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## The Paradigm of Salaf Pesantren: The Concept of Charismatic Spiritual Leadership of Kyai at Assalafiyah Pesantren

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## Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengangkat model kepemimpinan kharismatik spiritual Kyai Subhan Makmun di Pondok Pesantren Assalafiyah, hal ini didasari oleh keterbatasan kajian mendalam tentang pengaruh kepemimpinan kharismatik spiritual dalam konteks pesantren salaf, hal ini disebabkan oleh penelitian terdahulu yang lebih fokus pada model kepemimpinan umum dalam pesantren, sedangkan kajian khusus tentang bagaimana kepemimpinan kharismatik spiritual mempengaruhi kebijakan pendidikan dan strategi pengembangan pesantren masih minim. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengidentifikasi dan menganalisis bagaimana gaya kepemimpinan Kyai Subhan mempengaruhi kebijakan pendidikan dan strategi pengembangan di Pesantren Assalafiyah serta dampaknya terhadap kualitas mutu pendidikan di lembaga tersebut. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan pengumpulan data melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Data dianalisis secara kualitatif dengan menggunakan triangulasi untuk meningkatkan validitas hasil penelitian. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan kharismatik spiritual Kyai Subhan membawa dampak positif yang signifikan terhadap kebijakan dan strategi layanan pendidikan di lembaga tersebut. Melalui prinsip kesalehan dan kesederhanaan, Kyai Subhan menjadi teladan bagi santri dan masyarakat sekitar. Kepemimpinan karismatiknya termanifestasi dalam kemampuan luar biasa untuk menggerakkan warga pesantren, menjalankan misi lembaga pendidikan salaf, dan mewujudkan visi Pondok Pesantren Assalafiyah. Pentingnya peran Kyai dalam keberlangsungan pesantren mencerminkan strategisnya posisi Kyai sebagai pemimpin.

Kata Kunci: Pesantren Salaf, Kepemimpinan Karismatik, Kepemimpinan Spiritual, Kyai

Abstract

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This study examines the charismatic spiritual leadership model of Kyai Subhan Makmun at Pondok Pesantren Assalafiyah. This focus is based on the limited indepth studies on the influence of charismatic spiritual leadership within the context of traditional Islamic boarding schools (pesantren salaf). Previous research has predominantly concentrated on general leadership models in pesantren, leaving a gap in understanding how charismatic spiritual leadership impacts educational policies and development strategies in these institutions. The aim of this research is to identify and analyze how Kyai Subhan's leadership style influences educational policies and development strategies at Pesantren Assalafiyah and its impact on the quality of education provided. The research employs a qualitative descriptive approach, with data collection through observation, interviews, and documentation. The data is analyzed qualitatively using triangulation to enhance the validity of the findings. The results indicate that Kyai Subhan's charismatic spiritual leadership has a significant positive impact on the educational policies and service strategies at the institution. Through principles of piety and simplicity, Kyai Subhan serves as a role model for students and the surrounding community. His charismatic leadership is manifested in his exceptional ability to mobilize the pesantren community, carry out the mission of the traditional educational institution, and realize the vision of Pondok Pesantren Assalafiyah. The crucial role of the Kyai in the sustainability of the pesantren underscores the strategic position of the Kyai as a leader.

Keywords: Salaf Pesantren, Charismatic Leadership, Spiritual Leadership, Kyai.

#### INTRODUCTION

Islamic-based educational institutions that have maintained their existence as an integral part of Indonesia are Pondok Pesantren (Futaqi and Mashuri 2023:5). The term "Pesantren" refers to traditional Islamic educational institutions with unique and strong characteristics (Urwatul Wutsqa et al. 2022:44). Pesantren is not only just an educational institution but also plays a crucial role in enhancing the intelligence and morality of the community, a role they have fulfilled since ancient times.

The typology of pesantren has evolved over time, adapting to significant changes, yet there is a type that has preserved its originality in terms of curriculum and institution—known as *salaf* (traditional) pesantren (Hayati 2019:107), salaf pesantren tend to maintain and uphold the tradition of religious knowledge transfer, focusing on classical approaches.

Pesantren, as Islamic educational institutions, have distinct uniqueness reflected in the value system and cultural characteristics that set them apart from other educational institutions in Indonesia. Key elements of pesantren, such as Kyai, mosque, dormitory, students, and the teaching of classical Islamic books, shape the value system of pesantren life, which holds strong legitimacy within the community (Nasution, 2019: 124)

The dynamic development of pesantren, as highlighted by Dhofier (1994:73), reflects rapid growth over the past two decades. Government regulations granting equal legal status to pesantren as public schools have supported their growth. However, the uniqueness of pesantren, influenced by the values of the Kyai as the leader and caretaker, remains a crucial factor in their development.

Kyai in pesantren are not only central figures but also hold authoritative and influential roles in all policies and changes within the pesantren (Suryana, Khoiruddin, and Oktapiani 2021:202). The two key factors supporting the role of Kyai are centralized leadership based on charisma and paternalistic relationships, along with individual or family ownership of pesantren. This creates significant authority for the Kyai, who is even considered a "small king" in the context of pesantren.

However, as pesantren develop, some of these institutions begin to experience changes in leadership patterns—from charismatic to rationalistic, authoritarian-paternalistic to diplomatic-participatory, and laissez-faire to democratic (Suryana et al. 2021:203). These changes align with the implementation of formal education, where some pesantren establish daily management boards and improve management and administration.

Salaf Pesantren stands out as an Islamic educational institution that uniquely maintains its leadership concept, known as "charismatic" leadership. The term charismatic originates from the Greek word meaning "divinely inspired gift," such as the ability to perform miracles or predict future events (Yukl 2007:268). Charismatic leaders have a significant impact; their followers believe their leader's beliefs are correct, accept their leader without question, obey them, are emotionally involved in the group's or organization's mission, contribute to the mission's success, and strive for high performance goals (Hariyadi, Eko Pramono, and Yanto 2018:47).

In addition to charismatic leadership, spirituality is also a distinctive feature of leadership in Salaf pesantren. The core meaning of the word "spirit" and its related terms like "spiritual" and "spirituality" refers to the essence, eternity, and the dimension of the soul or spirit. In the context of Islam, spirituality is directly connected to the Divine Reality, the One True God. Spirituality is not foreign to humans but is the essence of humanity itself. Humans consist of material and spiritual elements, and human behavior results from the interaction between spiritual and material energies, or the dimensions of the soul and the body (Rafsanjani et al. 2017:2).

According to Fry (2003), spiritual leadership involves understanding and penetrating the fundamental needs of leaders and followers for spiritual life, enhancing organizational commitment and productivity. The values, attitudes, and behaviors in this leadership style are designed to intrinsically motivate oneself and others to experience spiritual sustainability through calling and membership. Theoretically, spiritual leadership describes a leadership process based on spiritual values, focusing on faith in God as the source of leadership vision and performance (Fry 2003:12). Spiritual values such as love, care, and compassion create life's meaning and understanding of living together, supporting the commitment of leaders and followers in achieving individual and organizational goals. In practice, spiritual values derived from religion significantly contribute to shaping individual behavior in organizations and support the transformation of leaders and organizations toward higher spiritual goals.

Regarding charismatic spiritual leadership, previous research with similar themes includes a study by Muhammad Komarun et al., in 2024, titled "*Types of Leadership in Islamic Educational Institutions: A Systematic Literature Review.*" This study shows that spiritual leadership is the second most dominant type applied in Islamic educational institutions (Komarun et al. 2024). Another study by Citra Zubaidah and Isa Anshory, titled "*Leadership in Salafiyyah Pesantren*," found that among the leadership models in Salafiyyah Pesantren, five models are most commonly adopted: 1) religio-paternalistic leadership, 2) paternalistic-authoritarian leadership, 3) legal-formal leadership, 4) natural leadership, and 5) charismatic-traditional leadership (Zubaidah and Anshor 2004:27). Although there are thematic spiritual leadership of a Kyai and aims to review the impact of Kyai's leadership integrated with the quality assurance of education at Assalafiyah Pesantren. This

research aims to fill the review on the role of Kyai at Assalafiyah Pesantren in managing and ensuring the quality of education through their unique leadership model, differing significantly from the findings of the two studies mentioned.

Ideally, education should adapt to the current era's developments to ensure quality education so that education as a human investment remains relevant (Hernawati, Hafizh, and Astuti 2023:417). This implies that the more relevant an educational institution is to modernity, the better the quality of education, as it answers contemporary challenges. However, the reality is that the existence of Assalafiyah Pesantren, which applies the Salaf or traditional pesantren model, remains persistent. Therefore, the role of Kyai in maintaining the Salaf pesantren model in the modern era becomes urgent. Kyai at Assalafiyah Pesantren have a charismatic spiritual leadership model in maintaining the Salaf pesantren in the modern era and have remarkable adaptation to all aspects of modernity, making it urgent to research.

Assalafiyah Pesantren, with its Salaf education model, remains a community choice despite having to respond to the demands of the times with adaptive leadership. In the context of Assalafiyah Pesantren, Kyai's leadership plays a central role in maintaining the pesantren's existence, developing educational services, and responding to societal changes. The leadership model of Kyai is crucial to analyze, especially in terms of strategic vision, management implementation, cadre development, and the leadership pattern applied.

With this background, research on the Kyai leadership model in Assalafiyah Pesantren becomes relevant and important to understand the dynamics of pesantren development amid changing times. This research aims not only to explore the leadership concept but also to understand the practical impact and implications of the concept. This study seeks to describe and analyze unique aspects that have not been fully revealed in previous studies. Thus, this research is expected to be a foundation for further development in understanding and implementing the concept of charismatic spiritual leadership in pesantren environments.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach, utilizing sources of data in the form of words, actions, and complementary data such as documents, images, and manuscripts relevant to the research topic (Raco 2010:76). Primary data are obtained through observation of the activities of the central figure, the Kyai, and interviews with key informants such as the caretakers of the pesantren, teachers, and several students. Secondary data includes documents such as student discipline books, organizational structure images, photos of activities at the pesantren, and journals related to the research topic. The data collection techniques involve observation, interviews, and documentation (Nilamsari 2014:178). After collecting the raw data, the researcher reduces the information by identifying common meanings, then classifies and organizes patterns or themes to form a framework that connects different thoughts. Data validity is checked using triangulation by comparing various data collection techniques and data sources.

#### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### Charismatic Spiritual Leadership of the Kyai in Pesantren Assalafiyah

Kyai Subhan Makmun, as a leader at Pesantren Assalafiyah, embodies charismatic spiritual leadership, which is reflected in his life at the pesantren. Kyai Subhan Makmun's charismatic leadership is evident in his statements emphasizing that students (santri) must acquire knowledge from the heart and act according to their words. He emphasized in an interview:

"A knowledgeable santri should enhance their devotion to Allah and their detachment from worldly matters, and must love Allah so that their behavior is solely for Allah. Santri must be humble before Allah, thus respecting and obeying their parents and teachers" (interview with Kyai Subhan, 20/10/2023).

This interview indicates that a kyai must be able to shape a generation with character and spirituality in line with the Quran and Hadith. To achieve this, the kyai must influence the diverse students through a life deeply connected to religious spirituality (Hariyadi et al. 2020:98).

Kyai Subhan Makmun believes that a kyai, as a leader and educator, should be a role model for the students, committing to serving them consistently to instill knowledge and values aligned with Islamic teachings. This suggests that the role model should truly reflect Islam, so the students emulate the correct behavior, as per the theory of modeling (Ali 2011:37; Wardoyo 2021:124).

Furthermore, Kyai Subhan Makmun's consistent dedication to serving his students in imparting knowledge becomes a value and spirit for the students. Unconsciously, these values become principles of life that are preserved. This is evident from the many students who have become teachers at the pesantren for many years (some for five to ten years), believing that continuity in good teaching, grounded in strong sincerity, will earn high rewards and status before Allah and society. This phenomenon demonstrates that Kyai Subhan's steadfastness in teaching profoundly influences the students' lives in achieving true Muslimhood focused on attaining Allah's pleasure, as reflected in daily life (Asmono 2021:13).

Kyai Subhan Makmun also holds that students are a trust, and their character and knowledge must be based on Islamic teachings. The kyai's duty is to nurture and guide them to align their character and knowledge with Islam. According to the author, the kyai's role as a nurturer and educator of students, orienting them towards both the hereafter and worldly matters, is closely related to the vision of Islamic education, which is *insān kāmil* (Hasanah, Hasanah, and Asmadewi 2023).

*Insān kāmil* refers to an individual who undergoes comprehensive and balanced education and development, becoming a person with optimal potential and competence. Through comprehensive education, the individual gains a deep understanding of various aspects of life, including intellectual, emotional, and social aspects. Additionally, balanced development hones their skills and talents, enabling them to compete and contribute positively in various situations and environments.

In other words, an individual who undergoes thorough and balanced education and development excels not only in academics but also achieves balance in personality, emotional intelligence, and practical skills. This creates an individual ready to face life's challenges with confidence, adaptability, and the ability to make a positive impact in society (Hasanah et al. 2023).

One way to realize insān kāmil in the lives of santri is through the input of Islamic knowledge, including studying traditional texts (*turās*) and solving contemporary issues (*baḥs al-masāil*). Additionally, the religious materials taught at the pesantren are always linked to sincerity through various methods, such as

lectures, storytelling about the righteous predecessors (*salaf al-ṣāliḥ*), and drawing lessons from their struggles. Kyai Subhan Makmun also instills the value of sincerity in all pesantren activities, such as end-of-year events, interactions between kyai and teachers (such as meetings and discussions), counseling sessions with students' parents, and official events related to alumni associations (interview with Kyai Subhan, 20/10/2023).

In managing Pesantren Assalafiyah, Kyai Subhan Makmun is heavily influenced by the salaf paradigm, which focuses on spiritual values. This is evident in his perspective that santri should uphold moral religious values, respect human values, behave correctly and honestly, and live simply with a pure heart. His understanding of the ideal santri is closely related to the theory of spirituality associated with character. Spirituality, as a value, is a character based on Islamic teachings, with the Quran and Hadith as the primary sources (Hasanah and Putri 2021:179; Jumala et al. 2019:162).

Santri, as a trust, must have their educational quality and character maintained so they can live well. Kyai Subhan Makmun predominantly teaches Islam at Pesantren Assalafiyah. However, to prepare students for life in society, the pesantren also offers Paket B and C exams. These exams address the modern world's educational challenges, namely the need for formal diplomas recognized by the government for further studies or employment after graduating from the pesantren (interview with Kyai Subhan, 20/10/2023).

Despite offering Paket B and C exams, the salaf paradigm is deeply ingrained in Kyai Subhan's perspective that some scholars must adhere to pure religious knowledge without integrating it with general sciences. This viewpoint is because scholars or kyai must teach religious knowledge deeply to maintain the purity of religion, ensuring that students do not err in their ijtihad (independent reasoning) on issues facing the ummah.

This perspective fosters steadfastness in religion, ensuring that all aspects related to Pesantren Assalafiyah are minimized from negative influences and maintain a good image of the pesantren. Kyai Subhan's commitment to learning and teaching religion can be seen in his sincerity in serving the Muslim community, closely aligned with the concept of *ta'āwun ala al-birr wa al-taqwā* (cooperation in

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righteousness and piety). Sincerity, aligned with the concept of mutual help, suggests that the Muslim community needs individuals who practice religion sincerely in their daily lives, particularly concerning the ummah's issues. This, in turn, motivates the Muslim community to address each other's issues sincerely, creating positive interactions.

Regarding financial issues, Kyai Subhan emphasizes the importance of reducing dependence on potentially impermissible funds for the pesantren's financing. He strives to enhance the pesantren's self-sufficiency through established enterprises. Kyai Subhan states that the pesantren's funding should come from its self-reliance efforts, which must be continually developed to minimize reliance on donations and charity (interview with Kyai Subhan, 20/10/2023).

# Implications of the Charismatic Spiritual Leadership Style of Kyai on Educational Service Policies and Strategies

The strategies implemented at Pesantren Assalafiyah are highly dependent on the policies established by the Kyai in leading the pesantren. The Kyai's policies reflect his thoughts and personality, which serve as a model for the students and the surrounding community (Hariyadi et al. 2018:50).

The Kyai's policy in managing the education system at Pesantren Assalafiyah involves not establishing formal schools under either the Ministry of Religious Affairs or the Ministry of National Education within the pesantren. The Kyai desires his students to concentrate fully on religious studies without prioritizing general education. However, he acknowledges the necessity for his students to obtain formal qualifications upon leaving the pesantren. Therefore, the Kyai has introduced Wajar DIKDAS classes, including Paket B and Paket C programs at Pesantren Assalafiyah (interview with Kyai Subhan, 20/10/2023).

In addition to the Wajar DIKDAS and Paket C programs, Kyai Subhan has initiated classical classes at Pesantren Assalafiyah. These include not only traditional religious study sessions (*bandongan*), but also the establishment of Muallimin and Muallimmat schools, as well as *Syawir* classes to support learning at the pesantren (interview with Kyai Subhan, 20/10/2023).

The impact of these classical classes at Pesantren Assalafiyah includes the provision of more comprehensive learning facilities and media to achieve educational effectiveness and efficiency. Currently, Pesantren Assalafiyah has a *masjid jam'i* located to the west of the pesantren. This mosque, separate from the pesantren, serves for public religious gatherings with the surrounding community. Married teachers live near the pesantren, while unmarried teachers reside within the pesantren premises (interview with Kyai Subhan, 20/10/2023).

Educational facilities and media at Pesantren Assalafiyah include a range of hardware and software components. The hardware consists of a masjid, an aula, student dormitories, the Kyai's residence, office buildings, school buildings, classrooms, a security post, a skills room, agricultural land, a sports field, and supporting transportation and communication infrastructure. The software includes comprehensive curriculum levels, a library, adequate bathing facilities, measurable educational goals, well-organised financial administration, and other educational media.

Madrasah Muta'allimin Muta'allimat Manba'ul Huda currently operates with fourteen buildings and various classrooms. Due to the large number of students and limited classroom space, classes are conducted in shifts from morning to evening for MMA, Aliyah, Wajar DIKDAS, Paket C, and TPQ programs.

Regarding the completeness of educational facilities and infrastructure, the management of education at Pesantren Assalafiyah is not different from other systems. It adheres to the *salafi* system, preserving the traditional education system (Afiful Ikhwan et al. 2022: 203).

Fundamentally, Pesantren Assalafiyah emphasises mastery of Salafi sciences. However, the pesantren also aims for its students to become proficient in various fields of knowledge (Afiful Ikhwan et al. 2022:204). Therefore, activities at Pesantren Assalafiyah are educationally based on religious teachings.

Pesantren Assalafiyah has three main educational systems: Salafi education, extracurricular education, and business unit development. The Salafi education system includes madrasah muta'alimin and muta'alimat manba'ul huda assalafiyah, majelis musyawarah madrasah manba'ul huda assalafiyah, *lajnah bahtsul masa'il* (LBM), and the *tahfidzul Qur'an* program. Extracurricular activities involve *Jam'iyah*,

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karate, and marawis training to develop students' intellectual, mental, and artistic talents. The business unit development includes small and medium enterprises (SMEs) such as fish farming, livestock, and onion farming, as well as a pesantren cooperative (*Kopontren*) that provides daily needs for the students. These systems aim to provide education, training, and economic skills to students, adhering to values such as *kafaah*, *himmatul 'amal*, and *amanah*.

The charismatic spiritual leadership style of the Kyai at Pesantren Assalafiyah profoundly influences the educational service strategies at the institution. The Kyai, as the primary role model for students and the surrounding community, embodies spiritual values and policies that shape religious character. The Kyai's policy of not establishing formal schools under the Ministry of Religious Affairs or National Education highlights his focus on religious education, implemented through the opening of Wajar DIKDAS classes, Paket B and C programs, and classical classes. The comprehensive educational infrastructure, including a separate mosque for public religious activities, reflects the Kyai's support for the educational goals at Pesantren Assalafiyah.

Another positive impact is the diversification of the educational system through Salafi education, extracurricular activities, and business unit development. The Kyai not only emphasises the mastery of *salafi* sciences but also strives to create a generation proficient in various fields of knowledge. This system includes religious-based educational activities, extracurriculars like *jam'iyah*, karate, and marawis training, and business unit development such as fish farming, livestock, and onion farming. Through these policies, Kyai Subhan demonstrates a holistic educational approach (Widyastono et al. 2012:271), integrating religious, economic, and extracurricular aspects.

The importance of preserving Salafi traditions is also evident in the educational strategy, with Pesantren Assalafiyah remaining faithful to the traditional education system. Consequently, the Kyai's charismatic spiritual leadership positively impacts Pesantren Assalafiyah, creating an educational environment that not only emphasises religious aspects but also encompasses holistic development for the students.

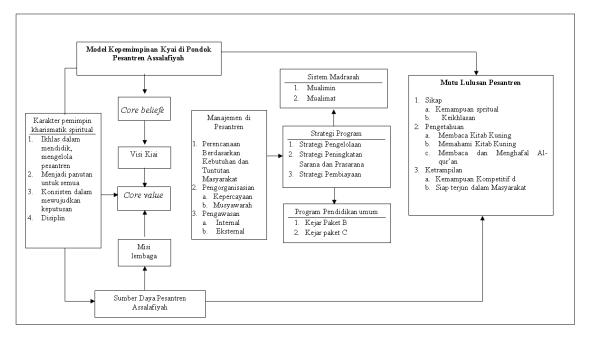
# The Role of Kyai's Leadership Model in Enhancing the Quality of Educational Services

According to research, Kyai Subhan Makmun, the leader of Pesantren Assalafiyah, prioritises religious education from Salafi scholars within the pesantren's Salafi education system. The principles upheld at Pesantren Assalafiyah are piety and simplicity, which serve as a model for the students and the surrounding community. Kyai Subhan's piety and simplicity earn him the respect and obedience of the students.

Based on the research data presented above, it can be concluded that the leadership model at Pesantren Assalafiyah involves Kyai's charisma in motivating the pesantren community to fulfil the mission of the Salafi educational institution according to Pesantren Assalafiyah's vision. The term charismatic leadership is used to describe a leader endowed with extraordinary abilities (Afiful Ikhwan et al. 2022:197). Charisma emerges during social crises when a leader with exceptional capabilities presents a radical vision that provides a solution to the crisis. Followers are drawn to the leader's vision and perceive the leader as extraordinary (Fry 2003:719).

Kyai Subhan Makmun's charisma is demonstrated through the admiration of the entire pesantren community and society. This is evident in his mindset, beliefs, speech, attitude, behaviour, mannerisms, and personal appearance. The impact of Kyai Subhan Makmun is reflected in the significant support from the community (both family and non-family) in developing Pesantren Assalafiyah, both materially and immaterially. For instance, in early 2013, Kyai Subhan was given a waqf land in the centre of Brebes to establish Pesantren Assalafiyah two, with the support of community leaders and entrepreneurs in developing Pesantren Assalafiyah.

The charismatic nature of Kyai Subhan is evident in his prioritisation of the needs of the pesantren over his personal or even family interests. He demonstrates this commitment by selflessly using the money he earns from giving lectures and the contributions from visitors seeking consultation for the development and necessities of the pesantren. Kyai Subhan does not wish to use the money he receives from his lectures or visitors for his family. Instead, he relies on the income from his agricultural and plantation activities to support his family. It is his character that motivates the teachers at the pesantren to dedicate themselves to imparting religious knowledge and inspires the students to pursue profound understanding, as they look up to Kyai Subhan as their role model. Here is Kyai's leadership model for improving the quality of educational services at Pondok Pesantren Assalafiyah.



## CONCLUSION

The charismatic spiritual leadership of Kyai Subhan Makmun at Pondok Pesantren Assalafiyah has created an educational environment focused on shaping generations of students with character and spirituality aligned with the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith. Through his charismatic leadership style, Kyai Subhan has successfully motivated students to acquire profound knowledge, emphasizing Islamic values and simplicity. His charismatic spiritual leadership at Pondok Pesantren Assalafiyah has had a significantly positive impact on educational policies and strategies at the institution. As a leader at Pondok Pesantren Assalafiyah, Kyai Subhan Makmun plays a crucial role in enhancing the quality of educational services through his application of charismatic leadership models. Upholding principles of piety and simplicity, Kyai Subhan serves as a role model for students and the surrounding community. His charismatic leadership is evident in his remarkable ability to mobilize the pesantren community, execute the institution's salaf educational mission, and realize the vision of Pondok Pesantren Assalafiyah.

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