Journal of Schooling and Pesantren Studies
Volume 1, Issue 1 (2026), pp. 15-28

Democratic leadership and the habituation of self-discipline among female students in an Indonesian islamic boarding school

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Received: Maret 2026 | Revised: April 2026 | Accepted: Mei 2026

ABSTRACT
This study aims to examine how democratic leadership fosters the habituation of self-discipline among female students at Al-Ishlah Islamic Boarding School in Jenggawah, Jember. The research was motivated by the growing need to transform disciplinary practices in Islamic boarding schools from externally enforced compliance toward internally regulated self-discipline. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed to gain an in-depth understanding of leadership practices, disciplinary habituation, and students' participation within the pesantren environment. Data were collected through passive participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis involving pesantren caregivers, dormitory heads, student organization leaders, and female students. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. In contrast, data trustworthiness was ensured through source and technique triangulation. The findings reveal that democratic leadership is implemented through participatory communication, deliberative decision-making, shared responsibility, and active student involvement in institutional activities. Self-discipline is cultivated through structured daily routines, exemplary conduct, organizational oversight, and periodic evaluation, leading to the gradual internalization of disciplined behavior. Female students responded positively to these leadership practices, demonstrating increased participation, confidence in expressing opinions, and responsibility toward collectively agreed regulations. The novelty of this study lies in conceptualizing democratic leadership as a character-building mechanism that facilitates the transformation of discipline from external compliance into internal self-regulation within a pesantren context. This study contributes to the literature on educational leadership, character education, and pesantren management by providing empirical evidence that participatory leadership can strengthen students' sustainable self-discipline in Islamic boarding schools.

KEYWORDS
Democratic Leadership, Female Students, Islamic Boarding School, Participatory Leadership, Self-Discipline

Please cite this article in APA style as:
Anwar, M., & Qonita, A. (2026). Democratic leadership and the habituation of self-discipline among female students in an Indonesian Islamic boarding school. *Journal of Schooling and Pesantren Studies, 1*(1), 15–28.

INTRODUCTION

Human resources are increasingly viewed as strategic assets in contemporary educational management. In Islamic educational institutions, particularly pesantren, the quality of students does not merely reflect academic achievement but also the

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Kaifama Research & Publishing

effectiveness of leadership, character formation, and institutional culture. Pesantren occupy a distinctive position in Indonesian education because they integrate religious instruction, moral habituation, social discipline, and communal living into a continuous educational environment. This makes pesantren not only centers of Islamic learning but also institutions for cultivating character, responsibility, and disciplined ways of life among students. In this context, the development of female students' self-discipline becomes a central concern because it is closely related to personal responsibility, moral awareness, obedience to institutional norms, and readiness to participate in wider social life.

Self-discipline is one of the most important dimensions of character education. It refers to an individual's capacity to regulate behavior, control impulses, manage time, fulfill responsibilities, and act consistently with internalized values rather than under external pressure. Unlike imposed discipline, which depends heavily on supervision, sanctions, and authority, self-discipline grows through awareness, habituation, and the internalization of values. Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory explains that sustainable behavioral regulation is more likely to emerge when individuals experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness in their social environment (Ryan & Deci, 2020). This perspective is highly relevant to pesantren life because disciplinary behavior should not remain at the level of formal obedience, but should become part of students' internal moral consciousness.

In pesantren environments, discipline is usually cultivated through structured routines, religious activities, dormitory regulations, collective responsibilities, and continuous supervision. These practices can create a stable institutional culture, but they may also produce dependency on external control when implemented through rigid, top-down mechanisms. A common challenge in student discipline management is that students may obey rules only when supervisors are present. Such compliance can be considered fragile because it does not necessarily indicate internal awareness or personal responsibility. Therefore, pesantren needs leadership practices that can transform discipline from enforced compliance to self-regulated conduct.

Leadership is a key factor in this transformation. Yukl and Gardner (2020) define leadership as a process of influencing others to understand, agree on, and carry out what needs to be done effectively. In educational organizations, leadership is not only concerned with administrative control but also with shaping values, building commitment, developing people, and creating conditions that support meaningful participation. Successful educational leadership is strongly associated with direction-setting, people development, organizational redesign, and improvement of institutional culture (Leithwood et al., 2020). In pesantren, leadership also carries moral and spiritual significance because leaders are expected to guide students through example, communication, supervision, and value-based decision-making.

Among various leadership styles, democratic leadership is particularly relevant for cultivating self-discipline. Democratic leadership emphasizes deliberation, two-way communication, participation, shared responsibility, respect for members' opinions, and collective decision-making. This style differs from authoritarian leadership because it does not rely mainly on command and punishment. Instead, it

encourages members to understand the reasons behind institutional rules and to participate in maintaining them. Northouse (2021) explains that leadership effectiveness depends partly on the leader's ability to build relationships, influence group processes, and create a climate in which followers feel involved and valued. In this sense, democratic leadership can strengthen students' sense of ownership toward pesantren rules and activities.

The relationship between democratic leadership and self-discipline can be understood through the logic of internalization. When students are involved in discussions, given opportunities to express opinions, trusted with responsibilities, and guided through persuasive communication, they are more likely to perceive rules as shared commitments rather than external burdens. This process supports the transition from external regulation to identified and integrated regulation, in which students act responsibly because they understand and accept the value of disciplined behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Therefore, democratic leadership is not merely a managerial style; it can function as a pedagogical strategy for character formation.

Previous studies have shown that leadership style influences discipline and institutional behavior in Islamic educational settings. Marjuki et al. (2024) found that kyais ' democratic leadership improved students' discipline through deliberation, guidance, and shared responsibility. Jakandar et al. (2024) also reported that democratic leadership in Islamic boarding schools encouraged student participation in disciplinary decision-making and strengthened responsibility for mutually agreed-upon rules. Similarly, Aryani (2023) showed that the kyai leadership style influenced students' disciplinary behavior in pesantren. These studies indicate that discipline in pesantren is shaped not only by rules but also by leadership patterns, communication practices, and the extent to which students are involved in institutional life.

Research on self-discipline further confirms its importance for students' development. Faidah and Rafsanjani (2021) found that self-discipline positively influenced learning outcomes through self-regulated learning. Darman et al. (2024) emphasized the role of peer support in strengthening students' self-discipline, while Rahayu and Setyawati (2025) showed that self-management strategies can improve students' disciplinary behavior. These findings suggest that self-discipline is not formed instantly but through consistent habituation, social support, structured routines, and reflective guidance. In pesantren, these elements are embedded in daily life, making the institution a strategic context for studying the habituation of self-discipline.

However, several gaps remain in the existing literature. First, many studies on student discipline in pesantren focus on obedience, rule enforcement, or disciplinary outcomes, while fewer studies examine how self-discipline is habituated as an internalized character trait. Second, previous research often treats democratic leadership as an institutional management style. However, it has paid less attention to its role as a mechanism for developing students' self-regulation and moral responsibility. Third, studies on pesantren leadership frequently focus on kyai or institutional authority in general, while the experiences, responses, and participation of female students remain underexplored. This gap is important because female

students live within specific dormitory structures, social relations, and daily routines that may influence how discipline is internalized.

To address these gaps, this study investigates democratic leadership and the habituation of self-discipline among female students at Al-Ishlah Islamic Boarding School, Jenggawah, Jember. The study focuses on three interrelated aspects: the implementation of democratic leadership in student development, the process through which self-discipline is habituated in daily pesantren life, and female students' responses and participation in democratic leadership practices. The novelty of this study lies in its attempt to examine democratic leadership not only as a decision-making style but also as a character-building approach that supports the transformation of discipline from external compliance into internal self-regulation.

This study contributes to the literature on educational leadership, pesantren management, and character education by offering a contextual understanding of how democratic leadership operates in a female pesantren environment. In practice, the findings are expected to provide insights for pesantren leaders, dormitory supervisors, and student organizations in designing participatory disciplinary systems that strengthen students' responsibility, awareness, and self-discipline. Therefore, this study argues that democratic leadership can be an effective strategy for cultivating sustainable self-discipline when implemented through deliberation, exemplary conduct, shared responsibility, persuasive guidance, and consistent habituation in daily institutional life.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore democratic leadership practices and the habituation of self-discipline among female students at Al-Ishlah Islamic Boarding School, Jenggawah, Jember, Indonesia. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand leadership practices, disciplinary habituation, and students' participation as social and educational phenomena embedded in a natural institutional context. Qualitative inquiry enables researchers to interpret meanings, experiences, interactions, and processes from participants' perspectives rather than reducing them to numerical indicators (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, this design enabled the researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of how democratic leadership was practiced in daily pesantren life and how these practices contributed to the development of self-discipline among female students.

The research was conducted at Al-Ishlah Islamic Boarding School, Jenggawah, Jember. This site was selected purposively because the pesantren represents an Islamic educational institution that combines religious learning, dormitory-based student development, organizational activities, and structured disciplinary routines. The institutional context was relevant to the study's focus because democratic leadership and self-discipline could be observed directly through daily interactions among pesantren caregivers, dormitory supervisors, student organization leaders, and female students. The natural setting of the pesantren provided a meaningful context for

examining how leadership values, rules, supervision, deliberation, and habituation were implemented in everyday educational practices.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling. This technique was used because the study required informants who possessed direct knowledge, experience, and involvement in the implementation of democratic leadership and student discipline at the pesantren. The informants consisted of pesantren caregivers, dormitory heads, student organization leaders, and female students. These participants were considered capable of providing rich, relevant information on leadership practices, decision-making processes, disciplinary routines, student participation, and responses to pesantren regulations. The selection of participants was guided by the principle of information richness, namely the extent to which informants could provide meaningful data related to the research focus.

Data were collected through passive participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Passive participant observation was conducted by attending and observing pesantren activities without directly participating. Using this technique, the researchers examined daily routines, leadership interactions, student discipline practices, organizational activities, communication patterns, and rule implementation within the boarding school environment. Observation was important for capturing naturally occurring behavior and for understanding how democratic leadership and self-discipline were enacted in practice.

Semi-structured interviews were used to obtain deeper information from key informants. This type of interview was selected because it provides a balance between focus and flexibility. The researchers prepared guiding questions on democratic leadership, student development, disciplinary habituation, and student responses, while still allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences and offer additional explanations. Semi-structured interviews are widely used in qualitative research because they enable researchers to explore participants' meanings, perceptions, and experiences in greater depth (Kallio et al., 2016). In this study, interviews helped clarify how leaders involved students in deliberation, how disciplinary values were communicated, and how female students interpreted their participation in pesantren life.

Document analysis was also conducted to complement data from observation and interviews. The documents reviewed included pesantren rules, activity schedules, attendance records, organizational documents, evaluation notes, and other materials relevant to student discipline and leadership practices. Document analysis was useful for understanding the formal structure of disciplinary habituation and for comparing written regulations with field-observed practices. The use of multiple data sources strengthened the comprehensiveness of the research findings and enabled the researchers to examine consistency between institutional documents, participants' statements, and observed behavior.

Data analysis was carried out using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020), which comprises data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data condensation involved selecting, simplifying, focusing, and organizing field notes, interview transcripts, and documents to address the

research questions. The data were then presented in structured narratives, thematic categories, and interpretive descriptions to facilitate systematic understanding. Finally, conclusions were drawn by identifying patterns, relationships, and meanings related to democratic leadership, self-discipline habituation, and student participation. The analysis was conducted continuously throughout the research process, beginning from data collection until the final interpretation of findings.

To ensure the study's trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were considered. Credibility was strengthened through source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from caregivers, dormitory heads, student organization leaders, and female students. Triangulation was carried out by comparing data from observations, interviews, and documentation. These procedures were used to ensure that the findings were not based on a single source or method. In addition, the researchers conducted careful data interpretation by repeatedly reviewing field notes and interview data to reduce bias and strengthen the accuracy of the findings. Trustworthiness in qualitative research requires systematic procedures that demonstrate the consistency, transparency, and credibility of the research process (Nowell et al., 2017; Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Ethical considerations were maintained throughout the research process. Before collecting data, the researchers explained the study's purpose to participants and ensured that participation was voluntary. Participants' responses were treated confidentially and used only for academic purposes. The researchers also maintained sensitivity to the pesantren context by respecting institutional norms, religious values, and the daily routines of female students. These ethical procedures were important to ensure that the research process did not disrupt pesantren activities and that participants could provide information comfortably and honestly.

RESULT

Democratic Leadership as Participatory Student Development

The findings indicate that democratic leadership at Al-Ishlah Islamic Boarding School, Jenggawah, Jember, was practiced through open communication, deliberation, student involvement, and shared responsibility in managing daily life in the pesantren. Leadership was not implemented merely through commands from the caregiver or dormitory authorities. Instead, the leadership pattern emphasized dialogue between caregivers, dormitory heads, student organization leaders, and female students.

Interview data showed that decisions regarding student activities were generally discussed in deliberative forums. The caregiver explained that student-related programs were not decided unilaterally but were first discussed with dormitory supervisors and student organization leaders. As stated by C1, "Before determining student activities, we usually discuss them with the dormitory heads and student organization administrators so that the programs can be accepted and implemented together." This statement indicates that leadership practices in the

pesantren involved participatory mechanisms that gave students space to contribute to institutional activities.

This finding was supported by the dormitory head, who emphasized that communication between leaders and students was relatively open. DH1 stated, "Students can convey suggestions or complaints through the organization or directly to the supervisor. We try not to make them afraid to speak." This statement suggests that democratic leadership was reflected not only in formal meetings but also in everyday communication. Female students were encouraged to express opinions, ask questions, and participate in solving problems related to dormitory life.

Observation also confirmed the presence of participatory leadership practices. During organizational meetings, student organization leaders were observed leading discussions, recording members' suggestions, and coordinating follow-up actions with dormitory supervisors. The caregiver and dormitory head did not dominate the discussion but provided direction and clarification when needed. This pattern shows that students were not treated merely as recipients of rules but as participants in the management of pesantren activities.

Student organization leaders played a significant role in translating democratic leadership into daily practices. SO1 explained, "We are trusted to manage activities, remind friends about the schedule, and report problems to the dormitory supervisor." This responsibility strengthened students' sense of involvement in institutional life. The organization functioned as a bridge between pesantren leaders and female students, particularly in planning activities, monitoring discipline, and communicating rules.

The findings reveal three main characteristics of democratic leadership in the pesantren. First, leadership was communicative because it allowed two-way interaction between leaders and students. Second, leadership was participatory because students were involved in planning and implementing activities. Third, leadership was collaborative, as student organizations shared responsibility for maintaining order and discipline. These characteristics demonstrate that democratic leadership was not merely a formal leadership label but was embedded in the everyday management of female students.

Habituation of Self-Discipline through Routine, Modeling, and Evaluation

The second finding concerns the habituation of self-discipline among female students. Data from interviews and observations indicate that self-discipline was cultivated through structured routines, consistent supervision, exemplary behavior, peer reminders, and periodic evaluation. The pesantren applied daily schedules that regulated religious activities, study sessions, dormitory duties, organizational responsibilities, and rest periods. These routines created an environment in which discipline was repeatedly practiced.

The dormitory head stated that repeated activities were central to the formation of disciplined behavior. DH2 explained, "Students follow the schedule every day. At first, some of them feel forced, but because the activities are repeated continuously, they gradually become accustomed to them." This statement shows that self-discipline habituation was not instantaneous; it developed gradually through continuous

practice. Discipline was initially experienced as an external requirement, but over time it became part of students' daily awareness.

Observation showed that female students followed a structured rhythm of activities, such as waking up early, participating in congregational prayers, attending religious learning sessions, completing dormitory duties, and joining organizational activities. Attendance lists and duty reports were used to monitor participation. However, the findings also indicate that supervision was not always punitive. When students violated rules, they were often approached through advice, reminders, and dialogical guidance before formal sanctions were considered.

Exemplary behavior was also important. Several students stated that they learned discipline from the consistency of caregivers, dormitory supervisors, and student organization leaders. FS1 stated, "When supervisors and senior students are disciplined, we feel embarrassed if we are careless. We learn from what they do." This indicates that self-discipline was shaped not only through written rules but also through social modeling. Leaders' behavior served as a practical reference for students in understanding how discipline should be practiced.

Female students also described a change in their perception of discipline. FS2 explained, "At first, I felt that the rules were heavy. But after some time, I became used to them. If I miss an activity, I feel uncomfortable." This statement reflects a shift from external compliance to internal awareness. Students no longer followed rules only because they were supervised but because they had begun to perceive discipline as a personal responsibility.

Periodic evaluation strengthened the habituation process. The pesantren used attendance records, dormitory duty reports, and organizational evaluations to monitor student discipline. SO2 explained, "We evaluate activities and remind friends who are often late or absent. Usually, we first talk to them personally." This indicates that student organizations contributed to internal supervision through peer-based reminders and persuasive communication. Such practices supported the development of self-discipline because students were guided within a relational and communal environment.

Overall, the habituation of self-discipline at Al-Ishlah Islamic Boarding School was formed through the interaction of structure and awareness. Rules and schedules provided external order, while modeling, dialogue, responsibility, and evaluation helped students internalize discipline as a personal value. This finding shows that self-discipline was not produced by regulation alone but by the continuous repetition of disciplined practices within a supportive leadership environment.

Female Students' Responses and Participation

The third finding shows that female students responded positively to democratic leadership practices. Their responses were reflected in increased courage to express opinions, greater active involvement in activities, a willingness to accept responsibility, and a stronger commitment to mutually agreed-upon rules. Students perceived democratic leadership as a leadership pattern that made them feel respected and trusted.

FS3 stated, "We feel more comfortable because we are allowed to give opinions. Even if our suggestions are not accepted, the reasons are explained." This statement indicates that students valued the opportunity to participate in communication and decision-making processes. The important point was not always whether their opinions were accepted, but whether they were heard and considered—this sense of being listened to encouraged students to participate more actively in pesantren activities.

Another student, FS4, explained, "When we are involved in discussions, we feel that the rules are also our responsibility." This finding indicates that participation strengthened students' sense of ownership. Rules were no longer perceived only as orders from leaders but as collective agreements that had to be maintained together. This sense of ownership laid an important foundation for self-discipline.

Observation also showed that female students were active in organizational activities, dormitory duties, and routine evaluations. They were involved in preparing activities, reminding peers, and maintaining order during scheduled programs. Student organization leaders were observed giving instructions, inviting members to cooperate, and reporting the progress of activities to dormitory supervisors. These practices indicate that participation extended beyond verbal expression to include concrete responsibilities.

However, the findings also show that democratic leadership did not eliminate the need for rules and supervision. Some students still needed reminders and guidance, especially regarding punctuality and consistent attendance at activities. Therefore, democratic leadership in this pesantren operated through a balance between participation and control. Leaders provided space for dialogue, but institutional rules remained important as a framework for collective discipline.

The overall results suggest that democratic leadership contributed to the habituation of self-discipline through three connected mechanisms: participatory communication, structured habituation, and student responsibility. Participatory communication created trust and openness. Structured habituation provided repeated practice of discipline. Student responsibility encouraged the internalization of rules as shared commitments. These mechanisms explain how democratic leadership can support the transformation of discipline from externally enforced obedience into internally motivated self-discipline.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that democratic leadership plays an important role in cultivating self-discipline among female students in an Islamic boarding school context. The leadership practices observed at Al-Ishlah Islamic Boarding School were characterized by open communication, deliberation, student involvement, and shared responsibility. These findings are consistent with the concept of democratic or participative leadership, which emphasizes the involvement of members in organizational decision-making and management processes. Wang et al. (2022) explain that participative leadership is rooted in democratic leadership because it allows subordinates to contribute to decision-making and organizational

improvement. In the pesantren context, this participatory principle was reflected in the involvement of student organizations and female students in planning, implementing, and evaluating daily activities.

The findings also strengthen previous research on democratic leadership in Islamic boarding schools. Jakandar et al. (2024) found that democratic leadership in pesantren disciplinary management facilitated students' active participation in decision-making regarding disciplinary policies. Similarly, Marjuki et al. (2024) showed that Kyai's democratic leadership helped overcome student discipline problems by fostering motivation, guidance, and supervision. The present study extends these findings by showing that democratic leadership not only improves disciplinary compliance but also supports the habituation of self-discipline as an internalized character trait among female students.

A significant contribution of this study lies in its explanation of how democratic leadership transforms discipline from external control into internal awareness. In many educational institutions, discipline is often maintained through supervision, sanctions, and hierarchical authority. Such mechanisms may lead to compliance, but they do not always foster self-discipline. The findings of this study show that when students are involved in deliberation, trusted with responsibilities, and guided through persuasive communication, they are more likely to accept rules as shared commitments. This process is closely related to self-determination theory, which argues that autonomous motivation develops when individuals experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Democratic leadership provides these three conditions by giving students a voice, responsibility, and relational support.

The role of structured routines in forming self-discipline is also important. The pesantren's daily schedule created repeated opportunities for students to practice discipline. However, routines alone were not sufficient. The effectiveness of habituation depended on how routines were communicated, supervised, and modeled. The findings show that students gradually moved from feeling forced to becoming accustomed to disciplined behavior. This transformation indicates a process of internalization, in which external regulations become part of personal awareness. In this sense, democratic leadership served as a bridge between institutional structure and individual self-regulation.

The findings can also be explained through social cognitive theory. Bandura (1986) emphasizes that interactions among personal factors, behavior, and the environment shape human behavior. Individuals learn not only through direct instruction but also through observation and modeling. In this study, caregivers, dormitory supervisors, and student organization leaders functioned as models of disciplined behavior. Students imitated the punctuality, responsibility, and consistency demonstrated by these figures. Therefore, self-discipline was not merely taught through verbal advice but was learned through repeated observation within the pesantren environment.

The role of student organizations further illustrates the importance of distributed responsibility in educational leadership. Student organization leaders

acted as mediators between institutional leaders and female students. They coordinated activities, reminded peers, monitored attendance, and helped solve disciplinary problems. This finding resonates with Leithwood et al. (2020), who argue that successful educational leadership is not limited to the actions of formal leaders but is also distributed across organizational members. In the pesantren context, distributed leadership enabled students to become active agents of discipline rather than passive objects of regulation.

The positive responses of female students indicate that democratic leadership strengthened engagement and psychological ownership. Students became more willing to participate because they felt heard, respected, and trusted. Wang et al. (2019) argue that student engagement develops through interactions across psychological, relational, social, and cultural contexts. This study supports that argument by showing that engagement in pesantren life was shaped by leadership relationships, peer interaction, institutional routines, and religious-cultural norms. When students experienced respectful communication and meaningful participation, they became more committed to maintaining discipline.

The findings also suggest that democratic leadership in pesantren should not be misunderstood as permissive leadership. Although students were given opportunities to express opinions, institutional rules remained firm. Leaders maintained boundaries through schedules, evaluations, and supervision. Therefore, democratic leadership in this study operated as guided participation rather than unrestricted freedom. This balance is important because pesantren discipline requires both collective order and personal awareness. A fully authoritarian approach may weaken internal motivation, while an overly permissive approach may reduce institutional consistency. Democratic leadership offers a middle path by combining participation, guidance, and accountability.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the literature on educational leadership and character education by connecting democratic leadership with the habituation of self-discipline. Previous studies often discuss leadership and discipline as separate themes. This study shows that democratic leadership can serve as a mechanism for character formation when practiced through communication, modeling, routine, evaluation, and shared responsibility. The findings also enrich discussions on pesantren management by highlighting female students' participation as an important element in disciplinary culture.

From a practical perspective, the findings imply that pesantren leaders should strengthen participatory disciplinary systems. Caregivers and dormitory supervisors should provide regular forums where students can express their opinions, discuss problems, and contribute to activity planning. Student organizations should also be empowered as partners in developing discipline, not merely as instruments of supervision. In addition, disciplinary routines should be accompanied by explanation, role modeling, and reflective evaluation so that students understand the meaning behind the rules.

Overall, this study confirms that democratic leadership can foster sustainable self-discipline among female students. The process occurs through three interrelated

mechanisms: participatory communication that builds trust, structured habituation that creates repeated disciplined practices, and shared responsibility that strengthens internal awareness. In the context of Islamic boarding schools, these mechanisms are particularly relevant because pesantren education aims not only to produce obedient students but also to cultivate morally responsible individuals who can regulate themselves in accordance with religious and social values.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the role of democratic leadership in fostering self-discipline among female students at Al-Ishlah Islamic Boarding School, Jenggawah, Jember. The findings revealed that democratic leadership had a greater impact on students' character formation than initially anticipated. Rather than functioning solely as an administrative or managerial approach, democratic leadership served as an effective mechanism for cultivating self-discipline through participatory communication, deliberative decision-making, shared responsibility, and continuous student involvement in institutional activities. The study found that self-discipline was not developed primarily through coercive control or punitive measures, but through a systematic process of habituation supported by structured routines, exemplary conduct, organizational supervision, and reflective evaluation. These findings challenge the conventional assumption that discipline in Islamic boarding schools is maintained mainly through hierarchical authority and strict regulation. Instead, the results suggest that participatory leadership practices can facilitate the transformation of discipline from externally enforced compliance into internally regulated behavior.

From a scientific perspective, this study reinforces previous findings regarding the positive relationship between democratic leadership, student participation, and disciplinary development in educational settings. At the same time, it extends the existing literature by demonstrating that democratic leadership can function as a character-building strategy that promotes the internalization of self-discipline among female students in a pesantren context. The study contributes to the growing discourse on educational leadership and character education by introducing a conceptual understanding of democratic leadership as a mechanism that connects participation, responsibility, and self-regulation. In doing so, it enriches scholarly discussions on how leadership practices influence not only organizational effectiveness but also the formation of students' personal and moral capacities.

Despite these contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. This study was conducted at a single Islamic boarding school and involved a relatively small number of participants, which may limit the transferability of the findings to other educational contexts. In addition, the study focused specifically on female students within a particular pesantren environment, making it difficult to generalize the results to broader populations or different institutional settings. Furthermore, the qualitative nature of the study emphasizes depth of understanding rather than statistical generalization.

Therefore, future research is recommended to involve larger and more diverse samples across multiple pesantren and educational institutions. Comparative studies

involving male and female students, different leadership styles, and various cultural contexts may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between leadership and self-discipline. Future investigations may also employ mixed-methods or longitudinal approaches to examine the long-term impact of democratic leadership on students' character development, self-regulation, and educational outcomes. In practice, pesantren leaders are encouraged to strengthen participatory leadership practices, empower student organizations, and maintain exemplary conduct to cultivate sustainable self-discipline and responsible citizenship among students.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors gratefully acknowledge the support of Universitas Islam Negeri Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq Jember, Indonesia, for facilitating this research. The authors would also like to thank the leadership, dormitory administrators, student organization members, and female students of Al-Ishlah Islamic Boarding School, Jenggawah, Jember, for their openness, cooperation, and active participation throughout the study. Their insights and experiences contributed to understanding the relationship between democratic leadership and the development of self-discipline in the pesantren context. The authors further appreciate all colleagues and parties who provided assistance, encouragement, and constructive support in completing this research.

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