

Kiai Leadership and Ustadz Competence in Fostering Student Learning Motivation: Evidence from an Indonesian Islamic Boarding School

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Abstract

This study examines the structural influence of Kiai leadership and Ustadz competence on students' learning motivation at Al Hasan Islamic Boarding School, Ciamis. A quantitative survey design was deployed involving 33 student respondents (n = 33). Data gathered through structured indicators were evaluated utilizing multiple linear regression analysis. The empirical results reveal that both Kiai leadership and Ustadz competence act as robust determinants of student motivation, functioning effectively both partially and simultaneously. Specifically, Kiai leadership drives motivation through spiritual guidance and close emotional communication, while Ustadz competence primarily enhances engagement via adaptive pedagogical management. These findings underscore the critical necessity of integrating visionary spiritual leadership with modernized teaching competencies to optimize the Islamic boarding school educational ecosystem.

Keywords: Kiai Leadership, Ustadz Competence, Student Learning Motivation, Islamic Boarding School.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini menguji pengaruh struktural kepemimpinan Kiai dan kompetensi Ustadz terhadap motivasi belajar santri di Pondok Pesantren Al Hasan, Ciamis. Desain survei kuantitatif diterapkan dengan melibatkan 33 santri sebagai responden (n = 33). Data yang dihimpun melalui indikator terstruktur dievaluasi menggunakan analisis regresi linier berganda. Hasil empiris menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan Kiai dan kompetensi Ustadz bertindak sebagai determinan kuat terhadap motivasi santri, yang berfungsi secara efektif baik secara parsial maupun simultan. Secara spesifik, kepemimpinan Kiai mendorong motivasi melalui bimbingan spiritual dan komunikasi emosional yang erat, sementara kompetensi Ustadz utamanya meningkatkan keterlibatan santri melalui manajemen pedagogis yang adaptif. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya mengintegrasikan kepemimpinan spiritual yang visioner dengan kompetensi pengajaran yang dimodernisasi untuk mengoptimalkan ekosistem pendidikan pondok pesantren.

Kata Kunci : Kepemimpinan Kiai, Kompetensi Ustadz, Motivasi Belajar Santri, Pesantren.

BACKGROUND

Motivation to learn is a key factor that determines the success of the educational process, including in the context of Islamic boarding schools which combine religious and general learning. (Muhammad Efendi, 2021). In an Islamic boarding school environment, students are not only required to understand science but also to internalize spiritual values, morals, and discipline. Students' motivation to learn is the primary driving force determining their enthusiasm for learning, participating in religious study groups, murojaah (religious study groups), and other academic activities. Theory Self-Determination asserts that intrinsic motivation grows when

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Received: 4 April 2025; Revised: 18 July 2026; Accepted: 26 July 2026

individuals feel they have autonomy, competence, and positive social connectedness (Dabie, 2025; Deci, E. L., & Ryan, 2000; Laguerre, 2025). In the context of Islamic boarding schools, these three elements can be realized through the exemplary behavior of the kiai, the guidance of competent ustadz, and a learning climate that supports a sense of togetherness and enthusiasm for learning. (Arum Nela Falakhina, 2025; Burhanudin, 2025; Imron Fauz, 2022; Qomusuddin, 2026). Thus, the motivation of students does not only arise from personal drive, but is also greatly influenced by the quality of leadership and the educational system implemented at the Islamic boarding school.

However, in practice, many Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) still face challenges related to low student motivation, including the Al Hasan Islamic Boarding School in Ciamis Regency, West Java. Based on initial observations and informal interviews with several ustadz, it was found that some students showed a decline in enthusiasm for participating in both religious and general studies. Some students focused more on non-academic activities, such as social activities or practical skills, while their involvement in the formal learning process decreased. This phenomenon may be caused by several factors. First, the leadership style of kiai (Islamic boarding school) which tends to be traditional and hierarchical sometimes does not provide enough space for student participation in learning activities, thus reducing their sense of autonomy and responsibility for learning. Second, the variation in ustadz competence, both in terms of material mastery and pedagogical skills, is still uneven. Ustadz who are less innovative in their teaching or do not use a contextual approach are often less able to attract student interest in learning. Furthermore, limited learning facilities such as reading rooms, modern teaching materials, and busy study schedules can also contribute to low learning motivation in Islamic boarding schools. This condition shows the need for in-depth research to understand how the leadership of the kiai and the competence of the ustadz influence the learning motivation of students at the Al Hasan Islamic Boarding School.

Several previous studies have shown that kiai leadership has a significant influence on student motivation and discipline. For example, research by Prayogi and Ashari (2024) found that a kiai's charismatic, communicative, and participatory leadership style positively contributed to increasing student learning motivation in traditional Islamic boarding schools. (Prayogi, M. ., & Ashari, 2024). Meanwhile, Maulana (2024) emphasized that the leadership of kiai who are able to be religious and moral role models will create a pesantren climate that is conducive to learning. (Maulana, Fatkhurrozak Johan; Ernawati, 2024). On the other hand, the competence of the ustadz has also been proven to play an important role in students' learning motivation.. EE Junaedi Sastradiharja (2022) found that pedagogical competence has a positive relationship with students' learning interest. (Sastradiharja, 2022). Similar results were reported by Tambak (2024), that teachers with good pedagogical competence were able to significantly increase students' learning motivation. (Maimunah Tambak, 2024). However, research that simultaneously examines these two factors—kiai leadership and ustadz competence—on student motivation in a specific Islamic boarding school is still relatively limited. Therefore, this study is important to fill this gap in empirical research and provide a more comprehensive picture of the dynamics of education in Islamic boarding schools.

This research is important because it can provide both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, this research enriches the study of the relationship between religious leadership and pedagogical competence in the context of Islamic educational institutions. Practically, the results of this study can be used as evaluation material for the management of the

Al Hasan Islamic Boarding School to improve the effectiveness of educational management, particularly in strengthening the leadership capacity of kiai and the competence of ustadz. Furthermore, the findings of this study can also be used as a basis for decision-making in designing training programs, workshops, and coaching for ustadz, as well as in developing more participatory and inspiring pesantren leadership policies. Thus, the results of this study are expected to not only improve the quality of students' learning motivation but also improve the quality of pesantren education as a whole.

This research can benefit various parties. Kyai (Islamic boarding school) and administrators can use the results to improve leadership strategies and student development. Ustadz (Islamic teachers) can use it as a reference to improve their pedagogical competence and professionalism in teaching. Students can experience a more motivating learning environment that supports their spiritual and academic development. The Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ciamis Regency Education Office can also use the results of this research as input in formulating policies for developing Islamic boarding schools. Furthermore, researchers and academics in the field of Islamic education can use this research as a basis for further studies on the relationship between religious leadership, educator competence, and learning motivation in various types of Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a quantitative approach with a survey design to examine the influence of Kiai leadership and Ustadz competence on students' learning motivation. The research location is the Al Hasan Islamic Boarding School in Ciamis, West Java, which integrates traditional and modern curricula. The study population includes all students actively under the guidance of Ustadz, totaling approximately 130 students. Based on the sampling framework from Arikunto (2010), a 25% proportion of the population was taken, resulting in a sample of 33 respondents (Ivan Fanani Qomusuddin & Siti Romlah, 2021). Although this number meets the basic criteria for local contextual analysis, the researcher acknowledges that this small sample size poses limitations in terms of statistical power and the generalizability of the findings to the broader Islamic boarding school ecosystem. Data collection was conducted through documentation studies and a 5-point Likert-scale questionnaire consisting of 33 items. To strengthen the conceptual aspects of the instrument, the items were arranged based on specific theoretical dimensions. Prior to the main analysis, classical assumption tests—including normality, linearity, and multicollinearity tests—were conducted to ensure data validity. Furthermore, data analysis was calculated using multiple linear regression analysis techniques with the help of SPSS software version 25.0. This statistical approach was chosen because it is able to provide a comprehensive understanding of the structural relationship, both partially and simultaneously, between Kiai leadership, Ustadz competence, and their influence on strengthening student learning motivation (Qomusuddin, Ivan Fanani; Bunyamin, 2020; Zamhuri Rachman, Z Rachman, H Ardi Hidayat, A Karim, 2025).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Demographics

The respondents in this study were 33 students from the Al Hasan Islamic Boarding School in Ciamis. Based on the data collection results, the respondents' characteristics can be described through four main categories: gender, age, grade level at the Islamic boarding school, and length of

study at the Islamic boarding school. These are as described in Table 1. Based on gender, the majority of respondents were male, 19 people (57.58%), while 14 people were female (42.42%). This indicates that the dominance of male students is still higher than female students at the Al Hasan Islamic Boarding School. This condition is in line with the general character of traditional and semi-modern Islamic boarding schools in the Ciamis area, which tend to have a larger number of male students due to their orientation towards mastery of yellow books and intensive deepening of religious knowledge. In terms of age, the majority of respondents were in the 20-30 year range, 17 people (51.52%), while 12 people (36.36%) were over 30 years old, and only 4 people (12.12%) were under 20 years old. This indicates that the majority of students are young adults, who generally have a more stable level of maturity of thought and motivation to learn. This condition reflects that students at this Islamic boarding school are not only of high school age, but also include adults who remain committed to studying religious knowledge in depth. Judging from the class level in the Islamic boarding school, it is known that the majority of respondents are at the Tsanawi level (equivalent to intermediate), namely 24 people (72.73%), followed by Ibtida (equivalent to basic) as many as 6 people (18.18%), and Takhosus (equivalent to advanced) as many as 3 people (9.09%). This data indicates that the majority of respondents are still at the intermediate stage of Islamic boarding school learning, so their learning motivation is greatly influenced by the intensity of guidance from the kiai and ustadz.

Table 1. Respondent Demographics

Item	Group	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	19	57.58
	Female	14	42.42
Age	Under 20 years	4	12.12
	20 – 30 years	17	51.52
	Over 30 years	12	36.36
Grade level at Islamic boarding school	Ibtida	6	18.18
	Tsanawi	24	72.73
	Takhosus	3	9.09
Duration of study at Islamic boarding school	Under 2 years	10	30.30
	3– 5 years	10	30.30
	Over 5 years	13	39.39

Source: Questionnaire results, 2025

Furthermore, based on the length of study at the Islamic boarding school, it was found that 13 students (39.39%) had studied for more than five years, 10 students (30.30%) had studied for 3–5 years, and 10 students (30.30%) had studied for less than two years. This illustrates that most students have studied at the Islamic boarding school for a long time, so they have a deeper understanding and experience of the kiai leadership system and the competence of the ustadz. Students who have studied at the Islamic boarding school for a longer time generally have higher loyalty and motivation to learn due to their emotional and spiritual closeness to the Islamic boarding school environment.

Validation and Reliability Test

This validity test aims to ensure that the instruments used in the research actually measure aspects that are in accordance with the theory underlying each variable (Qomusuddin, I., & Romlah, 2021). Thus, the research results are reliable and have a strong empirical basis. The validity test results for each variable can be seen in Tables 2 through 4. The validity test process is carried out by calculating the correlation coefficient between the score of each statement item and the total score of its variable using the Pearson Product Moment formula. A statement item is declared valid if the calculated *r* value is greater than the table *r* at a significance level of 0.05 ($\alpha = 5\%$) and a certain number of respondents (*n*). Conversely, items with a calculated *r* value smaller than the table *r* are declared invalid and must be revised or deleted (Ivan Fanani Qomusuddin & Siti Romlah, 2021). The validity matrix for all research instruments—comprising Kiai Leadership (KK), Ustadz Competency (KU), and Student Learning Motivation (MB). thereby confirming that all instruments are empirically valid, highly aligned with their respective theoretical constructs, and qualified for subsequent reliability testing as shown in table 2.

Table 2. Results of the Validity Test

No. Item	r value	r table	Description
KK1	.644	.344	Valid
KK2	.821	.344	Valid
KK3	.799	.344	Valid
KK4	.850	.344	Valid
KK5	.790	.344	Valid
KK6	.772	.344	Valid
KK7	.820	.344	Valid
KK8	.745	.344	Valid
KK9	.847	.344	Valid
KK10	.857	.344	Valid
KK11	.819	.344	Valid
KU1	.749	.344	Valid
KU2	.801	.344	Valid
KU3	.799	.344	Valid
KU4	.865	.344	Valid
KU5	.841	.344	Valid
KU6	.862	.344	Valid
KU7	.786	.344	Valid
KU8	.843	.344	Valid
KU9	.819	.344	Valid
KU10	.869	.344	Valid
KU11	.798	.344	Valid
KU12	.803	.344	Valid
MB1	.727	.344	Valid
MB2	.500	.344	Valid
MB3	.796	.344	Valid
MB4	.816	.344	Valid
MB5	.760	.344	Valid

No. Item	r value	r table	Description
MB6	.846	.344	Valid
MB7	.804	.344	Valid
MB8	.800	.344	Valid
MB9	.848	.344	Valid
MB10	.733	.344	Valid

Source: SPSS 25.00 Processing Results.

Reliability testing aims to demonstrate the extent to which measurement results are relatively consistent when repeated two or more times. In other words, reliability is an index that indicates the extent to which a measuring instrument is trustworthy and reliable. In this study, reliability testing was conducted using the Cronbach's Alpha (α) formula. Sekaran (1992) said that reliability measurement indicators are divided into 3 parts. If the alpha value is above 0.8 it is considered good, if it is 0.6-0.799 it is considered acceptable, whereas if it is less than 0.6, it is considered to have poor reliability (Qomusuddin, 2019) The reliability of the questionnaire for each variable is presented in Table 3. Table 3 shows that the statement items in the instrument have very strong internal consistency and are able to provide stable and reliable measurement results. In other words, each statement item in the three variables has a high correlation with each other in measuring the same construct.

Table 3. Reliability Test Results

Variable	Reliability	Description
Kiai Leadership (KK)	0,914	good
Ustadz Competence (KU)	0,953	good
Student Learning Motivation (MB)	0,957	good

Source: SPSS Processing Results

These results indicate that all research instruments used have been empirically and psychometrically tested to accurately measure each variable. The kiai leadership instrument consistently reflects the leadership behavior perceived by students; the ustadz competency instrument reflects the ustadz's pedagogical and professional abilities; and the students' learning motivation instrument consistently reflects the level of intrinsic and extrinsic learning motivation.

Normality and linearity test

Regression analysis requires several conditions to be met as a model for assessing the influence of independent variables on dependent variables. These conditions include: the data must be normally distributed and there must be a linear relationship between the variables being studied (Qomusuddin, Ivan Fanani; Bunyamin, 2020). The normality test was conducted to determine whether the data in this study was normally distributed (Qomusuddin, 2019). Testing was carried out using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov method with a significance level of 0.05 (Qomusuddin, 2019). Based on the results of data processing as shown in Table 4. Based on the results of the table above, the significance values for each variable are as follows: Ustadz Competence (KU) = 0.219 > 0.05, Learning Motivation (MB) = 0.389 > 0.05, and Kiai Leadership (KK) = 0.059 > 0.05. Thus, all research

variables have significance values above 0.05, so the data is declared normally distributed. These results indicate that the respondent data in this study has met the assumption of normality, so it is suitable to proceed to the multiple linear regression analysis stage. The normal distribution of data also strengthens the validity of the statistical model used, because there are no deviations from the basic assumptions of the regression.

Next is the linearity test, this test is a prerequisite for using regression and correlation analysis (Sugiyono, 2017). This test was conducted using SPSS version 25.0 with the Test for Linearity tool, the data is said to be linear if the sig value obtained is smaller than 0,05 (Qomusuddin, I., & Romlah, 2021). The test results in Table 5 show that the significance value of both relationships is less than 0.05, namely 0.006. This means that the relationship between Kiai Leadership (KK) and Student Learning Motivation (MB), as well as between Ustadz Competence (KU) and Student Learning Motivation (MB), are both linear. Thus, it can be concluded that the better the kiai leadership and the higher the ustadz competence, the more student learning motivation tends to increase proportionally and in the same direction. These results confirm that both independent variables have a linear relationship with the dependent variable, thus fulfilling the basic assumptions of multiple linear regression and can proceed to the regression analysis stage without violating statistical assumptions.

Table 4. Normality Testing Using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test Method

		TOTAL_KU	TOTAL_MB	TOTAL_KK
N		33	33	33
Normal Parameters ^{a,b}	Mean	53.6970	43.3333	50.8485
	Std. Deviation	5.26477	4.86484	4.44495
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.183	.157	.231
	Positive	.183	.103	.175
	Negative	-.159	-.157	-.231
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		1.051	.903	1.329
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.219	.389	.059

Source: SPSS 25.00 Processing Results.

Table 5. Summary of Linearity Test Results

Linearity	Sig.	Description
Kiai Leadership (KK) and Student Learning Motivation (MB)	0,006	Linier
Ustadz Competence (KU) and Student Learning Motivation (MB)	0,006	Linier

Source: SPSS 25.00 Processing Results.

Research Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was conducted to determine the extent to which the independent variables, namely Kiai Leadership (KK) and Ustadz Competence (KU), partially or simultaneously influence the dependent variable, namely Student Learning Motivation (MB) at the Al Hasan Islamic Boarding School, Ciamis. This stage is the core of quantitative data analysis. According to Riduwan (2021), hypothesis testing in multiple linear regression analysis is conducted in two ways:

- a. a. t-test (partial) — used to determine the influence of each independent variable (Kiai Leadership and Ustadz Competence) on the dependent variable (Student Learning Motivation) separately (Riduwan;Sunarto, 2009).
- b. F test (simultaneous) — used to determine the influence of both independent variables simultaneously on the dependent variable. (Riduwan;Sunarto, 2009).

In addition, the test also considers the value of the coefficient of determination (R^2) which shows the magnitude of the contribution of the independent variable in explaining the dependent variable (Ivan Fanani Qomusuddin & Siti Romlah, 2021). Thus, this hypothesis testing aims to statistically test whether the leadership of the kiai and the competence of the ustadz really have a significant influence on the learning motivation of students, both partially and simultaneously. The results of this hypothesis testing will form the basis for drawing conclusions and providing recommendations for improving the quality of learning in Islamic boarding schools. The hypothesis testing can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6 Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	t count *	t table**	Conclusion
“There is a positive and significant influence between kiai leadership on Student Learning Motivation at the Al Hasan Islamic Boarding School, Ciamis” Ho: There is no positive and significant influence between kiai leadership on Student Learning Motivation at the Al Hasan Islamic Boarding School, Ciamis. H1: There is a positive and significant influence between kiai leadership on Student Learning Motivation at the Al Hasan Islamic Boarding School, Ciamis.	2,912	2,042	t _{count} > t _{table} , so : H1 is accepted, H0 is rejected, meaning that it is proven that there is a positive and significant influence between the kiai leadership on Student Learning Motivation at the Al Hasan Islamic Boarding School, Ciamis.
“There is a positive and significant influence between ustadz competence on Student Learning Motivation at the Al Hasan Islamic Boarding School, Ciamis.” Ho: There is no positive and significant influence between ustadz competence on Student Learning Motivation at the Al Hasan Islamic Boarding School, Ciamis.. H1: There is a positive and significant influence between the competence of the ustadz on Student Learning Motivation s at the Al Hasan Islamic Boarding School, Ciamis..	3,391	2,042	t _{count} > t _{table} , so : H1 is accepted, H0 is rejected, meaning that it is proven that there is a positive and significant influence between ustadz competence on Student Learning Motivation at the Al Hasan Islamic Boarding School, Ciamis
“There is a positive and significant simultaneous influence between kiai leadership and ustadz competence on Student Learning Motivation at the Al Hasan Islamic Boarding School, Ciamis.” Ho: There is no positive and significant simultaneous influence between kiai leadership and ustadz competence on	7,329	2,488***	F _{count} > F _{table} , So: H1 is accepted, H0 is rejected, meaning that it is proven that there is a positive and significant influence simultaneously between kiai leadership and ustadz competence on students'

Hypothesis	t count *	t table**	Conclusion
Student Learning Motivation at the Al Hasan Islamic Boarding School, Ciamis. H1: There is a positive and significant simultaneous influence between kiai leadership and ustadz competence on Student Learning Motivation at the Al Hasan Islamic Boarding School, Ciamis.			learning motivation at the Al Hasan Islamic Boarding School, Ciamis.

Source: SPSS 25.00 Processing Results

* Calculation results using SPSS version 25.0 software

** The t-table value for a 5% error rate with N = 33 is 2.042 (see t-table, with df = N-2 = 33 - 2 = 31)

*** F-table alpha 0.05 (df numerator = k = 2, df denominator = N-k - 1 = 33 - 2 - 1 = 30) is 2.488.

To reveal the extent of the partial or simultaneous influence between kiai leadership and ustadz competence on students' learning motivation at the Al Hasan Islamic Boarding School in Ciamis, a coefficient of determination was calculated using regression analysis results. The results of the calculation can be seen in Table 9.

Table 9. Magnitude of Influence Between Variables

Influences	Koefesien Determination (R square)
Kiai Leadership (KK) and Student Learning Motivation (MB)	0,215
Ustadz Competence (KU) and Student Learning Motivation (MB)	0,271
Ustadz Competence (KU) and Ustadz Competence (KU) on Student Learning Motivation (MB))	0,328

Source: SPSS 25.00 Processing Results

The results show that:

1. Kiai Leadership (KK) contributes 21.5% to increasing Student Learning Motivation (MB). This indicates that the leadership style, role model, and guidance provided by the kiai have a significant influence in fostering students' enthusiasm for learning.
2. Ustadz Competence (KU) contributes significantly, at 27.1%, to Student Learning Motivation (MB). This indicates that the higher the ustadz's competence—whether in pedagogical, professional, social, or personality—the higher the students' learning motivation at the Islamic boarding school.
3. Simultaneously, Kiai Leadership and Ustadz Competence together influence Student Learning Motivation by 32.8%, while the remaining 67.2% is influenced by factors outside this study, such as family environment, learning facilities, interactions between students, or individual psychological factors.

The results of this study indicate that the leadership of kiai and the competence of ustadz play a significant role in shaping and enhancing the learning motivation of students in Islamic boarding schools. This phenomenon can be understood through a theoretical approach and the results of previous research which confirm that the dynamics of learning in Islamic boarding schools cannot be separated from the figures of kiai and ustadz as the main drivers of the educational process.

In the context of Islamic boarding schools, the kiai plays a role not only as an administrative leader but also as a murabbi (spiritual educator) who serves as a moral role model and source of inspiration for students. According to Maulana (2024), kiai leadership has two dimensions: charismatic and transformative. The kiai not only manages the institution but also shapes the religious awareness and learning ethos of the students through exemplary behavior, discipline, and spiritual guidance. This exemplary behavior stimulates the students' intrinsic motivation, as they view the kiai as a role model to be followed in behavior, worship, and the spirit of seeking knowledge (Maulana, Fatkhurrozak Johan; Ernawati, 2024).

This finding is also consistent with research by Prayogi (2022), which explains that a kiai's participatory and inspirational leadership style can increase students' commitment to learning. A kiai who actively interacts, provides direct guidance, and shows concern for students' development creates a positive emotional atmosphere, fostering a continued enthusiasm for learning (Prayogi, M. ., & Ashari, 2024). In other words, the leadership of the kiai not only creates an orderly system, but also builds spiritual and affective bonds between teachers and students which become the foundation of learning motivation in Islamic boarding schools.

Meanwhile, the competence of the ustadz has been proven to be a determining factor in directing the students' learning motivation through a pedagogical and scientific approach. Hamalik (2018) emphasized that teachers or ustadz with high competence are able to manage classes effectively, deliver material in an interesting way, and foster students' curiosity (Hamalik, 2018). In the context of Islamic boarding schools, the competence of the ustadz includes not only the ability to teach (ta'lim), but also to guide (tarbiyah) and instill moral values (ta'dib). Marwah's (2021) research supports this view by showing that the competence of educators in religious institutions significantly influences students' learning motivation. When religious teachers are able to explain material clearly, understand the students' character, and provide learning that is relevant to everyday life, students are more motivated to be active, diligent, and consistent in their learning (Jamil Suprihatiningrum, 2013; Marwah, I., & Sulastris, 2021).

Furthermore, the synergistic relationship between the leadership of the kiai and the competence of the ustadz is key to the success of the Islamic boarding school education system. The kiai's leadership creates a vision and a conducive educational climate, while the ustadz performs a pedagogical function that translates the values of that vision into the teaching and learning process. In line with transformational leadership theory (Bass & Avolio, 1994), leadership that inspires and supports individual development will encourage subordinates—in this case, the ustadz and students—to achieve beyond expectations (Avolio, B. J., & Bass, 1994). In the context of Islamic boarding schools, this theory is relevant because it shows that the kiai's leadership style is able to stimulate the motivation of students through spiritual guidance and consistent role models.

The findings of this study also strengthen the theory of learning motivation according to Deci & Ryan (1985) in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which explains that a person's motivation will increase if the needs for autonomy, competence, and social connectedness are met (Deci, E. L., & Ryan, 2000). In Islamic boarding schools, these three elements emerge through the leadership of the kiai, who provides moral direction and spiritual motivation, the competence of the ustadz, who ensures a meaningful and challenging learning process, and close social interactions among the students. These three elements form a learning ecosystem that psychologically motivates students to learn with awareness and sincerity. Thus, it can be said that the leadership of the kiai and the

competence of the ustadz are two complementary dimensions in shaping the learning motivation of students. The kiai plays a role in building intrinsic motivation stemming from spiritual values, sincerity, and moral example, while the ustadz plays a role in fostering extrinsic motivation through systematic, communicative, and relevant learning. The combination of these two makes the Islamic boarding school an educational institution that not only teaches knowledge but also instills a spirit and awareness of lifelong learning.

While the statistical regression demonstrates robust structural relationships among the variables, several methodological constraints must be critically acknowledged when interpreting the generalizability of these findings. First, the small sample size ($n = 33$) limits the statistical power required for broad-scale generalizations, making the insights highly contextualized to the studied cohort. Second, because this research was restricted to a single institutional site (Al Hasan Islamic Boarding School), the geographical and cultural specificities of this particular *pesantren* may not fully reflect the diverse operational dynamics of other Islamic boarding schools across Indonesia. Lastly, the reliance on self-reported questionnaires introduces potential subjectivity and social desirability bias among student respondents. Consequently, while these empirical results offer valuable diagnostic insights for local institutional development, future longitudinal studies utilizing larger, multi-site samples and mixed-method approaches are strictly necessary to validate these structural pathways on a macro scale.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that both Kiai leadership and Ustadz competence play a structural and vital role in enhancing students' learning motivation within the Islamic boarding school ecosystem. While the charismatic leadership of the Kiai fosters deep-rooted intrinsic and spiritual motivation, the pedagogical competence of the Ustadz establishes an effective and engaging learning environment. To optimize this ecosystem, *pesantren* management must implement three strategic actions: formalizing structured communication channels to amplify the Kiai's transformative guidance, providing continuous professional development in classroom management for the Ustadz, and integrating spiritual values with modern institutional governance to create a highly responsive learning atmosphere. To address the methodological limitations of this study—specifically the small sample size ($n = 33$) and the single-site focus—future research must expand its empirical scope. Subsequent studies should employ larger, multi-site samples across diverse regions to strengthen statistical power and generalizability, while incorporating broader variables such as family support systems, facility quality, and technology-based learning tools. Furthermore, utilizing qualitative or mixed-methods approaches is highly recommended to explore the deeply nuanced and intricate socio-spiritual dynamics of the Kiai-Ustadz-Santri relationship in greater depth.

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