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KIAI LEADERSHIP IN FORMING DISCIPLINE FOR STUDENTS IN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL

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Abstract

This study discusses the role of kiai leadership in shaping the character of santri discipline. Kiai as a charismatic figure is not only a spiritual leader, but also a role model that is emulated in everyday life. Exemplary behavior is the main strategy in instilling discipline without coercion. The application of discipline is carried out through rules, educational sanctions, and the habituation of spiritual activities such as dhikr and tawassul. This effort not only regulates external behavior, but also forms an inner attitude that is voluntarily obedient. Challenges such as laziness and differences in the background of students are overcome through a consistent and humanistic approach. The case study research method is used in this study, so that several research steps ranging from interviews, documentation, and observations are carried out so that researchers conduct interactive analysis by Miles and Huberman, conclusions are drawn by researchers carefully and in accordance with applicable scientific principles. The results of the study show that the combination of inspiring leadership, a clear rule system, and intensive spiritual guidance can create the character of students who are disciplined, responsible, and independent.
Keywords: Kiai leadership; role model; discipline; character; spirituality

Abstrak

Penelitian ini membahas peran kepemimpinan kiai dalam membentuk karakter disiplin santri. Kiai sebagai sosok kharismatik tidak hanya menjadi pemimpin spiritual, tetapi juga panutan yang dicontoh dalam keseharian. Keteladanan menjadi strategi utama dalam menanamkan kedisiplinan tanpa paksaan. Penerapan disiplin dilakukan melalui aturan, sanksi yang bersifat mendidik, dan pembiasaan kegiatan spiritual seperti dzikir dan tawassul. Upaya ini tidak hanya

mengatur perilaku lahiriah, tetapi juga membentuk sikap batiniah yang patuh secara sukarela. Tantangan seperti rasa malas dan perbedaan latar belakang santri diatasi melalui pendekatan yang konsisten dan humanis. Metode penelitian studi kasus digunakan dalam penelitian ini, sehingga beberapa langkah penelitian mulai dari wawancara, dokumentasi, dan observasi dilakukan sehingga peneliti melakukan analisis secara interaktif milik Miles dan Huberman, kesimpulan ditarik oleh peneliti secara seksama dan sesuai dengan kaidah ilmiah yang berlaku. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kombinasi antara kepemimpinan yang inspiratif, sistem aturan yang jelas, dan pembinaan spiritual yang intensif mampu menciptakan karakter santri yang disiplin, bertanggung jawab, dan mandiri.
Kata Kunci: Kepemimpinan kiai; keteladanan; disiplin santri; karakter; spiritualitas

A. INTRODUCTION

The term pondok pesantren consists of two words: pondok and pesantren. Etymologically, pondok comes from the Arabic word funduq, which means sleeping quarters, lodge, simple hotel, and can also mean room, small hut, or house. In Arabic, mahad or pesantren refers to a dormitory or a place where students study the Qur'an (ngaji) (Mu$hammad Sali, 2019). Pondok pesantren is a formal Islamic educational institution and represents an indigenous Indonesian cultural entity, deeply rooted in society (Lisda Nurul Romdoni; E$lly Malihah, 2020). A pesantren implements the concept of a traditional boarding school as a guide for life and religious understanding (tafaqquh fi al-din) in a communal setting (Prasetyo, Permadi, & Barlian, 2022). The pesantren has historically been a birthplace for fighters who, aside from being militant, are also fully responsible for their tasks and communities. This is because the pesantren acts as a kawah candradimuka—a crucible—for students before they truly enter society (Rizqiyah, 2021). Amid the currents of modernization and globalization influencing the lifestyles of Muslim youth, the pondok pesantren, as a long-standing Islamic educational institution known for character, moral, and disciplinary development, continues to maintain its existence in shaping obedient, disciplined, and virtuous generations.

The evolution of Islamic education in Indonesia can be seen from the emergence of a variety of educational institutions, from the very traditional to the modern, in both formal and non-formal sectors (Subagyo, Arifin, Egyp, Kediri, & Online, 2025). A pesantren can operate effectively if led by an ideal kyai who is capable of managing and developing the pesantren system efficiently (Nur Rahmadhani Sholehah SN & Suwadi, 2024). One of the key aspects in character development in pesantren is the leadership role of the kyai (Nur Rahmadhani Shole$hah SN & Su$wadi, 2024). Character is a person's moral and mental quality, formed by both inherent factors (fitrah or nature) and environmental factors (nurture or socialization) (Amalu$din, Dakwah, & Pu$rwoke$rto, 2020). Character, in essence, is a psychological condition that can be changed and improved through

systematic and deliberately designed methods (La Hadisi; Zu$lkifli Mu$sthan; Rasmi Gazali; He$rman; Sarjaniah Zu$r, 2022). In the context of pondok pesantren, the role of the kyai can be likened to the human heart (Melyvita Nur Anggraeni; Mochammad Syaifuddin Shobirin, 2024). As the leader of the pesantren, the kyai plays a central role in directing its development, including learning systems and the enforcement of applicable rules. The kyai is a central figure in pesantren life, not only as a structural leader but also as a spiritual, moral, and intellectual figure for the entire pesantren community. The kyai's charisma and authority do not solely stem from his official position, but also from the depth of his knowledge, his character, and his ability to nurture and guide students in religious and social aspects.

Leadership itself is the ability of an individual to design, manage, organize, and evaluate a group or organization to achieve targeted goals (U$mam, 2020). In the pesantren tradition, the kyai is the highest leader with full authority over all aspects of pesantren life. His leadership reflects the ability to formulate visions, make strategic decisions, build social relationships, and shape a distinctive organizational culture. A kyai does not only act administratively but also as a charismatic leader who can inspire, motivate, and set a personal example to the pesantren community, especially the students. The leadership characteristics possessed by a kyai, such as firmness, wisdom, integrity, and responsibility, are essential foundations for creating an effective guidance system. Pesantren culture is a traditional behavioral pattern shaped by the kyai's influence as the leader in instilling and forming Islamic values within the pesantren environment (Muhammad; Ahmad Syukri; Lukman Hakim, 2024).

Leadership is one of the most engaging discussions because it is a critical factor that determines the success or failure of an organization. In other words, leadership within an organization or institution plays a vital role (Sukamto, 1999). A kyai in the pesantren can serve in two aspects: as a role model and as a guide. As a role model, the kyai provides examples in actions and behavior. As a leader, he influences the character and attitudes of the students. Through strong and comprehensive leadership, the kyai is capable of creating a disciplined, orderly, and educational pesantren environment. The central role of the kyai aims to achieve educational goals through decision-making based on well-formulated policies (Nabila Zakiya; Yenni Aulia; Ahmad Sabandi; Hanif Alkadri, 2023).

Pesantren, as an Islamic educational institution, plays an essential role in building social capital and character in the younger generation (Margi Wahono; Dasim Budimansyah; Elly Malihah; Susan Fitriasari, 2023). Pesantren has become a critical foundation of Islamic education in Indonesia, serving not only to teach religious sciences but also to build students' character and morality (Nisa et al., 2024). Amid the challenges of the modern era, discipline among students is a highly significant topic. The rapid flow of information, instant culture, and ethical challenges faced by youth necessitate educational institutions, including pesantren, to reinforce the values of discipline and obedience. Discipline is not

merely about compliance with rules but is also a part of the soul and spiritual development process. Through discipline, students are trained to obey rules, respect time, and live in an orderly manner within the framework of Islamic values.

Students in pesantren come from diverse backgrounds, which necessitates a variety of approaches to discipline development. These differing characteristics require kyai leadership that can adapt effectively to shape student discipline. Many previous studies have addressed the leadership of the kyai and student discipline. For example, research by Muslichan Noor (2019) revealed that the kyai's leadership in pondok pesantren plays a significant role in shaping students' discipline. Through role modeling, guidance, and a distinctive approach, the kyai is able to instill discipline values that become part of the students' daily character.

In this study, student discipline is understood as the result of a combination between charismatic leadership and a consistently implemented regulatory structure, reflecting the kyai's holistic role both symbolically and structurally. The kyai's leadership style plays an essential role in fostering student discipline not only through rule systems and sanctions applied in pesantren but also through role modeling, emotional closeness, and the spiritual approach embedded in the kyai's daily interactions with the students.

This research is expected to provide a meaningful contribution to the discourse on Islamic educational leadership, particularly within the pesantren environment, by uncovering how kyai figures can shape student discipline through value-based leadership, exemplary behavior, and spiritual influence. Therefore, this paper will explore the leadership of the kyai in developing discipline among students in pondok pesantren.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to understand phenomena in a deep and holistic manner within a natural context. Meanwhile, the case study method is used because this study aims to explore intensively the role of kyai leadership in shaping student discipline in the pondok pesantren. The case study provides space for the researcher to gather detailed, comprehensive, and in-depth data on the research subject in real-life settings and to capture the meaning behind the phenomena being studied.

The research location was determined purposively, namely Pondok Pesantren Putri Walisongo Jombang, because this pesantren has characteristics relevant to the focus of the study, particularly the direct involvement of the kyai in the discipline development process of the students. The subjects in this study consist of the kyai as the leader of the pesantren, several administrators, and students actively involved in pesantren activities.

Data collection was conducted using three main techniques: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Participant observation was employed to obtain data on the daily activities of the kyai in the pesantren, such

as involvement in religious studies, worship activities, and supervision of student discipline. The researcher was directly involved in the pesantren environment to observe and record the behaviors and interactions between the kyai and students naturally.

In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants consisting of the kyai, several administrators, and selected students (through purposive sampling). The interviews aimed to explore the experiences, views, and perceptions of the informants regarding the role of the kyai and its impact on student discipline. The questions were designed flexibly to allow further exploration of emerging information in the field.

Documentation was used to strengthen the data from observations and interviews. The documents examined included pesantren regulations, student activity schedules, records of disciplinary violations, and photos of pesantren activities. This documentation provided written and visual evidence supporting field findings.

The research procedure was carried out in several stages: (1) Pre-field stage, which included instrument preparation, preliminary study, and obtaining research permits; (2) Fieldwork stage, which involved data collection through observation, interviews, and documentation; and (3) Data analysis and report writing stage.

The data analysis technique used the interactive model from Miles and Huberman, which consists of three main steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was done by sorting, selecting relevant data, and simplifying the field data. Data display was done in the form of descriptive narratives to facilitate understanding. The final step was drawing conclusions, which were initially tentative and continuously reviewed until valid and credible conclusions were obtained. To ensure the validity of the data, the researcher employed triangulation techniques—both source triangulation and technique triangulation.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Kyai's Leadership

Leadership is the art of influencing others to work together, based on one's ability to guide a group toward a shared goal (Arofah & Cahyadi, 2021). Kyai leadership in pesantren is a type of leadership characterized by strong personality and charisma. The charismatic nature of a kyai arises from the depth of knowledge and their ability to master both the pesantren environment and the surrounding community (Sulastri & Badrus, 2021). In the pesantren context, the kyai holds a highly strategic role. The term kyai refers to a religious scholar with deep Islamic knowledge. In Javanese social structure, a kyai belongs to the elite group respected and honored by the public (Ansori; Abu Khaer, 2023). For example, in Pondok Pesantren Putri Walisongo Jombang, the kyai enjoys high social recognition, not only as a spiritual leader but also as a respected role model.

A key element of kyai leadership is demonstrating exemplary conduct. Role modeling is crucial as it offers a tangible example for students to directly emulate. The kyai's leadership in advancing and developing Islamic education has had a significant impact on the improvement of Islamic educational quality in Indonesian society (Syahrullah Ramadhana Udma; chusnul chotimah; Didin Sirojudin, 2024). As the caretaker of the pesantren, the kyai occupies a central position, making all of his actions and attitudes observed and emulated by students in their daily lives. This exemplary behavior becomes a foundational element in character development, as the kyai's actions are not merely symbolic, but genuine models that influence students' behavior.

At Pondok Pesantren Putri Walisongo, the kyai plays a central role, not only in managing formal education but also in guiding students spiritually and maintaining emotional closeness. This emotional closeness between kyai and students has proven to be a key factor in successful character formation. The direct interaction established through religious activities, routine recitations, and daily supervision helps students feel personally cared for. This, in turn, strengthens the internalization of discipline values and accelerates the character development process.

Good exemplary behavior is an urgent requirement that must be consistently practiced so that others can imitate and follow the path of righteousness shown by the kyai as the pesantren's caretaker. This is in line with the statement of one of the students at Pondok Pesantren Putri Walisongo Jombang, Habibaturr Rohmah, who said:

"Our kyai always sets an example of discipline; he arrives on time for religious studies and always reminds us gently but firmly. That makes my friends and me reluctant to break the rules."

This finding indicates that the presence of the kyai is not merely symbolic as a leader, but visibly expressed in daily behaviors and interactions. The discipline shown in time management, simplicity, and attention to the students makes the kyai a highly respected and emulated figure.

Managing a pesantren institution certainly requires a leadership model or style from the central figure of the kyai to develop the pesantren effectively (Doni Armaya; Ade Riska Nur Astari; Asiyah, 2022). The leadership model in Pondok Pesantren Putri Walisongo Jombang aligns with Max Weber's idea of charismatic leadership, which is a form of authority based on extraordinary qualities possessed by an individual (Sukamto, 1999). Charismatic leadership is marked by personal appeal that inspires voluntary obedience and imitation from followers. The leadership of the kyai in this pesantren reflects this model, where student obedience arises not from coercion or written rules alone but from respect for the kyai's spiritual authority and admirable character. The concept of kyai leadership plays a significant role in influencing all aspects of student development (Mujtabarrizza & Musyarafah, 2023).

2. Santri Discipline

Pesantren functions not only as a center for religious education but also as a hub for character building, leadership training, and the development of student independence (Saenol Fajar; Kustiana Arisanti; Ummi laila Maghfiroh, 2024). To achieve this character development goals, most pesantren implement strict rules that serve as binding regulations within the institution (Sofyan STAI YPBWI Surabaya, n.d.). Character education has broader reach, as it involves the development of attitudes inherent in individuals (Istyi Nihayati; Erik Aditia Ismaya; Ika Oktavianti, 2021). The character traits that students must possess as the future defenders of the ummah include religious values, honesty, tolerance, discipline, hard work, creativity, independence, democracy, curiosity, patriotism, love for the homeland, appreciation for achievement, communication skills, peace-loving nature, reading habits, environmental and social awareness, and responsibility (Nuraeni; Ahmad Sukandar; Helmawati, 2022).

Discipline helps individuals to remain committed to their beliefs and social norms, fostering greater responsibility in maintaining order both personally and socially (Siti Mahmudah Noorhayati; Muhammad Shoffa Saifillah, 2024). Discipline also nurtures independence. The development of independence is crucial throughout life and is influenced by physical, emotional, and cognitive changes. These transformations encourage logical thinking that guides personal behavior (Muhammad Al-Barra; Muslihun; Imam Basyari, 2024). This is clearly evident at Pondok Pesantren Putri Walisongo Jombang, where the discipline system is enforced through daily rules such as waking before dawn, attending religious studies, maintaining dorm cleanliness, and adhering to a structured activity schedule. This system is implemented not only through sanctions but also through exemplary conduct and direct supervision by the kyai.

To instill discipline in students, the caretakers and administrators of the pesantren implement a number of strategic steps. These include establishing clear rules and guidelines, applying proportional sanctions based on the level of violations, and socializing these rules to both new and existing students. In addition, the pesantren conducts situational inspections and collaborates with dorm supervisors to strengthen monitoring in each student area. The instillation of Islamic values is also prioritized, particularly through the daily practice of dzikir (remembrance) and tawassul as a form of spiritual training to soften the students' hearts and enhance their acceptance of institutional rules.

The kyai's position in the pesantren plays a crucial role in enhancing students' spiritual intelligence (Sukamto, 1999). This is echoed in the statement by the caretaker of Pondok Pesantren Putri Walisongo, K.H. Amir Jamiluddin, who said:

"When students are accustomed to dzikir, it is their own heart that takes attendance. Therefore, students must develop the habit of dzikir so their hearts become soft and obedient."

Every parent has their own parenting style in educating their children (Anifah; Herman Suhdi, 2025). Similarly, as a caretaker of both the pesantren and the students, the kyai is assisted by a group of administrators tasked with enforcing daily discipline according to mutually agreed-upon rules (Afidah Nur Aini; Syamsul Rijal, 2022). However, the process of building disciplined character in students faces various challenges. One of the most significant obstacles encountered by caretakers and administrators is the persistent laziness among some students. This issue is further complicated by the diversity in background, personality, and habits of the students prior to joining the pesantren. Some are not accustomed to a highly structured, activity-intensive, and discipline-demanding lifestyle. This poses a distinct challenge in shaping disciplined character.

Pesantren is an educational institution that focuses on the development of religious and spiritual values through student formation (Samiya, 2023). In addressing these challenges, caretakers and administrators strive to help students understand the importance of discipline. Students are also habituated to reading tawassul and Surah Al-Fatihah regularly as part of efforts to instill spiritual discipline. On the other hand, the administrators implement sanctions adjusted to the nature of student violations as a consistent form of rule enforcement.

These findings indicate that spiritual approaches such as dzikir and tawassul practices can significantly contribute to the formation of disciplined character among pesantren students. This phenomenon aligns with Max Weber’s theory, which states that charismatic leaders exert great influence because they are perceived to possess extraordinary qualities capable of inspiring voluntary adherence among their followers (Sukamto, 1999).

D. CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that the leadership of the kyai at Pondok Pesantren Putri Walisongo Jombang plays a vital role in shaping the students' character, particularly in fostering discipline through exemplary behavior, direct supervision, and emotional closeness with the students. The kyai's charismatic leadership motivates students to be obedient not through coercion, but out of respect and the personal influence of the kyai.

The implementation of discipline in the pesantren is not carried out solely through rules and sanctions, but also through a spiritual approach such as the habituation of dzikir and tawassul, which serve to soften the students' hearts, making them more receptive and willing to comply with the rules. Although challenges such as laziness and diverse student backgrounds exist, consistent discipline grounded in religious values has proven effective in shaping students into independent, obedient, and responsible individuals.

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