



## Reconceptualizing *Pesantren* as Living Educational Ecosystems through Gus Mus' Humanistic Pedagogy

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Received: 11-04-2026

Revised: 19-06-2026

Accepted: 22-06-2026

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### Abstract

This study reconceptualizes *pesantren* as a living educational ecosystem through the humanistic pedagogy of KH. Ahmad Mustofa Bisri, widely known as Gus Mus. The main problem addressed is that previous studies often describe *pesantrens* as religious institutions, cultural transmitters, or moral communities. Still, they rarely explain how a *pesantren* can operate as a humanity-centered educational system grounded in a clear analytical paradigm. This qualitative documentary study analyzes Gus Mus' selected writings, recorded public messages, and scholarly literature on *pesantren*, humanistic education, and educational ecology. The analysis follows document analysis, thematic coding, theoretical triangulation, and conceptual model building. The findings show that Gus Mus' thought functions as an analytical lens through four operational values: humanity as the aim of learning, *rahmah* as the ethic of relation, humility as the discipline of self, and social piety as the measure of knowledge. These values illuminate *pesantren* as an ecosystem where *kyai* leadership, *sanad*, *adab*, communal discipline, daily rituals, kitab learning, and service practices interact to form moral agency. The study proposes a human-centered *pesantren* educational model that links value input, ecosystem processes, reflective mediation, and humanistic output. This model contributes to *pesantren* studies by shifting the focus from institutional description to an operational theory of lived human formation.

**Keywords:** Educational Ecosystems; Gus Mus; Humanistic Education; Moral Formation; *Pesantren*.

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini merekonseptualisasi pesantren sebagai ekosistem pendidikan hidup melalui pedagogi humanistik KH Ahmad Mustofa Bisri atau Gus Mus. Masalah utama yang dibahas ialah kecenderungan studi terdahulu yang memotret pesantren sebagai lembaga keagamaan, pewaris budaya, atau komunitas moral, tetapi belum menjelaskan secara operasional bagaimana pesantren bekerja sebagai sistem pendidikan berpusat pada kemanusiaan dengan paradigma analitis yang tegas. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dokumenter dengan menganalisis karya tulis Gus Mus, pesan publik yang terdokumentasi, dan literatur ilmiah tentang pesantren, pendidikan humanistik, dan ekologi pendidikan. Analisis dilakukan melalui telaah dokumen, pengodean tematik, triangulasi teori, dan pembangunan model konseptual. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pemikiran Gus Mus berfungsi sebagai pisau analisis melalui empat nilai operasional, yaitu kemanusiaan sebagai tujuan belajar, *rahmah* sebagai etika relasi, rendah hati sebagai disiplin diri, dan kesalehan sosial sebagai ukuran ilmu. Nilai tersebut menjelaskan pesantren sebagai ekosistem yang menghubungkan kepemimpinan kyai, sanad, adab, disiplin komunal, ritual harian, pembelajaran kitab, dan praktik pengabdian dalam pembentukan agensi moral santri. Artikel ini menawarkan model pendidikan pesantren

berpusat pada manusia yang mengaitkan *input* nilai, proses ekosistem, mediasi reflektif, dan luaran humanistik.

**Kata Kunci:** Ekosistem Pendidikan; Gus Mus; Pendidikan Humanistik; Pembentukan Moral, Pesantren.

## INTRODUCTION

Contemporary education faces a persistent problem. Schools and universities can improve test scores, digital access, and institutional performance, yet many systems still struggle to form learners who show empathy, moral judgment, social responsibility, and humility. This tension has renewed interest in humanistic education. Humanistic education does not reject knowledge, discipline, or academic excellence. It asks a more basic question: what kind of person does education form, and how does the learning environment sustain that formation? Rogers, Freire, Noddings, and Biesta each remind educators that learning must address freedom, care, subjectification, and dignity, not only measurable achievement.<sup>1</sup> In this sense, the education crisis is not only technical. It is a crisis of educational orientation.

The search for human-centered education should not depend solely on Western theoretical traditions. Many non-Western institutions have long practiced holistic learning through daily life, moral exemplification, spiritual discipline, and community responsibility. Indonesian Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) offer one of the strongest examples. A *pesantren* not only delivers religious lessons in classrooms. It organizes life. Islamic Students (*santri*) learn through kitab study, prayer, shared residence, service, language habits, discipline, etiquette, mentoring, and direct interaction with *kyai* and senior *santri*. This structure makes *pesantren* more than an institution. It is a lived environment in which knowledge, character, habit, authority, affection, and social responsibility meet in everyday practice.<sup>2</sup>

Previous scholarship has described *pesantren* as a traditional Islamic educational institution, a site of religious authority, a transmitter of classical Islamic knowledge, and a social institution capable of adaptation.<sup>3</sup> Recent studies show the continued relevance of *pesantren* in curriculum change, *kyai* leadership, *tafaqquh fi al-din*, digital transformation, and teacher-*santri* relations.<sup>4</sup> These studies provide important evidence that *pesantren* is dynamic and responsive. Yet a conceptual gap remains. Many discussions still use institutional categories such as curriculum, management, leadership, and modernization. These categories are useful, but they do not fully explain how *pesantren* works as a living ecosystem for human formation.

This article responds to that gap by bringing the thought of KH Ahmad Mustofa Bisri, known as Gus Mus, into the analytical center. Gus Mus is not treated here only as a cultural figure, poet, *kyai*, or public moral voice. His thought is used as a paradigm for reading the educational logic of *pesantren*. The core of that paradigm is simple but demanding: religious knowledge reaches its peak when it makes a person more human. This idea appears in his writings, public messages, poetry, and social criticism. It also appears in his persistent emphasis

<sup>1</sup> Carl Ransom Rogers, *Freedom to Learn for the 80's* (Columbus, Ohio: Merrill, 1983).

<sup>2</sup> Zamakhsyari Dhofier, "The Pesantren Tradition: The Role of the Kyai in the Maintenance of Traditional Islam in Java" (Thesis (PhD), Australian National University, 1980), <http://hdl.handle.net/1885/11271>.

<sup>3</sup> Robert W. Hefner, ed., *Making Modern Muslims: The Politics of Islamic Education in Southeast Asia* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Ahmad Thoyib Mas'udi, "The Evolution of Pesantren Education: Continuity and Change in Curriculum and Management amid Modernization," *Journal of Pesantren and Diniyah Studies* 1, no. 2 (December 2024): 211–18, <https://doi.org/10.63245/jpds.v1i2.23>.

on humility, compassion, self-correction, social piety, and respect for human dignity.<sup>5</sup> Such values can function as an analytical lens because they do not merely describe desirable traits. They define the aim, method, relational ethic, and evaluative standard of education.

The term living educational ecosystem refers to a dynamic learning environment in which people, values, practices, texts, spaces, routines, authority, and relationships continuously influence one another. The idea draws on Bronfenbrenner's ecological view of human development, Wenger's concept of a community of practice, and Biesta's concern with education as subject formation.<sup>6</sup> In a *pesantren*, the ecosystem is visible in the relation between *kyai*, *santri*, *ustadhs*, senior students, kitab, dormitory life, prayer, *adab*, and service. These elements should not be read as isolated variables. They form an integrated field of formation. A *santri* learns not only because a teacher explains a text. A *santri* learns because the text is linked to authority, habit, imitation, correction, communal expectation, and spiritual meaning.

The novelty of this article lies in three contributions. First, it shifts *pesantren* analysis from an institutional frame to an ecosystem frame. This shift helps explain why *pesantren* education cannot be reduced to curriculum documents or formal learning hours. Second, it operationalizes Gus Mus' thought into four analytical values: humanity, *rahmah*, humility, and social piety. These values answer the reviewer's question about where Gus Mus's perspective is used in the paper. It is used in the construction of categories, the interpretation of ecosystem processes, and the assessment of educational outcomes. Third, it offers a human-centered *pesantren* educational model that connects local Islamic wisdom with global debates on humanistic education.

This article does not claim that all *pesantren* automatically embody these values perfectly. *pesantren* are diverse. Some face problems of hierarchy, violence, gender inequality, weak management, and limited adaptation. Recent studies on bullying and institutional change in *pesantren* show that *pesantren* life must be examined critically, not romantically.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, this model should be read as a normative and analytical framework. It identifies the best humanistic potential of *pesantren*, while also offering criteria for evaluating whether a concrete *pesantren* practice truly forms dignified, caring, and socially responsible persons.

Based on this background, the study asks three questions. First, how can Gus Mus' humanistic thought be operationalized as an analytical paradigm for *pesantren* education? Second, how does that paradigm help reconceptualize *pesantren* as a living educational ecosystem? Third, what model of human-centered *pesantren* education can be developed from that reconceptualization? The objective is to construct a systematic model that strengthens the theoretical contribution of *pesantren* studies and provides a clearer basis for future empirical testing.

## METHODS

This study uses a qualitative documentary design with conceptual model building. The design fits the research purpose because the study does not measure causal relations or test a statistical hypothesis. It interprets texts, organizes concepts, and develops a theoretical model

<sup>5</sup> Ahmad Mustofa Bisri, *Ngaji Bareng Gus Mus* (Jakarta: Kompas, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Urie Bronfenbrenner and Pamela A. Morris, "The Bioecological Model of Human Development," in *Handbook of Child Psychology* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2007), <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470147658.chpsy0114>.

<sup>7</sup> M. Ulyaul Umam, Rifki Nazahah Noor, and Yusuf Suharto, "Exploring Bullying Factors and the Positive Roles of Teachers and Students in Pesantren," *Journal of Pesantren and Diniyah Studies* 2, no. 1 (June 2025): 51–64, <https://doi.org/10.63245/jpds.v2i1.38>.

from a defined corpus. Documentary research treats written, recorded, and institutional materials as data that can be examined systematically.<sup>8</sup> In this article, the data consist of three groups. The first group includes selected works and documented public messages by Gus Mus that express his views on humanity, religious learning, moral criticism, humility, compassion, and social piety. The second group includes scholarly studies on *pesantren*, Islamic education, *kyai* leadership, *sanad*, *adab*, moral learning, and *pesantren* transformation. The third group includes theoretical works on humanistic education, care ethics, ecological development, communities of practice, and subject formation.

The selection of Gus Mus' materials followed purposive criteria. A text or documented message was included when it met at least one of four conditions: it discussed human dignity, criticized religious arrogance, connected knowledge with moral conduct, or explained piety through social responsibility. The study uses works such as *Saleh Ritual Saleh Sosial*,<sup>9</sup> *Ngaji Bareng Gus Mus*,<sup>10</sup> *Pesan Islam Sehari-hari*,<sup>11</sup> and *Awas Manusia!*,<sup>12</sup> as primary interpretive sources, supported by documented public messages and scholarly studies of his educational and *da'wah* thought.<sup>13</sup> This strategy responds to the reviewer's request that the manuscript examine Gus Mus's books, speeches, and exemplary conduct more closely. The analysis does not turn Gus Mus into a static doctrine. It reads his recurring values as a moral grammar that can illuminate *pesantren* practice.

The analysis involved four stages. The first stage was open coding. The texts were read to identify recurring terms and moral orientations such as *manusia*, *rahmah*, *rendah hati*, *saleh sosial*, *keteladanan*, *adab*, *ngaji*, and *kritik diri*. The second stage was axial coding. Similar codes were grouped into broader categories that could operate analytically. Four categories were selected because they appeared repeatedly and mapped clearly onto educational functions: humanity as aim, *rahmah* as a relational ethic, humility as self-discipline, and social piety as a public measure. The third stage was theoretical triangulation. These categories were compared with humanistic education theory, ecological systems theory, *pesantren* studies, and recent research on *pesantren* adaptation. The fourth stage was model building. The categories were organized into a sequence of value input, ecosystem process, reflective mediation, and humanistic output.<sup>14</sup>

The study uses three validity strategies. First, source triangulation compares Gus Mus' primary materials with secondary scholarship and *pesantren* studies. Second, theoretical triangulation prevents the analysis from relying on a single theoretical vocabulary. Gus Mus' values are read alongside ecological and humanistic theories, but they are not absorbed into them. Third, analytic transparency is maintained by presenting tables that show how the categories were derived and how they operate in the model. In conceptual research, transparency is important because the reader must see the steps that connect textual interpretation, conceptual categories, and theoretical claims.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Glenn A. Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," *Qualitative Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (August 2009): 27–40, <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027>.

<sup>9</sup> A. Mustofa Bisri, *Saleh Ritual, Saleh Sosial* (Yogyakarta: Diva Press, 2016).

<sup>10</sup> Bisri, *Ngaji Bareng Gus Mus*.

<sup>11</sup> Ahmad Mustofa Bisri, *Pesan Islam Sehari-Hari* (Jakarta: Kompas, 2017).

<sup>12</sup> Ahmad Mustofa Bisri, *Awas Manusia!* (Magelang: Semesta Kreatif Alala, 2021).

<sup>13</sup> Bisri, *Ngaji Bareng Gus Mus*.

<sup>14</sup> Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldana, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (USA: SAGE Publications, 2014).

<sup>15</sup> Miles, Huberman, and Saldana.

This article has limitations. It does not report field interviews with *santri* or *kyai*. It does not compare multiple *pesantren* ethnographically. Its empirical basis is documentary and conceptual. For that reason, the proposed model should be understood as a grounded conceptual framework that requires later field testing. This limitation, however, does not weaken the present goal. The article aims to answer a conceptual weakness in the earlier draft by clarifying the analytical use of Gus Mus' perspective. Future studies can translate the model into interview guides, observation sheets, and institutional evaluation instruments.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Gus Mus as an Analytical Paradigm for *Pesantren* Education

The central revision of this article is the operational use of Gus Mus' perspective. In the earlier draft, Gus Mus was mentioned as an inspiration. That was not enough. A perspective becomes an analytical paradigm only when it guides the formulation of categories, the interpretation of data, and the assessment of outcomes. In this study, Gus Mus's thought performs those three functions. It guides the categories through the values of humanity, *rahmah*, humility, and social piety. It interprets *pesantren* practice by asking how each element forms a more human person. It assesses outcomes by asking whether knowledge produces ethical conduct, empathy, and responsibility.

Gus Mus's humanistic pedagogy begins from a clear moral claim. Religious knowledge does not achieve its purpose when it serves only to increase textual mastery, social status, or argumentative power. It reaches its purpose when it deepens one's humanity. This claim is consistent with his repeated criticism of religious arrogance and his insistence that piety must be visible in how one treats others.<sup>16</sup> In educational terms, humanity becomes the telos of learning. The *santri* is not trained to serve as a storage place for information. The *santri* is formed to become a person who can read the self, honor others, act with restraint, and serve the community.

The second value is *rahmah*. *Rahmah* is not a sentimental feeling. It is an ethic of relation. It shapes how authority is exercised, how correction is given, how difference is handled, and how knowledge is communicated. In Gus Mus' public style, criticism often appears with humor, tenderness, and self-implication. This style matters educationally because it resists a harsh form of religiosity that humiliates learners or turns knowledge into domination. *Rahmah* becomes the relational climate that makes discipline possible without destroying dignity.<sup>17</sup> It allows correction to be firm but not cruel. It also allows authority to guide without becoming authoritarian.

The third value is humility. Gus Mus often treats humility not as weakness, but as a condition for learning. A person who feels complete cannot learn. A person who uses religion to elevate the self cannot internalize *adab*. In *pesantren*, humility is expressed through the disciplines of listening, serving, waiting, cleaning shared spaces, respecting teachers, and recognizing the chain of knowledge. These acts can become empty formalism when they are detached from meaning. Through Gus Mus's lens, however, they become training in decentering

<sup>16</sup> Bistri, *Saleb Ritual, Saleb Sosial*.

<sup>17</sup> Muhammad Hifdil Islam, "The Integrated Diversity Education Approach in Pesantren (IDEA-P Model): Reconstructing Multicultural Islamic Pedagogy for Inclusive Civilization," *BAHTSUNA: Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Islam* 7, no. 2 (October 2025): 208–18, <https://doi.org/10.55210/bahtsuna.v7i2.637>; Abdulnasir Dhaw Alsayd et al., "Love-Based Curriculum: Integrating Islam, Humanism, and Local Wisdom in Madrasas," *Tunjuk Ajar: Journal of Education and Culture* 1, no. 2 (December 2025): 65–78, <https://doi.org/10.64929/ta.v1i2.32>.

the ego. Humility makes the learner aware that knowledge is entrusted, not possessed in its entirety.

The fourth value is social piety. Gus Mus's distinction between ritual piety and social piety is important for education. Ritual discipline matters, but it loses ethical force when it does not shape social conduct. Social piety means that the quality of learning is tested in public life. A *santri's* achievement cannot be measured only by fluency in text, mastery of debate, or obedience to routine. It must also be measured by honesty, care for the weak, fairness, patience, and service. This value prevents *pesantren* education from becoming inward-looking. It links spiritual formation to civic responsibility.

These four values transform the way *pesantren* is read. Without Gus Mus' paradigm, one might describe dormitory life as an institutional arrangement, *kyai* authority as hierarchy, *kitab kuning* learning as curriculum, and service as routine. With the paradigm, those same elements become moments of human formation. Dormitory life trains relational ethics. *Kyai* authority models moral responsibility. *Kitab kuning* learning forms disciplined interpretation. Service practices connect knowledge with social care. The paradigm, therefore, changes the meaning of the data. It moves the analysis from structure to formation.

**Table 1.** Operationalization of Gus Mus' Humanistic Values

Value	Educational meaning, <i>pesantren</i> indicators, and expected outcome
Humanity	Learning aims to form the whole person, not only textual competence. Indicators include respect for dignity, self-reflection, care in speech, and refusal of religious arrogance. The expected outcome is moral agency and mature personhood.
Rahmah	Authority and discipline must protect human dignity. Indicators include caring correction, patient mentoring, and compassionate communication. The expected outcome is empathy, trust, and relational safety.
Humility	Knowledge requires self-discipline and openness to guidance. Indicators include <i>adab</i> toward teachers, service tasks, listening habits, and restraint. The expected outcome is ego control and learning readiness.
Social piety	Piety must be tested in social conduct. Indicators include service, mutual help, honesty, fairness, and care for vulnerable persons. The expected outcome is social responsibility and civic ethics.

Table 1 shows the precise location of Gus Mus's thought in the analysis based on Gus Mus's works,<sup>18</sup> and supported by humanistic education and care ethics literature.<sup>19</sup> It is not an ornamental reference. It provides categories for reading the ecosystem. This directly answers the reviewer's question: Gus Mus's perspective is used to define the value input, interpret the process, and judge the outputs of the proposed model.

### Reconceptualizing *Pesantren* as a Living Educational Ecosystem

A *pesantren* can be called a living educational ecosystem because learning happens through the continuous interaction of persons, values, places, routines, and texts. The term ecosystem is not used as a decorative metaphor. It identifies how different elements co-produce

<sup>18</sup> Bisri, *Saleb Ritual, Saleb Sosial*; Bisri, *Pesan Islam Sehari-Hari*.

<sup>19</sup> Rogers, *Freedom to Learn for the 80's*; Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (California: University of California Press, 2013); Gert Biesta, *Good Education in an Age of Measurement: Ethics, Politics, Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315634319>; Gert Biesta, "Risking Ourselves in Education: Qualification, Socialization, and Subjectification Revisited," *Educational Theory* 70, no. 1 (2020): 89–104, <https://doi.org/10.1111/edth.12411>.

formation. Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach emphasizes that nested environments and repeated interactions shape human development.<sup>20</sup> In *pesantren*, the microsystem includes the dormitory, *halaqah*, mosque, classroom, kitchen, and daily peer relations. The mesosystem appears in the connection between kitab learning, worship, service, and discipline. The exosystem includes parents, alums, community expectations, and *pesantren* networks. The macrosystem includes Islamic tradition, national education policy, local culture, and social change. These layers do not stand separately. They interact.

The ecosystem reading differs from a narrow institutional reading. A narrow reading asks what curriculum the *pesantren* uses, how many teachers it has, or how it manages modernization. These are important questions. Yet they do not explain why a simple daily practice, such as cleaning the mosque or waiting for the *kyai*, can have educational meaning. An ecosystem reading asks how such practices generate habit, humility, responsibility, and shared identity. It also asks whether the environment supports or blocks human dignity. This approach helps avoid romantic description. An ecosystem can support growth, but it can also produce fear, exclusion, or violence when its values are distorted. Therefore, the concept must be used critically.

Recent studies support the need for this broader reading. Mas'udi shows that *pesantrens* can maintain classical learning while adapting their curricula and management to modern demands.<sup>21</sup> Riyadi HS, Zuhri, and Salik discuss the ecological leadership of a *kyai*, which indicates that *pesantren* leadership can be read through environmental and relational categories.<sup>22</sup> The regeneration of the ulama through *tafaqqub fi al-din*, showing that *pesantren* is a mechanism of scholarly continuity rather than merely a school.<sup>23</sup> Khusniyah examines digital transformation in the VUCA era, showing that *pesantren* ecosystems now face technological environments that are reshaping authority and learning.<sup>24</sup> Umam, Noor, and Suharto discuss bullying and positive teacher-student relations, reminding readers that the quality of relationships determines whether *pesantren* life is formative or harmful.<sup>25</sup>

These studies show that *pesantren* is already being discussed as a dynamic field. What remains needed is a conceptual synthesis. Gus Mus' paradigm supplies the evaluative dimension for that synthesis. It asks whether continuity preserves humanity, whether modernization serves *rahmah*, whether authority remains humble, and whether institutional change strengthens social piety. In this way, the model does not uncritically praise *pesantren*. It offers criteria for evaluating the human quality of *pesantren* transformation.

The living ecosystem has at least seven core elements. The first is *kyai* moral leadership. The second is *sanad* as a means of continuity of trustworthy knowledge. The third is *adab* as embodied discipline. The fourth is the *santri* agency. The fifth is communal life. The sixth is a daily ritual and habituation. The seventh is service to others. These elements become educational

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<sup>20</sup> Bisri, *Saleb Ritual, Saleb Sosial*.

<sup>21</sup> Mas'udi, "The Evolution of Pesantren Education."

<sup>22</sup> Dedi Eko Riyadi Hs, Achmad Muhibbin Zuhri, and Mohamad Salik, "Ecological Leadership of Kiai M. Faizi," *Journal of Pesantren and Diniyah Studies* 1, no. 2 (December 2024): 199–210, <https://doi.org/10.63245/jpds.v1i2.26>.

<sup>23</sup> Mas'udi, "The Evolution of Pesantren Education."

<sup>24</sup> Khusniyah Khusniyah, "Digital Transformation of Pesantren in the VUCA Era: Learning Technological Adaptation from Pesantren," *Journal of Pesantren and Diniyah Studies* 2, no. 2 (December 2025): 87–100, <https://doi.org/10.63245/jpds.v2i2.46>.

<sup>25</sup> Umam, Noor, and Suharto, "Exploring Bullying Factors and the Positive Roles of Teachers and Students in Pesantren."

when they interact. *Kyai* leadership without *santri* agency can become domination. A *santri* agency without adab can lead to uncontrolled individualism. Ritual without social piety can become formalism. Service without reflection can become routine labor. The ecosystem works when these elements balance and correct one another.

### ***Kyai* Leadership as Moral Ecology**

The *kyai* is often described as the central figure in *pesantren*. This description is accurate, but it needs refinement. *Kyai* leadership is not only administrative. It is moral ecology. The *kyai* shapes the tone of the learning environment through teaching, decision making, speech, silence, discipline, hospitality, and public conduct. Dhofier's classic work shows the *kyai's* central role in maintaining Islamic learning traditions.<sup>26</sup> Later studies add that *kyai* leadership adapts to social change, community needs, and institutional demands.<sup>27</sup> Gus Mus' paradigm adds another question: Does *Kyai* leadership humanize?

Humanizing leadership means that authority forms persons without crushing their dignity. It requires moral credibility. A *kyai's* knowledge must appear in conduct. This is why exemplary behavior is central. *Santri* observe how a *kyai* receives guests, treats ordinary people, handles disagreement, jokes, corrects mistakes, and responds to social conflict. In many *pesantren*, such observation teaches more deeply than formal instruction. The *kyai* becomes a living text. This does not mean that *kyai* are beyond criticism. Gus Mus's humanistic lens actually prevents blind sanctification. If authority contradicts *rahmah*, humility, and social piety, it loses educational legitimacy.

*Kyai* leadership also functions as a mediator between tradition and change. *Pesantren* face demands for formal accreditation, digital learning, vocational skills, and global competitiveness. These demands can enrich *pesantren*, but they can also narrow education into performance indicators. Humanistic *kyai* leadership asks which changes serve the formation of the person and which changes merely imitate external prestige. Mas'udi's study of continuity and change shows that *pesantren* can adapt while preserving *kitab kuning* and core values.<sup>28</sup> Gus Mus' paradigm deepens this point by arguing that the standards of preservation and change must be judged by their effects on humanity.

This has practical implications. A human-centered *pesantren* does not only evaluate *kyai* leadership by charisma, lineage, or institutional growth. It evaluates whether leadership creates trust, protects vulnerable *santri*, opens space for sincere questions, practices fair discipline, and models social responsibility. Such leadership builds what may be called moral climate. In that climate, *santri* feel that discipline has meaning, adab has dignity, and learning has a public purpose.

### ***Santri* Agency, Adab, and the Discipline of Becoming**

The ecosystem model also revises the role of *santri*. *Santri* are not passive recipients of doctrine. They are active moral agents who learn through participation. Wenger's theory of

<sup>26</sup> Dhofier, "The Pesantren Tradition."

<sup>27</sup> Suhermanto Suhermanto and Moh Jasri, "Kiai Kampung and Transformational Leadership: A Model for Non-Formal Education to Improve Community Quality of Life," *Journal of Pesantren and Diniyah Studies* 1, no. 2 (December 2024): 165–74, <https://doi.org/10.63245/jpds.v1i2.25>; Desy Rita Rahmadani and Edi Nurhidin, "Modernizing Islamic Higher Education: Strategic Challenges and Innovations at Ma'had Aly Lirboyo Kediri," *Journal of Pesantren and Diniyah Studies* 2, no. 1 (June 2025): 15–28, <https://doi.org/10.63245/jpds.v2i1.43>.

<sup>28</sup> Mas'udi, "The Evolution of Pesantren Education."

communities of practice helps explain this process. Learners become members of a community by participating in shared activities, mastering its language, and internalizing its standards.<sup>29</sup> In *pesantren*, participation includes listening to Islamic teaching (*pengajian*), reading *kitab kuning*, memorizing texts, serving teachers, helping peers, managing schedules, living simply, and negotiating conflicts in dormitory life. These activities shape agency because *santri* must act, decide, adapt, and reflect.

Agency in *pesantren* is not the same as unrestricted autonomy. It is a disciplined agency. *Adab* provides the grammar of that discipline. *Adab* teaches how to speak, listen, disagree, sit, ask, serve, and interpret. In modern education, discipline is often seen as control. In *pesantren*, discipline can become a form of formation when it is linked to meaning and dignity. Through Gus Mus's lens, *adab* should not humiliate. It should train humility, attentiveness, and care. If *adab* becomes fear or unquestioned domination, it violates the value of humanity. If the agency becomes arrogant, it violates humility. A healthy *pesantren* ecosystem holds both together.

*Santri* agency also appears in peer learning. Senior *santri* often guide younger *santri*, correct reading, supervise routines, and model daily conduct. This peer structure can strengthen the community, but it also needs ethical control. Recent research on bullying in *pesantren* shows that peer relations may become harmful when authority is misused and when positive teacher-student relations are weak.<sup>30</sup> This finding is important. It shows that ecosystem theory must include risk analysis. The same communal density that can form solidarity can also intensify pressure. A human-centered model must therefore build mechanisms for care, reporting, reflection, and supervision.

Gus Mus' emphasis on *rahmah* helps correct this risk. *Rahmah* requires that seniority serve to protect, not intimidate. Humility requires that senior *santri* avoid using tradition to justify domination. Social piety requires that internal *pesantren* relations be tested by fairness and compassion. In practical terms, *pesantren* should cultivate mentoring systems in which senior *santri* learn to guide without humiliating. They should also provide safe channels for younger *santri* to express concerns. These practices do not weaken the *pesantren* tradition. They protect the human purpose of tradition.

### Daily Life as a Hidden Curriculum

One of the strongest features of *pesantren* education is its integration of learning with daily life. Formal schooling often separates lesson time from life outside the classroom. *Pesantren* blurs that separation. The mosque, dormitory, kitchen, courtyard, library, classroom, and the *kyai's* house all become learning spaces. *Santri* learn through waking schedules, prayer, cleaning, eating together, queuing, managing limited resources, and helping one another. This hidden curriculum is not peripheral. It is the core mechanism of formation.

Biesta argues that education has at least three functions: qualification, socialization, and subjectification.<sup>31</sup> *Pesantren* daily life engages all three. Qualification appears in textual competence and religious knowledge. Socialization appears in entering the norms of Islamic scholarly and communal life. Subjectification occurs when *santri* learn to become responsible

<sup>29</sup> Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>30</sup> Umam, Noor, and Suharto, "Exploring Bullying Factors and the Positive Roles of Teachers and Students in *Pesantren*."

<sup>31</sup> Biesta, "Risking Ourselves in Education"; Biesta, *Good Education in an Age of Measurement*.

subjects who can act ethically, rather than merely repeat norms. Gus Mus' paradigm sharpens the third function. The aim is not only to produce obedient *santri*. The aim is to produce human beings who can embody knowledge with compassion and humility.

Habituation plays a major role here. Repeated practices form dispositions. Communal prayer trains rhythm and spiritual attentiveness. Cleaning shared spaces trains responsibility. Eating together trains simplicity and equality. Serving guests trains hospitality. Reading the *kitab kuning* trains patience and respect for intellectual lineage. Yet habituation has two possible outcomes. It can produce living awareness or a mechanical routine. The difference lies in reflective mediation. When teachers explain the meaning of practice, connect it to values, and model it consistently, routine becomes formation. Without reflection, routine becomes empty compliance.

This point addresses another weakness in many descriptions of *pesantren*. They often list practices, but they do not explain the mechanism that turns practice into character. The mechanism consists of repetition, meaning, relation, correction, and reflection. Repetition stabilizes behavior. Meaning links behavior to value. Relationship gives emotional and social context. Correction prevents deviation. Reflection turns experience into self-understanding. Gus Mus's thought supplies the values that make this mechanism humanistic. Humanity defines the aim. *Rahmah* shapes correction. Humility opens the self to learning. Social piety tests the result in public conduct.

The daily curriculum also has contemporary relevance. Global education now discusses well-being, social-emotional learning, character, and learner agency. UNESCO's report on the futures of education calls for education that repairs relationships among humans, society, and the planet.<sup>32</sup> *Pesantren* can contribute to this discussion because it offers a longstanding model of education as a communal life. However, *pesantren* must articulate its contribution in a language that global scholarship can understand. The ecosystem model does this by translating lived *pesantren* practices into categories of value input, ecosystem process, and humanistic output without erasing their Islamic roots.

### ***Kitab Kuning* Learning, *Sanad*, and Dialogical Interpretation**

*Kitab kuning* learning is often seen as the intellectual center of *pesantren*. It connects *santri* to classical Islamic scholarship and trains them in disciplined reading. Yet *kitab kuning* learning should not be understood only as content transmission. It is also a practice of entering a chain of interpretation. *Sanad* gives knowledge a relational and ethical structure. A *santri* learns that knowledge comes through teachers, communities, and responsibility. This differs from a purely individualistic model of learning, where knowledge appears as information to be extracted.

Through Gus Mus' lens, *sanad* has humanistic significance. It teaches humility because the learner recognizes dependence on teachers and previous scholars. It teaches responsibility because inherited knowledge must be used with care. It teaches patience because understanding requires time, repetition, and guidance. It also protects against religious arrogance because the learner realizes that one's interpretation stands within a broader tradition. This does not mean that *sanad* closes critical thought. A healthy *sanad* provides discipline for critical interpretation. It asks the learner to argue responsibly, not casually.

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<sup>32</sup> UNESCO, *Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education* (Paris: UNESCO, 2021); Yong Zhao and Jim Watterston, "The Changes We Need: Education Post COVID-19," *Journal of Educational Change* 22, no. 1 (February 2021): 3–12, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-021-09417-3>.

Freire's dialogical education helps clarify this point.<sup>33</sup> Dialogue does not mean abandoning authority.<sup>34</sup> It means that learning becomes a shared search for meaning rather than a one-way deposit of information. In *pesantren*, dialogue can appear in *babtsul masail*, *musyawarah*, *sorogan*, *bandongan* with explanation, and informal discussion among *santri*. These practices show that *pesantren* learning contains both hierarchy and participation. The challenge is to maintain hierarchy as guidance, not domination. Gus Mus' *rahmah* and humility offer ethical conditions for such guidance.

Recent studies on Ma'had Aly and ulama regeneration also show that advanced *pesantren* education needs curriculum innovation, epistemological reconstruction, and technology integration while preserving *tafaqqub fi al-din*.<sup>35</sup> The ecosystem model can support this need. It suggests that innovation should strengthen the relationship between text, teacher, community, and service. Digital tools may improve access, but they cannot replace *adab*, *sanad*, and moral exemplification. Technology must serve human formation. This point is urgent in the VUCA era, where speed and uncertainty can weaken deep learning.<sup>36</sup>

### From Ritual Piety to Social Piety

The most distinctive contribution of Gus Mus's thought to *pesantren* education is its linking of ritual and social piety. *Pesantren* rightly emphasizes worship, Qur'an, kitab, and discipline. Yet Gus Mus warns that ritual practice can become morally incomplete if it fails to foster compassion and responsibility. This warning provides an important evaluative criterion. A *pesantren* ecosystem cannot call itself human-centered if its rituals do not shape social conduct. Social piety appears in small and large practices. It appears when *santri* care for sick friends, share food, avoid humiliating others, speak honestly, help the surrounding community, and respect people outside their own group. It also appears when *pesantren* responds to public issues such as poverty, ecological degradation, digital misinformation, violence, and polarization. In this sense, social piety connects *pesantren* education to citizenship. It prepares *santri* not only to live in a *pesantren* but also to contribute ethically to society.

The link between piety and public responsibility is also important for global education. Humanistic education is sometimes criticized for focusing too much on individual self-actualization. Gus Mus's perspective prevents this individualistic reduction. Humanity is not self-expression alone. It is a responsibility toward others. *Rahmah* is not private kindness alone. It is a social ethic. Humility is not personal politeness alone. It is a discipline that prevents the

<sup>33</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).

<sup>34</sup> Gulistan Gursel Bilgin, "Freirean Dialogue: An Effective Pedagogy for Critical Peace Education," *Journal of Theory and Practice in Education* 16, no. 2 (December 2020): 139–49, <https://doi.org/10.17244/eku.801805>; Regina Helena de Freitas Campos and Sérgio Faleiro Farnese, "Paulo Freire, A Dialogical Pedagogy for Liberation and Its Contributions to Psychology," in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology* (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2026), 1–17, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-70581-6\\_348-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-70581-6_348-1); Darriel B. Harris and Debra L. Roter, "Profound Love and Dialogue: Paulo Freire and Liberation Education," *HLRP: Health Literacy Research and Practice* 8, no. 3 (July 2024): e118–20, <https://doi.org/10.3928/24748307-20240613-02>.

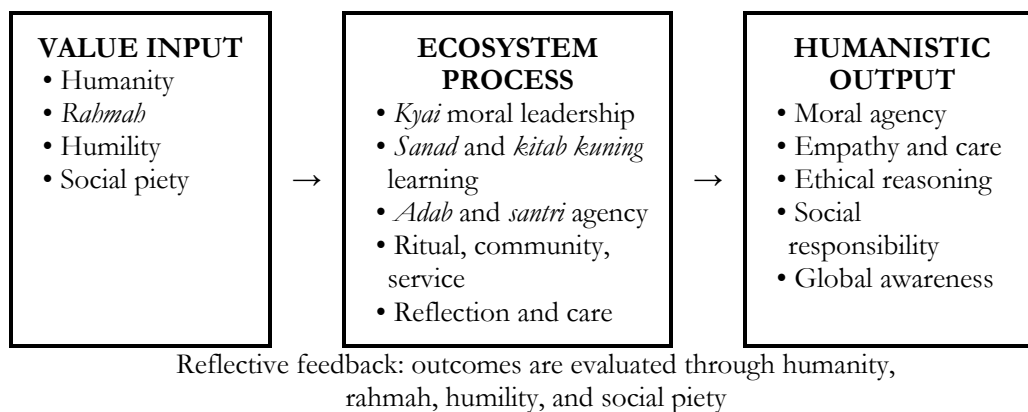
<sup>35</sup> Suudin Aziz and M. Jauharul Ma'arif, "Ulama Regeneration through Tafaqquh Fi Al-Din in Pesantren Education," *Journal of Pesantren and Diniyah Studies* 2, no. 1 (June 2025): 29–38, <https://doi.org/10.63245/jpds.v2i1.44>.

<sup>36</sup> Khusniyah, "Digital Transformation of Pesantren in the VUCA Era"; Umi Muzayanah et al., "Utilization of Digital Space in Strengthening Religious Moderation Education of Generation Z in Indonesia," *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 33, no. 2 (April 2025), <https://doi.org/10.47836/pjssh.33.2.11>; Maimunatun Habibah and Edi Nurhidin, "Profil Pelajar Dalam Kurikulum Merdeka Madrasah Di Era VUCA," *Intelektual: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Studi Keislaman* 13, no. 2 (September 2023): 211–30, <https://doi.org/10.33367/ji.v13i2.4061>.

abuse of knowledge and power. Social piety is not charity alone. It is the public proof that religious learning has transformed the person. This argument also corrects a common misunderstanding of *pesantren*. Some observers treat *pesantren* as inward-looking because it values tradition, ritual, and obedience. The ecosystem model shows that these elements can support outward responsibility when humanistic values guide them. The problem is not tradition itself. The problem is tradition without humanity, authority without *rahmah*, discipline without humility, and ritual without social piety. A human-centered *pesantren* must make these evaluative distinctions explicit.

### Human-centered *Pesantren* Educational Model

Based on the analysis above, this study proposes a human-centered *pesantren* educational model. The model has four components: value input, ecosystem process, reflective mediation, and humanistic output. The value input consists of Gus Mus' four operational values: humanity, *rahmah*, humility, and social piety. These values guide the direction of education. The ecosystem process consists of *kyai* moral leadership, *sanad*, *adab*, *santri* agency, communal life, daily rituals, *kitab kuning* learning, and service. These elements interact continuously to form the lived-learning environment. Reflective mediation links practice with meaning through explanation, mentoring, correction, dialogue, and self-evaluation. Humanistic output refers to moral agency, empathy, social responsibility, ethical reasoning, and global awareness.



**Figure 1.** Human-centered *Pesantren* Educational Ecosystem Based on Gus Mus' Perspective

Figure 1 shows the model links value orientation, lived *pesantren* practices, and humanistic formation in a continuous cycle based on Gus Mus' works,<sup>37</sup> *pesantren* educational elements,<sup>38</sup> and humanistic-ecological learning theories.<sup>39</sup> The model in Figure 1 is not linear in a mechanical sense. Value input shapes ecosystem process, but outcomes also return to values through reflection. For example, if a *pesantren* produces *santri* who are intellectually competent but socially arrogant, the ecosystem must return to the value input and ask which process failed. Was the authority too harsh? Was *kitab kuning* learning detached from social piety? What did *Adab* teach as fear rather than humility? Was communal life weak in care? The model therefore functions as both a descriptive and evaluative tool.

<sup>37</sup> Bisri, *Pesan Islam Sehari-Hari*; Bisri, *Saleh Ritual, Saleh Sosial*; Bisri, *Awat Manusia!*

<sup>38</sup> Dhofier, "The *Pesantren* Tradition."

<sup>39</sup> Wenger, *Communities of Practice*; Rogers, *Freedom to Learn for the 80's*; Noddings, *Caring*; Biesta, *Good Education in an Age of Measurement*; Biesta, "Risking Ourselves in Education."

**Table 2.** Human-centered *Pesantren* Educational Model and Operational Indicators

Model component	Elements, indicators, and evaluation questions
Value input	Core values are humanity, <i>rahmah</i> , humility, and social piety. Indicators include stated educational aims, teacher discourse, institutional norms, and role model behavior. Evaluation question: Do values guide daily decisions and not only appear in slogans?
Ecosystem process	Core elements are <i>kyai</i> , <i>sanad</i> , <i>adab</i> , <i>santri</i> agency, communal life, rituals, kitab learning, and service. Indicators include mentoring quality, peer relations, discipline, learning routines, and service activities. Evaluation question: Do practices form dignity, care, and responsibility?
Reflective mediation	Core elements are dialogue, correction, explanation, <i>musyawarah</i> , and self-evaluation. Indicators include feedback sessions, ethical explanation of routines, safe reporting, and reflective writing. Evaluation question: Do <i>santri</i> understand the meaning of practice?
Humanistic output	Core outcomes are moral agency, empathy, ethical reasoning, social responsibility, and global awareness. Indicators include conduct toward peers, community service, conflict handling, and respect for differences. Evaluation question: Does knowledge become humane action?

Table 2 presents the construction of a human-centered *pesantren* educational model and operational indicators based on a documentary analysis of Gus Mus' humanistic values and *pesantren* studies, triangulated with ecological systems theory, the community of practice, and humanistic education theory.<sup>40</sup> The model offers several practical uses. For researchers, it can become a framework for empirical study. Each component can be translated into interview questions, observation indicators, and document analysis categories. For *pesantren* leaders, it can become an internal reflection tool. Leaders can evaluate whether institutional growth remains connected to humanistic formation. For teachers and *ustadh*, it can guide the design of learning that connects *kitab kuning*, *adab*, and social practice. For policymakers, it shows why *pesantren* quality cannot be measured only by infrastructure, formal accreditation, or digitalization. Quality also depends on relational ethics and moral ecology. This model also helps integrate *pesantren* studies with global educational theory. Rogers' learner-centered approach emphasizes personal growth, but Gus Mus' paradigm adds a stronger communal and spiritual dimension.<sup>41</sup>

Noddings' care ethics emphasizes relation,<sup>42</sup> but *Rahmah* situates care within the Islamic moral vocabulary. Bronfenbrenner's ecology explains environmental interaction, but *pesantren* shows how spiritual authority, *sanad*, and ritual shape that interaction. Biesta's subjectification emphasizes the formation of the subject, while Gus Mus specifies the kind of subject expected: a person who becomes more human through knowledge.<sup>43</sup> The model, therefore, does not merely apply Western theory to *pesantren*. It creates a reciprocal dialogue. Global theory helps name the structure of *pesantren* formation. *Pesantren* and Gus Mus help expand global theory by showing that humanistic education can be grounded in spirituality, communal discipline, and social piety. This is the study's theoretical contribution.

<sup>40</sup> Bisri, *Ngaji Bareng Gus Mus*; Bisri, *Saleh Ritual, Saleh Sosial*; Bisri, *Pesan Islam Sebari-Hari*; Bisri, *Anas Manusia*; Dhofier, "The *Pesantren* Tradition"; Bronfenbrenner and Morris, "The Bioecological Model of Human Development"; Wenger, *Communities of Practice*; Rogers, *Freedom to Learn for the 80's*; Noddings, *Caring*; Biesta, *Good Education in an Age of Measurement*.

<sup>41</sup> Rogers, *Freedom to Learn for the 80's*.

<sup>42</sup> Noddings, *Caring*.

<sup>43</sup> Biesta, "Risking Ourselves in Education."

### Addressing Risk: Avoiding Romanticization of *Pesantren*

A credible model must also address risk. *Pesantren* are not free from problems. Dense communal life can foster solidarity, but it can also put pressure on individuals. Seniority can support mentoring, but it can also enable bullying. *Kyai* authority can guide moral life, but it can also become unchecked power. Ritual discipline can form character, but it can also become formalism. Digital transformation can improve access, but it can also weaken deep attention.<sup>44</sup> These risks must be acknowledged because humanistic education requires honesty. The human-centered model offers internal criteria for critique. First, humanity demands that no educational practice should degrade dignity. Second, *Rahmah* demands that correction and discipline avoid humiliation and violence. Third, humility demands that authority remain open to self-correction. Fourth, social piety demands that social ethics test ritual and knowledge.

These criteria can be used to evaluate actual *pesantren* practice. When a *pesantren* violates them, the problem should not be hidden in the name of tradition. It should be corrected in the name of the deeper human purpose of tradition. This critical dimension aligns with recent research. Studies on bullying in *pesantren* emphasize the importance of positive teacher-student relationships and safe learning environments.<sup>45</sup> Studies on digital transformation show that *pesantren* must adapt without losing core values.<sup>46</sup> Studies on *kyai* leadership and institutional dynamics show that leadership must build social capital and benefit the community.<sup>47</sup> These findings confirm that *pesantren* vitality depends on ethical relation, adaptive capacity, and public responsibility. Gus Mus' paradigm provides a coherent moral language to connect these issues.

### Implications for Research, Practice, and Policy

For research, the model opens several empirical pathways. First, future studies can test the model through multi-site ethnography. Researchers can observe how values, authority, daily practices, and peer relations interact in different *pesantren* types. Second, researchers can develop instruments to measure perceived *rahmah*, humility, social piety, and moral climate. Third, studies can examine how digital tools affect *sanad*, *adab*, and humanistic learning. Fourth, comparative studies can examine how *pesantren* models speak to other religious boarding schools and value-based educational communities.

For practice, the model suggests that *pesantren* should design reflective spaces. Many *pesantren* already have strong routines. The next step is to strengthen the reflective mediation of

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<sup>44</sup> Muhammad Zainal Abidin and M. Yusuf Fadlullah, "Adapting Artificial Intelligence in Pesantren: Institutional Typologies, Kyai Leadership, and Adaptive Optimism," *Journal of Pesantren and Diniyah Studies* 2, no. 2 (December 2025): 113–25, <https://doi.org/10.63245/10.63245/jpds.v2i2.56>; Muhammad Najihul Huda et al., "Pesantren Technology-Friendly: Enhancing Learning Effectiveness in The Modern Era," *Nadwa: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 19, no. 1 (July 2025): 1–22, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.21580/nw.2025.19.1.26173>; Moh Wardi et al., "Digital Transformation of Islamic Boarding School Financial System; Formulation, Implementation and Evaluation," *Munaddhomah: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam* 5, no. 4 (2024): 461–82, <https://doi.org/10.31538/munaddhomah.v5i4.1388>; Apriyanto Nugroho and Anita Puji Astutik, "Digital Transformation of Islamic Boarding School Education: Transformasi Digital Pendidikan Pesantren," *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Studies* 12, no. 2 (May 2024): 10.21070/ijis.v12i2.1723-10.21070/ijis.v12i2.1723, <https://doi.org/10.21070/ijis.v12i2.1723>.

<sup>45</sup> Umam, Noor, and Suharto, "Exploring Bullying Factors and the Positive Roles of Teachers and Students in Pesantren"; Reza Ahmad Zahid, "Bullying Prevention Strategies through the Foster Guardian Program in Pesantren," *Intelektual: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Studi Keislaman* 14, no. 2 (September 2024): 281–92, <https://doi.org/10.33367/ji.v14i2.5923>.

<sup>46</sup> Khusniyah, "Digital Transformation of Pesantren in the VUCA Era"; Abidin and Fadlullah, "Adapting Artificial Intelligence in Pesantren."

<sup>47</sup> Suhermanto and Jasri, "Kiai Kampung and Transformational Leadership."

those routines. *Santri* should understand why they serve, why they respect teachers, why they study *kitab kuning* slowly, why they live simply, and why ritual must become social ethics. Reflection does not weaken obedience. It deepens it by linking practice to meaning. Teachers and senior *santri* also need training in compassionate correction. Discipline without *rahmah* can damage trust. *Rahmah*, without discipline, the formation can weaken. The model requires both.

For policy, the model warns against reducing *pesantren* development to infrastructure, administrative compliance, or digital modernization. These are necessary, but not sufficient. Policy should also support teacher development, student protection systems, mental health awareness, community service programs, and research on the moral ecology of *pesantrens*. The state should respect the distinctiveness of *pesantren* while encouraging accountability to human dignity. Law and policy on *pesantren* should therefore protect autonomy and support safe, caring, and high-quality learning environments.

The model also has implications for global discourse. Many educational systems now seek holistic education, character formation, social-emotional learning, and civic responsibility. *Pesantren* can offer a distinct model by integrating knowledge, spirituality, community, and service within a continuous life setting. This contribution becomes stronger when *pesantren* scholars articulate their concepts systematically. Gus Mus' humanistic pedagogy provides one path for that articulation, as it speaks to Islamic tradition while addressing universal questions of humanity.

## CONCLUSION

This study reconceptualizes *pesantren* as a living educational ecosystem through the humanistic pedagogy of Gus Mus. The key finding is that Gus Mus's thought can function as an analytical paradigm, not merely as inspirational language. It operates through four values: humanity as the aim of learning, *rahmah* as the ethic of relation, humility as the discipline of the self, and social piety as the public measure of knowledge. These values guide how *pesantren* elements are interpreted and evaluated. Using this paradigm, *pesantren* appears as an ecosystem where *kyai* leadership, *sanad*, *adab*, *santri* agency, communal life, daily rituals, *kitab kuning* learning, and service interact continuously. The educational power of *pesantren* lies not only in formal instruction, but in the connection between value, routine, relation, correction, and reflection. Daily life becomes curriculum when it forms dignity, care, humility, and responsibility. *Kitab kuning* learning becomes humanistic when it trains disciplined interpretation and ethical conduct. Authority becomes educational when it humanizes rather than dominates.

The proposed model consists of value input, ecosystem process, reflective mediation, and humanistic output. This model answers the research gap by moving *pesantren* studies beyond institutional description toward an operational theory of lived human formation. It also addresses reviewer concerns by showing exactly how Gus Mus's perspective serves as the article's analytical lens. The study contributes to educational theory by placing *pesantren* and Gus Mus in dialogue with humanistic and ecological education. It shows that human-centered education can be grounded in Islamic spirituality, communal discipline, *sanad*, *adab*, and social piety. The study also offers practical criteria for *pesantren* evaluation: education should protect dignity, cultivate *rahmah*, train humility, and produce social responsibility. Future research should test this model through ethnography, interviews, observation, and comparative studies across different *pesantren* contexts.

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