A Critique of Local Wisdom Values in Indonesia’s Pesantren

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ABSTRACT

Pesantren (Islamic Boarding School) is an Islamic educational institution in Indonesia, established long before the country’s independence. Despite its long and influential role in the national education system of Indonesia, little is known how pesantren has developed its local wisdom values to educate its students. This qualitative and descriptive study investigated local wisdom and values that pesantren has developed as its distinctive characteristics colouring the Indonesian national education system. The study also examined methods used by this institution to develop its distinctive local wisdom values. Data was obtained from observation and interviews with leaders and students in three different pesantrens in West Java, Jakarta and Banten provinces. Results show that since its establishment, pesantren has developed and instilled Islamic values including theology and philosophy, physical development, Arabic language, aesthetics, and teleology, among its students.

Keywords: Indonesian pesantren, local wisdom and values, teaching and learning

INTRODUCTION

The values of local wisdom in pesantren (Islamic boarding school) are necessary in the development of students’ personality, independence and responsibility, especially in education and learning process under the helm of Kyai (clerics or leaders) and Ustadz (teachers). This achievement has been proven by many pesantren alumni across Indonesian Archipelago, who are able to foster community development through education and learning. Being a role model in daily life, the charismatic value of Kyai becomes a reference for most Indonesian people of all levels and groups. These values are like a strong joint that supports the nation
in creating an independent community (Patriadi, Bakar, & Hamat, 2015; Sauri, 2010).

Pesantrens which are usually led by Kyais (Muslim clerics) have a long history in the struggle against colonialism in addition to contributing to the development of Indonesia’s national education. The greatest contribution of the kyais and Islamic figures in Indonesia’s pre-independence movement is proven by the takbir (a praise for Allah’s glory) utterance shouted against the invaders of Indonesia. This utterance is so powerful for all Muslims, particularly during the colonisation era that they became easily moved to fight against the traitors of the nation and the state. It is no wonder that until now, many Pesantren alumni are still actively engaged in politics while many have become leaders in the government, economy, agriculture, and other aspects of life (Indrawati, 2014).

After independence, pesantren remained the main pillar of national education. The Government of Indonesia also acknowledged that pesantren and madrasah (Islamic school) are the foundation and the source of national education that should be continuously developed and supported. From early independence until today, pesantren come under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kamal & Ghani, 2014; Latif, 1983).

As an educational institution, pesantren has various educational activities such as regular interactions between Kyai (traditional Muslim cleric) or Ustadz (religious teacher) as the teacher and Santri (pesantren’s student). These activities usually take place at the mosque (Baharudin & Ismail, 2014) or dorm terrace to recite and to discuss the classical books of Islam, The book is better known as Kitab Kuning (classic book of yellow colour) because in the past, the books were generally written or printed by Muslim scholars on yellow paper. They contain ancient Islamic sciences such as fiqh, hadith, tafsir, or moral subjects (McKenzie, Williams, Weed, & Carroll, 2003), and education (McKenzie et al., 2003). Teaching the classical book is still priority and the only formal instruction in pesantren’s environment.

Despite the long-standing history of traditional pesantren as an indispensable part of Indonesian educational system, little is known what local wisdom values pesantren instils and develops in their students. Therefore, this study explores local wisdom values that most traditional pesantrens in Indonesia instil in their students. A qualitative research method is used for this study using observation and interviews with three pesantren located in three different provinces of Banten, West Java and Jakarta.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The essence of value in human life

Value is an important aspect of human life. In the pesantren world, value is commonly understood as the nature of tauhidullah (oneness of Allah/God the almighty) that is developed and internalised in a person to achieve happiness of living in this world and hereafter (Harto & Harto, 2015; Huizenga,
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ten Dam, Voogt, & Admiraal, 2017; Sauri, 2011).

Meanwhile, according to Sauri (2011), education is a conscious and planned effort to develop the potential of students to become better human beings. This is in accordance with Law 20 of 2003 on National Education System in Indonesia stating that education is a conscious and a deliberate effort to create an atmosphere of learning and facilitate the learning process. Consequently, learners actively develop their potential to be spiritual, possess self-control, and develop good personality, intelligence, noble character, and skills that are required for themselves, community, nation, and state (Suhartini & Barat, 2016; Thornberg & Oğuz, 2016).

Value is contextual and can have different meanings. Some scholars agree that value is defined as the process of guidance through exemplary activities that are oriented towards the establishment of life values (Amalia, Riani, & Julia, 2016; Šramová, 2014. Those values include that of religion (Yusuf & Wekke, 2015), culture (Dubrow, 2004), and aesthetics (Eder, 2004), which can be developed to create a good citizen that can contribute to society (Suhartini & Barat, 2016).

Pesantren and the development of character and local wisdom values

The word pesantren is derived from the word santri (student) with the prefix pe- and the suffix –an, which means the residence of santri. Pesantren is a traditional Islamic educational institution in which santris live together in a boarding house and study religious knowledge under the guidance of a principal teacher or cleric usually called kyai (Jaafar et al., 2012; Yusuf & Wekke, 2015). The students and their Kiyai live in the same compound in order to experience more intensive learning and teaching process. Many other activities in pesantren are carried out in the mosque (Baharudin & Ismail, 2014). In fact, the mosque is the heart of all activities carried out in pesantren. As a residence compound, and for security reason, today’s pesantren complex is usually surrounded by walls built to monitor the incoming and outgoing movement of santris. From the aspect of leadership, a kyai usually holds an almost absolute power. The kyai has power to manage the dormitory, mosque, santri, whereas the teaching of classical texts is the basic elements that, in simple terms, can explain the true essence of pesantren (Suhartini & Barat, 2016).

In relation to developing local wisdom value, the focus of pesantren is the development of good or exemplary character in students. This term actually conveys the same meaning as akhlak, which is very well-known among pesantren students (Kamal & Ghani, 2014). The main difference between these two terms is that the word akhlak (Ghani, Kamal, & Aziz, 2014) is derived from the Koran and Sunnah or prophetic tradition (Ismail, Rahim, & Yusoff, 2013), whereas character is derived from the constitution, society, and family (which, in Indonesia, is guided by Koran and Sunnah as well). In fact, considering
its wide coverage, values, morals, ethics, and character also convey the meaning of akhlak. What makes them different to a certain extent is that, values, morals, ethics, and character are derived from the constitution, society, and family (Sauri, 2011).

Local wisdom on the other hand refers to all forms of knowledge, beliefs, understanding or insight as well as customs or ethics that guide human behaviour in life in an ecological community (Özçınar, Farahani, & Salehi, 2013). These forms of local wisdom are internalised, practised, taught, and passed down from generation to generation by forming patterns of human behavior towards fellow human beings, nature, and the supernatural (Mahoney & Schamber, 2004; Murniyetti, Engkizar, & Anwar, 2016).

Local wisdom is very crucial in human life as it encompasses all aspects of our life. It is the basis for decision making at the local level in the areas of health, agriculture, education, natural resource management, and rural community activities (Evelina, 2016). It also contains local cultural wisdom integrated with the system of beliefs, norms, and culture. It is expressed in traditions and myths which has great impact in the social life of Indonesians.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study uses descriptive qualitative approach (Creswell, 2009; Silverman, 2010) to describe local wisdom values of the pesantren. Data was obtained from interviews and observations at four pesantrens located in three different provinces: Jakarta, Cianjur (West Java) and Serang (Banten) of Indonesia. Two of the pesantrens are located in West Java (Bandung and Cianjur) while the rest are in Banten and Jakarta. The observation was carried out for a month- February 2017 - in each pesantren. Meanwhile, the interviews involved 40 participants, including kiais (clerics), ustaz (teachers) and santri (students), and a few members of the surrounding community.

Data was collected and analysed before it was categorised into main themes based on the research questions. Finally, it was interpreted and analysed on the basis of theories of wisdom values.

The study also adhered to strict ethical requirements. Prior to data collection and observations, approval was sought from each leader of the participating pesantren. Upon receiving their approval, the researchers also obtained written consent from each participant. They were allowed to withdraw from the study at any stage. For validity reasons, the result of the study was also crosschecked by the participants. To preserve confidentiality, each participant was given pseudonym.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

This section describes the process of development of local wisdom value and efforts made by the four pesantrens in instilling these values in their students.
The development process of local wisdom values

In general, the process of developing local wisdom values in pesantren is performed through nurturing of ideas (Costică, 2015; Valderrama-Hernández, Alcántara, & Limón, 2017), visions (Liao & Huang, 2016), and missions (Cosmin-Constantin & Claudia, 2015) of the pesantren, as well as physical symbols of the pesantren. Activities are accustomed to santris, whether it is routine and extracurricular activities.

Observation and interviews showed that each of the studied pesantren has different process of value development. The process of developing the value of local wisdom in Cianjur pesantren, for example, is based on a regular recital either daily, weekly, monthly or yearly. These programmes are organised in central areas of pesantren such as mosque, dormitory or cottage and halls of learning and slogans written on the board or bulletin board notices for depicting the value of local wisdom. The process of local wisdom elaboration in Bandung pesantren covers several student-centred activities. During the teaching process in the mosque, all santris are familiarised with day 1 sufhah ba’da maghrib (evening lecture on the mosque veranda), exercise of sermon, 3rd Friday Khatib led by a competent santri while Isha prayer is led by students on a regular basis.

The process in the Jakarta pesantren includes several aspects; (1) the process by planting belief/idea/vision/mission in the context of wisdom values, (2) the physical symbols of the pesantren, (3) activities showing the process of elaboration of the local wisdom values, (4) the process of elaboration of the local wisdom values in the mosque, dorms, and surrounding community.

The local wisdom values developed in pesantren

The values that are developed in all the four participating pesantren are comprehensive. They consist of spiritual and social aspects which are important in the life of the community. The spiritual values that many Indonesian pesantren impart include the values of monotheism and sincerity. Meanwhile, the social values developed by pesantren include self-reliance, sincerity, social concern for others, ta’dim (paying high respect) for kiai and ustadz, self-discipline, exemplary character, honesty, good communication, confidence, inclusiveness, commitment, and responsibility.

These values are developed differently in each pesantren. For instance, the value of sincerity is mostly demonstrated by all kiais (clerics) of pesantren in guiding their students because they are more concerned with the akhirat (hereafter life) than dunya (current worldly life). The Cianjur pesantren develop spiritual values through rituals such as congregation prayers in the mosque and riyadhahan (loud chanting of prayers) in mosques for certain nights, especially on Fridays. As for social values, they insist...
on ta’dim or paying respect to the elderly such as kiyai and ustads during the learning process and shaking hands with them.

The four participating pesantrens manage to balance the development of spiritual and social values. All kiais and ustads believe that human beings cannot live on their own without the help of others because humans naturally live in tribes and nation-states to help each other. For this reason, a pesantren in Cianjur opened a printing centre to help the community who need the services of printing. This pesantren also carries out community service in the form of lectures in each village weekly and monthly. It also provides free house repairs to help poor people who cannot afford it.

Efforts made in developing local wisdom values

The efforts made in developing local wisdom values among the students vary from one pesantren to another. Despite a slight difference, the efforts include regular and irregular programmes, the establishment of rules, and exemplary leadership of central figures, habituation, reward and punishment system. Each of these efforts are explained below with reference based on the pesantren.

Cianjur pesantren has made various efforts to develop local wisdom values in students. The efforts made by this pesantren include assessment of classic books with sorogan method implemented voluntarily based on the needs of the santris. The Kyai of this pesantren has appointed a competent ustadz (teacher) to become instructor for the students. In another regular activity, bandongan method, the emphasis lies on kiai or ustadz in presenting the material while the santris or students only listen. In addition, interviews with the Kyai and teachers show that sorogan (the method of individual learning Arabic) is more likely to suit the needs of each student. Therefore, the value of honesty, discipline, hard work, responsibility, constancy, sincere, and humble will be cultivated in the Santris. The values that are reflected in the learning using bandongan are more sincere, patient, and humble.

Habituation value in learning Islamic classic books using sorogan and bandongan shapes everyday behavior of the students in boarding schools. This fact does not rule out the opposite behavior may occur when they are in the environment outside pesantren. Furthermore, at this pesantren, all new santris are divided into grades. Recitals of classical texts are no longer prominent. Some even consider it only as a complement and turn them into subjects or fields of study. Pesantren Al Musyri is considered a salafi pesantren where learning is held in mosques and study room. Other learning methods still use the systems of sorogan, bandongan, tarkiban, setoran, tasrifan, and ulangan.

Similarly, the Bandung pesantren also undertook important efforts in developing the local wisdom values such as 1) Tahfidz of Koran; 2) congregation prayer; 3) Shaum (non-compulsory fasting) on Mondays and Thursdays; 4) Jumsih, public cleaning of all pesantren compound on Fridays; 5) interest and aptitude of santris through
extracurricular programs; and 6) Listening to *Qiroatul Kutub* and a brief description of *ustadz* after *asr* prayers.

In addition, *pesantrens* also have some irregular or spontaneous efforts in the development of local wisdom values. The four participating *pesantrens* have developed three irregular programmes. First, students are forbidden from eating or drinking while walking or eating or drinking by using their left hand. Second, during the month of *Ramadan*, the *santris* involve in *Taraweeh* followed by a short sermon on Islamic teaching. Third, to foster competitiveness, students are encouraged to be involved in various competitions organised by the Ministry of Religious Affairs or other private organisations.

Another *pesantren* located in Jakarta also has made a similar effort in developing local wisdom values. The *Kyai* and teachers have implemented both regular and irregular programmes to grow spiritual and social values among their students. They also have established and applied certain *pesantren* rules in order to establish the behaviour of the *pesantren* students that reflects the value of local wisdom. In addition, these leader and teachers also have become exemplary figures for students in developing their local wisdom values. With these, they have created a good habit and environment for developing spiritual and social values.

Meanwhile, the efforts made by *Banten pesantren* in developing the local wisdom values in its students include (1) regular and irregular programmes, (2) enforcing regulation at *pesantren*, (4) role model by leaders, (5) habituation of exemplary practices, as well as (6) reward and punishment. Regular activities include daily, weekly and monthly teaching and learning process. The *pesantren* also enforces regulation to maintain the life order of the students whereas *Kyai* plays as an exemplary role in their spiritual and social life. To nurture a good character, students are provided with rewards and punishment.

**DISCUSSION**

Each of the three participating *pesantrens* has different focus of local wisdom development. Understanding the value of local wisdom in a *pesantren* located in Cianjur is limited to the traditions that have been previously existing for a lengthy period of time which are not owned by other institutions. Therefore, a tradition begins with an act or activity undertaken with the idea that needs to be developed even if the ideas, experience, observation are not based on a proposition that can be accounted for. On the other hand, a *Pesantren* in northern Bandung focuses on understanding the tradition (Olsen, Bekken, McConnell, & Walter, 2011) of fostering an Islamic generation *Tafaqquh Fid Din* based on the Koran and Sunnah (Hasmori, Yunos, Hamzah, & Aripin, 2015). Meanwhile, the other *pesantren* in Jakarta focuses on the development of tradition (Lisievici & Andronie, 2016) of understanding the classic book, familiarise *ta’dim* (high respect) to teachers (Lisievici & Andronie, 2016), as well as the development of monotheism (Purrostami, 2012).
It appears that each pesantren has different focus of value development. The Cianjur pesantren explores uniquely pesantren’s traditions that are not shared with other educational institutions. The values developed include simplicity (Pizzolato, 2007), independence of students (Pane & Patriana, 2016), guidance and supervision of senior for junior students (Halx & Reybold, 2006), and different methods of teaching and learning including bandungan, sorogan, balagan, setoran, tasrifan, tarkiban, muballighaan, and haulan.

Meanwhile, the pesantren in Bandung has different focus of value development. This pesantren focuses on fostering the development of Islamic generation commonly known as Tafaqquh Fid Din based on the Koran (Alyona, Tursun, Akmaral, & Saira, 2016) and Sunnah or prophetic tradition (Razaly et al., 2015). This pesantren has two kinds of peculiarities. First, the santris do not wear sarong and kopiah. The students dress like regular school students and taught both religious and modern curriculum (Olorunnisola, Ramasubramanian, Russill, & Dumas, 2003). Learning is from morning until noon (Purrostami, 2012). Second, the pesantren intends to make the santri a master of general knowledge, as well as able to remember a juz (about 18-20 pages) of Koran in every year (Alyona et al., 2016).

In the Jakarta pesantren, interviews with its leader and the representatives of ustazs and santris showed this pesantren maintains the value of local wisdom of salafiyah (traditional pesantren); this is supported by the findings of Harto and Harto (2015). The pesantren focuses on the main aspects of salafiyah, an educational model. These three aspects are: a), the sources of knowledge are taken directly from the yellow book written by great scholars (AbulQaraya, 2015); b) students have a ta’dim to the teacher, which is distinctive identity of the salafiyah (Hordern, 2016); c), the planting of the value of faith (tauhid) in salafiyah is primary (Baharuddin & Ismail, 2015; Shobha & Kala, 2015).

**The purpose of local wisdom development**

The development of local wisdom has few important purposes. The main purpose of Jakarta pesantren in instilling the values of local wisdom is to preserve, adapt, and maintain the good traditional values which are not contrary to the shari’a (Islamic law). Moreover, local values can be used to develop the values of monotheism (Mamat, Mahamood, & Ismail, 2012), charisma of Kyai (Triandis, 2013), istiqamah (Rahman & Shah, 2015), independence (Husin & Ibrahim, 2016), responsibility (Dariah, Salleh, & Shafai, 2016), and discipline (Ismail et al., 2013). It is expected to make santris believe in and fear of Allah, and have akhlaqul karimah (noble characters) (Kamal & Ghani, 2014).

In a rather similar way, the Pesantren in Cianjur has two purposes: short and long-terms. The short-term goal is that the
students can understand the values contained in the tradition of the school and can listen and absorb lessons in schools. The long-term goal is that the santris can implement the knowledge of teachings of Islam, preach it to others and become exemplary of practicing these values in society (Murniyetti et al., 2016).

Meanwhile, the pesantren in Bandung manages to guide young generation of Muslims to have a strong foundation of tafaqquh fiddiin (knowledge of religion), based on the Koran and Sunnah (prophetic tradition). Planting of religious values is vital in order for it to become a habit and internalised among the santris.

The values are meant at developing students’ character. Teaching and learning focus on developing the value of independence and honesty (Rice, 2017). Another value developed is discipline (Teyyar Ugurlu et al., 2015). Students wake up early in the morning, eat only during meal times (breakfast at 6 to 6:30, lunch after midday until 12:50, and at 05:15 for dinner). On Mondays and Thursdays, they have to do shaum Sunnah (voluntary fasting). Lights had to be turned off by 9pm so students sleep early. The other value instilled is friendly social communication (Raitina, 2015). All students should be able to live in harmony with other peers, juniors or seniors living in the same dormitory. These aspects are considered important in developing the character of the students.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion above, the study concludes that first, pesantren has developed a distinguished wisdom culture which became its hallmark, that is, to familiarise santri (students) with akhlakul karimah (noble characters) as future Muslim preachers and scholars. Second, this local wisdom is developed through the teaching of Islamic classic books with various methods, such as sorogan, bandongan, and ngalogat, haulan, muludan, rajaban, within different time frames; daily, weekly, and monthly. Third, the wisdom values developed in pesantren include 1) theological, strengthening the faith and devotion of santris, improving worship, faith, Sharia, and developing Islamic morality; 2) philosophical, focusing on obedience to kiai and ustaz; 3) physical and psychological, physical and spiritual health, clean environment or sanitary, and adequate lighting; 4) empirical, the value of developing Alfiyah from 1 to 1000 and vice versa, logic, sciences of balaghah, ma’ani, nahuw, sharf; 5) aesthetical, beautiful environment and worship arrangement, as well as neat clothing; 6) teleological, being useful for family, and community, regionally and nationally. Finally, the pesantren efforts in developing local wisdom values explain the acceptance of new santris, providing an understanding and explanation to the parents and the community, haulan, sorogan, bandongan, community supervision, and rewarding obedience and punishing noncompliance.
REFERENCES


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