

# Women, Islamic Boarding Schools, and Communications: Interpersonal Approach of Islamic Boarding School Leadership

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**Abstract:** *The reality of pesantren that is identical with Kyai and masculinity is caused by a gender bias towards women's leadership. Women are deemed incapable of being communication leaders to mobilize Islamic Boarding school activities. Contrary to that, this article aims to prove that women's leadership communication patterns can positively impact pesantren activities, even though a female leader faces several problems at the Islamic boarding school. This article uses a descriptive qualitative method based on the leadership observation of Dra. Tiaman at the Ummul Masakin Islamic Boarding School, Jambi. This study also uses in-depth interview techniques and data documentation related to the themes: 1) Leadership, 2) Communication, and 3) Islamic boarding schools. The article reveals that the leadership of women in Islamic boarding schools can positively impact the development of the students' personality and the activities of the Islamic Boarding School because interpersonal communication patterns dominate the communication patterns that are built. Women have the power of wisdom to drive positive things and minimize negative things, such as conflicts or disharmony problems, especially in Islamic educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools.*

**Keywords:** *Communication Pattern, Women Leaders, Islamic Boarding School*

**Abstrak:** Realitas pesantren yang identik dengan kiyai dan maskulinitas disebabkan oleh bias gender terhadap kepemimpinan perempuan. Perempuan dianggap tidak cakap menjadi *communication leader* untuk menggerakkan aktifitas kepesantrenan. Bertentangan dengan itu, artikel ini bertujuan untuk membuktikan bahwa pola komunikasi kepemimpinan perempuan mampu memberikan dampak yang positif terhadap aktifitas pesantren, meskipun terdapat beberapa problematika yang

dihadapi oleh seorang pemimpin perempuan di pondok pesantren. Artikel ini menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif dari observasi kepemimpinan Dra. Tiaman di pondok pesantren Ummul Masakin, Jambi. Penelitian ini juga menggunakan teknik wawancara mendalam dan dokumentasi data yang berkaitan dengan tema: 1) Kepemimpinan, 2) Komunikasi, dan 3) Pondok pesantren. Artikel menyimpulkan bahwa Kepemimpinan perempuan di pondok pesantren dapat memberikan dampak positif kepada pengembangan kepribadian santri dan aktifitas kepesantrenan karena pola komunikasi yang dibangun yang didominasi oleh pola komunikasi interpersonal. Hal ini disebabkan perempuan memiliki kekuatan wisdom yang mampu menggerakkan hal positif dan meminimalisir hal negative, seperti konflik atau problem disharmoni khususnya pada lembaga pendidikan Islam seperti pesantren.

**Kata-kata kunci:** Pola Komunikasi, Pemimpin Perempuan, Pondok Pesantren

## I. INTRODUCTION

An Islamic boarding school with Kyai as its leader is known as an Islamic boarding school. In general, the communication factor in Islamic boarding school leadership is identical with Kiai and masculinity. Female leaders in Islamic boarding schools have found their significance in the millennial era. Although the reality is that women do not lead many Islamic boarding schools, but there is an interesting phenomenon in the Ummul Masakin Islamic boarding school led by a female leader. Pesantren has a unique education system because pesantren has special characteristics that are not fully owned by public schools, such as Kyai, Santri, Huts, 'yellow books', and mosques<sup>1</sup>.

In general, when a cleric leads a boarding school, a term appears, 'manut kyai', which means that every element in the boarding school, from students to Ustads (male Islam teachers) must follow what is instructed by Kyai as the leader in Islamic boarding schools.

Another term that often appears is 'Sami'na wa atho'na' which means we hear we obey. It shows that every element in the Islamic boarding schools must hear and obey everything that Kyai says in Islamic boarding school.

Women are not familiar figures in leading Islamic boarding schools, and it is even rare for Islamic boarding schools to vote a woman as a leader. However, an interesting fact happened at the Ummul Masakin Pemayung Islamic Boarding School, Batang Hari Regency, where a woman becomes a leader for a long time (ten years) at the Islamic boarding school.

There are interesting things to study about women and Islamic boarding schools, one of which is how the leaders of Islamic boarding schools apply the communication patterns and the problems experienced by a woman when she becomes a leader in a boarding school. Of course, it is not easy for a woman who

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<sup>1</sup> Amin Haedari, *Jurnal Pondok Pesantren Mihrab*, Vol. II, No. 1, 2007, p. 34

leads a religious education institution such as a boarding school identical to Kyai as its leader.

Based on the problems and phenomena in the field, the authors are interested in seeing further how the communication patterns applied by female leaders at the Ummul Masakin Batang Hari Islamic boarding school.

This study uses the descriptive qualitative method to examine the condition of natural objects. Triangulated (combined) inductive data analysis are used as data collection techniques, and the results of this qualitative study emphasize meaning rather than generalization<sup>2</sup>. The setting is in the Ummul Masakin Islamic Boarding School, Batang Hari Regency, Jambi Province, precisely in the village of Kampung Pulau RT.01. The subjects were the leaders of Islamic boarding schools, 'Ustads, Ustadzah', and students. To determine the sampling, the author uses a non-probability sampling technique with the purposive sampling method.

In this study, observation as the data collection techniques is applied to see how the leadership communication pattern of Dra. Tiaman at the Ummul Masakin Islamic boarding school, Jambi. This study also uses in-depth interview techniques and data documentation related to the theme of this study.

## II. Islamic Boarding School Leadership in History

Islamic Boarding school has existed simultaneously with the process of Islamization in the archipelago. Zamaksyari Dhofier explained that since the 15th century, the Islamic Boarding school has already existed, first founded by Maulana Malik Ibrahim and later developed by Sunan Ampel<sup>3</sup>. The role of pesantren became prominent in the 18th century in all corners of the archipelago. A network of religious studies on the broader community was built, religious books were written and distributed. Islamic Boarding Schools were also the centre of activities for the 'Sufis' at that time. Originally regional, this institution has developed into a modern institution whose leadership and students are no longer based on ethnicity<sup>4</sup>.

However, Islamic Boarding Schools had stagnated during the colonial period and rose again at the end of the 19th century, along with Islamic revivalism globalized. Meanwhile, Martin Van Bruissen stated that pesantren in a new institution or institution was born in 1742, 'Pondok Pesantren Tegalsari', Ponorogo, East Java<sup>5</sup>. Throughout Indonesia's history, apart from traditions that it continues to maintain, now Islamic boarding schools continue to experience changes. Since 2005, many Islamic boarding schools have opened formal schools or have allowed their students to attend traditional schools.

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<sup>2</sup> Sugiyono, *Memahami Penelitian Kualitatif*. Bandung: Alfabeta, 2009, 1

<sup>3</sup> Marwan Saridjo et. al., *Sejarah Pondok Pesantren di Indonesia*. Jakarta: Dharma Bhakti, 1982, p. 22.

<sup>4</sup> D.I. Ansusa Putra & Zikwan, The Role of Jawi Tafsir in Sociocultural Transformation of the Nusantara Islam: A Study on Tarjuman Al-Mustafid, *International Journal of Religious Literature and Heritage*, Vol. IX, No. II, 2019, p. 287

<sup>5</sup> Martin Van Bruinessen, *Kitab Kuning, Pesantren dan Tarekat: Tradisi-tradisi Islam di Indonesia*. Bandung: Mizan, 1999, p. 18

Considering the history of Islamic boarding schools in general, they are always led by a Kyai (a male leader). Women are usually considered as a complement to the existence of Kyai as spiritual leaders in a pesantren. However, along with the history of Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia, several women have been the leaders in an Islamic boarding school, such as Nyai Dadah, who once led the Tahfidzhol Qur'an Al Asro Islamic boarding school in Gunung Pati sub-district, Semarang, then there is also Hj. rosmaini who leads the 'Diniyyah Islamic boarding school Al Azhar' Muara Bungo, Hj. Safwah as the leader at the 'Hajaroh Basir Salafiyah' Islamic boarding school 'Kajen Margoyoso Pati', Hj. Masriyah Amva at the 'Pondok Jambu Al Islamy Babakan Ciwaringin Cirebon', Hj. Nadhiroh at the 'Al-Hidayah Putri Karang Suci' Islamic Boarding School in Purwokerto and Ustadzah Tiaman at the 'Ummul Masakin' Islamic Boarding School, Batanghari.

Women in Islamic boarding schools initially considered only as a complement to the Kyai in leading has started to change along with the times. Moreover, today, gender equality and women's emancipation are very intense in modernisation in educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools.

The leadership of Islamic boarding schools is usually inherited or passed on to the son of 'Kyai'. It has happened since the beginning of Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia. However, this inherited leader in Islamic boarding schools may no longer apply because women are now on a par with men and women are believed can lead a religious education institution such as an Islamic boarding school.

At the Ummul Masakin Islamic boarding school, the author found something unique and rare where 'Ustadzah' Tiaman, as the 'Ummul Masakin Islamic Boarding School' leader, was able to lead the Islamic boarding school for a relatively long period of 10 years. The 'Ummul Masakin Islamic Boarding School', founded on Thursday, April 21, 2011, was established because ma'am Tiaman wanted to help people and orphans whose poor economic situation. These people could not continue their education, so that a religious education institution was built and could accommodate all social strata of the society. During his leadership, the 'Ummul Islamic Boarding School' experienced significant progress starting from the number of students, infrastructure and the achievements won by the students at the Islamic boarding school.

History has shown that the position of women at the time of the Prophet Muhammad was not only considered a wife, companion, and complement to men, but was also seen as a human being who has an equal position in rights and obligations with other women humans. For examples, Aisyah (ummul mukminin) leading the 'Jamal War'. Caliph Umar assigned umm Hani, 'al-Syifa', a woman who was good at writing as an officer in charge of the market in Madinah<sup>6</sup>.

Problematic for women's advancement are the assumed gender differences in commitment to work and motivation to lead. This claim confirms that men are more likely to possess the traits necessary for effective leadership than women.

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<sup>6</sup> Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Al-Islam Wa al-Thaqah al-Mu'attalah*. Kairo: Dar al-Kutub Al-Haditsah, 1964, p. 138

Gender stereotypes describe labelling beliefs about the nature of women, where men are considered to have stereotyped controlling characteristics, such as self-confidence, assertiveness, independence, rationality, and certainty. Meanwhile, women are considered to have communal characteristics, such as caring for others, being sensitive, warm, helpful, and guiding<sup>7</sup>.

Although Islamic teachings do not limit women to be leaders, female leaders among Muslims are still very limited. Many factors block women's leadership potential, including a misunderstanding of Islamic teachings. In fact, according to Qasim Amin, an intellectual from Egypt, most of the adherents of Islam in this world are women. If these women and men are encouraged to explore their leadership potential, God willing, the progress and glory of Islam in this world can be realized<sup>8</sup>.

It is considering that men are the dominant figures in all existing sectors, including in religious education institutions such as Islamic boarding schools. Even female Islamic boarding schools are led by 'Kyai', which is commonplace in Indonesia's Islamic boarding schools. Women only fill positions that men cannot do, such as being a teacher at a women's boarding school, being a supervisor in a women's dormitory, and being a cook at a boarding school. Of course, a concept like this is not entirely in line with the emancipation of women and gender equality that is being carried out in Indonesia.

The concept of women's emancipation should place men and women to have equality in terms of work, distinguishing only notable things that are the nature of men and women. For example, only males are allowed to supervise the male dormitory, and vice versa. Women are solely capable of performing the role of female dormitory supervisor.

Nowadays, several facts show that women are able to carry out roles that are usually dominated by men, such as being a leader in an institution or organization. Even if we look at history in Indonesia, it was once led by a female president. For religious education institutions, such as Islamic boarding schools, there are currently women-led ones, such as in the 'Ummul Masakin Islamic Boarding School', Batanghari.

At this boarding school, Ustadzah Tiaman has been the highest leader for 10 years. During his leadership period, there were many positive changes in the Ummul Masakin Islamic Boarding School and what was extraordinary was that he was there not only leading female students but also male students, employees and male teachers. Many critical aspects to her success in running the government at the Islamic boarding school, but the most prominent is the communication aspect because, of course, it is not easy to be a female leader to lead a religious education institution in which there are male students, employees and teachers.

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<sup>7</sup> G. Petter Northouse, *Kepemimpinan*. Jakarta: PT Indeks, 2013, p. 337

<sup>8</sup> Neng Dara Afifah, *Islam, Kepemimpinan Perempuan, dan Seksualitas*. Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia, 2017, p. 9

### **III. Interpersonal Communication of Women's Leadership Interpersonal**

Communication is a blending process of conveying thoughts and feelings from one person to another to know, understand, and carry out certain activities<sup>9</sup>. In general, interpersonal communication can be interpreted as a process of exchanging information between communicators and communicants. This type of communication is considered the most effective in changing a person's attitude, opinion, or behaviour because it is dialogic in the form of conversation. Interpersonal communication impact can be felt at that time by the parties involved<sup>10</sup>.

A leader is someone who has responsibility for leading an organization or agency. For a leader to become a good leader, one of the skills that must be possessed is communication. If a leader has a good communication style, the organization he leads can be brought in a better direction, and vice versa. If the leader does not have a good communication style, it is difficult for the organization to progress or become better.

The 'Ummul Masakin Islamic Boarding School' is a boarding school that has been established in 2011 and is led by a woman. Generally, the dominant Islamic boarding school is led by a 'Kyai' (male), but the 'Ummul Masakin Islamic boarding school' who holds the stick of leadership is a woman. As a woman who runs a boarding school, she must have a unique way in order to obtain the desired results, and one thing to keep in mind is the communication pattern because communication patterns are critical in supporting a leader's performance.

The female leader who leads the 'Ummul Masakin Islamic boarding school' has been going on for ten years, and the development of the Islamic boarding school is getting more advanced day by day. One of the keys to his success is to apply a perfect communication pattern. Ibu Tiaman, as the head of a boarding school, is frequently confronted with issues, ranging from minor problems to major issues. If the problem is severe, he will contact the appropriate person who is experiencing it to solve it. In addition, she also does not hesitate if there are students, teachers or workers who want to tell privately about the problems they are experiencing. Tiaman's leadership pattern uses a direct communication approach and guides students like a mother to her child.

Her leadership follows the statement from Kabacoff (1988), which states that women's leadership is much better at communicating, as is the case with Chusniyah (2015) research in *Nyai Dadah: The Elasticity of Gender Roles and Life History of Pesantren Women*. The leader, who emphasized that the approach with the students by communicating directly and guiding the students like a mother to her child, by

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<sup>9</sup> Onong Uchjana Efendi, *Ilmu Komunikasi Teori dan Praktek*. Bandung: PT. Remaja Rosdakarya, 1990, p. 126

<sup>10</sup> Sr. Maria Assumpta Rumanti OSF, *Dasar-dasar Public Relation Teori dan Praktis*. Jakarta: Grasindo, 2002, p. 88

teaching reading the Qur'an correctly and adequately, was able to create a warm environment between the students and the leader. Mindell (2001) stated that women are less intense in their use of language, citing a statement made in a study by one of the teachers at the Ummul Masakin Islamic boarding school, who stated that Tiaman, as the leader of the boarding school, was always open to listening to her workers and students who stayed at the boarding school to talk about the problems they faced. A similar statement regarding the head of the Islamic boarding school, which is very open and willing to communicate personally, was also told by one of the female students who said that Tiaman was very open when students had problems. It would affect the education at this Islamic boarding school, so she always provided solutions and advice.

When experiencing problems and needing to introspect, she applies intrapersonal communication or communicates with herself. However, if she faces a relatively large and complicated problem, she will call students or employees with problems through interpersonal communication patterns. If they face problems related to work and need input, it is not uncommon for Tiaman as the Ummul Masakin Islamic boarding school leader to discuss with other people, which is a form of group communication.

Tiaman is a flexible person in communicating to find a solution to a problem at hand. Three communication patterns, namely intrapersonal communication, interpersonal communication and group communication, are the communication patterns that are most often applied by her, which are adapted to the context of the problems she is facing. In her daily leadership, Tiaman tends to use interpersonal communication patterns because almost every day, someone has to deal with her, both from 'Ustadz-Ustadzah' and the students. These communication patterns are applied with the aim that the problems faced do not interfere with the achievement of educational goals at the 'Ummul Masakin Islamic boarding school'.

Communication is the process of delivering information between one individual and another or between individuals and groups. In this case, every communication must have a positive impact or a positive impact. The communication pattern applied by the female leader at the Ummul Masakin Islamic boarding school may have a positive impact. The results of research that have been carried out show that there are three positive impacts of the communication pattern applied by the leader at the Islamic boarding school, including a positive impact on students, a positive impact on workers, and a positive impact on society.

The positive impact of communication for students will be awakened if communication goes well to produce something good. In this case, good communication by the Ummul Islamic boarding school leadership creates openness between students and him as the leader of the Islamic boarding school. Tiaman, the Islamic boarding school leader, is often confronted by students who want to talk

about the problems they experience both at their boarding school and at home and are very open about telling these problems<sup>11</sup>.

The same thing was also stated by one of the students at the Islamic boarding school who said that she and her fellow students did not hesitate to tell stories related to the problems they experienced to the leadership of the Islamic boarding school Ummul Masakin.

***Translation:*** *For us it has become a matter of course. when you get a problem and tell it to the head of the boarding school because she is the person who wants to listen to what is the problem with her students<sup>12</sup>.*

In addition to creating openness between the leadership of the Islamic boarding school and the students, good communication also creates closeness between them. This is what the researchers saw from the results of observations when they were in the Islamic boarding school, the researchers saw that the mother in charge always greeted her students friendly and so did the students in the Islamic boarding school they were very familiar and friendly with the head of the boarding school, this was marked by when they met the matriarch they did not hesitate to throw their smiles at her.

The positive impact felt by workers at the 'Ummul Masakin Islamic Boarding School' is the comfort in carrying out the work they are responsible for. An educational institution undoubtedly has a goal to reach, and one approach to accomplish this objective is to establish an effective communication pattern, such as the one utilized by the leader at the 'Ummul Masakin Islamic Boarding School.' As a result, the staff or workers were able to follow what she instructed.

***Translation:*** *Alhamdulillah, so far when I say something, it can be heard well by my workers, and this directs them to do what they have to do well so you can see that everything in this 'Islamic boarding school' has so far been achieved, and that is because teamwork feels good<sup>13</sup>.*

In addition, the communication pattern used by the leader of the Islamic boarding school Ummul Masakin is also able to overcome the problems or conflicts that occur in the Islamic boarding school.

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<sup>11</sup> Tiaman, Pimpinan Pondok Pesantren Ummul Masakin, interview, office, Pondok Pesantren Ummul Masakin, February 15<sup>th</sup> 2021

<sup>12</sup> Suci Okta Fitriyana, Santriwati pondok pesantren Ummul Masakin, interview, home of the Ummul Masakin leader, February 19<sup>th</sup> 2021

<sup>13</sup> Tiaman., Op.cit



**Translation:** *So far, several problems or conflicts have been related to the workers in this Islamic boarding school. However, because they want to listen to me and want to solve the problem, it does not feel like a problem has not been resolved at this Islamic boarding school because we are a family system<sup>14</sup>.*

An educational institution certainly has a goal to be achieved, and one way this goal can be achieved is by implementing good communication patterns. The communication pattern used by the leader at the 'Ummul Masakin Islamic Boarding School' has led her to achieve what has become the goal of the Islamic boarding school, and it is because the staffs and workers were able to follow what she instructed.

If communication goes smoothly, it will almost always result something positive; in this example, good communication by the leadership of the Islamic boarding school Ummul Masakin encourages openness between students and her as the boarding school's leader.

#### **IV. CLOSING**

The reality of pesantren, identical with 'Kyai' and masculinity, is caused by gender bias towards women's leadership. This article concludes that women's leadership in Islamic boarding schools positively impacts the personality development of students and Islamic boarding school activities. Interpersonal communication patterns dominate the communication pattern; interpersonal communication applied by Tiaman with her workers or students will be more open to express all the problems.

Although her employees and workers disagree with Tiaman's perspective or beliefs, she may achieve harmony and acceptability of her beliefs with her employees and workers since the problem is solved through a group discussion. As a result of this openness, the Islamic Boarding School will grow and prosper.

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<sup>14</sup> Tiaman, Ibid.,

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