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Local Islamic Traditions and Adaptive Leadership: *Arakan Sahur* and Ulema Regeneration in Jambi

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LOCAL ISLAMIC TRADITIONS AND ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP: *ARAKAN SAHUR* AND ULEMA REGENERATION IN JAMBI

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Abstract

The declining regeneration of ulema presents a serious challenge to the sustainability of Islamic education in Jambi. This study investigates how the traditional Arakan Sahur ritual, once rooted in communal religious practice, has been reframed by Kiai into a leadership strategy to prepare future scholars. Emphasizing values of togetherness, discipline, social harmony, and empowerment, Arakan Sahur is adapted within pesantren to foster students' spiritual resilience and leadership capacity. Employing a qualitative case study design, data were collected through interviews with Kiai, students, and community leaders, alongside observations of leadership practices reflecting Arakan Sahur values. Thematic analysis, strengthened by triangulation, revealed that these values underpin an adaptive leadership model that blends local wisdom with modern approaches, including digital da'wah tools. This adaptation strengthens the relevance of Islamic education, equipping students to navigate contemporary challenges while remaining rooted in tradition. The findings affirm the importance of preserving local religious practices as dynamic resources for leadership development in pesantren. Overall, the study shows how cultural traditions can be revitalized to support sustainable ulema regeneration and contribute to educational renewal in modern Islamic contexts.

Keywords: *Arakan Sahur; Kiai Leadership; Ulema generation; Local Traditions.*

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A. Introduction

Islamic education in Indonesia is entering a critical phase marked by tension between cultural continuity and the urgent need for adaptation. The era of globalization, accompanied by rapid technological development and shifting cultural paradigms, has created a dual challenge for *pesantren*: to preserve their local cultural and religious heritage while ensuring the effective regeneration of ulema who can respond to contemporary demands. In this shifting landscape, *pesantren* in Jambi Province stand as vital institutions—not only as sites of religious knowledge transmission but also as cultural strongholds that embody and sustain indigenous traditions embedded in the Islamic worldview (Hariyadi, 2020). The role of the *Kiai* in this context is particularly strategic. As spiritual authorities, educators, and cultural leaders, *Kiai* are responsible not only for the intellectual and moral formation of students but also for ensuring that these future scholars remain deeply rooted in local wisdom while gaining the capacity to lead in a modern world (Auliana & Izar, 2023; Hasan, 2022).

However, the ability of *pesantren* and *Kiai* to fulfill this role is increasingly under strain. The pressures of modern life—especially the omnipresence of global information flows, consumerist values, and digital cultures—have weakened the younger generation's connection to traditional Islamic practices and local heritage (Prabowo et al., 2023; Sumantri, 2021; Widianto & Lutfiana, 2021). While *pesantren* remain vital, their sustainability and influence hinge on their capacity to adapt their leadership, curricula, and pedagogical strategies without abandoning their foundational values. In this context, the leadership of *Kiai* must evolve from static preservationism toward a dynamic model that integrates tradition with innovation. Addressing this complex demand, the current study adopts James A.F. Stoner's theory of dynamic engagement, which emphasizes anticipatory capacity, adaptability, influence, and the management of change as pillars of effective leadership (Klasmeier & Rowold, 2022). These dimensions offer a promising framework to analyze how *Kiai* can navigate educational transformation while safeguarding the core values of *pesantren* (Tabrani & Masbur, 2016).

Despite the growing attention to the importance of preserving local wisdom within *pesantren* education, existing studies tend to focus on the symbolic value of traditions rather than their operational potential. Numerous scholars have acknowledged the role of cultural and religious traditions in providing moral grounding and a sense of identity within *pesantren* communities (Djazifah et al., 2016; Priamantono, 2020; Saputra et al., 2022; Widari, 2021). However, few have attempted to examine how such traditions—particularly religious rituals like *Arakan Sahur*—can be systematically transformed into pedagogical and leadership strategies that are applicable within modern Islamic educational systems. *Arakan Sahur*, which is traditionally practiced during Ramadan as a communal act of spiritual preparation, holds potential not merely as a cultural artifact but as a values-based model for adaptive leadership formation. The current study addresses this overlooked area by treating *Arakan Sahur* not simply as a tradition to be preserved but as a dynamic medium for fostering leadership competencies aligned with the moral and social foundations of *pesantren* life.

This research gap is particularly salient when viewed through the lens of broader discourses in global educational leadership. Recent literature on faith-based education has increasingly highlighted the necessity of spiritually grounded, community-engaged, and culturally responsive leadership models, especially in Muslim schools across diverse contexts (Aslam et al., 2023; Taylor & Benac, 2022). In many cases, these models stress the integration of religious values with leadership theories to foster not only academic excellence but also moral integrity and social cohesion. In parallel, studies on Islamic curriculum modernization emphasize the need to fuse traditional Islamic teachings with 21st-century competencies—including digital literacy, civic responsibility, and organizational adaptability—to enhance the relevance of Islamic education in globalized societies (Badrudin et al., 2025).

However, within the Indonesian context, scholarship on *pesantren* leadership remains largely bifurcated. On the one hand, some works celebrate *pesantren* as bastions of tradition, focusing on their role in maintaining local customs and resisting Westernized secular education. On the other hand,

modernization-oriented studies often promote managerial or technocratic reforms without integrating the cultural or spiritual dimensions that are central to *pesantren* identity(Sapirin, 2022; Thalib, 2023). What is missing is a theoretical and practical synthesis—a model that operationalizes *pesantren* traditions as living resources for cultivating leadership that is both adaptive and rooted in Islamic ethical frameworks. This study seeks to fill that critical interdisciplinary void by offering a model of "adaptive traditionalism" that bridges the realms of cultural preservation and institutional innovation.

Specifically, this study explores how the values embedded in the *Arakan Sahur* tradition—such as collective devotion, time discipline, social harmony, and communal responsibility—can be translated into leadership practices consistent with the four capacities of Stoner's dynamic engagement theory. These values, when embedded into the routines, pedagogy, and institutional culture of *pesantren*, can serve as a strategic foundation for regenerating ulema who are morally upright, socially engaged, and organizationally competent. Furthermore, by applying an interdisciplinary framework that combines leadership theory, Islamic educational studies, and cultural anthropology, the study offers a new perspective on how Islamic leadership can be reimagined through the revitalization of tradition. This is especially important given the increasing demand for faith-based educational models that are capable of addressing both local challenges and global shifts (Brooks & Mutohar, 2018; Said et al., 2023; Sarnoto & Rahmawati, 2022).

Moreover, this study does not merely aim to contribute at the conceptual level. By focusing on *pesantren* in Jambi Province that have actively integrated *Arakan Sahur* values into their educational practices, the study offers empirical grounding for a theory-informed model. These institutions provide living laboratories where tradition and innovation intersect, offering valuable insights into how adaptive leadership emerges through the intentional cultivation of cultural rituals within the educational process. The study thereby affirms that the regeneration of ulema is not solely a matter of curriculum reform or leadership training, but also of cultural continuity and ethical formation, mediated through collective spiritual practices.

This study positions *Arakan Sahur* as a transformative tradition—one that can be leveraged not only for spiritual discipline but also for leadership development within *pesantren*. By applying Stoner's dynamic engagement framework, the research reconceptualizes *Arakan Sahur* as a leadership instrument that enables *Kiai* to anticipate change, adapt to complexity, influence their communities, and manage institutional transitions—all while preserving the moral and cultural ethos of *pesantren*. In doing so, it proposes a new paradigm of Islamic educational leadership that is grounded in tradition yet attuned to the demands of the present and future.

B. Method

This study employed a qualitative approach using a collective case study design (Lai et al., 2016) to examine how the values embedded in the *Arakan Sahur* tradition are transformed into *Kiai* leadership strategies that support *ulema* regeneration in Jambi Province. The collective case study allowed for contextual comparison across several *pesantren* that actively incorporate *Arakan Sahur* into their educational leadership practices (Cheron et al., 2022).

Research sites were selected purposively based on three criteria: (1) the active implementation of *Arakan Sahur*; (2) direct leadership involvement by *Kiai* in educational transformation; and (3) relevance to local cultural preservation. This purposive approach ensured that each *pesantren* represented a meaningful intersection between tradition and leadership innovation. Twelve informants were involved, comprising *pesantren* leaders, students, and local citizens, all of whom possessed established knowledge and involvement in the tradition. Informants were coded as IR 1–12 to maintain confidentiality and consistency. Recruitment was facilitated through *pesantren* networks and community gatekeepers, with ethical procedures observed throughout. Each participant received full disclosure of the research aims and provided informed consent. The study strictly adhered to ethical research protocols, including participant confidentiality, voluntary consent, and institutional review board approval. Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Batanghari Jambi.

Data were collected through three triangulated techniques. First, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with *Kiai*, students, and local figures to explore perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of *Arakan Sahur* in leadership contexts. Second, participant observation was carried out during *Arakan Sahur* practices and daily *pesantren* leadership routines to capture behaviors and interactions in natural settings. Third, document analysis included school reports, *pesantren* archives, and community records related to the tradition. All fieldwork adhered to naturalistic inquiry principles to ensure ecological validity and reduce researcher intrusion (Singer, 2019). Data saturation was achieved once additional interviews and observations failed to yield new insights (Galanis, 2018), signaling information sufficiency for analysis.

Thematic analysis was employed to examine the data (Thompson, 2022), supported by NVivo 14 for coding and data management. Drawing on grounded theory procedures (Battaglia et al., 2022), the analysis unfolded in three phases: open coding to identify emergent concepts; axial coding to group and relate categories; and selective coding to synthesize themes into a coherent explanatory framework. An audit trail documenting coding decisions, memos, and analytic reflections was maintained to ensure transparency and replicability.

Interpretation was guided by James A.F. Stoner's theory of dynamic engagement, which emphasizes four dimensions: anticipatory ability, adaptability, influence, and change management (Feng & Huang, 2021; Klasmeier & Rowold, 2022). These constructs were used to align thematic findings with a leadership theory relevant to the educational and cultural context of *pesantren*. The use of this framework allowed for a structured interpretation of how *Arakan Sahur* values map onto transformative leadership strategies.

Methodologically, this study is situated within an interpretive epistemological paradigm that values contextual richness, theoretical coherence, and emic understanding (Tabrani et al., 2024). By treating tradition as a dynamic educational resource rather than a static heritage, the study design enables a nuanced analysis of how *Kiai* internalize, mobilize, and adapt *Arakan Sahur* as part of contemporary Islamic leadership formation.

C. Results and Discussion

A *Kiai*, as an adaptive leader grounded in Stoner's theory, is capable of fostering leadership that remains relevant to contemporary challenges while staying true to Islamic values and local traditions. This balance allows the *Kiai* to respond effectively to the demands of modernization and globalization without compromising the cultural and spiritual foundations of their leadership. The findings from interviews with several Islamic boarding school leaders and teachers provide valuable insights into this leadership approach.

1. Results

The findings of this study reveal the dynamics of *Kiai* leadership in integrating the traditional values of the *Arakan Sahur* ritual with the demands of modern leadership within the *pesantren* environment. The data was collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis conducted in several *pesantren* actively preserving the *Arakan Sahur* tradition in Jambi Province. The analysis employed a thematic approach based on grounded theory, resulting in three main themes: adaptation to change, integration of ethical values in leadership, and the creation of a supportive environment.

a. Adaptation to changes in Kiai leadership

The *Kiai* in the *pesantren* studied demonstrated a strong adaptive capacity in facing social and technological changes while maintaining the core values of classical *pesantren* traditions. They continue to uphold traditional practices such as *talaqqi* (oral transmission of knowledge), the study of classical Islamic texts, and spiritual guidance, while also being open to innovations in teaching methods and institutional management. *Kiai* emphasized maintaining foundational practices while welcoming innovation. In this case, one of the leaders of the *pesantren* explained:

> *"We should continue practices like classical teaching, studying the Yellow Book, and keeping strong bonds between Kiai and students. But as times change, we also need to welcome new ideas like using technology in learning, improving pesantren management, and working together in leadership".* (Interview with NB, January 07, 2024)

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In the context of leadership ability, navigating and adapting to shifting socio-cultural and technological landscapes embodies a central dimension of leadership in the era of dynamic engagement, as articulated by James A.F. Stoner. Such adaptability illustrates how leaders can maintain fidelity to cultural and religious traditions while simultaneously responding to the evolving demands of modernization and globalization. In this context, *Kiai* leadership exemplifies a model of engagement that is both context-sensitive and future-oriented, positioning tradition not as a barrier but as a resource for innovation and institutional sustainability.

In addition, the integration of cultural heritage with digital pedagogy exemplifies a proactive form of leadership that not only preserves identity but also embraces innovation in educational delivery. In doing so, it demonstrates how tradition and modernity can be harmonized to strengthen institutional resilience and relevance in rapidly changing contexts. As one of the *pesantren* leaders stated:

> *"We use digital platforms for learning the Yellow Book without replacing the talaqqi method… technology is only a tool to deepen religious knowledge".* (Interview with DA, January 07, 2024)

This analysis shows that *Kiai* leadership is not merely reactive but strategically adaptive, addressing the challenges of modernization through engagement and innovation. Unlike normative or purely moralistic accounts of leadership, the findings highlight how concrete adaptive practices align with established theoretical concepts. The blending of Islamic pedagogical values with modern technology reflects Stoner's idea of dynamic, value-driven, and stakeholder-oriented leadership. In this sense, the tradition of *Arakan Sahur* serves as a medium to emphasize universal values such as togetherness, discipline, and social harmony. These values are then integrated into educational programs that support the regeneration of ulema, which are both adaptive and resilient in navigating societal transformation.

One of the leaders has noted the cooperation, discipline, and democratic decision-making of *Arakan Sahur* values. This approach observed aligns closely with the leadership philosophy espoused by IR3 during an interview.

> *"The tradition of deliberation is a form of applying Islamic democratic values... ensuring students can live those values in daily life". (Interview with NC, January 07, 2024)*

This statement aligns with Stoner's emphasis on *values-based leadership* and *cultural engagement*. By embedding ethical values into cultural forms, *Kiai* exercises leadership that builds both moral and cultural capital in its communities. So, the integration of cultural tradition and educational strategy allows *Kiai* to cultivate future scholars who embody strong moral character and the ability to navigate complex social dynamics while preserving their cultural and religious roots.

Moreover, the innovation approach made religious teaching more relevant, especially for youth. As one of community leader stated:

> *"We don't just teach religious texts but relate them to everyday life… Making da'wah more relevant and impactful".* (Interview with CB, January 07, 2024)

This statement highlights the adaptability of *Kiai* leadership through innovative *da'wah* strategies that creatively employ local traditions such as *Arakan Sahur* as communicative tools. Such approaches enable leaders to connect with diverse audiences, including younger generations who are more responsive to engaging and interactive methods. At the same time, this strategy successfully integrates cultural heritage with contemporary needs, ensuring that Islamic teachings remain relevant, accessible, and meaningful in everyday life.

The last is collaboration with governments, local organizations, and cultural practitioners, which ensured the sustainability of traditions, as the respondent stated about collaboration interschool.

> *"We synergize with educational institutions and youth organizations…. collaborations like this are key to building a stronger, more independent society".* (Interview with CR, January 08, 2024)

This collaboration not only strengthens ties between the government, local communities, and Islamic boarding schools but also ensures the sustainability of local traditions in the face of modernization. By fostering these

collaborative efforts, *Kiai* exemplifies adaptive leadership that balances tradition with innovation, ensuring that local values remain integral to scholarly and societal development.

The above explanation shows that *Kiai* leadership is not only reactive but also strategically adaptive, addressing the challenges of modernization through active engagement and innovation. Unlike normative or purely moralistic views of leadership, this study demonstrates how concrete adaptive practices correspond with established theoretical concepts. The integration of Islamic pedagogical values with modern technology reflects Stoner's notion of dynamic, value-driven, and stakeholder-oriented leadership. By linking empirical findings to these theoretical domains, the analysis goes beyond description and provides a clearer conceptual understanding of leadership transformation within *pesantren* settings.

b. Integration of ethical values in Kiai leadership

First, the integration of ethical value in *Kiai* leadership, one of the respondents stated that *Kiai* stressed moral responsibility as the foundation of leadership.

> *"We implement an education system that trains students to be responsible for the tasks and mandates given… teaching that honesty is more important than just seeking personal gain"*. (Interview with NB, January 08, 2024).

According to the statement above, ethical values were consistently practiced through the tradition of *Arakan Sahur*. These values closely reflect the leadership style of the *Kiai*, where cultural and religious traditions are integrated into daily life. Thematic coding of interview data highlights repeated emphasis on honesty and sincerity, which are nurtured through regular practices and discipline. This approach aligns with Stoner's idea of sustainable leadership.

The second value, Community engagement, was used to cultivate empathy. One of the leaders explained.

> *"We teach our students to understand the social conditions of the community by going directly into the field… social care is not just about material giving*

> *but also includes attention, prayer, and moral support".* (Interview with CC and CL, January 08, 2024).

The interpretative lens shows that empathy in this context is not only about feelings but also about function. It helps leaders become more responsive and aware of different situations, which are key competencies highlighted by Stoner.

Another significant value is justice and fairness, which, under Stoner's framework, are essential for maintaining balance and legitimacy in an organization. The leadership of *Kiai* reflects this through deliberate teaching strategies that help students learn fair judgment and conflict resolution. The findings show that in communal decision-making or conflict situations, *pesantren* leaders guide students to practice inclusive listening and careful deliberation, as also noted by the students themselves.

> *"In resolving differences of opinion or conflicts, Kiai tries to listen to all parties... looking for the best solution without harming one party". (Interview with DE, January 08, 2024).*

From the statement above, it is concluded that the leadership model combines fairness in procedures with moral teaching, so that students develop not only obedience but also the ability to make decisions based on values. This approach reflects the idea of "ethical equilibrium" in Stoner's dynamic engagement theory.

The next value is the ethical modeling component in Stoner's framework for leaders. In Stoner's framework, leaders act as moral role models, and this is clearly shown in *pesantren* life. The *Arakan Sahur* tradition serves as a medium for transmitting values through example. The data highlight that consistent daily behavior is an important teaching method. As one student explained, *"We were taught to be honest because the Kiai and ustaz always showed honesty in their words and actions".* (Interview with NC, January 08, 2024)

This finding highlights that values such as honesty and discipline are not taught through abstract instruction but through consistent and observable behavior. Such modeling reflects Stoner's perspective that effective leadership

influence operates simultaneously at the cognitive and behavioral levels, where learners internalize values by witnessing them in daily practice.

Another significant value is mutual responsibility and teamwork, which are central to engaged leadership. The interview data show a strong *pesantren* culture that emphasizes collective success and shared accountability. Students are encouraged to work together and support one another, particularly during communal activities like *Arakan Sahur*. As two students explained, this system helps them learn to rely on peers and take responsibility as a group.

> *"Every student has the responsibility to maintain order... if one person is negligent, the others should remind, not blame"*. (Interview with BC and FC, January 08, 2024).

By using thematic coding and a clear theoretical framework, this study goes beyond simple description and provides a deeper understanding of how ethical leadership is intentionally developed in *pesantren*. The results show that Stoner's theory is highly relevant to Islamic education and also offers a model of value-based leadership that can be adapted to different cultural and social contexts.

c. Creating a supportive environment

Creating a supportive environment shows how *Kiai* creates an environment that supports students' intellectual growth, moral guidance, and cultural development, making *pesantren* a place for holistic leadership formation. First of all, collaborative learning spaces where students and teachers participated in deliberation and shared decision-making. *"We build a collaborative relationship by encouraging deliberation in decision-making, both in managing the pesantren and in students' lives"*. (Interview with BC, FC, January 08, 2024)

This finding demonstrates how collaborative learning environments foster not only academic achievement but also leadership development, aligning with Stoner's principle of organizational synergy through shared engagement.

Second, the sustainability of cultural traditions. Traditions like *Arakan Sahur* were integrated into the curriculum as living practices. *"We teach students*

to understand and respect cultural values, such as the tradition of Arakan Sahur, the Prophet's Birthday, or the recitation of the Yellow Book" (Interview with NB, January 08, 2024). This integration of local wisdom into formal leadership development reflects a hybridized model that fuses traditional values with institutional objectives, supporting long-term relevance and rootedness in the local context.

Third, psychological and spiritual support. *Kiai* designed programs that promoted emotional resilience and spiritual growth. *"We provide counseling programs, moral development, and Islamic studies that shape their mental and spiritual resilience"* (Interview with NB, January 08, 2024). These efforts demonstrate that leadership formation in *pesantren* is not solely intellectual but deeply embedded in emotional and spiritual scaffolding.

Fourth, technology as a cultural tool. Digital platforms were used not only for learning but also for preserving traditions. *"We allow da'wah through social media. That way, students not only get traditional education but also develop digital skills that are invaluable for spreading religious knowledge"* (Interview with BC, January 09, 2024). This demonstrates a dual-layered strategy: maintaining local identity while positioning students to lead in a technologically interconnected world.

Fifth, participation and shared purpose. Students were given leadership opportunities to manage activities and organizations. *"We give responsibility to students in various aspects of pesantren life, such as managing student organizations, organizing Islamic studies, and being active in social activities"* (Interview with DF, January 09, 2024). Such participatory practices not only enhance leadership capacity but also ensure that tradition-based knowledge is transmitted experientially, not just didactically.

In conclusion, the implementation of James A.F. Stoner's theory on *Kiai* leadership that integrates the values of the "*Arakan Sahur*" tradition serves as a strategic approach to supporting the regeneration of ulema in Jambi Province. This leadership model highlights the importance of dynamic engagement, where *Kiai* adapts to changes while preserving the essence of local traditions and Islamic values.

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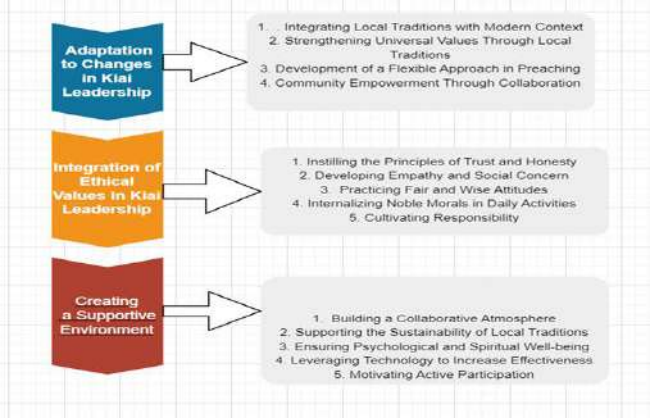

Figure 2. Internalization of Kiai leadership

Based on Figure 2, the findings demonstrate that *Kiai* leadership is characterized by strategic adaptability, ethical grounding, and supportive community-building. Through the transformation of *Arakan Sahur* values into leadership strategies, *pesantren* not only preserve local traditions but also prepare future ulema with the moral resilience, cultural rootedness, and adaptive skills necessary for contemporary challenges.

2. Discussion

The findings of this study provide important insights into the transformation of Islamic leadership within *pesantren* through the revitalization of the *Arakan Sahur* tradition. Rather than functioning merely as a cultural artifact (Muhajir et al., 2025), *Arakan Sahur* emerges here as an operational tool for adaptive leadership, deeply embedded in the values of togetherness, discipline, social harmony, and communal responsibility. This finding challenges conventional perspectives that often separate cultural heritage from institutional innovation in Islamic education (Yusuf et al., 2024). Previous works have generally treated *pesantren* traditions as symbolic legacies that preserve identity and continuity (Djazifah et al., 2016; Soemantri et al., 2025; Widari, 2021). However, the results of this study move beyond such descriptive approaches by showing that tradition, when systematically reframed, can serve as a dynamic pedagogical strategy to cultivate ulema capable of navigating the demands of contemporary society (Salim et al.,

2024). In this way, the study introduces a new paradigm that demonstrates how heritage and innovation can be mutually reinforcing rather than mutually exclusive (Noor, 2023).

The analysis also confirms the relevance of James A.F. Stoner's theory of dynamic engagement for understanding leadership in *pesantren*. According to Stoner, effective leadership in the modern era is characterized by anticipatory capacity, adaptability, ethical grounding, and the ability to manage change (Klasmeier & Rowold, 2022). The empirical findings from Jambi show that these dimensions are not only compatible with Islamic leadership but are in fact embodied in traditional practices such as *Arakan Sahur*. The emphasis on punctuality and collective devotion during sahur reflects a structured discipline that mirrors organizational adaptability and system responsiveness (Kistoro et al., 2023).

Likewise, the value of communal participation cultivated in the tradition strengthens moral authority and fosters inclusive decision-making, reinforcing Stoner's idea of stakeholder-oriented leadership. This alignment illustrates that *pesantren* leadership is not simply reactive to external pressures (Noor, 2023), but is strategically adaptive, turning cultural rituals into instruments for institutional resilience. By linking tradition to theory in this way, the study makes an original contribution to leadership scholarship (Pylypenko et al., 2023), particularly by extending Stoner's framework beyond Western and secular contexts into the realm of Islamic education (Brooks & Mutohar, 2018; Said et al., 2023; Sarnoto & Rahmawati, 2022).

The novelty of this study becomes particularly evident when compared to previous scholarship in Indonesia. On the one hand, some studies highlight *pesantren* as guardians of local tradition and religion, presenting them as institutions resistant to the influence of Westernized secular education (Sapirin, 2022). On the other hand, modernization-oriented approaches often advocate for managerial and technocratic reforms that risk marginalizing the spiritual and cultural dimensions at the heart of *pesantren* identity (Thalib, 2023). The current study addresses this polarization by showing that tradition itself can be the locus of innovation, thus avoiding the binary between preservation and modernization (Basori et al., 2023; Mumtaz et al., 2024). The *Arakan Sahur* Value

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Model developed in this study demonstrates that *pesantren* can simultaneously maintain cultural authenticity and embrace contemporary challenges, offering a balanced model of "adaptive traditionalism" that bridges cultural preservation with institutional innovation (Jelaca et al., 2020; Tanucan et al., 2023). By doing so, this study contributes a theoretical synthesis that has been largely absent in Indonesian scholarship on Islamic leadership.

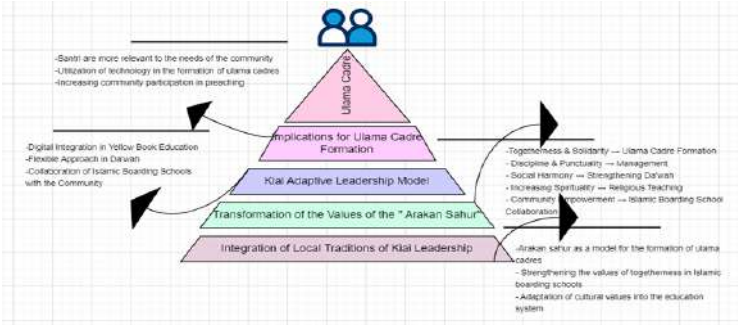

Figure 3. Design model of arakan sahur value

Figure 2 illustrates the *Arakan Sahur* Value Model, which integrates cultural traditions, organizational adaptability, ethical responsibility, and global relevance as interconnected dimensions of leadership formation within *pesantren*. The figure does not merely serve as a visual representation but synthesizes the empirical findings of this research into a conceptual framework that highlights the interdependence between cultural authenticity and institutional adaptability. By placing cultural traditions at the core, the model underscores that the preservation of heritage is not antithetical to modernization; instead, it provides a moral and social foundation for nurturing leaders who are responsive, ethical, and globally oriented.

The model also emphasizes that organizational adaptability within *pesantren* is deeply linked to ethical responsibility, ensuring that leadership practices remain grounded in spiritual values while addressing contemporary challenges. Furthermore, the inclusion of global relevance in the model indicates that the principles embedded in *Arakan Sahur* are not confined to local contexts but hold potential applicability across diverse cultural and educational landscapes. In this way, Figure 2 encapsulates the essence of the

study's contribution: a holistic and transferable model of leadership development that positions *pesantren* traditions as living instruments of innovation rather than static cultural remnants.

At a broader disciplinary level, the study enriches three overlapping academic conversations. Within Islamic education studies, the findings deepen our understanding of how ulema regeneration can be achieved through the operational transformation of cultural rituals into structured leadership programs. This is a departure from conventional curriculum reforms and managerial solutions, positioning cultural practices as central to educational innovation. From an anthropological perspective, the research echoes arguments that traditions evolve through symbolic innovation to remain socially relevant (Akın, 2022; Mahfud, 2023; Irsad et al., 2024). Just as *hadrah*, *qasidah*, or *da'wah* theater have been adapted to engage new generations (Carvalho, 2019; Segara, 2021; Tomičić, 2022).

Arakan Sahur has been reframed as a leadership instrument that ensures continuity while enabling responsiveness to contemporary realities. In terms of leadership theory, the study introduces a culturally grounded model that unites moral formation, organizational discipline, and social capital, dimensions that are often examined separately in mainstream leadership literature (Feleih & Mohammed, 2022; Muliadi & Asyari, 2024; Sidiq & Indra, 2023). The *Arakan Sahur* Value Model shows how these dimensions are organically interdependent in *pesantren* life, thereby expanding theoretical discussions of leadership beyond individual or organizational outcomes to encompass cultural and spiritual dimensions.

The implications of this study are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, the study broadens the application of dynamic engagement theory by embedding it within a faith-based, non-Western educational setting, thereby challenging assumptions of universality that often underpin mainstream leadership models. By showing that tradition can generate adaptive and value-based leadership, the findings offer an alternative framework that integrates spirituality with organizational development. Practically, the study underscores the importance of embedding cultural values into leadership formation

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programs within *pesantren*. For policymakers and religious leaders, this means that initiatives to support ulema regeneration should not be limited to curricular modernization or administrative reforms, but should also strengthen the operationalization of cultural traditions. The integration of digital tools with local practices, as observed in this study, further highlights the potential for *pesantren* to innovate without abandoning their cultural foundations, thus ensuring both continuity and relevance in a globalized era (Khojir et al., 2025; Khasanah et al., 2023).

Beyond these local and national contributions, the findings of this study also carry significant implications at the global level. The *Arakan Sahur* Value Model demonstrates that cultural traditions are not peripheral but central to building adaptive and ethical leadership in faith-based education. This insight is particularly relevant for educational institutions in Muslim-majority countries such as Morocco and Turkey, where communal religious practices already play a role in shaping civic values and leadership formation (Abid, 2021; Setiaji, 2024; Firdaus et al., 2025). By providing an empirically grounded example of how traditions can be operationalized into structured leadership strategies, the model offers a transferable framework for reimagining Islamic education in comparable contexts across the Muslim world (Anam et al., 2024). The comparative resonance with *zawiya* institutions in North Africa or Imam-Hatip schools in Turkey underscores the universality of the values embedded in the model—discipline, participation, ethical responsibility, and social harmony—and shows that these values can be adapted to diverse cultural and institutional settings.

The global relevance of this study extends even further to Muslim-minority contexts, including Europe and North America, where Islamic schools face the dual challenge of preserving religious identity while engaging with pluralistic societies. In such environments, traditions like *Arakan Sahur*, which foster resilience, identity, and adaptive leadership, offer valuable lessons for developing educational strategies that are both faithful to cultural heritage and responsive to the demands of multiculturalism. The values embedded in the tradition resonate universally and can contribute to leadership development

in broader multicultural and interfaith settings. This underscores the potential of *pesantren* in Indonesia to contribute meaningfully to international debates on education, leadership, and cultural resilience, particularly within the growing body of Global South scholarship that emphasizes the interplay between local authenticity and global applicability. By situating its findings in these broader contexts, the study demonstrates that Indonesian *pesantren* can enrich cross-cultural approaches to leadership and provide globally relevant models for faith-based education in the twenty-first Century (Priamantono, 2020; Sumantri, 2021; Widianto & Lutfiana, 2021).

Despite these contributions, it is essential to recognize the limitations of this study. The focus on *pesantren* in Jambi Province restricts the generalizability of the findings, as leadership practices and traditions may vary significantly across regions of Indonesia. The qualitative case study approach, while providing depth and contextual richness, does not capture broader patterns that might emerge in larger or more diverse samples. Moreover, the cross-sectional nature of the study limits the ability to assess the long-term impact of *Arakan Sahur*-based leadership training on ulema regeneration, student development, and institutional sustainability. These limitations are not weaknesses but reflections of the scope of the study. They also open opportunities for future research to conduct comparative or longitudinal studies across different *pesantren*, regions, and even international contexts.

D. Conclusion

This study has examined how *Kiai* leadership, rooted in the values of the *Arakan Sahur* tradition, has been transformed to sustain the regeneration of ulema in Jambi Province. By applying James A.F. Stoner's theory of dynamic engagement, the study has demonstrated that adaptive leadership emerges through the integration of local traditions, digital innovation, flexible *da'wah* strategies, and collaborative community involvement. The synthesis of these findings confirms that cultural traditions, far from being static rituals, serve as dynamic resources for nurturing future scholars who are both resilient in faith and responsive to contemporary challenges.

The contribution of this study is twofold. Theoretically, it broadens the application of Stoner's dynamic engagement theory by embedding it in a non-Western, faith-based educational context. The study introduces the *Arakan Sahur* Value Model as a culturally grounded yet adaptable framework, thereby enriching leadership and educational theory with a perspective rooted in Islamic tradition. Practically, the findings emphasize the strategic importance of embedding cultural values into *pesantren* leadership programs, encouraging the integration of digital tools, and strengthening collaboration between *pesantren*, communities, and policymakers. The novelty of this study lies in positioning *Arakan Sahur* not merely as a symbolic ritual but as a transferable leadership model that bridges cultural preservation and educational innovation, distinguishing it from previous studies that often separated these dimensions.

At the same time, this study acknowledges its contextual and methodological boundaries. The focus on *pesantren* in Jambi Province limits the generalizability of the findings, while the qualitative case study design and cross-sectional nature restrict the ability to assess long-term impacts. Future research should therefore expand this inquiry by exploring *pesantren* in other Indonesian regions and Muslim-majority countries, adopting comparative or longitudinal designs, and examining intersections with other indigenous traditions such as *gotong royong* and *piil pesenggiri*. Such directions would not only broaden the empirical scope but also deepen the theoretical contribution of culturally adaptive leadership within global Islamic education discourse.

The key message of this study is that tradition and modernity are not opposing forces but complementary resources for shaping leadership in Islamic education. By revitalizing local practices such as *Arakan Sahur*, *pesantren* can regenerate ulema who embody ethical integrity, cultural rootedness, and adaptive skills, while also contributing to international debates on faith-based leadership and educational transformation. This study reaffirms that culturally grounded models of leadership can inspire not only local renewal but also global innovation in the search for educational systems that balance authenticity with modern relevance.

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