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The Duality of Structure and Culture: Strategic Scaffolding for Santriwati Leadership Development in Pesantren

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to (1) Describe the application of cultural approaches and structural approaches in women's pesantren leadership education (2) Analyze the integration of cultural and structural approaches as leadership education strategies in the formation of student leadership, and (3) Analyze the implications of cultural and structural approaches to women's pesantren leadership education at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor Putri 3 Widodaren Ngawi. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method. Data collection techniques use interviews, observations, and documentation. Data analysis goes through three simultaneous activity streams between data reduction, data presentation, conclusion and verification. The subjects of the study include the leaders of the boarding school, teachers, and students. The findings of the application of the cultural approach at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor Putri 3 through the internalization of leadership values into the lives of students, direction, assignments, discipline, interpreting leadership as a mandate. The application of structural approaches through a comprehensive institutional system, organization, assignment, direction, regeneration, example, discipline. The integration of these two approaches is through real organizational experience, the pattern of teacher-administrator-student relationship, the division of structure, example, regeneration, and discipline. The implications of both approaches can be seen in changes in mindset, attitudes, behaviors for the better, managerial and adaptation skills, growth in confidence and responsibility. The conclusion of this study is that the integration of cultural and structural approaches forms an organizational leader with high moral integrity and character. This study recommends other educational institutions if they can adopt some of the leadership education strategies in PMDG Putri 3.

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Introduction

Leadership is defined as the process by which a leader influences surrounding individuals to achieve desired organizational objectives (Hidayah et al., 2022). It serves as a foundational

pillar for the sustainability and success of organizations across the corporate, governmental, and educational sectors (Suryani et al., 2025). Currently, leadership in Indonesia faces a critical crisis driven by declining integrity among public officials in upholding their mandates. This phenomenon is evidenced by pervasive corruption scandals and a palpable neglect of public welfare, which collectively erode societal trust in leadership (Kencana et al., 2025).

As an institutional process aimed at cultivating human potential in alignment with societal values, traditions, and culture, education fundamentally seeks to elevate the quality of human life (Al-Farabi, 2023). Consequently, leadership education that emphasizes character formation, moral integrity (akhlak), and Islamic values has become an urgent imperative in contemporary pedagogy. Culturally grounded education is vital to ensure that learning extends beyond academic achievement to actively shape sound moral character (Muadzin & Sunarto, 2025). Within Islam, leadership is conceptualized as a sacred trust (amanah) that must be executed with accountability, justice, and integrity (Naufal et al., 2026). This Islamic leadership paradigm directly aligns with Indonesia's national educational objectives, which emphasize the development of faithful, pious, noble, knowledgeable, creative, and responsible individuals (Ikhwan, 2018).

In the scholarship of leadership pedagogy, cultural approaches posit that leadership character is forged through the internalization of cultural values (Mujahid et al., 2021). As articulated by Ki Hajar Dewantara (in Rohimah, 2026), character education centers on moral character (budi pekerti) as the core essence of pedagogy. Character involves not merely a cognitive awareness of right and wrong, but its active embodiment through habituation, exemplary role modeling, and the consistent practice of moral values in daily life. Thus, cultural approaches position the educational environment as the primary medium for instilling leadership character through habituation.

Conversely, structural approaches focus on developing leadership competencies through structured organizational systems, wherein authority is exercised through delegated duties and defined administrative roles (Ilwan & Mesiono, 2022). This approach provides students with empirical arenas to hone leadership capabilities through active organizational involvement. Indeed, experiential learning serves as a critical driver of holistic pedagogy (Dewey, 1938). Therefore, structural approaches function not merely as administrative frameworks, but as practical laboratory spaces for leadership development.

Although distinct in mechanism, cultural and structural approaches are complementary in leadership pedagogy. The cultural approach instills foundational values, whereas the structural approach provides the practical arena for execution. Lacking strong cultural values, leadership education risks producing individuals with purely administrative capabilities. Conversely, devoid of organizational structures, cultural values remain abstract and unpracticed. Hence, the synergy between these two paradigms offers a strategic framework for cultivating comprehensive leadership character.

This dual framework is highly salient to the pesantren (Islamic boarding school) educational system. As a 24-hour residential institution, the pesantren prioritizes holistic character building and moral integrity over mere academic credentials, positioning itself as a vital pillar of national human resource development (Ikhwan, 2017). Historically, pesantren have played a pivotal role in shaping students' character, moral discipline (adab), self-reliance, and Islamic identity (Jamil et al., 2025). Among the institutions consistently advancing leadership pedagogy is Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor Putri 3. Leadership education in this female pesantren synthesizes cultural and structural paradigms. Culturally, leadership values such as role modeling, discipline, and self-reliance are continuously internalized. Structurally, student organizations, committees, and administrative assignments offer hands-on managerial experience. The integration of these paradigms forms a strategic blueprint for nurturing well-rounded leadership among female students (santriwati).

Strategically, while cultural and structural approaches possess distinct functions, they

operate interdependently. The cultural approach establishes the moral foundation, while the structural approach offers the operational medium to enact these principles. If structural experiences lack grounding in core values, organizational routines devolve into mere task execution. Conversely, an overemphasis on cultural values without structural mechanisms risks leaving santriwati with theoretical understanding bereft of practical acumen. Thus, the critical pedagogical issue lies not merely in how leadership education is conducted, but in how values and practical experiences are synergized to foster holistic female leadership.

In practice, leadership education at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor Putri 3 faces the challenge that value internalization alone is insufficient to build complete leadership competence. Preliminary observations indicate that santriwati still require structured scaffolding through guidance, task assignment, mentoring, and continuous evaluation to fulfill their responsibilities effectively. This underscores that understanding institutional values does not automatically translate into operational capability when navigating organizational challenges.

For instance, during task assignments, santriwati are not merely entrusted with administrative duties, but are systematically briefed on the philosophical objectives behind them. In various scenarios, student leaders still require active mentorship in activity management, inter-departmental coordination, and problem-solving. Furthermore, the cadre development process follows a progressive continuum: students move from passive observation and modeling senior leadership to taking on incremental duties before assuming major organizational mandates. These findings confirm that leadership development requires a tight coupling between value orientation and direct experiential leadership.

While scholarly literature on pesantren leadership education is extensive, existing studies predominantly isolate either the cultural or structural dimension. This siloed focus leaves a critical gap regarding how both approaches are strategically integrated into a cohesive pedagogical framework. Specifically, the dynamic synthesis between institutional pesantren values and formal organizational structures remains underexplored.

Furthermore, empirical research on leadership education specifically within female pesantren (pesantren putri) remains scarce, as the literature overwhelmingly focuses on co-educational or male institutions. Given that female pesantren exhibit distinct pedagogical systems, mentoring dynamics, and organizational cultures, a dedicated investigation is required to unpack the nuances of santriwati leadership development. This study aims to analyze cultural and structural strategies in shaping santriwati leadership character at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor Putri 3. The novel contribution of this research lies in its integrative evaluation of both paradigms within the distinct context of an all-female Islamic boarding school—a domain hitherto underrepresented in educational literature.

Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method with a phenomenological approach. The qualitative descriptive approach is systematically structured to describe and articulate empirical conditions, contextual backgrounds, and field observations supported by valid and relevant data (Santika & Ikhwan, 2024). Meanwhile, phenomenology constitutes a rigorous scientific inquiry designed to investigate and elucidate the lived experiences of individuals or groups, focusing on the subjective meanings embedded within those experiences (Moleong, 2018). Qualitative research provides a holistic portrayal of phenomena by analyzing the perspectives of key informants, scrutinizing narrative discourse, operating within naturalistic settings, and constructing detailed, nuanced accounts through a balanced analytical lens (Ikhwan et al., 2025). Within this qualitative framework, the researcher serves as the primary instrument (human instrument) who must engage directly in field investigation. Consequently, the researcher acts as the sole agent responsible for data collection, processing, analysis, interpretation, and reporting at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor Putri 3.

To ensure data accuracy and empirical rigor, primary data were gathered directly from

targeted key informants, including the head/deputy leader (Kyai/Wakil Pengasuh), deputy director (Wakil Direktur), student affairs staff (Staf Pengasuhan Santri), and female student leaders (santriwati) at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor Putri 3. Data collection was carried out through structured interviews utilizing a predetermined interview protocol, as the specific analytical parameters were defined prior to fieldwork (Sugiyono, 2020). This was complemented by participatory observation conducted over approximately one month, alongside secondary document analysis. The secondary documentary sources examined included the institutional profile of Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, modern pesantren management manuals, literature on Gontor leadership philosophy, student leadership activity reports, institutional regulations, and facilities records.

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which encompasses three concurrent streams of analytical activities: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Hartono, 2018). To ensure data trustworthiness and rigorous validity, several verification techniques were deployed, including prolonged field engagement, persistent observation, source and method triangulation, and continuous peer debriefing/supervisory consultation.

Results and Discussion

Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor (PMDG) for Girls Campus 3, located in Karangbanyu Village, Widodaren District, Ngawi Regency, East Java, was officially inaugurated on 18 Shawwal 1423 H (December 25, 2002) on an area of approximately 12 hectares under the auspices of the PMDG Waqf Board. The establishment of this female-only Islamic boarding school (pesantren) was designed to replicate and contextualize the well-established system of value-based and leadership education from the main campus. The existence of this geographically isolated yet systematically structured ecosystem provides a conducive space for the comprehensive, 24-hour character formation and leadership development of female students (santriwati).

Leadership education at PMDG Girls Campus 3 is not merely constructed through a formal classroom-based instructional curriculum; rather, it is operationalized through systemic penetration involving two main domains: a cultural approach based on value internalization and a structural approach grounded in organized institutional governance. The cultural approach operates through the enculturation of the pesantren's philosophical values—such as the Five Souls (Panca Jiwa), Five Targets (Panca Jangka), Mottoes (Motto Pondok), Operational Guidelines (Khittah), Ideology (Fikrah), Identity (Shibghah), and Activities (Ansyithah)—into the complete daily rhythm of the santriwati. This enculturation process generates a living culture that consistently nurtures moral nobility, ethical compliance, and emotional intelligence.

This cultural internalization confirms Thomas Lickona's character development theory regarding the continuity among moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. The santriwati do not merely comprehend the ethical discourse of leadership cognitively (moral knowing), but also internalize it through the rhythms of dormitory life (moral feeling), ultimately embodying it in contextual leadership behavior (moral action). This aligns with Ki Hajar Dewantara's view that a living ethos constitutes an essential foundation in shaping a holistic personality. In this context, the transformation of philosophical values is manifested through academic and non-academic rituals in the form of orientation sessions (briefing) prior to every scheduled agenda, wherein the core doctrine "ready to lead and ready to be led" transforms hierarchical power relations into egalitarian discipline. According to Ahmad Sahal Zarkasyi, briefings function as cognitive-motivational instruments underlying experiential learning (learning by doing), while simultaneously reinforcing that an effective leader is an individual who has attained complete obedience to the system.

The implementation of this cultural leadership rests upon the principles of exemplary role

modeling (uswah) and selfless service (khidmah), which comprehensively reflect Ki Hajar Dewantara's Educational Trilogy. The principle of ing ngarsa sung tuladha (leading by example) is demonstrated by the leadership assembly of Kyai, male teachers (Ustadz), female teachers (Ustadzah), and senior students through disciplined behavioral performance. Meanwhile, the principle of ing madya mangun karsa (encouraging from within) is materialized in the continuous 24-hour interaction between teachers and students, and tut wuri handayani (empowering from behind) is applied through the delegation of leadership authority. Within a theological framework, the entrustment of leadership responsibilities (amanah) is understood in accordance with the mandate of Surah An-Nisa verse 58, where organizational positions are not perceived as structural privileges, but rather as forms of spiritual accountability and instruments of dedication (ruhul khidmah).

On the other hand, the structural approach provides a formal arena in which these cultural values are tangibly actualized. PMDG Girls Campus 3 designs a tiered organizational structure that incrementally trains the managerial skills of the santriwati through involvement in the Modern Boarding School Student Organization (Organisasi Pelajar Pondok Modern / OPPM), the Scouting Movement coordination committee, as well as dormitory room and classroom management teams. This active involvement reinforces David A. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, wherein concrete experience in planning, coordinating, and resolving conflicts triggers reflective observation and abstract conceptualization that shape practical managerial competence.

The structural management of the santriwati within the OPPM is not designed to perpetuate hierarchical dominance, but rather to serve as a medium for community service. This finding precisely confirms Robert K. Greenleaf's Servant Leadership model, in which the primary characteristic of a leader is the inclination to serve first (servant-first). Grounded in the principle of sincerity (ikhlas), structural positions are embodied as a form of dedication to facilitate the needs of members and maintain collective order. This structural leadership is sustained by three pillars of institutional governance: nidzom (a transparent and standardized regulatory system), tandzim (clear delegation of authority and task allocation), and intidzom (the organic consciousness of santriwati to independently adhere to regulations without coercion).

The pedagogical superiority of PMDG Girls Campus 3 lies in the convergent synthesis between the cultural and structural approaches. Rather than operating separately as binary oppositions, both domains interact dialectically within a 24-hour Total Life-Space Learning ecosystem. The integration of these two approaches is facilitated by a three-tiered sociological interaction scheme between educators or administrators and the santriwati: mu'amalah as formal-institutional relationships, mu'asyarah as personal mentoring and ethical counseling, and mukholatoh as intensive social immersion in daily dormitory life.

This integrated pattern of interaction accords with Paulo Freire's perspective on dialogue-based emancipatory education, as well as John Dewey's principle of learning by doing. Through this scheme, santriwati not only master the technical dimensions of leadership (how to lead), but also internalize its philosophical and spiritual foundations (why to lead). This leadership regeneration process is bound within a systematic cadre-building model that integrates seven operational pillars briefing, training, task assignment, habituation, mentoring/supervision, exemplary modeling (uswah hasanah), and personal approach to guarantee the intergenerational continuity of pesantren leadership values.

The synthesis of cultural and structural approaches yields significant theoretical and practical implications for character formation among the santriwati. Discipline enforced through structural regulations (nidzom) transforms into personal moral consciousness (intidzom), thereby shifting the santriwati from a level of heteronomous morality toward autonomous morality. Furthermore, residential life as a micro-society refines their social capacity, communication skills, negotiation abilities, crisis management, and psychological resilience. Ultimately, this integrated leadership education model successfully realizes the

vision of holistic education that harmonizes the mind (head), heart (heart), and physical action (hand), producing graduates with intellectual maturity, moral integrity, and social competence who are prepared to contribute meaningfully to broader society.

Conclusion

Leadership education at PMDG for Girls Campus 3 demonstrates that the optimal formation of character and managerial competence among female students (santriwati) relies on a dialectical synthesis of cultural and structural approaches. The cultural approach internalizes the institution's core philosophical values into every facet of 24-hour residential life as a living curriculum, whereas the structural approach provides an experiential platform through tiered student organizational governance. The efficacy of this educational model lies in the absence of dominance by either approach; both converge to yield a holistic leadership paradigm. This synergy produces substantive implications for the enhancement of students' managerial capabilities, manifesting in cognitive, affective, and behavioral transformations encompassing refined mindsets, value consciousness, ethical attitudes, and mature leadership conduct. Ultimately, the integration of these dual approaches successfully cultivates future leaders who possess not only administrative and organizational proficiency but also deeply rooted moral and spiritual integrity.

Nevertheless, this study is subject to scope limitations, as it strictly focuses on internal leadership education strategies through cultural and structural dimensions within the pesantren ecosystem. External determinants that potentially influence leadership formation—such as family sociocultural background, parenting styles, and broader social interactions outside the institution—were not thoroughly examined. These constraints provide valuable avenues for future research to expand the analytical framework by incorporating external variables or exploring this leadership pedagogy through alternative interdisciplinary approaches in Islamic educational studies.

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