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Human Resource Management to Improve the Quality of Education in Islamic Boarding School

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ABSTRACT

Human resource management (HRM) constitutes a strategic component in efforts to improve the quality of education, including within pesantren institutions characterized by their religious foundations and distinctive cultural traditions. This study aims to examine relevant and effective HRM practices that support the enhancement of educational quality in pesantren. Employing a qualitative approach through a literature-based study, this research reviews various scholarly works, previous empirical findings, and academic documents focusing on HRM within pesantren-based educational institutions. The analysis indicates that improving educational quality can be achieved through well-directed planning of educator needs, recruitment processes that emphasize competence and integrity, the implementation of continuous training and development programs, and systematic performance evaluations. Additionally, the leadership of the kiai plays a pivotal role in establishing strategic policies and fostering an organizational climate conducive to optimizing HRM performance. These findings underscore that systematic and contextually appropriate HRM constitutes a critical element in enhancing instructional effectiveness and institutional management within pesantren.

1. Introduction

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) are long-established Islamic educational institutions that have significantly shaped religious understanding, moral character, and social values in Indonesian society. For centuries, pesantren have served as centers for the transmission of Islamic knowledge through the study of classical texts (kitab kuning), theology (kalam), Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), and ethical guidance in daily life. The learning process in pesantren emphasizes not only cognitive knowledge but also moral formation through exemplary behavior (uswah

hasanah) and continuous habituation (ta'lim wa ta'allum) under the guidance of the kiai. This creates a distinctive educational ecosystem in which knowledge is internalized through lived practice as well as formal instruction.

Despite their strong traditional roots, pesantren are not static institutions. Social transformation, globalization, and technological advancement have gradually reshaped their roles. Pesantren now function not only as centers of religious learning but also as institutions for character education, social engagement, and life-skill development. Their presence across various regions in Indonesia positions them as potential agents of community empowerment capable of responding to both local and global challenges. This evolving role places pesantren in a dynamic situation where they must maintain their traditional identity while simultaneously adapting to contemporary educational expectations to remain relevant within the broader national education system.

Modernization pressures arise from multiple directions. Rapid access to information, competition with formal schools, and increasing expectations from parents and students require pesantren to improve their academic quality alongside religious education. Many pesantren have begun integrating diniyah curricula with general subjects in a more systematic and structured manner. Research shows that this integration enhances the academic competitiveness of pesantren without diminishing their traditional values (Lesmana et al., 2020). However, curriculum reform alone is insufficient. Institutional governance, management practices, and organizational professionalism must also evolve to support sustainable quality improvement (Rohmat et al., 2023).

Within this context, human resource management (HRM) becomes a critical determinant of educational quality in pesantren. Human resources in pesantren encompass not only the kiai and ustadz but also musyrif (dormitory supervisors), administrative staff, financial managers, and other supporting personnel. The competence, professionalism, and integrity of these individuals directly influence the effectiveness of educational delivery and institutional sustainability. Even well-designed curricula and adequate facilities cannot produce optimal results without qualified human resources capable of implementing them effectively.

In practice, however, pesantren often face complex challenges in managing their human resources. Recruitment processes frequently rely on kinship, loyalty, and personal trust, reflecting deeply rooted cultural traditions. While these practices preserve moral alignment and institutional values, they sometimes limit objective competency assessment and professional standardization (Sukarno & Murayama, 2025). In addition, many pesantren lack structured training programs, systematic professional development, measurable performance evaluation systems, and competitive compensation mechanisms (Kasir, 2024). These challenges correspond with broader findings indicating that Islamic educational institutions require more structured and adaptive HR systems to ensure educator effectiveness (Nufus et al., 2025).

The need for strengthening HRM in pesantren becomes more urgent as they compete within the national education landscape. Adaptive and contextual HR strategies are required strategies that combine modern managerial principles with deeply rooted spiritual and cultural values. Strengthening HRM includes strategic planning, competency-based recruitment, continuous professional development, and multidimensional performance evaluation as fundamental components of educational quality improvement (Maskar, 2025; Rohmat et al., 2023; Uluum et al., 2025). These efforts are not intended to replace traditional pesantren values but to reinforce them through more systematic management practices. Another emerging challenge relates to technological adaptation in learning. The integration of digital learning platforms, multimedia resources, and innovative instructional technologies requires educators who are not only religiously knowledgeable but also technologically competent. This dual competency demand highlights the importance of HR planning that anticipates future educational needs rather than responding reactively to immediate shortages. Without such foresight, pesantren risk falling behind in delivering relevant learning experiences to students.

Furthermore, leadership plays a central role in shaping HR practices in pesantren. The kiai, as the spiritual and managerial leader, influences recruitment decisions, training priorities, organizational culture, and institutional direction. This unique leadership model blends moral authority with managerial responsibility, making HR implementation inseparable from leadership dynamics. Consequently, understanding HRM in pesantren requires attention not only to managerial procedures but also to cultural and leadership contexts that shape their application. Although previous studies have discussed various aspects of pesantren management, many of them examine HR challenges, training, or leadership separately. A comprehensive explanation of how HRM practices collectively influence educational quality in pesantren remains limited (Rahman & Hidayat, 2023). There is still a need for a systematic analysis that connects HR planning, recruitment, training and development, performance evaluation, and leadership into a coherent framework that explains their causal relationship with educational outcomes.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze systematically how human resource management practices in pesantren contribute to improving educational quality. The research focuses on identifying key HR components, understanding the challenges faced by pesantren, and explaining how these components interact within the cultural and spiritual context of the institution. By doing so, the study seeks to bridge the gap between traditional pesantren values and modern HR management principles. This study is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it contributes to the development of a conceptual understanding of HRM within Islamic boarding schools by explaining the causal relationship between HR practices and educational quality. Practically, it offers insights and recommendations that can serve as references for pesantren managers, educational practitioners, and policymakers in designing HR strategies that are adaptive, systematic, and value-driven.

2. Methodology

Research Design and Data Sources

This study employed a qualitative approach using library research, selected because it provides an in-depth understanding of the construction of human resource management concepts within the pesantren context. This approach positions the researcher analytically to examine various scholarly literature systematically and structurally so that the phenomenon can be understood comprehensively. To ensure both breadth and depth of data, this research accessed major academic databases such as Google Scholar, Garuda Dikti, DOAJ, and SINTA, all of which provide reputable peer-reviewed publications. In addition, data were obtained from university repositories, theses, dissertations, academic books, governmental policy documents, and official institutional reports from Islamic boarding schools. Each source was selected based on its relevance to themes such as HR planning, recruitment, training, performance evaluation, and leadership in Islamic education. The literature search was conducted using structured keywords including “Islamic boarding school human resource management,” “HRM pesantren,” and “quality of education pesantren.” The study also ensured that all collected documents originated from credible and verifiable scholarly sources. By employing this research design, the entire data collection process can be replicated by other researchers following the same procedural steps.

Inclusion-Exclusion Criteria and Document Analysis Instrument

The selection of literature followed strict inclusion criteria to ensure the quality and relevance of all data sources. Included literature had to be published between 2014 and 2025, directly relate to human resource management in Islamic boarding schools or educational quality, and originate from reputable journals, academic books, or official institutional documents. In addition, each source was required to contain a clear methodology and strong scholarly foundation so that it could be objectively analyzed. Literature excluded from analysis included blog articles, opinion pieces, social media content, non-academic documents, and publications without a peer-review process. To systematically assess each document, this study employed a *Document Analysis Sheet* comprising four major assessment categories. These categories included content relevance, methodological quality, completeness of HRM information, and conceptual contribution to improving educational quality in pesantren. The instrument was designed to ensure that the analysis process was consistent, measurable, and replicable across different evaluators. The use of a written instrument also strengthened research transparency, as every assessment step could be traced through the predetermined rubric.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection in this study followed several operational stages designed to support research accuracy and consistency. The first stage was conducting a literature search using well-defined keywords based on core research concepts to ensure high relevance of retrieved documents. The second stage consisted of an initial screening

by reading titles and abstracts to determine alignment with the research questions. In the third stage, all documents that met the inclusion criteria were downloaded in full-text format to enable complete analysis using the designated instrument. The fourth stage involved data extraction, where key information from each document was transferred into a structured analysis table to facilitate categorization. The extracted information included research objectives, main findings, research methods, and contributions to HRM practices in pesantren. The fifth stage consisted of storing all data in an internal repository to ensure that the process was fully documented and auditable. Through these stages, this study ensured that data collection was transparent, systematic, and replicable for future research.

Data Analysis Stages

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis, which enables researchers to interpret meanings and identify patterns across multiple literature sources. The first stage involved identifying recurring themes from various documents, such as HR planning, recruitment, training, performance evaluation, and leadership. The second stage involved data reduction, a process of filtering, summarizing, and selecting core information directly relevant to the research focus. The third stage was coding, during which each piece of information was assigned specific labels to facilitate grouping according to predetermined subthemes. The fourth stage was categorization, where the coded data were merged into larger conceptual groups to clarify relationships between variables. The fifth stage involved synthesizing findings, combining results from multiple sources to form a comprehensive understanding of HRM dynamics in Islamic boarding schools. The sixth stage involved holistic interpretation by connecting findings with previous literature and deriving theoretical and practical implications. All stages were conducted sequentially and documented thoroughly to ensure transparency, traceability, and full replicability of the analysis process.

3. Results and Discussion

Results

Based on an in-depth literature analysis, a comprehensive picture of human resource (HR) management in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) begins to emerge. Key findings indicate that HR management in Islamic boarding schools is not simply a repurposed corporate model, but rather a unique and hybrid managerial ecosystem. This ecosystem carefully integrates modern management principles such as strategic planning, competency-based recruitment, training and development, and performance evaluation with the religious, spiritual, and traditional values that define the pesantren (Hasan, 2023). The findings reveal that improvements in educational quality within Islamic boarding schools do not occur by chance but through a series of systematic, planned, and contextually grounded managerial practices. These synthesized findings are summarized and categorized as presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Summary of Key Findings on HR Management in Islamic Boarding Schools

Main Theme	Identified Practices	Strengths	Challenges
HR Planning	Needs analysis, competency mapping, leadership regeneration schemes (Maskar, 2025; Fadillah, 2021)	Proactive, long-term orientation	Limited documentation; lack of systematic data
Teacher Recruitment	Competency- and value-based selection; interviews by the kiai (Nurhidayati, 2022; Mulyawati et al., 2025)	Maintains moral integrity and cultural alignment	Quality standardization uneven; patronage still present
Training & Development	Methodology training, digital literacy, spiritual development (Wijayanti & Fauzi, 2024; Sukarno & Murayama, 2025)	Holistic development (professional + spiritual)	Digital divide; limited access to quality training
Performance Evaluation	Classroom supervision, student feedback, assessment of discipline and spiritual commitment (Rohmat et al., 2023)	Comprehensive and multidimensional	Measuring moral aspects objectively is difficult
Kiai Leadership	Vision setting, moral guidance, cultural preservation (Syafi'i & Hidayat, 2023; Abidin et al., 2024)	Strong moral authority; inspirational leadership	High dependency; risks during leadership succession
Internal & External Challenges	Financial limitations, dual-competency gaps, administrative weaknesses (Nugroho, 2024; Kasir, 2024)		Structural and cultural barriers

The literature on the table 1 shows the analysis reveals a clear pattern showing that human resource (HR) management in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) operates within a hybrid management ecosystem. This ecosystem integrates modern management principles such as strategic planning, competency-based recruitment, structured training, and performance evaluation with the spiritual, cultural, and traditional values that fundamentally shape pesantren education. These findings indicate that improvements in educational quality in pesantren do not occur spontaneously but emerge through planned, systematic, and context-sensitive managerial practices.

Conceptual Model : HR Practices and Educational Quality in Pesantren

To provide a clearer understanding of how human resource practices interact within Islamic boarding schools, this study proposes a conceptual model that visually represents the causal relationship among the key HR components identified in the literature. The model illustrates that HR planning serves as the starting point that shapes subsequent recruitment processes, training and development activities, and performance evaluation mechanisms. These components are interconnected in a

linear progression but operate within a cultural and spiritual context that is unique to the pesantren environment. Importantly, the model incorporates the moderating role of kiai leadership, which influences all stages of HR implementation by embedding traditional values, spiritual authority, and organizational identity. By integrating managerial and cultural dimensions into a single diagram, the model clarifies the overall flow of HR practices and highlights how each component contributes to educational quality. Figure 1 below presents the conceptual model developed in this study.



Figure 1. Conceptual Model of HR Practices and Educational Quality in Pesantren

The conceptual model presented in Figure 1 illustrates a sequential and interconnected chain of human resource management practices that collectively shape the overall educational outcomes of Islamic boarding schools. The model emphasizes that HR planning acts as the strategic starting point that determines teacher competency requirements and long-term staffing needs. Recruitment then becomes more targeted and value-oriented, ensuring the selection of educators who are both professionally competent and aligned with pesantren culture. Training and development subsequently strengthen the pedagogical, technological, and spiritual capacities needed to fulfill institutional expectations. Performance evaluation provides continuous monitoring and feedback, enabling consistent improvement and accountability among educators. The arrows connecting each component highlight their causal and reinforcing relationship, demonstrating that weaknesses in one area may hinder progress in others. At the same time, kiai leadership moderates the effectiveness of each HR component, meaning that leadership style, value orientation, and institutional philosophy significantly shape how these practices are implemented. Through this interaction, the model provides a clearer explanation of how HR practices contribute directly and indirectly to improving educational quality in pesantren.

Discussion

Human Resource Planning: A Strategic Foundation for Sustainability

Human resource planning in pesantren emerges as a fundamental determinant of institutional sustainability because it ensures that staffing decisions are proactive, data-based, and aligned with long-term educational goals. High-performing pesantren tend to conduct systematic needs analyses, competency mapping, and

regeneration planning, rather than responding reactively to teacher shortages (Fadillah, 2021). This proactive orientation ensures not only adequate teacher numbers but also appropriate mastery of pedagogy, Islamic sciences, and digital literacy. The increasing importance of technological competence is evident in broader educational research, where the development of innovative learning media such as augmented reality (AR) significantly enhances conceptual understanding and student engagement (Khusnunnisa & Andriani, 2025; Septiani et al., 2025). These developments indirectly reinforce the necessity for pesantren to anticipate technology integration by preparing teachers with the necessary skills. Such alignment also reflects Maskar's (2025) argument that HR planning is essential for institutional continuity, particularly in ensuring leadership regeneration and maintaining pesantren identity amid modernization pressures. The planning process becomes not merely administrative but a strategic tool for shaping future competitiveness. Overall, the literature positions HR planning as a crucial anchor for ensuring both adaptive capacity and cultural preservation in pesantren.

Teacher Recruitment: Balancing Competence and Value Alignment

Teacher recruitment in pesantren represents the first and most critical gateway for safeguarding educational quality, as it determines the entry of human resources who will shape both the academic and spiritual environment of the institution. The shift from kinship-based recruitment toward structured, competency-based selection suggests progressive adaptation to modern educational demands (Nurhidayati, 2022). Screening methods now include administrative verification, teaching demonstrations, and intensive value-oriented interviews led by the kiai, ensuring alignment with pesantren culture. However, research consistently shows that value-laden loyalty and trust remain influential, which complicates efforts to standardize teacher competencies across institutions (Sukarno & Murayama, 2025). This hybrid approach simultaneously maintains cultural identity and introduces modern selection criteria, reflecting a dynamic negotiation between tradition and professionalism. This recruitment challenge parallels findings in broader educational technology development, where successful implementation of digital tools such as AR-based media requires educators with adequate digital competence (Masrukhin et al., 2024; Munawarah, 2025). Therefore, pesantren must refine their recruitment system to attract educators who not only fit the value system but are also capable of responding to contemporary learning needs. This makes recruitment a strategic mechanism for positioning pesantren within the broader national education landscape.

Training and Professional Development: A Holistic Investment in Human Capital

After recruitment, management's focus shifts to training and professional development, which represents a long-term investment in the Islamic boarding school's most important asset. Training programs for Islamic boarding school teachers are becoming more comprehensive and less monolithic. The material includes strengthening teaching methodologies, the use of innovative learning media, and a balanced integration of religious and general curricula (Wijayanti &

Fauzi, 2024). However, the most challenging and crucial aspect today is mastery of digital technology. This training goes beyond application usage, but also encompasses hybrid learning design, utilization of a Learning Management System (LMS), and the creation of engaging digital content.

Training and professional development in pesantren must be understood as multidimensional processes that enhance teachers' pedagogical expertise, technological readiness, and spiritual depth. Traditional training, which emphasizes mastery of kitab kuning and classical pedagogy, remains essential but is no longer sufficient in the context of digital-era learning demands. Recent studies show that AR-based learning media and interactive modules significantly improve conceptual learning, motivation, and student engagement (Siswono et al., 2024; Jannah et al., 2025). Hasan and Inayati (2025) further emphasize that the success of tahfizh learning is strongly influenced by systematic mentoring and teacher pedagogical competence, highlighting the central role of human resource development in Islamic educational institutions. These findings reinforce the urgency for pesantren teachers to master modern instructional technologies and integrate them with religious instruction.

Beyond technical skills, spiritual development such as collective dhikr, religious study, and kiai mentorship remains an integral component shaping teacher integrity and sincerity, which are fundamental to pesantren culture (Maskar, 2025). Haromain (2014) further argues that pesantren HR systems must blend professional and spiritual development to maintain institutional authenticity. This dual focus mirrors the broader movement in educational innovation, where e-modules, AR, and inquiry-based materials have been shown to enhance both cognitive and affective learning outcomes (Maisaroh et al., 2025; Hafni et al., 2025). Consequently, pesantren must structure development programs capable of cultivating teachers who are professionally competent, spiritually grounded, and technologically adaptive. This holistic approach ensures sustainable teacher quality progression.

Adopting digital learning platforms is not simply a technical issue but also requires a paradigm shift and pedagogical competency often overlooked in conventional training programs (Sukarno & Murayama, 2025). In addition to formal professional development, spiritual and moral development of human resources is a distinctive differentiator and a key strength of Islamic boarding school management. Routine activities such as religious study, collective dhikr, evening study, exemplary behavior by the kiai (uswah hasanah), and disciplined worship are not separate programs, but rather an integral part of a continuous moral development strategy. These activities aim to strengthen the integrity, sincerity, and mental resilience of educators and staff, which in turn will be reflected in the quality of their learning and guidance (Maskar, 2025). This combination of professional and spiritual development aligns with Haromain's (2014) view that ideal Islamic boarding school human resource management must encompass training, recruitment, and the inculcation of Islamic boarding school values in a holistic and inseparable manner (Haromain, 2014).

Performance Evaluation: Multi-Dimensional Assessment

Human resource performance evaluation in pesantren adopts a holistic and multidimensional framework that assesses teachers not merely on academic output but on their discipline, moral conduct, and engagement with students inside and outside the classroom. Senior ustadz and administrators typically conduct classroom observations to examine teaching strategies, subject mastery, and student interaction (Rohmat et al., 2023). Musyrif further contribute evaluations by documenting teacher involvement during non-instructional hours, reflecting the comprehensive expectations placed upon educators. This evaluation model, while culturally embedded, presents challenges due to its emphasis on non-quantifiable dimensions such as spiritual sincerity, moral exemplary behavior, and personal integrity. These challenges mirror measurement issues identified in educational technology adoption, where evaluating the impact of digital or AR-based media requires nuanced, multidimensional assessment tools (Ryni & Sukarmin, 2025; Febriyanti & Andriani, 2025). Despite these difficulties, performance evaluation remains essential for ensuring continuous improvement and maintaining alignment with pesantren values. By incorporating structured rubrics and multi-source feedback, pesantren can achieve more objective and development-oriented evaluations. Ultimately, evaluation becomes both a governance measure and a cultural reinforcement mechanism.

Kiai Leadership: Navigating Between Tradition and Modernization

Kiai leadership stands as the central moderating force influencing all dimensions of HR management, shaping organizational direction, decision-making processes, and educational philosophy within pesantren. Research consistently indicates that transformational kiai leadership promotes collaboration, innovation, and adaptive institutional culture (Abidin et al., 2024; Syafi'i & Hidayat, 2023). However, the kiai's influence extends beyond managerial roles into spiritual mentorship, value transmission, and identity preservation. This dual role creates a unique leadership model that blends moral authority with strategic oversight, making the kiai a stabilizing force in times of institutional change. At the same time, overdependence on the kiai can generate structural vulnerabilities, particularly during leadership transitions or in institutions with limited managerial formalization. The importance of leadership in shaping educational transformation echoes findings in broader school leadership literature, which shows that principals significantly influence teacher performance, innovation adoption, and school culture (Hardiman et al., 2025; Trihandayani et al., 2025). In pesantren, the kiai's moderating role affects not only policy implementation but also the acceptance of technology integration, including AR-based learning and e-modules. Thus, leadership regeneration strategies are essential to ensure long-term institutional resilience.

Challenges in Pesantren Human Resource Management: Structural, Cultural and Technological Barriers

Pesantren face a complex network of challenges that constrain the effectiveness of HR management, encompassing financial, human resource, and cultural-structural

barriers. Financial limitations reduce the competitiveness of teacher salaries and hinder the recruitment of qualified educators (Nugroho, 2024). Human resource shortages—especially teachers with dual competencies in religious and general subjects—pose significant obstacles to meeting modern curricular expectations. Cultural and structural constraints also persist, including resistance to modernization, reliance on informal administrative systems, and tension between maintaining tradition and adopting innovation (Kasir, 2024; Maskar, 2025). These structural challenges parallel obstacles found in the integration of AR-based and digital learning media, where limited infrastructure, teacher readiness, and digital literacy impede effective classroom implementation (Munawarah, 2025; Syahrir et al., 2025). As a result, pesantren require integrated reform strategies combining financial management, HR development, administrative modernization, and technological capacity-building. Addressing these interconnected challenges is essential for sustaining educational quality improvements.

The Impact of Strengthening Human Resources on Education Quality: A Positive Spiral of Transformation

Strengthening HRM in pesantren creates a positive, reinforcing cycle that enhances educational quality across cognitive, affective, and institutional dimensions. Improvements in teacher competence directly influence instructional quality, leading to better student academic performance and more meaningful learning experiences. Simultaneously, enhanced spiritual integrity among teachers contributes to stronger moral and character formation, which remains the hallmark of pesantren education. Institutional governance also benefits from strengthened HR systems, as standardization, accountability, and transparency increase stakeholder trust and institutional credibility (Fatimah et al., 2022). Moreover, partnerships with universities, government agencies, and private sectors provide access to resources, accreditation pathways, and training opportunities that further enhance institutional capacity (Rohmat et al., 2023). This developmental cycle parallels findings in studies involving AR media and e-modules, where teacher competence directly shapes the effectiveness of digital innovation (Karim, Oktarina, & Antoni, 2025; Noviantoko & Ratnawati, 2025). In pesantren, HR strengthening becomes the central pillar enabling modernization, relevance, and competitiveness.

Integrative Discussion Conclusions

Overall, this study demonstrates that HRM in pesantren forms a unique hybrid system combining modern HR principles, spiritual-cultural values, and strong kiai leadership. The conceptual model clarifies the causal relationships among HR planning, recruitment, training, and performance evaluation, demonstrating how each practice contributes directly and indirectly to educational quality. The findings emphasize that pesantren educational improvement does not occur through isolated activities but through an integrated system moderated by leadership. The inclusion of AR-based learning media and digital module development literature further highlights the increasing importance of teacher technological competency, signalling emerging priorities for pesantren HR development (Khusnunnisa &

Andriani, 2025; Maisaroh et al., 2025). This integrated perspective provides a stronger theoretical contribution by explaining not only what HR practices matter but also how and why they shape pesantren educational outcomes. As a result, the study advances pesantren management literature by offering a clearer causal explanation supported by contemporary educational technology research. The hybrid managerial model presented in this study thus reflects the future trajectory of pesantren education: rooted in tradition, strengthened by leadership, and empowered by modern HRM frameworks.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the research objectives, namely analyzing the core practices, challenges, and impacts of human resource management in Islamic boarding schools, have been systematically achieved. Pesantren implement a distinctive human resource management model that combines modern managerial practices with deeply rooted spiritual and cultural values. This value-driven approach is the central contribution of the study because it shows that human resource practices are inseparable from the moral, religious, and communal ethos that shapes the institution. Effective planning, competency based recruitment, continuous training, and multidimensional performance evaluation form a coherent framework that improves educational quality. Teacher competence, character, and spiritual integrity influence educational quality more strongly than curriculum design or infrastructure alone, placing human resources as the primary driver of excellence. The leadership of the kiai also plays a moderating role by preserving institutional identity while guiding the success of human resource initiatives and educational outcomes. Scientifically, this study proposes a structured conceptual model that links human resource practices to educational quality through the role of kiai leadership. Practically, the study recommends merit based recruitment aligned with Islamic ethics, systematic training in pedagogy and digital literacy, comprehensive performance evaluation, stronger policy support, and wider collaboration with universities and certification bodies to sustain the relevance and quality of pesantren education.

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