

Charismatic Leadership In Shaping The Character Of Santri In The Global Era At Pondok Pesantren An-Nuriyyah Malang

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Kiai Leadership, Charisma, Moral Authority, Pesantren, Global Era

Article history:

Received 2025-11-11

Revised 2025-12-12

Accepted 2026-01-07

ABSTRACT

The leadership of the kiai at Pondok Pesantren An-Nuriyyah Malang plays a central role in preserving pesantren culture and shaping the character of students amid the challenges of the digital era. This article explores the strategies employed by the kiai to uphold traditional values while wisely accommodating technological advancements. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, the study finds that the kiai implements strategies such as strengthening discipline, modeling exemplary behavior, and nurturing moral values through daily interaction and classical Islamic teaching. The use of technology, such as laptops, is strictly regulated and limited to formal learning purposes. The kiai also instills digital literacy values so that students are not only spiritually competent but also responsible in digital media use. Furthermore, the kiai actively fosters social awareness and environmental concern through collective activities, social service, and environmental care programs. The study concludes that the combination of charisma, moral authority, and adaptive leadership enables the kiai to create an educational environment that fosters a generation of students with strong character, religious, socially responsible, and spiritually grounded who are prepared to face modern challenges.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) as traditional Islamic educational institutions have played a significant role in shaping the character of the Muslim community in Indonesia. One of the main strengths of pesantren lies in the figure of the kiai, who not only serves as a teacher of religious sciences but also acts as a spiritual, social, and cultural leader for both the students (santri) and the surrounding community. The kiai serves as a role model in everyday life and is regarded as a moral authority due to his profound knowledge, exemplary character, and commitment to preserving Islamic values. In the

context of contemporary development, especially in the era of rapid globalization and digitalization, the position and role of the kiai face increasingly complex challenges. Changes in the lifestyle of the younger generation, the penetration of information technology, and the massive exposure to foreign cultures have greatly influenced the mindset and behavior of the santri. In such conditions, the kiai is expected to remain the primary guide in maintaining the integrity of pesantren culture while also being able to bridge traditional values with the demands of modern times.

More than merely preserving traditions, the kiai in the global era is also expected to shape a generation of santri who are not only intellectually smart but also possess strong moral values, mature spirituality, and adequate digital literacy. Therefore, kiai leadership based on charisma and moral authority becomes the key to the cultural transformation of pesantren so that it remains relevant and competitive amid the global wave of change. The classical concept of charisma in leadership was introduced by Max Weber (1978), who divided authority into three forms: legal-rational, traditional, and charismatic. Charismatic leadership is based on society's belief in the extraordinary qualities of a leader, including spiritual, moral, and intellectual capabilities. In the context of pesantren, the charisma of a kiai is formed through a combination of traditional legitimacy (*turats*), consistent religious practice, and a deep spiritual connection with the santri. This charisma is not constructed within formal spaces but is developed through exemplary conduct, devotion, and continuous scholarly depth. The kiai's charisma also functions as a form of "soft power" capable of influencing and shaping santri behavior without structural coercion. Santri obey not out of fear of punishment, but out of respect and belief in the kiai's knowledge and piety.

Authority and Social Legitimacy Authority is the right to influence and lead, and in the pesantren context, a kiai's authority is often absolute yet non-repressive. According to French and Raven (1959), there are five sources of power: legitimate, reward, coercive, expert, and referent power. The kiai's authority is also symbolic and cultural. This social legitimacy enables the kiai to act not only as a decision-maker but also as a guardian of values and a moral role model within the pesantren community. Organizational Culture in Educational Institutions According to Edgar Schein (2004), organizational culture is a pattern of basic assumptions learned by a group to adapt to external environments and integrate internally. In pesantren, organizational culture is shaped by strong Islamic values, intergenerational traditions, and religious symbols. Pesantren culture is normative and practical, transmitted through activities such as *ngaji kitab kuning*, *mujahadah*, *musyawarah*, and collective life in dormitories. The kiai acts as a creator, maintainer, and transformer of that culture.

Character Education Character education in the Islamic perspective aims to develop individuals with noble character (*akhlak karimah*). Thomas Lickona (1991) asserts that character education involves three aspects: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. In pesantren, all three are integrated through a holistic approach—cognitive, affective, and spiritual. Media and the Digital Era In the digital era, communication becomes more horizontal and interactive. Manuel Castells (2010) argues that the digital society consists of interconnected networks that continuously shape identity construction. This challenges pesantren in preserving traditional values, as santri live in two realms: the value-based pesantren world and the virtual digital world. Here, the kiai's role becomes crucial—not merely to safeguard traditional values but also to mediate the transition of values into digital spaces. A morality-based digital literacy approach is one of the emerging needs that pesantren must facilitate, without losing its spiritual essence.

2. METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, aiming to comprehensively describe and analyze the role of the kiai's charisma and authority in building the pesantren culture and shaping the character of santri in the global era. This method is chosen to explore meanings, values, as well as social and cultural practices that cannot be measured quantitatively.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 *Strategies of the Kiai in Building a Strong Pesantren Culture in the Digital Era*

In facing the challenges of the digital era and shifting values, the kiai at Pondok Pesantren An-Nuriyyah Malang implements strategies based on the preservation of traditional pesantren values while adapting wisely to technological advances. These strategies include strengthening a discipline system rooted in Islamic principles, encouraging congregational worship, training daily manners, and providing intensive moral guidance through role modeling. The daily life of santri is oriented toward sincerity, independence, simplicity, and respect for teachers and knowledge. This character formation is carried out continuously, both through formal teaching in classrooms and daily interactions within the pesantren environment. The kiai serves as a central figure, not only delivering advice but also demonstrating how to live according to Islamic values.

On the other hand, the kiai begins to use technology selectively and purposefully. Social media is used as a means of da'wah and for spreading Islamic values to students and the broader community, but with strict content and usage time control. Within the pesantren, the kiai sets specific regulations for santri using laptops. Their use is limited to certain times and must be supervised by caregivers or teachers, ensuring it remains within the scope of education and character development. Although technology is utilized as a supportive tool, the kiai emphasizes that the primary source of learning at the pesantren remains the classical Islamic books (*kitab kuning*). Santri are encouraged to deeply study classical texts, attend regular study sessions (*pengajian*), and actively write da'wah materials as part of character building and reinforcement of Islamic scholarly tradition.

The kiai also instills in santri the importance of digital literacy, so they become not just passive users of technology, but critical and wise consumers of information. This is vital in preventing santri from being swept up in the negative currents of the digital world such as hoaxes, hate speech, inappropriate content, or consumerist culture. By combining classical pesantren values with intelligent use of technology, Pondok Pesantren An-Nuriyyah successfully preserves its identity as a morally and spiritually strong Islamic educational institution, while remaining relevant in the face of modern developments. The pesantren culture continues to live and serves as the foundation for forming santri characters who are prepared to face the modern world without losing their traditional roots.

3.2 *The Role of the Kiai in Shaping Santri Character through Education and Teaching*

At Pesantren An-Nuriyyah, the kiai does not only function as a formal educator, but also as a highly respected role model in the everyday lives of the santri. This role encompasses spiritual, social, and cultural dimensions, where the kiai becomes both an inspiration and a guide in shaping the mindset and behavior of the students. Through educational activities such as studying *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic texts), *halaqah* (learning circles), *maulid* recitations, and religious discussions, the kiai consistently instills noble character values such as honesty, humility, responsibility, and respect toward teachers and peers. These values are not merely delivered through theory but are planted through the kiai's concrete daily examples.

The exemplary behavior shown by the kiai becomes a powerful force in the character formation process of the santri. Simplicity in lifestyle, sincerity in teaching, discipline in worship, and strong commitment to knowledge are important elements that are emulated and internalized by the students. This fosters an emotional bond between santri and kiai, making the kiai's advice and guidance accepted not as mere orders, but as deep spiritual mentorship. Santri learn not only from books, but also from social interactions, shared experiences, and observations of the behavior of the kiai and the teaching staff (*asatidz*). This approach simultaneously develops the three major domains of education cognitive (through mastery of religious sciences), affective (through habituation of positive attitudes and values), and psychomotor (through direct training in religious practices, community service, and interpersonal care).

The kiai also acts as a moral leader and manager of pesantren culture. He ensures that the pesantren environment remains conducive to character formation for example, by creating a disciplined yet affectionate atmosphere and preserving pesantren values such as brotherhood (ukhuwah), trustworthiness (amanah), and hard work. In the context of the digital era, this role becomes even more significant, as the kiai must also guide santri to remain firmly rooted in pesantren values even as they begin to interact with the outside world through technology.

3.3 Challenges Faced by the Kiai in Character and Culture Development in the Digital Era

A major challenge faced by the kiai in building santri character and pesantren culture in the digital era is the overwhelming flow of information, much of which is not aligned with Islamic values. Although access to the internet and social media is now part of modern life, its use is strictly limited at Pesantren An-Nuriyyah. Santri are only allowed to use laptops during formal school activities, such as ICT lessons or specific academic assignments that require digital tools. Outside of school hours, laptop usage is prohibited to prevent exposure to digital content that could conflict with pesantren values.

Secular, liberal, hedonistic, or violent content is readily accessible online, and if not responded to wisely, it can influence the thoughts and behaviors of santri. The openness to instant culture, digital entertainment, and online gaming also raises concerns about reduced learning motivation, disrupted discipline, and erosion of adab (manners) and respect toward teachers and fellow students. A serious challenge also lies in the growing dependency on technology even when its use is restricted to class hours. This dependency can still diminish spiritual focus in worship, interfere with classical Islamic studies, and reduce time for meaningful educational and character-building activities. Time that should be spent reading religious texts, engaging in discussions, or attending sermons may be displaced by passive digital activities.

To address these issues, the kiai at Pesantren An-Nuriyyah applies a value-based social control strategy. This approach does not rely on punishment but emphasizes the development of moral awareness and self-control. The kiai promotes spirituality through activities such as dzikir gatherings, congregational night prayers, and continuous monotheistic education, ensuring that the hearts of santri remain connected to Allah SWT. This process involves all elements of the pesantren, including teachers and student supervisors, to create an educational climate that nurtures discipline and responsibility.

In addition, the kiai fosters awareness among the santri about the importance of using technology selectively and responsibly. Through sermons, advice, and open discussions, santri are encouraged to understand that technology can be a medium for learning and da'wah if used correctly. The pesantren enforces strict policies: laptops may only be used during formal learning, and all digital content is closely monitored. Training in Islamic values-based digital literacy is also provided to strengthen the santri's understanding and wisdom in using media. In this way, the kiai acts not only as a guardian of pesantren traditions but also as a key guide in preparing a generation of santri who are digitally literate, morally grounded, and spiritually aware ready to navigate the modern world wisely.

3.4 The Kiai's Efforts to Integrate Traditional Values and Technology in Character Formation

The kiai at Pesantren An-Nuriyyah does not adopt a stance of total rejection toward technology. Instead, he strives to integrate digital advancements with the traditional values of pesantren in a balanced and purposeful manner. In this context, the use of digital media especially laptops is permitted but strictly limited to formal educational purposes within the pesantren's general school curriculum. The kiai understands that in the national education system, certain subjects such as ICT, digital literacy, and project-based tasks require access to digital devices. Therefore, the use of laptops is allowed but governed by tight restrictions. Their use is strictly confined to formal school hours, inside classrooms or computer labs, and always under direct supervision by formal school teachers.

Laptops are not permitted in dormitories or outside school hours to prevent misuse, disruptions to worship, or a decline in motivation to study Islamic sciences such as the kitab kuning.

This policy ensures that santri remain focused on their pesantren routines, which are rich in values of manners (adab), discipline, and spirituality, while still being able to keep up with formal education proportionally. The kiai actively instills in students the understanding that technology is merely a tool not the goal. Thus, even though laptops are used for formal learning, pesantren values continue to serve as the main framework guiding the santri's way of thinking and behaving. All digital activities conducted at school are directed toward supporting academic skills and literacy development such as making class presentations, writing reports, or submitting assignments through designated platforms. Through this approach, the kiai manages to balance 21st-century skill needs with a strong commitment to preserving pesantren culture and values. Santri are taught not to rely on technology but to use it wisely, moderately, and in accordance with educational goals. This also reinforces their character as individuals who are not only religious and well-mannered, but also responsible in their use of modern tools for meaningful purposes.

3.5 Monitoring and Evaluation by the Kiai on Santri Character Development

To ensure that the santri's character develops optimally, the kiai at Pesantren An-Nuriyyah conducts continuous and holistic monitoring of their lives, both in learning environments and daily activities. This monitoring is carried out not only through formal routines of the pesantren but also through direct observation in everyday interactions, reports from supervising teachers (ustadz), and open communication between the kiai and the santri in the form of personal dialogues or group discussions. Through this process, the kiai can gain a comprehensive understanding of each santri's personality development and internal dynamics that may not be visible in formal education.

The evaluation conducted by the kiai does not only focus on academic aspects such as mastery of subject matter or reading classical texts but also includes affective and social dimensions, such as discipline, honesty, responsibility, politeness, cooperation, and social sensitivity toward fellow santri and the surrounding community. The kiai pays special attention to students who show signs of attitude shifts, behavioral deviations, or difficulties in adapting to pesantren life. In such cases, rather than resorting immediately to sanctions, the kiai prefers an educational, dialogical, and compassionate approach, which is a hallmark of character development in pesantren. Personal mentoring conducted by the kiai often becomes a meaningful moment for santri. In a warm and open emotional setting, the kiai not only offers advice but also explores the root causes of a santri's struggles and patiently helps them find solutions.

This approach creates a psychologically safe environment, builds trust, and strengthens the emotional bond between the kiai and the santri. Santri feel appreciated as unique individuals not merely as objects of education. Furthermore, the character development process occurs in a religious, value-laden atmosphere rich in role modeling, where values such as patience, compassion, responsibility, and discipline are instilled not just through theory but through direct experiences and observations of the behavior of the kiai and ustadz in everyday life. By addressing the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions simultaneously, santri are guided to become individuals who are not only knowledgeable but also emotionally mature and morally strong.

3.6 Character Formation of Santri with Social Awareness and Environmental Concern

One of the primary missions of the kiai's leadership at Pondok Pesantren An-Nuriyyah is to produce santri who not only possess spiritual proficiency and deep religious knowledge but also demonstrate strong social awareness and concern for the environment. According to the kiai, the success of pesantren education should not be measured solely by the students' ability to read classical Islamic texts or their discipline in worship, but also by how far they can become individuals who benefit their social surroundings. To instill these values, the pesantren integrates Islamic teachings with real-life community practices. Various concrete activities are carried out to plant these values,

such as regular communal work (*kerja bakti*) involving all santri in maintaining the cleanliness of the pesantren environment from the yard and dormitories to public facilities. Through these activities, santri learn about shared responsibility and the spirit of cooperation.

In addition, the pesantren organizes social service programs for the surrounding community, such as giving aid to those in need, visiting the homes of the poor, and collecting donations during natural disasters. These actions aim to nurture empathy, solidarity, and an understanding of the santri's role as socially responsible Muslims. In terms of environmental concern, the kiai promotes a love-for-nature movement, implemented through programs like tree planting, greening the pesantren area, and proper waste management. Santri are directly involved in these efforts through collective planting events, separating organic and inorganic waste, and participating in simple recycling training. These activities are not merely physical tasks but serve as concrete applications of ecological ethics education, which aligns with Islamic teachings on preserving nature as a trust (*amanah*) from Allah SWT.

In religious lectures and study circles, the kiai consistently emphasizes the concepts of *hablum minannas* (maintaining good relations with fellow humans) and *hablum minal 'alam* (caring for the natural world) as inseparable parts of a believer's faith. Santri are guided to understand that worship is not just a private ritual, but must have social and ecological impact. Values such as compassion, social responsibility, and environmental stewardship are part of the hidden curriculum that is continuously cultivated. Through this approach, the kiai aspires to raise santri who are well-rounded individuals religious in their spirituality, courteous in their character, resilient in facing challenges, and actively contributing to society and the environment. In this way, pesantren education becomes a vital instrument in nurturing an Islamic generation that is not only devout in worship but also responsive to social realities and the sustainability of the natural world.

CONCLUSION

The charisma and authority of the kiai's leadership at Pondok Pesantren An-Nuriyyah Malang play a central role in maintaining the continuity of pesantren culture and shaping the character of santri amid the onslaught of the digital era. A leadership model grounded in exemplary behavior, spirituality, and scholarly depth makes the kiai a figure who is not only respected but followed with sincerity by the santri. In facing the challenges of digitalization, the kiai does not adopt a closed attitude toward technology. Instead, he utilizes it selectively and purposefully. Laptops are used as formal learning tools in classrooms, while discipline and spirituality are maintained through strict supervision and reinforcement of moral awareness. The kiai has also succeeded in integrating pesantren education with programs that cultivate social concern and environmental awareness, molding santri into individuals who are not only religious but also sensitive to community needs and ecological sustainability. Thus, the leadership of the kiai in the digital era functions not only as a guardian of tradition, but also as a transformational agent capable of bridging classical Islamic values with contemporary demands. This leadership model demonstrates that pesantren remains relevant as a center for character education, even amid the complexities of modernity. The kiai's spiritual strength and adaptability become the key to success in shaping a generation of santri who are ethical, independent, and competitive.

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