

## The existence kiai of the islamic boarding school in the community

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### Abstract

Many consider that Islamic boarding schools are lagging behind the times and are unable to meet the needs of the community. In contrast, Islamic boarding schools are considered as social education institutions, where Kiai plays a central role in uniting boarding school and community. Therefore the purpose of this study is to explore how the part of Kiai in the community. This study uses qualitative approaches and descriptive methods. The data in this study obtained through participant observation, interviews with Kiai, administrators, principals, surrounding communities, and documentation. The results of this study indicate that Kiai can establish strong relationships without stopping with people who are far from religious understanding. Kiai is an influential figure who can integrate all existing social institutions with the institutional boarding school he leads. Further, Kiai is used as a primary role model in thinking, acting, and behave. So that the community recognizes the existence of the Kiai, Kiai can answer every problem that the society faces and accommodate every aspiration of the community.

**Keywords:** kiai, Islamic boarding school, communities

## INTRODUCTION

Historically, pesantren can be viewed as a training center that serves people and automatically becomes an Islamic cultural center or educational coaching center as well as Islamic Shari'a (Baharun, 2017). Based on this, pesantren is a place of education developed by the community as a means of studying various problems that exist in society, especially in exploring the field of religion.

Pesantren is a place where students live (Wahid, 2010). Mastuhu (1994) defines that pesantren are traditional Islamic educational institutions for studying, understanding, living, and practicing Islamic teachings by emphasizing the importance of religious morals as guidelines for daily behavior. While Rabithah Maahad Islamiyah (RMI), as conveyed by Subki (2013), defines pesantren as a *tafaqquh fiddin* institution that carries out the mission of continuing Muhammad SAW's message while preserving the teachings of Islam which is *Ahlussunnah wal jama'ah*.

Based on the above definitions, pesantren can be concluded as a religious education institution that seeks to preserve, teach, and spread Islamic teachings as well as training *santri* to live independently as well as to have the theological understanding and able to practice it in everyday life. Islamic boarding school can also be interpreted as a place where students recite religious knowledge to the Kiai to provide experience in this world and the hereafter.

Zakaria (2010) said Pondok Pesantren is one of many forms of educational Islamic institutions and centers which advocate the spread of Islam and can be found in the hearts of communities throughout the country. The tradition of education in Pondok Pesantren in Indonesia possesses a lengthy history in its efforts to advance and improve the citizens and residents of the country.

One of the main pillars (center) of the boarding school is its founder, Kiai. Because the boarding school is based on Kiai, every activity, policy, growth, and development of the boarding school will follow its Kiai. In this case, the role of the Kiai is vital to develop Islamic boarding schools. Therefore the pesantren is an autonomous institution so that outsiders will not be able to influence various pesantren policies except with the permission of the Kiai.

From this Kiai, the Islamic boarding school moves to match every curve of the social life of the people around him. The abilities needed by the Kiai to bring up the view of the Kiai who supports charisma that cannot be released by others so that it can be used as a respected, dignified, and imitated figure. Sartono Kartodirdjo (in Sukamto, 1999) said that the Kiai of Islamic boarding schools were and are prominent figures who can shape the social, cultural, and religious life of Muslims in Indonesia.

In the structure of traditional society, Kiai is considered as spiritual leaders. Almost every activity carried out or problems appeared in the community will be consulted to Kiai. This is why the figure of Kiai is very much taken into account, and every policy he made is obeyed. According to Nasution (2017), from a social perspective, the strength of Kiai lies in two things, namely having a deep and high sense of community and always basing something on mutual agreement. These two things make the position of the Kiai in society is sturdy so that the figure of a Kiai has a strong influence as an informal leader figure.

According to Muhibbin (2012), scholars, especially in traditional societies, have factors that are supporting the Kiai to have such a respectable position. Firstly, Kiai has extensive knowledge, especially in the religious field, so everyone who has ethical problems will consult the Kiai for the solutions. Second, Kiai comes from well-to-do families, although it is rare to find Kiai, who is lacking when they first started teaching Islam. With the significant influence of the Kiai on the community, the Kiai indirectly has high authority in the community, even the village government or higher than him can submit to the Kiai.

Besides that, the Kiai in society also acts as a religious figure, which includes the role of a community figure, an agent of change, educational, spiritual, social, and cultural influences (Turmudi, 2003). The spiritual part of the Kiai is seen from the Kiai's figure who understands the most about religion, and every word and behavior is following the religious law. Every advice given by the Kiai is following Islamic law. We can see the role of Kiai education where the Kyai provides religious instruction either directly to the place of the local population or in the educational institution he has built.

According to Horikoshi in Tafsir (2016), the reason for the power of the Kiai or scholars in becoming a figure that is used as an example and role models in the workings

of life is rooted in two things, namely: 1) moral credibility and 2) the ability to maintain social institutions. From these two forces, Kiai gained a strategic position in the midst of society.

It is interesting to investigate deeper in how Kiai as the founder of a boarding school, can play its role both in Islamic boarding schools, which are Islamic educational institutions, and in the midst of the surrounding community, which is an inseparable part of the boarding school itself.

## METHOD

The research method used is descriptive qualitative, interactive, and non-interactive. Interactive is used to obtain or retrieve data and collect data from the results of interactions with individuals, namely humans. In contrast, non-interactive is used for some situations that do not directly interact with humans, namely by analyzing documents or literature (Sukmadinata, 2012).

The technique used to obtain research data, as revealed by Satori and Komariah (2014), is Interview, which is conducted to Kiai as the founder and those who are considered by researchers to be able to provide information related to the role of Kiai in the community. Observation is used to collect data about objective conditions at the study site and Kiai's life. Documentation, the utilization of information contained in various types of literature to explore the basic concepts found by experts to help solve problems in research.

The research instrument used as Sugiyono (2011) in his book states that the instrument in qualitative research is the researcher himself (human instrument). The data analysis technique in this study uses the Miles and Huberman model, namely by categorizing data that has been obtained in the field, then presented in such a way, structured, systematic, and massive, which then verifies or draws a conclusion of the data that has been delivered (Bungin, 2014).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pesantren is a transformation and absorption of cultural acculturation and adaptation to the teachings of Islam, and its emergence cannot be separated from its founding figure called Kiai or Ajengan. Herman (2013) explains pesantren are formed through a long process. It is beginning with the formation of leadership in society.

A Kiai as a leader of a pesantren does not just show up. The Kiai's leadership emerged after the recognition from the community. Kyai became an informal leader among the people because he was considered to have the virtue of knowledge. Then the clerics become a reference and a place to ask questions, not only about religion but also about social problems.

The relationship between the Kiai and the community is bound by religious emotion, which makes his policies even more influential. This has led to a culture of compliance and obedience of students and the community towards pesantren. Communities voluntarily donate their land, donate funds or materials needed, to donate energy. In essence, people give what they can provide. This kind of thing still often happens in pesantren until now.

Therefore, the title of Kiai is always related to the degree that emphasizes public recognition and honor, which is given voluntarily to scholars, not an academic title that is given through formal education. Besides that, Kiai has a role in society so that it becomes a system of control over the community. This control system can provide direction to the community where they should go and how they should act. Because Kyai is a central figure in the religious field, the direction of movement of the traditional society he leads is always spiritual.

Then followed by Kiai as the second figure who educates, provides religious knowledge, and provides guidance to pursue the happiness of living both in the world and in the hereafter. In such contexts, the people favor the Kiai or ulemas rather than the bureaucracy. Such reality does not change until Indonesia reaches independence (Hasan, 2016).

### **Community Empowerment Program**

The low level of knowledge of the village community has triggered developments and changes that are not matched by intellectual abilities or skills. Therefore, pesantren, as an educational institution owned by the community, has the potential to be developed into a center for developing human resources (HR) towards the realization of intelligence and prosperity of the nation.

Therefore, KH. Asep Burhanuddin, head of the Darul Falah Islamic Boarding School, seeks to advance not only the Santri but also the surrounding community by

organizing several programs, namely: First, Community Study. Islamic boarding schools are religious institutions that cannot be separated from the community, especially rural communities, because pesantren grow and develop from and for the community (Sulaiman, Masrukhin, Chusmeru, & Pangestuti, 2016). One of them is by using the tradition of general study as a medium for the socialization of pesantren policy thinking, communication between Kiai/Nyai from various roles that have been carried out, and as a media for strengthening networks for educational programs and community empowerment (Roqib, 2009).

Therefore, Darul Falah Islamic Boarding School began holding community two studies, which held once a week, every Tuesday, and once a month (*shahriyahan*). The procurement of community study is a response and request from the community itself to KH. Asep Burhanuddin.

Community recitation conducted once a week (*salasaan*) starts at 07:00 until 09:00, while recitation every once a month (martyrdom) starts at 21:00 until 00:00. The recitation using a yellow book with KH. Asep Burhanuddin as the teacher. To attract the interest of the community in the Koran, KH. Asep Burhanuddin always gives treats to the community members who participate in the Koran.

It is not only adults who take courses at the Darul Falah Islamic Boarding School. Many children and young people from the surrounding community also joining classes at the Darul Falah Islamic Boarding School or ask to be taught by senior *santri*.

This is a form of being a pesantren that has historical value towards religious social movements (Mustofa, 2011). The role of pesantren in the improvement of community morals is carried out through the development of study institutions. The study is ideally carried out routinely every week as a means of fostering the morals of the village community. Koran is an informal gathering which aims to teach the basics of religion to the general public. Thus, recitation is very vital as an effort to Islamize the masses. This study shows the arguments of the Koran then relate it to the problems of the world that are often encountered in everyday life, both regarding family problems and community issues.

From this Kiai, the Islamic Boarding School moves to match every curve of the social life of the people around him. Such abilities that Kiai has led to the view that Kiai

has a charisma that cannot be possessed by others, making him a respected, dignified figure and imitated. Sartono Kartodirdjo (in Sukamto, 1999), said that Kiai were important figures who could shape the social, cultural, and religious life of Muslims in Indonesia so that the community around calling the cleric with the title of special Kiai, which in West Java is also called as Ajengan (Khorri, 2017).

Second, Sholawat recitation, As already mentioned, Darul Falah Islamic Boarding School held a program for the recitation of Salawat in the community. The media of the recitation of *Salawat* could enlighten religious knowledge by the moment (Hasan, 2016). So that people will get to know more about religion through the recitation of *Salawat* and other enlightenments delivered in the recitation of the *Salawat*. Hasan (2016) also explained that the existence of the *Salawat* recitation gives an understanding of the meaning and function of the recitation of celestial be carried out every week or half a month, involving young people as heirs of this tradition, the Kiai invites their students to participate in reciting the cellar, and parents invite her sons and daughters took part in the reading activities pimple.

Third, Death and Pilgrimage. The credibility of the pesantren cannot be separated from the roles and social actions of the Kiai. These roles and activities gave birth to a social value system and became a magnet for pesantren institutions in fostering trust in society (Fauzi, 2017).

Nata (2001) stated that one of them was many people who asked Kiai for help, such as prayers and practices that could facilitate his affairs. Darul Falah Islamic Boarding School has a recitation congregation to pray for other community members when they die, or when one of their families died. Then the students would wait for their graves for one week to read *Yasin* and other verses of the Koran. Likewise, with the pilgrimage that was held at the Darul Falah Islamic Boarding School, many people followed the Kiai because they believed in the Kiai.

Fourth, Pondok Pesantren Cooperative (KOPONTREN), Daniar (2013), also emphasized that Islamic boarding school has a very strategic role, namely as a center for the development of religion, education, social, and culture as well as economic of power. Improvement of the rural economy can be made by utilizing vacant land for productive activities. Rural communities also do not have to focus on productive activities that must

use economic goods and commodity goods. The service sector can still be done and invite a lot of interest for those who have little access, namely cooperatives that are currently carried out by pesantren. Institutional Development in the economic field is a Savings and Loan Unit (USP) managed by the Pondok Pesantren Cooperative (KOPONTREN), which is open to the village community. Still, the main target is the people who already have a business or those who do not have a business but want to start a business. In addition to the Kopontren, entrepreneurship, and life skills, education and training should also be developed.

In the development of an Islamic boarding school, it would not have been possible without the involvement of the community in it. Therefore, in the development of the Darul Falah Islamic Boarding School, KH. Asep Burhanuddin then made several programs to develop Islamic boarding schools with the aims to educate the community itself, such as weekly and monthly public reading, *Salawat* reading in the community, death, pilgrimage, and KOPONTREN.

The condition of Darul Falah Islamic Boarding School in its development efforts is based on the independent business of KH. Asep Burhanuddin, which resulted in Islamic boarding schools that develop internal economic strength to continue to exist and finance the implementation of education. Therefore, it is not surprising that many pesantren develop economic power in various forms of business entities in the form of cooperatives, credit banks, agricultural management, plantations, and others (Solichin, 2012). The development of the pesantren economic strength carried out by Darul Falah Islamic Boarding School, which involves interaction with the community and efforts to develop the community and pesantren in the form of the Islamic Boarding School Cooperative (KOPONTREN).

### **Community Trust**

The Kiai is able to respond to people's tastes so that he can act as a social engineer in developing pesantren that are more responsive to the needs of modern life (Chotimah, 2016). Out of trust in the Kiai at the Darul Falah Islamic Boarding School, many people provided assistance, services, and property.

KH. Asep Burhanuddin can predict every policy taken during his time that will be seen in the future. According to Tafsir (2016), Kiai's strength is supra-rational. Compared to the two previous forces, this power seems to have a more significant



on the surrounding community and added charisma or authority and a significant role of the Kiai. With this supra-rational, a Kiai can sometimes guess the secret or content of one's heart, even answering questions that will be asked to him before the problem is said. This is, as stated by Roqib (2009), with high religious awareness, it is possible for the Kiai/Islamic boarding school to be able to interpret public trust so that it is more efficient.

Buchori (1989) explains that pesantren are part of the internal structure of Islamic education in Indonesia that is traditionally organized, which has made Islam a way of life. As part of the internal system of Indonesian Islamic education, Islamic boarding schools have particularities, especially in their function as educational institutions, in addition to being a missionary institution, social guidance, and even struggle. Such as the struggle for prosperity or benefit of the people and guidance to the community around the Darul Falah Islamic Boarding School, even to the children of the surrounding community, is the main target of the Darul Falah Islamic Boarding School education.

Besides, Darul Falah Islamic Boarding School alumni always provide support to Kiai, especially in developing Islamic boarding schools, from various lines. Therefore the pesantren alumni network is an extraordinary strength because: (a) when the power of the socio-political system is miserable and fragile, the Santri network will become an alternative, (b) the network based on religious values will be lasting and more empowered in order if appropriately managed, (c) the pesantren network should not be narrowed sufficiently for the Kiai and Gus, but also the pesantren community network (Roqib, 2009).

Generally, the Kiai has a firm root in the rural environment, because Kiai can be a consultant for all the problems faced by the community. A person who wants to send his son to school often still comes to the Kiai to ask for *Baraka* prayers and advice. In the case of marriage, people also come to the Kiai to consult the right time for the wedding. Likewise, in several other aspects of life (Jamaluddin, 2012). This can be seen how the Kiai in Darul Falah Islamic Boarding School is very much needed by parents of students or the community. Every prayer said is expected to be a medicine and can be a helper to people in need.

Horikoshi said the reason for the power of the Kiai or ulemas in becoming a figure who was used as an example and role model in living life was rooted in two things,

namely: 1) moral credibility and 2) the ability to maintain social institutions. From these two forces, Kiai gained a strategic position in society.

What is conveyed by Horikoshi is true. This view illustrates that a Kiai as a person who has a good personality and high morality, as well as being able to care for social institutions (traditions) that always exist and run in the community without negating or deviating from the teachings of religion that he teaches both to his students and to the community.

A concrete example where Kiai able to combine institutions (traditions) in society with the life of Islamic boarding schools is seen at Darul Falah Islamic boarding school when holding *Utaqo* prayer commemoration. Other communities rarely perform this prayer. Darul Falah held this activity open to every group, whether students or other community. The Kiai even gave *shadaqah* and treats to attract people to attend this activity. The community who attend this prayer wanted to get Kiai's blessings.

The Kiai is indeed very central in the success or failure of the teaching and learning process in pesantren, even the community (Muhakamurrohman, 2014). In the future, the Kiai must also be able to read opportunities both in terms of strengths and weaknesses; has a high sensitivity that can read the needs of the community; can build trust in the boarding school administrators and the students to continue to develop and collaborate; can adapt to all elements of society; and be able to build a boarding school community consisting of administrators, *asâtîdz* (teachers), and students to be able to work synergistically and the ability to develop, in the sense that having the ability to read aspects of pesantren needs to develop more advanced (Jamaluddin, 2012).

What was delivered by Muhakamurrohman and Jamaluddin above had taken place at Darul Falah Islamic Boarding School. Everything that is held both Santri education, and society, everything is inseparable from the participation of the community who continue to provide input to the Darul Falah Islamic Boarding School to continue to progress, so that the Darul Falah Islamic Boarding School can meet every need of the community, especially in maximizing the educational aspect.

Islamic boarding school is a concentration that is not separated by environmental conditions, including the culture that develops around Pesantren. This is known as Darul Falah Islamic Boarding School since its inception not only as an

educational institution for students but also with the layers of society, ranging from children to adults.

Sakir (2015) said pesantren has initially been a simple educational institution established by a religious expert called a Kiai for the Javanese, to provide Islamic spiritual lessons. Islamic boarding schools are typical religious education institutions that have their sub-culture. Pesantren is also empirically a part of the society that has shaped the culture around it.

Kiai, as an authoritative figure, has a very dominant role in influencing the community. The strength of the Kiai's authority relationship in society is proven by the obedience and community participation in the socio-religious field. The students and the surrounding community always try to get close to the clerics to get blessings, because according to their assumptions, as stated by Dhofier (2011), the clerics have an unreachable position, which is not accessible to schools and the public understands, God's majesty and secrets natural.

The role of pesantren in the challenges of globalization remains the primary reference material, armed with social values as a pesantren culture and tradition built by the Kiai. The construction of social values is meant, created through the social actions of the Kiai, by prioritizing the attitude of struggle.

Kiai's fame in society is believed to have advantages and bring *Karamah*. He is a person who is equipped with extraordinary abilities and outperforms one's proficiency in his time. The interpretation of *Karamah* is born because of the closeness to God; in this context will give birth to *barakah* (Fauzi, 2017).

These social values give birth to interpreted meanings as *barakah*. This is reflected in the fame of the Kiai among ulemas and the community. Therefore, the social behavior of Kiai can influence all social actions. It is not surprising that the community always listens to words Kiai (Fauzi, 2017). The influence of the Kiai in his community, especially in the Islamic boarding school, where they devoted themselves to the interests of students (Zuhriy, 2011).

The various opinions that have been presented above show that the role of the Kiai is crucial in determining the relationships and developments that occurred in Islamic boarding schools and the community, especially in Darul Falah Islamic Boarding School.

The community always makes Kiai as a person who can meet his inner and outer needs. They seek blessings in every pesantren curve, and even garbage from pesantren is willing to be collected because of having this assumption.

The figure of the Kiai, who is the "fulfill" of spirituality, Santri, and community needs and provides alternative solutions to the problems found in his people. For this reason, pesantren are 'subcultures,' which will erode the crisis and, in turn, will be able to collect and form their own culture in their environment (Muhakamurrohman, 2014). Many parents of students or the community who come to Kiai to ask for prayers for their children and personally, this is as explained because the Islamic Boarding School is able to meet spiritual needs, especially Kiai.

### **Kiai in Politics and Organizations**

The entry of KH. Asep Burhanuddin in organization and politics is one form of Kiai's existence in the society which is positioned as a role model and reference in taking concrete steps both in the political and organizational fields. According to Turmuzi (in Yatimah, 2011), many Kyai plays an intermediary role for Muslims by giving them an understanding of what is happening at the national level. The leadership of the Kyai, in general, is changing and resulting in changes in the situation and socio-political views of Muslims.

Meanwhile, according to Zuhriy (2011), with Kiai participating in politics shows the value of his nationality. This requires a way of thinking, behaving, and doing that shows loyalty, care, and high respect for the language, physical environment, socio-cultural economy, and national politics.

KH. Asep Burhanuddin received support in society, both social, economic, and political issues (Hasan, 2016). According to Rizal (in Sofwan & Habibi, 2016), historically, pesantren have documented various histories of the Indonesian nation, both the socio-cultural history of the Islamic, economic, and political community of the Indonesian country. Since the beginning of the spread of Islam, pesantren have been the principal witnesses for the spread of Islam in Indonesia.

What was conveyed by Rizal was, in fact, accurate, as Darul Falah Islamic Boarding School became a forum for the aspirations of the people not only in education and religion. Even in the benefit of the people, such as the expansion of West Bandung,

which aims to form an independent regional autonomy, whether independent of political elements or no community, give their choices and beliefs to Darul Falah Islamic Boarding School.

Darmadji (2011) added that an independent Islamic boarding school certainly plays a vital role in maintaining a position with existing political forces. Pondok Pesantren has also shown its role in maintaining political stability through the recognition and acceptance of Pancasila as the sole principle in the organization as represented, at least by the Islamic Boarding School under its affiliation, Nahdhatul Ulama. Therefore KH. Asep Burhanuddin participated in the NU organization, starting at the Bandung Regency level.

As a charismatic figure, Kiai is not only respected by the *Santri*, but also by the community around the Islamic Boarding School. So, it is not surprising that since the colonial period, the role of religion, and political roles (including social roles) always surrounds the Kiai. At least by Islamic Boarding Schools under affiliation, Nahdhatul Ulama (Darmadji, 2011). It is precisely through the NU organization, the thought of KH. Asep Burhanuddin began to open up to open formal institutions assisted by KH. Anwar Hidayat, and changed the traditional pattern to modern. This is in line with what was conveyed by Arifin (2012) that pesantren in the current and contemporary period were generally founded by Kiai affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU).

According to Prof. Dr. Quraish Shihab, the alteration can be carried out due to the understanding and appreciation of the values of the Qur'an and the ability to use and adapt to the laws of history. Both historical values and rules are clearly explained by the Qur'an (Muchlis, 2018). This opinion seems to be very much in line with what happened at Darul Falah Islamic Boarding School. A change made by KH. Asep Burhanuddin from the traditional pattern to the modern practice by establishing a formal due to reasons taken from the understanding of the Koran "*Litaarofu Waqobaila*". How to get to know each other, if language alone cannot be understood. Therefore, he thought to hold a school with such intentions. The knowledge gained need to be conveyed back to others in languages that can be mutually understood, not only understood by oneself or some circles.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research described above, it shows that the Kiai is the central figure in the development of the boarding school, as well as the prominent figure in community life. This is because the life of the Kiai in the Islamic boarding school will always be related to community life. Kiai is also ever needed as role models and references by the community, not only in the field of religion, which is a Kiai specialist in but also in other areas such as economy, society, and politics.

The implication of this research is expected to be the leaders of Islamic boarding schools as Islamic educational institutions not to release themselves from the communities that surround them. Also, the leaders should be able to become a container for the development of human potential not only in the boarding school environment but also in the community.

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