

Transformational Leadership of *Tuan Guru*: A Local Wisdom Approach to Preventing Bullying in *Pesantren*

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ABSTRACT

Bullying in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) poses serious psychological, social, and academic risks for students. Despite their strong moral frameworks, *pesantren* remain vulnerable to hierarchical practices that can perpetuate bullying. Transformational leadership grounded in local wisdom offers a potential strategy for fostering a safe and supportive environment. This study explored the transformational leadership strategies of the *tuan guru* at Pondok Pesantren Selaparang, West Lombok, in preventing bullying. A qualitative case study design was employed, using in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis. Eight key informants—including the *tuan guru*, madrasa head, dormitory supervisor, teachers, students, and parents—provided diverse perspectives on leadership practices within the *pesantren*. Findings reveal that the *tuan guru* integrates Sasak local wisdom, including *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), tolerance, and traditional practices such as Rowah, Nyunatan, Khataman, Nyongkolan, and Sorong Serah Aji Krama. These practices foster solidarity, mutual respect, and social harmony among students. Senior-junior mentoring systems strengthen supportive relationships and instill social responsibility, while a restorative approach to conflict resolution focuses on repairing relationships rather than punitive measures. Parental and community involvement further reinforces moral values beyond the school environment. The study highlights a culturally grounded transformational leadership model that effectively reduces bullying and builds students' moral character. This hybrid approach—combining leadership principles with local wisdom—offers a replicable framework for other religious education institutions. The findings suggest the need for leadership training programs and further research to test the scalability of this model in diverse cultural contexts.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Bullying in educational environments significantly impacts the psychological and academic development of students, disrupting their learning and well-being (Hymel & Swearer, 2015; Ilyas & Handayani, 2022). In *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools), where students live in enclosed environments, the effects of bullying are amplified (S. Suryadi et al., 2023). Victims often experience anxiety, depression, and diminished self-confidence (Anjani et al., 2024; da Silva et al., 2020; Pörhölä et al., 2019). Therefore, it is essential to ensure that educational institutions provide a safe, bullying-free environment.

Pesantren play a crucial role in Indonesia's education system, imparting religious knowledge and fostering moral character (Lukens-Bull, 2000). However, despite their strong value systems, *pesantren* face challenges in creating a safe space for students. Limited supervision and inadequate staff training in addressing interpersonal conflicts hinder effective bullying prevention (Ahmad et al., 2021; Hafidzi et al., 2024). Moreover, the culture of seniority within *pesantren*, which emphasises respect for elders, can inadvertently perpetuate a hierarchical structure that fosters misuse (Horton, 2016). Thus, there is a clear need for inclusive and effective leadership to tackle these issues.

The role of leadership is pivotal in shaping a positive educational climate. Effective leadership fosters an environment that reduces bullying by encouraging good behaviour (Budiningsih & TD, 2022). In *pesantren*, the *tuan guru*, as a highly respected leader, plays an essential role in preventing bullying through firm policies and a supportive, dialogical approach (Nauval, 2024). Research shows that empathetic leadership increases student safety and reduces bullying (Khalifa et al., 2016). Thus, the leadership strategies of Tuan Guru are crucial in creating a safe and supportive environment.

Transformational leadership, characterised by inspiration, motivation, and empowerment, is particularly relevant for fostering positive school culture and addressing bullying. This leadership style enhances trust between leaders and teachers, encouraging collective well-being and reducing bullying (Anderson, 2017; Heenan et al., 2023). However, while transformational leadership has been widely studied, its specific application in *pesantren* to address bullying remains under-researched. This gap in the literature highlights the need to explore how transformational leadership, informed by local wisdom, can be utilised to prevent bullying in *pesantren* settings.

One *pesantren* that implements transformational leadership based on local wisdom is Pondok Pesantren Selaparang, located in Kediri, West Lombok. This *pesantren* was founded by noble figures of the Sasak ethnic group in Lombok and actively integrates Sasak local wisdom into its educational system (*interview, observation, 2024*). This is evident from various traditions maintained and practised by the *pesantren*, such as the *Nyongkolan* and *Sorong Serah Aji Krama* celebrations, which form part of traditional Sasak wedding ceremonies, particularly among the nobility. Photographic documentation shows students dressed in traditional Sasak attire during these ceremonies, underscoring the *pesantren's* commitment to preserving local culture as an integral part of education. Observations also reveal that students routinely use *Bahasa Sasak Alus* (a refined variant of the Sasak language traditionally used by the Sasak nobility) in their daily interactions. Studies by Nurlaela et al. (2024), Nashuddin (2020) and Murdianto (2021) affirm that Pondok Pesantren Selaparang in Kediri, West Lombok, applies local wisdom as part of its moral education initiatives.

This study is deemed highly urgent. Research indicates that transformational leadership has numerous benefits in fostering a positive environment and preventing bullying. This leadership style creates supportive conditions by reducing incidents of bullying, whether related to work, personal issues, or physical intimidation (Dussault & Frenette, 2015). Additionally, transformational leadership enhances organisational well-being by promoting positive interactions, building trust, and increasing empathy among students (Cemaloglu, 2011). Transformational leaders are also adept at identifying early signs of negative behaviour and taking preventive measures promptly, thereby ensuring a safe and conducive environment. Emotional support provided by leaders, including recognition of positive efforts, plays a pivotal role in motivating participants to engage in constructive behaviour (Bass et al.,

2016). Thus, transformational leadership emerges as a vital strategy in bullying prevention within *pesantren*.

This study aims to examine how the transformational leadership strategies of the *tuan guru*, rooted in local wisdom, contribute to preventing bullying in *pesantren*. By investigating the role of local wisdom in shaping leadership approaches, this research seeks to fill the gap in existing literature on leadership in faith-based educational institutions, particularly in the context of bullying prevention. The findings will provide valuable insights for leaders of other educational institutions in Indonesia, offering guidance on how to adopt similar strategies to create a safer, more supportive learning environment.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study method to examine the transformational leadership strategies of *Tuan Guru* in preventing bullying within *pesantren*, focusing specifically on Pondok Pesantren Selaparang in Kediri, West Lombok. The participant selection involved 6 key informants, including the *tuan guru*, who serves as the leader of the boarding school, the head of the madrasa, and the head of the *pesantren* dormitory. A purposive sampling strategy was utilized to select participants who were directly involved in the leadership and management of the *pesantren*. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis. Thematic analysis was applied to identify key themes related to the *Tuan Guru*'s leadership strategies grounded in local wisdom. The analysis process followed a systematic approach: first, data were transcribed and coded to identify initial patterns and recurring ideas; second, codes were grouped into broader categories to form preliminary themes; third, the themes were refined and organized into overarching themes that reflected the transformational leadership strategies of the *Tuan Guru*. Finally, the themes were interpreted in the context of local cultural values and educational leadership. The credibility of the data was ensured through triangulation, cross-checking the findings from multiple sources, and member checking, where participants were given the opportunity to review and confirm the findings, ensuring validity and consistency.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Findings

Tuan Guru's transformational leadership strategy, underpinned by local wisdom, also plays a significant role in the prevention of bullying within Islamic boarding schools. This study identifies a range of interconnected, holistic strategies, which include: the formation of an inclusive leadership vision, the application of local wisdom values in leadership through traditions and local narratives, empowering students in bullying prevention, a restorative approach to addressing bullying cases, strengthening the culture of *pesantren* through collaborative learning, and parental and community engagement (see figure 1).

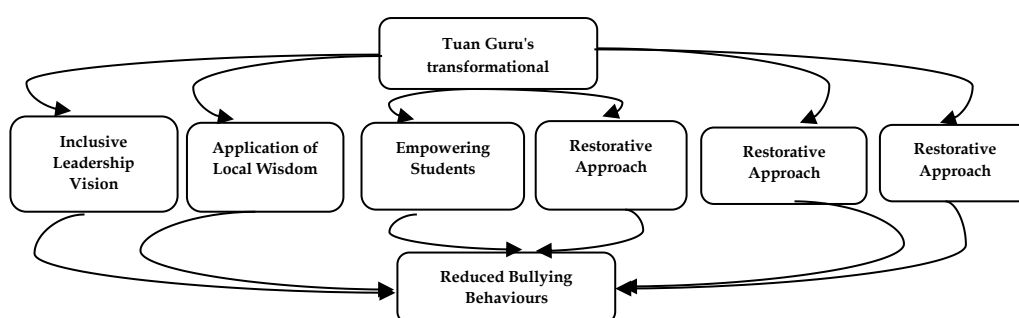


Figure 1. The holistic interconnected strategy of *Tuan Guru*'s transformational leadership in preventing Bullying

3.1.1. The formation of an inclusive leadership vision

At Pondok Pesantren Selaparang, the leadership vision articulated by TGH Lalu Pattimura Farhan (*Interview*, 2024) emphasizes fostering both academic excellence and inclusive character development. This vision aims to guide students (*santri*) towards positive behaviours, including anti-bullying. Interviews with Ustaz H. Abdul Hafiz, Ustazah Nurlaela, and Ustaz Rusli further reinforce this emphasis. The *pesantren's* vision highlights the creation of a generation with noble character, broad knowledge, and the ability to integrate Islamic values with modern challenges for community and national advancement. To achieve this, the *pesantren* employs a holistic educational approach that blends traditional religious teachings with contemporary knowledge. This integration enhances intellectual capacity and instills humanitarian values that promote social harmony and moral integrity (*Vision and Mission Documentation Study of Pondok Pesantren Selaparang*, 2024).

To strengthen this inclusive leadership vision, the Tuan Guru (religious leader) regularly conveys his leadership vision through various activities such as religious sermons, leadership meetings, and daily interactions, aiming to foster a culture of mutual respect and conflict avoidance within the boarding school (TGH. Lalu Pattimura Farhan, Ustaz H. Abdul Hafiz, M. Rusli, Ustazah Hj. Nurlaela, *Interview*, 2024). Observations revealed that the Tuan Guru organises monthly coaching meetings and sermons attended by teachers, students, and parents. During these events, he emphasises the importance of maintaining brotherhood and avoiding acts of mockery or actions that could provoke altercations. The Tuan Guru also underscores the necessity for school heads to ensure that no bullying—verbal or physical—occurs, whether perpetrated by teachers or among students (*Observation*, 2024).

3.1.2. Application of local wisdom values in leadership through local traditions and stories

Local wisdom plays a central role in the leadership approach at Pondok Pesantren Selaparang, particularly through the value of *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation). Traditions like *Nyongkolan*, *Begawe Merariq*, and *Sorong Serah Aji Krama* actively involve students (*santri*) under the guidance of the Tuan Guru. These practices not only preserve cultural heritage but also serve as effective tools for character development and community life (*Interviews, Observations*, 2024). By embedding these traditions into daily activities, the *pesantren* fosters a leadership model that promotes social responsibility and harmony. In addition, local stories are also used to prevent bullying. For example, the Tuan Guru shares a story where the founder discouraged bullying by pretending not to notice when a student passed wind during a religious lesson (TGH. Lalu Pattimura Farhan, H. Abdul Hafiz, and Hj. Nurlaela, *Interviews*, 2024).

3.1.3. Empowering students in bullying prevention

Empowering students is a cornerstone of the transformational leadership strategies employed by the Tuan Guru. Senior students, particularly those in the third year of *Aliyah* (senior high school) and university-level students, take on roles as dormitory leaders and mentors for younger students. These mentoring programs focus on character building and reinforcing social values, creating a harmonious and bullying-free environment (TGH. Lalu Pattimura Farhan, Ustaz H. Abdul Hafiz, Ustazah Hj. Nurlaela, and M. Rusli, *Interviews*, 2024). Observations indicate that this approach not only supervises but also fosters solidarity based on Islamic principles and local values, making it an effective model for conflict prevention within the *pesantren* (*Observations*, 2024).

3.1.4. A restorative approach to addressing bullying cases

The *pesantren* employs a restorative approach to address bullying, focusing on repairing relationships between perpetrators and victims. Through mediation led by the *tuan guru*, dialogues are facilitated to promote mutual understanding and genuine remorse. This process helps rebuild trust and respect between parties (TGH. Lalu Pattimura Farhan, Ustaz H. Abdul Hafiz, Ustaz Mumtaz, Ustaz

Muliawan, & Ustazah Nurlaela, *Interview*, 2024). By prioritizing dialogue over punishment, the *pesantren* reinforces a culture of peaceful conflict resolution and sustained harmony (*Observations*, 2024).

3.1.5. Strengthening the culture of *pesantren* through collaborative learning

A bullying-free culture is further nurtured through collaborative learning initiatives. Tuan Guru emphasizes values such as togetherness, mutual respect, and empathy, reinforced through activities like communal cooperation (*gotong royong*), group discussions, and social programs. These initiatives foster solidarity and strengthen interpersonal relationships among students (*Observations, Documentation, Interviews*, 2024). By creating a positive atmosphere, the *pesantren* becomes a safe space for character development and the cultivation of noble ethics, demonstrating how transformational leadership can build a harmonious and value-based learning environment.

3.1.6. Parental and community engagement

Collaboration with parents and the community is integral to the *pesantren's* approach to character building and bullying prevention. Tuan Guru actively engages with these stakeholders through meetings and workshops, emphasizing the importance of consistent moral education at home. Parents are equipped with non-violent educational methods to align with the *pesantren's* teachings (*Interviews*, 2024). Observations show strong parental involvement in activities such as religious gatherings (*pengajian*) and parent-teacher meetings (*Observations*, 2024). By fostering this collaboration, the *pesantren* becomes more than just an educational institution—it serves as a center for moral and character development involving all stakeholders. This joint effort ensures the formation of a generation with exemplary character and strong moral values.

The findings align with the principles of transformational leadership theory, demonstrating its applicability in addressing bullying through culturally grounded, community-focused strategies. Further research may explore the scalability of these strategies to other educational contexts.

3.2. Discussion

The transformational leadership strategies employed by the *tuan guru*, the *pesantren* leader in Lombok, to prevent bullying at Pondok Pesantren Selaparang involve key initiatives: establishing an inclusive leadership vision, incorporating local wisdom through traditions and narratives, empowering students in bullying prevention, adopting restorative practices, strengthening *pesantren* culture through collaborative learning, and engaging parents and the community.

At the core of Pondok Pesantren Selaparang's approach is the Tuan Guru's inclusive leadership vision, focusing on cultivating character based on tradition and local wisdom. This inclusive leadership vision creates a safe environment prioritising bullying prevention (Shafaei et al., 2024; Srivastava et al., 2024). Integrating local wisdom enriches the educational experience and instils values such as tolerance, cooperation, honesty, and social awareness, essential for fostering harmonious relationships (Rasyid & Aisa, 2024; Subur et al., 2024). Through this approach, the *pesantren* nurtures students with strong character, grounded in local wisdom, and capable of creating a bullying-free environment.

A key element of the Tuan Guru's leadership is the consistent communication of this vision, fostering a respectful, conflict-free culture. Through sermons, leadership meetings, and daily interactions, he emphasises values like brotherhood and conflict prevention. This aligns with transformational leadership principles, which stress the importance of clear communication to motivate members and enhance performance (Nafal et al., 2024; Y. Suryadi et al., 2024). Transformational leaders like the Tuan Guru inspire shared purpose, intrinsic motivation, and commitment to the *pesantren's* values, ensuring these principles are relevant and tangible in daily life, thus strengthening community cohesion (Bashori et al., 2022).

Moreover, integrating local traditions into the educational framework builds character and fosters solidarity (Sakti et al., 2024). This approach encourages teamwork and collective responsibility,

reinforcing social cohesion and empowering individuals through culturally relevant practices (Ahmar & Azzajjad, 2025). Incorporating local traditions helps students connect their cultural identity to learning, making it more engaging (Richmond et al., 2017). Local values promote moral development, social responsibility, and community solidarity (Wringe, 1998), facilitating individual growth and strengthening social structures.

The Tuan Guru also incorporates local wisdom through inspirational stories, including stories about the founder of Pondok Pesantren Selaparang. These stories emphasise tolerance and the prohibition of bullying. These stories instil values of empathy, respect, and social responsibility, fostering a bullying-free environment (Awalunisah, 2019; Septika & Prasetya, 2020). Storytelling conveys moral messages, strengthens character, and encourages students to reject unethical behaviour (Nurhuda & Putri, 2023). By integrating these narratives into character education, the *pesantren* helps students reflect on moral values, cultivating a tolerant, empathetic generation (Layli et al., 2023).

Mentorship programmes, essential in educational settings like boarding schools, play a crucial role in fostering empathy, responsibility, and mutual respect. These programmes involve senior students guiding juniors, creating a supportive dormitory environment. Mentoring aids junior students' character development and strengthens social support within the *pesantren* community (Masyitoh, 2018). Effective programmes with clearly defined roles result in better character development and smoother transitions (Cody & Bingham, 2016). This approach also reduces bullying by creating an environment based on mutual respect and support.

Leadership grounded in local wisdom is vital for fostering empowerment, solidarity, and preventing interpersonal conflicts. The Tuan Guru uses local values, such as the 5S culture (*senyum* – smile, *salam* – greeting, *sapa* – addressing, *sopan* – politeness), to create a respectful and harmonious environment (Ardian et al., 2021; Setyaningsih & Anggraeni, 2023). As a multicultural leader, the Tuan Guru integrates spiritual, intellectual, and social dimensions to accommodate diversity, building an inclusive environment that respects differences (Futaqi & Mashuri, 2023). This approach promotes tolerance and harmony, positioning leadership based on local wisdom as a model for building inclusive, harmonious communities.

Additionally, mentorship programmes involving senior students help foster a bullying-free environment (Roach, 2014). By serving as role models, senior students instil values of tolerance, empathy, and social responsibility, aligned with Islamic principles and local wisdom. Incorporating a Service-Learning approach in mentorship enhances students' commitment to bullying prevention (Susanto, 2023). The Peer Mentorship model, where senior students teach social and emotional skills to juniors, further reinforces solidarity and harmony within the *pesantren* community (Espelage & Swearer, 2023; Grenz, 2014). These programmes not only prevent bullying but also cultivate students with noble character and care for others.

The restorative approach to bullying views conflict as an opportunity for social and moral learning. It emphasises relational accountability, encouraging students to understand the impact of their actions and take steps to make amends, fostering moral values (Recchia et al., 2024). Techniques like restorative circles create spaces for social engagement, build harmonious communities, and prevent future incidents (Ward-Seidel et al., 2022). By focusing on relationship restoration and peaceful conflict resolution, this approach fosters an inclusive and just school environment.

Research shows that restorative practices improve school climate, strengthen interpersonal connections, and reduce bullying, including cyberbullying (Acosta et al., 2019). Replacing exclusionary punishments, such as suspensions, with restorative practices offers a more sustainable solution (Ward-Seidel et al., 2022). Despite institutional challenges, frameworks like HEART (Harmony, Empathy, Awareness, Respect, Thinking of others) help simplify adoption (Kehoe, 2017). Continuous support and proper training enable restorative practices to create an equitable, inclusive environment grounded in community bonds (Normore & Jarrett, 2021; Smith, 2015). Therefore, restorative practices provide a sustainable approach to reducing bullying and fostering a fair, inclusive educational environment.

The leadership model employed by the Tuan Guru represents a hybrid approach, combining transformational leadership with elements of local wisdom. This hybrid leadership model is particularly relevant in educational settings, where cultural context plays a critical role in shaping effective leadership practices. By blending contemporary leadership theories with local cultural practices, this model provides a framework for addressing the complexities of leadership in diverse environments. The integration of local wisdom enhances the applicability of transformational leadership, making it more resonant and effective in multicultural communities.

In practical terms, this approach suggests the need for leadership training in *pesantren* that incorporates both transformational leadership principles and local wisdom. Such training can equip future *pesantren* leaders with the tools to effectively address bullying and foster a supportive, harmonious environment. By focusing on the integration of cultural values, restorative practices, and mentorship, this training can help leaders create a positive school culture where students feel respected and supported. Furthermore, this model can be adapted for use in other educational settings, particularly those with a strong cultural foundation.

One limitation of this study is its reliance on a single *pesantren*, which limits the ability to generalise the findings to other contexts. The effectiveness of the leadership model discussed may vary significantly across different *pesantren* or educational settings, particularly those in urban areas or with more diverse populations. Additionally, the specific cultural and religious context of Pondok Pesantren Selaparang may influence the impact of the leadership strategies employed. Future research should explore how these strategies work in different settings and cultures to determine their broader applicability. Moreover, the study does not address the long-term effects of these leadership strategies, leaving room for further exploration of their sustained impact on bullying prevention and character development.

4. CONCLUSION

This study underscores the significance of the Tuan Guru's transformational leadership strategy, supported by local wisdom, in preventing bullying at Pondok Pesantren Selaparang. The approach is grounded in several interconnected initiatives, including the establishment of an inclusive leadership vision, the integration of local wisdom through traditions and narratives, the empowerment of students in bullying prevention, the adoption of restorative practices, the promotion of collaborative learning, and the active engagement of both parents and the community. Together, these strategies create a holistic and comprehensive framework for fostering a bullying-free environment.

For policymakers and educational administrators, this study highlights the importance of embedding local cultural values and community involvement within leadership strategies. The development of leadership training programmes that empower students and integrate restorative practices offers a promising avenue for tackling bullying. Furthermore, educational institutions are encouraged to strengthen partnerships with parents and the wider community, ensuring a unified approach to character education and moral development.

Future research should focus on exploring the scalability and adaptability of these strategies in various educational contexts, particularly in multicultural and urban environments. Longitudinal studies would be valuable to assess the long-term impact of these leadership practices on bullying prevention and character development. This would provide crucial insights for refining and extending these strategies across different educational systems and settings globally.

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encouragement throughout the writing process. Finally, we acknowledge the limitations of this study and encourage further research into leadership frameworks rooted in cultural contexts, with the aspiration that such endeavours will contribute to the creation of more equitable, violence-free educational environments.

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