Strengthening Leadership Culture
(The Role of Kyai in Indonesian Pesantren)

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Abstract

Pesantren is the traditional Islamic education system and the oldest non-formal institution in Indonesia. In order to its role, this boarding school has many contributions in the strengthening of education culture, specifically in building and concerning the identity of Islam. Some scholar proved the important role of Pesantren in transferring Islamic knowledge, strengthening people’s religious loyalty to Islamic principles. In addition, Pesantren has two roles: teaches religion knowledge and encourage it’s student or santri to develop globally. All of thus cannot be separated from the Kyai role as an owner and a leader to manage its community. As an official subject, leadership practice of Kyai seems to be high expected to inculcate education. Kyai in Pesantren plays many roles such as educator and caregiver, society connector, leader, and manager of the Pesantren. This paper aims to find the role of Kyai in Pesantren as the leader in managing an educational system inside it. By using the literature research, the writer found that Kyai’s leadership as a symbol and strength in building values. Santri character, actually not only dealing with the process of education, but also for every santri have a duty as a successor and educator in the future, the spreader mission Islamic da’wa that eventually became the guard and fortress of the ummah. The sustainability and its existence of Pesantren are on Kyai as the leader, main holder, policymaker, especially in the sphere of education and educating society.

Keywords: Culture, Islamic knowledge, Kyai, Leadership, Pesantren.
A. Introduction

The oldest traditional Islamic education and non-formal institution in Indonesia was Pesantren. These Islamic boarding school is a uniquely Indonesian phenomenon\(^1\). In addition, Education Management Information System, Ministry of Religious Affairs shows that the number of Pesantren in 2014 is about 28961, with 81.4% was located at Java (https://emispendis.kemenag.go.id). It is mean that Pesantren has the contribution in a strengthening of education culture, specifically in building and concerning identity of Islam itself. Some scholar proved the pivotal role of Pesantren in playing transmitting Islamic teachings and strengthening people’s religious loyalty to Islamic principles as well as in a certain moment becoming as a source of identity for whole Indonesian Muslim societies\(^2\).

This boarding school also transform from religious school to a part of an educational system in Indonesia. They do not only teach religion but also encourage santri to take part of world progress\(^3\). Furthermore, Pesantren has been considered as a model institution that excels in a scientific tradition that regarded as a great tradition, as well as on side of transmission and internalization of morality. Pesantren role to empower santri certainly cannot be separated from the Kyai role as an owner and a leader to manage its community\(^4\).

Given the fact of Kyai role as a leader, in the future, the personal leadership of Kyai really set the movement quality, sustainability and

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the continuation of Pesantren activity. According to Kasful Anwar Us, Pesantren has shown that Kyai, as well as santri, preserve the chain of traditional Islam within the structure of the intelligent network. In maintaining the linkage, marriage and kinship play important roles. It means that Kyai not only maintains their charismatic over their scholarship and religious leadership but also play social and cultural roles in societies. Moreover, Kyai and his people should deal with the practices of the lead character in internalizing values and learning society without any tensions, negotiations, and cooperation. Pesantren itself must be has 5 (five) elements; (1) a dormitory for santri lives, (2) the mosque as a place of worship and also as a place of learning, (3) santri or students, (4) Kyai as the leader, (5) one learning of Islamic classical books.

As an official subject, leadership practice of Kyai seems to be high expected to inculcate education. According to Dhofier, the definition of Kyai is derived from the Javanese language, which was originally used for three different types of titles: (1) Honorary title for goods considered sacred. (2) An honors degree for older people in general. (3) The title was given by the community to an Islamic religious scholar who owns or becomes the leader of the Pesantren and teaches the classical Islamic books on his student. In this case, the author takes the third definition, to describe the figure of Kyai as a person who has authority in running the wheel of life in the Pesantren.

A Kyai in Pesantren plays many roles such as educator and caregiver, society connector, leader, and manager of the Pesantren. The complex role requires Kyai to be able to adjust him to various situations. To do that, therefore, it is needed a Kyai who has the ability,
dedication, and commitment to do these roles. Arifin also found that Kyai is commonly perceived as a charismatic leader, not only by his santri but also in the wider context of traditional Muslims in Indonesia. This perception is also based on a common understanding of the establishment of Pesantren throughout Java. However, Kyai not only transmitting Islamic knowledge and values in an education system, but also coping with social changes, promoting economic development, and even supporting gender studies.

B. Literature Review

There are several theories and past researchers that can be used as supporting materials for this study on leadership practices in Pesantren. Smith, in a research-focused his analysis on two issues, namely the Kyai (leaders) and Kitab Kuning (teaching materials). He found the role played by the Kyai is a vital one as a leading central figure that is unique in education. His research findings further inspire students to follow the example of the prophet, which conforms to the idealistic purpose of a Pesantren and is the main mission in developing it. Whereas Hicks as mentioned by Wekke and Hamid, in his thesis showed that the Leadership of a Kyai is influenced at least by three factors, namely: competency, piety, and linkage. The leadership style was found to be a combination of rational-traditional, whereby even though the leadership at Pondok Pesantren (boarding school) is seen to be rational in nature but when seen from Weber’s concept of traditional (charismatic and legal-rational), in reality, a lot are inconsistent with rational leadership principles.

Next, the study of leadership which is related to other concepts had been conducted by some scholars. Combs had surveyed in how

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9 Kasful Anwar Us, “The Leadership….,88.


12 Ismail Suardi Wekke and Sanusi Hamid, “Technology on Language……, 586

leader tries to managing people, although his cultures became more complex. His writing accentuates on the analysis of the problem that should be solved with a learning experience, and how the leader did some activities that deal with conflict resolution and mediation, adult learning and development, team building, and staff evaluation and professional growth. Furthermore, accomplishing this all progressing can be addressing with study in higher academic. Leithwood et al, comes with the same argument et al. that leadership is an influence process that encompasses the affective, behavioral, and cognitive performance of a variety of leaders at the individual, group, and school levels in interaction with a matrix of school constituencies at multiple levels\textsuperscript{14}.

Hallinger states that the centrality of leadership model in the pursuit of better outcomes is now widely accepted and acknowledged\textsuperscript{15}. The quality of school leadership is now directly associated with better academic success and higher achievement for every student. It is also clear that educational leadership in general and the teacher as an educational leader, in particular, should develop learning materials, curricula, programs for change and effectiveness in class activities. The same argument comes from Sukamto\textsuperscript{16}, that Kyai leadership is often identified with the title of charismatic leadership, even though it has been born mapping position and function in the organizational structure of boarding school. This charisma gains support from society because it has moral stability and scientific qualities, thus giving birth to a form of magnetic personality (full of attraction) to the congregation.

In Indonesian Pesantren context, Muflih et. al\textsuperscript{17} was conducted in order to reveal the meaning behind leadership evolution actions of Kyai at PP Lirboyo. He concludes that PP Lirboyo able to maintain

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and develop salafiyah activities with the number of santri continues to increase, whereas many boarding schools are migrating to modern Boarding school and many salafiyah boarding school santri are increasingly decreased. Kyai competence of PP Lirboyo is shown in science, intelligence, exemplary, authority, charisma, sincerity, capabilities, and community acceptance. Among many elements of these competencies, the most preferred is scientific competence, charisma, and sincerity in accepting leadership mandate. Muflih works prove that PP Lirboyo has 3 concepts of leadership. First, the first generation of PP Lirboyo Founder implements individual charismatic leadership with the monomorphic pattern. Second, generation caregivers, implement collective charismatic leadership with the polymorphic pattern. And the third generation implements individual charismatic leadership polymorphic pattern. In line with this work, Busyairi\textsuperscript{18} also in same part sees the full authority of Kyai in PP Tebuireng in decided the education system. All of the component in that education system is dependent, especially about learning and teaching process including the goal, learning material, the method, and evaluation. Those entire components ideally integrated become one so the goal can reach easily.

C. The Leadership Culture of Kyai

Since tens of years, even before Indonesian independence boarding school in Indonesia has been discussed by experts and researchers in various disciplines. Sociologically, the presence of Pesantren huts in the midst of Indonesian society has contributed greatly to the sustainability of education in Indonesia. Nurcholis Madjid\textsuperscript{19} said that the various complexities that exist in Pesantren, such as vision, mission, goals, objectives, curriculum, methods and approaches in teaching and learning process, management management, infrastructure, environmental layout, cleanliness,


order, beauty to Kyai leadership in Pesantren tradition into the material of study of experts, researchers and observers. The study of experts and researchers generally say that the various components that exist in the Pesantren still not describe the ideal ideals of Islamic teachings.

Kyai leadership is very important in boarding school; all forms of power, policy, managerial and all operational boarding school are under his direction. Related to power, Kyai has full authority about the survival of boarding school. Regarding the policy of Kyai should have the views contained in the vision, mission, and programs that can improve the quality of boarding schools. In addition, also matters relating to the fields of politics, economic, social, cultural; cottage relationships with other huts, cottage relationships with other educational institutions at home and abroad, and cottage relationships with government, society and others. As for cottage operations, it is related to curriculum management; learning management; human resource management, facilities management infrastructure, santri management, library management, financing management and others. Kyai who services as a leader of the dormitory will be more successful in carrying out his leadership if he is personally charismatic. Charismatic Kyai usually has many advantages compared to other Kyai, such as mental state, skill, piety and, others.  

From the phrase, it can be seen, that the pattern of leadership Kyai is a charismatic leadership, personal and religion feudalism. This leadership pattern is considered as less positive in terms of democratic development, egalitarian, openness, and public access. This is for example seen in the customs that apply to the guests who come to him, that guests are just waiting for an opportunity until Kyai himself is willing to ask for his needs. The visiting officers did not dare to inform Kyai, that he was being awaited guests, except for certain guests, such as government officials arranged by the protocol or who had entered into an agreement first.

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20 Nurcholish Madjid, Bilik-bilik Pesantren……., 58-60.
Nevertheless, with all its shortcomings, including in its leadership pattern, it turns out that Pesantren in Indonesia is one of the ablest institutions to respond to the challenges of modernization compared to similar educational institutions in other countries. Pesantren currently not only performs three traditional functions, namely transmission and transfer of Islamic sciences, maintenance of Islamic tradition and reproduction of ulama, but also a center of health education, center of appropriate technology development for rural people; centers for rescue and conservation of the environment; and more importantly become the center of economic empowerment of the surrounding community\(^{21}\).

In this last context, it is seen that more and more Pesantren are involved in vocational and economic activities, such as in agribusiness businesses that include crop cultivation, livestock, fisheries and forestry, the development of home industries or small industries such as convection, handicrafts, shops, cooperatives and so forth. The response of Islamic boarding schools to the modernization of Islamic education and the socio-economic changes taking place in Indonesia involves renewing the substance or content of Pesantren education by including general and vocational subjects, methodological reforms, such as classical systems, institutional reform and reform, such as Pesantren leadership, educational institutions, and renewal of educational, social and economic functions\(^{22}\).

D. The Roles and Responsibilities of Kyai

Abdurrahman Mas’ud incorporated the Kyai into five typologies: (1) encyclopedic and multidisciplinary Kyai who concentrated in the world of science; learning, teaching, and writing produced many books, such as Nawawi al-Bantani. (2) Kyai is an expert in one of the specialties in the field of Islamic science. Because of their expertise in various fields of science, their Pesantren is sometimes named according to their specialties, such as the Qur’anic Pesantren. (3) Charismatic

\(^{21}\) Zamakhsyari Dhoﬁer, Tradisi Pesantren…… 102.

Kyai who derives his charism from religious knowledge, especially from his Sufism, such as KH. Kholil Bangkalan Madura. (4) Kyai Dai tour, whose attention and involvement are greater through lectures in conveying his knowledge as a form of interaction with the public along with the mission of sunnisme or aswaja with effective rhetorical language. (5) Kyai movement, due to his outstanding leadership roles and skills, both in society and the organization he founded, and the depth of his religious knowledge, thus becoming the most prominent leader, such as KH. Hasyim Asy’ari.23

Kyai’s leadership position in Pesantren emphasizes the aspect of Pesantren share ownership and morality as well as the depth of religious knowledge and often ignores the managerial aspects. Kyai’s announcement is not only the leader but also as the owner of the Pesantren. Kyai’s position is also to guide the santri in all matters, which in turn result in the role of Kyai as a researcher, filter and ultimately similar cultural aspects from outside, in such circumstances in itself puts Kyai as cultural brokers.

Pesantren is an Islamic educational institution under the leadership of a Kyai, both through formal and non-formal channels that aim to learn and practice the teachings of Islam through yellow book study by emphasizing religious morals as a guide in the daily behavior of santri. The leadership style presented by the experts, but the most popular and used as a reference by practitioners and researchers only four leadership styles, namely: autocratic, democratic, the lesser faires (freestyle), and situational. Kyai as a Pesantren leader in guiding the santri or the surrounding community using a situational approach.24

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very influential. Thus Kyai behavior can be observed, imitated, and interpreted by his followers (directly) in everyday interactions.

Of the many styles of leadership (leadership style) put forward by experts, the most popular and often discussed and used as a reference by practitioners and researchers only four styles of leadership, they are; autocratic, democratic, the laisser faire (freestyle), and situational. Leadership in Pesantren emphasizes the process of guidance, direction and affection. According to Mansur, the leadership style presented by Pesantren is collective or institutional leadership. He further argues that the style of leadership in Pesantren has paternalistic characteristics, and free rein leadership, in which the passive leader, as a father who gives his child a chance to be creative, but also authoritarian, gives the final words to decide whether the work of the subordinate concerned may be forwarded or not.

From the description above, it can be understood that Kyai as the leader of Pesantren in guiding the students or the surrounding community using situational approach. This is apparent in the interaction between Kyai and his santri in educating, teaching the book, and giving advices, as well as a consultation point of the problem. It is mean that sometimes Kyai functions as a parent and teacher who can be encountered indefinitely. These conditions show that Kyai’s leadership is full of responsibility, attentive, full of attraction and very influential. Thus Kyai behavior can be observed, imitated, and interpreted by his followers (directly) in everyday interactions.

The discussion and argument above show that Kyai at least has 3 roles in managing an educational system, namely:

1) **Preserving Islamic Tradition.** Kyai must have a capability and skill in training santri for Islamic subject. In another word, it is related to the intellectual and spiritual aspects

2) **Intellectual relation.** Kyai needs to maintain its intellectual relation with the society. This networking tends to be multi-interpretation, not only intellectual authority but also social religious authority

3) **Spiritual relation.** This role supports the previous one, which is the
last plays a central role in the maintenance of Islamic tradition. Moreover, santri and most people do believe that Kyai is connected and channel of Allah in the world.\textsuperscript{25}

In education aspect based on the three roles, Kyai in Pesantren must have ability, commitment, and dedication in playing several roles: educator and caregiver, leader, society connector, and manager in same times. In addition, Kyai is a model, representation of the society around him. It also can be explained, that Kyai controls all sector in Pesantren.

Some of the main things that Kyai has done as pesantren leaders in raising and developing pesantren are: Firstly, Kyai is able to create an atmosphere that encourages students to learn through the creation of a conducive learning environment through the provision of learning facilities, special services, instructional innovations, individual learning, and meaningfulness of learning through the growth of motivation and enthusiasm of students in learning. Secondly, Kyai is able to motivate and encourage the ustad to have the high commitment to progress pesantren, manage conflict effectively, instill disciplinary values, equalize vision, improve prosperity which all require the ability of ustad to grow personally and professionally. Thirdly, Kyai as head of Pesantren is able to take support from investors both domestic and abroad, foundations, and parents of santri in order to realize the desired expectations together.

Effective Kyai leadership is in accordance with the criteria set by Dubin\textsuperscript{26}, which is able to meet three things, namely: (a) create an atmosphere conducive for student learning; (b) teacher involvement and growth; (c) community support and high expectations.

E. Conclusion

Pesantren is one of the oldest educational institutions in Indonesia, born and grew along with the development of Islam in Indonesia. The presence of Pesantren has colored and contributed


greatly to the development of education in Indonesia. The three main components of *Pesantren*, namely: the existence of *Kyai*, santri, and dormitory are pillars and pillars that blend in one frame that can not be separated.

*Kyai*’s leadership as a symbol and strength in building values. *santri* character, actually not just dealing with the process of education of young shoots who are taking the period of formation in the *Pesantren*, but also for every *santri* have a duty as a successor and educator in the future, the spreader mission Islamic da’wa that eventually became the guard and fortress of the ummah. The sustainability and its existence of *Pesantren* are on *Kyai* as the leader, main holder, policymaker, especially in the sphere of education and educating society.

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