

## **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

#### **ARTICLE INFO**

*Article history:*

Received: 18 September 2017

Accepted: 12 March 2018

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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,

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 (Thornberg & Oğuz, 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), *ustadz* (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 (Costică, 2015) 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 extra-curricular 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, 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 *ustadz* 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 (Lisievic & Andronie, 2016) of understanding the classic book, familiarise *ta'dim* (high respect) to teachers (Lisievic & 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 *haulana*.

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 *ustadz*s 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, & Shafiai, 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 *ustadz*; 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*, *nahwu*, *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.

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