

Islamic education leadership model comparative study of K.H. Ahmad Dahlan and K.H. Imam Zarkasy

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze and compare the leadership models of Islamic education of KH Ahmad Dahlan and KH Imam Zarkasyi in the context of contemporary Islamic education challenges characterized by leadership crises, degradation of values, and demands for adaptation to changing times. This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature study method on various relevant primary and secondary sources. The results of the study show that both figures apply leadership that is transformational, visionary, and oriented towards reforming the people's education system. KH Ahmad Dahlan carried out transformation through the Muhammadiyah movement by emphasizing the integration of religious and general knowledge, reform of learning methods, and strengthening the role of education in building the socio-religious awareness of the community. Meanwhile, KH Imam Zarkasyi modernized the pesantren through institutional system reform, professional education management, an integrated curriculum, and character development of students based on pesantren values. This study concludes that in the midst of the challenges of modernization, globalization, and character crisis, the leadership models of the two figures remain relevant as a strategic reference for the development of sustainable and competitive Islamic education.

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Introduction

Islam is a universal and comprehensive religion, which regulates the procedures of its people in worshipping Allah and covers all aspects of life. His teachings cover various fields, ranging from worship, social life, the search for knowledge—both religious and general to state management and affairs related to leaders and leadership (Shihab et al., 2023).

In reality, every human being is a leader, so his every action and behavior will be held accountable. Leadership can arise even in a personal context, and even if a person only leads himself, the responsibility for his or her leadership remains attached. This shows how important the role of leadership is. (Syadzili, 2018). This is in accordance with the words of Allah SWT in QS Al-Baqarah verse 30:

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً ۖ قَالُوا أَتَجْعَلُ فِيهَا مَن يُفْسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَاءَ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ ۖ قَالَ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ٣٠

"(Remember) when your Lord said to the angels, 'I am going to make a caliph¹³ on earth.'" They said, "Do you want to make the one who destroys and sheds blood there, while we praise You and sanctify Your name?" He said, "Surely I know what you do not know."

كُلُّكُمْ رَاعٍ وَكُلُّكُمْ مَسْئُولٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ الْإِمَامُ رَاعٍ وَمَسْئُولٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ وَالرَّجُلُ رَاعٍ فِي أَهْلِهِ وَهُوَ مَسْئُولٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ

"Each of you is a leader and will be held accountable for your leadership. A priest is a leader and will be held accountable and likewise a man is a leader for his family and will be held accountable for his leadership." (HR. Bukhari: 2278).

Leaders have a very decisive role in the success or failure of an organization or business. Whether in the fields of business, education, health, religion, social, political, or government, the quality of a leader is a benchmark for the success of the institution he leads (Abdul Wahab, 2011). This is because leaders must be able to manage the organization well, give a positive influence to others, show the right direction and behavior to be done together, and foster a spirit of cooperation in the team. Good leadership also has a big impact on the motivation and spirit of the group (Scott, 2019).

Leadership is an activity that guides a group of people to achieve a common goal. It reflects a person's ability to influence, encourage, direct, and move others to be willing to accept those influences. Leadership is an important element for the organization to function effectively (Burhanuddin, 2019).

Leadership in Islam has a very important position. In its implementation, a leader is bound by various complex rules to regulate the leadership system, both in the scope of individuals, society, nation, and the state (Yani, 2021). In the Islamic view, leadership has a very important role. Every group or organization is encouraged to have a leader, even if the group is small (Shihab et al., 2023). This is in line with the words of the Prophet Muhammad SAW.

"It was narrated from Abu Said from Abu Hurairah that the two said, the Messenger of Allah said, "When three people go out to travel, let them make one of them the leader." (HR. Abu Daud number 2241).

The leadership of Islamic education is currently a crucial issue because it greatly affects the quality and sustainability of educational institutions. Various studies, one of which was carried out by (Tamsiyati et al., 2025) It shows that many institutions still face difficulties integrating spiritual values and professionalism in management and decision-making practices, resulting in a weak quality of education and organizational systems. Other research conducted by (Thohri, 2022) In practice, many Islamic educational institutions still have difficulty balancing Islamic values with the demands of modernization and technology, so a leadership model that is not only religious, but also innovative and adaptive to the changing times is needed.

The problem of Islamic educational leadership is not only structural, but also cultural, characterized by the tendency of a less participatory leadership style (Saputri & Ahmadi, 2025), weak communication, and suboptimal delegation of tasks that hinder the performance of the institution. This condition is exacerbated by weak strategic vision and low managerial competence of leaders, especially in facing the challenges of the global and digital era (Setyaningrum et al., 2025).

With the above conditions, it is very important to examine the leadership model of Islamic education that is relevant to today's challenges, because without an adaptive, visionary, and contextual leadership model, Islamic educational institutions are at risk of stagnation, lack of innovation, and are unable to respond to the needs of students, society, and global development. The study of historical leadership models as developed by Islamic education reformers in the past such as K.H. Ahmad Dahlan and K.H. Imam Zarkasyi has the potential to provide new insights to improve contemporary Islamic education leadership practices.

K.H. Ahmad Dahlan. He is known as the founder of the Muhammadiyah Islamic organization and is an important figure in the reform of Islamic education in the country. His ideas about education were progressive and brought about revolutionary change (Shihab et al., 2023). Another figure is K.H. Imam Zarkasyi or "Pak Zar", a fighter for Islamic education who consistently fights for the role of humans as caliphs. His struggle was manifested through thought, devotion, and sacrifice of wealth in order to uphold the word of Allah. Armed with his experience studying in various Islamic boarding schools in Java and Sumatra, he founded Kulliyatul Mu'allimin al-Islamiyah (KMI), a six-year secondary education institution (Rahmawati, 2019).

Previous studies have examined KH Ahmad Dahlan and KH Imam Zarkasyi separately in the context of educational thinking. As in several previous studies, there was a discussion on "The leadership model of K.H. Ahmad Dahlan's pre-emptive Islamic education in Muhammadiyah". However, it only discusses one leadership model owned by K.H. Ahmad Dahlan, such as the research conducted by Mohammad Ihsan Wahab and friends entitled "Prophetic Leadership: The Urgency of Examining the Leadership Model of KH Ahmad Dahlan in the 21st Century Era". The purpose of this study is to find out the prophetic leadership model of KH Ahmad Dahlan, the results of the research are four characters of the Prophet Muhammad SAW that need to be adapted in the leadership model, namely Amanah (Trust, Integrity and Responsibility), Siddiq (Honest and Transparent), Fathonah (Competent and Professional) and Tabligh (communication/networking) (Wahab et al., 2024). Another research conducted by Ruslan Rasid with the title "Transformative Leadership of K. H. Ahmad Dahlan in Muhammadiyah", this study aims to find out the leadership model of K. H. Ahmad Dahlan. The results of the study show that K. H. Ahmad Dahlan has a transformative leadership spirit that is charismatic, motivating, and has intellectual intelligence and visionary thinking (Rasid, 2018).

Other research conducted by Nurhijjah & Hariyanto (2024) This study aims to examine the role of KH Imam Zarkasyi in transforming traditional pesantren into modern pesantren programs, especially through the reform of the education system, curriculum, management, and pesantren culture. The results of the study show that KH Imam Zarkasyi succeeded in building Pondok Modern Gontor with an organized classical education system, integrating religious and general knowledge, implementing modern institutional management, and instilling the values of the Five Souls as the basis for character formation and student leadership, so that Gontor became a model of modern pesantren that had a wide influence in Indonesia.

There has been no research that specifically examines and compares the educational leadership model of K.H. Ahmad Dahlan and K.H. Imam Zarkasyi in one typological framework. Therefore, this article offers a new perspective by positioning both as two typologies of Islamic education leadership, namely *movement-based leadership* and *institution-based leadership*, with the title "*Islamic Education Leadership Model: A Comparative Study of K.H. Ahmad Dahlan and K.H. Imam Zarkasyi.*"

Method

The method used in this study is qualitative research with a literature study approach (*Library Research*). In writing this article, a qualitative approach was used with a data collection method through literature studies (Subandi, 2016). In the data collection process, two types of information sources are used, namely primary and secondary sources. Primary sources refer to books while secondary sources refer to reputable and accredited journal articles, which relate to research topics (Ahmad Asron Mundofi., 2024).

This study uses the literature study method as a data collection technique. The author collected various information from a number of available sources, then carefully examined and examined the data. The data obtained is then combined into a whole unit before the validity verification process is carried out. After that, the data is selected, edited, and rearranged so

that it is presented in the form of a systematic and easy-to-understand sentence. Based on the results of the data processing, the author gained an understanding of the leadership model of Islamic education which is the main focus of this study.

Results

Results

Biography of K.H. Ahmad Dahlan

K.H. Ahmad Dahlan was born in Kauman Yogyakarta on August 1, 1868 and died on February 23, 1921. His nickname is Muhammad Darwis born to his father, K.H. Abu Bakar bin K.H. M. Sulaiman, served as a preacher at the Great Mosque of Yogyakarta at that time, which was part of the Sultanate of Yogyakarta. His mother, Nyai Abu Bakar, was the daughter of K.H. Ibrahim bin K.H. Hasan, who also served as the *Kepengulon* in the Sultanate of Ngayogyakarta (Putra, 2018).

Muhammad Darwis is a descendant of a great scholar who developed Islam on the island of Java, because from his lineage his descendants will reach Maulana Ibrahim. Muhammad Darwisy (Nyai Abu Bakar) is the brother of his father Siti Walidah (K.H. Muh Fadhil) Maka K HA. Dahlan and Nyai A. Dahlan are cousins (Salam, 2009).

Dervish first received his religious education from his father. At the age of 8, he was fluent in reading and reciting the Qur'an according to the rules of *tajweed* (Putra, 2018). He is known as a diligent child, intelligent, diligent in learning, and has high curiosity and creativity (S. Setiawan, 2025).

At the age of 15, K.H. Ahmad Dahlan went to Makkah to deepen his religious knowledge and interact with Islamic reformist thinkers. After returning from his first Hajj, he gained a deep understanding of the idea of renewal, then returned to live in Makkah for five years to study. Ahead of his return, Muhammad Darwis changed his name to Haji Ahmad Dahlan (Putra, 2018; Akhyar et al., 2024; Shihab et al., 2023). In 1889, he married Siti Walidah and was blessed with six children. In 1903, he returned to Makkah with his son to study religion from a number of scholars of the archipelago (Mu'thi et al., 2015).

Biography of KH Imam Zarkasyi

K.H. Imam Zarkasyi was born in Gontor, Ponorogo, East Java on March 21, 1910 and died in Madiun on March 30, 1985, leaving behind a wife and eleven children. He is the youngest of seven children, the fruit of Kiai Santoso Anom Besari and Nyai Sudarmi Santoso. From a young age, he grew up in a devout Muslim family (Scott, 2018).

Not even 16 years old, K.H. Imam Zarkasyi studied at various Islamic boarding schools in his native area, then continued his studies at a number of institutions in Solo until 1930 (Scott, 2018), with a major interest in Arabic. After that, he studied at Kweekschool Padang Panjang until 1935. Upon returning to Gontor in 1936, he introduced the *Kulliyatul Mu'allimin al-Islamiyah* (KMI) education system and directly led the institution. The principle of his struggle is formulated in the phrase, "my politics is education", which emphasizes that nation-building must be pursued through education (Fatihah, 2018).

After completing his studies at Kweekschool Padang Panjang until 1935, K.H. Imam Zarkasyi served as the director of the school for one year at the request of Mahmud Yunus, before returning to Gontor because he felt that he was more needed there. In 1936, he introduced the *Kulliyatul Mu'allimin al-Islamiyah* (KMI) education system and led it. In addition to being active in Gontor, he also served in the Ministry of Religion and the Ministry of Education, was involved in Hezbollah, led PGII (1948–1955), and represented Indonesia in various international forums. He is known as an educational figure and a prolific writer with many works that are still used in Islamic boarding schools, especially at Pondok Modern Gontor (Scott, 2018).

Transformative K. H. Ahmad Dahlan in Reconstructing the Qibla Direction of the Great Mosque of Yogyakarta

K. H. Ahmad Dahlan's transformative leadership in reconstructing the direction of the qibla of the great mosque of Yogyakarta, changing the direction of the qibla is a rational and scientific action, based on astronomy and astronomy. K.H. Ahmad Dahlan introduced a new way of thinking in understanding religion that religion does not contradict science.

Motivated by the number of mosques and mosques on the island of Java to the Great Mosque of Yogyakarta whose qibla faces west is just right, namely facing Ethiopia/Africa, not exactly to the northwest of 24 degrees (qibla direction). After matching with the knowledge of falak that he had learned earlier and assisted with the use of compasses and world maps, it was found that many did not face the qibla. K. H. Ahmad Dahlan is of the view that facing the qibla is a valid condition for prayer. K. H. Ahmad Dahlan is also of the view that Muslims who cannot see the Kaaba directly when praying, it is enough to face their faces towards the Kaaba. The views of K. H. Ahmad Dahlan are in line with the account of Kyai Syuja', with the term *jihatu al-Ka'bah*, used by K. H. Ahmad Dahlan to show that Muslims outside Makkah are considered valid if they pray facing the Kaaba and not '*ain al-Ka'bah*' (Rasid, 2018). Therefore, for about a year, dialogues were held regarding the reconstruction of the direction of this qibla until finally K. H. Ahmad Dahlan gathered scholars to discuss the problem of this qibla in Yogyakarta. Although the results of the deliberation did not produce a consensus decision due to the pros and cons regarding the reconstruction of the direction of the Qibla, the *Idealized Influence Charisma and Intellectual Stimullation* (Suminto, 2016).

A blend of ideas and facts (Rasid, 2018) owned by K. H. Ahmad Dahlan was able to arouse and attract the hearts of young people who always eavesdropped on the discussion of the direction of the qibla who were also relatives of the head of the palace (Rasid, 2018). There was a line change incident *shaf* at the great mosque of Yogyakarta at that time on the basis of their own initiative without the order and connection of K. H. Ahmad Dahlan. K. H. Ahmad Dahlan as a person who has a transformative leadership spirit and thinks strategically *Inclusive Relativism* in the sense of understanding that the need for a sportsmanship and universal spirit that may have a positive value to others, so that K. H. Ahmad Dahlan applied the direction of the qibla by making a shaf line on Langgar Kidul that he made himself.

The Transformation of KH's Thinking. Imam Zarkasyi

The reform of pesantren education initiated by K.H. Imam Zarkasyi departed from the awareness of the various limitations that traditional pesantren had at that time. Therefore, in order to answer and correct these weaknesses, he paid great attention to the formulation and reaffirmation of the direction and purpose of education, because In the mid-1970s, Islamic educational institutions in general were relatively far behind modern schools (Scott, 2018). One of the forms of modernization of Islamic education in Indonesia is the Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor (PMDG), which aims to update the Islamic education system through the development of Islamic boarding schools, without imitating the Western education model (Madjid, 1997).

Institutional reform in Gontor began with the waqf of Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor to the Waqf Board, so that the hut no longer became private property, but belonged to Muslims (Courtesy of Hakim., 2004). The Waqf Agency is the highest institution that has the authority to appoint kiai and set policy directions through the Panca Jangka program (Zarkasyi, 2005). With this system, kiai and teachers do not manage the finances of the cottage, so the management of the institution runs professionally, openly, and objectively (*Gontor Magazine February Issue*, 2014).

K.H. Imam Zarkasyi updated the curriculum of Islamic boarding schools in Gontor by applying the concept of 100% general science and 100% religious science. In addition to Islamic subjects, he included various general sciences and emphasized mastery of Arabic and English as the main characteristics of education. Arabic language learning uses direct methods and is used as the language of instruction, while the entire education system is designed to form the science, character, and personality of students in a balanced manner (Scott, 2018).

Strategy and Thoughts of K. H. Ahmad Dahlan Establishing the Muhammadiyah Organization in Kauman Yogyakarta

By *Normative-Conceptual*, the identity or characteristics of Muhammadiyah are addressed to the Islamic movement, the da'wah movement and the *Tajdid*/renewal (Ali, 2016), so long before the establishment of Muhammadiyah in 1912 carried out by K. H. Ahmad Dahlan, there had been many movements or efforts that colored his struggle, including (Rasid, 2018):

1. After his return, K. H. Ahmad Dahlan performed the Hajj, establishing a close relationship with the colonial government of the Dutch East Indies by becoming an educator in the Netherlands. *Nursery School Gubernamurs* Jetis belonged to the Dutch colonials. This can be said to look unique because K. H. Ahmad Dahlan towards the Dutch East Indies is patterned *Rival-Moderate* (Rasid, 2018), in the sense of recognizing the existence of the Dutch East Indies colonial as the government at that time, there were no writings that led to opposition to the Dutch colonial colonialism, but it did not mean that K. H. Ahmad Dahlan sided with the Dutch because of the struggle and the thought pattern of K. H. Ahmad Dahlan paid attention to the weak and the oppression that occurred at that time.
2. The Joining of K. H. Ahmad Dahlan with the Budi Utomo Organization (Syukri, M., & Ismail, 2018), with one of the goals being to incorporate religious values into the organization according to the needs of the members of the Budi Utomo organization, so that through this organization K. H. Ahmad Dahlan got encouragement to create an Islamic school.
3. Affiliated with *Jam'iatul Khair* and Syarikat Islam.
4. Conducting tabligh and visits to various regions on the island of Java in order to voice Muslims must return to *the Qur'an* and *As-Sunnah* and avoid all forms of practices that plunge the perpetrators into shirk, *khurafa'at*, and superstition.

All of these are transformative leadership strategies and patterns carried out by K. H. Ahmad Dahlan in preparing the forum for his movement (Rasid, 2018).

K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's Leadership Strategy

In developing pesantren as an institution that educates the nation and forms individuals of faith and morals, K.H. Imam Zarkasyi and his two brothers developed a strategy through the synthesis of four advanced Islamic educational institutions. This step is done using the *Benchmarking*, which compares various institutions based on their respective advantages for the development of Islamic boarding schools (Nurhijjah & Hariyanto, 2024).

Benchmarking, according to Tatterson and Westinghouse in Ellitan & Anatan (2021), is an effort to compare and adopt best practices on an ongoing basis to establish values, vision, and improve the quality of the institution. In this context, K.H. Imam Zarkasyi has applied it through the synthesis of four advanced educational institutions while maintaining the Indonesian characteristics of Islamic boarding schools. Updates are made not by removing old ones, but by fixing and improving those that are still relevant in a directional way and based on a clear purpose (Sudarmanto et al., 2021).

Educational updates don't need to remove the old ones, but simply improve and refine those that are still relevant to a clear purpose. Therefore, benchmarking is needed as the basis for the preparation of institutional development strategies (Nurhijjah & Hariyanto, 2024).

Benchmarking has a number of important benefits for institutions or organizations in developing their development strategies, including (Nurhijjah & Hariyanto, 2024):

1. help identify the level of efficiency and effectiveness of institutional functions, processes, practices, and performance in more depth;
2. smoothing and effective performance improvement processes;
3. accelerate the implementation of institutional development;
4. to be the basis for planning strategic steps to catch up while encouraging continuous improvement; and
5. to be a means to make institutional changes and updates.

In the leadership of the Islamic boarding school, the kiai plays the role of a central figure as well as the founder and developer of the institution, so it is required to have a clear and planned strategy. The strategy must be systematically prepared and implemented properly so that the long-term goals of the pesantren can be achieved (Ahmad, 2020).

K.H Ahmad Dahlan's Thoughts on Islamic Education Reform

K.H. Ahmad Dahlan is known as a figure of Islamic reform in Indonesia who advanced Islamic education through modern methods, based on the experience of Islamic boarding schools and studies in Makkah. His concern for deviant religious practices and his wide association encouraged him to make reforms, especially in the field of education (Mayarisa, 2018).

The idea of reforming K.H. Ahmad Dahlan, especially in the field of education, was not written by himself because he was better known as a praxis figure. His thinking is understood through the works and testimonies of subsequent generations, especially regarding the renewal of Islamic educational goals, methods, and processes. This can be understood as follows (Akhyar et al., 2024).

1. Education System

During the Dutch colonial period, indigenous education was in a backward condition and was more directed towards colonial interests, Christianization, and the provision of cheap administrative labor, while community education was still limited to pesantren and suraus that focused on religious science (I. Setiawan, 2018). Muhammadiyah responded to this condition by establishing modern schools that were different from colonial schools, especially by including Qur'an lessons in its curriculum (Akhyar et al., 2024). At that time, the colonial school system included Village Schools, Second Class Schools, Bumiputra Schools, and First Class Schools established in 1914 (I. Setiawan, 2018).

According to Abdul Mu'thi, K.H. Ahmad Dahlan updated the curriculum and educational methods by integrating general science and religion, implementing a tiered classical system, fighting for religious teaching in government schools, and developing formal and non-formal religious education. He also updated the learning methods through dialogue and question and answer, raised the status of Islamic schools to be equal to Dutch schools, and equipped educational facilities with a modern classroom system (Mu'thi et al., 2015).

2. Educational Objectives

The purpose of K.H. Ahmad Dahlan's education is a renewal that combines Islamic boarding school education and modern schools, to straighten the understanding of Islam, free the community from ignorance, and arouse the spirit against colonialism. He emphasized the importance of pursuing the highest possible knowledge and encouraging Muhammadiyah cadres to become professionals, then return to serve the people and the organization (Roybah & Munib, 2022).

3. Learning Materials

The learning materials according to K.H. Ahmad Dahlan include:

- a. Aqidah, with the affirmation of monotheism and the rejection of tuberculosis (superstition, bid'ah, superstition)
- b. Worship, which is taught according to the Qur'an and Sunnah as the main duty of man;
- c. Morality, to form the behavior of courtesy to Allah, oneself, others, and nature;
- d. Muamalah, as a guideline for social and economic life that remains based on sharia; and
- e. General science, which is seen as important for developing intellect, strengthening religious understanding, and advancing the lives of the people.

4. Teaching methods

K.H. Ahmad Dahlan teaches religion not only through texts, but also through real practice, such as in the teaching of Surah Al-Ma'un which emphasizes social concern. He emphasized the awareness and practice of teachings, so that the ummah does not just memorize, but live and realize them in actions that are beneficial to society and the nation (Alim & Ali, 2021; Son, 2018).

Islamic Education Reform K.H. Imam Zarkasyi

1. Madrasah Education System Update

K.H. Imam Zarkasyi started the reform of the madrasah by making KMI (Kulliyatul Mu'allimin al-Islamiyah) the center of Gontor's educational planning and curriculum. This system replaces the traditional methods of sorogan and wetonan with a modern class system without leaving the spirit of the pesantren. The curriculum is designed to be adaptive to the development of science and technology and the needs of the community to develop the potential of students as a whole and regulate learning objectives, methods, and activities both inside and outside the classroom (Suparman, 2020).

The KMI curriculum makes Gontor a modern pesantren with a classical teaching system that combines religious, general, and skills (Mahrussilah, 2022). Unlike traditional Islamic boarding schools, Gontor reforms language teaching through *direct method* (Berlitz method) so that students not only master theory, but also actively practice language (Mustadi et al., 2021). This method is applied not only in language lessons, but also in all intra, co, and extracurricular activities with the principles of exemplary, directing, assignment, habituation, and creating an environment. This update places KMI as a cottage system and curriculum, which is strategically included in the *Corporate Strategy* because it is directly related to the mission, objectives, and direction of the institution's development (Mustadi et al., 2021)

2. Updating the Islamic Boarding School Education System

Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor requires students to participate in 24-hour education through classroom and non-classroom activities under the guidance of teachers, so that education takes place comprehensively and shapes the personality of students intellectually, morally, and physically. Based on the classification of the M. Ridlwan Nasir Islamic boarding school, Gontor is a modern pesantren because it uses a classical system and abandons the sorogan and wetonan methods, although it still maintains the main elements of the pesantren such as dormitories, kiai, santri, mosques, and religious education (Nurhijjah & Hariyanto, 2024)

Through the KMI curriculum, Gontor integrates the pondok and madrasah system (formal and non-formal) in a balanced manner between religious, general, and skillful sciences. Education at Gontor not only emphasizes the academic aspect, but also the formation of the soul, ethics, and personality of students according to the motto: virtuous, healthy, knowledgeable, and free-thinking. The renewal of this pesantren system, including

strengthening the teaching of the book and skills activities, can be categorized as *Corporate Strategy* because it concerns the mission and direction of the development of the institution (Nurhijjah & Hariyanto, 2024).

3. Institutional System Update

The Gontor Waqf Agency (YPPWPM) is the highest institution responsible for the sustainability and development of the Darussalam Gontor Modern Pond. Its management is developed with a *Enterprise Strategy* which emphasizes institutional relationships with the community to maintain existence, improve service quality, and expand reach. In the institutional aspect, it is also applied *Business Strategy* through strengthening the excellence of institutions, especially through the quality of alumni and the development of universities as a means of increasing public trust (Nurhijjah & Hariyanto, 2024).

K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's initial strategy was carried out through *Benchmarking*, which then gave birth to three main reforms: (1) the madrasah education system by making KMI a curriculum and abandoning the sorogan-wetonan method; (2) the pesantren education system through the renewal of language, book, and skill teaching activities; and (3) the institutional system through strengthening the role of the Waqf Agency. The update of the madrasah and pesantren system includes *Corporate Strategy*, while institutional updates include *Enterprise Strategy* and *Business Strategy* (Nurhijjah & Hariyanto, 2024).

Discussion

K.H. Ahmad Dahlan's Leadership Model in Islamic Education

K.H. Ahmad Dahlan's leadership model in Islamic education is as follows:

1. Humanism Leadership

According to K.H. Ahmad Dahlan, Islamic education from the perspective of humanism is directed at the formation of morals based on the Qur'an and Hadith, emphasizing that religious learning does not stop at memorization, but must be realized in real practice. This attitude was born out of his concern for the people who studied Islam in a superficial and formalistic manner so that they lost their substantive meaning. Therefore, Dahlan developed a method of awareness-based education, as reflected in his teaching of Surah al-Ma'un which was not only repeated to be memorized, but also required to be practiced in the form of social concern for the poor (S. Setiawan, 2025).

In terms of humanist leadership, K.H. Dahlan's thinking is also reflected in the way he leads the congregation by providing space for dialogue, motivation, and empathy for the social conditions of Muslims who at that time were still lagging behind in the field of education and the welfare of the general public. His leadership is inclusive, respectful of each individual and not authoritarian (Rasid, 2018).

2. Liberation Leadership

K.H. Ahmad Dahlan emphasized that the purpose of Islamic education is the formation of morals, not just the mastery of religious texts. He emphasized the importance of practicing the Qur'an and hadith in real life through learning that fosters cognitive and moral awareness. Under his leadership, Muhammadiyah developed an integrated education between religious and general knowledge in a modern way to liberate the ummah from intellectual and social backwardness (S. Setiawan, 2025).

3. Transcendent Leadership

The dimension of transcendence in the leadership of K.H. Ahmad Dahlan is reflected in his efforts to unite the goals of education with divine awareness, where Allah SWT is positioned as the main source and orientation of Islamic education. This attitude is manifested, among other things, through his steps to straighten the direction of the qibla of mosques in Yogyakarta based on the science of falak, so that the implementation of prayer is again in accordance with the provisions of sharia. This shows Dahlan's consistency in purifying the teachings of Islam and returning it to an authentic source, without allowing the mistakes that have taken root in the community (S. Setiawan, 2025).

In addition, K.H. Ahmad Dahlan emphasized that monotheism and the practice of Islamic teachings are the main orientation of Islamic education. This transcendent leadership pattern shows that education is not solely directed at mastering worldly knowledge, but also at fostering Muslim personalities who have a spiritual awareness of Allah and moral responsibility in social life (Hidayanto et al., 2025).

4. Transformative Leadership

K.H. Ahmad Dahlan is seen as a transformative leader who is able to bring about significant changes (transformations) in the thinking of the ummah about Islamic education; Thinking visionary and innovative in building educational institutions, having the ability to empathize and motivation to follow social and cultural changes, leading with integrity and high intellectual capacity (Rasid, 2018).

5. Prophetic Leadership

A number of studies show that the leadership of Muhammadiyah pioneered by K.H. Ahmad Dahlan rests on the prophetic leadership style, namely leadership based on the values of the Qur'an and Hadith as exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad SAW. Thus, leaders are not understood simply as administrative managers, but as exemplary figures who radiate moral and spiritual values (Habeahan et al., 2025).

6. Innovative Leadership

In the perspective of modern leadership, K.H. Ahmad Dahlan is understood as an innovative leader because of his ability to respond to the social and political dynamics of his time. He pioneered an educational institution that combined the Islamic education system with a modern educational model, as well as expanding the work of Muhammadiyah not only in the religious field, but also in the health, social, and community welfare sectors. A number of experts consider that Dahlan's innovations reflect the leadership model of Islamic education that is adaptive to the demands of changing times (Ministry of Education and Education, 2025).

7. Participatory and Collective Leadership

The sustainability of Muhammadiyah's development after the death of K.H. Ahmad Dahlan without relying on one figure shows that this organization is built on a collective-collegial leadership pattern. This pattern places deliberation and member involvement as the basis for decision-making, accompanied by a clear division of tasks in the organizational structure, so that the continuity of the movement is maintained despite the change of leadership. The model reflects a leadership style that is not authoritarian, but emphasizes teamwork and sound organizational management, as characterized by Muhammadiyah after the Dahlan era (Ifani, 2025).

8. Integralistic Leadership in Islamic Education

This model is reflected in the way K.H. Ahmad Dahlan integrates religious education and general education in one complete system. In practice, moral values and general

knowledge are placed in a balanced manner in the learning process, without opposing or separating the two as is the case in traditional or Western educational models. This concept emphasizes that Dahlan's educational leadership is integralistic, which combines spiritual and intellectual dimensions so that students develop as complete individuals (Okastina et al., 2025).

K.H. Imam Zarkasyi's Leadership Model

1. Democratic Leadership Model

The democratic leadership style allows space for subordinates to be involved in decision-making through deliberation, although the final decision remains in the hands of the leader. This pattern emphasizes teamwork, member capacity development, and fostering a sense of responsibility and participation, as exemplified by K.H. Imam Zarkasyi in solving problems in Gontor by involving teachers and students. Democratic leaders are open to subordinate suggestions, provide freedom that remains directed, and encourage the development of potential and self-effectiveness. This is practiced by K.H. Imam Zarkasyi by approaching students, listening to their complaints, and giving space for freedom in learning, opinions, and self-development. However, this leadership style is only effectively applied to certain situations, not to all conditions (Nurhijjah & Hariyanto, 2024).

2. Charismatic Leadership

K.H. Imam Zarkasyi showed the character of a visionary charismatic leadership, characterized by a strong belief in the decisions and reforms he pursued despite facing rejection. He is able to inspire and cultivate the trust of his subordinates through authority, steadfastness, and high commitment to goals. This attitude is also reflected in his reforms in the field of teaching, such as improving language methods and learning books to be more effective. Consistency, optimism, and a strong sense of responsibility make him unyielding, as well as his belief that what has been started must be completed, and this is one of the factors that have contributed to Gontor's sustainability and success to date.

3. Transformational Leadership Style

Transformational leadership differs from charismatic in that it rests on a shared vision, not just personal charm. According to Avolio and Bass, this style emphasizes the leader's ability to motivate subordinates to exceed targets and improve performance through shared challenges and expectations. This pattern can be seen in K.H. Imam Zarkasyi who actively assists the activities of students and provides constructive direction and advice to foster their independence and development (Fadhli & Maunah, 2019).

According to Bass and Avolio, transformational leadership is characterized by a leader who is charismatic and visionary as an example, able to motivate and develop individual potential, encourage intellectual stimulation to think creatively and solve problems, and give personal attention through coaching and delegating tasks so that subordinates develop (Sagala, 2018). The characteristics of transformational leadership as stated by Avolio and Bass can be seen in K.H. Imam Zarkasyi through his efforts to motivate students to develop academic and social potential, foster leadership cadres by providing learning opportunities, and build loyalty through example. His leadership is inspirational and visionary, characterized by support for positive activities of students and various ideas for pesantren reform (Nurhijjah & Hariyanto, 2024).

**Comparative Synthesis of Islamic Education Leadership Models
Ahmad Dahlan and KH Imam Zarkasyi**

Comparative Aspects	KH Ahmad Dahlan	KH Imam Zarkasyi
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Movement Base	Tajdid and da'wah movement through Muhammadiyah	Education movement through Islamic boarding schools (Gontor)
Leadership Pattern	Transformative-reformative based on the ummah movement	Transformational-institutional based on the pesantren system
Change Orientation	Reform of religious understanding and education of the people	Modernization of the pesantren system
Leadership Strategy	Da'wah, education, curriculum reform, organization formation	Educational systemization, regeneration, institutional strengthening
Science Approach	Integration of religious and general sciences	100% religious science and 100% general science
Management Model	Socio-religious organizations	Waqf system and institution of huts
The Role of the Leader	Inspirers and drivers of change	Architect of pesantren system and culture
Leadership Style	Charismatic, persuasive, and praxis	Visionary, systemic, and cadre
Strength Base	Ideas, examples, and networks of people	Institutional systems, disciplines, and cultures
Educational Objectives	To produce knowledgeable and charitable Muslims	To form people with morals, knowledge, and independence
Leadership Sustainability	Continued by the Muhammadiyah organizational system	Maintained by the waqf system and the regeneration of the hut

From the table, it can be affirmed that KH Ahmad Dahlan represents a movement-based transformative-reformative leadership model, while KH Imam Zarkasyi represents a transformational leadership model based on institutions and systems. Both are reformers, but differ in the path of change: Dahlan through socio-religious movements, Zarkasyi through the engineering of the educational and institutional systems.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that K.H. Ahmad Dahlan and K.H. Imam Zarkasyi both display a transformational, visionary, and reform-oriented Islamic education leadership model, even though it is applied in different contexts and strategies. K.H. Ahmad Dahlan emphasized the renewal of education through the Muhammadiyah movement with the integration of religious and general knowledge, reform of learning methods, and the formation of socio-religious awareness of the people, while K.H. Imam Zarkasyi modernized Islamic boarding schools through the reform of the madrasah, pesantren, and institutional systems with professional management, an integrated curriculum, and character development based on pesantren values. This finding shows that the success of Islamic education transformation is highly determined by leadership that has a vision of change, the courage to reform the system, and the ability to build institutions in a sustainable manner, so that the leadership model of these two figures can be used as a practical reference for the development of Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia today.

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