

Transformative Female Leadership: Solichah Wahid Hasyim's Contribution at Muslimat NU 1950-1994

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Abstract

Muslimat Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) was established to enhance the role of Muslim women in religious, social, and educational spheres. As a key figure, Solichah Wahid Hasyim played a pivotal role in transforming Muslimat NU from its early form as Nahdlatul Oelama Moederbond (NOM) into an autonomous NU body with a clear organizational vision. Guided by transformative leadership theory and gender and development perspectives, this study examines her leadership strategies in institutionalizing Muslimat NU through the establishment of local branches, member capacity building, and program innovation. This study employs historical research methods encompassing four stages: heuristic (collecting archival records and treatises), source criticism (evaluating authenticity and credibility), interpretation (contextualizing contributions within Indonesia's socio-political landscape), and historiography (systematic narrative construction). The findings reveal that Solichah challenged the entrenched domestic stigma faced by women from Islamic boarding schools by initiating campaigns to eradicate illiteracy, promoting vocational training, and advancing health education, while aligning these initiatives with Islamic values. Her influence extended nationally through active participation in the Indonesian Women's Congress (KOWANI) and the national parliament, where she advocated for policies related to women's rights and education. This study underscores the importance of integrating religious legitimacy with transformative leadership to achieve sustainable women's empowerment. The findings not only enrich leadership and gender studies within the Islamic context but also highlight Solichah Wahid Hasyim's enduring legacy as a role model for contemporary Muslim women leaders in Indonesia.

Keywords: Transformative Leadership, Solichah Wahid Hasyim, Muslimat NU, Women Empowerment, Gender And Development.

1. Introduction

Gender discourse in Islam has become a central topic in contemporary Islamic studies, grounded in the principles of al-'adl (justice) and al-musawah (equality) as integral components of Islamic teachings. Contemporary Islamic gender theorists such as (Wadud, 1999) and (Mernissi, 1991) emphasize the need for contextual reinterpretation of these principles to dismantle structural barriers that restrict women's participation in both religious and public life (Ramadhan, 2024; Shahin, 2024). Within the pesantren tradition, the concept of al-umm madrasatul ula ("the mother as the first school") underscores women's foundational role in shaping future generations. When connected to the ongoing classical–contemporary debate on gender in fiqh, this concept aligns with maqasid al-shariah interpretations that legitimize women's leadership beyond domestic boundaries, thereby advancing what may be termed "Islamic justice" in the public sphere (Prasetia, Alamsyah, and Hosna, 2024).

Historically, women have played active roles in transmitting Islamic knowledge and values (Huwaida, 2017). In Indonesia, early 20th-century reformers such as Raden Ajeng Kartini and Rahmah El Yunusiyah challenged prevailing norms by demanding educational access and leadership opportunities for women. Kartini's letters, later compiled in *Habis Gelap Terbitlah Terang* (Hidayati and Wulandari, 2025; Khairullah et al., 2025; Taylor, 1976), articulated a vision of education as a means of emancipation. Rahmah, through Diniyah Putri Padang Panjang (Setiawan et al., 2024), demonstrated that women could excel in scholarship and da'wah while preserving their Islamic identity (Hidayatillah and Hakim, 2023). This spirit inspired the establishment of women's organizations such as Muslimat Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), which evolved from Nahdlatul Oelama Moederbond (NOM) into an autonomous body promoting education, social welfare, and religious activism among Muslim women (Matingvan and Hariyono, 2024).

While previous studies have documented aspects of women's leadership in Indonesia, focused research on figures such as Solichah Wahid Hasyim who operated within a traditional religious organization yet advanced transformative agendas remains limited. (Purwanti, 2008) explored her activism and political role but did not fully situate her leadership within a broader gender theory framework. (Mufadah and Wisnu, 2016) highlighted her contributions in founding the NU Muslim Welfare Foundation (1963) and promoting family planning programs, yet without linking these initiatives to contemporary Islamic feminist thought. (Dahlan, Ahmad, and Zawawi, 2001) provided biographical details but offered no phenomenological analysis of her lived leadership experiences or their impact on Muslimat NU's organizational identity.

The problem addressed in this study is the lack of an integrated analysis that situates Solichah Wahid Hasyim's leadership within both historical-political contexts and Islamic gender theory, particularly in examining how her actions bridged pesantren traditions with modern concepts of women's empowerment. The purpose of this article is to analyze and interpret Solichah's contributions in institutionalizing Muslimat NU through branch expansion, member development, and organizational vision, using a historical approach enriched by phenomenological interpretation to capture the lived meaning of her leadership.

The novelty of this study lies in its combination of historical documentation with theoretical perspectives from Islamic feminism and leadership studies to reveal how So-

lichah's strategies challenged the domestic stigma associated with pesantren women while embedding empowerment initiatives within Islamic values. By linking her legacy to contemporary organizational challenges, this research contributes not only to the historiography of Muslimat NU but also to the theoretical discourse on transformative leadership among Muslim women in Indonesia.

This integrated perspective is expected to offer fresh insights for both scholars and practitioners by demonstrating that women's leadership within traditional Islamic organizations can serve as a model of sustainable empowerment rooted in faith, responsive to social change, and capable of guiding future generations of Muslimat NU in navigating the demands of globalization.

2. Methods

This research focuses on the contributions of Solichah Wahid Hasyim to Muslimat NU, as the phenomenon of women's active roles in traditional Islamic organizations remains rarely examined in depth within academic studies. In fact, such discussions are crucial to affirm gender equality grounded in Islamic values. The author selected this topic because Solichah represents a tangible example of Muslim women's leadership capable of advancing women's organizations toward self-reliance, education, and sustainable empowerment. Her contributions serve as an inspirational model for the current generation of Muslimat NU in advocating for women's rights in the educational and social spheres.

This research employs historical methods combined with phenomenological approaches to trace the leadership experiences of Solichah Wahid Hasyim and the meaning of her contributions to Muslimat NU. The historical method is conducted through four main stages: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography, while the phenomenological approach is applied to understand the subjective experiences of historical actors or witnesses who directly interacted with Solichah. The heuristic stage involved collecting primary sources in the form of official Muslimat NU organizational documents, such as annual work programs, congress resolutions, and meeting minutes from the 1950–1994 period, as well as internal archives including correspondence, activity reports, and photographic documentation. These were complemented by interviews with Muslimat NU figures who personally knew or worked with Solichah. Evidence of Solichah's gender thought was identified through her speeches and program initiatives, including literacy eradication, women's skills training, and advocacy for family planning programs grounded in Islamic values. Secondary sources comprising academic books, indexed journal articles, theses, and relevant dissertations were accessed through Google Scholar, the Garuda portal, and university libraries to provide historical context and comparative perspectives on women's leadership in other Islamic organizations.

The source criticism stage involves assessing the authenticity and validity of each document through external criticism, to determine its origin, as well as internal criticism, to verify the accuracy of the facts it contains. For example, organizational regulations are compared with conference hearing outcomes to ensure consistency, while interview testimonies are cross-checked with archival evidence to avoid memory bias. This process ensures that only valid and relevant information forms the basis of the analysis. In the interpretation stage, the researcher analyzes data that has passed source criticism by identifying key themes related to Solichah's leadership, organizational strategy, and women's

empowerment agenda. A phenomenological approach is employed to understand how Solichah's actions and decisions were perceived by contemporaries, including how his pesantren background shaped his awareness of gender justice grounded in Islamic values. Thematic analysis is conducted by categorizing data into areas such as branch expansion, educational empowerment, policy influence, and the formulation of gender justice within a fiqh framework responsive to its social context.

The final stage is historiography, in which the results of interpretation are presented in a scientific narrative organized both chronologically and thematically, reconstructing Solichah's contributions from the beginning of her involvement in Muslimat NU to her work at the national level. This reconstruction not only depicts key events but also integrates historical evidence with subjective meanings derived from a phenomenological perspective, providing a comprehensive understanding of how women's leadership in the Islamic tradition can be transformative. By combining historical methods with phenomenological approaches, the study aims to present an in-depth and holistic account of Solichah Wahid Hasyim's strategy, vision, and leadership legacy in the development of Muslimat NU.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

3.1.1. Biography of Solichah Wahid Hasyim

In Islamic gender studies, scholars such as (Wadud, 1999) and (Mernissi, 1991) emphasized that the equality of men and women should be assessed based on their actual contributions in both public and domestic spheres, rather than solely through normative discourse. This principle is relevant when examining the life of Solichah Wahid Hasyim, known as Mrs. Wahid, who was born on October 11, 1922, in Denanyar, Jombang, with the name Munawwarah, familiarly called Neng Waroh (Dahlan, Ahmad, and Zawawi, 2001). From childhood, she grew up in a pesantren environment rich in religious and traditional values, where her mother, Noer Khadijah, descended from a prominent scholar from Tambakberas, and her father, Kyai Bisri Syansuri, was the founder of the Denanyar Islamic Boarding School. The social structure of her family resembled a palace-like system, reflected in the title "Ning" for the kiai princess, which affirmed her social status within the pesantren community (Dhofier, 1980; Zamakhsyari Dhofier, 1994).

Solichah's adolescence illustrates a sharp contrast between the materialistic colonial lifestyle and the social inequalities that oppressed indigenous peoples, particularly women. Her family education instilled a rejection of colonial practices including fashion, culture, and mindsets to preserve Islamic identity and uphold the honor of the pesantren family. At the age of 14, she married Abdurrohman from the Singosari Islamic Boarding School family, but became a widow a few months later and returned to Denanyar. The three-year period of marginalization she experienced reflects the strong tradition of endogamy in pesantren communities: on one hand, it served to protect women's honor, but on the other, it limited their mobility (Hidayah and Arifi, 2017). This experience marked the beginning of her awareness that women in Islamic boarding schools could maintain religious values while playing an active role in the public sphere, in line with the concept of Islamic justice from a contemporary fiqh perspective.

Her marriage to Abdul Wahid Hasyim in 1938 was part of a strategy to preserve the purity of the pesantren's scientific lineage (nasab) and to strengthen the socio-political networks of the ulama family. After relocating to Tebuireng, Solichah accompanied Wahid Hasyim in his political activities, including his tenure as Minister of Religion. While living in Jakarta in 1944, she began to establish a social network of Muslim women, demonstrating her awareness of the strategic role women could play beyond the domestic sphere.

After Wahid Hasyim's death in 1953, Solichah assumed the responsibility of raising her six children as a single parent: Abdurrahman Wahid, Siti Aisyah, Salahuddin al-Ayyubi, Umar al-Faruq, Lilik Khadijah, and Muhammad Hasyim (Dahlan, Ahmad, and Zawawi, 2001; Mufadah and Wisnu, 2016; Purwanti, 2008). Her spirit of self-directed learning, including mastering Dutch and English, as well as understanding social, political, and economic issues, reflects the forward-looking perspective of a pesantren woman preparing to navigate changing times. After returning to Jombang in 1954, her home became the center of NU Muslimat activities.

Mrs. Wahid is also recognized as a prominent NU Muslimat figure who engaged in politics. After NU transformed into a political party in 1952, she became active in political activities. Her dedication to the organization earned her a seat on the parliamentary council. Her first position was as a member of the Greater Jakarta DPRD for the period 1957–1960, representing the NU Party. At the VII Congress in 1959, she was elected Vice Chair I of the Central Executive of Muslimat NU, serving alongside Mahmudah Mawardi as chairperson. During this period, Mrs. Wahid contributed significantly to the advancement of NU Muslimat (Burhanuddin, 2002). In addition, she served as a member of the Military Women's Cooperation Agency (BKS) when Muslimat NU collaborated with the Indonesian Armed Forces from 1958 to 1960. The relationships she built with military figures expanded NU Muslimat's capacity to participate in political activities. Through this pathway, Solichah Wahid Hasyim was elected as a member of the DPRGR/MPR for the period 1960–1971, and later served as a member of the DPR/MPR from 1972 to 1987 ("Anggota Wanita Parlemen Indonesia Sedjak Tahun 1946 Sampai Sekarang" 1972).

She became a member of the Advisory Board of the KOWANI organization from 1966 to 1968, representing NU Muslimat. Additionally, in 1964, she served as a member of the committee of the Asian-African Islamic Congress alongside Mahmudah Mawardi and even acted as an advisor to the Indonesian delegation. Her dedication earned her the trust to serve as Vice Chair I of Muslimat NU until the XII Congress in Kaliurang, Yogyakarta, held on November 25–28, 1989 (Burhanuddin, 2002).

Her courage was evident during the G30S/PKI political crisis, when she opened her home as a meeting place for NU figures and actively supported the dissolution of the PKI. This action demonstrates that her role was not merely symbolic as the wife of a cleric, but that she was a strategic decision-making actor whose influence extended to the broader community.

The nickname "Mother of the Nation" for her was reflected in the thousands of mourners who attended her funeral in Tebuireng on July 29, 1994, demonstrating the deep respect of the Nahdliyin community and NU Muslimat for her contributions to advancing the role of Muslim women in Indonesia (Syukriyah, 2016). This biography not only presents historical narratives but also highlights the value of pesantren-based women's education, combined with the courage to navigate socio-political dynamics, serving as

concrete evidence of women's capacity to lead and drive change in large organizations such as Muslimat NU.

3.1.2. The Beginning of the Formation of NU Muslimat

The late 19th century to the early 20th century marked a significant period in the awakening of Indonesian women's consciousness, driven by the struggles of figures such as RA Kartini, Martha Christina Tiahahu, Cut Nyak Dien, Cut Nyak Meutia, Rahma EL Yunusiyyah, and Nyai Ahmad Dahlan, who inspired women to demand their rights, particularly in the field of education (Azuhra, 2025; Jamilatun, Sari, and Arqam, 2024; Marpelina, Musadad, and Dyah, 2019; Parlindungan and Short, 2024; Setiawan et al., 2024; Situmeang, Wardah, and Nst, 2024). This spirit of emancipation later penetrated Islamic boarding schools, driven by the ulama, as a form of resistance against colonial oppression. One manifestation of this resistance was the rejection of Dutch subsidies, symbolizing the independence of pesantren in managing the social and economic life of the community. In Jombang, this spirit of resistance was strongly influenced by Hadratus Sheikh Hasyim Asy'ari and Kyai Bisri Syansuri, Solichah's father and father-in-law who instilled the value that true happiness is not measured by material wealth, but by the blessings gained through practicing religion (Fiqih, 2022; Hadi and SH, 2018; Subekti et al., 2024). The saying "the world is so important for the sake of worship" became a guiding principle, leading the pesantren family to regard social and religious activities as a form of devotion to the nation and to religion (Lailiyah, Saefullah, and El Syam, 2024; Pratomo, 2021).

The establishment of NU Muslimat is closely linked to the dynamics within Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) itself (Bintang et al., 2025). Founded in 1926, NU initially focused on purifying the Islamic teachings of Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah and addressing the challenges of modernity. However, the awareness of the need to form a women's organization emerged from the necessity to address women-specific issues. This awareness was driven by the role of the nyai-nyai, who accompanied the kiai at NU congresses and recognized that women needed to be organized to advocate for their rights and welfare (Syukriyah, 2016; Waskito and Nur Kholik, 2020).

Historical records indicate that in the 1930s, NU established a ma'arif institution to manage education and, in the same year, formed Nahdlatul Ulama part of Moeslimat (NOM) as the precursor to NU Muslimat (Fernando, Kurniawan, and Birsyada, 2023). The 13th NU Congress in Menes, Banten, marked an important milestone when NU women officially voiced their ideas in the NU forum for the first time, through Mrs. Djunaisih and Mrs. Siti Sarah (Sahed, 2020). The effort to establish a women's organization continued in subsequent congresses: at the 14th NU Congress in Magelang in 1939, the NOM general meeting was held, and at the 15th NU Congress in Surabaya in 1940, the first closed meeting of NU women took place, led by Mrs. Djunaisih (Afif, 2013). The peak of this momentum occurred at the 16th NU Congress in Purwokerto on March 29, 1946, when NOM was officially inaugurated as Nahdlatul Ulama Muslimat (NUM), affirming the legitimacy of women's organizations within NU, with Chadidjah Dahlan elected as chairperson. Data from the 19th NU Congress in Palembang in 1952 shows the transformation of NUM into an autonomous NU body under the name Muslimat Nahdlatul Ulama (Muslimat NU), marking the independence of NU women in managing the organization (Diana, 2015; Saifuddin Zuhri, 1979).

This indicates that the formation of Muslimat NU did not result from a delayed response by women to social issues, but rather from the strong patriarchal culture within NU, which confined women's roles primarily to the domestic sphere. Consequently, the struggle to establish women's organizations was challenging and required the collective awareness of NU women. This observation supports the findings of (Diana, 2015) and (Syukriyah, 2016), who argued that Islamic women's organizations face significant challenges in negotiating public spaces within patriarchal societies. The establishment of Muslimat NU ultimately succeeded in overcoming these constraints, demonstrating that women can play a strategic role in supporting the objectives of religious organizations while advancing women's welfare through education and organizational strengthening. The results of this study confirm that NU Muslimat represents a concrete response by NU women to the demands of the times and serves as a symbol of the courage of Islamic boarding school women in seizing strategic spaces for the benefit of the broader community.

3.1.3. Solichah's Contribution to the Development of NU Muslimat

The spirit of nationalism, combined with religious values, served as the strong foundation of Solichah Wahid Hasyim's leadership in developing Muslimat NU. Historical records indicate that her awareness of justice and independence encouraged pesantren women not to be confined to domestic roles, but to actively participate in social, religious, and national movements (*ibid.*). In this context, Solichah succeeded in challenging the stigma that pesantren women were incapable of competing in the public sphere. Through perseverance and wisdom, she organized Muslimat NU from the local to the national level, emphasizing the principle of unity with her message, "Unite Muslimat, don't get divorced," which highlighted the importance of organizational solidarity as a foundation for advancing women's status (Mufadah and Wisnu, 2016).

Solichah's leadership extended beyond rhetoric and was manifested in concrete programs. She spearheaded the establishment of Muslimat branches across various regions, initiated religious studies, literacy and skills training, and developed educational programs for women. One of her tangible legacies at the local level was the founding of the Munawwarah Mosque in Ciganjur, which became a center for religious and social activities. Through these initiatives, she demonstrated that women could play a central role in public spaces while upholding Islamic values (Dahlan, Ahmad, and Zawawi, 2001; Purwanti, 2008).

Her contributions were most prominent in the fields of da'wah and social welfare. In da'wah, Solichah positioned Muslimat NU not only as a space for deepening religious knowledge but also as a platform for cultivating social awareness. Since the Japanese occupation, she actively delivered lectures emphasizing monotheism, prayer, and interfaith harmony, while encouraging women to be pious mothers who also contributed to education and community development. This contextual da'wah connected Islamic teachings with the real-life challenges faced by women, particularly highlighting education as a means for social mobility and empowerment (Purwanti, 2008).

Another significant contribution of Solichah was in the Family Planning (KB) movement. As Chair of the Social Division of Muslimat NU in 1963, she established the Muslimat Welfare Foundation, which focused on maternal and child health. Through this foundation, BKIA centers and family planning clinics were created to improve fam-

ily welfare (Yayasan Kesejahteraan Muslimat, n.d.). Despite resistance from traditional groups who considered KB un-Islamic, Solichah employed a persuasive religious approach, demonstrating that family planning aligned with the principle of protecting family well-being. Archival evidence records: "Muslimat NU became the intermediary between LKBN and Nahdliyin society, ensuring KB was accepted through the legitimacy of religious values" (Naskah Timbang Terima, 1978). This innovative approach positioned Muslimat NU as the first Islamic women's organization capable of bridging national policy with community needs.

Solichah's transformative vision was also evident in her symbolic strategies. For example, she promoted the kebaya as a marker of Muslim women's identity, transforming it into a symbol of elegance, resilience, and readiness. Accounts highlight how Muslimat women participated in demonstrations against the PKI wearing kebaya, demonstrating that women could assert themselves in public while maintaining cultural and religious dignity (Waskito and Nur Kholik, 2020). Furthermore, during the Gestapu crisis, Muslimat NU under her leadership established public kitchens and supported calls for the dissolution of the PKI, affirming women's strategic role in political life (Umam, 1977).

Another vital aspect of her contributions was fostering Fatayat NU, officially founded in 1950 as the women's youth wing. Solichah played a central role in guiding Fatayat as a regeneration forum for NU female cadres aged 20–40, with the goal of reshaping the image of pesantren women from orthodox to progressive. Fatayat programs, including dhikr, religious counseling, economic empowerment, and fiqh studies, reflected Solichah's vision for holistic women's development (Damayanti, 2024; Irhamsyah and Anshor, 2023). Tri Istriniarti's (2023) research highlights Fatayat's success in enhancing women's religious and social insights, grounded in the leadership foundation established by Solichah.

Overall, Solichah's contributions demonstrate that she was not merely a symbolic figure, but the driving force behind the transformation of Muslimat NU. Her leadership transformed Muslimat from a small recitation group into a nationally recognized women's organization, balancing domestic and public roles, and exemplifying a model of pesantren-based female leadership committed to education, health, and empowerment.

3.1.4. The Role of Nyai Solichah in the National Arena

The participation of NU Muslimat in the 16th NU Congress in 1946 marked a significant milestone for the inauguration of Muslimat as an autonomous NU body, as well as for affirming the contributions of women in the national arena. The findings indicate that this event coincided with the formation of the Indonesian Women's Congress (Kowani), a federation of women's organizations united in the struggle for independence, aimed at strengthening the position of women as part of national power. Muslimat, which later became an active member of Kowani, demonstrated formal recognition of the contributions of NU women at the national level, particularly through the representation of Muslimat figures in Kowani's management ranks (Amini, 2021).

These findings also illustrate how Nyai Solichah played a strategic role in Kowani. Serving as a member of the Kowani Leadership Council from 1968 to 1973, Solichah not only symbolically represented NU Muslimat, but was also actively involved in designing women's empowerment programs and national policies that benefited Indonesian women. This role demonstrates that Solichah possessed a national vision rooted in Islamic values,

while also being able to navigate the dynamics of national politics after independence. Her contributions to Kowani reflect her capacity to build cross-organizational networks, extend the influence of Islamic boarding school women beyond the NU community, and underscore the importance of collaboration among women's organizations (Purwanti, 2008).

The study also found that Solichah's activities extended beyond policy forums. At the grassroots level, she actively conducted lectures on Islamic studies, emphasizing the importance of being a pious mother capable of educating the next generation, maintaining social harmony, and affirming monotheism within the socio-cultural context of the time. These teachings were highly relevant, given the social challenges and ideological crises that emerged, particularly during the Gestapu period. This demonstrates that Solichah's lectures were not merely religious routines, but served as a means of cultivating critical, insightful, and resilient Muslim women (Syukriyah, 2016).

Solichah's leadership career, which began at MWC Diwek District in 1946–1950 and culminated in her role as Chairman I of Muslimat NU for nearly two decades, demonstrates her extraordinary leadership capacity. The stability of her position at the top of Muslimat NU reflects both the trust of its members and Solichah's ability to manage the organization amid national political and social dynamics. This illustrates that her leadership combined firmness, exemplary conduct, and effective communication strategies, enabling Muslimat NU to grow into a modern and nationally recognized Islamic women's organization (Purwanti, 2008).

Solichah's achievements in key events further affirm her role as an agent of social change. This study documents her involvement in the suppression of the PKI following the Gestapu, the promotion of the controversial Family Planning Program, and her efforts to reconcile internal conflicts within the NU environment, such as those between the Cipete and Situbondo factions. Furthermore, Solichah's initiatives in establishing the NU Muslimat Welfare Foundation (1963) and the NU Family Welfare Foundation (1978) provide concrete evidence of her ability to address women's needs through institutional approaches (Mufadah and Wisnu, 2016). These contributions demonstrate that Solichah recognized the importance of institutionalizing programs to ensure the sustainability of women's struggles, so that they do not rely solely on the leadership of an individual, but are structurally embedded (Arnez, 2010).

Thus, the findings of this study indicate that Nyai Solichah's role in the national arena was not merely symbolic, representing active women from Islamic boarding schools, but also embodied a strategic vision and consistent commitment to advancing women's rights, education, and welfare grounded in Islamic values. Her contributions underscore that women possess the capacity to assume strategic roles in the public sphere, even amid the challenging socio-political landscape following independence.

3.1.5. The Relevance of Solichah's Leadership for NU Muslimat in the Present

The findings of this study indicate that the leadership of Solichah Wahid Hasyim remains highly relevant for NU Muslimat in the modern era. Solichah succeeded in dispelling the stigma that women belong solely to the domestic sphere, demonstrating that Muslim women can assume strategic roles in the educational, economic, and political sectors without compromising their Islamic identity. This evidence shows that Solichah's leadership, rooted in moderate Islamic values and noble morality, provides a critical foundation for contemporary NU Muslimat in designing women's empowerment programs.

Her leadership, which upholds inclusivity, openness, and tolerance in line with the culture of Nahdlatul Ulama, serves as a model for fostering synergy across diverse circles, including government, community organizations, and non-Muslim groups, to achieve the common good (Syukriyah, 2016).

This study found that the values instilled by Solichah inspired the development of strategic Muslimat NU programs that were responsive to the challenges of the time, such as literacy alleviation initiatives, women's skills training, and programs to strengthen the family economy. These programs align with Solichah's vision of elevating women's dignity through education and self-reliance. This demonstrates that Solichah's leadership approach emphasized the importance of setting an example, where a female leader is not only capable of governing but also embodies integrity, simplicity, and dedication to the ummah (Mufadah and Wisnu, 2016).

Solichah's success in guiding NU Muslimat to support national programs, such as the Family Planning (KB) initiative in 1973, also demonstrates the relevance of her leadership values, which were grounded in responsiveness to the needs of the people (ibid.). This study found that NU Muslimat's role in the family planning program was not limited to socialization, but also involved providing religious legitimacy through fatwas that endorsed the program in accordance with sharia. This illustrates that, under the inspiration of Solichah's leadership, Muslimat NU was able to bridge the needs of the state and the Nahdliyin community synergistically, while upholding the principles of Islamic teachings (Amalia, Islam, and Fauziyah, 2021).

In addition, the Fatayat NU organization, fully supported by Solichah, has proven to play a significant role in preparing young female cadres who are progressive, competitive, and ready to contribute to national development. This study shows that Fatayat programs, such as dhikr, women's fiqh studies, and organizational strengthening, represent tangible expressions of Solichah's vision, which emphasizes the importance of sustainable regeneration to address the challenges of the times (Dahlan, Ahmad, and Zawawi, 2001; Mufadah and Wisnu, 2016). The findings confirm that Solichah's leadership was not only relevant in her era but also serves as a visionary and contextual model of Muslim women's leadership today. The values exemplified by Solichah provide NU Muslimat with social and spiritual capital to continue being a driving force for women's progress, responding to the challenges of globalization while upholding Islamic values and the local culture of Islamic boarding schools, characterized by moderation, tolerance, and rahmatan lil 'alamin.

3.2. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that Solichah Wahid Hasyim's leadership at Muslimat NU exemplifies a transformational leadership model, consistent with the framework proposed by (Bass and Riggio, 2006). As a woman from an Islamic boarding school, she did not merely lead through directives but served as a role model and motivator, capable of inspiring her members through a clear vision, moral values, and firmness. This approach is evident in her ability to build consensus amid differing internal organizational perspectives and in guiding NU Muslimat toward the strategic goal of enhancing the quality of women based on Islamic values (Munawwaroh, Hanisy, and Roisyah, 2024).

This leadership style produced tangible results. At the internal level, Solichah successfully transformed Muslimat NU from a local recitation group into a nationally

recognized women's organization with significant roles in education, social development, and politics. Programs such as literacy eradication, economic skills training, and the promotion of the Family Planning program through a religious approach demonstrate the integration of Islamic values with the social needs of the community. This success aligns with the findings of (Amalia, Islam, and Fauziyah, 2021), (Fitriana and Cenni, 2021), and (Huwaida, 2017), who affirm that women's education grounded in religious values significantly contributes to improving the quality of families and communities.

From a phenomenological perspective, Solichah's leadership journey demonstrates that women from Islamic boarding schools can transcend domestic stereotypes without compromising their Islamic identity. She positioned the role of mothers as *al-um madrasatul ula* not only within the household but also as active agents of change, aligning with Paulo Freire's emphasis on critical consciousness as a prerequisite for social liberation (Adnan, 2015; Shor, 2002). Through this critical education, NU Muslimat under her leadership was able to interpret social realities and develop programs that were responsive to the challenges of the times.

At the national level, Muslimat NU's role as a pioneer in the promotion of the Family Planning program in the early 1970s demonstrates Solichah's ability to integrate state development needs with sharia legitimacy (Rohman, Widiastuti, and Kusairi, 2025). This strategy highlights the relevance of a moderate religious approach as an effective bridge between the state and faith-based communities, supporting (Amalia, Islam, and Fauziyah, 2021) finding that religious legitimacy is a key factor in the success of public policies within religious communities.

Historically, these findings contribute to the theory of women's leadership within *pesantren* contexts, an area that has been relatively underexplored in academic studies. While women's leadership in modern sectors often receives primary attention, this study highlights how traditional Islamic boarding school figures, such as Solichah, were able to modernize women's organizations without abandoning their traditional roots. This contribution addresses a gap in the literature while refining traditional Islamic women's leadership theories to be adaptive to contemporary contexts. This perspective aligns with Asma Barlas (2002), who emphasized that the Qur'an does not deny women's capacity for leadership, both intellectually and socially.

The practical implication of this research is the importance for today's NU Muslimat to emulate Solichah's leadership by strengthening organizational synergy, optimizing women's education, and addressing global challenges through contextual yet value-based programs grounded in Islamic principles. The regeneration of female cadres is a strategic agenda to ensure the continuity of visionary leadership. In the theoretical realm, the findings of this study can serve as a reference for developing a women's leadership education curriculum in Islamic boarding schools and women's organizations, aimed at cultivating a generation of leaders with strong character, inclusiveness, and adaptability in the modern era.

4. Conclusions

The results of this study conclude that Solichah Wahid Hasyim played a central role in strengthening Muslimat NU as an independent, progressive, and competitive Islamic women's organization. Her leadership, grounded in moderate Islamic values, ef-

fectively dismantled the stigma surrounding the perceived limitations of Islamic boarding school women, demonstrating that women possess strategic capacities in education, social development, and politics. Solichah not only formulated a vision of women's unity and empowerment but also realized it through concrete actions, including the establishment of Muslimat branches, literacy eradication programs, skills training, and active participation in national initiatives such as the Indonesian Women's Congress (Kowani). These findings illustrate that pesantren-based women's leadership can serve as a model of Islamic women's leadership that is adaptive to changing times. Solichah's contributions in harmonizing religious teachings with social programs, such as Muslimat's involvement in promoting sharia-based Family Planning programs, highlight the enduring relevance of her leadership values. The principles of sincerity, unity, and openness that she exemplified remain highly relevant in addressing the challenges of globalization and modern social change. Therefore, Solichah's leadership can inspire Muslimat NU and other Islamic women's organizations in strengthening women's capacity as agents of change while upholding Islamic values rooted in rahmatan lil 'alamin. The prospects for further research are extensive, particularly in exploring patterns of female cadre regeneration in pesantren as a strategy for cultivating Muslim women's leadership with strong character. Future studies could also examine the effectiveness of NU Muslimat empowerment programs in the digital era and investigate how technological integration can enhance the role of women's organizations in addressing the broader needs of the ummah inclusively. Overall, the findings of this study are expected to strengthen the literature on Islamic women's leadership in Indonesia and to support education and women's empowerment policies that remain relevant to Islamic values and contemporary societal challenges.

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