

| | |
|--|--|
|  | <p style="text-align: center;">International Conference on Islam, Law, and Society (INCOILS) Conference Proceedings 2024</p> |
| | |
| <p>Transformative Leadership Strategy: Developing Soft Skills for Workforce Readiness among Santri at Pondok Pesantren Fathul ‘Ulum Jombang</p> | |
| <p>Ika Winarti¹, Liatul Rohmah² ^{1,2} UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung e-mail: ikawinarti40@gmail.com, liatulrohmah77@gmail.com</p> | |
| <p>ABSTRACT :</p> <p>The leader of a pesantren plays a strategic role in shaping individuals holistically, integrating religious values, morals, and life skills. Although still relying on conventional approaches, pesantren strives to adapt to changing times to develop the soft skills of students without neglecting its traditional principles. By blending strong traditional values with openness to innovation, pesantren can create an education system that meets the needs of modern times while maintaining its core principles. This research uses a qualitative-descriptive method, with data collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The findings show that the transformative leadership strategy implemented successfully integrates religious values with the development of students' soft skills. Through a holistic approach that includes life skills training, entrepreneurship, and economic empowerment, students are equipped with relevant abilities to face modern challenges, such as public speaking, muhadhoroh activities, and social skills, enabling them to interact better in society. As a result, students are not only prepared for the workforce but also become independent, resilient individuals who contribute positively to society.</p> | |
| <p>Key words: <i>Leadership Strategy, Soft Skills Development, and Workforce Readiness</i></p> | |

INTRODUCTION

In the era of freedom like today, students, both in Islamic boarding schools and other educational institutions, are not only expected to master general knowledge, but also to develop personality or soft skills. The application of soft skills in Islamic boarding schools or schools aims to equip students with the ability to communicate and interact in their social environment. Soft skills are more related to a person's sensitivity to their environment. Therefore, soft skill education is closely related to psychology, so that its impact cannot be seen directly but can be felt, such as polite behavior, discipline, ability to work together, lead, help others, and so on.

The concept of soft skills is actually a development of emotional intelligence or EQ, which includes the ability to recognize one's own feelings and those of others, motivate oneself, and manage emotions both personally and in social relationships. Individuals who are skilled in social intelligence can easily establish relationships, read the reactions and feelings of others, lead,

organize, and handle conflicts that arise. People like this tend to be liked because they create an emotionally comfortable atmosphere for those around them.¹

Soft skills are the key to success, including leadership, decision making, conflict resolution, communication, creativity, presentation skills, humility, self-confidence, emotional intelligence, integrity, commitment, and cooperation. As skills related to personality and attitude, soft skills are often not directly visible, so they are often overlooked. There are still many Islamic boarding schools that have not focused on developing or accustoming their students to have soft skills, either through policies, supervision, or coaching.

Soft skill education is related to the basic abilities that students must have so that they can motivate themselves and others, be responsible, establish good relationships, communicate effectively, and adapt to the environment. The culture of Islamic boarding schools reflects the quality of life in the Islamic boarding school environment which is seen in the form of rules or norms, work patterns, habits, and leadership styles applied by leaders and members of the Islamic boarding school.

Pesantren, as one of the oldest educational institutions in the archipelago, has a strategic role in forming individuals holistically, both as servants of Allah and as leaders on earth.² With a curriculum based on religious and moral values, Islamic boarding schools have a great opportunity to develop the soft skills of their students comprehensively.³ However, the educational methods in Islamic boarding schools often still rely on conventional approaches, making it difficult for Islamic boarding schools to adapt to the progress of the digital era. However, basically Islamic boarding schools do not reject changes in the times. Islamic boarding schools have strong principles in maintaining their existence, adhering to good traditional values, while being open to accepting new things that are considered more useful.⁴

This study aims to implement a transformational leadership strategy in the development of soft skills of students in Islamic boarding schools, in order to improve the skills and work readiness of students after graduation. This study focuses on the strategy of innovative and

¹ Ria Estiana et al., "Pentingnya Penguasaan Soft Skill Bagi Generasi Z Di Kalangan Santri Pesantren Yaa Bunayya, Purwakarta," *Buletin Abdi Masyarakat* 3, no. 2 (2023): 1, <https://doi.org/10.47686/bam.v3i2.549>.

² Makmur Haji Harun, "Pendidikan Islam: Analisis Dari Perspektif Sejarah," *Qalam : Jurnal Ilmu Kependidikan* 7, no. 2 (2019): 66, <https://doi.org/10.33506/jq.v7i2.370>.

³ Najwa Mu'minah, "CHARACTER BUILDING DALAM KONSEP PENDIDIKAN IMAM ZARKASYI DITINJAU DARI FILSAFAT MORAL IBNU MISKAWAIH," *Jurnal Filsafat* 25, no. 1 (August 14, 2016): 100, <https://doi.org/10.22146/jf.12616>.

⁴ Ahmad Damanhuri, Endin Mujahidin, and Didin Hafidhuddin, "Inovasi Pengelolaan Pesantren Dalam Menghadapi Persaingan Di Era Globalisasi," *Ta'dibuna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 2, no. 1 (2013): 17, <https://doi.org/10.32832/tadibuna.v2i1.547>.

adaptive transformative leaders in the development of communication skills, cooperation, creativity, and problem solving among students in Islamic boarding schools. The results of this study are expected to provide significant contributions to the development of education in Islamic boarding schools and provide practical recommendations for the integration of technology into the Islamic boarding school curriculum so that Islamic boarding school students not only have strong academic and spiritual competencies, but also soft skills that are relevant to the demands of the modern work world.

METHODS

The approach and method used in this study are qualitative-descriptive. Qualitative methods are the basis for researchers to produce descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from individuals and observable behavior. This study is a field study that aims to find information facts at the Fathul 'Ulum Islamic Boarding School in Jombang. Data collection was carried out through participatory observation techniques, in-depth interviews, and documentation with various parties at the boarding school. Data analysis was carried out using data condensation techniques, data presentation, and verification of findings, while data validity was checked through extended research time and intensive participation.

RESULT

Transformative Leadership Strategy in Developing Soft Skills of Santri

According to Mujamil Qomar, leadership is a person's ability to influence and direct others to achieve collectively determined goals.⁵ In carrying out his duties, the leader does not only give orders, but also creates harmonious and supportive relationships between group members. Leadership also involves efforts to bring the team to achieve the expected results in an efficient and wise manner.

Meanwhile, Binti Maunah explained that leadership is a skill to motivate and inspire followers through responsible and ethical behavior. A good leader is able to increase the work enthusiasm and morale of his followers, so that they are motivated to work hard and achieve common goals.⁶ In this case, ideal leadership requires a balance between strong character, effective communication, and commitment to moral values.

The concept of transformational leadership is a leadership model that focuses on the ability of leaders to bring about significant change in organizations through inspiring, motivating, and

⁵ Mujamil Qomar, *Manajemen Pendidikan Islam* (Jakarta: Erlangga, 2010). 45

⁶ Binti Maunah, *Kepemimpinan Dalam Pendidikan Islam* (Yogyakarta: Teras, 2015). 72

empowering their followers. Transformational leaders not only work to achieve short-term goals but also strive to drive sustainable and transformative change by leading their followers to go beyond personal interests for the common good.⁷

Strengthening the Islamic education curriculum will form a solid moral and ethical foundation, in line with Islamic values. This effort does not only focus on the spiritual aspect, but also includes strengthening social values, leadership, and caring for others. Thus, students not only excel academically, but also have a strong character and are able to make a positive contribution to society.

The development of soft skills is in line with the vision and mission of the Fathul 'Ulum Islamic Boarding School Jombang, so one of its manifestations is to organize education that produces alumni who are sensitive, creative, independent, faithful, pious, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually intelligent. To produce quality graduates who are ready to face various challenges in the future through the involvement of all parties, such as teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders, this program is expected to be a real step in building a comprehensive educational environment that is relevant to the needs of the times.

Programs and Activities Carried Out to Develop Students' Soft Skills

The application of soft skills through the culture of Islamic boarding schools includes all psychological experiences experienced by Islamic boarding school students, both socially, emotionally, and intellectually, while they are in the Islamic boarding school environment. This experience involves students' daily responses to various aspects, such as the attitudes and behavior of teachers and Islamic boarding school administrators, the implementation of Islamic boarding school policies, the condition of canteen and cooperative services, to the arrangement of cleanliness, beauty, and comfort of the Islamic boarding school environment. All of these elements form the Islamic boarding school culture which gradually seeps into the psychological experiences of all Islamic boarding school residents, including students, and ultimately forms their values, attitudes, habits, and behavior.

Soft skills are abilities that are not physically visible but can be felt in everyday life. Each individual has uniqueness in this ability, so learning soft skills is important. Here are some forms of soft skills according to Suyadi⁸:

1. Honesty: The ability to align knowledge, words, and actions. This attitude reflects the truth that is known, spoken, and done, so that a person becomes a person who can be trusted.

⁷ Bernard M. Bass, *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations* (New York: Free Press, 1985). 20-25

⁸ Suyadi, *Strategi Pembelajaran Pendidikan Karakter* (Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya, 2013). 8

2. Responsibility: Willingness to accept the consequences of what is said and done. This includes awareness in carrying out obligations and duties to oneself, society, nation, and God.
3. Self-confidence: Belief in one's own ability to complete the tasks given. Confident individuals understand their strengths and weaknesses and are able to overcome fear, doubt, and hesitation when making decisions.
4. Self-motivation: Internal encouragement in the form of ideas or methods that help a person move in a directed and planned manner to achieve goals.
5. Communication skills: Oral and written communication skills used by a person as a social being in interacting with their surroundings.
6. Leadership: The process of cooperation that is realized through the ability to lead to achieve common goals.

The Impact of Implementing Transformative Leadership Strategies and Soft Skills Development on the Work Readiness of Santri

The increasingly modern era encourages education to continue to adapt, both in terms of learning strategies, curriculum, and various other aspects that support the improvement of its quality. Education plays a role as a means to help students realize and develop their soft skills. Thus, education becomes an important medium in producing a generation of the nation with positive behavior. Its functions include the development of intellectual abilities, character formation, and personality. This aims to produce individuals, including students, who are not only superior in science but also able to apply their knowledge in real life, based on soft skill values. Transformative leadership strategies and soft skills development have a significant impact on the readiness of students to work.

The benefits of soft skills are visible and very important in supporting the planning and management of graduate quality. Here are some of the benefits of soft skills:

1. Improving specific skills that support career development.
2. Forming relevant abilities that are in accordance with the needs of students.
3. Adjusting learning materials to the level of student growth and development.
4. Helping students achieve the expected competencies.
5. Supported by facilities and tools that support the learning process.
6. Equipping students with life skills that are useful in everyday life.

7. Making it easier for students to socialize, act positively, and be competitive in facing various life challenges.⁹

The development of soft skills in education aims to build individual intelligence, which includes:

- a. Intrapersonal intelligence: A person's ability to negotiate in social relationships through skills based on values such as empathy, compassion, understanding, assertiveness, and expression of desire. This allows for the creation of positive and expressive social relationships in interacting with others.
- b. Interpersonal intelligence: A person's capacity to manage relationships with themselves through reflection and self-development. This process includes understanding emotions, thoughts, feelings, and ideals, which encourage self-motivation to face various life challenges.

DISCUSSION

Transformative Leadership Strategy in Developing Soft Skills of Santri

One of the cores of leadership is implementing leadership transformation, which is realized through communication. Leaders who are able to communicate persuasively with their members will support the leadership transformation process. Conversely, leaders who do not have the ability to communicate can hinder the transformation. Therefore, it is important for leaders to have strong characters, so that the progress and decline of an organization can be reflected in the characteristics of its leaders.

Soft skills are a very important aspect for generation Z, as stated in one of the World Economic Forum reports that 80% of the skills needed by the workforce to compete in the industrial era 4.0 are soft skills, while the rest are technical skills. Along with the demands of the world of work that increasingly emphasize creativity and cross-party collaboration, generation Z not only needs to master technology, but also have interpersonal intelligence. However, the development of soft skills, which include core human characters such as creativity, imagination, intuition, emotion, and ethics, requires a long process and cannot be achieved instantly.

Strengthening the Islamic education curriculum at the Fathul 'Ulum Islamic Boarding School in Jombang will form a solid moral and ethical foundation, in line with Islamic values. This effort does not only focus on the spiritual aspect, but also includes strengthening social values, leadership, and caring for others. Thus, students not only excel academically, but also have a strong

⁹ Intan A. Razak, *Strategi Pembelajaran Dalam Implementasi Kurikulum Berbasis Soft Skill* (Yogyakarta: Depublish, 2012).

character and are able to make a positive contribution to society. The development of soft skills is in line with the vision and mission of the Fathul 'Ulum Islamic Boarding School in Jombang to produce quality graduates who are ready to face various challenges in the future. Through the involvement of all parties, such as teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders, this program is expected to be a real step in building a comprehensive educational environment that is relevant to the needs of the times.

Based on data analysis, the transformative leadership strategy applied in the development of students' soft skills so that students can be more independent and ready to work after graduating is as follows:

1. Religious Education and Independence: Kiai Ahmad Habibul Amin emphasized the importance of integrating religious education with independence. Religious education remains the main priority, but is enriched with life skills training so that students not only understand religion but also have practical skills for everyday life.
2. Life Skills Training: Islamic boarding schools organize various skills training programs such as leadership, teaching, sewing, fisheries, animal husbandry, agriculture, multimedia, IT, culinary, and creative economy. This program provides opportunities for students to master skills that are relevant to the real world. This supports students in developing soft skills.
3. Economic Empowerment: One of the main focuses is improving life skills through economic empowerment. Programs such as fisheries, animal husbandry, and various other businesses provide students with direct experience in managing businesses, understanding economics, and creating job opportunities.
4. Entrepreneurship Teaching: The entrepreneurship curriculum implemented in Islamic boarding schools provides an in-depth understanding of business, management, and entrepreneurial ethics. This helps students utilize economic potential optimally.
5. Interest and Talent Support: Pesantren encourages the development of programs that are in line with the interests and talents of students, allowing them to focus and develop in the areas they master.
6. Soft Skills Improvement: In addition to technical skills, pesantren also develops students' soft skills, such as public speaking skills, muhadhoroh activities, and social skills, so that they can interact better in society.

7. **Mentoring and Guidance:** Kiai plays an active role as a mentor, providing direction, advice, and support to students to help them recognize their potential and overcome challenges.
8. **Empowering the Surrounding Environment:** Entrepreneurship programs not only have an impact on students, but also help improve the economy of the surrounding community, creating broader benefits for the local community.
9. **Avoiding Dependence:** By instilling a spirit of independence and entrepreneurship, as well as soft skills, students are trained not only to rely on religious knowledge, but also to have the ability to generate income through the businesses they have learned.

Programs and Activities Carried Out to Develop Students' Soft Skills

With the support of the Salaf curriculum and the existence of internal business at the Fathul Ulum Islamic Boarding School, students can develop various potentials. Through the routine of boarding school activities, training and motivational studies, they are honed in self-recognition skills. Cultivating an honest attitude, responsibility and individual self-confidence through boarding school activities. Rational thinking skills are developed through the use of mobile phones as a tool to broaden horizons and explore information relevant to the skills of each student.

The social skills of students are seen from the cooperation established in teams in various programs that are run, with good communication skills enabling them to achieve common goals. In addition, skills are demonstrated through students' awareness in planning for the future, creating career opportunities, and determining career steps after completing education at the Islamic Boarding School. The process of cooperation is realized through leadership skills to achieve common goals. The Islamic Boarding School also develops students' soft skills, such as public speaking skills, muhadhoroh activities, and other social skills.

The Impact of Implementing Transformative Leadership Strategies and Soft Skills Development on the Work Readiness of Santri

The role of a Kiai is very influential in shaping the character and success of a pesantren. The nature, expertise, charisma, and skills of a Kiai are the main factors that determine the identity and achievements of a pesantren. Kiai Ahmad Habibul Amin's efforts in instilling a spirit of independence and life skills in students, both hard skills and soft skills at the Fathul Ulum Islamic Boarding School have had a significant positive impact. These steps have succeeded in equipping students with a wider range of abilities, preparing them to face various life challenges.

Kiai Ahmad Habibul Amin leads the Fathul Ulum Islamic Boarding School with a holistic and adaptive approach, integrating pesantren traditions with educational innovation and entrepreneurship development. His leadership that combines charisma, authority, and democratic principles allows students to develop into independent individuals with entrepreneurial skills, while still adhering to religious values and pesantren traditions. Through innovative programs, Kiai Amin has succeeded in changing society's view of pesantren graduates and creating an environment that supports the development of students' potential to the maximum.

CONCLUSION

The transformative leadership strategy implemented at the Fathul Ulum Islamic Boarding School by Kiai Ahmad Habibul Amin shows significant efforts in integrating religious values with the development of students' soft skills. This holistic and adaptive leadership focuses not only on spiritual guidance, but also on life skills training, economic empowerment, and entrepreneurship teaching. This approach equips students with relevant skills to face the challenges of the modern world, including in terms of interpersonal intelligence, creativity, and independence.

Programs such as leadership training, technical skills, and activities that support the development of soft skills have provided space for students to develop their potential. With the support of the salaf curriculum and the internal business of the pesantren, students learn to utilize technology, collaborate, plan for the future, and build good social skills. These abilities are strengthened through routine activities, mentoring, and direct direction from the Kiai, who plays an active role in guiding students to recognize their potential and overcome various challenges.

The results of this strategy can be seen in the readiness of students in facing the world of work and social life. The charismatic, authoritative, and democratic character of the kiai is an inspiration in building an effective leadership pattern. This approach not only has a positive impact on the students but also on the environment around the pesantren, through contributions to economic and social empowerment. Thus, the Fathul Ulum Islamic Boarding School has succeeded in creating a generation that is not only knowledgeable, but also resilient, independent, and able to provide real benefits in society.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bass, Bernard M. *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations*. New York: Free Press, 1985.
- Damanhuri, Ahmad, Endin Mujahidin, and Didin Hafidhuddin. "Inovasi Pengelolaan Pesantren Dalam Menghadapi Persaingan Di Era Globalisasi." *Ta'dibuna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 2, no. 1 (2013): 17. <https://doi.org/10.32832/tadibuna.v2i1.547>.

- Estiana, Ria, Saun Supriaman, Djumat Purnomo, and Eko Sugiyanto. "Pentingnya Penguasaan Soft Skill Bagi Generasi Z Di Kalangan Santri Pesantren Yaa Bunayya, Purwakarta." *Buletin Abdi Masyarakat* 3, no. 2 (2023): 1. <https://doi.org/10.47686/bam.v3i2.549>.
- Harun, Makmur Haji. "Pendidikan Islam: Analisis Dari Perspektif Sejarah." *Qalam : Jurnal Ilmu Kependidikan* 7, no. 2 (2019): 66. <https://doi.org/10.33506/jq.v7i2.370>.
- Maunah, Binti. *Kepemimpinan Dalam Pendidikan Islam*. Yogyakarta: Teras, 2015.
- Mu'minah, Najwa. "CHARACTER BUILDING DALAM KONSEP PENDIDIKAN IMAM ZARKASYI DITINJAU DARI FILSAFAT MORAL IBNU MISKAWAIH." *Jurnal Filsafat* 25, no. 1 (August 14, 2016): 100. <https://doi.org/10.22146/jf.12616>.
- Qomar, Mujamil. *Manajemen Pendidikan Islam*. Jakarta: Erlangga, 2010.
- Razak, Intan A. *Strategi Pembelajaran Dalam Implementasi Kurikulum Berbasis Soft Skill*. Yogyakarta: Depublish, 2012.
- Suyadi. *Strategi Pembelajaran Pendidikan Karakter*. Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya, 2013.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to express their gratitude to all parties who have contributed to this research. Special thanks are addressed to the Kiai, the administrators of the Islamic boarding school, and the students who have provided access and valuable information related to transformative leadership strategies in developing the students' soft skills. We also appreciate the support from colleagues and institutions that have provided literature and resources to support the research process. Without the assistance and cooperation of various parties, this research would not have been possible.