

Transformative Kiai Leadership and the Formation of Entrepreneurial Culture in Pesantren

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Abstract: This study examines the leadership of kiai in shaping the entrepreneurial culture of santri at Qur'any Islamic Boarding School in Blitar and Fathul Ulum Islamic Boarding School in Jombang. The research was motivated by the growing need for Islamic educational institutions to strengthen students' economic independence while maintaining spiritual and moral values. This study employed a qualitative approach with a multi-site design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies involving kiai, pesantren administrators, teachers, and santri. Data analysis was conducted through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing using single-site and cross-site analysis techniques. The findings reveal that kiai leadership plays a transformative role in fostering an entrepreneurial culture through exemplary leadership, internalisation of spiritual values, participatory engagement, and collective habituation. Entrepreneurial activities in both pesantrens were integrated with Islamic values such as sincerity, discipline, responsibility, and social empowerment. The kiai functioned not only as a religious leader but also as an agent of socio-economic transformation, encouraging santri to develop independence and productive skills. This study contributes to the development of Islamic educational leadership theory by proposing a spiritually based transformational leadership perspective within pesantren entrepreneurship education. The findings also demonstrate that pesantren can function as institutions of community empowerment capable of integrating spirituality, character education, and economic productivity within a holistic Islamic educational framework.

Keywords: Kiai Leadership, Entrepreneurial Culture, Santri, Islamic Boarding School, Transformational Leadership.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengkaji kepemimpinan kiai dalam membentuk budaya kewirausahaan santri di Pondok Pesantren Qur'any Blitar dan Pondok Pesantren Fathul Ulum Jombang. Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh kebutuhan lembaga pendidikan Islam untuk memperkuat kemandirian ekonomi santri tanpa meninggalkan nilai spiritual dan moral pesantren. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi multi situs. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan studi dokumentasi yang melibatkan kiai, pengurus pesantren, guru, dan santri. Analisis data dilakukan melalui tahapan kondensasi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan dengan teknik analisis situs tunggal dan lintas situs. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan kiai berperan secara transformatif dalam membentuk budaya kewirausahaan melalui keteladanan, internalisasi nilai spiritual, keterlibatan

partisipatif, dan pembiasaan kolektif. Aktivitas kewirausahaan di kedua pesantren terintegrasi dengan nilai-nilai Islam seperti keikhlasan, kedisiplinan, tanggung jawab, dan pemberdayaan sosial. Kiai tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai pemimpin agama, tetapi juga sebagai agen transformasi sosial-ekonomi yang mendorong santri untuk memiliki kemandirian dan keterampilan produktif. Penelitian ini berkontribusi terhadap pengembangan teori kepemimpinan pendidikan Islam melalui perspektif kepemimpinan transformasional berbasis spiritual dalam pendidikan kewirausahaan pesantren. Temuan penelitian juga menunjukkan bahwa pesantren mampu menjadi institusi pemberdayaan masyarakat yang mengintegrasikan spiritualitas, pendidikan karakter, dan produktivitas ekonomi secara holistik.

Kata Kunci: Kepemimpinan Kiai, Budaya Kewirausahaan, Santri, Pondok Pesantren, Kepemimpinan Transformasional

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Introduction

The rapid transformation of the global economy and contemporary social dynamics has compelled Islamic educational institutions to move beyond purely religious orientations toward the development of students' economic independence and life skills (Mukhlis et al., 2026; Sahin, 2018). In this context, Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) as traditional Islamic educational institutions are increasingly challenged to remain relevant amid social, economic, and cultural change. For decades, pesantren have often been perceived merely as institutions that emphasize religious instruction and moral formation, while paying limited attention to economic empowerment and entrepreneurial development (Hakim et al., 2025; Hasan et al., 2024; Rohmah et al., 2025). In fact, pesantren possess substantial social, cultural, and spiritual capital that can be developed into community-based centers of economic empowerment. Within this structure, the kiai, as the central leader of the pesantren, plays a decisive role in directing institutional transformation and shaping the educational culture of the pesantren (Azra, 2012; Dhofier, 2011)

In recent years, the issue of entrepreneurship within Islamic boarding schools has attracted increasing scholarly and governmental attention, particularly in response to rising unemployment among graduates, weak economic independence among youth, and declining interest in productive sectors such as agriculture (Anggadwita et al., 2021). Indonesia is currently facing a serious crisis in the regeneration of young farmers, as younger generations tend to perceive agriculture as unprofitable, outdated, and lacking prospects (Hakim et al., 2019). This phenomenon raises concerns regarding the sustainability of national food security and the future of community-based economic resilience (Irham Zaki et al., 2020). In this situation, pesantren have begun to assume strategic roles by developing

entrepreneurship education grounded in Islamic values, self-reliance, and community empowerment (Fauzi, 2020; Hidayat & Syamsudin, 2022).

Consequently, pesantren are no longer positioned merely as institutions for transmitting religious knowledge, but also as agents of socio-economic transformation (Ayumi & Nasution, 2025; Rofiq et al., 2025; Suwendi et al., 2024). Many pesantren have developed productive business units, entrepreneurship training programs, integrated farming systems, cooperatives, livestock management, and various forms of community-based economic empowerment. Such transformations demonstrate the adaptive capacity of pesantren in responding to modern challenges without abandoning their spiritual and traditional identities. In this process, the leadership of the kiai becomes highly influential because institutional policies, organizational culture, and the character formation of students are largely shaped by the leadership model implemented within the pesantren environment (Wahid, 2001; Madjid, 2008).

Theoretically, studies on Islamic educational leadership have predominantly focused on charismatic authority, traditional legitimacy, and spiritual leadership (Brooks & Mutohar, 2018; Shah, 2006). Previous studies generally portray the kiai as a moral figure and cultural authority within pesantren, while discussions regarding the role of kiai leadership in constructing entrepreneurial culture among students remain relatively limited. Existing research tends to emphasize character education, pesantren management, transformational leadership, or economic empowerment separately. Studies specifically examining how the kiai's role, typology, leadership style, and strategies contribute to the formation of entrepreneurial culture based on spiritual values are still scarce, particularly within multi-site qualitative approaches (Basri, 2019; Munir, 2021).

This research gap indicates that kiai leadership has not been sufficiently conceptualized as a transformative force in developing pesantren economic culture. In practice, however, the kiai functions not only as an administrative leader or religious scholar, but also as a transformative agent capable of integrating spirituality, character education, and economic productivity into students' daily lives. Leadership in pesantren possesses distinctive characteristics because it is constructed through exemplary behavior (*uswah hasanah*), moral influence, emotional closeness, and the internalization of Islamic values in everyday practices (Hasanah, 2025; Qosim & Siri, 2025). Such a leadership model differs substantially from modern leadership paradigms, which tend to emphasize structural and managerial dimensions (Bass, 1985; Northouse, 2019).

This study was conducted at Qur'any Islamic Boarding School in Blitar and Fathul Ulum Islamic Boarding School in Jombang because both institutions demonstrate unique and contextual models of entrepreneurial development among

santri. Qur'any Islamic Boarding School develops entrepreneurship culture through the integration of thariqah-based spirituality, agriculture, plantation management, trade activities, and economic literacy programs for students. Meanwhile, Fathul Ulum Islamic Boarding School promotes student economic empowerment through integrated farming systems, livestock management, and the establishment of the Kelompok Santri Tani Milenial (KSTM) as a strategy for regenerating young farmers within the pesantren environment. These institutions illustrate that entrepreneurial culture can be cultivated through the integration of spiritual values, character education, and productive economic practices under the direct leadership of the kiai.

Based on this context, this study aims to analyze the leadership of the kiai in shaping the entrepreneurial culture of santri within pesantren. The research focuses on the role, typology, leadership style, and strategies employed by the kiai in constructing entrepreneurial culture grounded in spiritual and cultural values. This study is significant because it not only contributes empirically to the development of Islamic educational management within pesantren but also offers a contextual and spiritually grounded perspective for the advancement of leadership theory in Islamic educational settings.

Theoretically, this study proposes the development of leadership concepts through a spiritually and culturally based transformational leadership model within pesantren. The findings reveal that kiai leadership functions not merely as an organizational control mechanism, but also as an instrument of value transformation capable of fostering sustainable entrepreneurial culture among santri. Thus, this research offers a new perspective on pesantren leadership that integrates spirituality, character formation, and economic empowerment within the broader framework of contemporary Islamic education.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach using a multi-site research design to explore the leadership of kiai in shaping the entrepreneurial culture of santri within Islamic boarding schools. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because this research aimed to understand social phenomena, leadership practices, cultural values, and the meaning-making processes constructed within the pesantren environment (Yin, 2018). The multi-site design enabled the researcher to compare and analyze leadership patterns across two different pesantren contexts in order to identify both unique and shared characteristics of kiai leadership in fostering entrepreneurial culture (Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2018).

The research was conducted at Qur'any Islamic Boarding School in Blitar and Fathul Ulum Islamic Boarding School in Jombang. These two pesantren were purposively selected because they demonstrate distinctive models of entrepreneurship development integrated with Islamic educational values and pesantren traditions. Qur'any Islamic Boarding School emphasizes spirituality-

based entrepreneurship through agricultural, plantation, and trade activities, while Fathul Ulum Islamic Boarding School develops integrated farming systems and student economic empowerment through the Kelompok Santri Tani Milenial (KSTM). Both institutions represent pesantren that actively integrate spiritual education and entrepreneurial empowerment within their educational systems. The primary data sources in this study consisted of kiai, pesantren administrators, teachers, and santri who were directly involved in entrepreneurship programs and pesantren activities. Secondary data were obtained from institutional documents, organizational archives, entrepreneurship program reports, photographs, and other supporting documents related to pesantren leadership and entrepreneurial activities. Informants were selected purposively based on their knowledge, involvement, and experience related to the research focus (Miles et al., 2014).

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies (Sugiyono, 2017). In-depth interviews were conducted to obtain comprehensive information regarding the role, leadership style, typology, and strategies of the kiai in shaping entrepreneurial culture among santri. Participant observation was carried out by directly observing daily activities within the pesantren environment, including entrepreneurship practices, agricultural activities, leadership interactions, religious activities, and the internalization of entrepreneurial values in students' daily life. Documentation studies were conducted by examining institutional records, leadership policies, entrepreneurship program documents, photographs, and other written sources relevant to the study.

Data analysis was conducted continuously and interactively throughout the research process using the interactive analysis model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The analysis process was carried out through two stages: single-site analysis and cross-site analysis. Single-site analysis was conducted separately in each pesantren to identify specific patterns of kiai leadership and entrepreneurial culture formation (Miles et al., 2019). Subsequently, cross-site analysis was employed to compare findings from both pesantren to generate broader conceptual interpretations and identify common leadership characteristics across research sites.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, this study applied four criteria proposed by Lincoln & Guba, (1985): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was established through prolonged engagement, triangulation of data sources, triangulation of techniques, and member checking. Transferability was ensured by providing rich and detailed descriptions of the research context and findings. Dependability was maintained through consistent documentation of the research process, while confirmability was achieved by maintaining objectivity and ensuring that findings were grounded in empirical data

rather than researcher assumptions. The researcher acted as the primary instrument in this study by directly engaging in the research setting, interacting with participants, interpreting data, and constructing meaning from the field findings. This role enabled the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the cultural and spiritual dimensions underlying kiai leadership in shaping the entrepreneurial culture of santri within the pesantren environment.

Results And Discussion

Results

The findings of this study demonstrate that the leadership of the kiai plays a central role in shaping the entrepreneurial culture of santri in both Qur'any Islamic Boarding School in Blitar and Fathul Ulum Islamic Boarding School in Jombang. The entrepreneurial culture developed within these pesantren is not merely oriented toward economic productivity, but also toward the internalization of spiritual values, independence, discipline, collective responsibility, and social empowerment. The process of forming this culture occurs through the integration of leadership practices, religious values, daily habituation, and direct involvement of the kiai in entrepreneurship activities within the pesantren environment.

At Qur'any Islamic Boarding School, entrepreneurial activities are strongly integrated with the pesantren's spiritual orientation rooted in thariqah traditions. Based on interviews with KH. Muhammad Faruq as the pesantren leader, entrepreneurship is understood not solely as an economic activity, but as a medium for spiritual and character education. He explained:

"Entrepreneurship activities in this pesantren are not merely intended to improve the economy. We facilitate these activities so that santri can improve their literacy skills, financial management abilities, and spiritual awareness simultaneously. We want santri to become individuals who are spiritually grounded, socially useful, and economically independent."

This statement indicates that entrepreneurial culture in the pesantren is constructed through the integration of spirituality and productivity. The kiai positions entrepreneurship as part of religious devotion and self-development rather than merely financial gain. This perspective significantly influences the attitudes and behavior of santri in conducting entrepreneurial activities.

The observational findings also revealed that the kiai was directly involved in supervising agricultural activities, plantation management, livestock care, and pesantren business development. Every morning, groups of santri could be seen participating in farming activities, maintaining crops, managing livestock, and handling various productive tasks under the supervision of pesantren administrators. The researcher observed that these activities were not treated as extracurricular tasks, but rather as integral components of the pesantren educational system. Santri participated collectively in productive activities while simultaneously

receiving moral guidance and religious instruction from the kiai and senior administrators.

Documentation data further supported these findings. Several institutional documents showed that entrepreneurship programs had become part of the pesantren's long-term educational vision. Photographs and activity reports documented students participating in plantation management, agricultural production, and trade-related activities. These documents indicate that entrepreneurship development in the pesantren is systematically organized and institutionally supported.

The entrepreneurial culture at Qur'any Islamic Boarding School is also strengthened through exemplary leadership. The kiai does not merely instruct students to work productively, but personally demonstrates discipline, responsibility, and direct engagement in economic activities. During observations, the researcher found that the kiai frequently joined students in agricultural fields, supervised farming processes, and provided direct motivation regarding the importance of self-reliance and hard work. This form of leadership created a strong emotional connection between the kiai and the santri, making entrepreneurial values easier to internalize within students' daily lives.

A similar pattern was identified at Fathul Ulum Islamic Boarding School in Jombang. However, the entrepreneurship model implemented in this pesantren demonstrated a stronger orientation toward integrated farming systems and youth agricultural regeneration. Based on interviews with KH. Ahmad Habibul Amin, the pesantren, intentionally developed entrepreneurship education to prepare santri for social realities after graduation. He stated:

"Today, pesantren should not only teach religious sciences such as fiqh, tafsir, or tasawuf. Santri must also be equipped with practical life skills because society will later ask whether they can survive independently and contribute positively to the community."

This statement reflects a transformative leadership orientation in which the kiai seeks to redefine the role of pesantren in responding to contemporary socio-economic challenges. Entrepreneurship education is viewed as an inseparable component of Islamic education and character formation.

Observational findings at Fathul Ulum Islamic Boarding School showed that santri were actively involved in integrated farming systems, including rice cultivation, fish farming, livestock management, organic fertilizer production, and greenhouse maintenance. Students were not positioned merely as laborers, but as active participants responsible for planning, managing, and evaluating productive activities. The researcher observed that entrepreneurial learning was conducted through practical engagement and collective participation rather than theoretical classroom instruction alone.

One of the most significant initiatives identified during the research was the establishment of the Kelompok Santri Tani Milenial (KSTM). Documentation records indicated that this program was initiated in response to the declining interest of younger generations in agriculture. Through this program, santri were encouraged to perceive agriculture as an innovative and sustainable economic sector rather than as outdated manual labor. The pesantren introduced integrated farming systems combining agriculture, fisheries, livestock, and waste recycling into a single ecosystem-oriented entrepreneurship model.

The researcher observed that this integrated farming system significantly shaped the entrepreneurial mindset of santri. Students learned not only technical agricultural skills but also leadership, collaboration, discipline, responsibility, and environmental awareness. The entrepreneurial culture emerging from these activities was deeply rooted in pesantren values such as sincerity (*ikhlas*), cooperation (*gotong royong*), simplicity, and social responsibility.

Interviews with santri further revealed that the direct involvement of the kiai served as the primary motivational factor in sustaining their commitment to entrepreneurship activities. One santri explained:

"When the kiai directly supervises us in the fields and reminds us that working is also part of worship, we feel more motivated and sincere in doing these activities."

Another student stated:

"At first, we thought farming was difficult and uninteresting. But after participating in the pesantren programs, we realized that agriculture can become a meaningful and productive activity for our future."

These interview findings indicate that entrepreneurial culture is formed not merely through institutional policies but through continuous value internalization and relational leadership practices. The kiai functions as a moral authority whose actions and attitudes shape the students' perceptions of work, independence, and productivity.

The study also found that the entrepreneurial culture within both pesantren was developed through collective habituation. Daily routines such as communal work, agricultural maintenance, livestock care, and pesantren business management were repeatedly practiced until they became embedded cultural patterns among santri. Observational findings demonstrated that students gradually developed self-discipline, responsibility, and initiative through these routines. Entrepreneurship was therefore not taught as an isolated subject but integrated into the pesantren's social and spiritual environment.

Another important finding concerns the integration of spiritual values into entrepreneurial activities. In both pesantren, productive work was consistently linked to Islamic teachings regarding sincerity, honesty, discipline, and social benefit. The kiai continuously emphasized that economic activities should not

merely pursue material profit but must also contribute to social welfare and spiritual growth. This value-oriented approach distinguishes pesantren entrepreneurship from purely market-oriented entrepreneurship models.

Documentation records also revealed that entrepreneurship programs in both pesantren had contributed significantly to institutional economic sustainability. Several pesantren business units generated income used to support educational activities, infrastructure development, and student welfare programs. This indicates that entrepreneurial culture not only shaped student character but also strengthened institutional independence and sustainability.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the leadership of the kiai plays a transformative role in shaping entrepreneurial culture among santri through exemplary leadership, spiritual value internalization, participatory engagement, and institutional empowerment. Entrepreneurial culture within the pesantren is constructed through continuous interaction between religious values, leadership practices, productive activities, and collective educational experiences. These findings confirm that pesantren can function not only as centers of religious learning but also as institutions of socio-economic empowerment grounded in Islamic values and community-based leadership traditions.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the leadership of the kiai in shaping the entrepreneurial culture of santri reflects a transformative, spiritual, and culturally embedded leadership model that differs substantially from conventional organizational leadership paradigms. In both Qur'any Islamic Boarding School in Blitar and Fathul Ulum Islamic Boarding School in Jombang, entrepreneurial culture was not merely developed through managerial policies or economic programs, but through a holistic process of value internalization rooted in pesantren traditions, Islamic spirituality, and exemplary leadership practices. The kiai functioned not only as institutional leaders but also as spiritual authorities, moral exemplars, cultural agents, and social transformers who integrated religious values with productive economic activities (Bashri, 2021). This confirms that leadership in pesantren possesses a multidimensional character that combines educational, spiritual, social, and economic dimensions simultaneously (Muhammad et al., 2025; Musaddad, 2024; Suhendi et al., 2025).

The leadership practices identified in this study support the argument that pesantren leadership cannot be fully understood through modern managerial frameworks alone. Instead, the kiai's leadership reflects a culturally embedded leadership model grounded in moral legitimacy, spiritual authority, and communal relationships. Unlike formal leadership structures that rely heavily on bureaucratic authority and institutional regulation, the leadership of the kiai derives its influence primarily from exemplary conduct (*uswah hasanah*), emotional closeness, religious

legitimacy, and symbolic authority within the pesantren community. This finding aligns with Dhofier's (2011) argument that the kiai occupies a central position in pesantren life because he functions simultaneously as a teacher, spiritual guide, community leader, and moral authority. However, this study extends previous perspectives by demonstrating that the kiai also serves as an entrepreneurial and transformational leader capable of reshaping economic culture within Islamic educational institutions.

The findings further reveal that entrepreneurial culture in pesantren is constructed through continuous interaction between spirituality and productivity. In both research sites, entrepreneurship was not perceived merely as an economic activity aimed at generating profit, but rather as a form of worship, self-discipline, and social responsibility. This orientation distinguishes pesantren entrepreneurship from secular entrepreneurial models that tend to emphasize competition, market expansion, and financial accumulation (Budiyono, 2025). The integration of spirituality into entrepreneurship practices demonstrates that economic activities within pesantren are embedded within broader ethical and religious frameworks. Such findings support the concept of spiritual entrepreneurship proposed by (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000), who argue that spirituality in organizations can shape work meaning, collective commitment, and ethical behavior. Nevertheless, this study provides a more contextualized understanding by showing how Islamic spirituality specifically functions as the foundation of entrepreneurial culture formation within pesantren communities.

The leadership model identified in this study also demonstrates significant similarities with Bass, (1985) theory of transformational leadership, particularly regarding inspirational motivation, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. The kiai inspired santri not only through verbal instruction but also through direct participation in productive activities such as farming, livestock management, and entrepreneurship development. Their direct involvement strengthened students' emotional attachment and increased the legitimacy of entrepreneurial values within the pesantren environment. However, this study argues that transformational leadership theory alone is insufficient to fully explain pesantren leadership because the transformational process observed in pesantren is deeply intertwined with spirituality, religious ethics, and transcendental values (Bashori et al., 2022; Nasrullah, 2026). Therefore, this research proposes a spiritually based transformational leadership perspective in which transformation is not solely directed toward organizational effectiveness but also toward moral and spiritual development.

Another important finding concerns the role of habituation and collective practice in shaping entrepreneurial culture among santri. The entrepreneurial mindset of students was not developed through formal classroom instruction alone

but through repetitive daily practices integrated into pesantren life. Activities such as farming, managing livestock, operating pesantren business units, and participating in collective labor routines gradually shaped students' discipline, responsibility, independence, and work ethic. This finding is consistent with Bourdieu's concept of habitus, which emphasizes that social behavior and cultural dispositions are formed through repeated practices within particular social environments. In the context of pesantren, entrepreneurial habitus emerged through continuous interaction between leadership practices, collective routines, spiritual teachings, and productive labor. Thus, entrepreneurship became embedded not merely as technical knowledge but as part of the santri's cultural identity and moral consciousness.

The findings also indicate that the kiai's leadership functions as a mechanism for cultural transformation within pesantren institutions. Traditionally, pesantren have often been associated primarily with religious instruction and spiritual formation. However, both pesantren examined in this study demonstrate that pesantren are capable of transforming into centers of socio-economic empowerment without abandoning their religious identity. This transformation occurred because the kiai successfully reconstructed the meaning of entrepreneurship within the framework of Islamic values. Entrepreneurship was no longer perceived as a purely worldly pursuit but as an integral component of Islamic responsibility, self-reliance, and social contribution. Such findings support the argument proposed by Hefner (2009) that Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia possess adaptive capacities enabling them to negotiate modernity while maintaining religious authenticity.

The integrated farming system implemented at Fathul Ulum Islamic Boarding School represents another important dimension of this transformation. The pesantren developed a sustainable entrepreneurship model integrating agriculture, fisheries, livestock management, and environmental conservation within a single ecosystem-oriented framework. This approach reflects an ecological entrepreneurship paradigm emphasizing sustainability, resource efficiency, and collective welfare rather than purely individual profit maximization. The establishment of the Kelompok Santri Tani Milenial (KSTM) further illustrates how pesantren leadership actively responds to contemporary social problems such as the decline of young farmers in Indonesia. By involving santri directly in agricultural innovation and integrated farming systems, the pesantren reconstructs agriculture as a meaningful, modern, and spiritually valuable profession. This finding expands previous studies on pesantren economic empowerment by demonstrating that pesantren can function as institutions for sustainable rural regeneration and agricultural transformation.

The entrepreneurial culture developed within both pesantren also reflects characteristics of servant leadership. The kiai positioned themselves not as

authoritarian rulers but as facilitators, mentors, and role models who continuously guided students through direct interaction and participation. Their leadership emphasized service, empowerment, empathy, and collective development rather than hierarchical control. This finding aligns with Greenleaf's (1977) concept of servant leadership, which emphasizes leaders' responsibility to serve and empower followers. However, the pesantren context reveals a distinctive form of servant leadership grounded in Islamic spirituality and religious morality. Service in pesantren leadership is not only organizational but also spiritual and educational in nature, aiming to develop students' moral integrity and social responsibility alongside entrepreneurial competence.

Furthermore, this study found that the kiai's leadership generated strong institutional legitimacy for entrepreneurship programs within pesantren. Because the kiai possesses high symbolic authority, his support for entrepreneurship activities significantly influenced students' attitudes toward productive work. In many traditional religious contexts, economic activities are sometimes perceived as secondary to religious devotion. However, the Kiai's reinterpretation of entrepreneurship as part of Islamic values successfully eliminated such dichotomies and encouraged students to view economic productivity as compatible with spiritual devotion. This finding demonstrates the importance of symbolic leadership in transforming organizational culture and legitimizing institutional change.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of leadership theory by proposing that pesantren leadership represents a spiritually embedded transformational leadership model. Existing leadership theories generally emphasize organizational performance, strategic management, or psychological influence, while paying limited attention to spirituality as a central dimension of leadership transformation. In contrast, the findings of this study demonstrate that spirituality can function as the primary driving force for cultural transformation, organizational commitment, and entrepreneurial development. The kiai's leadership integrates spiritual authority, moral values, educational processes, and socio-economic empowerment into a unified leadership framework that is contextually rooted in pesantren traditions.

This study also contributes to Islamic educational management by demonstrating that pesantren can become institutions of economic empowerment without losing their religious identity. The integration of entrepreneurship into pesantren education challenges the conventional dichotomy between religious education and economic productivity. Instead, this study shows that Islamic educational institutions can simultaneously cultivate spirituality, character formation, and entrepreneurial competence through culturally embedded educational practices. Such findings are particularly relevant within contemporary

Muslim societies facing economic inequality, youth unemployment, and social transformation.

Overall, the findings of this study confirm that the leadership of the kiai functions as a transformative force in shaping entrepreneurial culture among santri through exemplary behavior, spiritual value internalization, participatory engagement, collective habituation, and institutional empowerment. Entrepreneurial culture within pesantren is not merely an economic phenomenon but a socio-cultural and spiritual construction shaped through continuous interaction between leadership, religious values, educational practices, and productive activities. Consequently, pesantren leadership offers an alternative paradigm of educational leadership that integrates spirituality, morality, community empowerment, and socio-economic transformation within a holistic Islamic educational framework.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the leadership of the *kiai* plays a transformative role in shaping the entrepreneurial culture of santri within Islamic boarding schools. The entrepreneurial culture developed in Qur'any Islamic Boarding School in Blitar and Fathul Ulum Islamic Boarding School in Jombang is not merely oriented toward economic productivity, but also toward the internalization of spiritual values, independence, discipline, collective responsibility, and social empowerment. The findings demonstrate that the *Kiai* functions simultaneously as a spiritual leader, moral authority, educational mentor, and socio-economic transformer who integrates Islamic values with productive entrepreneurial activities. Through exemplary leadership, participatory engagement, and value-based education, entrepreneurship becomes embedded within the daily life and cultural identity of santri. The leadership of the *kiai*, therefore, reflects a spiritually grounded transformational leadership model that combines spirituality, character education, and economic empowerment within the pesantren environment.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of leadership and Islamic educational management theories by offering a contextual understanding of spiritually based transformational leadership within pesantren institutions. This research extends conventional transformational leadership theory by demonstrating that leadership transformation in pesantren is not solely directed toward organizational effectiveness, but also toward moral formation, spiritual consciousness, and collective socio-economic empowerment. The findings further contribute to the discourse on entrepreneurship education by showing that entrepreneurial culture can be effectively constructed through the integration of religious values, collective habituation, and culturally embedded leadership practices. In addition, this study provides empirical evidence that pesantren can

function not only as centers of Islamic learning but also as institutions of sustainable socio-economic transformation and community empowerment.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted only in two pesantren with specific socio-cultural and institutional characteristics, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other pesantren contexts in Indonesia. Second, the study primarily focused on leadership practices and entrepreneurial culture formation within the pesantren environment without examining the long-term socio-economic outcomes experienced by santri after graduating from the institutions. Third, this research employed a qualitative multi-site design that emphasized in-depth interpretation rather than quantitative measurement of leadership effectiveness or entrepreneurial impact. Therefore, future studies are recommended to explore broader comparative contexts, incorporate mixed-method approaches, and investigate the long-term influence of pesantren entrepreneurship education on students' economic independence and community development.

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