The Formalization of Education Management: A Challenge to Indonesia's Traditional Pesantren System

by Mukhtar Hadi

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Abstract: Efforts to improve education quality through formalization have resulted in the disorientation of pesantren education (i.e. education conducted at traditional Islamic boarding schools), and even created a dilemma in the everyday life dynamics of these institutions. This study seeks to understand how the formalization process occurs in pesantren and the factors that hinder the formalization of education management. This study also seeks to understand the implications of formalization for the traditions of these institutions. It applies a descriptive-qualitative approach, with data collected through observations, interviews, and document reviews. This study finds that formal education management systems limit the ability of pesantren to adapt to new challenges and demands. At the same time, formalization has eroded the traditional characteristics of these institutions, including the dignity of the kyai and the values of independence, simplicity, and submission. Pesantren have been required to transform their cultural management systems into structural ones, and their family-based leadership models into professional ones. These institutions have not rejected change, but sought to accommodate it by maximizing the potential of new systems. Future research should consider a range of pesantren to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how the formalization of education management influences such institutions.

Keywords: *Formalization, Education Management, Pesantren, Traditional Education, Indonesia*

Introduction

Indonesia's traditional Islamic boarding schools, or *pesantren*, have experienced significant change and begun losing their social influence. Recognizing graduates' anxiety when entering general society, where formal education is preferred over informal education, some *pesantren* have transformed themselves by abandoning their traditional management systems and even such values as independence, simplicity, and submission (Bashori, 2017; Faizin, 2015; Rizal, 2011; Suheri, 2016; Suradi, 2018). According to Ahmad Najib Afandi, only 10% of Indonesia's 14,798 *pesantren* have maintained their traditional values. The remainder have become "accommodations" for students to study Islam after learning science, social studies,

mathematics, and citizenship, which are no longer viewed as *haram* (forbidden) but *fard* (compulsory) (Afandi, 2007).

Studies of *pesantren* management generally fall into three categories. First are those studies that examine the processes through which *pesantren* change and adapt to new demands and developments (Asifudin, 2017; Sagala, 2015). Second are those studies that examine the resources of *pesantren* as well as said resources use in empowering students and administrators (Fauzi, 2017; Arifin, 2014; Faj, 2011; Baroroh, 2006; Siregar, 2018). Third, studies have examined these institutions' management of their finances and assets, particularly their efforts to guarantee their economic independence (Arifin, 2017; Marliana & Almunawwaroh, 2016; Prasetyo, 2017; Priatna, Nurhamzah, Ratnasih, & Siregar, 2018; Suhendi, 2018; Sulaiman, Masrukin, Chusmeru, & Pangestuti, 2016). It may thus be surmised that structural considerations, particularly within the context of management reform in response to macro-level policies, have yet to receive significant attention.

This article seeks to fill the gap in studies of education management, which have failed to analyze these institutions dynamic response to government and social demands for formalization. It thus seeks to answer three questions: (a): How is education management formalized in *pesantren*; (b): What factors hinder the formalization of education management in *pesantren*; (c): How does the formalization of education management in *pesantren* influence the traditions of these institutions? These three questions will be answered in detail below.

This study departs from three arguments. First, the formalization of education management in *pesantren* has transformed these institutions' traditional values. Consequently, formalization has caused these institutions to lose their unique identity as Islamic educational institutions that strictly adhere to traditional principles. Second, the formalization of *pesantren* has resulted in their administration being static, rather than dynamic (as under the traditional system), and as such this formalization has faced both internal and external resistance. Third, the formalization of pesantren education has reduced the influence of the *kyai* in these institutions and in their communities. *Kyai* have consequently lost their authority in today's ever-changing society, as have *pesantren*.

Literature Review

Education Management

Moloney and Pettersen (2016) define management as encompassing all of the everyday practices used to ensure the comfort of members of an organization in order to achieve a shared goal. Hallinger (2019) adds that management plays a central role in organizational advancement. In education, management is necessary to ensure that institutional needs are fulfilled effectively and efficiently (Romlah, 2016). According to Romli, education management is necessary to anticipate the global transformations that are precipitated by advances in science and information technology. Such advances occur rapidly, and as such educational institutions must continually adapt themselves to remain competitive and optimize their output. Only through optimal management can educational institutions provide quality education and realize their goals (Romlah, 2016).

Education management is not only used by formal institutions, but also by informal ones such as *pesantren*, where values of faith and piety are emphasized. The implementation of education management in *pesantren* cannot be separated from the activities of planning, organizing, motivating, conforming, and evaluating, all of which require a high level of discipline to implement maximally, as seen in the Gontor Pesantren (Faj, 2011). *Pesantren* must open themselves and their eyes to the outside world, understanding and anticipating global phenomena to mitigate any clashes that would threaten their sustainability. At the same time, mutual symbiosis is necessary to ensure that *pesantren* can contribute to global discourse, accumulate resources, and empower themselves. This will enable such traditional institutions to survive in an increasingly modern world (Untung, 2011;Munir, 2018).

Formalization of Pesantren *Education*

Education is foundational in personal and cultural development (Nurmadiansyah, 2016). As the oldest educational institutions in Indonesia, *pesantren* have contributed significantly to the shaping of the ummah (Arifin, 2013). As times have changed, *pesantren* have been forced to adapt (Subhi, 2016). This can be seen in their formalization, which is used in the political–administrative domain to refer to the proliferation and application of formally and explicitly defined values for managing individual behaviors within an organizational context (Woelert, 2015). According to Maksum (in Yahya, 2017), formalization may involve the application of state regulations in accordance with specific criteria. In the context of *pesantren* education, formalization may include the revision of curricula to include general knowledge and/or the use of educational institutions and facilities for general purposes (Tamin AR, 2018). The fundamental philosophy of *pesantren* has thus transformed in order to accommodate the changing needs of society.

Historically, pesantren have been independent institutions, meaning that they have had the right to administer themselves using their own strategies and approaches. Over time, however, this has changed as *pesantren* have interacted with public education systems and as general knowledge has been incorporated into their curricula (Subhi, 2016). These institutions of Islamic education no longer rely exclusively on indigenous and traditional approaches such as *halaqah*, *wetonan*, *bandongan*, and *sorogan*; many have adopted westernized systems and models (Abdullah, 2013). Steenbrink notes that *pesantren* have been formalized by incorporating non-religious materials into their curricula, creating "integrated madrasahs" with both religious and secular materials (Tamin AR, 2018). Furthermore, as many *pesantren* have begun referring to guidelines provided by the Department of Education and Culture when planning and implementing their learning activities, their structures and processes are nearly identical to those of public schools.

The Deauthorization of Traditional Leaders

Leadership is defined as the process through which individuals influence others to create organizational change and betterment (Antes, Mart, & DuBois, 2016). All leaders are expected to heave several key competencies: 1) an ability to convey their vision of the future to others; 2) interpersonal skills that enable them to effectively interact with others; 3) personal skills that enable them to endure and persevere in the face of difficulty (Muhammad, 2014)**.** Leadership is dynamic, and leaders can lose their authority where they lack dominance and decision-making power (Koschmann et

al, 2017). Where more rational and national systems are implemented, this deauthorization can erode the quality of traditional authority (legitimacy, charisma, and trust). Although these leaders retain their titles and their support, they lose their ability to influence society. To ensure that traditional leadership is maintained, authority and legitimacy are thus necessary (Mansur, Sofianto, & Mahzuni, 2013).

Kiai, as the central figures in *pesantren*, have significant leadership power, and even at the village level they can help determine the future of the nation (Rohim, 2015). *Kiai* and their students (*santri*) establish effective kinship networks based on ethics and aesthetics, which are used to influence broader society (Rohim, 2015). *Pesantren* can use their political influence to facilitate their provision of educational services. However, has a boomerang effect; many have criticized *pesantren* for their political activities. First, the quality of education suffers when *kiai* and other pesantren leaders focus on politics. Second, pesantren are perceived as supporting pragmatic politics, wherein votes are exchanged for money, and this distances *pesantren* from their communities. Third, local communities oppose political decisions that they perceive as purely interest-driven (Ernas, 2010).

Method

This study was conducted at the Darul A'mal Pesantren in West Metro, Metro, Lampung. This *pesantren* was chosen owing to its relative age (having been established in 1987). This pesantren employs an accommodative model, having established its own formal schools while also offering traditional pesantren services. Established by the charismatic *kiai* Khusnan Musthafa Ghufron, nicknamed the White Lion, Guardian of the Ulama, this *pesantren* was entrusted to its founder's son after Ghufron's death. Owing to formalization, this *pesantren* has lost much of its influence, instead being recognized primarily as a formal educational institution.

This study is a qualitative one, relying primarily on phenomenological and naturalistic data. Its key informants are Gus Umar Anshori Khusnan, the son of KH. Khusnan Mustafa Ghufron and leader of the Darul A'mal Pesantren, and Gus Kodratul Sidiq, the brother of Gus Umar. Other informants included *ustad* (religious scholars) and administrators, who were selected through purposive sampling. Collectively, these informants represented the policymakers, managers, and teachers of the Darul A'mal Pesantren.

Data were collected through observations of three factors: the physical and geographic condition of the *pesantren*, the people of the pesantren, and their behavior. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with informants and a review of the literature. The researchers also participated in several *pesantren* to record the situation, events, and knowledge, all of which were necessary for analysis. Analysis was conducted inductively, using an interpretative approach. Data analysis was conducted both during and after data collection. Data were organized, categorized, and described, then interpreted. A conclusion was ultimately drawn.

Results

Formalization of Education Management in Pesantren

The formalization of education management in *pesantren* has a legal basis in Government Regulation No. 55 of 2007 regarding Religion and Faith, which contains several articles that regulate the religious education provided by *pesantren*. In accordance with this government regulation, the Ministry of Religion issued Regulation of the Minister of Religion No. 3 of 2012 regarding Religious Education. More recently, this matter has been regulated through Law No. 18 of 2019, under which *pesantren* are required to become legal bodies, and to provide formal and non-formal education in accordance with government standards.

Darul A'mal Pesantren was established in 1987 as a *salafiyah pesantren* with a strong cultural affiliation with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), one of Indonesia's largest Islamic organizations. It initially taught Islam using non-formal managerial techniques and classical textbooks, and its graduates did not receive diplomas. However, over time, recognizing government and public demands, the administrators of the institution adapted a *mu'adalah* model whose graduates were equal to those of formal schools and madrasahs. Under this system, the *pesantren* not only provided non-formal lessons, but also established its own *madrasah* at the junior and senior high school levels, as well as a vocational school.

This formalization process involved a number of stakeholders. The first and foremost of these was the government, which—through the Ministry of Religion—had the authority to issue permits, regulate, and standardize formal religious educational institutions. Formalization also involved a number of outside actors who had never previously been involved with the *pesantren*, including teachers (in charge of formal education), administrators (in charge of infrastructure and finances), human resource officers (in charge of socialization), janitors, and canteen staff. Formalization also required significant changes to the buildings, infrastructure, human resources, administration, and financial management of the *pesantren*, as well as the creation of new linkages with outside stakeholders.

Obstacles to the Formalization of Education Management in Pesantren

The adoption of a *mu'adalah* model in the Darul A'mal Pesantren has transformed the values that have long characterized such institutions, including piety, simplicity, independence, and submission. Previously, education had been entirely under the purview of the kiai. Today, however, it has adapted to formal and legal guidelines, becoming more pragmatic, uniform, and monolithic. When asked why she had entered the profession, one madrasah teacher answered:

> "*I'm a graduate of teacher's college, and so I became a teacher, because I wanted to earn an income from this profession*". (US, interview, 22/08/2019)

When asked about her understanding of *pesantren*, she answered:

> "*Because I'm not a graduate of a pesantren, I don't really know. To the best of my knowledge pesantren graduates know much about Islam, such as Arabic, Islamic jurisprudence, and prayer*". (US, interview, 22/08/2019)

Formalization has not only been manifested in the erosion of existing values, but also in the transformation of managerial processes. Previously, the kiai—as the owner of the pesantren—had been the sole leader and manager of the *pesantren*, being assisted by several senior *santri*. However, as a consequence of formalization, authority has been redistributed. Madrasahs, despite formally being part of the pesantren, require staff with the necessary managerial competencies. This can be seen, for example, in financial matters. Where the *pesantren* had previously relied on its santri to manage its assets, formalization has necessitated the hiring of professional staff who require adequate payment. Before formalization, the fields owned by the *pesantren* had been worked voluntarily by *santri*, with the harvests being used to support the institution. Such a practice is untenable today. Many *santri* and their guardians feel that, as they have paid for an education, they are only required to focus on their studies; other activities, such as asset management, are no longer viewed as compulsory.

The formalization of *pesantren* management has received diverse responses, and the difference has been felt acutely by individuals who dealt with the *pesantren* before it began formalization. One local resident, who had interacted with the *santri* since the institution's establishment, stated:

> "*Before, when the pesantren was first established, I experienced for myself how the santri were. Many came from around here, while some came a significant distance. They were simple, polite, and friendly in their interactions with others. However, now I am having trouble distinguishing between the santri and the ordinary students, especially since there are many boarders around here*". (R, interview, 17/08/2019).

Students also mentioned the differences between the formal and non-formal systems. As one informant stated:

> "*My parents told me to study at the Madrasah Aliyah here, while living in the pesantren and studying religion. However, after I started, I felt it was very difficult, because I did not only have to study at the pesantren but also the numerous subjects in the Madrasah Aliyah. I also didn't like living in the pesantren, because the schedule is strict, and I'd often lose my sandals. My phone and the money in my wallet even went missing. In the end, I asked my parents to let me board elsewhere, while I was finishing my studies at the MA. My parents could understand, and so I didn't stay at the pesantren, but still studied at its MA*" (D, interview, 17/08/2019).

Efforts to create an integrated education management model that meets regulatory standards and recent developments were also recognized by *pesantren* leaders.

> "*Now, if a pesantren relies on old models of learning like before, people would abandon them. As a pesantren administrator, I need to consider the future of my santri. After they graduate, they need a recognized diploma that they can use to continue their studies or apply for work, or for other purposes. Looking only at the pesantren, the pesantren have difficulty developing because they have significant needs. That's why we established our own schools. But those schools are still under the*

pesantren, and so we can continue to develop". (GUAK, son of *pesantren* founder, interview, 22/08/2019).

From these interviews, it is apparent that *pesantren* have been expected to adapt to the changing times. Parents have been generally unwilling to send their children to *pesantren*, especially those that have continued applying a traditional approach. As such, *pesantren* have begun abandoning their traditional models and establishing formal educational institutions. Even where pesantren retain their traditional model, they still operate formal schools. This has occurred throughout Indonesia, including in Java,

The Influence of Formalization on the Educational Traditions of Pesantren

Pesantren are broadly recognized as having several unique characteristics, including the reproduction of fundamental values through the *kiai*, the *santri*, and the *ustad*. Because these institutions were established to promote community service and Islamic piety, *pesantren* were culturally recognized as financially and academically independent educational institutions. *Pesantren* also promoted simplicity, as well as participation in all aspects of society. Local communities felt themselves to be part of the pesantren, and consulted the *kiai* when making decisions.

In the case of Darul A'mal Pesantren, its founder KH. Khusnan Musthafa Ghufron was not only perceived as a leader by santri, but also by communities throughout Lampung. After being educated in such an environment, *santri* were expected to open their own *pesantren* elsewhere. This situation has changed, however, since the formalization of the institution, which has resulted in the *pesantren* losing their flexibility, becoming less independent and more structural.

At the same time, formalization has transformed leadership from familial to professional. In the past, leadership of Darul A'mal Pesantren was inherited; upon the death of the kiai, his eldest son would become the new kiai, as he occupied a special position and was given special recognition. The sons of *kiai* were given the honorific title "Gus". For example, KH Khusnan Musthafa Ghufron had three sons: Gus Umar Anshori Ghufron (the current leader of the pesantren), Gus Kodratullah Sidiq, and Gus Isro' Sulthoni (both members of the foundation). However, despite occupying important formal positions, these men lack their father's authority and influence. This can be attributed not only to them having less religious knowledge than their father, but also to them no longer being the sole managers of the pesantren.

Under the current hybrid system, wherein the *pesantren* operates its own madrasahs, the institution is restricted by formal regulations and must search for professional labor elsewhere. The previous system, wherein the *kiai* was assisted by senior *santri*, can no longer be employed. The educational system, which once accommodated diversity, must now conform with outside curricula. Traditionally, *pesantren* have employed an open system, accepting any *santri* at the discretion of the *kiai*. Under this system, *pesantren* operated independently, without government intervention.

The formalization of education management has forced *pesantren* to employ a uniform and singular approach, a process that is still ongoing (Oktradiksa, 2017). The madrasahs opened by these institutions, meanwhile, have had to follow government-set curricula and standards. *Santri* are given the opportunity to receive a diploma,

known as a *mu'adalah*, but must write a government-drafted equivalency examination in order to do so. Consequently, *pesantren*—including the *kiai*—must orient themselves towards the competency standards set by the government.

Discussion

The formalization of education management at *pesantren* has significant implications for their institutional survival as well as the perpetuation of their traditional values. *Pesantren*, which have existed in the Indonesian archipelago for centuries and developed diverse forms, have begun losing their unique characteristics. Despite remaining identified as *pesantren*, these are no longer indigenous educational institutions, but hybrid ones with different forms and types (Arifin, 2017; Maulida, 2017; Zulhimma, 2013), being identified variously as "modern pesantren" (*pesantren modern*), "combination pesantren" (*pesantren kombinasi*), "mixed pesantren" (*pesantren campuran*), "integrated pesantren" (*pesantren terpadu* or *pesantren terintegrasi*), etc. (Alwi, 2016).

The institutional transformation of *pesantren* also has implications for the foundational values that have enabled them to endure through the centuries. The loss of such values as simplicity, independence, and submission has broad and complex consequences. Such traits, once commonly practiced and internalized by *santri*, are no longer common. These noble values have given way to more pragmatic, static, uniform, and mathematic ones, and this has undermined the goal of providing an Islamic education.

Formalization generally leads to standardization, and standardization is usually measured in terms of institutions' ability to apply these standards without discrimination; this has been shown by several previous studies (i.e. Hidayatullah, 2015; Sidiq, 2013; Jubba & Pabbajah, 2018). This has also occurred in *pesantren*, where unique traditions and characteristics have been eroded by formalization. Recognition of this tendency underpinned the debate and discussion that emerged as the Pesantren Law was being drafted. Opponents of the law feared that, with the introduction of government regulations, *pesantren* would lose their genuineness, while supporters suggested that government regulation and support would facilitate their institutional and economic survival.

Formalization, in conjunction with standardized education management, can cause significant shock. *Pesantren* must change their ideologies and accommodate new values and techniques, and such transformations cannot be readily accepted by members and affiliates of these organizations (Implementasi, 2011; Moorhead & Griffin, 2013; Purhantara, 2012; Sutirman, 2015). It is thus not surprising that formalization has faced resistance, both open and covert, even as government standards have been begrudgingly adopted.

It may thus be surmised that the formalization of education management in *pesantren* has only been accepted half-heartedly, as these institutions fear that it will erode their very essence. Many are unwilling to abandon their deep-rooted institutional values, but nonetheless are forced to embrace new values that are different than or even opposed to their own. In the social sciences, this phenomenon is known as culture shock (Kracke, 2015; Presbitero, 2016), a condition wherein one must accept and adapt to an entirely different culture.

As the *kiai* have lost influence and as the cultural values of *pesantren* have changed, these educational institutions have lost their nobility and authority in their society. The title *kiai*, which is traditionally bestowed upon individuals with a deep knowledge of Islam, has been contaminated by globalization (Khanif, 2011; Mundiri & Bariroh, 2019; Musaropah, 2018). Traditionally, *kiai* have been venerated as wise authority figures who impart their students with wisdom and moral fortitude.

Some months ago, a viral video depicted an incident at a pesantren where a parent raged through a pesantren in Pekanbaru, Riau, even hitting an *ustad* because his son had been expelled from the *pesantren* and would be unable to write his final examinations. This example shows that formalization is associated with several complex phenomena, including a loss of respect for *pesantren* and their staff as well as an expectation that these institutions provide the same services as formal schools.

Such transformations seemingly confirm the view that, the more advanced and modern a society, the more likely it will abandon its traditions—even when those traditions had been maintained for centuries (Ismanto, Huda, & Maulida, 2013; Mazidah, 2011; Zulfikri, 2017). However, history is replete with examples of traditional values being re-embraced when new values are found to be lacking (Pabbajah, Jubba, Widyanti, Pabbajah, & Iribaram, 2020). In the current era of modernization and digitization, there is still a desire to restore the traditional order. It is therefore necessary to ensure that *pesantren* retain their traditional characteristics and values, even as they are formalized to meet the demands of the times.

Conclusion

Formalization, long identified as a means of providing quality education, has not had a positive effect on the management of *pesantren*. This study makes three important findings. First, the formalization of education management has transformed the traditional characteristics of *pesantren* as these institutions have been forced to adapt to changing policies. Second, the traditional authority and charisma of the *kiai*, as well as the cultural values of simplicity, independence, and submission, have been eroded over time. Third, *pesantren* have embraced new practices as they have transformed their cultures and structures, shifting from familism to professionalism. It may be seen that *pesantren* do not reject change, but accommodate it as they attempt to maximize their potential. Several pesantren have thus taken on a more formalistic and modern form.

The perspective used in this study has enabled it to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of how pesantren have culturally and managerially transformed their education management systems. The formalization of education management requires significant change, and this has faced both overt and covert resistance from administrators, *santri*, and communities. As such, the formalization of pesantren must be reexamined to ensure that these institutions can retain their traditional identities while adapting to the demands of the times.

This study has been limited by its reliance on data from a single *pesantren*, one that has combined formal and non-formal education, and thus cannot provide a comprehensive and comparative understanding. Future studies should thus consider several types of *pesantren* in order to provide a comprehensive understanding, with a particular focus on the effectiveness of formalization. It is also necessary to give

particular consideration to stakeholders and educators in drafting policies that enable pesantren to retain their traditional characteristics. Only then can the quality of education be improved and expected goals be realized.

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