

## Leadership of Kiai and Students' Obedience in Islamic Boarding School

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### Abstract

*Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) are non-formal Islamic educational institutions where students (santri) live together in a cottage (dormitory) to study Islamic religious scholarship under the guidance of the caretaker of the cottage who is often referred to as a kiai. The pesantren, which from its inception, prioritized religious knowledge and pesantren culture, was easily able to apply the slogan sam'an watha'atan (submission and obedience) to the kiai which later became the principle of santri in everyday life. However, along with the development of increasingly modern pesantren, this principle has been displaced by various experiences and knowledge. The disobedience of santri to the kiai as a leader in the pesantren is caused by various factors, one of which is the perception of the santri towards the leadership of the kiai.*

**Keywords:** pesantren, obedience, kiai, leadership

### Background

As social beings, life in Islamic boarding schools cannot be separated from the interaction between one individual and the social environment. In these interactions, the community or group has a norm as a rule that explicitly becomes a guide in living daily life. Baron (2003) defines norms or rules as mutually agreed rules about what group members should and should not do. Communities or groups apply norms or regulations to their environment as a guide in behaving in that environment. The functioning of norms or regulations in the community is influenced by how individuals behave in complying with applicable regulations. Kusumadewi, Hardjani, and Priyatama (2013) in their research maintain that in order for the established regulations to function and achieve their objectives, it is necessary to have a compliant attitude from community members, which is commonly known as obedience.

Meanwhile, obedience, respect, and reverence for the kiai are one of the main values instilled in every santri or student (the term of student and santri will be used interchangeably in this paper to refer students in Islamic boarding schools). Absolute obedience is expanded to include respect for the previous ulama (Suprayogo,

2007). The obedient attitude of the santri does not only apply to the kiai or ulama', but to the kiai's family this obedience is also shown. In general, the community views that obedience is more important than studying knowledge, but for the kiai it is an integration between the knowledge that will be mastered by the students with the attitude of obedience itself so that they are given convenience in learning knowledge and benefiting from their knowledge.

Sears (1985) argues that obedience is showing a certain behavior due to a demand, even though they prefer not to display it. The demands in question are regulations that apply in a community or group environment. One of the causes of non-obedience is that individuals seem forced to undergo these rules. So it can be concluded that the emergence of various violations committed by group members is the result of a lack of satisfaction with the rules that have been set.

At the boarding school, there are three student's obedience indicators: *first*, obedience of students toward conducting boarding activities covering congregational prayer, reciting the Qur'an, reciting the book, attending *mujahadah/istighasah, dibaiyah*, tahlilan and compulsory education; *second*, obedience of students toward safety including permission to enter and leave the pesantren, the use of clothing in accordance with the provisions of the pesantren, and relations with the opposite sex; *third*, students' adherence to the pesantren's code of ethics, including santri personality, manners, rights and obligations, and *takziran* (sanctions).

Since at the boarding school, every student has studied and known various Islamic religious sciences, be it the science of *'alaq* such as morality, fiqh, monotheism, *nahwu sharaf*, to the science of *tasawuf*. Even to learn the science takes quite a long time. So it is proper for students to understand the content of these sciences so that they are able to internalize them in their daily lives. Even so, returning to the personality of each student, in fact the phenomenon of violating the rules is still carried out by students, while they also realize that these actions are contrary to what they have learned.

Based on the description of the background above, the question in this study is, "How is the relationship between perceptions of kiai's leadership and student obedience in Islamic boarding schools?".

## Methods

This study uses a qualitative library research method, where the main sources used are obtained through a study of written sources in the form of books, journals, scientific articles and other digital sources. The theory used is *servant leadership*. Servant leadership is a leadership that starts from sincere feelings that arise from a heart that desires to serve. The orientation of servant leadership is to serve

followers with spiritual moral standards, flexibility of delegation of organizational structure at followers, and is future-oriented. Servant leaders usually puts the needs of followers as a priority and treat it as a partner, so the closeness between the two is strong for each other engage with each other.

The dimensions of servant leadership behavior according to Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) consist of 5 (five) dimensions, namely: Altruistic Calling, Emotional Healing, Wisdom, Persuasive Mapping, Organizational Stewardship. With this theory, it will be found a relationship between the perception of servant leadership of kiai and the level of obedience of students in Islamic boarding schools.

## Literature Review

A research conducted by Andik Matulesy, Siti Ma'rufah, and Noviekayati (2014) found that there is a positive relationship between perceptions of the kiai's leadership, and conformity to obedience with pesantren regulations. Students' obedience with regulations was significantly related to perceptions of the kiai's leadership ( $r = 0.410$  and  $p = 0.001$ ) and conformity ( $r = 0.317$  and  $p = 0.001$ ).

Another related study was conducted by Nur Lailatul Muniroh (2013). The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between self-control with disciplined behavior in students. This study uses the theory of disciplinary behavior by Marcal (2006) which is associated with self-control using Averill's (1973) theory. The main hypothesis is that there is a positive relationship between self-control and disciplined behavior in students. Based on the effectiveness test, this study showed significant results, where the higher the self-control, the higher the disciplinary behavior of a person. Vice versa, the lower the self-control, the lower the discipline behavior of the person.

Another study was conducted by Kusumadewi, Hardjani, and Priyatama (2012). This study uses quantitative methods with Blass's (1999) obedience theory which is linked to House's (1994) social support and Averill's (1993) self-control. The results of this study indicate that there is a moderate positive relationship between peer group social support and self-control with adherence to adolescent girls at Assalam Sukoharjo Senior High School. As for the partial correlation, it shows that there is a low positive relationship, both between peer group social support and obedience with regulations, as well as between self-control and obedience with regulations. This means that the higher the peer group social support or self-control, the higher the obedience with regulations, and vice versa.

A similar study conducted by Miftakhul Isna (2013). This study uses a qualitative method with accidental data collection. The theory used in this research is the developmental theory by Cole (1959). This study found that the lack of understanding

of female students towards existing regulations led to hidden resistance behavior carried out by female students in Islamic boarding schools.

Based on research on students' obedience with the rules of modern boarding schools conducted by Rahmawati (2015), it can be seen that the differences in the reasons students choose to live in Islamic boarding schools are quite significant. Most of the students enter the pesantren at the request of their parents. Meanwhile, students who stay in pesantren at the wishes of their parents tend to have low self-awareness, so that students lack the will to obey the rules. In contrast to the santri who choose to live in the pesantren of their own volition, they tend to have a high enough self-awareness so that they have high self-awareness to obey the rules that apply in the Islamic boarding school. Santri who show obedience have self-awareness of the initial purpose of entering the Islamic boarding school, so that they have a sense of responsibility and are able to carry out the mandate given by their parents.

### **Dynamic of Students' Psychological Obedience**

Pesantren is one of the educational facilities that aims to produce young people who are not only educated, but also to produce morally generations. Besides aiming to instill spiritual values, humanity, etiquette, and moral behavior, pesantren also provide provisions for students to get used to living in simplicity (*qona'ah*) from an early age which is useful for maintaining and cleaning themselves both physically and mentally. So to achieve this goal, it is proper for a santri to be obedient both to the kiai as *the power of authority* and to the regulations that apply therein, namely the rules of the pesantren. Dhofier (1998) reveals that the obedience behavior of santri towards the kiai is a manifestation of the attitude of reverence (glorifying) to the kiai. The values of *takdzim* which are interpreted so that they are manifested in obedient attitudes and behavior arise by involving a process called the perception process. The perception process is a process of interpreting environmental stimuli (Gibson, 2009).

The perception of the kiai's leadership is related to the obedient attitude and behavior through the meaning and interpretation of the leadership applied by the kiai. The correct interpretation of the kiai's leadership will provide an objective understanding of the students, thereby eliciting a response that is in accordance with the aims and objectives of the kiai's leadership, namely directing students to behave obediently. A research conducted by Ma'rufah, Matulesy, and Ekayati (2014) explains that a positive perception of the kiai's leadership will have a positive influence on santri obedience. The relationship between the results of the study and the perception of *servant leadership* that led to the obedient behavior of students is that the perception process carried out by students will provide a positive value or meaning to the kiai's leadership style. Then from this positive perception, it

encourages students to behave obediently both to the kiai and the rules of the pesantren.

The leadership referred to in this study, namely *servant leadership*, is the understanding that students have on the leadership of their kiai so as to shape the attitudes and behavior of students' obedience. Students who perceive the kiai's *servant leadership* stimulus will have a good and correct understanding of the kiai's *servant leadership*. This raises the attitude and behavior of students' obedience, because one of the dimensions of obedience according to Darley and Blass (Feldman, 2003) is that individuals who have obedience will accept whatever is ordered by their leader.

*Servant leadership* consists of five dimensions (Barbuto and Wheeler, 2006), namely; *altruistic calling, emotional healing, wisdom, persuasive mapping, and organizational stewardship*. Previously, Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) had conducted a study to develop a *servant leadership* measurement scale using 11 leadership characteristics. Then the factor analysis of the research resulted in five dimensions of *servant leadership*.

The first dimension of *servant leadership* is *altruistic calling*. Cognitively, *altruistic calling* as an object of perception means that students have the idea that the kiai is willing to put the interests of his students above personal interests. From the stimulus, the students will provide an interpretation so that it gives rise to an impression in the form of a positive or negative impression, which supports whether the stimulus is accepted or not. Affectively, from this impression, the students will tend to believe in the stimulus so that they decide whether they will behave obediently or disobediently.

If the santri give a positive impression of the kiai, the santri will interpret that the kiai is fully committed to the pesantren. Santri also perceive that the life of the kiai is dedicated to the pesantren, therefore the santri believe that the kiai prioritizes the interests of the santri above personal interests. For students who have a positive impression, conatively students will tend to behave obediently to their kiai.

On the other hand, if the santri give a negative impression, the santri will interpret that the kiai does not have an *altruistic calling* dimension. Santri do not give the impression and assessment of the *altruistic calling of the kiai*. For students who give this negative impression, students are unable to see the dimensions of *altruistic calling* in the kiai. Santri do not understand that the kiai's life is dedicated to the pesantren, so the santri also do not perceive that the kiai puts the interests of the santri above personal interests. Therefore, for students who do not perceive the *altruistic calling* dimension of the kiai, they tend to behave disobediently.

The next dimension of *servant leadership* is *emotional healing*. Cognitively, *emotional healing* is an object of perception where students receive a stimulus that the kiai has the ability to motivate and inspire his students, foster joy,

comfort, and enthusiasm for life. From the stimulus, the students will provide an interpretation so that it gives rise to an impression in the form of a positive impression and a negative impression that is supportive of the stimulus to be accepted or not. Affectively, from giving this impression, students will have a tendency to decide whether they will accept the stimulus or reject it, so that students will appear obedient or disobedient to the kiai.

If students interpret the stimulus correctly, they will give a positive impression on the *emotional healing* dimension. Santri will perceive the idea that the kiai has an *emotional healing* dimension, namely the kiai's efforts to motivate, protect, and increase the spirit of the santri. Therefore, for students who have a positive impression, conatively decide to behave obediently to their kiai. Because students believe that the kiai is a figure of motivation, inspiration, and protector for students.

On the other hand, if the santri give a negative impression on the kiai, then the santri are not able to provide an assessment and interpretation of the dimensions of *emotional healing*. Santri will interpret that the kiai does not have an *emotional healing* dimension, namely the ability of the kiai to motivate, inspire, and foster enthusiasm for the students. For students who give a negative impression, conatively students also tend to behave disobediently.

The third dimension of *servant leadership* is *wisdom*. Cognitively, the santri will give an assessment of the kiai that the kiai has the ability to apply his knowledge and experience as a consideration in acting and taking action. From the stimulus, the students will give an interpretation so that it gives rise to an impression in the form of a positive impression and a negative impression. Affectively, the impression is that students have a tendency to decide whether they will accept the stimulus or reject it.

If students interpret the stimulus correctly, then students will give a positive impression on the *wisdom* dimension. Santri will perceive that the kiai is a wise figure. This means that the kiai is able to read and understand all situations in the pesantren environment. Therefore, for students who believe in the idea conatively, students will tend to behave obediently.

On the other hand, if the santri give a negative impression on the kiai, the santri will interpret that the kiai does not have a dimension of *wisdom*. As the impression received by students tends to reject the idea, so students will perceive that the kiai does not have a wise nature. Therefore, for students who give a negative impression, conatively students do not tend to behave disobediently.

The next dimension of *servant leadership* is *persuasive mapping*. Cognitively, students have the idea that the kiai has the ability to map problems in the pesantren and conceptualize the various possibilities that occur to solve these problems. From the stimulus, the students will give an interpretation so

that it gives rise to an impression in the form of a positive impression or a negative impression. Affectively, from the impressions they receive, the students decide whether the students tend to accept the stimulus or reject it, so that the students will appear obedient or disobedient to the kiai.

If the students receive the stimulus correctly, then the students will give a positive impression on the *persuasive mapping* dimension of the kiai. Santri will interpret that the kiai has a *persuasive mapping* dimension. For santri, the kiai is a person who is full of responsibility, as can be seen from his ability to solve various problems in his organizational environment, in this case the pesantren. Therefore, students who give a positive impression, conatively students tend to behave obediently.

On the other hand, if the students give a negative impression, the students will interpret that the kiai does not have a *persuasive mapping* dimension. Santri reject the idea of *persuasive mapping* to the kiai, so that it does not give rise to judgments and impressions. For students who give a negative impression on the dimension of *persuasive mapping*, conatively students tend to behave disobediently.

The last dimension of *servant leadership* according to Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) is *organizational stewardship*. Cognitively, the santri have the idea that the kiai is able to make a positive contribution to the pesantren environment, thus getting full support from the santri to bring about better changes for the pesantren. From the stimulus, the students will give an interpretation so that it gives rise to an impression in the form of a positive impression or a negative impression. Affectively from this impression, students believe whether they will tend to accept the stimulus or reject it, so that students will appear obedient or disobedient to the kiai.

If the students receive the stimulus appropriately, then the students will give a positive impression on the kiai. Santri will interpret that the kiai has an *organizational stewardship* dimension, namely that the kiai is able to have a positive influence on the pesantren. That is, by making a positive contribution the kiai is able to become an example for the students so that they are able to bring students into better changes. For students who have a positive impression, conatively students will tend to behave obediently. In addition, in the pesantren culture, being obedient to the kiai is a form of imitating the attitudes and behavior of the kiai.

On the other hand, if the students give a negative impression, the students will interpret that the kiai has no *organizational stewardship* value. Santri reject the idea of *organizational stewardship*, so that it does not give rise to judgments and impressions. Therefore, for students who have a negative impression, conatively students tend to behave disobediently.

Based on the explanation above, the perception of santri towards the kiai's *servant leadership* has a relationship and influence with santri obedience, through cognitive understanding of the dimensions of *servant leadership* and then creates an obedient attitude so that it forms a series of habits into obedient behavior. The aspects of perception that are applied to the *servant leadership* dimension direct students to behave in accordance with the rules of the pesantren and the kiai's decision is a manifestation of the attitude and behavior of students' obedience. This means that the obedient attitude and behavior of students is manifested by interpreting the aspects of perception into the dimension of *servant leadership*.

### Islamic Boarding School and Obedient Culture

Related to the obedience of students in boarding schools, Yasmadi (2002) maintains that student's obedience to clerics is more viscous than general education institutions. This is due to the fading of the manifestation of the *ngalap* (obtaining) tradition of the kiai's blessing in other institutions which no longer make the tradition a belief. On the other hand, in Salaf Islamic boarding schools, this belief is still preserved until now. They believe that to get Allah's blessing and ease in studying, one of them is through the blessing of the kiai.

The obedience of the santri in the pesantren is basically a reflection of the respect of the santri to glorify the kiai (cult). The santri accept the leadership of the kiai because they believe in the concept of blessing which in Javanese society is based on the doctrine of the privileged status of a pious or *wali*. The *ngalap* blessing tradition which is rooted in the religious and cultural values of the pesantren is a form of cult that is carried out by the santri to get the blessing of the teacher (kiai) so that their knowledge is useful. One form of *ngalap* blessing on the kiai is by obeying whatever a kiai says and commands, glorifying his family, from parents to his grandchildren, even to property and other things that the kiai uses every day. They believe that the blessing of the kiai is a form of reward that is only obtained by students who are obedient to their kiai.

Modern boarding schools no longer make the tradition of *ngalap* blessing as a belief and culture of pesantren. The fading of this belief is the influence of the development of new thoughts and paradigms. Both in terms of concept and practice, modern pesantren implements a western education system, where discipline is the main factor applied to students. Therefore, belief in the tradition of *ngalap* blessing in modern pesantren is no longer a phenomenon that is still enforced as in salaf pesantren.



Students' obedience can be described that students will accept whatever rules have been set by the pesantren. In salaf pesantren, the kiai has a role as the holder of the highest power. Kiai is likened to a king in a pesantren, all words and orders become words for all his students. There is no refusal or the slightest opposition from the santri, because the kiai is considered a plenary figure where all his words and actions are full of wisdom. The kiai as the highest authority in the pesantren is doctrinally confirmed from the book *Ta'lim Muta'alim*, namely that as the ruler of knowledge, the kiai must be respected and honored by his students who are the servants of knowledge. Therefore, the santri submit to the demands of the kiai and are willing to take whatever action is ordered.

In pesantren, the kiai participates and plays a direct role in educating students. Even to teach the material to the students is done by the kiai himself, so that there is an interaction between the kiai and the santri which creates closeness between the kiai and the santri. In addition, the kiai also has the authority to give rewards and punishments to his students. The reward is usually a blessing from the kiai which is believed to be obtained by the santri if he is obedient to his kiai. The punishment is usually in the form of a warning that threatens the existence of students, for example, students who do not obey will get knowledge that is not useful.

In modern pesantren, the interaction between santri and kiai can be said to be low because the intensity of face-to-face meetings between santri and kiai is very minimal. The kiai only acts as the leader of the pesantren institution, without participating directly in educating and teaching knowledge to his students. Meanwhile, learning activities for the role of the kiai are carried out by teaching staff from Islamic boarding schools. Therefore, it can be said that in modern pesantren there is no closeness between santri and kiai, resulting in the weak role of the kiai as a *legitimate authority*. The kiai as an authority figure who has the highest power has less influence in shaping obedient behavior for his santri, so that the acceptance of the santri for his leader (kiai) is also lacking.

Based on the theoretical explanation of the psychological dynamics above, it can be concluded that the perception of santri towards the kiai's *servant leadership* has an influence on the formation of student obedience behavior, where the servant leadership dimension is formed from the strong personality and character of the leader in this case is the kiai. The kiai builds a strong personality and character in himself so that it affects the students' assessment of the kiai. Then the assessment affects the emergence of obedient attitudes and behavior of students. In addition, the function of the students' perception of the kiai's *servant leadership* is to direct the students to behave obediently according to the dimensions of obedience which include; belief, acceptance, and implementation.

## Conclusion

Violations in salaf pesantren tend to be smaller than in modern pesantren. This means that the obedience of salaf pesantren students is higher than modern pesantren students. The violations mentioned above do not only occur in the general public, but violations also occur in Islamic educational institutions, namely Islamic boarding schools. This phenomenon is rife in both Salaf and modern Islamic boarding schools. Meanwhile, salaf pesantren and modern pesantren have different regulations. Santri are faced with a number of rules and regulations that must be obeyed. Santri have a busy schedule of activities from waking up to going back to sleep. It aims to form independence and discipline in students, so that the values of obedience and responsibility are embedded. The density of activities and the strictness of these regulations can make the condition of students tend to be depressed. Students who are under pressure to vent their emotional state with behavior against the rules that are marked by violations.

A factor that may influence santri obedience is the perception of the kiai's leadership. Pesantren as an educational institution has a characteristic that distinguishes it from other educational institutions. The values of Islamic boarding schools that frame the life of social interaction between kiai, ustadz and santri are the distinguishing characteristics in question. Therefore, the kiai's social power and the legitimacy of his scientific authority have great potential to make the kiai a source of exemplary and moral standards for santri behavior.

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