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Tirakat, *Barakah*, and The Legitimation of Leadership in *Pesantren*: A Study of Spiritual Authority and Governance

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Abstract: Research on spiritual leadership explains how leaders' spirituality shapes followers' motivation and well-being, whereas studies of *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) document the authority of the *kiai* (the *pesantren* leader) without showing how religious practices become publicly accepted grounds for that authority in an educational institution. This study asked how leaders' ascetic practices (*tirakat*) are interpreted by community members, how those interpretations relate to accepted authority, and how acceptance is carried across student cohorts and leadership succession. Method. We conducted a multisite qualitative case study of two *pesantren* in East Java, Indonesia, using interviews, observations, and documents. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, first within, then across sites. Findings. Informants described the leaders' practices as visible, communal, and consistent over time. They interpreted these practices as signs of moral integrity and often expressed that interpretation through the idiom of *barakah* (perceived divine blessing). Informants tied these interpretations to respect (*ta'dzim*), service (*khidmah*), and acceptance of leaders' decisions, which were reproduced through rules, roles, and communal work. The sites differed in succession: one relied on delegation among family members and senior alumni, the other on transferring the leadership of a Sufi order within the family. Implications and originality. The study proposes a context-bound conceptual model of how perceived spiritual credibility is converted into recognized authority in Islamic educational institutions, without claiming that spiritual practice causes organizational outcomes. The findings bear on educational leadership, teacher–student relations, and succession planning, and they point to the need to pair spiritual legitimacy with transparent decision-making.

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INTRODUCTION

The study of leadership has evolved over time, shifting from an initial focus on how leaders manage organizations effectively and efficiently toward a broader understanding of how values, ethics, and psychological and spiritual dimensions shape organizational life. Concern about leaders' integrity and declining and build trust in institutions has been one driver of this shift (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Ng & vanDuinkerken, 2021). More over when the discussion about leadership in educational institutions, where leaders are not only responsible for organizational direction but also serve as educators whose conduct may become a reference for students. Within this literature, spirituality has been studied as a source of ethical orientation, meaning at work, commitment, and well-being (Benefiel et al., 2014; Karakas, 2010; Reave, 2005).

The best-known account of this relationship is Spiritual Leadership Theory (SLT). Fry (2003) proposed that a leader who develops a shared vision and fosters hope/faith and altruistic love can cultivate among followers a sense of calling and membership, which in turn supports spiritual well-being, organizational commitment, and productivity. Later work extended the model to broader organizational outcomes (FRY & SLOCUM, 2008), and reviews have reported associations between spiritual leadership and ethical behavior, trust, well-being, and performance (Benefiel et al., 2014; Dent et al., 2005; Oh & Wang, 2020; Samul, 2019). Much of the empirical evidence, however, has come from surveys of employees in business and health-care organizations (De Carlo et al., 2020; Pio & Tampi, 2018) , while the theory is

generally presented as an inclusive framework that does not depend on a particular religious tradition (Fry, 2003). Related values-based approaches, such as servant leadership, have similarly examined the relationship between leaders' values, follower responses, and organizational outcomes (Eva et al., 2019). At the same time, reviews note continuing disagreement about the definition of spiritual leadership and the mechanisms through which it operates (Oh & Wang, 2020).

A related question concerns what happens to leadership when it must be sustained beyond the individual leader. In this perspective, sustainable leadership is not primarily about how long a particular leader can remain in a leadership position. Rather, it focuses on whether the values, practices, and capabilities associated with leadership can continue within the organization and be carried forward by subsequent actors. This issue is particularly relevant in educational institutions, where leadership is embedded in institutional culture and must be reproduced across successive generations of educators and learners. Yet the relationship between spiritual leadership and leadership sustainability has received less attention than the relationship between spiritual leadership and immediate psychological or organizational outcomes. In contexts where leadership authority is strongly attached to a particular religious figure, sustainability raises a further question: how can the values, practices, and legitimacy associated with one leader be reproduced when leadership passes to another?

Two recent lines of work bring the spiritual leadership literature closer to Islamic and Indonesian settings. (Azzuhri et al., 2024) derive leadership competencies from Al-Ghazali's cardinal virtues and test them among employees in the Islamic banking sector in Java, while proposing a framework for leader, spiritual, and moral development (Allen & Fry, 2023). Both concentrate primarily on the competencies or development of the individual leader. Studies of *pesantren* have begun to use related vocabulary. (Amin et al., 2025a) analyzed sustainability-oriented spiritual leadership in a large *pesantren* through transformational leadership and a management model of institutional resilience. (Hamdanah et al., 2025) examined how visionary leadership grounded in barakah, understood as divine blessing and moral authority, was translated into management strategies at one *pesantren* in South Sulawesi. (Karim et al., 2025) studied the spiritual leadership of kiai in relation to students' entrepreneurial spirit and independence. These studies demonstrate the relevance of spirituality to leadership and institutional life in Islamic educational settings, but they do not fully explain how religiously specific spiritual practices become socially recognized sources of leadership legitimacy or how such legitimacy is reproduced across leadership transitions.

An older body of *pesantren* scholarship treats the authority of the kiai as a starting point rather than as a process requiring further explanation. (Turmudi, 2006) describe kiai authority as resting on religious learning, genealogical and teacher–student ties, and personal standing, while (Lukens-Bull, 2005) shows how Javanese Islamic schooling contributes to the construction of religious identity. Research on *pesantren* governance has more recently turned to accountability. A systematic review reports that *pesantren* accountability is commonly framed as a double responsibility, to God and to other people, and that legitimacy theory is the theory most often used to explain it (Nurkhin et al., 2024). One study has compared the normative systems of *pesantren* and public schools in terms of educational authority and regulatory legitimacy (Hasan, 2025). This scholarship establishes the importance of kiai authority and legitimacy, but leaves less clearly specified the social processes through which individual religious practices become collectively recognized forms of authority and are subsequently reproduced as part of institutional and educational life.

Taken together, these bodies of literature leave an important question open. SLT explains spiritual leadership largely through shared vision, hope/faith, altruistic love, and followers' psychological states such as calling, membership, and spiritual well-being. Research on *pesantren* establishes that religious credibility, kiai authority, and barakah matter for educational and organizational life, while recent studies have begun to connect spiritual leadership with institutional sustainability. What remains less clear is what happens between these stages: how a leader's religious practices are understood by the community as expressions of moral integrity and legitimate authority; how this understanding develops through repeated interaction and everyday educational routines; and how it continues when leadership moves from one person to another. This study addresses this gap by examining spirituality not simply as a personal quality of a leader, but as a set of practices that are observed, interpreted, and given meaning within a

particular social and educational setting. From this perspective, the study links spiritual leadership with sustainable leadership by examining legitimacy, institutional continuity, and leadership succession rather than assuming that spirituality itself automatically leads to sustainable leadership. Table 1 summarizes how the present study relates to each body of work.

Table 1. Positioning of the study relative to prior research

Body of work	Representative studies	What it establishes	What it leaves open for the present study
Spiritual leadership theory and reviews	Fry (2003); Fry & Slocum (2008); Benefiel et al. (2014); Oh & Wang (2020); Pio & Tampi (2018); De Carlo et al. (2020)	Vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love are linked to calling, membership, well-being, and commitment; evidence is mostly follower-level and survey-based.	How a leader's tradition-specific practices become recognized authority in a community, and how that recognition is reproduced across cohorts and successions.
Spiritual leadership in Islamic and Indonesian settings	Azzuhri et al. (2024); Allen & Fry (2023)	Islamic virtue-based competencies and a framework for leader and moral development.	Focus on the individual leader's competencies or development; little on institutional recognition or succession in schools.
Spiritual leadership and *barakah* in *pesantren* management	Amin et al. (2025); Hamdanah et al. (2025); Karim et al. (2025)	Single-site accounts linking spiritual, transformational, or visionary leadership and *barakka* to management strategies, resilience, or student outcomes.	The process by which community interpretations become accepted authority; comparison of how two sites secure succession.
Kiai authority and *pesantren* governance	Dhofier (2011); Turmudi (2006); Nurkhin et al. (2024); Hasan (2025)	*Kiai* authority rests on learning, lineage, and standing; accountability combines responsibility to God and to others; legitimacy theory is widely used.	Legitimacy is often assumed or treated in the aggregate; the role of visible ascetic practice and of daily educational routines is less explicit.
This study	Two-site comparison guided by RQ1–RQ3	Reported and observed processes linking practice, interpretation, recognized authority, educational routines, and succession.	Context-bound conceptual model; causal claims and the truth of religious claims are not tested.

This issue is also closely related to education. A *pesantren* is an Islamic boarding school where students *(santri)* live and study with their teachers, and authority operates through formal positions as well as teaching, personal example, relationships, and institutional rules. The kiai consequently holds a distinctive position. The kiai is not merely responsible for managing the institution, but also represents the moral and religious orientation that shapes its educational mission. In the classical text widely studied in *pesantren, Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, the benefit of knowledge is closely related to respect for the teacher (Az-Zarnuji, 2019b) . Such norms link educational practice to authority, yet research on spiritual leadership has paid limited attention to how these norms are learned and reproduced across generations of students, and how they are reflected in subsequent leadership. Exploring this process can therefore extend leadership theory while also providing insight into how educational cultures are sustained and changed within *pesantren*.

The issue is relevant to *pesantren* leaders and boards concerned with succession and institutional continuity, as well as to policymakers working with an institution that has a long history in Indonesian Islamic education and has received a specific legal framework since 2019 (Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 18 of 2019 Concerning Pesantren, 2019) (Syafe'i, 2017).

Several local terms are used throughout this study. A *pesantren* is an Islamic boarding school led by a *kiai* (scholar and caregiver) in which *santri* (students) live and study; teachers are called *ustaz*. *Tirakat* denotes a set of ascetic and devotional disciplines, such as fasting, *wirid* (repeated recitation of prescribed formulas), *riyadhah* (spiritual training), *mujahadah* (striving against the lower self), *qiyam al-lail* (night prayer), and *suluk* (a period of intensive Sufi practice). In Islamic scholarship, these disciplines are associated with *tazkiyat al-nafs*, the purification of the soul (Al-Ghazali, 2005). *Barakah* refers to divine blessing; in *pesantren* life, it is also an everyday interpretive idiom for the good, benefit, and ease that community members attribute to piety, service, and closeness to a respected teacher. *Thariqah* is a Sufi order or path, led by a *mursyid* (spiritual guide), and *sanad* is the chain through which knowledge is transmitted from teacher to teacher. *Ta'dzim* is deep respect toward teachers, and *khidmah* is devotional service to a teacher, the *pesantren*, or other people. Further terms are explained where they first appear in the findings. These terms are treated as participants' categories and as culturally situated concepts rather than as assumptions adopted by the researchers. This study does not assess whether *barakah* exists or operates as a divine effect. Rather, it examines how community members understand, invoke, and act upon the concept in everyday *pesantren* life.

To study this process, the research brings together several perspectives that are used to interpret the empirical evidence rather than to establish a predetermined causal model. Spiritual Leadership Theory (Louis W. Fry, 2003) as Grand Theory and provides the main starting point for examining spiritual leadership and its relationship with followers and organizational life. Weber's (1978) discussion of charismatic, traditional, and legal-rational authority is useful for understanding how authority is established and how charismatic authority may become routinized, including through kinship. Suchman's (Mayer et al., 1995) concept of legitimacy shifts attention to how an actor's conduct is regarded as appropriate and desirable within a socially constructed system of norms, emphasizing recognition by others rather than claims made by leaders themselves. Berger and Luckmann (1966) help explain how individual actions can become collective and taken for granted through externalization, objectivation, and internalization, while Bevir (2013) draws attention to the influence of traditions, beliefs, and practices on governance. Schein (2017) further shows how leaders shape organizational values through role modeling, teaching, and everyday routines. Taken together, these perspectives provide a basis for examining how spiritual practices acquire social meaning, become connected to legitimacy, and are subsequently sustained through educational and institutional practices.

The purpose of this study is therefore to analyze how the *tirakat* and *thariqah* practices of *pesantren* leaders are enacted and recognized by community members as dimensions of spiritual leadership, how these practices and their meanings become associated with the perceived legitimacy of *kiai* leadership, and how such recognition is reproduced through educational routines and leadership succession in ways that illuminate sustainable leadership in *pesantren*. Accordingly, the study asks how *tirakat* and *thariqah* practices are made visible and interpreted as signs of a leader's moral integrity, including through the idiom of *barakah*; through what social and organizational processes these interpretations become associated with accepted authority, including deference, compliance, and acceptance of leaders' decisions and rules; and how recognition, spiritual leadership practices, and legitimacy are reproduced through educational routines and leadership succession, with implications for educational leadership and governance.

The study makes three contributions. First, it specifies observable and reportable processes through which perceived spiritual credibility becomes associated with recognized authority, including the public legibility of spiritual practices, attribution of integrity and motive, deferential conduct, repeated communal routines, and the transmission of practices and values through roles and succession. Second, it extends the discussion of spiritual leadership by showing how, in the *pesantren* context, it is embedded in educational routines and leadership succession rather than being examined solely through leader–follower psychological responses. This provides a context-bound account of how spiritual leadership may

be related to sustainable leadership through processes of legitimacy and reproduction. Third, it separates participants' accounts from the authors' interpretations and clearly states what the data can and cannot support. The study does not claim that *tirakat* or *barakah* objectively produces leadership legitimacy, nor that spiritual leadership universally determines organizational sustainability. Rather, it proposes a context-bound conceptual model, derived from two *pesantren* cases, of how spiritual practices are socially interpreted, legitimized, and reproduced within an educational institution. The next section describes the research method, followed by findings organized around the research questions and a discussion of the emerging model, its limits, educational implications, and conclusions.

METHOD

Research Design

We used a qualitative, multisite case study design (Stake, 2013; Yin & Campbell, 2018). The design suits the research questions because they concern how people interpret and enact practices in bounded institutional settings, and because comparing two cases with different institutional arrangements makes it possible to see which processes recur and which depend on the setting. The study is interpretive: we treat participants' accounts as evidence of how they understand and justify their practices, and we do not evaluate the truth of religious claims. In line with the logic of theory building from cases (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007), the outcome is a conceptual model of limited scope, not a tested theory.

Research Sites

The study was conducted in two *pesantren* in East Java, Indonesia, referred to here as Site A and Site B. They were chosen purposively because both maintain a living tradition of *tirakat* and *riyadhah*, both have shown institutional continuity, and they differ in ways that allow comparison. Site B has an established *thariqah* and holds *suluk* retreats, whereas the *tirakat* at Site A, as participants described it, centers on the founder's tradition of *riyadhah*. Both offer non-formal religious education alongside formal schooling. The founder of Site A had died by the time of data collection, and leadership had passed to his children; the senior *kiai* of Site B remained active in the leadership of the *pesantren*. The sites and participants are referred to by codes to protect their identities.

Participants and Sampling

Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their sustained involvement in the pesantren and their direct knowledge of its spiritual practices, decision-making, educational routines, or leadership transitions. The selection was intended to capture different roles and different degrees of proximity to pesantren leadershipas shows in Table 2. Six participants were included in the study, with three from Site A and three from Site B. The participants comprised caregivers or members of caregivers' families, administrators, khodam, senior kiai, and alumni, allowing the study to consider leadership practices from both internal and external perspectives.

At Site A, the participants included KH. Sholeh Bahruddin, the founder and kiai of the pesantren; Siti Mukarramatussa'diyyah, a female administrator who had been involved in the pesantren for approximately 10 years; and Kasyiful Anwar, a male alumnus who had studied there for approximately eight years. At Site B, the participants included KH. Hasan Maghfur, the senior kiai and son of the founder, KH. Irfan Tonawi; Eko, a male khodam who had been involved in the pesantren for approximately 11 years; and Ainul Yaqin, a male alumnus who had studied there for approximately 12 years.

Five participants were interviewed directly. Data from KH. Sholeh Bahruddin were obtained through statements documented by the researcher during religious teaching sessions and informal conversations in which he conveyed advice and reflections during the researcher's visits. These statements were treated as naturally occurring verbal accounts rather than as responses to a formal interview. The combination of leadership figures, those closely involved in daily pesantren activities, administrators, and alumni was intended to provide perspectives from different positions within the leadership and educational environment.

Table 2. Participants whose accounts are quoted in this article

Code	Site	Role	Data used in this article	Length of Affiliation
A1	A	Caregiver; son of the founder; head of the *pesantren* after the founder's death	Interview: *tirakat* tradition; succession	-
A2	A	Alumnus	Interview: trust in decisions and in the internal regulations	
A3	A	Senior student serving as companion to the *kiai* (*khodam*)	Interview: obedience, communal work	
B1	B	Senior *kiai*	Interview: sharia and *thariqah*	
B2	B	Administrator of a women's dormitory; about ten years in the *pesantren*	Interview: *suluk*, *khidmah*, obedience	
B3	B	Alumnus	Interview: *sanad*, the leader's conduct, succession	
—	A, B	Other participants not quoted roles and numbers	Interviews and observation notes	

Ethical Considerations

A study was conducted with the oral permission and consent of the relevant *pesantren* authorities and participants. No formal institutional ethics approval or written research-permission letter was obtained. Before each direct interview, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and the intended use of the information, and participants provided oral informed consent. Participants also agreed to the use of their names and statements in the article. No interviews were audio-recorded; the researcher relied on contemporaneous notes and written documentation of participants' statements.

For KH. Sholeh Bahruddin, the study draws on statements conveyed during religious teaching sessions and informal conversations during the researcher's visits rather than from a formally recorded interview. These statements were documented by the researcher during the fieldwork, with KH. Sholeh Bahruddin's knowledge and consent for their use as research data. The two *pesantren* and the leaders discussed in this article are therefore not anonymized, as permission was given for their institutional and personal identities to be disclosed.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles et al., (2014), comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The analysis was conducted in two stages. First, within each *pesantren*, interview notes, field notes, and relevant documents were reviewed and coded according to issues related to spiritual practices, participants' interpretations, leadership conduct, forms of deference and obedience, educational routines, and leadership succession. Related codes were then grouped into broader analytical categories and organized into matrices to identify patterns within each site.

Second, the categories and matrices from the two sites were compared to identify recurring processes as well as differences in how spiritual practices were interpreted, socially recognized, and reproduced through everyday educational and leadership practices. The analysis also considered data that did not fully correspond with emerging patterns in order to avoid interpreting the findings solely in terms of the researchers' initial expectations.

In reporting the findings, three levels of evidence were distinguished: (a) what participants said or believed, (b) what was observed or documented concerning conduct and institutional arrangements, and (c) the researchers' interpretation of these data. Participant accounts are presented as participants' perspectives rather than as objective evidence of theological claims. Interpretive claims concerning authority, legitimacy, and leadership continuity are therefore grounded in observable practices, participant

accounts, and documented institutional arrangements, while their scope is limited to the contexts examined in the two *pesantren*.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the study was addressed through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln, 1990; Nowell et al., 2017; Tracy, 2010). Credibility was supported through triangulation of participants, sites, and data sources, including interviews, observations, and relevant documents. Interpretations were checked against the available field records and compared across participant accounts and the two sites.

The researcher was an alumnus of Site A and a member of the management at Site B. These relationships facilitated access and contextual understanding but also required reflexive attention during interpretation. The analysis therefore distinguished participants' accounts, documented practices, and the researchers' interpretations. Transferability was addressed through contextual descriptions of the two *pesantren* and by limiting the findings to the processes examined in these settings.

RESULT

The findings are organized around the three research questions. For each question, participant accounts are presented alongside relevant observational evidence, followed by the researchers' interpretation. Where the available evidence is limited, this is explicitly acknowledged. Interview excerpts are translated into English, while culturally specific terms are retained in their original form where relevant to the analysis. Table 3 provides a comparative overview of the two *pesantren* and establishes the contextual basis for the analysis.

Table 3. Outline of the two sites as described by participants

Dimension	Site A	Site B
Educational setting	Non-formal madrasah diniyah and Qur'an madrasah, alongside a formal institution established about two years before the interview (A1)	Formal schools and early-childhood education alongside the thariqah (B1)
Spiritual practices described by participants	Multi-year dalail fasting, wirid dalail, ngerowot (abstaining from rice), and qiyam al-lail led by the caregiver each night (A1)	Sharia combined with the Naqshbandiyyah–Qadiriyyah thariqah; suluk of three days and nights involving fasting from animal-derived side dishes, the five daily prayers, and additional wirid (B1, B2)
Participant-described bases of trust in the leader	Tirakat, daily wirid, fasting, simple living, steadfast teaching, and participation in communal work (A2, A3)	Continuity of sanad, steadfastness, strength of the thariqah, and avoidance of practical political roles (B3)
Succession arrangement	Delegation by the founder, before his death, of separate units to sons and senior alumni (A1)	Sons appointed as mursyid, each with a dormitory unit and a role in formal institutions (B3)

Spiritual Practices as Visible and Educationally Embedded Practices

Practices as shared, organized activities.

In both sites, informants described spiritual discipline as part of institutional life and not as a private matter. A1 explained that his *pesantren* had long been known for *tirakat* and *riyadhah*, to the extent that senior students from other *pesantren* came to *nyepuh*, a Javanese term he glossed as maturing one's knowledge by strengthening one's grasp of Sufism through *riyadhah*:

> In this *pesantren*, since the time of [the founder], it has been known for *tirakat* and *riyadhah*. In the past, many senior students from surrounding *pesantren* came here to

> *nyepuh* (to mature knowledge, that is, to strengthen knowledge of Sufism through *riyadhah*). The practices that are often done, and certainly done, include *dalail* fasting, which is fasting for three years in a row, the recitation of *wirid dalail*, *ngerowot* fasting (not eating rice), and *qiyam al-lail* led by the caregiver every night. The students see that every sharia science needs to be perfected through Sufi practice and *tirakat*, through *riyadhah*, so that knowledge is not limited to *dzahir* (outward, exoteric knowledge). (A1, Site A)

A1's account lists several practices: a multi-year fast known as *dalail* fasting, the recitation of *wirid dalail*, *ngerowot*, and *qiyam al-lail* led by the caregiver every night. Two features matter for the argument. First, the practices are collective and led by the caregiver, which makes them visible to students and visitors; they are not only personal devotion. Second, A1 explains them through an educational idea: sharia sciences need to be perfected through Sufi practice so that knowledge does not remain at the level of the outward. This is the participants' way of relating learning to discipline. It should be read as a statement about how the institution understands its educational purpose, and it is consistent with the classical framing of *tazkiyat al-nafs*, in which learning is completed by the training of character (Al-Ghazali, 2005) (Nurul Romdoni & Malihah, 2020). It does not, by itself, show that the practices produce the effects claimed for them. At Site B, B1 located the same concern in the relation between sharia and *thariqah*:

> In this *pesantren* there is sharia, and there is also *thariqah* (the Naqshbandiyyah–Qadiriyyah order). So that we do not lean to one side, the balance of sharia and the way of *thariqah* work together. If sharia alone easily blames people, *thariqah* is also needed so that people can be meek and think broadly and flexibly. (B1, Site B)

> Formal schools and early-childhood institutions are merely the courtyard; the core essence remains the *thariqah*. (B1, Site B)

B1 presents sharia as the normative base and *thariqah* as a corrective that moderates judgment; he describes what the *thariqah* is for. His second statement ranks the institution's activities: teaching in formal schools is the outer part and the spiritual path is the center. Both statements show how the leader defines the *pesantren*'s educational identity, namely as a place where knowledge is meant to be joined with a disciplined spiritual path. Because this is a self-description by the person whose authority is at issue, it is evidence of the institution's official framing and not independent evidence of its effects. B2 described the *suluk* practiced at Site B:

> *Suluk* lasts three days (a *tirakat* practice in the *thariqah*); initially it was only three days and three nights. The *tirakat* consists of fasting from side dishes made of animals or animal products, performing the five daily prayers, and more *wirid*. The effect I feel is not so much about worldly things. The heart feels relieved and calm, not restless. It is like understanding the meaning of life better. There is a saying like this: the closer to the source, the more water is stored. When we do *suluk*, worship seems not hard at all, and sustenance seems to be there. (B2, Site B)

B2's account is a first-person report of calm, reduced attachment to worldly matters, and ease in worship. Such reports matter in two ways. They indicate why participants find the practices credible and worth continuing, since they are described as personally meaningful. They also resemble the well-being and meaning outcomes that SLT attributes to spiritual practice (Fry, 2003), so at the level of individual experience our informants' reports are compatible with existing theory. They cannot, however, demonstrate that *tirakat* forms the moral integrity of *leaders*: B2 is a student administrator describing her own experience, and no independent measure verifies it. Nor does the account explain *barakah*. B2's remark that sustenance 'seems to be there' is better read as an example of the idiom that links discipline to ease, which reappears below.

These accounts were also supported by observations of spiritual practices as organized communal activities. At Site B, *qiyam al-lail* was conducted nightly under the leadership of senior students appointed by the kiai, with participation from students who had joined the *thariqah*. Collective *suluk* was also conducted under the guidance of the kiai and, on some occasions, his sons. At Site A, *qiyam al-lail*

had previously been conducted nightly with the founder and has continued under the guidance of his successor. *Dalail* fasting and other forms of *tirakat* were likewise practiced under the guidance of the same leadership tradition.

The two sites frame spiritual discipline differently. At Site A, *tirakat* is described as a way of tempering knowledge (*nyepuh ilmu*), which gives it an epistemic and moral emphasis anchored in the individual's progress in learning. At Site B, the *thariqah* is described as the framework that gives the institution its center, which gives it an institutional emphasis. Both frames assign spiritual discipline an educational purpose, and both are voiced by leaders or senior members who speak for the institution.

SLT explains how a leader's vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love foster calling and membership among followers (Fry, 2003), and it has been extended to organizational outcomes (Fry & Slocum, 2008). Our data do not contradict this, and B2's account even fits it. The difference lies in the question asked. SLT asks what a leader's spiritual qualities do for followers' motivation. The *pesantren* cases raise a prior question: what makes a specific, tradition-bound set of practices count, for a community, as evidence of a leader's credibility? The accounts point to a combination of features. The practices are public, since the caregiver leads them and they are done in the community. They are cast in a shared religious vocabulary (*tazkiyat al-nafs*, *riyadhah*, *thariqah*). And they are explicitly tied to the institution's idea of education. The claim we can defend from RQ1 is therefore modest: participants describe *tirakat* and *thariqah* as visible, organized practices that they associate with the moral formation of both students and leaders. Whether the practices in fact produce integrity is not something interviews can establish.

From Visible Practice to Recognized Leadership Authority

The second question concerns how the interpretation of practice becomes deference. Three informants in different positions, a student companion and an alumnus at Site A and an alumnus at Site B, gave accounts that point to the same set of processes.

> Father *Kiai* never asked me to show *ta'dzim* or to obey. My obedience and that of my fellow students grew out of our respect and love for him. He is a practitioner of *tirakat*, a practitioner of daily *wirid*, someone who fasts, lives simply, and remains steadfast (*istiqamah*) in teaching even when he is sick. This makes us respect and obey his decisions, because we are sure that his rulings do not come from nowhere; there must be inner considerations that we do not understand. This includes *ro'an* (communal work): we go to *ro'an* because we see him setting an example. Father *Kiai*, even though he is old, still takes part in *ro'an* and even inspects the construction. (A3, Site A (companion to the *kiai*))

> I personally believe in Father *Kiai*. His decisions on religious matters and on the *pesantren*, I believe, are the best. This is because he decides everything only after *tirakat* over many years, for example, the *Qanun Pondok* (the *pesantren*'s internal regulations), which he compiled under the spiritual direction of his own teacher, through his *tirakat*. All of his decisions are never arbitrary or made without deep spiritual contemplation. (A2, Site A (alumnus))

> Our belief in [this *pesantren*] rests on the succession of *sanad* to the *Mbah Kiai*; we know who his teachers are, and they can be traced back to the Prophet. In addition, I salute *Mbah Kiai's* extraordinary steadfastness (*istiqamah*). The *thariqah* is also strong. *Mbah Kiai* does not want to take practical political positions or positions in [a large religious organization]. This was also passed on to his sons and daughters, so that his family does not clash with the community and alumni and so that he remains steadfast in his religious study and recitation. (B3, Site B (alumnus))

In each account, trust is anchored in conduct that others can see. A3 cites the *kiai's* daily *wirid*, fasting, simple living, and steadfast teaching even when ill, and his participation in *ro'an* despite his age. B3 cites the leader's steadfastness, the strength of the *thariqah*, and his refusal of practical political roles or positions in mass organizations, a stance extended to his children so that the family would not clash with the community. These are behaviors that observers can, in principle, check against what they see, which distinguishes them from statements about inner states. We call this the public legibility of practice. It also shows that trust is grounded in conduct over time, since steadfastness (*istiqamah*) appears in two of the three accounts. Perceived integrity is a familiar antecedent of trust in leaders (Dirks & Ferrin, 2022; Mayer et al., 1995a), so the appeal to visible, consistent conduct is not peculiar to *pesantren*; what is

distinctive is the religious vocabulary and the specific practices cited. The interview accounts were consistent with observations of the kiai participating in *ro'an* at both sites, particularly in the morning and during construction activities. The kiai was therefore observed not only in instructional or religious roles but also participating in collective work alongside members of the *pesantren*. This provides observable context for participants' accounts that respect for the kiai was associated with his example and participation in communal activities.

A3 and A2 go a step further, from observed conduct to inferred motive. A3 says the *kiai's* rulings do not come from nowhere and that there must be inner considerations that the students do not understand. A2 says the *kiai's* decisions are never arbitrary or made without deep spiritual contemplation. Both attribute good-faith, spiritually informed deliberation to the leader without seeing, or being told, the reasoning behind particular decisions. We interpret this as a presumption of deliberation. It has consequences for governance. It allows decisions to be accepted when their reasons are not explained, which supports smooth compliance, but it also means that acceptance rests on the leader's credibility and not on scrutiny of reasons. The section on educational implications returns to this point.

A3 states that the *kiai* never asked for *ta'dzim* or obedience and that it grew from respect and love; he links his own participation in *ro'an* to seeing the *kiai* take part. This description of deference as voluntary is important data on how deference is experienced. Observations also showed students responding to the kiai and senior leaders through forms of respectful and compliant conduct, consistent with participants' descriptions of *ta'dzim*, obedience, and *khidmah*. These observations provide behavioral evidence that deference was enacted in everyday interactions. They do not, however, establish that such compliance was entirely voluntary or free from social pressure, particularly within a residential educational setting. Such conduct cannot be taken as proof that no pressure exists. Students live in the institution, have been taught norms such as *ta'dzim* toward teachers, and were interviewed by researchers who reached them through the institution. We therefore report voluntary compliance as the participants' own characterization. Students live in the institution, have been taught norms such as *ta'dzim* toward teachers, and were interviewed by researchers who reached them through the institution, confirming the access route. We therefore report voluntary compliance as the participants' own characterization.

A2 ties his trust in the *Qanun Pondok* to the way the rules were prepared: the *kiai* compiled them after long *tirakat* and under the spiritual direction of his own teacher. Trust in a rule is thus derived from the credibility of its author and not from the procedure by which it was enacted. This shows one way in which recognition is written into the institution: rules inherit the authority of the person who made them. The organizational dimension of authority was also visible in the rules governing everyday conduct. At Site A, the pesantren applies *Qanun 6*, while Site B maintains *Mo Limo*, a set of five prohibitions. In both sites, these rules were established under the authority of the respective kiai and formed part of the institutional framework encountered by students. The observations therefore show that leadership authority was not expressed only through personal deference but was also translated into formalized expectations governing everyday behavior.

In the three excerpts above, informants ground their trust mainly in visible conduct and presumed deliberation. The word *barakah* is not used in these accounts. It is explicit in B2's account, where she describes the benefits she associates with *suluk*, *khidmah*, and obedience. The interpretation that *barakah* converts moral integrity into legitimacy is therefore not supported by these excerpts, and we do not treat *barakah* as a demonstrated mediating step. Instead, we treat it as an interpretive idiom through which participants describe benefits they attribute to devotion and obedience. In the present study, *barakah* is therefore positioned as part of participants' religious interpretation rather than as an independently established mechanism of leadership legitimacy.

DISCUSSION

These processes are consistent with Weber et al., (1978) view that authority depends on recognition by followers, and with Suchman, (1995). view of legitimacy as a perception held by an audience. It is worth noting what the audience cites as evidence. It does not cite extraordinary powers, the classic marks of charisma, but disciplined, routinized, and checkable conduct, together with lineage

(*sanad*) in B3's account. Authority in these cases seems to rest on a mixture of charismatic, traditional, and exemplary-ascetic grounds, and our data cannot weigh their respective contributions. In Bevir's (2013b) terms, governance in these *pesantren* is held together by a tradition of belief and practice that participants reproduce in daily life. The processes named above are our attempt to specify empirically how such a tradition becomes authority: legible practice, attributed motive, deferential conduct, and codification.

Reproducing Leadership through Educational Routines and Succession

Educational routines

B2 linked service, obedience, and the sense of ease in daily life:

> There are many blessings that I have received during my ten years here, and the most strongly felt is the blessing of *khidmah* in taking care of the children (junior students). When I am obedient to the teacher, I feel my life runs more smoothly. Even though there is a heavy feeling because so many routine things clash in the *pesantren*, all the roads feel easier. If *Ning* (the *kiai's* daughter) sends me to do *tirakat istiqamah* in doing good, then I find many blessings in my life. (B2, Site B)

Three points stand out. First, *khidmah* and obedience are routine roles and not exceptional acts: senior students care for juniors, and the account treats this as a source of benefit. In educational terms, *khidmah* is a form of apprenticeship and peer care. Second, the account shows an interpretive loop. Benefits and ease in life are attributed to obedience, which attaches a reward to deference that does not come from the teacher. We interpret this as one plausible way in which deference is reinforced. Our data support the suggestion only through this account, and it should be tested. Third, the assignment of *tirakat* by a member of the leader's family shows that spiritual discipline is at times directed by authority as well as chosen. That combination of assigned and valued practice is typical of a formative institution, and it deserves attention from an educational-ethical point of view.

These interview accounts were also reflected in the educational routines observed at both sites. Students were regularly gathered under the direction of senior students or the kiai, and senior members provided guidance to other students. Religious instruction likewise emphasized knowledge, obedience, and student formation. At Site A, these themes were conveyed through the study of Ihya' Ulum al-Din and Ta'lim al-Muta'allim, while at Site B they were addressed through the study of Tafsir al-Jalalayn and Ta'lim al-Muta'allim. Such routines positioned khidmah, obedience, and religious discipline within everyday relationships between senior and junior members and made them part of the educational environment encountered by successive groups of students.

B2's reading matches the classical claim in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* that the benefit of knowledge depends on respect for teachers and on earnest effort (Az-Zarnuji, 2019a). Following Schein & Schein (2017), *khidmah*, A3's role as *khodam*, the communal work of *ro'an* led by the *kiai*, and the nightly and periodic disciplines can be seen as ways in which leaders embed values: role modeling, teaching, and the routines to which attention is given. Each cohort learns, by taking part, the vocabulary in which the leader's conduct is interpreted and the roles through which respect is enacted. In Berger & Luckmann's (1966) terms, this is how a practice that began as one person's discipline is objectified in institutional roles and internalized by newcomers. We offer this as an interpretation of the pattern across accounts, not as something the data measure.

Leadership succession

At Site A, A1 described succession as something the founder arranged before his death:

> Two months before my father died, he gathered all his sons who were settled (living at home) and several senior alumni around [the regency] in the living room. He said that the ones to manage the *pesantren* next would be all of us. He then appointed two alumni, each entrusted with managing the non-formal *madrasah diniyah* and the Qur'an *madrasah*, and appointed my younger brother, who was not there at the time, to establish and manage a formal institution, which, thank God, has now been running for two years. Then I was appointed to manage the *pesantren* as a whole. Of course, some alumni at first could not accept that the extraordinary figure of [my father] was being replaced by us, who had not yet done anything, but the majority of alumni could accept and support us. The proof is that some of them have taken part in teaching early on and become

> donors, and many alumni still often come to visit, even those from Central Java, West Nusa Tenggara, and Lampung. We also held several *ngaji* [Islamic study sessions] across Java and Sumatra for alumni. So, thank God, it is like this. (A1, Site A)

At Site B, B3 described a different pathway:

> At [Site B], regeneration is carried out in a distinctive way, marked by the appointment of the biological sons as *mursyid* of the *thariqah*. But not only that: usually each son, who has a family, is given a separate dormitory unit that he can manage. In addition, his son is also given responsibility as caregiver of each formal institution. But our belief as alumni and students is further strengthened by the appointment of his biological son as *mursyid*. (B3, Site B)

A1's account describes a meeting held two months before the founder's death in which the founder assigned separate units to his sons and to senior alumni and named A1 to lead the *pesantren* as a whole. A1 also reported that some alumni at first could not accept being led by the founder's children, that most accepted and supported them, and that alumni continued to teach, donate, visit, and attend study sessions organized for them. We call this pattern *functional-collective delegation*: authority is divided among units and shared among family members and senior alumni through a public act performed by the founder while alive. Two features stand out. Acceptance was described as partial and negotiated, not automatic, which agrees with Suchman's (1995) view that audiences confer legitimacy. And the arrangement uses the founder's recognized standing to legitimate the successors, a device compatible with (Weber et al., 1978) account of how charismatic authority is transferred, including by designation. The evidence is one account, given by a successor, and it should be read with that in mind.

B3's account describes a pathway in which the leader's sons were appointed as *mursyid* of the *thariqah*, usually with a dormitory unit of their own and responsibility for formal institutions, and in which alumni's belief was said to be strengthened by the appointment of a son as *mursyid*. We call this *lineage-based transfer with unit-level autonomy*. Here the *thariqah* supplies a ready-made role, the *mursyid*, that carries recognized spiritual rank, so succession is anchored in a role whose meaning the community already shares. Observations further showed that leadership continuity was embedded in the organizational structure of both sites. At Site A, different educational institutions under the pesantren foundation were managed through differentiated responsibilities among members of the founder's family. At Site B, separate institutional units were likewise operated by the founder's descendants. These arrangements indicate that succession was incorporated into the ongoing organization of educational units rather than occurring only as a symbolic transfer of leadership.

Comparison and caution.

Both pathways are kin-centered. Kinship is a familiar way for religious authority to be routinized (Weber et al., 1978), which makes it a competing explanation for acceptance. The pathways also differ. At Site A, the founder distributed authority across functional units and included senior alumni; at Site B, authority is carried by a spiritual office in an order with its own lineage. Both sites also maintain formal educational units, which suggests that continuity was accompanied by institutional expansion. The literature on sustainable leadership treats planned succession as a condition of continuity (Hargreaves & Fink, 2012), and the two cases show two ways in which *pesantren* plan it. What we cannot say is that spiritual legitimacy is the main determinant of continuity. The accounts show that many alumni accepted the successors, according to participants; they do not show why, or for how long.

A Context-Bound Conceptual Model

Table 4 brings the findings together while keeping participants' accounts, our interpretation, and the strength of the evidence apart. Figure 2 then presents the processes as a conceptual model. The model summarizes processes reported and observed in two cases. The solid arrows in Figure 2 show the direction of influence in participants' accounts and in our reading of them; they do not represent tested causal effects. The dashed elements mark ideas that appear in participants' talk, or alternative explanations, but that our evidence does not establish.

Table 4. Synthesis of findings: participants' accounts, analytic interpretation, evidence, and educational implications

Process (RQ)	Participants' accounts	Authors' interpretation	Evidence and its limits	Educational and governance implication
Legible practice (RQ1)	Nightly *qiyam al-lail* led by the caregiver, multi-year fasting, *wirid*, *suluk*; Sufi practice said to complete the learning of sharia (A1, B1, B2)	Practices are communal and public and are framed as part of the institution's educational purpose	Interviews; leaders' self-descriptions are not independent evidence; observation and documents insert	Spiritual discipline is part of the curriculum in a broad sense; its content and demands should be explicit to students and parents
Attributed integrity (RQ1–RQ2)	Leader described as steadfast, simple, involved in communal work, distant from politics (A2, A3, B3)	Community members ground trust in conduct they can see over time	Interviews with insiders; observation insert	Educators' conduct is a primary source of authority; consistency matters as much as title
Presumed deliberation (RQ2)	Decisions are 'never arbitrary'; 'inner considerations' students do not understand (A2, A3)	Acceptance of decisions rests on presumed good-faith deliberation, which can substitute for explanation	Two accounts; interpretive	Risk to transparency; leaders can explain rationale and open channels for questions
Deferential practice (RQ2–RQ3)	Obedience described as born of respect and love; *ta'dzim*; *khidmah*; *ro'an* (A3, B2)	Deference is enacted in routine roles and communal work and described as voluntary; pressure and socialization cannot be excluded	Interviews; observation insert	Teacher–student relations combine reverence with care; boundaries and student welfare need attention
Codification (RQ2)	Trust in the *Qanun Pondok* because of how the leader prepared it (A2)	Rules inherit the credibility of their author	One account;	Rule-making can be made explicit and participatory without losing its religious grounding
Succession (RQ3)	Delegation to sons and senior alumni before the founder's death (A1); sons appointed *mursyid* with dormitory units (B3); some alumni initially unable to accept (A1)	Two kin-centered pathways, each mediated by a publicly recognized act or office; acceptance partial and negotiated	Two accounts, one from a successor; Observation insert	Plan succession early and openly; combine functional delegation with recognized offices

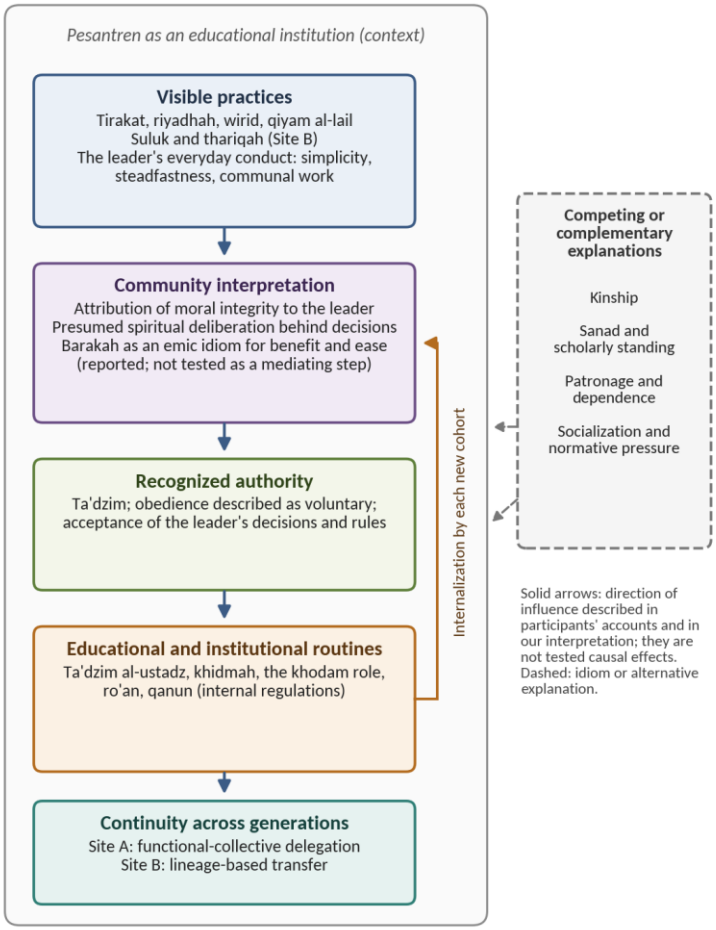


Figure 2. Conceptual model of how perceived spiritual credibility becomes recognized authority and is reproduced in two *pesantren* (analytic model, not a causal test)

Positioning the Contribution

1. Relative to spiritual leadership theory

We do not claim that SLT overlooks organizational outcomes; Fry and Slocum (2008) extended it to organizational performance. Our contribution lies elsewhere. In a religious educational institution, we specify social processes through which a leader's spiritual credibility is interpreted, recognized, and reproduced within the community and its institutional routines, which SLT's psychological mediators, such as calling and membership, do not describe. The follower-level states that SLT addresses, such as the calm and meaning B2 reports, and the community-level processes described here may operate together. This study cannot show how these levels interact, and we therefore read our findings as a contextual complement to SLT rather than a challenge to it.

2. Relative to legitimacy scholarship and *pesantren* research

The finding that *kiai* authority rests on more than formal office is well established (Dhofier, 2011; Turmudi, 2006), and legitimacy theory has been used in *pesantren* accountability research (Nurkhin et al., 2024). *Barakka* has been linked to visionary leadership and management (Hamdanah et al., 2025), and spiritual leadership to institutional resilience (Amin et al., 2025). We add three things: an account of processes rather than only relations between concepts; an educational focus on ta'dzim, khidmah, the khodam role, ro'an, and qanun as routines through which recognition is enacted and reproduced; and a comparison of two succession pathways.

We use *spiritual governance* as a descriptive term for the set of religious practices, interpretations, and routines through which authority is recognized and continuity is reproduced within the institution, drawing on Bevir's (2013b) view of governance as arising from traditions and practices. We call the

resulting conceptual synthesis the Spiritual Governance of Traditional *Pesantren* (SGTP) model. It is a context-bound conceptual model rather than a formal theory because it does not yet specify testable relationships or boundary conditions (Whetten, 1989).

Alternative Explanations and Limits of Inference

Five alternative or complementary explanations limit what the data allow us to conclude. First, *kinship*: both succession pathways are kin-centered, so acceptance may reflect hereditary claims as much as spiritual credibility. Second, *scholarly standing and lineage*: B3 cites *sanad* alongside conduct, and we cannot separate their weights. Third, *patronage and dependence*: students and alumni may depend on the *pesantren* for education, networks, or livelihood, which can encourage loyalty independently of perceived integrity. Fourth, *socialization and normative pressure*: participants were socialized into norms of *ta'dzim*, and interviews conducted inside the institution may favor accounts that honor its leaders. Fifth, our sample consists mainly of committed insiders, and the only trace of dissent is A1's remark that some alumni initially could not accept the succession; we did not interview people who had left or who disagreed.

Given these limits, the findings support a description of how community members explain and enact deference. They do not show that *tirakat* causes moral integrity, that *barakah* operates as a causal mechanism, or that spiritual practice determines institutional sustainability. The first two are questions that lie partly outside empirical social research, and the third would require designs, such as longitudinal or comparative studies with contrasting cases, that this study does not have.

Educational Implications and Practical Recommendations

The following recommendations are derived from the findings and are offered as propositions for practice in *pesantren* and similar religious educational institutions, not as tested interventions.

1. Treat exemplary conduct as pedagogy and make it teachable
   Participants grounded trust in what leaders and senior students visibly did. Roles such as *khodam* and *khidmah* can function as forms of apprenticeship in leadership and service. Institutions could make these roles explicit as developmental pathways, with clear expectations, mentoring, and opportunities for reflection, so that learning through example does not depend on chance proximity to the leader.
2. Pair spiritual credibility with explicit decision rationale.
   Because trust rests partly on presumed spiritual deliberation, leaders can explain the reasons for major decisions and rules, record how internal regulations were prepared, and provide channels through which students, teachers, and alumni can ask questions. This is consistent with the double accountability, to God and to others, described in *pesantren* research (Nurkhin et al., 2024), and it keeps *ta'dzim* from precluding scrutiny.
3. Plan succession early and openly.
   Site A's pre-death delegation and Site B's use of a recognized spiritual office show that succession can be prepared while the leader is active. Boards and families can document who is responsible for which units, involve senior alumni, and communicate arrangements to the wider community, as planned succession is a recognized condition of sustainable leadership (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).
4. Keep spiritual disciplines voluntary in practice and attentive to student welfare.
   B2's account shows that *tirakat* is at times assigned by authority, and A1's account mentions multi-year fasting. *Pesantren* can distinguish clearly between required and optional practices, explain the purposes of demanding disciplines to students and parents, and attend to students' health and workload, especially where *khidmah* adds to study demands.
5. Support teacher development that engages the tradition critically.
   Professional development for *ustaz* and school leaders can include structured discussion of classical texts on the teacher–student relation, such as *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, alongside contemporary ideas about mentoring, care, and professional boundaries, so that reverence and accountability are treated as compatible.

6. For policy and support organizations.
   Bodies that support *pesantren* under the current legal framework Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 18 of 2019 Concerning Pesantren (2019) can recognize indigenous sources of legitimacy while encouraging transparent governance instruments, instead of imposing purely administrative templates that ignore how authority is actually recognized.

Limitations

This study has several limitations beyond those discussed above. It covers two *pesantren* in East Java with particular cultural, historical, and religious affiliations, one of which has an established *thariqah*, so its findings cannot be generalized to all *pesantren*. It relies mainly on the accounts of insiders, and the concepts of *barakah* and spiritual legitimacy are contextual and depend on participants' interpretations. Interviews were translated into English, and some nuance may have been lost. The model has not been tested in other settings, including modern *pesantren*, institutions without a *thariqah*, and *pesantren* led by women. The researcher's prior relationship with the two sites—as an alumnus of one and a member of management at the other—facilitated access and contextual understanding but may also have shaped access, participant responses, and interpretation

CONCLUSION

This study asked how the *tirakat* of *pesantren* leaders comes to be recognized as a ground of authority and how that recognition is reproduced. In answer to RQ1, participants in both sites described *tirakat* and *thariqah* as visible, organized practices tied to the institution's idea of education, and they interpreted the leaders' consistent conduct as a sign of moral integrity, sometimes speaking of it through the idiom of *barakah*. In answer to RQ2, participants linked these interpretations to acceptance of authority through four processes: public legibility of practice, attribution of motive and presumed deliberation, deferential conduct described as voluntary, and codification in rules. In answer to RQ3, recognition was reproduced through educational routines such as *ta'dzim*, *khidmah*, the *khodam* role, and *ro'an*, and through two different succession pathways: functional-collective delegation at Site A and lineage-based transfer with unit-level autonomy at Site B.

The contribution is a context-bound conceptual model, the SGP model, that specifies these processes and their educational embedding while stating what the evidence cannot show. The study makes no claim that spiritual practice causes moral integrity or institutional sustainability. For practice, the findings suggest treating exemplary conduct as pedagogy, pairing spiritual credibility with explicit decision rationale, and planning succession openly.

The findings suggest three propositions for future testing. (1) Authority grounded in spiritual discipline is more readily recognized when practices are public, consistent over time, and interpretable in the community's vocabulary. (2) A presumption of spiritual deliberation reduces the demand for explicit justification of decisions, with possible costs for transparency. (3) Succession is more readily accepted when authority is transferred through publicly recognized acts and offices. Future research could test these propositions in modern *pesantren*, in institutions without a *thariqah*, and in institutions led by women, and could include the voices of people who left or who disagree. Longitudinal studies could follow successions as they unfold, and mixed-methods designs could develop measures of perceived integrity, deference, and institutional outcomes. Comparative work with other religious educational institutions would show which processes are specific to *pesantren* and which are shared.

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AI USAGE STATEMENT

In revising this manuscript in response to the reviewers' comments, the authors used a generative AI assistant (Claude, Anthropic) to assist with restructuring sections of the manuscript, refining the presentation of arguments based on the authors' existing analysis and empirical materials, and improving English language and clarity. AI assistance was also used during the revision process to help identify areas requiring clarification and to suggest alternative formulations of text.

The data collection, analysis, interpretation of the findings, and development of the manuscript's substantive arguments were conducted by the authors. The authors remained responsible for determining the relevance and validity of all revisions and did not delegate the interpretation of empirical findings or the formulation of the study's conclusions to the AI tool. All AI-assisted text was reviewed, revised, and, where necessary, rewritten by the authors to ensure that it accurately reflected the underlying data, analysis, and intended argument of the study.

The authors also checked the references and quotations used in the revised manuscript against the original sources and interview materials. AI tools were not used to collect empirical data or to substitute for the authors' analysis, interpretation, or scholarly judgment.

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