

Character Education Based on Multiculturalism: A Case Study of Tuan Guru's Leadership at Pesantren Raudlatul Husna Kepok

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Abstract: Multicultural-based character education plays a crucial role in shaping a generation that can adapt to global diversity. This article aims to explore the implementation of multicultural character education at Pesantren Raudlatul Husna Kepok, focusing on the leadership of Tuan Guru in shaping the character of the santri. The study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design, where data was gathered through in-depth interviews with Tuan Guru, the foundation's management, santri, and teaching staff, as well as direct observations. The findings reveal three key aspects: (1) Tuan Guru's leadership through the teaching of texts that emphasise moral values, ethics, and courtesy, which shape the character of the santri to be virtuous. (2) Tuan Guru's transformational leadership, applied through egalitarian principles, creates an inclusive environment where no social status distinctions exist among educators, and every individual is given the opportunity to contribute within the framework of Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah teachings. (3) The empowerment of alumni, who actively contribute to society, as evidenced by the placement of many alumni at the Quranic schools (Taman Pendidikan Al-Quran [TPQ]) in Central Lombok and their employment in various companies. This multicultural-based character education also strengthens solidarity among the santri and the wider community. Overall, the character education at Raudlatul Husna serves as a model for the development of value-based education relevant to the challenges of the times.

Keywords: character education, multiculturalism, leadership, pesantren, Tuan Guru, santri

Abstrak: Pendidikan karakter berbasis multikultural memiliki peran penting dalam membentuk generasi muda yang mampu beradaptasi dengan keberagaman global. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi implementasi pendidikan karakter multikultural di Pesantren Raudlatul Husna Kepok, dengan fokus pada kepemimpinan Tuan Guru dalam membentuk karakter



santri. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus, di mana data diperoleh melalui wawancara mendalam dengan Tuan Guru, pengelola yayasan, santri, dan staf pengajar, serta observasi langsung. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan tiga temuan utama: (1) Kepemimpinan Tuan Guru melalui pengajaran kitab-kitab yang menekankan nilai moral, etika, dan sopan santun, membentuk karakter santri yang berbudi pekerti. (2) Kepemimpinan transformasional Tuan Guru yang diterapkan melalui prinsip egaliter, menciptakan lingkungan inklusif di mana tidak ada perbedaan status sosial antar tenaga pendidik, dan setiap individu diberi kesempatan berkontribusi dalam kerangka ajaran Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah. (3) Pemberdayaan alumni yang aktif berkontribusi di masyarakat, terlihat dari banyaknya alumni yang ditempatkan di Taman Pendidikan Al-Quran (TPQ) di Lombok Tengah dan diterima bekerja di perusahaan-perusahaan. Pendidikan karakter berbasis multikultural ini juga memperkuat solidaritas di kalangan santri dan masyarakat. Secara keseluruhan, pendidikan karakter di Raudlatul Husna menjadi model pengembangan pendidikan berbasis nilai yang relevan dengan tantangan zaman.

Kata kunci: pendidikan karakter, multikultural, kepemimpinan, pondok pesantren, Tuan Guru, santri

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Introduction

Education is a conscious and planned effort to guide individuals in developing their potential, encompassing knowledge, skills, values, and character. It is not merely the transfer of knowledge but also the formation of attitudes and behaviours that prepare the younger generation to face future challenges. One of the essential dimensions of education is character education, which goes beyond teaching information to instil values that shape the personality of learners. According to Sari (2021), character education involves cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects, where learners not only know but also feel and practise what is good in daily life.

This research focuses on character education at Islamic boarding schools, specifically at Pesantren Raudlatul Husna Kepok, exploring the leadership

model of Tuan Guru (an honorary title for scholars or leaders of pesantren in Lombok, similar to the title of Kiai in Java) in shaping the character of the students (santri). Tuan Guru plays a crucial role in guiding the santri to become independent, religious, tolerant, humane, and inclusive individuals. According to Nungraheni and Firmansyah (2021), Tuan Guru's leadership within the context of an Islamic boarding school has a significant impact on character development. The approach adopted in this study is ethnopedagogy, with a cultural-based character development model that emphasises independence.

Education is inseparable from human life, as every individual continues to learn throughout their life. The goal of education is to nurture humans holistically, encompassing emotional, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions. In the context of an Islamic boarding school, the leadership of Tuan Guru plays a central role, as every action, word, attitude, and activity of Tuan Guru serves as a role model for the santri. As a leader, Tuan Guru functions as both a guide and a motivator, capable of influencing and coordinating all elements within the institution to achieve common objectives.

However, the understanding of leadership often varies due to the many definitions and perspectives available. At its core, leadership is the art of influencing others to move towards a shared vision. In this context, Tuan Guru's leadership must be able to integrate multicultural values in carrying out his vision and mission, considering the cultural and social backgrounds of the community surrounding the pesantren. Such inclusive and multicultural leadership is essential for creating a harmonious environment among santri from diverse backgrounds.

Character education has been implemented in Indonesia for a long time, even before independence, with pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) playing a significant role in shaping the nation's character. Through the educational process at pesantren, santri are guided to have good moral conduct, manners, and an ability to respect differences. This remains highly relevant in the

modern era, where technological advancements and globalisation present challenges in maintaining moral and ethical values, especially among the younger generation.

The family and community environment, including peer interactions and the influence of social media, play a crucial role in shaping the character of children in the digital age. In this context, pesantren such as Pesantren Raudlatul Husna Kepok provide a relevant alternative, as character education is integrated with moral development and a sense of community—foundations of social life. Tuan Guru's transformational and charismatic leadership is vital to ensuring that this character education remains relevant and practical while prioritising principles of multiculturalism that respect diversity.

Multicultural education at pesantren is not merely about fostering tolerance between groups; it is also about valuing differences in various dimensions, such as race, culture, and social status. This is part of the effort to create a more inclusive and harmonious society. At Pesantren Raudlatul Husna Kepok, the implementation of multicultural-based character education serves as a fundamental foundation in building solidarity and mutual understanding among santri from diverse backgrounds.

Therefore, this study aims to explore how the leadership of Tuan Guru at Pesantren Raudlatul Husna Kepok can implement multicultural-based character education to form a generation that is not only intellectually competent but also has good morals, high tolerance, and the ability to live together in diversity.

This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design, focusing on Tuan Guru's role in integrating multicultural values into character education at the pesantren. Data collection includes in-depth interviews with Tuan Guru, the foundation's management, santri, and teaching staff, as well as direct observation of daily practices at the pesantren. Additionally, educational

documents such as the curriculum and teaching materials will be analysed to evaluate the consistency of the policies implemented.

Data will be analysed thematically to identify the role of Tuan Guru's leadership in fostering values of tolerance, mutual respect, and appreciation of diversity, as well as its influence on the character development of the santri.

Islamic Boarding Schools, Character Education, and Challenges in the Digital Era

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) have become a key solution to the challenges posed by the digital age. With the rapid advancement of digitalisation, information from all corners of the world is now easily accessible. However, this ease of access also brings negative consequences, particularly for the millennial generation. As a result, parents, as the primary educators of their children, must be able to filter both positive and negative information. They need to be vigilant about any changes in their children's behaviour to prevent them from being led astray, whether in terms of their thinking, social interactions, or their understanding of religious teachings as outlined in the Qur'an and Hadith.

In this context, pesantren play a vital role. Pesantren not only teach religion but also contribute to the empowerment, character formation, and strengthening of communities. According to Hidayat et al. (2018) and Haryanto (2017), pesantren have historically played a role in resisting colonialism, both in the past and in the face of contemporary challenges. The role of pesantren extends beyond that of merely an educational institution; it serves as a cultural centre that preserves Islamic values while providing space for students (santri) to grow in an increasingly global and modern world.

Pesantren offer various forms of knowledge that help students confront present-day challenges, such as the moral crisis and the decline in manners among the younger generation. In this regard, pesantren in Indonesia not only function as educational institutions but also as religious centres that resist

oppression. They serve as hubs for scholarly research, training, community development, and as cultural touchstones (Hidayat, 2018).

At the Raudlatul Husna Kepok Islamic Boarding School, the Tuan Guru, as the leader, plays a crucial role in the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of character development among the students. The pesantren focuses not only on academic education but also on the mental and moral development of its students through various religious programmes, such as the study of traditional Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*), public speaking (*muhadarab*), devotional activities (*shalawatan*), Quran memorisation (*tabfiẓ*), Quran recitation (*tilawah*), and regular study circles.

The study of *kitab kuning* at the pesantren aims to provide a deep understanding of Islam. By studying these texts, students are better equipped to comprehend Islamic law in greater detail, from the proper intention for *wudu*' (ablution) to the correct procedure for performing wudu and other foundational religious practices. The ultimate goal is for students to become individuals who are well-prepared to live in society and meet their Creator.

Furthermore, pesantren also play a role in strengthening the mental resilience of their students. A strong santri is one who is mentally resilient, with a steadfast character that is not easily shaken by despair. To this end, pesantren instil habits of leadership, teaching students to step forward and lead. Santri are trained to become skilled public speakers, deliver speeches, and master other skills, such as playing traditional *hadrah* music, often performed at major events like the Prophet's birthday (Maulid Nabi), regular study sessions, and community outreach to villages or the homes of fellow students' guardians.

With these various activities and developmental programmes, pesantren continually adapt to meet the needs of the times. All institutions under the auspices of the pesantren foundation are required to hold *muhadarab* (public speaking practice) every morning before classes begin. Additionally, the

pesantren offers extracurricular activities that support the development of the students' skills, such as music and preaching (*dakwah*).

The Leadership of Tuan Guru in the Formation of Multicultural Character in Santri

The implementation of multicultural education in Islamic boarding schools (pondok pesantren) has had a positive impact on the development of the character of the santri, enhancing multicultural awareness, tolerance, and a broader understanding of the global community (Yusuf, 2023). Tuan Guru's leadership at Pesantren Raudlatul Husna Kepok plays a pivotal role in this process, particularly within the context of multicultural education. As the leader of the pesantren, Tuan Guru is responsible for managing and harmonising the diversity present within the pesantren community. This diversity includes differences in ethnicity, race, gender, and social status. In addressing these challenges, Tuan Guru has adopted an inclusive approach, valuing each individual, encouraging mutual respect for differences, and fostering a spirit of unity amidst diversity.

The leadership style of Tuan Guru at this pesantren is unique. Many long-established pesantren operate with a leadership structure based on family ties, where the leadership and management of the foundation are held by family members. However, Tuan Guru has adopted a more egalitarian leadership principle, where there is no differential treatment between family members and non-family members. All individuals, regardless of their social or organisational background, have an equal opportunity to contribute to the education and development of the pesantren, provided they have a sincere intention to engage in educational efforts and adhere to the Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah framework.

An important aspect of Tuan Guru's leadership is his openness to various organisations that remain committed to the principles of Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah. For example, despite the tensions between the Nahdlatul Ulama

(NU) and Nahdlatul Wathan organisations, which frequently influence the dynamics of pesantren in Central Lombok, Tuan Guru has chosen to keep the doors of the pesantren open to all organisations that align with these principles. For Tuan Guru, organisational differences are not obstacles but opportunities to collaborate in enhancing the quality of education and maintaining unity among the Muslim community.

This principle is reflected in the leadership structure at Pesantren Raudlatul Husna Kepok. Unlike many pesantren that prioritise family lineage in the management of the foundation, Tuan Guru has selected board members from various backgrounds. The Chairman of the Foundation is not a family member, nor is the Treasurer, who, although from the same village, is not part of Tuan Guru's extended family. Only the Secretary is a blood relative of Tuan Guru. Additionally, at Pesantren Raudlatul Husna, the five educational institutions – including the Kindergarten, Elementary School, Junior High School, Senior High School, and Vocational School – are managed by individuals who are not all from Tuan Guru's family. Some are from outside the village, or even the sub-district, demonstrating that Tuan Guru's leadership is both multicultural and inclusive.

In terms of teaching, Tuan Guru ensures that all santri, regardless of ethnicity, religion, social status, or wealth, have equal access to education. Both formal and informal learning opportunities are provided equally to all students, with no discrimination based on social or economic background. This concept is also evident in the religious materials taught, which emphasise the importance of respecting differences. Tuan Guru regularly holds study sessions that address contemporary issues, with one of the recurring themes being diversity and how Islam teaches respect for differences. A frequently cited verse is Surah Al-Hujurat, verse 13, which states: “O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of

Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.”

Through this inclusive leadership approach that values diversity, Tuan Guru has succeeded in creating an educational environment that not only teaches religious knowledge but also forms santri with the character to live harmoniously in a plural society. The diversity within the pesantren is not a challenge but a strength that enriches the learning experience and strengthens unity in diversity.

The Influence of Tuan Guru’s Leadership

"Don't judge a book by its cover." This phrase is frequently expressed by Tuan Guru during his lectures, whether to students, teachers, or the community. The message he aims to convey is that one should not judge a person solely by their external appearance. As Goleman (1995) suggests in his work on emotional intelligence, this involves the ability to recognise, understand, and manage one's own emotions, as well as the capacity for empathy and building healthy relationships with others, regardless of their background or appearance.

Tuan Guru also teaches his students that a person's success cannot be predicted, but what is certain is the importance of continuous effort. This aligns with Carol Dweck's (2006) concept of "growth mindset," which asserts that individuals who believe their abilities can develop through effort and perseverance are more likely to achieve success, regardless of their background.

Furthermore, Tuan Guru emphasises that poverty should not be seen as an obstacle to achieving a successful career. Both male and female students are encouraged to continue learning without being burdened by their limitations. As Sen (1999) explains in *Development as Freedom*, access to education and equal opportunities are fundamental rights that provide

individuals with the freedom to improve their quality of life, even in difficult socio-economic conditions.

Tuan Guru also frequently states that women should not be limited to the role of homemakers; they too can pursue their dreams and careers. This view aligns with Afsana's (2008) assertion that education is a tool for empowering women, opening up opportunities for them in the workforce. Moreover, Siregar (2023) argues that the academic advancement of women through career development has a significant impact on various aspects, including fulfilling potential, personal development, and social contribution.

For male students, Tuan Guru encourages them to prove themselves not only through memorisation but by achieving greater accomplishments, such as memorising all 30 Juz of the Qur'an, sometimes surpassing the female students. This philosophy reminds us of the importance of role models in education, as Bandura (1997) notes, who can inspire individuals to strive for higher achievements. The motivation provided by Tuan Guru continues to drive students, both male and female, throughout their learning process at the pesantren. This is also why many alumni frequently return to visit the pesantren. "Coming back," for Tuan Guru, means never forgetting the knowledge and values gained during their time at the pesantren. Many alumni have succeeded in various careers, including in law enforcement, the military, and business, indicating the success of an educational approach that integrates both religious and worldly knowledge.

After completing their education at the pesantren, students graduate with a deep understanding of religious knowledge and the skills to memorise the Qur'an. Raudlatul Husna Pesantren also operates a vocational high school (SMK) under the guidance of the Ministry of Education, showing that Tuan Guru holds a balanced worldview encompassing both the religious and the secular. Graduates of this vocational school have proven themselves ready for work, with several securing positions in large companies. As Sahlberg (2011) suggests, an education that aligns practical skills with spiritual and moral

values is key to producing individuals who are not only intellectually capable but also possess strong character.

In addition, many hafiz and hafizah who have completed their education at the pesantren are placed at the Qur'an Education Parks (TPQ) scattered across districts in Central Lombok. This is part of an alumni empowerment programme, ensuring the continued dissemination of the values instilled at the pesantren. Such empowerment initiatives align with Friedman's (2005) concept in *The World is Flat*, which posits that community-based education can create networks of solidarity, helping society withstand the challenges of globalisation.

One noticeable outcome is the return of alumni to their hometowns after completing their studies. Many of them actively engage in religious activities, such as revitalising mosques, performing congregational prayers, and teaching at TPQs managed by the foundation. This demonstrates that the character education provided at the pesantren has a direct impact on the social life of the surrounding community.

The character education received at the pesantren has successfully shaped students with strong mental resilience, entrepreneurial spirit, and independence. For example, in the first batch of 27 students, 15 continued their education at university, 5 became entrepreneurs, and 5 others directly entered the workforce. This proves that education integrating religious values, practical skills, and entrepreneurship produces graduates who are ready to compete in the workforce.

Tuan Guru, a humble figure, pursued his studies in the holy city of Mecca and the Middle East. His determination to seek knowledge has inspired many alumni to follow in his footsteps, with some continuing their education in Mecca, Egypt, and other countries. Currently, around 10 alumni are pursuing studies abroad, further enriching the knowledge base at the pesantren. As Gardner (1999) explains in *Intelligence Reframed*, a continuously developing and

globalising education system provides individuals with opportunities to broaden their perspectives and enhance their intellectual capacities.

The contributions of alumni to the pesantren are substantial. In addition to financial donations, alumni continue to support the institution by improving facilities and assisting with construction efforts. They also actively participate in various activities, such as celebrating religious holidays and engaging in communal work, strengthening the ties between the pesantren and its alumni.

Conclusion

Character education at Raudlatul Husna Kepok Islamic Boarding School is influential in shaping students into intellectually competent and morally strong students. The inclusive and multicultural leadership of Tuan Guru creates an environment that fosters diversity while also teaching tolerance and respect for differences. In addition to focusing on the memorisation of the Qur'an, the school also develops practical skills and entrepreneurship, preparing students to contribute across various fields. By integrating religious, social, and moral values, this pesantren successfully produces a generation equipped to face global challenges and live harmoniously within a diverse society.

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