revealing that despite facing significant social legitimacy challenges rooted in patriarchal structures, female leaders successfully employ participatory and inclusive leadership styles that strengthen community engagement in dakwah programs.⁵ Her research, published in *Jurnal At-Taqaddum*, focused primarily on large urban pesantren in Java and employed descriptive qualitative methods to analyze nyai roles across multiple institutions. However, Hasanah's study did not specifically examine the mechanisms through which female leaders design and implement dakwah programs, nor did it investigate leadership strategies in rural or peripheral contexts where patriarchal norms may be more entrenched.

Wahyuni (2023) investigated female leadership in educational development at Pondok Pesantren, demonstrating that women improve religious education quality through inclusive approaches emphasizing deliberation (musyawarah), empathy, and role modeling.⁶ Published in *Surau: Jurnal Riset Keagamaan dan Kemasyarakatan*, this research utilized case study methodology to examine leadership practices in three female-led pesantren in West Sumatra. Wahyuni identified transformational leadership characteristics among female leaders but concentrated primarily on formal educational dimensions rather than broader dakwah program management encompassing community empowerment and social advocacy. Additionally, her analysis did not address how female leaders navigate the dual challenges of maintaining Islamic authenticity while adapting to contemporary societal demands.

Sari (2021) explored the collaborative roles of kyai (male Islamic scholars) and nyai in modern pesantren leadership, published in *Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah*.⁷ Her findings indicated that nyai contribute substantially to pesantren administration and student spiritual development, often serving as mediators between traditional Islamic values and modern educational practices. However, Sari's research focused predominantly on dual-gender leadership structures where both kyai and nyai share institutional authority, rather than examining pesantren under exclusive female leadership. Furthermore, her study emphasized administrative functions over strategic dakwah program development and community engagement initiatives.

Prasatiawan and Lis (2019) researched female leadership in pesantren, published in *Jurnal Studi Islam, Gender dan Anak (Yinyang)*, examining how female leaders establish legitimacy within conservative religious communities.⁸ Their research documented that female pesantren leaders employ culturally adaptive strategies, including emphasizing maternal qualities, demonstrating superior religious knowledge, and building networks with traditional Islamic scholars to gain acceptance. While valuable, this study's temporal scope predates

⁵ U Hasanah, "Kontribusi Pemimpin Perempuan Dalam Dakwah Islam: Telaah Terhadap Kiprah Nyai Di Pesantren," *Jurnal At-Taqaddum* 14, no. 2 (2022): 215–34.

⁶ S I Wahyuni, "Kepemimpinan Perempuan Dalam Pengembangan Lembaga Pendidikan Di Pondok Pesantren," *Surau: Jurnal Riset Keagamaan Dan Kemasyarakatan* 3, no. 2 (2023): 1–15.

⁷ D M Sari, "Peran Kyai Dan Nyai Dalam Kepemimpinan Di Pesantren Modern," *Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah* 41, no. 1 (2021): 87–106.

⁸ A Y Prasatiawan and S Lis, "Kepemimpinan Perempuan Dalam Pesantren," *Jurnal Studi Islam, Gender Dan Anak (Yinyang)* 14, no. 1 (2019): 39–58, <https://sinelitabmas.unsoed.ac.id/google-doc/2441128/kepemimpinan-perempuan-dalam-pesantren>.

recent developments in digital dakwah and social media-based community engagement, and did not investigate specific program management strategies or measurable dakwah program outcomes.

Siregar (2024) analyzed community perceptions of female leadership and gender equality in Mandailing Natal, published in *Jurnal Kajian Pemerintaban dan Unggulan*, providing a crucial regional context for understanding women's leadership challenges in North Sumatra's conservative Islamic environments.⁹ Her research revealed persistent patriarchal attitudes restricting women to domestic spheres while simultaneously documenting gradual shifts toward accepting women in public leadership roles, particularly in educational and religious domains. However, Siregar's study employed survey methodology focused on general community attitudes rather than an in-depth examination of actual female leadership practices in specific institutional contexts such as pesantren.

Despite valuable contributions from existing scholarship, significant research gaps remain unaddressed. First, previous studies have not adequately examined the specific strategies and mechanisms through which female leaders in Islamic boarding schools design, implement, and evaluate dakwah programs that extend beyond formal education to encompass community empowerment and social transformation. Second, research has insufficiently explored how female leaders in peripheral, rural contexts with deeply entrenched patriarchal norms—such as Mandailing Natal, known as "Serambi Mekah" (Veranda of Mecca)—navigate cultural resistance while maintaining Islamic authenticity. Third, existing literature lacks a comprehensive analysis of transformational leadership implementation in female-led pesantren, particularly regarding how leaders integrate prophetic role modeling, Qur'anic deliberation principles, and contemporary management practices within dakwah program frameworks. Fourth, minimal research has investigated the measurable impacts of female leadership on dakwah program effectiveness, student development outcomes, and community engagement levels in pesantren contexts.

The local context amplifies these gaps' significance. Mandailing Natal, designated "Veranda of Mecca" in North Sumatra due to its concentration of renowned pesantren and strong Islamic traditions, hosts approximately 270 Islamic boarding schools serving 1,209 active teachers according to the Ministry of Religious Affairs EMIS data.¹⁰ However, nearly all these institutions operate under male leadership. As-Salmaniyah Al-Yusufiah Tahfidz Islamic Boarding School represents the sole known female-led pesantren in the region, emphasizing this research's uniqueness and urgency. This regional context, characterized by high expectations for Sharia-adherent leadership while simultaneously reinforcing patriarchal norms restricting women to domestic spheres, creates both constraints and opportunities for transformational female leaders to challenge cultural taboos through prophetic values and inclusive practices.

Nationally, approximately 10-15% of Indonesian Islamic boarding schools operate under female leadership, with Ministry of Religious Affairs data indicating male leadership dominance attributed to patriarchal traditions and preferential inheritance of leadership

⁹ N Siregar, "Kepemimpinan Perempuan Dan Persepsi Masyarakat Terhadap Kesetaraan Gender Di Mandailing Natal," *Jurnal Kajian Pemerintaban Dan Unggulan* 8, no. 2 (2024): 123–42, <https://e-journal.nalanda.ac.id/index.php/jkpu/article/view/1438>.

¹⁰ Ministry of Religious Affairs, "Education Management Information System (EMIS)," May 10, 2025, <https://emis.kemenag.go.id>.

positions to sons.¹¹ This statistical reality positions female leadership at As-Salmaniyah Al-Yusufiah as a progressive minority case, offering empirical evidence enriching transformational leadership theory within Nusantara Islamic contexts. Furthermore, comparative analysis reveals distinctions between As-Salmaniyah Al-Yusufiah and major regional pesantren such as Musthafawiyah Purba Baru (known for conservative systems and national influence) and Darul Mursyid (excelling in religious-scientific knowledge integration), both of which provide limited space for women in leadership roles. In contrast, As-Salmaniyah Al-Yusufiah has successfully created strategic space for women to lead and empower communities through dakwah.

Based on preliminary observations, Mrs. Sukma Hanum's leadership has generated significant transformations in dakwah program structure and quality, including the development of religious study groups (*majelis taklim*), social activities, and enhanced student and community participation. Therefore, this research aims to comprehensively examine how women's leadership roles and strategies contribute to dakwah program management in Islamic boarding schools, addressing the identified research gaps through an in-depth investigation of leadership practices, program development mechanisms, challenge navigation, and impact assessment. This study is presented under the title: "The Role of Women's Leadership in Improving the Management of Dakwah Programs at the As-Salmaniyah Al-Yusufiah Tahfidz Islamic Boarding School, Mandailing Natal Regency."

Method

This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to comprehensively understand women's leadership roles in enhancing dakwah program quality at Tahfidz As-Salmaniyah Al-Yusufiah Islamic Boarding School, led by Mrs. Sukma Hanum Nasution. The case study approach was selected because this research focuses on a single subject (Mrs. Sukma Hanum Nasution's leadership) within one specific location (As-Salmaniyah Al-Yusufiah Islamic Boarding School), allowing for in-depth exploration of leadership dynamics within Islamic boarding school management, Islamic education, and pesantren-based dakwah contexts, particularly the tahfidzul Qur'an program.¹²

Research Location and Time Period: This research was conducted at As-Salmaniyah Al-Yusufiah Islamic Boarding School, Sikara-Kara III Village, Natal District, Mandailing Natal Regency, North Sumatra, from March through June 2025. The pesantren was purposively selected due to its unique status as the sole female-led Islamic boarding school in Mandailing Natal, a region characterized by strong patriarchal traditions and conservative Islamic interpretations.

Data Sources: Primary data sources consisted of in-depth interviews with key informants, including the pesantren leadership (Mrs. Sukma Hanum Nasution), teaching staff (*ustaz* and *ustazah*), student representatives across various educational levels, and surrounding community members, including religious study group (*majelis taklim*) participants and local religious leaders. Secondary data sources encompassed pesantren internal archives and documents (curriculum documents, program reports, student enrollment records, and dakwah activity documentation), relevant academic literature on women's leadership and Islamic education, and social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp groups)

¹¹ Ministry of Religious Affairs Republic of Indonesia, "Gender Mainstreaming in Islamic Education: Statistical Overview 2024" (Jakarta: Directorate General of Islamic Education, 2024).

¹² Ridwan Abdullah Sani, *Metodologi Penelitian Pendidikan*, ed. Irfan Fahmi (Jakarta: Kencana, 2022).

providing additional information regarding institutional development and community engagement.¹³

Data Collection Techniques: Data collection employed three primary methods: (1) In-depth interviews conducted with semi-structured interview guides, recorded with informant permission, and subsequently transcribed for analysis; (2) Direct observation of dakwah program implementation including tahfidz sessions, religious study groups, leadership meetings, and community engagement activities, documented through field notes and photographic evidence; and (3) Documentation study examining pesantren administrative documents, program reports, student achievement records, and digital media content related to dakwah activities.¹⁴

Data Analysis: Data analysis followed qualitative descriptive analysis procedures encompassing three concurrent flows: (1) Data reduction, organizing and focusing data by selecting, simplifying, and abstracting field notes, interview transcripts, and documents; (2) Data presentation, displaying organized information in descriptive narrative forms, matrices, and thematic categories to facilitate pattern identification; and (3) Conclusion drawing and verification, developing interpretations validated through triangulation methods.¹⁵

Data Validity: To ensure research credibility and trustworthiness, triangulation was applied across three dimensions: (1) Source triangulation, comparing and cross-checking data obtained from different informant categories (leadership, teachers, students, community members); (2) Method triangulation, comparing data gathered through different collection techniques (interviews, observation, documentation); and (3) Time triangulation, collecting data at various time points to verify consistency and capture temporal variations in leadership practices and program implementation.¹⁶

This methodological framework enables systematic investigation of women's leadership dynamics in dakwah program management while maintaining research rigor appropriate for qualitative case study inquiry within Islamic educational contexts.

Result and Discussion

Women's Leadership Role in Dakwah Program Planning

Based on field observations and interviews with various stakeholders, Mrs. Sukma Hanum occupies a crucial role in planning the pesantren's dakwah program. She engages directly in developing the program's vision, mission, and strategic direction. Her responsibilities extend beyond providing general guidance to encompass leading dakwah curriculum development, establishing themes for weekly and monthly religious studies (majelis taklim), and designing socio-religious activities that directly impact surrounding communities. This planning is conducted participatorily through deliberation forums (musyawarah) involving ustaz (male teachers), ustazah (female teachers), and student administrators. However, final decision-making authority rests with her as institutional leader. This demonstrates a leadership style combining collective participation with clear visionary direction, consistent with Bass and Avolio's transformational leadership framework, emphasizing idealized influence and inspirational motivation.¹⁷ In planning processes, Mrs. Sukma emphasizes making dakwah a

¹³ Lexy J Moleong, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*, Revised edition (Bandung: PT. Remaja Rosdakarya, 2019).

¹⁴ Muhammad Ramadhan, *Metode Penelitian* (Surabaya: Cipta Media Nusantara, 2021).

¹⁵ Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, Dan R&D*, 2nd ed. (Bandung: ALFABETA, 2021).

¹⁶ Husein Umar, *Metode Penelitian* (Jakarta: Rajawali Press, 2015).

¹⁷ Bernard M Bass and Bruce J Avolio, *Improving Organizational Effectiveness through Transformational Leadership* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994).

means of devotion ('ibadah) rather than merely routine religious activity, reflecting the Islamic principle that leadership in dakwah requires sincere intention (niyyah) oriented toward seeking Allah's pleasure.¹⁸

Implementation of Dakwah Programs

In program implementation, Mrs. Sukma applies principles of discipline, professionalism, and exemplary behavior (*uswah hasanah*). She does not manage solely from administrative positions but actively monitors implementation at the ground level. In the *tahfidz* program, for instance, she frequently attends *murojaah* (review/repetition) sessions and provides direct motivation to students. Similarly, in women's religious study programs, *dakwah safaris* (community outreach), and *da'iyah* (female preacher) training programs, Mrs. Sukma ensures activities proceed smoothly and align with *pesantren* values. The involvement of senior students in external dakwah programs constitutes contextual learning implementation at this *pesantren*. Students receive not only theoretical education but practical training to engage society's dynamics directly. This approach has proven effective in developing students who not only memorize the Qur'an but also possess strong leadership and social communication competencies. This pedagogical strategy reflects transformational leadership's individualized consideration dimension, where leaders attend to each follower's developmental needs and provide personalized support.¹⁹

Program Evaluation and Monitoring

Program monitoring and evaluation are conducted periodically through monthly evaluation forums. In these forums, each program manager submits activity reports, encountered challenges, and follow-up plans. Mrs. Sukma actively listens, provides input, and frequently intervenes to resolve emerging issues. Evaluations address not solely administrative aspects but also qualitative dimensions, including community participation, activity impact, and participants' spiritual development (*ruhiyah*). When declining community participation is detected, Mrs. Sukma immediately implements persuasive measures such as visiting community leaders, strengthening networks with village officials, or adapting dakwah methods to enhance relevance. This approach demonstrates that monitoring is not conducted solely through bureaucratic instruments but also through humanistic, socially embedded approaches. This monitoring strategy exemplifies transformational leadership's intellectual stimulation dimension, where leaders encourage followers to question assumptions and generate innovative problem-solving approaches.²⁰

Analysis of Women's Leadership Style

Mrs. Sukma's leadership style can be categorized as transformational, characterized by the ability to inspire, build shared vision, provide intrinsic motivation, and instill integrity values.²¹ She not only issues directives but also leads by example. Her maternal demeanor makes students feel close, comfortable, and respected, reflecting what Islamic scholarship terms as *rahmah* (mercy) and *'atf* (compassion) in leadership.²² Furthermore, her leadership style combines authoritative and participatory approaches. She exercises decisiveness in strategic matters and makes final decisions, yet in technical matters, she involves

¹⁸ Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Fiqh Al-Anlawiyyat: Dirasah Jadidah Fi Daw' Al-Qur'an Wa Al-Sunnah* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 1996).

¹⁹ Bass and Avolio, *Improving Organizational Effectiveness through Transformational Leadership*.

²⁰ Bass and Avolio.

²¹ Bass and Avolio.

²² Quraish Shihab, *Wawasan Al-Qur'an: Tafsir Maudhu'i Atas Pelbagai Persoalan Umat* (Bandung: Mizan, 2021).

administrators and students in decision-making processes. This fosters a sense of ownership and shared responsibility for the dakwah program's sustainability. This hybrid leadership approach aligns with contemporary Islamic leadership discourse, emphasizing shura (consultation), balanced with decisive leadership when consensus cannot be achieved.²³

The Role of Leadership in Improving Dakwah Quality

Female leadership presence in Islamic boarding schools has been proven capable of improving dakwah quality through various measurable indicators. First, student enrollment has increased year-over-year, indicating growing public trust in the pesantren. Specifically, total student enrollment increased from 220 students in 2018 (pre-Mrs. Sukma's full leadership implementation) to 318 students in 2024, representing 44.5% growth. Second, dakwah programs have become more varied, extending beyond routine religious studies to encompass leadership training, community economic empowerment, and social advocacy. Third, memorization of the complete 30 juz (chapters) of the Qur'an increased from 8 students (3.6% of enrollment) before Mrs. Sukma's leadership to 35 students (11% of enrollment) in 2024. Additionally, 25 students won district-level Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an (MTQ—Qur'an recitation competition) awards in 2023-2024, compared to 5 winners in 2017-2018, and 40% of alumni gained acceptance into State Islamic Universities (UIN) or State Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKIN) through internal scholarship programs.

Comparative analysis with other regional pesantren reveals As-Salmaniyah's superior performance. Nurul Huda Girls' Islamic Boarding School in Malang experienced 25% enrollment growth with 7% complete Qur'an memorization rate, while Al-Bi'tsatul Islamiyah Mandailing Natal remained stagnant at 5% growth with 4% memorization rate. As-Salmaniyah's achievements approximately doubled these benchmarks, attributable to digital dakwah innovation and transformational leadership implementation, establishing the pesantren as a regional benchmark for North Sumatra's Ministry of Religious Affairs.²⁴

Challenges Faced by Women's Leadership

Although Mrs. Sukma Hanum's leadership has demonstrated significant achievements, she faces various complex obstacles originating from both internal and external sources, reflecting genuine challenges confronting women in religious leadership positions.

Patriarchal Culture: The primary obstacle encountered is a strong patriarchal culture deeply rooted in Mandailing Natal society. Some community members maintain the belief that men should hold religious affairs and leadership of Islamic boarding schools. Stereotypes such as "women are unsuitable to lead pesantren" or "women are emotional and incapable of making strategic decisions" often become psychological and social stumbling blocks. Mrs. Sukma herself acknowledges that her position as a female pesantren leader represents social change not yet fully accepted by all groups. On several occasions, she has encountered skepticism from both community leaders and some internal administrators unaccustomed to female leadership. This resistance reflects broader patterns documented in Islamic education leadership literature, where female leaders must navigate deeply entrenched gender norms while establishing professional credibility.²⁵

²³ Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2001).

²⁴ Siregar, "Kepemimpinan Perempuan Dan Persepsi Masyarakat Terhadap Kesetaraan Gender Di Mandailing Natal."

²⁵ Hasanah, "Kontribusi Pemimpin Perempuan Dalam Dakwah Islam: Telaah Terhadap Kiprah Nyai Di Pesantren."

Limited Resources: Limited human resources (HR) and financial resources also pose challenges. Not all pesantren administrators possess the educational backgrounds necessary to support professional dakwah program implementation. Meanwhile, pesantren operational funds derive largely from community donations (infaq) and internal productive efforts, sometimes insufficient to finance broader, more sustainable dakwah program development. This resource constraint is particularly acute in peripheral regions like Mandailing Natal, where economic conditions limit both government funding and community donation capacity.²⁶

Dual Roles and Emotional Burden: As a woman fulfilling domestic family roles, Mrs. Sukma faces challenges balancing time, energy, and emotions between housewife responsibilities and religious institution leadership. In certain situations, this dual role demands high physical and mental resilience, especially when facing pressures from two distinct worlds: public and domestic. This challenge reflects what feminist scholarship terms the "double burden" or "second shift" phenomenon, where women leaders navigate professional responsibilities while maintaining primary responsibility for domestic labor.²⁷

Diverse Student Motivations: Not all students attending As-Salmaniyah Islamic Boarding School possess equally strong dakwah motivation. Most enroll due to parental encouragement or desire to become hafidz/hafidzah (Qur'an memorizers) rather than from an intrinsic desire to preach in communities. Consequently, dakwah development among students requires more intensive personal and emotional approaches to help them genuinely understand the urgency of the da'iyah (preacher) role in society.

Strategies to Improve Women's Leadership Quality in Pesantren Dakwah

To address these challenges, Mrs. Sukma has implemented adaptive, culturally responsive, and spiritually grounded strategies designed to strengthen women's positions in pesantren leadership while simultaneously improving dakwah program quality sustainably.

Cultivating Islamic Leadership Role Models: One effective strategy involves building narratives about women's leadership in Islam rooted in prophetic history and exemplary female Companions. Stories of female Companions such as Khadijah bint Khuwaylid (successful businesswoman and supporter of the Prophet's mission) and 'Aisha bint Abi Bakr (scholar and teacher of Companions) serve as inspiration in various Islamic study forums and student training sessions. These exemplary roles are displayed not only in lectures but also through practical demonstration. Mrs. Sukma strives to model Islamic leadership by not only mastering Islamic jurisprudence but also upholding excellent character (akhlaq karimah), firmness, and empathy, embodying the prophetic qualities of siddiq (truthfulness), amanah (trustworthiness), tabligh (conveying message), and fathonah (intelligence).²⁸

Collaboration with External Institutions and Community Leaders: To expand influence and strengthen leadership legitimacy, the pesantren has established collaborative networks with various external institutions, including Islamic mass organizations, universities, and Muslim women's NGOs. These collaborations provide access to leadership training, scholarships for female preachers, and publications on dakwah programs. Specifically, collaboration with the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in Mandailing Natal generated IDR

²⁶ Siregar, "Kepemimpinan Perempuan Dan Persepsi Masyarakat Terhadap Kesetaraan Gender Di Mandailing Natal."

²⁷ Arlie Russell Hochschild and Anne Machung, *The Second Shift: Working Families and the Revolution at Home* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012).

²⁸ Salman Harun, *Tafsir Tarbawi: Nilai-Nilai Pendidikan Dalam Al-Qur'an* (Yogyakarta: Lentera Hati, 2019).

500 million in waqf (endowment) funding from 2022-2024, representing a 300% increase from self-funding, plus digital dakwah training for 150 students through a 2023 Memorandum of Understanding. Impact included expanded dakwah reach to 10 villages, increased alumni employability by 25%, and strengthened long-term legitimacy. Furthermore, Mrs. Sukma has established harmonious relationships with traditional leaders, religious figures, and village officials. This cultural approach aims to minimize social resistance to female leadership and position the pesantren as an integral part of Mandailing Natal's social system.

Spiritual Guidance and Strengthening: Awareness of spirituality's importance in leading dakwah institutions prompted Mrs. Sukma to strengthen the tazkiyatun nafs (soul purification) aspect of pesantren life. Each administrator and student receives guidance to strengthen spiritual connection with Allah through routine activities, including qiyamul lail (night prayer), dhikr (remembrance of Allah), tilawah (Qur'an recitation), and tarbiyah (spiritual education) circles. Quoting Imam Al-Ghazali, who stated that "a leader who does not strengthen himself with closeness to Allah will be weak in controlling others," this spiritual approach constitutes the main foundation in developing strong, visionary dakwah leader character.²⁹ This emphasis on spiritual leadership development reflects Islamic educational philosophy prioritizing internal transformation (tarbiyah ruhiyyah) alongside external skill acquisition.³⁰

Improving Competence and Economic Independence: The pesantren also provides skills training to students and administrators, including sermon writing, public communication, and social program management. Furthermore, to support dakwah funding sustainability, the pesantren develops productive businesses, including pesantren agriculture, student cooperatives, and small business units. This aims to ensure pesantren economic independence and reduce reliance on external donations. This economic empowerment strategy aligns with contemporary Islamic social entrepreneurship discourse, emphasizing faith-based institutions' self-sufficiency as a means of maintaining operational independence and mission integrity.³¹

Learning from Failed Strategies: The pesantren's development has also involved learning from unsuccessful initiatives. The initial "open Friday sermon" strategy (2018) failed significantly due to a boycott by conservative clerics. Lessons learned emphasized prioritizing pre-implementation deliberation over confrontation with established norms. The online mentoring program (2020, pandemic era) proved ineffective, with only 60% participation due to limited internet access in Mandailing Natal; lessons learned led to adopting a hybrid model with offline training prioritized. These adaptive learning experiences demonstrate organizational resilience and leadership capacity to adjust strategies based on contextual realities, reflecting transformational leadership's intellectual stimulation dimension.³²

Impact of Women's Leadership in Managing Dakwah

²⁹ Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *Ihya' 'Ulum Al-Din*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2005).

³⁰ Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1998).

³¹ Habib Ahmed, *Islamic Social Business: Concept and Application of Social Business in Islamic Context* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2019).

³² Bass and Avolio, *Improving Organizational Effectiveness through Transformational Leadership*.

Female leadership at As-Salmaniyah Al-Yusufiah Tahfidz Islamic Boarding School has generated a broad impact both internally in pesantren life and externally in community dynamics.

Internal Impact: Internally, the implemented leadership style successfully created a conducive, disciplined, and enthusiastic atmosphere for executing dakwah activities. Students feel valued and motivated, witnessing directly how their leader actively participates in pesantren life. Ustaz and ustazah (religious teachers) also feel empowered to participate in program planning and implementation. The pesantren's inclusive and spiritual atmosphere fosters solidarity among members, reduces internal conflict, and strengthens collective commitment to the dakwah mission. Student testimonials corroborate this impact. Siti Rahma, a third-year student, stated: "I used to be stuck memorizing 10 juz, but Ibu Sukma's personal mentoring helped me complete the memorization process last year." This personalized mentoring approach exemplifies transformational leadership's individualized consideration dimension, where leaders attend to each follower's unique needs and potential.³³

External Impact: Externally, Mrs. Sukma's leadership has contributed positively to improving the quality of community religious life. Dakwah activities, da'iyah training, and women's religious studies have made the pesantren a vibrant center for Islamic outreach responsive to social needs. The pesantren serves not merely as a closed educational institution but also as a social change agent, bridging Islamic teachings with modern society realities. This positive reputation has increased public trust in the pesantren and strengthened social support for women's leadership. Alumni testimony supports this assessment. Nurhaliza, now a teacher at another pesantren, noted: "From skepticism to conviction after seeing us preach in 5 villages, the students' attendance has increased dramatically." Community leader Ust. Hasan from Mandailing Natal observed: "Initially, we rejected the sermon, but the anti-bullying results changed 300 residents; now they fully support it." These testimonies demonstrate how effective dakwah programs can transform community perceptions and build legitimacy for women's leadership through tangible social impact.³⁴

Discussion: Women's Leadership Effectiveness in Dakwah Management

Research findings confirm that women possess substantial potential to lead Islamic missionary institutions. Mrs. Sukma's leadership demonstrates not only managerial competence but also spirituality, exemplary behavior, and innovation. In a patriarchal cultural context, this success serves as a counter-narrative, proving that leadership capacity is determined not by gender but by integrity, knowledge, and strong vision.³⁵ This finding aligns with contemporary Islamic feminist scholarship arguing that Qur'anic principles support gender-egalitarian leadership while patriarchal interpretations represent cultural rather than theological constraints.³⁶

Furthermore, leadership approaches emphasizing deliberation (*musyawarah*), role modeling (*uswah hasanah*), and spiritual development (*tarbiyah ruhiyyah*) demonstrate that women's leadership styles possess unique characteristics highly relevant in dakwah contexts. Empathy, patience, communication, and relational qualities constitute unique strengths often absent in

³³ Bass and Avolio.

³⁴ Wahyuni, "Kepemimpinan Perempuan Dalam Pengembangan Lembaga Pendidikan Di Pondok Pesantren."

³⁵ Suryani, *Perempuan Dan Kepemimpinan Dalam Islam*.

³⁶ Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

traditional, masculine, and authoritarian leadership models.³⁷ Mrs. Sukma's approach, described by community members as "active listening" and "preaching while listening," reflects what communication scholars term dialogical or participatory communication, contrasting with monological, top-down dakwah approaches.³⁸

Comparative analysis reveals distinctive features of Mrs. Sukma's leadership. In Mandailing Natal pesantren such as Darul Huffadh or other local institutions, male leaders tend to plan dakwah programs with formal hierarchical structures, semester meetings, and rigorous fiqh studies based on traditional organizational practices. Mrs. Sukma's approach is unique in integrating modern media such as television talk shows with emotional dakwah based on women's stories, making it more inclusive of Muslim women through gender-specific empathy. This uniqueness lies in personal flexibility and contemporary adaptability, differing from rigid models of male leaders who prioritize collective discipline. This innovation exemplifies what scholars term "vernacular Islam" or "lived religion," where Islamic practice adapts to local contexts while maintaining theological authenticity.³⁹

Women's Leadership as Systematic Management: Women's leadership in this context is not merely symbolic but evident in practical dakwah program management. The program planning process is carefully and systematically structured, involving pesantren structural elements including teaching staff, female religious teachers, and student administrators. Dakwah activities focus not only on religious rituals but also on social and educational aspects such as training in *tajhizul mayyit* (preparing the deceased according to Islamic rites), coaching for women in religious study groups, and strengthening community-based dakwah. Regular evaluation constitutes a crucial component of program management. Reflecting on achievements and challenges allows program adaptation to both the student and the surrounding community's needs. This demonstrates women's leadership skills in applying modern management principles within Islamic education and preaching contexts.⁴⁰

Tangible Impact on Pesantren Development: Female leadership has generated a tangible, measurable impact both internally and externally. Internally, there has been increased student motivation to learn, improved daily discipline, and a growing collective spirit among teachers and administrators. The pesantren environment has become more conducive to students' intellectual, spiritual, and emotional growth. Externally, relationships between pesantren and the community have strengthened. Islamic outreach programs targeting communities outside the pesantren have been positively received, and the number of new students interested in joining has increased. This demonstrates that humanistic leadership and openness to the wider community can expand dakwah reach and strengthen pesantren social legitimacy.

Adaptive Strategies Against Obstacles: Like any leadership model, women's leadership faces numerous challenges. Identified obstacles include a persistent patriarchal culture in social environments, limited human and financial resources, and internal challenges such as the dual burdens of domestic and professional duties. However, women's leadership in this case has not surrendered. Instead, challenges are met with intelligent, adaptive approaches. Through internal training, female Islamic teachers receive space to develop competencies. Collaborative strategies between male and female teachers are implemented to create fair and synergistic work environments. Diversification of funding sources and optimization of

³⁷ Prasetiawan and Lis, "Kepemimpinan Perempuan Dalam Pesantren."

³⁸ A Syukur, *Strategi Dakwah Kontemporer* (Jakarta: Rajawali Press, 2017).

³⁹ Robert W Hefner, ed., *Making Modern Muslims: The Politics of Islamic Education in Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009).

⁴⁰ Sani, *Metodologi Penelitian Pendidikan*.

pesantren assets support economic independence and dakwah program sustainability. An inclusive cultural approach is also key to penetrating patriarchal cultural boundaries. By engaging community leaders, traditional figures, and local social networks, the pesantren successfully integrates women's leadership as an integral part of community socio-religious dynamics.

Substantial, Not Symbolic Leadership: Research findings clearly indicate that female leadership at As-Salmaniyah Al-Yusufiah Tahfidz Islamic Boarding School is not merely a symbolic representation. Women's roles are genuinely recognized and granted strategic mandates in decision-making and program implementation. In this context, gender is not a barrier but rather a dimension enriching leadership quality and dakwah management.⁴¹ The distinctive touch of female leadership, emphasizing interpersonal communication, empathy, and humanistic approaches, has been proven to increase the absorption of Islamic preaching messages among both students and the general public. This broadens understanding that dakwah success depends not only on content but also on relational and emotional delivery approaches.⁴²

Replicable Model for Best Practices

This research provides important insights for developing female leadership models replicable in other pesantren. Successful strategies implemented at Tahfidz As-Salmaniyah Al-Yusufiah Islamic Boarding School can serve as best practice models in managing pesantren-based dakwah programs. These include: (1) Active involvement of women in pesantren institutional structures; (2) Capacity development of female teachers through ongoing training; (3) Strategic assignments in community outreach programs; (4) Synergy between domestic and professional roles through work flexibility; and (5) Economic empowerment of pesantren as supporters of women's dakwah programs. This overall strategy proves that with appropriate approaches, women's leadership can be a transformative force in Islamic education.⁴³

However, challenges faced remain significant. Without structural support and policies supporting gender equality, such successes will remain exceptional rather than normative. Therefore, systematic efforts are needed from the government, Islamic organizations, and the wider community to create greater opportunities for women in leadership positions within Islamic missionary institutions.⁴⁴ This calls for what Islamic feminist scholars term "gender mainstreaming in Islamic institutions," where policies, structures, and cultures are deliberately reformed to ensure women's full and equal participation in religious leadership.⁴⁵

Conclusion

This research examined women's leadership roles in enhancing dakwah program management at As-Salmaniyah Al-Yusufiah Tahfidz Islamic Boarding School, Mandailing Natal Regency. Through qualitative case study methodology, this study generated empirical evidence regarding female leadership effectiveness, strategies, challenges, and impacts within Islamic educational contexts.

⁴¹ Sari, "Peran Kyai Dan Nyai Dalam Kepemimpinan Di Pesantren Modern."

⁴² Syukur, *Strategi Dakwah Kontemporer*.

⁴³ Wahyuni, "Kepemimpinan Perempuan Dalam Pengembangan Lembaga Pendidikan Di Pondok Pesantren."

⁴⁴ Hasanah, "Kontribusi Pemimpin Perempuan Dalam Dakwah Islam: Telaah Terhadap Kiprah Nyai Di Pesantren."

⁴⁵ Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

Research findings demonstrate that women's leadership makes substantial contributions to pesantren-based dakwah programs. Mrs. Sukma Hanum's leadership exemplifies effectiveness through visionary, participatory, and transformational approaches that successfully articulate institutional direction, involve all stakeholder elements, and consistently evaluate implementation. Measurable impacts are evident both internally and externally. Student enrollment increased from 220 (2018) to 318 (2024), representing 44.5% growth. Complete Qur'an memorization achievement rose from 8 students (3.6%) to 35 students (11%), MTQ competition winners increased from 5 to 25 students, and 40% of alumni gained acceptance to State Islamic Universities. Externally, dakwah programs expanded to 10 surrounding villages, and the pesantren established itself as a regional benchmark for North Sumatra's Ministry of Religious Affairs.

This research contributes theoretically by empirically validating transformational leadership theory within Islamic boarding school contexts and enriching gender-Islamic education discourse. It demonstrates that Islamic leadership principles such as shura (consultation), uswah hasanah (exemplary behavior), and tazkiyatun nafs (soul purification) can be embodied effectively by female leaders when provided with institutional space and community support. Practically, successful strategies implemented at As-Salmaniyah can serve as replicable best practice models, including: (1) active women's involvement in institutional structures; (2) capacity development through ongoing training; (3) strategic community outreach assignments; (4) work flexibility enabling domestic-professional role synergy; and (5) economic empowerment supporting dakwah programs.

This research underscores the necessity for systematic efforts from the government, Islamic organizations, and the wider community to create greater opportunities for women in Islamic institutional leadership positions. Without structural support and gender equality policies, successes like As-Salmaniyah will remain exceptional rather than normative. Gender mainstreaming in Islamic institutions—where policies, structures, and cultures are deliberately reformed to ensure women's full participation in religious leadership—must become a strategic priority for the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Islamic mass organizations, and pesantren networks nationwide.

Limitation of the Study

Despite significant contributions, this research acknowledges several limitations. First, this single case study focused on one leader and a pesantren in Mandailing Natal, limiting generalizability to pesantren nationwide, particularly those in different geographical regions, organizational scales, or educational orientations. The unique sociocultural context of Mandailing Natal as "Serambi Mekah" with deeply patriarchal traditions may not reflect dynamics in more progressive urban pesantren. Second, qualitative research inherently involves the researcher's interpretive processes, potentially introducing subjective elements. While triangulation methods were employed, researchers' insider positions as Islamic boarding school alumni may have introduced affirmative bias regarding female leadership. Third, this research's limited timeframe (March-June 2025) provides only a cross-sectional snapshot. Leadership effectiveness and program impacts ideally require longitudinal assessment to capture sustainability and long-term outcomes. Fourth, the absence of systematic comparative analysis between female-led and male-led pesantren with similar characteristics limits conclusions regarding whether observed effectiveness is attributable specifically to female leadership or to other organizational factors.

Future research should employ multi-case comparative studies examining female leadership across diverse pesantren contexts to enhance generalizability, longitudinal designs tracking

development over 5-10 years to assess sustainability, quantitative comparative studies with larger samples to strengthen causal inferences, and alumni tracer studies examining long-term career trajectories and leadership roles.

Women's leadership at As-Salmaniyah Al-Yusufiah functions not only as an internal pesantren driving force but also as a social change agent. By successfully navigating patriarchal cultural contexts, limited resources, and dual role challenges through adaptive strategies grounded in Islamic principles and transformational practices, Mrs. Sukma Hanum's leadership demonstrates that gender need not be a barrier to effective Islamic institutional leadership. This research contributes to scholarship challenging essentialist gender assumptions and demonstrating that leadership capacity derives from integrity, knowledge, vision, and commitment rather than biological sex. Strengthening women's leadership roles must become part of strategic agendas for pesantren, Islamic organizations, and religious education policymakers in Indonesia.

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