

# 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<sup>1</sup>. 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<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup>. 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<sup>4</sup>.

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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<sup>1</sup> Mohamad Mustari, "The Roles of the Institution of Pesantren in the Development of Rural Society : A Study in Kabupaten Tasikmalaya , West Java , Indonesia," *International Journal of Nusantara Islam*, 2011, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Zamakhsyari Dhofier. *Tradisi Pesantren: Studi Tentang Pandangan Hidup Kiai*. Jakarta: LP3ES, (1994: p.17). Ronald Lukens-bull, "Madrasa By Any Other Name: Pondok, Pesantren, and Islamic Schools in Indonesia and Larger Southeast Asian Region," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 4, no. 1 (2010): 2–5. Rosalia Sciortino, "Learning Form Islam: Advocacy of Reproductive Rights in Indonesian Pesantren," *Reproductive Health Matters* 8, no. 1 (1996): 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ismail Suardi Wekke and Sanusi Hamid, "Technology on Language Teaching and Learning : A Research on Indonesian Pesantren," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 83, no. 2 (2013). 1–2,.

<sup>4</sup> Mus Mulyadi, "Charismatic Leadership In Bengkulu City Harsallakum Al-Qur'an Islamic Boarding School," *Journal of Education Research in Administration and Management* 1, no. 2 (2017). 107.

the continuation of *Pesantren* activity<sup>5</sup>. According to Kasful Anwar Us<sup>6</sup>, *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<sup>7</sup>.

As an official subject, leadership practice of *Kyai* seems to be high expected to inculcate education. According to Dhofier<sup>8</sup>, 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,

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<sup>5</sup> Muhammad Latif Fauzi, "The Roles of *Kyai* and *Pesantren* in Preserving Islamic Tradition and Negotiating Modernity". *Journal of Indonesia Islam* 6, no. 1 (2012). 126–27.

<sup>6</sup> Kasful Anwar Us, "The Leadership of *Kyai* in Islamic Boarding School ( A Study of Islamic Boarding School in Jambi )" 22, no. 1 (2001). 88.

<sup>7</sup> Zamakhsyari Dhofier. *The Pesantren tradition: The role of the kyai in the maintenance of traditional Islam in Java*. United States of America: the Program for Southeast Asian Studies (ASU), (1999).25-41.

<sup>8</sup> Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren*..... 93.

dedication, and commitment to do these roles<sup>9</sup>. Arifin<sup>10</sup> 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<sup>11</sup>, 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<sup>12</sup>. 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<sup>13</sup> had surveyed in how

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<sup>9</sup> Kasful Anwar Us, "The Leadership....", 88.

<sup>10</sup> Achmad Z. Arifin. "Charisma and Rationalisation in a Modernising Pesantren : Changing Values in Traditional Islamic Education in Java." University of Western Sydney, Australia, 2013. 14-16.

<sup>11</sup> B.J Smith, Stealing women, stealing men: Co-creating cultures of polygamy in a pesantren community in Eastern Indonesia. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 11(1), (2009). 189-207.

<sup>12</sup> Ismail Suardi Wekke and Sanusi Hamid, "Technology on Language.....", 586

<sup>13</sup> A.W.Combs. *On Becoming A School Leader: A Person-Centered Challenge*, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. (1999).7-8.

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<sup>14</sup>.

Hallinger states that the centrality of leadership model in the pursuit of better outcomes is now widely accepted and acknowledged<sup>15</sup>. 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<sup>16</sup>, 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<sup>17</sup> 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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<sup>14</sup> K. Leithwood, et al. *Second International Handbook of Educational Leadership and Administration* Second Edi. K. Leithwood, ed., New York: Springer, (2002).116.

<sup>15</sup> Philip Hallinger, "Leadership For Learning: Lessons From 40 Years Of Empirical Research". *Journal of Educational Administration*, Vol. 49 Iss: 2 (2011). 125 – 142.

<sup>16</sup> Sukamto. *Kepemimpinan Kiai Dalam Pesantren*. Vol. 1. (Jakarta: PT Pustaka LP3ES, 1999).

<sup>17</sup> Ahmad Muflih. "Leadership Evolution of Salafiyah Boarding School Leader at Lirboyo Kediri." *International Journal of Business and Management Invention* 3, no. 3 (2014).47-48.

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<sup>18</sup> 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<sup>19</sup> 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,

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<sup>18</sup> Ismail Suardi and Sanusi Hamid, "Technology on Language Teaching and Learning : A Research on Indonesian Pesantren," (2013). 1–2.

<sup>19</sup> Nurcholish Madjid. *Bilik-bilik Pesantren; Sebuah Potret Perjalanan*, Cet. 4; Jakarta: Paramadina, (2006). 45-46.

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<sup>20</sup>.

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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<sup>20</sup> 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<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup>.

#### **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

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<sup>21</sup> Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren.....* 102.

<sup>22</sup> Azyumardi Azra, *Pendidikan Islam: Tradisi Modernisasi Menuju Millenium Baru*, (Jakarta: Logos Wacana Ilmu 2000).102.



*Kyai* who derives his charisma 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<sup>23</sup>.

*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<sup>24</sup>. This is apparent in the interaction between *Kyai* and his *santri* in educating, teaching the book, and giving advice, as well as a consultation point of the problem, so that a *Kyai* sometimes also functions as a parent and teacher who can be encountered indefinitely. Conditions like these show that *Kyai's* leadership is full of responsibility, attentive, full of attraction and

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<sup>23</sup> Abdurrahman Mas'ud. *Intelektual pesantren: Perhelatan agama dan tradisi (Intellectuals in Pesantren: The dialogue of religion and tradition)*. (Yogyakarta: LkiS, 2004). 236-237.

<sup>24</sup> Kartono Kartini, *Pemimpin dan Kepemimpinan*. (Jakarta: PT. Grafindo Persada. 1998). 80.

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 *laissez 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<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>, 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

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<sup>25</sup> Muhammad Latif Fauzi, "The Roles of Kyai and Pesantren in Preserving Islamic Tradition and Negotiating Modernity," *Journal of Indonesia Islam* 6, no. 1, (2012). 135–36.

<sup>26</sup> A. E. Dubin. *The Principal as Chief Executive Officer*, (London: The Falmer Press. 1991). 49.

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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