

Born or Made: Weighing Up Nature vs Nurture Complexities in Choosing Islamic Boarding School Leaders

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Abstract

One fundamentally plagued debate on leadership is whether leaders are born or made: nature vs nurture. Existing studies have either supported or opposed each of the arguments. Yet the literature that discusses this topic in the educational context is still limited. Despite the condition, an interesting tradition has been practiced within Indonesia's Islamic boarding schools—colloquially known as *pesantren*—where in appointing its leaders, most of them depend on heredity. This study aims to garner the responses of *pesantren* future leaders about the hereditary leadership system in *pesantren*, focusing on perception, reflection and projection inquiries. This phenomenological study relies on in-depth interviews to collect the data, whilst employing triangulation of the data sources with three *pesantren* future leaders in East and Central Java. The findings show that by weighing up the positive and negative implications of the *pesantren*'s hereditary leadership, converging it with the meritocratic system appears to be salutary, given it ticks all the boxes of three human developmental facets: physical (leadership gen), cognitive (intellectual ability) and socio-emotional (moral integrity). In this regard, the hereditary-meritocratic convergence system could help *pesantren* run its leadership selection with both nature (intrinsic) and nurture (extrinsic) deliberations, as supported by the Western-secular and Islamic scientific discourses. Yet, despite the positive outcome, it also leaves a critical question on the side of the meritocratic system on why meritocracy dismisses genetic considerations given studies have proved that leadership is indeed influenced by both genetics and environment. The findings call for further investigation on the hereditary-meritocratic convergence system in choosing school leaders—especially in the *pesantren* context—that despite the meritocracy, heredity, too, could be a pivotal cogitation.

Keywords: *Islamic educational leadership, born vs made leaders, nature vs nurture of leadership, hereditary educational leadership, pesantren leadership.*

Introduction

The question of whether a leader is born or made has been one of the most voguish topics discussed in the literature on leadership (Boerma et al., 2017). In this regard, existing literature has either supported or opposed each of the arguments. On the one hand, studies have indicated that there is a strong correlation between genetics and leadership capacity (see De Neve et al., 2013; Arvey et al., 2006; Johnson et al., 2004). Yet on the other, different studies demonstrate that leaders are environmentally formed (see Boerma et al., 2017; Ruvolo et al., 2004; Strategic Direction, 2008). Despite the controversy, leadership—which is defined as “a process of social influence which maximizes the efforts of others towards the achievement of a goal” (Kruse, 2013, p. 3)—appears to be partially understood. Scholars seem to only view its individual components rather than the totality as a whole, suggesting that they might only view leadership as “blind men describing a moving elephant” (Winston & Patterson, 2006, p. 6). This indicates that many aspects of leadership are yet to be revealed, including its factors which are centered on the nature (intrinsic) vs nurture (extrinsic) debate.

In favor of the nature (intrinsic) side, numerous twin studies have been carried out in the last three decades on the heredity of leadership (Boerma et al., 2017). A twin study is defined as “a study in which the behavioral similarity of identical twins is compared with the behavioral similarity of fraternal twins” (Santrock, 2017, p. 67). In this case, twin studies offer a useful evaluation of inherited and made leadership where each twin acts as a control for the other. A twin study by De Neve et al. (2013) indicated that the heritability of leadership stood at 24 percent. Contrarily, the extrinsic factor (environment) showed an insignificant correlation. This is supported by an earlier study by Johnson et al. (2004) which found that leadership, either “transactional” or “transformational part of”, exhibits significant genetic variability. Meanwhile, other twin studies also show a “moderate genetic influence” on leadership personal attributes, with a genetic basis for leadership having an overall relative influence of up to 30 percent (De Neve et al.,

2013; Arvey et al., 2006). Notwithstanding, the results of twin studies have consistently demonstrated that leadership does indeed have a strong genetic basis.

Despite the studies that favor the genetic factor of leadership, other studies become the counter-narrative for the argument. Boerma et al. (2017) argue there are at least three reasons why the claims that “leaders are born” cannot be accepted. First, the twin studies that evaluate leadership have statistical weakness, in that they could not be generalized as they are not randomized and thus do not represent the general population. Second, there is indeed evidence that showed “historical figures” who had no leadership background, yet they became great leaders such as Walt Disney and John D Rockefeller, Sr. Third, people can acquire the qualities of an excellent leader through real-life experiences and training programs for leadership (Boerma et al., 2017, p. 3), backed up by the conclusion of the 2001 Global Leadership Conference that leadership development initiatives are essential to the success of organizations (Ruvolo et al., 2004). Here, the born leader is considered a myth and many leadership misconceptions and presumptions have been dispelled thanks to the advances in educational and developmental psychology (Direction, 2008). In this case, the counter-argument argues that humans could be trained to be leaders, regardless of their genetic background.

With the debate on the intrinsic (nature) and extrinsic (nurture) factors of leadership, the present study tries to contextualize this into the educational context. To do that, it is crucial to first review how school leaders are chosen. To give a glimpse of the global context, Huber and Hiltmann (2010) provide a review of current procedures for selecting and hiring school leaders with an international outlook. The review is based on a synthesis of the literature already in existence, and the initial findings of a “comparative research study” involving twenty countries including those in Europe, Asia, Australia and America. The findings indicate that overall approaches to school leaders’ selection are varied from centralized and decentralized ones, and use job profiles or framework conceptualizations that are based on standards or school

regulation. As for the selection process, a variety of diagnostic tools are used, such as a “mixed method approach integrating biographic-oriented, behavioral-oriented, and trait-oriented instruments” (Huber & Hiltmann, 2010, p. 327). The review indicates that in the global context, school leaders are mostly chosen based on merit. In this case, the meritocratic system refers to “a fair and objective measure of individual ability and achievement that exclude the non-merit variables such as family background, gender, religion, race or social networks” (Steed, 2020, p. 1304). Here, meritocracy is in favor of the extrinsic (nurture) factor, which believes that leaders could be trained, and ignores non-merit deliberations such as family background or genetics.

Despite meritocracy generally being taken as the basis for selecting education leaders worldwide, the current body of literature apparently sets aside the fact that natural or intrinsic factors could also be taken as the basis in appointing leaders in education or school contexts. It is no surprise though that this perspective is not a popular lens of viewing—especially in the global context which mostly favors meritocracy. Consequently, the literature which discusses this particular topic in the education context is still scarce. That being said, it does not refute the fact that the hereditary system of selecting educational leaders exists and is being practiced in certain educational contexts, pointing to the *pesantren* institutions. *Pesantren* or Islamic boarding school is a kind of educational institution in Indonesia that poses as the center of Islamic learning in the region (Dhofier, 1990). This is one type of Islamic educational institution offering both formal and informal education, administered under the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Hefner, 2009; Azra, 2007; Dhofier, 1994). Privately run, *pesantren* have independence including in designing their curriculum (Lee, 1995). Statistics from the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs reveal that, as of 2021, over four million students are studying at 27,722 *pesantren* throughout the country (Ministry of Religious Affairs, n.d.). This indicates that this type of education remains a favored educational option in Indonesia, a country with progressive reforms in its Islamic education (Hefner, 2022).

Interestingly, while the hereditary system in appointing education leaders is not a common practice globally, literature has indicated that this has been part of *pesantren* tradition from time to time (see Azro'i & Fuaidi, 2020; Ta'rifin & Halid, 2021; Aedi, 2014; Arifin, 2013). This, though, is not a ground for generalization as not all *pesantren* apply this hereditary system. Depending on their educational type, *pesantren* have three methods of selecting leaders: hereditary, professional and a combination of both (Azro'i and Fuaidi, 2020). Pure hereditary is applied mostly in traditional *pesantren* in which the leadership system is like in a kingdom where the sons of the *pesantren* leaders are expected to be the future leaders of the institutions (Dhofier, 1980). Meanwhile, professional selection is employed in modern *pesantren* where the management is run by the *ummah* (Muslim group). In the meantime, semi-traditional-modern *pesantren* combine both methods together (Azro'i and Fuaidi, 2020). Given this fact, this is crucial to do a deeper research deeper about the phenomenon of *pesantren's* hereditary leadership appointment practices as they are still being applied in the traditional and semi-modern *pesantren*. Thus, this study aims to generate insights into the *pesantren's* hereditary leadership appointment system at three semi-modern *pesantren* in Central and East Java as they combine heredity and professional selection systems together, focusing on the *pesantren's* future leaders as the subjects. The research inquiries are formulated as follows:

- 1) How do *pesantren* future leaders perceive the hereditary appointment practices in *pesantren* leadership?
- 2) How do *pesantren* future leaders reflect on the hereditary appointment practices in *pesantren* leadership?
- 3) How do *pesantren* future leaders project on the hereditary appointment practices in *pesantren* leadership?

In this regard, three *pesantren's* future leaders (sons of the active *pesantren* leaders) from semi-modern *pesantren* in Central and East Java are argued to be appropriate subjects for this study, not only

because they come from *pesantren* which still apply hereditary-professional selection practices but also due to their versatile position. First, they are born to be future educational leaders. Second, they are in positions where they are not yet education leaders. Third, eventually, they will one day lead educational institutions. Thus, with this versatile position, fair responses are expected to be unraveled from this born-to-be leaders' group. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to adding a perspective to the scholarly discussion on the recruitment process of education leaders, by using the context of Islamic educational institutions. In particular, this study is expected to provide a prototype of how the hereditary appointment system is applied in the selection and recruitment process of educational leaders which is still less discussed in the literature on educational leadership.

***Pesantren* and Hereditary Leadership System: A Literature Review**

The existence of *pesantren* can be dated back to pre-independence Indonesia, where they became an option of an educational institution for Muslim societies (Dhofier, 1982). The term *pesantren* itself is mostly translated into English as “Islamic boarding school” given its boarding system and is considered the “oldest indigenous” Islamic educational institution by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. In terms of organizational type, *pesantren* is one part of three Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, besides *Madrasah* (formal Islamic school) and *Pengajian Qur'an* (informal Qur'an study) (Hefner, 2009); all of them supervised by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Despite the traditional nature associated with *pesantren*, this institution has experienced robust transformation, especially during the post-colonial period when it made rapid organizational reform (Hefner, 2008). This resulted in the state's recognition of its existence as an educational institution that is on par with other formal schools such as public schools (Dhofier, 1994; Hefner, 2008). Currently, *pesantren* have gained full acknowledgment from the state as the government released Law No. 18 in 2019 on *pesantren* which legally elevated the position of *pesantren* in the national school system.

In the *pesantren* context, the leaders are known as the *kiai*, a sacred position whom only those with certain characteristics could achieve. Among the characteristics they must possess are what they call *karamah* (extraordinary traits) or *barakah* (blessings), by which, because the *kiai* have certain extraordinary traits such as closeness to God (*karamah*), then they become the source of blessing (*barakah*) for other people around them (Dhofier, 1980). Hence, given this context, *pesantren* as private educational institutions constantly anticipate that in terms of the leadership regeneration system, the sons of the active *pesantren* leaders will traditionally continue their leadership at the institution. If the leaders do not have sons, the sons-in-law shall be designated as the primary candidates. In this scenario, it is believed that the sons of *pesantren* leaders would receive certain spiritual characteristics from their biological fathers. Furthermore, most of them are said to have *laduni* knowledge, which is the aptitude and talent to acquire diverse fields of Islamic knowledge in an approach that God substantially facilitates (Dhofier, 1982).

However, with its robust development, the leadership regeneration system in *pesantren* has also evolved. In this regard, previous studies have tried to uncover the development of leadership regeneration systems in *pesantren*. A study by Azro'l and Fuaidi (2020), for instance, addresses the question of the viability of the regeneration system at Central Java's *pesantren* and its consequences for their institutional sustainability. Through interview, observation and document analysis, the study identified that there are three types of regeneration systems in *pesantren*. They are (1) genealogy which is based on genetics and heredity; (2) professional system which is more into the professionalism of the candidates; and (3) genealogy-professional which is the combination of both. In this case, genealogy is practiced in the *salaf* or traditional *pesantren*, while the professional system is used in the modern *pesantren*. In the meantime, the combination of the genealogy-professional system is adopted by the semi-modern *pesantren*. This study highlighted that not only do *pesantren* make robust development

in terms of organization and curriculum, but their leadership system is also reformed to meet the needs of the *ummah* (Muslim group).

Following this study, Ta'rifin and Halid (2021) shed light on the effects of the charismatic leadership of *pesantren* leaders and the succession of those leaders on the long-term sustainability of the *pesantren*. Employing phenomenological and historical designs, this study highlighted that the charismatic leadership of the kiai (the *pesantren* leaders) and the institutional improvement of the *pesantren* are essential for the *pesantren's* continuance. Similar to this, effective regeneration is used to carry out the succession of *pesantren* leadership. The study found that there are indeed *pesantren* that were "discontinued" after their founders passed away. This is because the charismatic leadership of the kiai was not accompanied by the formalization of the *pesantren*, or the succession of *pesantren* leadership was not accompanied by the structured regeneration. This indicates that for certain *pesantren*, the sustainability of their existence is impacted by their charismatic leadership and the regeneration process of their leaders.

In a quite similar topic, Aedi (2014) seeks to describe the leadership regeneration of *salaf* or traditional *pesantren*. Employing a literature review, the study found that the discourse has made clear that genetics, idealism and respect for *pesantren* leaders had an impact on the "tradition of *pesantren* leadership succession". In this case, other people outside the *pesantren* family will not have any share in the regeneration of the *pesantren's* leadership. This is affirmed by another study by Arifin (2013) which found that the succession issue within *pesantren* leadership is indeed related to the so-called "routinization of charisma". Here, the idea of "holy lineage" is important for *pesantren* as this is the process of passing down the charismatic authority of the kiai as *pesantren* leaders to their children. The idea of holy lineage makes it abundantly evident that "the transformation of charisma" in *pesantren* is connected to the idea of hereditary charisma that could be passed on from the kiai as *pesantren* leaders to their children (Arifin, 2013).

Apart from the studies that focus on the regeneration process of the *pesantren* leadership above, other studies focus on the style of *pesantren* leadership. These range from charismatic leadership (Fikri et al., 2021), Sufistic-based leadership (Muali et al., 2021), religious-paternalistic leadership (Dacholfany, 2015), and transformational leadership (Falah, 2021). These studies reveal that *pesantren* educational leadership is indeed unique in a way that it is mainly derived from the Islamic perspective, which believes that educational leaders are those who are perceived as better at mastering knowledge (*'alim* or *'ulama*). In the meantime, other studies use different perspectives in studying *pesantren* leadership such as woman leadership in *pesantren* (Samsu et al., 2021; Srimulyani, 2008) and the historical perspective of *pesantren* leadership (Ridwan, 2020). These studies indicate that despite the selection process of *pesantren* leaders being mostly taken through a hereditary appointment system, the ways the *pesantren* leaders lead vary in style.

From the findings of the literature review, three points could be generated. First, although the debate on nature versus nurture in leadership discussion has been frequent, the literature that contextualizes this in the educational context is still limited. Second, within the Indonesian context, it is indeed noted that several studies have been conducted on this particular topic—specific only to *pesantren* institutions. However, it is quite a challenge to categorize the studies given they are limited in number, and most of them do not directly address this issue as the core of the discussion. Rather it is taken as a sub-element among a wider scope such as the regeneration system. Third, in studying *pesantren* leadership, none of the existing literature on *pesantren* leadership employs a lens of nature versus nurture of leadership aspects. In fact, this debate has been a fundamental topic discussed within the scope of leadership in general. Thus, the findings of the literature review affirm the novelty of the present study in viewing the hereditary appointment system of *pesantren* educational leadership through the lens of the nature (intrinsic) vs nurture (extrinsic) debate, as explained in the introduction of this study.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a phenomenology design. A qualitative approach is appropriate since the problem under study is too complex to be quantified into small variables, as this relates to the perception, reflection and projections of individuals. In this case, a qualitative approach is utilized to examine and comprehend the significance of an individual's assumption concerning a social or human issue (Creswell, 2019, p. 42), which here correlates to the paradigm that the research inquiries of this present study would like to answer; namely, perception, reflection and projection of future *pesantren* leaders on their leadership appointment system that is hereditary.

Meanwhile, phenomenology design enables one to understand the essential value of an individual's experiences in a phenomenon (Creswell, 2019, p. 50). In this case, the hereditary leadership practices at *pesantren* is considered a unique phenomenon as this is not a common practice in the global context. Given the uniqueness of the phenomenon, phenomenology fits this study to make sense of the issue through reflective insight obtained from the lived experience of the participants. Here, phenomenology tries to comprehend a "commonality" among individual experiences, as it believes that there are some aspects of the human experience that are universal (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). With the phenomenology design, it is expected that the participants could perceive, reflect and project on the *pesantren* leaders' hereditary appointment system.

As for the data collection technique, phenomenology could notably be conducted through deep interviews with the selected participants (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Thus, this is taken as the technique to collect data in this study. Deep interviews fit this study given the nature of the questions that this present study would like to dig deeper into. With deep interviews, this study aims to gain a thorough understanding of the participants' perceptions or opinions on a subject (Gay et al., 2012). In practice, a semi-structured interview is employed to give more space to explore the participants' answers (Bhandari, 2022). However, before the interview, a list of questions is formulated and they

are grouped as per the three research inquiries: perception, reflection and projection. However, this study did not go further for observation in collecting the data, and thus it is recommended for future research to address this limitation.

To validate the data, the triangulation technique is employed for the data sources. In this case, three participants are recruited as data sources, all of whom have the same background: they are future leaders of *pesantren* institutions or the sons of active *pesantren* leaders. In this case, all participants come from semi-modern *pesantren* which in terms of leadership appointment, still adopt the hereditary system, although being combined with the professional system. Two of the *pesantren* are from Central Java, while one *pesantren* is from East Java. One respondent was interviewed face-to-face (audio-taped), one respondent was interviewed via Zoom (videotaped), and one was via email/correspondence interview—as per the participant’s request. A member-checking process is also employed to validate the data before being analyzed.

As for the analysis technique, this study employs thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is “a method to develop, analyze and interpret across a qualitative dataset, which involves systematic processes of data coding to develop themes” (Clarke & Braun, 2021). One important stage in thematic analysis is coding (Basit, 2003), which here is conducted electronically using Quirkos software. Here, the transcripts of the interviews are examined and coded to find the communal themes between the different responses of the respondents. With the thematic analysis, it is expected that this study could generate interpretation from the responses of the *pesantren* future leaders on the issues to be addressed with the research inquiries. With a very small sample collected, the findings of this study is indicative not try to represent the whole situation of *pesantren* leadership practices.

Results

The structure of the findings follows the list of research questions that have been formulated. It starts with the perception of *pesantren*

future leaders on the *pesantren* hereditary leadership system and continues with their reflection on its practice, and eventually ends with their projection of the future. After explaining the findings in each category, these are then taken as the basis for discussion, which ends with the identification of how these findings contribute toward the already-established theoretical concepts.

Perception: “Hereditary System Should be Present at Pesantren”

Generally, all respondents believed that both intrinsic and extrinsic factors contribute to leadership capacity. Depending on which aspect contributes more to it, the effect could be different from one person to another. Two respondents even coincidentally mentioned Prophet Muhammad as the sample of a natural-born leader. It is because he was born into a privileged Arabic ethnicity of Quraish, and he has the inherited blood of Prophet Ibrahim—known as the father of many nations. Meanwhile, as for the sample of the “made” leader, one respondent exemplified Indonesia’s current President Joko Widodo (or called as Jokowi), who was born into a regular family, but then eventually made it to become the president thanks to his environmental factors. Unlike Jokowi whose environment supported him to be a leader regardless of genetics, the environment of prophet Muhammad was considered “*jahiliyyah*” (dumb environment). Yet, it is believed that the genetic factor of Prophet Muhammad is stronger than his environment so he managed to maintain his noble traits despite being in an unsupportive environment.

Given all respondents agree to the contribution of both factors of leadership, it is no surprise that all of them fully supported the notion of a hereditary system in *pesantren* leadership. The reasons for their support are varied, yet the communal themes among all the responses could be divided into three: spiritual aspects, tradition and characteristics. As for the spiritual aspect, it is believed that the children of *pesantren* leaders (hereinafter called “*gus*”) will most likely inherit the spirituality possessed by their fathers or *pesantren* leaders (*kiai*). Due to this particular reason, *gus* would receive the same respect as the *kiai* upon the belief that they would at least inherit certain characteristics that the *kiai*

have. The rationale is that some children would most likely inherit certain characteristics or features that their parents or grandparents have, either physically or psychologically. The theme “spiritual” here is mentioned by the respondents either as “religiosity”, “*barakah*” (blessing), “holiness”, or “religious role model” as elements that should be present within *pesantren* education.

Spiritual Aspect	It could maintain the spiritual aspect of the kiai that is believed to be passed down to their children.
Tradition	This has been a tradition practiced from generation to generation.
Characteristic	This is what differentiates <i>pesantren</i> from other educational institutions.

Table 1. *Reasons Why the Hereditary Leadership System Should be Present in Pesantren*

Meanwhile, the term “tradition” was identified as another theme, which was exactly mentioned by the respondents as literally “tradition”. What it means is that the hereditary leadership appointment system has been taken as a tradition that is practiced by the *pesantren* from time to time. This tradition has been considered as the “standard of truth”, which is expected to maintain the line of the holiness of *pesantren* leaders from generation to generation. In line with the tradition, the third theme is “characteristic” which is expressed by the respondents in different ways such as “special feature”, “independent institution”, “different from other educational institutions”, “religious education” or “faith-based education”. As for characteristics, the hereditary appointment practices at *Pesantren* leadership is considered as a uniqueness which they—as independent educational institutions—could follow as part of their culture. Further, “characteristic” here means that this is what differentiates *pesantren* from other educational institutions. Thus, the three communal themes generated from the participants’ perception

inform that the reason that the hereditary system should be present in *pesantren* leadership appointment is that it is to maintain their spirituality, tradition and characteristics as an independent religious-based educational institution.

Reflection: "Hereditiy is Good, But It is not Enough"

In the reflection part, the respondents acknowledge that the hereditary leadership system at *pesantren* has both positive and negative implications. As for the positive implications, this is related to the three already-mentioned themes in the perception part. This could maintain the *pesantren* spiritual aspect, as well as sustain tradition and its characteristics. Meanwhile, as for the theme of negative implications, this is mainly related to three scenarios: first, a case in which *gus* do not have leadership capability in leading the *pesantren*. Second, a case in which *gus* have expertise not in *pesantren* education, but rather in other disciplines such as medicine, and so on. Third, a case in which *gus* are forced to be leaders, while they are not ready yet due to whatever possible reasons. All these possible negative implications are believed to act as constraints in the running of the *pesantren* education.

Positive	Negative
It could maintain the spiritual aspect of the <i>pesantren</i>	A case in which <i>gus</i> do not have leadership capability
It could foster the tradition of the <i>pesantren</i>	A case in which <i>gus</i> have expertise not in <i>pesantren</i> education
It keeps the characteristic of the <i>pesantren</i>	A case in which <i>gus</i> are not ready, yet forced to be a leader

Table 2. *Positive and Negative Implications of the Pesantren Hereditary Leadership System*

However, despite the negative implications, all respondents are firm that *pesantren* leadership should be continued by the sons of the *kiai* regardless of the situation. This is because they also believe that, in the case of a *gus* not having leadership capabilities, or not having expertise in

pesantren education, or not yet ready to be a leader, all of these could be addressed through capacity building. The narratives from their response are: “as long as the *gus* do not have psychoneurotic disorders”; “the leadership training might be harder [in the case where the *gus* lacks leadership capabilities], but it is no problem”; “they can even start to learn about it once they are appointed as leaders”. Thus, it can be concluded that the respondents believe that “*gus*” should be the ones who lead the *pesantren* as they have the total package of both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. In other words, they have the *kiai*’s natural factors (“gen”) and at the same time can also be trained.

Thus, upon their belief that leadership is impacted by both genetic and environmental factors, the participants think that the hereditary appointment system in *pesantren* leadership is a good practice to maintain their spiritual aspect, tradition and characteristics. Yet, considering the possible negative implications as mentioned above, they come up with notes that it should not be taken as the sole basis to select *pesantren* leaders. In addition to the heredity aspect, they highlight that their capabilities are also crucial elements that should be considered. In explaining the capabilities, one respondent comes up with two considerations; namely, intellectuality and integrity. Intellectuality is related to their intellectual capability, whilst integrity is related to their behavior and personality traits. In detail about intellectuality, this is related to the intellectual quality of the *gus*, whether he has a good educational background, or is knowledgeable about Islam and *pesantren* education. In this case, intellectuality is related to the cognitive aspect of the *pesantren* future leaders.

While intellectuality is related to the *gus*’ cognitive aspect, integrity is more into their socio-emotional abilities in which the output is *akhlaq* (ethics and morals), especially in human interaction. In this case, one respondent divided integrity into two aspects: material and spiritual. In detail, material integrity is related to integrity that is more world-related. This could apply not only to *pesantren* but also to other educational institutions in general. The instances for this could be showing good behaviors in dealing with people, treating others with

respect, and so on. In the meantime, spiritual integrity is beyond the world. This is related to the spirituality that in the context of *pesantren*, is practiced in the form of religious rituals. Spiritual integrity requires the *pesantren* leaders to be role models on how to practice Islam. The rituals are exemplified by doing *sholah* (prayers), *dzikir* (remembering and chanting God's name), reciting the Qur'an, or any other types of religious worship in daily activities. In this context, spiritual integrity is all about how committed an individual is to Islamic teaching, and this should be role-played by the *kiai* themselves as *pesantren* leaders so that social communities within the *pesantren* will follow, and feel connected to, them.

To sum up the reflection part, it is noted that integrity and intellectuality are both as important as heredity in appointing *pesantren* leaders. This generated idea is taken by weighing up the positive and negative implications of the *pesantren's* hereditary leadership appointment system. Thus, the findings of the reflection inquiry conclude that despite the respondents' perception that the hereditary leadership system is a good practice, it should not be taken as the sole basis. Individual capabilities which consist of intellectuality and integrity should also be taken as crucial elements that should be considered in choosing *pesantren* leaders. In conclusion, the respondents believe that the requirement for *pesantren* future leaders here is not only genetic (physical), but also their capabilities which consist of intellectuality (cognitive) and integrity (socio-emotional aspect).

Projection: Should the Hereditary System be Changed or Preserved?

Projecting a scenario of whether the hereditary leadership appointment system in *pesantren* should be changed or preserved, the answer that we found from the respondents is neither to change nor preserve. To change means to replace it with something else, and to preserve means to maintain it as it is. Yet, the narratives that are expressed by the respondents are not about the two mentioned options, but more to modify and combine with a meritocratic system. What it means is that, if the leadership capacity is both impacted by genetics and environment, then why choose only one of them? The requirement of the

pesantren leaders' selection process should cover both aspects. Here, taking only the hereditary appointment system is not enough, yet to change the *pesantren* leadership system into a fully meritocratic one is considered going too far by the respondents. Thus, the win-win solution is to combine the hereditary and meritocratic systems at the same time.

In general, all respondents perceive a meritocratic system in selecting educational leaders as something positive. Yet, changing the *pesantren* leadership selection system into being a “fully meritocratic” could potentially decrease the essence of the *pesantren* which includes spirituality, tradition and characteristic. The responses of the respondents lingered on narratives like: “meritocratic is good, but not too suitable for the *pesantren* culture”; “it could perhaps be applied while still maintaining the hereditary system”. Further, one respondent stated that merging the meritocratic system with heredity will help *pesantren* boost pre-service training for its future leaders, where the kiai could prepare their sons better. In this case, adding the meritocratic aspect to the hereditary system would be considered a win-win solution, and is believed to bring positive implications towards *pesantren*'s development. This suggests that merging hereditary and meritocratic systems could be the best option to take, instead of only taking one among the two options.

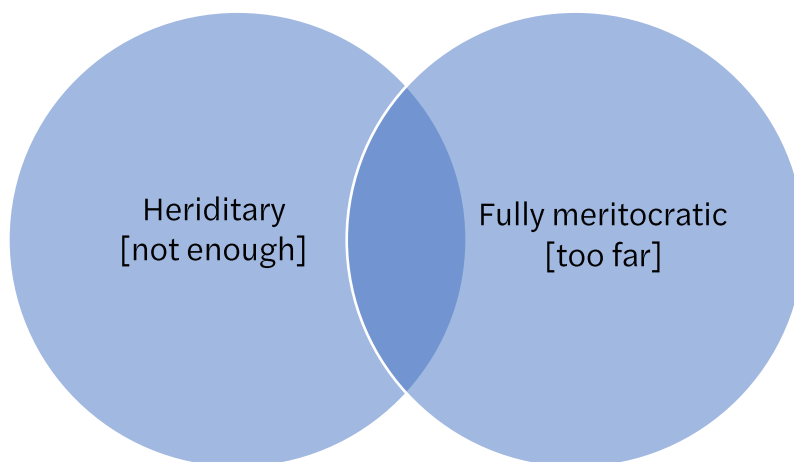


Figure 1. The reason why merging both hereditary and meritocratic systems is considered the best option by respondents.

When it comes to the practicality of the merging of hereditary-meritocratic systems in *pesantren* leaders' selection, a suggestion given by one respondent is worth a closer look. This respondent explained that what it means by merging the hereditary-meritocratic system in *pesantren* leaders' selection is more about flexibility in the selection process. In choosing a *pesantren* leader, the option should not only be limited to the particular *kiai*'s family but expanded to their relatives. The mentioned theme here is "*misanan*" a Javanese term meaning relative or kinship. The rationale for this is that it has been common in *pesantren* culture that every *kiai* or *kiai*'s children have a clear identification of *nasab* (bloodline), from parent, grandparent, and so on. Through the scenario of expanding the scope from family to relatives, the *pesantren* selection process could still follow the hereditary system, yet at the same time also take meritocratic aspects as other considerations. In other words, this merger of the hereditary-meritocratic system means choosing the best merit among the expanded available blood-related future *pesantren* leaders within a relative or kinship circle.

Discussion

At this point, it is evident that the findings of this present study indicate that the hereditary and meritocratic convergence system appears to be salutary to be applied in the *pesantren*, generated from the perception, reflection and projection of the research participants. These findings posed a new affirmation that could be taken as the basis for discussing the nature vs nurture influence on leadership capacity under the framework of human development theories. Thus, the discussion part starts with an explanation as to how these findings contribute to the already-established theoretical concepts either from the Western-secular or Islamic perspectives on how nature vs nurture influences leadership. This ends with generating the implication of these findings on the three human developmental aspects, namely physical, cognitive and socio-emotional considerations, as the pivotal facets in the education leaders' selection process.

In the context of human development, there has been a debate on which among nature and nurture impacts the development of an individual. While the evidence has been generated to support each of the arguments, another prominent argument besides the two is the combination of both, known also as convergence theory or what Santrock (2016) described as “heredity-environment interaction” (p. 66). Based on the findings of this present study, it is clear that the responses of the respondents are in favor of the convergence category or more specifically “heredity-environment correlations” theory, as they believe that leadership capacity is impacted by both genetics and environment. In this case, this theory believes that both genetics and environment influence development, yet the emphasis here is that “genetics direct the environment” (Santrock, 2016).

In more detail, there are three types of heredity-environment correlations: passive, evocative and active. The passive correlation occurs when children are raised by their natural parents, where the children are passively given an environment that the parents think is suitable for their natural abilities. Meanwhile, evocative correlation is when the children’s natural condition attracts the reaction of people (environment) around them. In the meantime, active correlation is when the children actively search for an environment that they think is suitable for themselves without intervention from others. In the context of this present study, the dataset indicates that the types of heredity-environment correlations that are practiced within *pesantren* are more into the passive and evocative patterns.

The passive pattern is generated from the respondent’s statement that reads as follows: “the kiai who has more than one child, has identified which of their children will take care of this and that; or which of them will handle the *pesantren* and which one will not”. It could be interpreted as follows: the kiai (as the parent) has already noticed which one among their children has the strongest natural leadership skills. Following this identification by the kiai, this particular child who is seen to have strong natural leadership ability would then be given a supportive environment to develop their leadership skills such as by giving them training or

pursuing education as the preparation for them to be *pesantren* leaders in the future. In this case, the natural ability that a particular gus possesses has directed the kiai to facilitate them with an environment that could support them to be *pesantren* leaders, as it resonates with the passive heredity-environment correlation in which heredity “directs” the environment.

Meanwhile, the evocative pattern could be sourced from the reaction of people surrounding gus such as *santri* (*pesantren* students) and other *pesantren* community members. In the context of *pesantren*, gus enjoy the same respect as kiai, as conveyed by the respondent: “The title “gus” is superior, so privileged. In *pesantren*, people who have no title of gus will bow below the feet of the gus.” This resonates with the thesis that indeed the family members of the kiai receive the same level of respect and obedience as the kiai, making them gain a privileged status within the society (Dhofier, 1980). It means that the natural factors (gen) of the gus as *pesantren* future leaders attract the reaction of people around them to treat them as the future leaders evocatively. This condition resonates with the evocative pattern in which the natural condition of a human attracts the reaction of people (environment) around them, to support them to be what they think to be—which in gus’s case is to be a *pesantren* future leader. Thus, this indicates that when it comes to the pattern of heredity-environment interaction in *pesantren* leadership, this is not only passive but also evocative.

While it is argued that the findings of this study are in favor of the convergence theory of human development as per the western-secular perspective, the findings also support the argument on the nature vs nurture influence on human development based on the Islamic perspective. Here, Islam believes that a human is impacted by both nature (*fitrah*) and nurture (environment) in their development. This is based on the scriptures within Islam itself: Qur’an and hadith. The Qur’an mentions that humans are “God’s vicegerent on earth” or *khalifa Ullah fil-ard*. The complete quote reads as follows: “Remember when your Lord said to the Angels: ‘Indeed I want to make a caliph on earth.’ They said: ‘Why do you want to make (the caliph) on earth a person who will make

mischief on it and shed blood, even though we always glorify you by praising you and purifying you?’ God said: ‘Indeed, I know what you do not know’.” (Al-Baqarah: 30). The term *khalifa* here could mean caliph or leader (Mohamed, 1995). Through this verse, Islam believes that humans are the representative of God on earth, equipped with an innate leadership nature as part of *fitrah* that He blew on humans before they were born to earth (Junoh et al., 2022). Here, the axiom of *fitrah* is related to the “central being” of humans that they are “God’s vicegerent on earth” (Mohamed, 1995, p. 3). Hence, the verse indicates that humans are born with innate (*fitrah*) leadership capabilities.

Not only with the innate (*fitrah*) leadership potential as the intrinsic factor, Islam also believes the environment is another factor that could also influence human capabilities. This is based on the hadith that reads: “Every child is born in a state of *fitrah* (the natural state of man), then his parents (environment) make him into a Jew or a Christian or a Magian” (Bukhari and Muslim). The term *fitrah* is interpreted as the human’s “innate predisposition” which becomes their fundamental nature (Mohamed, 1995), and could expand to unprecedented levels (Junoh et al., 2022). While *fitrah* is one factor, another factor that could influence human capacities is the environment, as represented in the hadith as the parent. Here, the idea that a person is born with a “*fitrah*” nature and afterward influenced by the external environment is at the core of the Islamic conception of human development (Bhat, 2016). Contextualizing the leadership capability which the Qur’an says is a natural (*fitrah*) potential of every human, the hadith above indicates that the environment could also influence human capabilities, which here also include leadership capacity. Thus, the findings of this study could also affirm the Islamic belief that when it comes to leadership capability, this is both naturally and environmentally formed.

Conclusion

In sum, the findings of this study confirm the already-established theoretical concepts on human development from either Western-secular or Islamic perspectives that leadership is influenced by both

nature and environment. The inquiries on perception, reflection and projection on the hereditary appointment system at *pesantren* culminate in a conclusion that the hereditary appointment system in selecting *pesantren* leaders is not to be changed or preserved, yet more to be combined with the meritocratic system. Converging both hereditary and meritocratic systems could be a panacea, as it accommodates both nature (intrinsic) and nurture (extrinsic) deliberations together, whilst also providing room for both components to back up each other's weaknesses and strengths (positive and negative implications). If studies have proved that genetics and environment both influence leadership capacity, then why choose only one aspect of consideration to select an educational leader? Combining both heredity and meritocracy here covers the total package, as it ticks all the boxes of three human developmental facets and thus becomes a win-win solution for *pesantren* in selecting leaders. This includes physical (leadership gen), cognitive (intellectual ability), and socio-emotional (moral integrity). Physical here is in favor of the hereditary leadership system, while cognitive and socio-emotional are in favor of the meritocratic system.

As one implication, the heredity-meritocratic convergence system could help *pesantren* balance their hereditary leadership system with meritocratic considerations. Yet, another implication is that this could also open up space for the meritocratic system—despite its strengths and limitations—to start considering heredity as another pivotal cogitation. This is not just because the scientific evidence has shown that genetics indeed influence leadership. Yet, more importantly, this is to embed the complete package of all human development facets within the process of selecting educational leaders. Here, the findings of this study provide enough basis to further question: if the studies proved that genetics influence leadership capacity, then why is heredity not included as a consideration to select leaders? Pros and cons might be there, and this study does not have enough data to touch that area. Thus, this study calls for further research to particularly discuss this topic to enrich the scholarly discussion on educational leadership which still has many loopholes to be uncovered.

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