

Women's Leadership in Islamic Boarding Schools: A Comparative Study of Islamic Boarding Schools in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam

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Received: 2023-06-05; Accepted: 2023-10-24; Published: 2023-10-28

ABSTRACT

It is common knowledge that men are the leaders of women, but Islam also encourages gender equality in education, which can be seen in the prophetic direction and the lives of salaf scholars, where at that time many female scholars emerged. Even so, religious boundaries must still be considered where in teaching and learning practice there can be no ikhtilat or mixing between men and women, therefore in the field of Islamic education, especially pesantren, it becomes a need for pesantren which only consists of women to the top. . In recent years, there has been a growing interest in women's leadership in these schools, as many Muslim women are seeking to become religious leaders. This comparative study aims to examine women's leadership in Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam. The purpose of our study was to analyze the different leadership roles of women in Islamic boarding schools in these three countries. We use a qualitative approach combined with literature studies with interviews as a data collection technique. In addition, we used thematic comparative analysis to analyze the data collected from the interviews. The results are; in Indonesia, women often serve as heads of pesantren, focusing on collaborative, community-oriented leadership emphasizing service and mutual support. Conversely, female leadership in Malaysian Islamic schools is relatively rare, characterized by hierarchical structures and strict rule enforcement. Brunei Darussalam displays limited female leadership, with some exceptions following a conservative, values-centered approach. The study underscores the influence of cultural, social, and religious factors on women's leadership styles in Islamic educational institutions. The research highlights the need for further exploration of these dynamics, enabling the development of policies and practices that foster inclusive leadership environments within the context of Islamic teachings. At the end of this article will be presented in the form of a table about a comparison conclusion between Islamic Boarding School and Women Leadership in these specified countries for better understanding..

Keywords: Women Leadership; Boarding School; Indonesia; Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam.

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INTRODUCTION

Men and women have equal rights in education. Where education is an important transformation tool from the beginning of knowledge to building awareness.¹ By getting an education, a person goes through the process of gaining knowledge, abilities and self-developed skills, up to a change in attitude. In the context of education for women, for them education can be an important key step towards a better life.²

The word education is etymologically Greek *ducare*, whose meaning is the same as the word “lead, direct, lead”, where the letter *e* means “out”. Which can then be interpreted as leading out. Education in Arabic is known as *tarbiyah*, which comes from the word *raba-yarbu* (رَبَّ-يَرْبُو), which means according to which it grows or expands. Until now, patriarchal culture, is the most widely adopted culture by most of the world's population, which forms the perception that the roles of men and women must be differentiated in social life. Men hold a leading role in society because they are considered more powerful, potential and productive. While women who have reproductive organs, considered weaker, less potential and unproductive.³

Issues that are often highlighted by the West to Islamic education, namely about the equality of men and women as well as how the contribution of women in Islamic education itself. According to the West, most of the teachings of Islam are considered too biased towards men and emphasize their masculinity.⁴ The Islamic text of Revelation states that women are equal to men. Previously, people in Asia and Europe discriminated against women. Many discriminatory practices start from the pagan religion they profess. People began to see gender consciousness after their religion was changed by Islam. A number of female scholars were born during this period because Muslims fought for their rights for a long time.⁵

And if given space on the portion, then women can also lead as well as men. Because, the existence of women leaders is needed in certain fields, for example in communities that contain women only, of course we are more comfortable being led by a woman as well, although maybe behind women leaders, there is a role of men who can help or guide leadership.

In most countries of the world, there is a special concern about how to increase the number of women leaders in all sectors and industries. Therefore, it is considered necessary for women to take positions of leadership roles accompanied by higher education.⁶

Islamic boarding schools, or *pesantren*, are a significant part of the Islamic education system, it has a long history and a prominent role in Islamic education in Southeast Asia. in Southeast Asia. They are schools that offer both religious and secular education to students, with a focus on Islamic teachings and practices. In this comparative study, we will examine the similarities and differences between Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam. Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam have their own unique Islamic boarding school systems that have developed over time, reflecting the respective countries' religious and cultural contexts.

This article uses Literature Studies. There are many references to women's leadership in Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia, while there are very few of references to women's leadership in Islamic

¹ Dwi Ratnasari, ‘Pemberdayaan Perempuan Dalam Pendidikan Pesantren’, *Anil Islam: Jurnal Kebudayaan Dan Ilmu Keislaman*, 9.1 (2016), 122–47 <<http://jurnal.instika.ac.id/index.php/AnilIslam/article/view/11>>.

² Dian Ardiyani, ‘Konsep Pendidikan Perempuan Siti Walidah’, *Tajdid*, 15.1 (2017).

³ Zainal Abidin, ‘Kesetaraan Gender Dan Emansipasi Perempuan Dalam Pendidikan Islam’, *Tarbawiyah Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan*, 12.01 (2017), 1–17.

⁴ Dewi Ratnawati, Sulistyorini, and Ahmad Zainal Abidin, ‘Kesetaraan Gender Tentang Pendidikan Laki-Laki Dan Perempuan’, *Jurnal Harkat Media Komunikasi Gender*, 15.1 (2019), 10–23.

⁵ Abidin.

⁶ Susan R. Madsen, ‘Women and Leadership in Higher Education: Current Realities, Challenges, and Future Directions.’, *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 14.2 (2012), 131–39 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/1523422311436299>>.

boarding schools in Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam.

In Malaysia, the previous research analyses in the case of Batu Pahat District's Islamic Institution, that having a female headmistress positively influences teachers' satisfaction and perception. This finding aligns with numerous studies indicating the positive impact of female leadership in education, often associated with improved school environments, teacher morale, and student outcomes.⁷ In Brunei Darussalam, although the government does not discriminate based on gender, women's leadership is still underrepresented, especially in comparison to men. Despite policies promoting gender equality, cultural and societal factors might still influence the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles. Addressing these barriers could involve targeted initiatives to encourage and support women in pursuing leadership positions.⁸ While in Indonesia, it's interesting to note the variation in perceptions towards women's leadership in different educational institutions. In some spaces, such as *pesantren*, provide opportunities for women to lead, there are challenges such as the rejection or displeasure from the community, often rooted in stereotypes about women's education levels. This highlights the importance of challenging societal norms and stereotypes to enable women to take on leadership roles without facing unnecessary prejudice.⁹

The novelty of this study compared to previous studies above, this study discusses a comparative study of women's leadership in Islamic institutions in three countries. The topic on this subject has never been discussed and this article is the first to peel it. This will bring a new scientific treasure about women's leadership in Islam that can be accepted in its portion in Sharia. Therefore, this research will try to contribute to the theme mentioned above. The research objectives are as follows: 1) Identify Women Leaders: Explore the presence and roles of women leaders in Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam; 2) Analyze Leadership Styles: Examine the various leadership styles employed by women in Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam, highlighting the differences or similarities among them.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses qualitative approach combined with literature studies with interviews as a data collection technique. The main sources in this study are in-depth interviews with primary sources, scientific articles and other reading sources related to women's leadership in Islam. In addition, we used thematic comparative analysis to analyze the data collected from the interviews and sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Definitions of Pondok Pesantren

Pondok Pesantren or Islamic Boarding School is the oldest Islamic educational institution in Indonesia, which teaches Islamic sciences to its students called *santri* on an ongoing basis by requiring the *santris* to live in dormitories or called *asrama/pondok*.

⁷ Noor Hidayat bt Mohd Jamil, 'Teachers' Perception Towards Women Leadership in Education in Malaysia', *Elixir International Journal*, 2014.

⁸ Hafizah Binti Abd Rahim, 'Women Leadership in Brunei Darussalam Challenges and Enabling Factors', *Southeast Asia: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 21.1 (2021), 30–44 <[https://fass.ubd.edu.bn/SEA/vol21-1/Women leadership in Brunei Darussalam.edited.pdf](https://fass.ubd.edu.bn/SEA/vol21-1/Women%20leadership%20in%20Brunei%20Darussalam.edited.pdf)>.

⁹ Muhammad Arif Mustaqim, Heidiah Waskito Rini, and Imron Sadewo, 'Women's Leadership in Islamic Boarding Schools: A Case Study at Darus Salam Islamic Boarding School Mandigu Hamlet Suco Village Mumbulsari District Jember Regency', *Santhet: Jurnal Sejarah, Pendidikan Dan Humaniora*, 6.1 (2022), 70–77 <<https://doi.org/10.36526/js.v3i2.1912>>.

This is in line with what is said by Qomar (2006) that *Pesantren* is a place of education and teaching that emphasizes Islamic religious studies and supported by dormitories as permanent student residences.¹⁰ As the oldest educational institution in Indonesia, Islamic boarding schools play a very important role in the history of education. Before the modern education system was introduced by the Dutch, Islamic boarding schools were the only education system in Indonesia. Islamic boarding schools also played an irreplaceable role in the spread of Islam in Indonesia. *Pondok Pesantren* provides formal socialization media where Islamic beliefs, norms, and values are transmitted and instilled through various teaching activities. In other words, Islamic boarding schools function also as developers of Islamic teachings and custodians of orthodoxy as quoted from Turmudi (2004).¹¹

In Malaysia, religious education such as *pesantren* is widely found. As quoted from Ismail Ab Rahman (1992) educational institutions with this *pesantren* system can be called '*Pondok*' in Malaysia.¹² Meanwhile in Brunei Darussalam, boarding religious learning such as *pondok pesantren* or boarding schools in Indonesia, does not exist, according to local people, and also there is no literature evidence about the topic whatsoever. Although, in higher education level, such as *Institut Tahfidz al-Qur'an Hasanah Bolkiah*, a boarding system is applied.

Traditional Leadership in the Context of *Pesantren*

In Indonesia, leadership in *pesantren* is still centrally and hierarchically patterned, centered on a *Kiai*.¹³ Most *pesantren* in Java were founded by *Kiai* as a central figure. *Kiai* is one of the five elements of *pesantren* in addition to huts, mosques, teaching classics and *santri*.¹⁴ *Kiai's* role in leading *pesantren* will not be maximized without good cooperation with *Kiai's* wife (*Nyai*). But when the *Kiai* has passed away, the usual leadership role carried by the *Kiai* will automatically be replaced by *Nyai*. *Nyai* and especially *Kiai* are the central figures in the Islamic boarding school. Apart from being leaders, they are teachers, role models, and sources of advice for students. They have a substantial role in socializing religious concepts and teachings in *pesantren*.¹⁵

Women Leadership

According to Amalia & Arifin (2018), in *pesantren*, *Kiai* as leaders have charisma because of their religious knowledge and knowledge. *Nyai* (*Kiai's* wife) who also leads the girls' boarding school is also a community leader whose Islam is very strong and respected. Even so, there is still an assumption in the wider community that *nyai's* success in leading the *pesantren* is due to the influence and role of the *kiai* as her husband, so that *nyai's* existence as the leader of the *pesantren* is because of her husband, not because of her ability.¹⁶ In the contemporary era, women began to be considered as leaders in *pesantren*. Especially in boarding schools for girls or *pondok pesantren putri* who really need a female leadership figure as well.

¹⁰ Dyah Aji Jaya Hidayat, 'Perbedaan Penyesuaian Diri Santri Di Pondok Pesantren Tradisional Dan Modern', *Fakultas Psikologi Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta*, 2009.

¹¹ Muhyidin Zainul Arifin, 'Peran Kepemimpinan Nyai Di Pondok Pesantren', *Saintekbu: Jurnal Sains Dan Teknologi*, 7.2 (2014), 25–47.

¹² Gamal Abdul Nasir Zakaria, 'Pondok Pesantren: Changes and Its Future', *Journal of Islamic and Arabic Education*, 2.2 (2010), 45–52 <<http://jiae.pimm.my/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/22-19.pdf>>.

¹³ Abdul Karim, 'Kepemimpinan & Manajemen Kiai Dalam Pendidikan', *Journal of Chemical Information and Modeling*, 53.9 (2013), 1689–99.

¹⁴ Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren: Studi Tentang Pandangan Hidup Kyai Dan Visinya Mengenai Masa Depan Indonesia* (LP3ES, 2011).

¹⁵ Muhyidin Zainul Arifin.

¹⁶ Supriani Yuli, Hasan Basri, and Andewi Suhartini, 'Kepemimpinan Wanita Dalam Pesantren', *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Konseling*, 4.6 (2022).

Islamic Sources on Women's Leadership (Dalil Bayani)

In Islamic teachings, there are several relevant verses from the Quran and hadiths (sayings of Prophet Muhammad) that emphasize the importance and permissibility of women's leadership. Here are a few relevant postulates from the Quran and hadiths:

1. Quran 4: 32 (Surah An-Nisa, Verse 32):

وَلَا تَتَمَنَّوْا مَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بِهِ بَعْضَكُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ ۗ لِلرِّجَالِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا كَسَبُوا ۗ وَلِلنِّسَاءِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا كَسَبْنَ ۗ وَسَأَلُوا
اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمًا

*"And do not wish for that by which Allah has made some of you exceed others. For men is a share of what they have earned, and for women is a share of what they have earned. And ask Allah of His bounty. Indeed, Allah is ever, of all things, Knowing."*¹⁷

This verse emphasizes the equal spiritual value of men and women and suggests that both genders can earn and contribute, implying the potential for women's leadership roles.¹⁸

2. In Islam, every human being is in fact a good leader for him/herself and what he/she led, so that a leader will one day be asked responsibility. This is like the hadith from the Prophet ﷺ which narrated by Ibn ' Umar (رضي الله عنه) :

*"I have heard the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) say: "Everyone is a leader and be held accountable for their leadership. The head of State will be asked accountability of the people he leads. A husband will be asked about the family he leads. A woman who keeps her husband's House asked about his responsibilities and duties. And you will be questioned of the things he leads.""*¹⁹

3. Qur'an 33: 35 (Surah Al-Ahzab, Verse 35):

وَالصَّادِقَاتِ وَالصَّابِرَاتِ وَالْمُحْسِنَاتِ وَالْمُحْسِنَاتِ وَالْمُنَصِّحَاتِ وَالصَّابِغَاتِ وَالصَّابِغَاتِ وَالصَّابِغَاتِ
وَالْحَافِظَاتِ قُرُوجَهُنَّ وَالْحَافِظَاتِ وَالذَّاكِرَاتِ وَالذَّاكِرَاتِ أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُنَّ مَغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا

"Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women, the obedient men and obedient women, the faithful men and faithful women, the patient men and patient women, the humble men and humble women, the faithful men and faithful women, the faithful men and faithful women, the faithful men and faithful it is for this reason that Allah (سبحان الله وتعالى) has prepared for them a great reward and forgiveness."

This verse illustrates the spiritual equality between men and women in Islam, emphasizing their shared virtues and rewards, regardless of gender.

¹⁷ Yayasan Penyelenggara Penerjemah Al-Qur'an and Lajnah Pentashih Mushaf, *Al-Qur'an Tajwid Dan Terjemahnya, Kementerian Agama RI* (Solo: Tiga Serangkai Pustaka Mandiri, 2016).

¹⁸ Anis Zohriah, Chepi Rafiudin, and Anis Fauzi, 'Women's Leadership in Islamic Educational Institutions', 06.01 (2023), 5784-92.

¹⁹ Isyatul Mardiyati, 'Perempuan Dan Kepemimpinan Dalam Pendidikan Islam', *Raheema*, 1.1 (2014) <<https://doi.org/10.24260/raheema.v1i1.160>>.

While these postulates do not explicitly mention women's leadership in the context of Islamic boarding schools, they lay the foundation for the equal worth and potential of women in Islam, suggesting that women can assume leadership roles within the bounds of Islamic principles and teachings.

Comparisons History of Islamic Education in Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam.

In Indonesia, the historical record of Islamic education can be traced to the beginning of the 20th century, there was a female figure who was quite famous in developing education for women. This figure was named Rangkayo Rahmah Al-Yunisiah and he founded a *Diniyyah Madrasah* specifically for women in Minangkabau.²⁰ There is a lot of literature on women's leadership in Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia. Such as Umi Waheeda's charismatic and transformational leadership at *Pesantren Nurul Iman* Parung Bogor, which requires all students to complete their education up to the S1 level and be able to free all costs from managing various business units managed by the foundation.²¹ Also some studies of the charismatic figure of Nyai Hajjah Masriyah Amva who is a leader in *Pesantren Kebon Jambu Al-Islamy* Cirebon, she considered succeeded in developing *pesantren* programs in the academic and non-academic fields.^{22 23 24 25}

According to research conducted by Astuti, in Malaysia, especially in Johor, there is no information or very less about women's leadership in Islamic boarding schools, but in Malaysia women are encouraged to become teachers or any job that does not require much physical or high-risk work, because it is considered that women are weaker physically than men.²⁶

According to Hafizah, women's leadership in Brunei Darussalam is underrepresented, although the Brunei government does not restrict women from taking part in any field in their country, even in Brunei, free education is provided for all citizens, as well as provided with health facilities and care.²⁷

In-depth interview with one of ustazah who lives in Brunei Darussalam for many years. There are Religious Schools or *Sekolah Ugama* are compulsory for children, but there are no Islamic boarding schools or *Pondok Pesantren* in Brunei. Freelance interviews with local residents found that *Sekolah Ugama* in Brunei Darussalam are similar to madrassas in Indonesia, where *santris* study religion a few hours a day after school. And many schools in Brunei are led by women, it's just that the school is not in the form of an Islamic boarding school or *Pondok Pesantren* but a formal school, although there is a boarding or overnight option but it is only as a facility for students who live far from school, while students who live close to school do not stay overnight.

²⁰ Ibi Syatibi, 'Kepemimpinan Perempuan Di Pesantren', *Al-Ahwal: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Islam*, 2.1 (2016), 29–46.

²¹ Siti Kafidhoh, 'Kepemimpinan Perempuan Dalam Pendidikan Islam (Studi Atas Peran Umi Waheeda Dalam Mengelola Yayasan Al-Ashriyyah Nurul Iman Islamic Boarding School Parung)', *Alim Journal of Islamic Education*, 1.2 (2019), 427–62.

²² Fikriyah Istiqlaliyani, 'Ulama Perempuan Di Pesantren: Studi Tentang Kepemimpinan Nyai Hj. Masriyah Amva', *Jurnal Educatio FKIP UNMA*, 8.1 (2022), 104–9 <<https://doi.org/10.31949/educatio.v8i1.1670>>.

²³ Alfiatun Munawwaroh, Farid Wajdi, and Vinesa Fitri, 'Gaya Kepemimpinan Nyai Hajjah Masriyah Amva Di Pondok Pesantren Kebon Jambu Al-Islamy Babakan Ciwaringin Kabupaten Cirebon', *Eduprof: Islamic Education Journal*, 1.2 (2019), 78–92 <<https://doi.org/10.47453/eduprof.v1i2.21>>.

²⁴ Ratih Pratiwi, Winda N R Wardhani, and M Shidqon Prabowo, 'Pemberdayaan Santripreneur Di Pesantren : Kajian Kepemimpinan Perempuan (Nyai) Dalam Meningkatkan Keterlibatan Santriwati Dalam Berwirausaha', 8 (2022), 98–110 <<https://doi.org/10.24252/iqtisaduna.v8i2.31321>>.

²⁵ Yuli, Basri, and Suhartini.

²⁶ Tri Marhaeni Pudji Astuti, 'Gender Construction in Pesantren in Johor (Malaysia) and Central Java (Indonesia)', *Humaniora*, 22.2 (2010), 125–41.

²⁷ Abd Rahim.

A Comparisation between Women leading Pondok Pesantren in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam.

In Indonesia, female leaders in *pesantren* are commonly called Nyai and usually become leaders in *pesantren* together with their husbands or *Kiai*. Or become a leader when the *Kiai* dies. Very few started Islamic boarding schools from scratch. Women leadership in *pondok pesantren* in Indonesia has a long and complex history, with various styles and approaches to leadership emerging over time. Historically, women have played important roles in *pondok pesantren*, particularly as teachers and mentors to female students. However, their leadership roles were often limited to managing the affairs of the women's section of the *pesantren*, and they were rarely involved in the overall management of the institution.²⁸ In the early 20th century, a number of female leaders emerged in the *pondok pesantren* movement, particularly in the East Java region. These women, such as Nyai Ahmad Dahlan and Nyai Haji Kharimah, were instrumental in establishing women's *pesantren* and in promoting women's education and empowerment. They developed a unique leadership style that emphasized a combination of religious knowledge, practical skills, and social activism. In the post-independence era, women's leadership in *pondok pesantren* continued to evolve, with women taking on increasingly prominent roles in the management and governance of *pesantren*. Some women, such as Nyai Masriyah, have been recognized as key figures in the modernization and professionalization of *pesantren* management, introducing new management techniques and modern technology to the institutions.²⁹

Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world, and Islamic boarding schools have a long history in the country, its *pesantren* system is the oldest and largest in the region. The *pesantren* system in Indonesia is diverse, with different types of schools that vary in terms of their curriculum, teaching methods, and religious orientation.³⁰ It is range from traditional to modern, with some schools offering both religious and secular education. The most traditional *pesantren* in Indonesia are known as salafiyah, which emphasizes the study of classical Islamic texts and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad *Sallahu 'Alaihi Wa Sallam*. Traditional *pesantren* in Indonesia emphasize Quranic studies and the memorization of Islamic texts, as well as adherence to Islamic practices and values.³¹

In addition to traditional *pesantren*, referring to the Regulation of the Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia Number 31 of 2020 concerning *Pesantren* Education in Chapter 2 which regulates the path, level, and form of *pesantren*.³² There are also modern *pesantren* that offer a more diverse curriculum, including subjects such as science, mathematics, and social studies. These schools also focus on character building and emphasize the importance of social and community service. More modern *pesantren* in Indonesia offer a wider range of subjects, including science and mathematics, while still emphasizing Islamic values and practices.

Over the years, there have been numerous women who have taken on leadership roles in these institutions. Here are some notable women leaders of *pesantren* in Indonesia: 1) Nyai Ahmad Dahlan - She was the wife of Muhammadiyah's founder, Ahmad Dahlan, and played an important role in the development of *pesantren* in Indonesia. Nyai Ahmad Dahlan established the first modern *pesantren* for women, called *Pesantren Putri* Padang Bulan, in Yogyakarta in 1916; 2). Nyai Masriyah Ahmad - She was a prominent female leader in Muhammadiyah and the founder of the Aisyiyah, a women's organization

²⁸ Moh Mahbub and Kamila Adnani, 'The Role Equality of Nyai In The Development of Islamic Boarding School (Pesantren) (Case Study of Al-Huda Islamic Boarding School , Doglo , Cepogo , Boyolali Regency)', 7 (2022).

²⁹ Munawwaroh, Wajdi, and Fitri.

³⁰ Zaenal Arifin, 'Perilaku Kepemimpinan Tradisional Pesantren', *Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman*, 24.2 (2015), 80–98 <<https://doi.org/10.33367/tribakti.v24i2.176>>.

³¹ Dhofier.

³² Kementerian Agama RI, 'PMA No 31 Tahun 2020 Tentang Pendidikan Pesantren', 2020, 65.

within the Muhammadiyah movement. Nyai Masriyah Ahmad also established the first Aisyiyah *pesantren* for girls, called *Pesantren Aisyiyah Yogyakarta*, in 1917; 3) Siti Musdah Mulia - She is a Muslim scholar and activist who has been involved in various women's rights and interfaith initiatives in Indonesia.³³ Siti Musdah Mulia is also a co-founder of the Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace, and she has advocated for the inclusion of women's voices in Islamic scholarship and leadership. There are also many examples of women's leadership in *pesantren* in Indonesia, such as the leadership of Nyai Hajjah Masriyah Amva at Kebon Jambu Al-Islamy Islamic Boarding School Babakan Ciwaringin Cirebon Regency, West Java, Indonesia. Where she continued the role of leader in the cottage after her husband (*Kiai*) passed away.³⁴ Just like Umi Waheeda's role in managing *The Foundation* (Yayasan) of Al-Ashriyyah Nurul Iman Islamic Boarding School Parung Bogor, which continued the leadership of *pondok pesantren* after the death of her husband.³⁵

Women within the scope of power of the *pesantren* undergo a kind of subordination. The teachings of Islam developed in *pesantren* is permanent in placing men and women. Within this framework, Islamic *pesantren* is Islam developed in a culture that gives privileges to men. The presence of women in the *pesantren* world is very important, not only changing the face of *pesantren* to be more gender sensitive, but also building people's perspectives on the face of Islam that is women-friendly, peaceful and *rahmatan lil'alam* (blessings from Allah to the entire universe).³⁶

Female boarding school caregivers are needed for girls' dormitories, that's why women are no longer seen as weak figures who are always at the back line, but a woman is able to appear on the front line as a successful leader in various sectors of life, especially in relation to being a *pesantren* leader.³⁷

The leadership of women as *Nyai's* mother together with her husband the *Kiai* in managing the Islamic boarding school can also be seen in the leadership of Mrs. *Nyai* Maquatis Surroh with her husband *Kyai* Sulahak Syarif in the *Kyai* Syarifuddin Wonorejo Lumajang Islamic Boarding School, East Java. *Ibu Nyai* carries out her role optimally in the environment of *Putri* and *Putra* students and can bring this cottage to become a superior and favorite educational institution in the region.³⁸ For Islamic Boarding Schools or *pesantren* that were founded from scratch by a woman, there is *Nyai* Hj. Kholidah Thayyibah Baidawi who is the leader of *Darut Thayyibah Islamic Boarding School*. *Nyai* Thayyibah pioneered from the beginning of the establishment of *pesantren* since 1980 and is a great and independent female leader.³⁹

Malaysia also has a long history of Islamic education, with its Islamic boarding school system heavily influenced by the traditional *pesantren* of Indonesia. In Malaysia, Islamic boarding schools are known as *sekolah pondok* or *pondok* schools or *madrasah*. They emphasize Quranic studies and the memorization of Islamic texts, as well as religious practices and values.⁴⁰ These schools are often

³³ Samsul Zakaria, 'Kepemimpinan Perempuan Dalam Persepektif Hukum Islam (Studi Komparatif Antara Pemikiran Kh. Husein Muhammad Dan Prof. Siti Musdah Mulia)', *Khazanah*, 6.1 (2013), 65–97 <<https://doi.org/10.20885/khazanah.vol6.iss1.art7>>.

³⁴ Istiqlaliyani; Munawwaroh, Wajdi, and Fitri.

³⁵ Kafidhoh.

³⁶ M. Ma'ruf, 'Dekonstruksi Gender Dalam Pesantren', *Jurnal Al-Makrifat*, 1.1 (2016).

³⁷ Yuli, Basri, and Suhartini.

³⁸ Eva Maghfiroh, 'Kepemimpinan Pengasuh Perempuan Di Lingkungan Pesantren (Studi Atas Fenomena Kepemimpinan Nyai Maquatis Surroh Dalam Mengasuh Santri Putri Di Pondok Pesantren Kyai Syarifuddin Lumajang)', *An-Nisa'*, 11.2 (2018), 235–54 <<http://ejournal.iain-jember.ac.id/index.php/annisa/article/view/785>>.

³⁹ M. Zammil Al-Muttaqin and Sigit Priyo Sembodo, 'Pola Kepemimpinan Perempuan Di Pondok Pesantren Darut Thayyibah Dan Peran Sosialnya Di Masyarakat', *IRSYADUNA: Jurnal Studi Kemahasiswaan*, 1.3 (2021), 273–88.

⁴⁰ Rosnani Hashim and others, 'Traditional Islamic Education in Asia and Africa: A Comparative Study of Malaysia's Pondok, Indonesia's Pesantren and Nigeria's Traditional Madrasah', *World Journal of Islamic History and Civilization*, 1.2 (2011), 94–107.

associated with the Islamic reformist movement known as the Salafi movement, which emphasizes a return to the fundamentals of Islam as practiced during the time of the Prophet Muhammad *Sallahu 'Alaihi Wa Sallam* and his companions.

Sekolah pondok in Malaysia have a similar curriculum to those in Indonesia, with a focus on Islamic studies and Arabic language, along with secular subjects such as mathematics and science. However, there is also a greater emphasis on the integration of modern technology and teaching methods in Malaysian *sekolah pondok*. Compared to traditional *pesantren* in Indonesia, madrasah in Malaysia offer a more structured and standardized curriculum, with a greater emphasis on academic subjects and Islamic law.

In Malaysia, *Pondok* schools, also known as Islamic religious schools, have a long history in Malaysia, dating back to the 18th century. These schools have traditionally been male-dominated, with women playing a limited role in leadership positions. However, over the years, there have been women who have broken through these barriers and emerged as leaders in *Pondok* schools. One such woman is *Ustazah Zainab Awang*, who became the first female principal of a *Pondok* school in Malaysia in 2007. *Ustazah Zainab Awang's* leadership style was known for being inclusive and consultative.⁴¹ She was known to involve all stakeholders in the decision-making process, including the students, teachers, and parents. Another notable woman leader in *Pondok* schools is *Ustazah Siti Aminah Abdul Rahman*, who was appointed as the first female director of the *Pondok Tanah Merah* in Kelantan in 2017. She was responsible for overseeing the education and welfare of over 500 students in the school. *Ustazah Siti Aminah Abdul Rahman's* leadership style was known for being firm but fair. She was known to be strict when it came to discipline, but also caring and supportive towards the students.

These women leaders have paved the way for more women to take on leadership roles in *Pondok* schools in Malaysia. Today, there are more women serving as principals and directors in these schools, and their leadership styles are diverse and varied. Some prioritize inclusivity and consultation, while others focus on discipline and order. However, they all share a common goal of providing a quality education and nurturing environment for their students.

The title "*Ustazah*" in Malaysia is commonly used to refer to a female Islamic religious teacher.⁴² One example of a women leader in an Islamic boarding school in Malaysia is *Ustazah Norhafizah Musa*.⁴³ She is the founder with her husband Dr Azahar bin Yakuub and principal of *Maahad Tahfiz Integrasi Sains Madinatul Huffaz* in Kuala Lumpur, which is a leading Islamic boarding school for girls and boys in Malaysia.⁴⁴ *Ustazah Norhafizah Musa* is known for her dedication and passion in educating young Muslim girls in Malaysia. She has been actively involved in the Islamic education sector for over 20 years, and has been recognized for her contributions to the field. Under her leadership, *Madinatul Huffaz* has become a highly respected institution for Islamic education in Malaysia, with a strong focus on Quranic studies and character development. The school has also produced many outstanding graduates who have gone on to become successful professionals in various fields. *Ustazah Norhafizah Musa's* leadership style is characterized by her emphasis on discipline, perseverance, and the pursuit of knowledge. She is also known for her compassionate and caring approach towards her students, and is highly respected by both students

⁴¹ Nur Atikah, 'Suri Hati Tuan Guru Haji Abdul Hadi Awang: Toh Puan Seri Hajah Zainab Binti Awang Ngah', *Facebook.Com*, 2018 <https://www.facebook.com/UstazahNuridah/posts/suri-hati-tuan-guru-haji-abdul-hadi-awang-toh-puan-seri-hajah-zainab-binti-awang/1639533439461419/?_rdc=2&_rdr> [accessed 22 March 2023].

⁴² Ermanto, David Syasli, and Novia Juita, 'Comparing Ustaz Abdul Somad's Language Style to Ustazah Mama Dedeh's Language Style', *Proceedings of the Ninth International Conference on Language and Arts (ICLA 2020)*, 539.Icla 2020 (2021), 61–66 <<https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.210325.012>>.

⁴³ (Wikipedia, 2023)

⁴⁴ Admin, 'Maahad Tahfiz Integrasi Sains Madinatul Huffaz', *Tahfizmadinatulhuffaz.Com*, 2023 <<https://tahfizmadinatulhuffaz.com/pengenalan/>> [accessed 11 March 2023].

and parents alike.⁴⁵

Overall, Ustazah Norhafizah Musa is an excellent example of a women leader in an Islamic boarding school in Malaysia, who has dedicated her life to educating and empowering young Muslim girls.

While the situation in Brunei, which is an Islamic small country located on the island of Borneo, with a population that is predominantly Muslim. From the beginning, the purpose (*matlamat*) of Brunei State Islamic Education was to form pious people and pious communities starting from the childhood level.⁴⁶

Islamic boarding schools in Brunei are known as *sekolah pondok* or tahfiz schools. Religious schools or called *Sekolah Ugama* play an important role in the education and upbringing of their citizens. They are similar to the *pesantren* system in Indonesia and the *sekolah pondok* system in Malaysia, with a focus on Islamic studies and Arabic language, also it primarily focus on Quranic studies and the memorization of Islamic texts, with a lesser emphasis on academic subjects along with secular subjects such as mathematics and science.⁴⁷

However, unlike in Indonesia and Malaysia, *sekolah pondok* in Brunei are primarily reserved for male students. Female students in Brunei typically attend separate Islamic schools that are not part of the *sekolah pondok* system. The government of Brunei Darussalam has recently taken steps to modernize its Islamic education system, with plans to introduce more secular subjects and promote a more holistic approach to education that integrates Islamic values with modern knowledge.

In Brunei Darussalam, in the early years of *Pondok schools*, women leaders were often chosen for their religious knowledge and moral authority. They were respected for their piety and wisdom, and they used their influence to guide and educate the students under their care. They were also responsible for managing the daily affairs of the school, such as cooking, cleaning, and maintaining the facilities. As *Pondok schools* evolved and became more formalized, women leaders began to take on more administrative roles. They became involved in curriculum development, teacher training, and school governance. They also began to work more closely with male leaders, collaborating on policy and decision-making. Today, women play a significant role in the leadership of *Pondok schools* in Brunei Darussalam. They are actively involved in shaping the education and training of future generations of Muslim scholars and leaders. They are respected for their knowledge and expertise, and their leadership style is characterized by collaboration, consensus-building, and a deep commitment to the values of Islam. Overall, the history of women's leadership in *Pondok schools* in Brunei Darussalam is a testament to the importance of education and the central role that women have played in shaping Islamic education and scholarship in the region.

Women in Brunei have traditionally been underrepresented in leadership positions in Brunei's religious institutions, there have been some efforts to increase their involvement and representation. One notable example is *Datin Paduka Hajah Rokiah bint Haji Zakiah*, who is a President of Women's Business Council Brunei Darussalam (WBC).⁴⁸ Another well-known female leader in religious education in Brunei

⁴⁵ Fatimah Syarha Mohd Noordin, Mohammed Yusuf, and Nur Shahidah Paad, '[The Contemporary Challenges of Public Management by Women Celebrities in Malaysia] Cabaran Kontemporari Di Era Globalisasi Dalam Pengurusan Masyarakat Oleh Pendakwah Selebriti Wanita Di Malaysia', *Jurnal Islam Dan Masyarakat Kontemporari*, 21.2 (2020), 89–101 <<https://doi.org/10.37231/jimk.2020.21.2.485>>.

⁴⁶ Wasiah, 'Pendidikan Islam Di Brunei Darussalam', *A diba: Journal of Education*, 2.1 (2022), 97–108.

⁴⁷ Muhammad Yusran, 'Kurikulum Pendidikan Islam Di Thailand Dan Brunei Darussalam', *Jurnal Ar-Risalah*, 15.1 (2019), 131–32 <<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110805949.bm>>.

⁴⁸ Admin, 'WBC Brunei Darussalam Sertai ASEAN SME 2015', *Ihsan Majlis Perniagaan Wanita Brunei Darussalam*, 2015 <<https://www.pelitabrunei.gov.bn/Lists/Berita/NewDisplayForm.aspx?ID=8203&ContentTypeId=0x0100BC31BF6D2ED1E4459ACCF88DA3E23BA8>> [accessed 21 March 2023].

is *Datin Seri Paduka Dr. Hajah Romaizah bint Haji Mohd Salleh*, who is the Deputy Minister of Ministry of Education.⁴⁹ She is a scholar and educator who has made significant contributions to the development of Islamic education in Brunei and beyond. These women leaders have shown that women can play an important role in religious education and leadership in Brunei, and their contributions have helped pave the way for future generations of women in these fields.

In Brunei Darussalam, Religious Schools or *Sekolah Ugama* are compulsory for children, but there are no Islamic boarding schools or *Pondok Pesantren* in Brunei. Our in-depth interview with one of the Ustazah who is a local resident for many years stated that *Sekolah Ugama* in Brunei Darussalam are similar to madrassas in Indonesia, where *santris* study religion a few hours a day after school. And many schools in Brunei are led by women, it's just that the school is not in the form of an Islamic boarding school or *Pondok Pesantren* but a formal school, although there is a boarding or overnight option but it is only as a facility for students who live far from school, while students who live close to school do not stay overnight.⁵⁰

Table 1.

A Comparison conclusion between Islamic Boarding School and Women Leadership in Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam Indonesia:

| | Indonesia | Malaysia | Brunei Darussalam |
|---|---|---|--|
| Institution Terms | Pesantren/Madrasah | Sekolah Pondok/Madrasah | Sekolah Pondok/Sekolah Ugama |
| Islamic Boarding Institution Existence | Yes, there are many, named Pondok Pesantren | Yes, there are boarding schools for boys and girls | there are no Islamic boarding schools or <i>Pondok Pesantren</i> in Brunei. Although there’s a boarding or overnight option but it is only as a facility for students who live far from school, while students who live close to school do not stay overnight. |
| The existence of women’s leadership | Yes, very many. | More women serving as principals | Many lead elementary schools but not boarding schools |
| The types of leadership | Emphasizes collaboration, community-building, and service | Women’s leadership is less common, with a more hierarchical and rule-enforcing approach | women's leadership is limited, but some adopt a conservative, value-centric leadership style |

CONCLUSION

In summary, the research uncovers diverse women's leadership styles in Islamic boarding schools across Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam. Indonesian women leaders prioritize collaboration and community-building, contrasting with the more hierarchical and rule-enforcing approach in Malaysia. Brunei Darussalam displays limited but varied female leadership styles, reflecting conservative values. These distinctions stem from cultural, social, and religious factors, shaping women's roles in these

⁴⁹ Pebriansyah Ariefana, ‘Sejarah! Sultan Brunei Tunjuk Menteri Perempuan, Romaizah Jadi Menteri Pendidikan’, *Msn.Com*, 2022 <<https://www.msn.com/id-id/berita/dunia/sejarah-sultan-brunei-tunjuk-menteri-perempuan-romaizah-jadi-menteri-pendidikan/ar-AAYcIB5>> [accessed 23 March 2023].

⁵⁰ Nizma Armila, *Interview with Anonymous Source 21 March 2023 by Voice Call*.

institutions. The findings underscore the need for further in-depth exploration of these factors and emphasize the potential for cross-country knowledge exchange to support women's leadership in Islamic boarding schools. The study demonstrates that cultural influences significantly impact women's roles in these educational settings, showcasing the complexity of women's leadership across Southeast Asian countries. Overall, the study suggests that women's leadership in Islamic boarding schools varies across Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam, with different cultural and social factors influencing the role of women in these schools, and highlights the potential for Muslim women to become leaders in these schools and to play an important role in shaping the future of the Muslim community.

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