

Micro-Level Leadership: The Role and Challenges of Room Leaders in Student Development at Islamic Higher Education Institution

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role and challenges of room leaders as micro-level leaders in student development within the dormitory of STAI Ali bin Abi Thalib Surabaya. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis, and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model. The study involved 18 informants consisting of four room leaders, eight room residents, three dormitory administrators, two residential mentors, and one dormitory supervisor. The findings show that room leaders play a strategic role as micro-level leaders who supervise students' daily activities, coordinate room life, serve as a communication bridge between students and dormitory management, enforce dormitory regulations, and influence students through personal example. However, the implementation of these roles is constrained by three main categories of challenges: limited leadership and communication competencies, social interaction dynamics among room residents, and insufficient structural support in the form of mentoring, coordination, monitoring, and appreciation. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on room leaders as micro-level leaders who operate within the closest sphere of interaction in a dormitory-based student development system, an aspect that remains underexplored in studies of higher education dormitory management. The study suggests strengthening room leaders through structured leadership training, improved communication and social interaction, regular monitoring and evaluation, and systematic institutional support and appreciation.

Keywords: Room Leader, Micro-Level Leadership, Student Development, Dormitory Leadership, Leadership Challenges

INTRODUCTION

Student dormitories constitute an essential component of the student development system in Islamic higher education institutions. A student dormitory may be defined as a temporary residence managed by an educational institution and provided for students throughout their period of study (Latuhuru, 2023). Its function extends beyond offering housing facilities; it also serves as a space for managing students' daily lives, cultivating discipline, and fostering social interaction within a structured environment. In this context, the effectiveness of dormitory management becomes a determining factor in creating a conducive, orderly, and supportive learning atmosphere that contributes to students' academic, spiritual, and social development (Yusuf et al., 2024).

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To fulfill these educational and developmental functions, dormitory management requires organized programs, supervision, and a clear distribution of responsibilities among the personnel involved. Effective dormitory management generally involves planning, organizing, implementation, and supervision (Lasmi & Arafah, 2024). In Islamic higher education, dormitory-based programs can provide a structured environment for developing students' religious character and daily habits through guidance, habituation, and supervision (Purwanto et al., 2021). Within such a system, student leaders who operate at the room or peer-group level may play an important role in translating institutional rules and developmental programs into students' everyday practices. Previous research on student leadership in residential educational settings indicates that peer leaders can contribute to discipline management, although limitations in leadership preparation and training may constrain their effectiveness (Mwangudza & Mbirithi, 2023).

At STAI Ali bin Abi Thalib Surabaya, the student dormitory implements various coaching activities, supervision, and regulations governing students' daily routines. However, preliminary observations and internal evaluations indicate that several aspects of dormitory management still require strengthening, particularly coordination mechanisms, disciplinary governance, and the clarity of roles among dormitory management personnel. Within this structure, the room leader occupies a strategic position as a student leader who organizes room activities, provides peer guidance, monitors compliance with dormitory regulations, and facilitates communication between room residents and dormitory management. Preliminary field observations further indicate that the implementation of these responsibilities has not been fully optimal, particularly in internal room leadership, disciplinary supervision, communication, and reporting. These conditions point to the need to examine more closely the role of room leaders and the factors that facilitate or constrain the implementation of their responsibilities.

Previous studies have examined dormitory-based education from several perspectives. The first group of studies has focused on dormitory management as an institutional mechanism for supporting student development. (Arsyad et al., 2024) for example, examined dormitory management in Islamic boarding school educational institutions and highlighted the importance of systematic planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling in managing dormitory activities. Their study also emphasized the importance of clear organizational structures and the distribution of roles and responsibilities among those involved in dormitory management. Similarly, (Aliyudin et al., 2025) examined the management of the dormitory management institution at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah UIN Sultan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi and highlighted its role in character development and language

competency among students. These studies demonstrate the importance of systematic management structures, clear role distribution, and coordination in ensuring that dormitory-based educational programs function effectively.

A second group of studies has emphasized the role of dormitory environments in student character development. (Susilo et al., 2021) examined the role of dormitory supervisors in shaping students' religious, honest, disciplined, responsible, and independent character. Likewise, (Limbong et al., 2023) investigated the relationship between leadership, school culture, and dormitory life in student character development and found that these factors contributed significantly to character formation. More recent research has also highlighted university dormitories as spaces for developing student character beyond formal classroom settings (Musadad et al., 2025). These studies establish the educational significance of residential environments in shaping students' behavior and character.

A third strand of research has examined student leadership in relation to discipline and residential education. (Mwangudza & Mbirithi, 2023) investigated student leadership in public day and boarding schools and found that student leadership in dormitories, classrooms, clubs, and faith-based organizations contributed to the management of student discipline. However, their study also identified limitations in student leadership training and competencies. This finding indicates that student leadership can function as an important component of discipline management, but its effectiveness depends partly on the preparation and capacity of student leaders.

Taken together, the existing literature has established the importance of dormitory management, residential environments, formal supervision, and student leadership in supporting student development. However, these studies tend to examine dormitory management at the institutional level, focus on formal supervisors or administrators, or discuss student leadership more broadly. Less attention has been given to the room leader as a micro-level leadership actor who operates within students' immediate residential environment and interacts with them on a daily basis. Moreover, limited attention has been paid to how room leaders simultaneously perform supervisory, coordinative, communicative, rule-implementation, and role-modeling functions and to the challenges that affect the implementation of these roles.

Therefore, this study addresses this gap by examining room leaders as micro-level leaders within a dormitory-based student development system at STAI Ali bin Abi Thalib Surabaya. The study focuses on two interrelated dimensions: the roles performed by room leaders in students' daily residential life and the challenges that constrain the effective implementation of those roles. This

focus provides a more specific understanding of how leadership operates at the closest level of students' everyday residential environment.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the roles and challenges of room leaders in student development within the dormitory of STAI Ali bin Abi Thalib Surabaya. A qualitative descriptive design was selected to obtain a contextual description of participants' experiences, interactions, and practices in their everyday residential environment. The methodological approach was informed by qualitative descriptive inquiry, while Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory served as the theoretical framework for interpreting the findings, particularly through the concepts of the microsystem and proximal processes. The framework was used to examine how the room leader's position within the students' immediate residential environment and their recurring interactions with room residents relate to student development.

Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews and observations, while secondary data were obtained from relevant dormitory and institutional documents. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in dormitory life and their relevance to the research focus. The study involved 18 informants, consisting of four room leaders, eight room residents, three dormitory administrators, two residential mentors (mushrif), and one dormitory supervisor. The informants were selected to provide perspectives from different positions within the dormitory system, particularly those directly involved in room leadership, student life, supervision, and dormitory management.

Tabel 1. Informants of the Study

No	Informant Category	Number
1	Room leaders	4
2	Room residents	8
3	Dormitory administrators	3
4	Residential mentors	2
5	Dormitory supervisor	1
Total		18

Data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis. In-depth interviews explored the roles and challenges of room leaders, including supervision, coordination, communication, implementation of dormitory regulations, and role modeling. Observations were conducted to examine these practices and interactions in the natural dormitory setting. Document analysis was used to identify formal responsibilities, regulations, reporting procedures, and

coordination mechanisms relevant to room leaders and student development. The three techniques were used complementarily to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the roles and challenges of room leaders.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The analysis focused on two main dimensions: the roles performed by room leaders and the challenges affecting the implementation of those roles. Data from interviews, observations, and documents were compared and organized according to relevant themes. The findings were subsequently interpreted through Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, particularly the concepts of the microsystem and proximal processes, to understand how room leaders' daily interactions with students operate within the immediate residential environment and relate to student development.

The credibility of the findings was established through source and technique triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from room leaders, room residents, dormitory administrators, residential mentors, and the dormitory supervisor. Technique triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained through interviews, observations, and document analysis. These procedures enabled the researcher to examine the consistency of information across different sources and methods and to ensure that the findings concerning the roles and challenges of room leaders were supported by multiple sources of empirical evidence.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Urgency of the Room Leader's Role in Dormitory Management

The room leader holds a central position in student development within the dormitory environment, as they are the figure situated in the closest and most intensive sphere of interaction with students. From the perspective of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, the dormitory room as a student living space is situated at the microsystem level, the most immediate environment in which students engage in direct, routine, and recurring interactions. It is at this microsystem level that the processes of habit formation, communication patterns, and discipline are shaped. The microsystem is not merely a physical environment but also a social interaction space where individuals actively participate in shaping and responding to ongoing dynamics. It represents the closest everyday environment in which an individual experiences direct and intensive social relations. Within this space, individuals are not passive recipients of influence; rather, they actively

respond to, adapt to, and shape these interactions, which over time influence their habits, discipline, and daily character. (Salsabila, 2018)

From this standpoint, the room leader functions as the primary agent within the dormitory's microsystem, a proximate social environment that exerts a direct influence on students' behavioral and habitual development. Bronfenbrenner emphasizes that interactions occurring within the microsystem, such as those between students, roommates, supervisors, and room leaders, play a substantial role in forming habitual patterns that become embedded in one's behavior. Thus, the room leader becomes a mediating figure who bridges the institution's normative values with the students' daily lived practices. They are not merely administrative executors but also representatives of the dormitory's cultural ethos, ensuring that every room occupant undergoes a developmental process in aspects of discipline, responsibility, and social ethics. This view is reinforced by a residential mentor who stated:

“The room leader is one of our frontline figures in the development of each room member.”

This statement illustrates that the room leader's influence is direct and continuous, shaping the interactional patterns and habitus of room occupants. Through supervision, guidance, and exemplary conduct, the room leader creates a micro-climate of social learning that reflects the institution's moral and religious values. In Bronfenbrenner's terms, this constitutes proximal processes, the recurring interactions between individuals and their environment that shape behavior and character. (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) Therefore, the role of the room leader not only supports the technical operations of dormitory life but also serves as a primary instrument for value internalization within a sustained ecological development framework.

Within the dormitory management system, room leaders play a vital role as micro-level supervisors who maintain order and ensure that institutional policies are implemented at the most fundamental level. As noted by a dormitory administrator:

“The role of the room leader in supervising and guiding students includes monitoring and reporting issues, observing the behavior of room members, reporting problems to the residential mentor, implementing dormitory regulations, and ensuring their enforcement in each room. They also serve as the coordinator within their respective rooms.”

This explanation highlights that the room leader's function lies at the implementational stage of the dormitory management cycle. They act not only as administrative intermediaries but also as ongoing observers of room dynamics, including discipline, compliance with regulations, and

social interactions among members. Rather than serving merely as reporters, room leaders ensure the continuity of developmental functions at the most concrete point of the dormitory ecosystem.

Findings from (Jela et al., 2022) further emphasize that the effectiveness of dormitory management and student development is strongly influenced by the intensity of control and continuity of supervision provided by dormitory authorities. However, in practice, optimal supervision is hindered by the fact that dormitory supervisors also perform dual roles as academic staff on campus. These dual responsibilities limit the time, focus, and energy supervisors can dedicate to fully monitoring students' daily lives within the dormitory. This condition demonstrates that effective mentoring requires a figure consistently present within the dormitory environment, capable of giving timely responses to emerging issues.

In this context, the room leader becomes the ecological substitute for the supervisor's proximal presence. Because supervisors are not always available, the room leader becomes the most feasible figure to perform micro-supervision functions, monitoring daily activities, maintaining the room's social stability, and ensuring continuous enforcement of dormitory rules. This aligns with the notion that supervision and student development cannot rely solely on formal structures that are infrequently present; rather, they must be supported by figures embedded within the students' everyday microsystem. Thus, the room leader assumes the supervisory role within the immediate environment, facilitating value conditioning and responsiveness to room dynamics.

This finding strengthens the argument that the room leader holds a crucial role in ensuring continuity of supervision and development within the dormitory, as their position is closest to the students. When supervisors cannot fully perform their roles due to multiple responsibilities or external constraints, the room leader becomes the only figure capable of ensuring that discipline, responsibility, and order are upheld in students' daily routines.

A room leader explained:

"The room leader has a strong influence. When the room leader is disciplined, the members will also be disciplined. Conversely, if the room leader neglects the room, discipline, cleanliness, and tidiness will all decline."

This statement highlights that leadership effectiveness within the room does not depend solely on formal authority but significantly on the power of example provided by the micro-level leader. The discipline demonstrated by the room leader directly establishes behavioral standards adopted by room members, not merely through instruction but through strong social modeling mechanisms within small groups. This aligns with (Anam et al., 2019), who found that informal

leadership significantly affects an institution's quality culture. Informal leaders shape orientation, behavior, and work culture not through structural authority but through exemplary conduct, relational closeness, and daily interactions that foster trust and natural adherence. The room leader's influence on discipline and orderliness thus mirrors the dynamics of effective informal leadership as described in their findings.

Conversely, when the room leader displays negligence or lack of concern toward room management, such behavior is quickly mirrored in the room's daily environment, reflected in declining discipline, reduced cleanliness, and weakened collective responsibility. This demonstrates that the room leader manages not only the physical space but also the norms, as their behavior sets the boundaries of group tolerance toward disorder. At this point, the room leader functions as a trendsetter within the room's social ecosystem, active leadership fosters an orderly culture, whereas negligence opens space for indiscipline and diminishing collective awareness. Thus, the room leader's influence is not only structural but also psychosocial, shaping the room atmosphere through presence, habits, and daily conduct.

In summary, the theoretical review and empirical evidence demonstrate that the room leader is an indispensable element in the success of dormitory management and student development. Their proximity of interaction, exemplary influence, and ability to regulate the rhythm of room life place them in a highly strategic role in maintaining order, cultivating discipline, and safeguarding social stability among students in residential settings. At this level, the room leader is not merely an extension of structural policy but the primary actor ensuring that the dormitory's educational values manifest in students' daily practices. However, despite their strategic potential, the realization of this role is not always optimal. Various structural, personal, and environmental constraints often affect their effectiveness. Therefore, it is critical to further examine the factors that inhibit the optimal performance of room leaders within the context of dormitory management and student development.

Obstacles to the Implementation of the Room Leader's Role

Although the role of the room leader is strategically positioned within dormitory management and student development, its implementation in practice does not always meet expectations. The findings of this study show that the effectiveness of room leaders in carrying out coordination, supervision, and rule enforcement is significantly influenced by multiple interrelated factors. These obstacles are not only structural but also arise from personal, social, and cultural dynamics that develop within the room environment. Therefore, a comprehensive mapping of these

obstacles is essential to understand why the role of the room leader is not always optimized and to identify aspects that require strengthening so that the dormitory's developmental system can function more effectively and sustainably.

Analysis of interview data indicates that the obstacles faced by room leaders fall into three major categories: obstacles related to the room leader's leadership competencies, obstacles associated with social interactions and the responses of room members, and obstacles originating from inadequate structural support and mentoring. These categories illustrate that the challenges encountered by room leaders are multidimensional, spanning personal, relational, and systemic aspects, which collectively determine the success or failure of room management and student development processes. Understanding these obstacles allows improvement efforts to be more accurately directed, whether through strengthening room leaders' leadership capacity, enhancing the social culture within the room, or increasing the effectiveness of mentoring and structural support provided by the dormitory management system.

1. Obstacles Related to the Competence and Leadership of Room Leaders

One important factor influencing the effectiveness of room leaders in managing dormitory life is their personal capacity and leadership competence. Room leaders are not only required to carry out administrative responsibilities but also need the ability to communicate effectively, manage group dynamics, influence member behavior, and maintain the stability of room life through exemplary conduct and interpersonal skills. Research on peer leadership indicates that effective peer leaders require competencies related to communication, interpersonal support, responsibility, and the ability to respond to the needs of group members (Baker, 2015). In the context of boarding education, (Mwangudza & Mbirithi, 2023) likewise found that student leadership contributed to discipline management, while limitations in leadership training and competencies constrained the effectiveness of student leaders.

However, field findings show that not all room leaders are adequately prepared to assume this role. Some lack prior leadership experience, others have not yet mastered communication techniques or group management, and some struggle to maintain the consistency needed to regulate room activities. This condition indicates that limitations in competence and leadership constitute one of the primary obstacles faced by room leaders within the dormitory environment.

This is further emphasized by the statement of a residential mentor:

“Some room leaders do not function optimally because they lack a strong sense of responsibility and do not yet possess sufficient public speaking skills when dealing with their members. As a result, their leadership capacity is not ready to effectively coordinate or guide room members.”

This explanation illustrates that weaknesses in fundamental capacities: responsibility, communication skills, and leadership ability, that directly affect the authority and effectiveness of room leaders in managing room members.

This aligns with the findings of (Parhusip et al., 2023) concerning the leadership role of teachers in the classroom. Their study indicates that leaders in small units, such as teachers leading a class, can influence students' behavior and learning outcomes not merely through formal authority, but primarily through their ability to influence, guide, and mentor. Teachers are described as leaders who must create order, motivate students, and serve as role models, a form of micro-leadership that closely parallels the role of room leaders in the dormitory. The finding that “teacher leadership significantly influences student achievement” demonstrates that leadership within small groups is only effective when the leader communicates well, guides consistently, and manages the group directly and continuously.

In the dormitory context, room leaders perform nearly identical leadership functions: they lead small groups, supervise daily activities, and shape the room's social atmosphere through ongoing interactions. As noted by the residential mentor, and as reflected in earlier statements by room leaders themselves, when a room leader is “unwilling to manage the room,” is uncommunicative, or lacks discipline, the developmental rhythm of the room weakens, similar to a classroom that loses effectiveness when the teacher lacks strong leadership. These findings reinforce the argument that micro-leadership requires mature communication competence; without it, room leaders cannot effectively influence members to maintain discipline, cleanliness, or order. Thus, this study demonstrates that obstacles in room leaders' leadership capacity are not merely technical issues but reflect core leadership limitations that significantly determine the effectiveness of development within small social settings such as dormitory rooms.

Referring to (Kurniawan, 2014) discussion on effective leadership, a leader's ability to direct and influence group members is heavily shaped by personal competencies, including

integrity, self-confidence, emotional intelligence, honesty, and communication skills. The article stresses that effective leadership is achieved only when leaders successfully integrate character, interpersonal skills, and leadership style appropriate to their group's conditions. This perspective is consistent with the residential mentor's statement that some room leaders lack a strong sense of responsibility and have not yet mastered communication and leadership skills needed to coordinate their members. Based on Kurniawan's framework, deficiencies in these basic competencies hinder micro-leaders, such as room leaders, from building influence, enforcing rules, and cultivating disciplined collective behavior in small groups. Therefore, this research confirms that obstacles related to room leaders' competencies are not merely technical shortcomings but structural leadership issues that directly impact the effectiveness of room-based student development.

2. Obstacles Related to Social Interaction and Room Members' Responses

Obstacles to the implementation of the room leader's role are not solely rooted in individual factors but also emerge from the social interaction dynamics within the room. Several informants noted that the responses of room members toward guidance, disciplinary habituation, and developmental activities were not always optimal. This condition does not necessarily reflect rejection; rather, it illustrates the diversity of students' character, habits, and readiness to adapt to the cultural expectations of dormitory life.

Some residents described that maintaining order in the room, whether in terms of cleanliness, the use of Arabic, or discipline in worship, often requires stronger reinforcement. Sustaining cleanliness still demands consistent regulation, and certain peer interactions do not always support the creation of a conducive learning environment. Other informants added that although room leaders provided guidance, some members continued to repeat unproductive habits, indicating that effective room climate management requires more varied and persuasive strategies.

From the perspective of dormitory administrators, social dynamics play a significant role in influencing the effectiveness of room leaders. One administrator stated:

“The effectiveness of a room leader's role largely depends on how often they interact with their members. The more frequently they gather and communicate, the closer their relationship becomes. When they are familiar with each other, the room leader's guidance is usually more readily accepted and listened to.”

This indicates that when room leaders have limited opportunities for intensive interaction with members, their guidance may not receive full attention. The explanation underscores the importance of relational closeness, as warm and positive communication fosters openness and mutual respect within the room.

These descriptions show that obstacles related to social interaction should not be viewed as confrontational issues; rather, they represent developmental challenges within a heterogeneous living community. As peer leaders, room leaders must manage interpersonal relationships wisely, while room members require time to adapt to the discipline and habituation processes practiced in the dormitory.

These findings are consistent with previous studies on social interaction in residential educational settings. Lamanepa et al found that the quality of interaction among dormitory residents significantly affects comfort and contributes to the formation of an orderly social climate. When interactions run smoothly, compliance with regulations increases naturally. (Lamanepa et al., 2016) In the context of peer leadership, Mwangudza & Mbirithi demonstrated that leadership effectiveness in dormitories is strongly influenced by peer support; when social bonds are well established, leaders' guidance tends to be accepted more naturally without perceptions of coercion. (Mwangudza & Mbirithi, 2023) Similarly, Rofiah reported that in Islamic boarding schools, dialogical, persuasive, and exemplary interactions are key to successful student mentoring. (Rofiah, 2019)

Therefore, obstacles in social interaction and room members' responses are best understood as developmental challenges inherent to communal living. A more humanistic approach, warmer communication patterns, and strengthened norms of mutual advice (*naṣīḥah*) are needed to support room leaders in fostering an orderly, comfortable, and spiritually enriching room environment conducive to the development of students' Islamic character.

3. Obstacles Related to Mentoring and Structural Support for Room Leaders

In addition to individual factors and social dynamics, the effectiveness of student leadership can also be influenced by the training, mentoring, and institutional support provided by the educational organization. (Mwangudza & Mbirithi, 2023), for example, found that although student leadership in boarding settings contributed to the management of student discipline, available leadership training was insufficient to address gaps in student

leaders' abilities and competencies. This indicates the importance of adequate preparation and institutional support for students who assume leadership responsibilities.

In the present study, several obstacles were also identified within the dormitory management system. Some informants described that coordination pathways, developmental mechanisms, and institutional support have not functioned optimally. One administrator explained that the appointment of room leaders often occurs suddenly and without a rigorous selection process, resulting in the placement of individuals who are not fully prepared to assume the responsibility. Some students were appointed abruptly and therefore required time to adjust to their new duties. Administrators also noted that coordination across structural lines sometimes requires extended time, particularly when room-related issues must await follow-up from higher authorities. Some reported that problem resolution can be delayed due to multi-layered communication channels.

From the developmental perspective, residential mentor and supervisors do provide mentoring; however, limited monitoring frequency prevents certain issues from being promptly identified. Dormitory supervisors admitted that although routine evaluations are conducted, monthly monitoring alone is insufficient to ensure optimal daily oversight. This aligns with findings by (Susanto et al., 2024), which emphasize that intensive and scheduled monitoring has a direct impact on the effectiveness of development programs and performance improvement among educational personnel. Infrequent monitoring delays the problem-identification process, hindering timely intervention at the operational level. Conversely, when monitoring is conducted more regularly, administrators are better able to provide timely support, strengthen discipline, and maintain the motivation of those receiving guidance. Thus, these findings reinforce the reality within the dormitory that the frequency of mentoring plays a crucial role in ensuring that room leaders can perform their responsibilities consistently and sustainably.

Additionally, informants highlighted the need for more meaningful forms of appreciation for room leaders. As one room leader expressed:

“What I feel is that the appreciation from administrators or supervisors is very minimal. It’s really minimal. So, midway through the leadership period, room leaders may feel underappreciated. Some of them even experience decreased motivation. This needs to be evaluated.”

This statement indicates that structural support in the form of appreciation significantly influences the sustainability of room leaders' motivation and performance. In the context of student development, room leaders are not only technical managers but also figures who carry out daily mentoring, supervision, and role-modeling functions. Appreciation, whether verbal, symbolic, or administrative, acts as reinforcement that strengthens commitment and psychological resilience in facing on-the-ground challenges. Insufficient appreciation may lead to feelings of neglect, reduced sense of belonging, and ultimately decreased enthusiasm for fulfilling assigned responsibilities.

This finding aligns with the theory of perceived organizational support, which posits that individuals demonstrate stronger commitment when they feel supported, valued, and acknowledged by the organization. Research by (Musyaropah & Sari, 2024) demonstrates that perceived organizational support significantly influences commitment and persistence among teachers, contributing up to 35.8% to their work commitment. When organizational support manifests in the form of attention, appreciation, fairness, and moral reinforcement, individuals' motivation and commitment increase substantially. In the dormitory context, the same principle applies: room leaders as peer leaders will demonstrate greater stability, confidence, and consistency in their duties when they perceive genuine support from administrators and supervisors. Hence, enhancing appreciation and structural support is not merely a symbolic gesture but a vital strategy to sustain the role of room leaders and foster a healthier developmental climate within the dormitory.

Overall, these structural obstacles demonstrate that the effectiveness of room leaders is not solely determined by personal capacity or social dynamics within the room but is also heavily dependent on the quality of mentoring systems and institutional support surrounding them. When the appointment process lacks selectivity, coordination pathways remain layered, monitoring is infrequent, and appreciation is not systematically implemented, the psychological and administrative burden placed on room leaders outweighs the support they receive. This mismatch creates a gap between role expectations and available resources. Therefore, systemic strengthening through improved coordination mechanisms, increased monitoring intensity, and structured appreciation is essential to ensure that room leaders can carry out their developmental functions more consistently, effectively, and sustainably. With such strengthening, room leaders are not merely assisted but truly empowered, enabling the

dormitory's developmental climate to progress positively and align with the institution's goals for student character formation.

Recommendations for Strengthening the Role of Room Leaders in Dormitory Management

A comprehensive explanation based on field data regarding the obstacles encountered by room leaders in carrying out their duties and responsibilities illustrates that these issues cannot be resolved by one or two individuals alone. Such obstacles require systematic analysis and collaborative solutions involving all elements within the dormitory system. (Pitriyani & Kamaludin, 2024) Room leaders are individuals who hold a strong social role in dormitory life. Their mandate from supervisors (pembina) and residential mentor, as well as their direct interaction with students, places them at the center of addressing many of the challenges arising within the dormitory. However, field findings indicate that their role despite being central to dormitory life has not yet functioned optimally.

Strengthening this role requires a more participatory relational pattern within the dormitory environment. Active involvement of room leaders and residents, individual empowerment, recognition of contributions, and active communication characteristics of cooperative problem-solving approaches must serve as core pillars in enhancing the role of room leaders. Through such an approach, various deficiencies that have hindered room leaders' performance can gradually be resolved and redirected toward a more effective dormitory management mechanism.

The following are several recommendations for strengthening the role of room leaders in managing the dormitory at STAI Ali bin Abi Thalib Surabaya:

1. Leadership and Public Communication Training for Room Leaders

Leadership is a broad and complex concept that can be understood as the art of influencing and directing others. A leader's ability to cultivate compliance, trust, and respect through effective public communication serves as a driving force that enables an organization to achieve its collective goals and overcome challenges encountered along the way. (Taufikurrahman et al., 2024) Every individual possesses the potential for leadership, as emphasized in the saying of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ:

كُلُّكُمْ رَاعٍ، وَكُلُّكُمْ مَسْئُولٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ

"Each of you is a leader, and each of you will be questioned about your leadership."

(Al-Bukhari, 2012)

However, the extent to which this potential is developed and utilized varies among individuals. As peer leaders within the dormitory environment, room leaders should ideally

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possess strong influence among residents. This leadership image is crucial for fostering a dormitory environment that supports Islamic character development and academic growth. To realize this leadership image, room leaders' leadership skills must be cultivated through structured coaching and leadership training programs.

Such training should include the introduction of characteristics of effective leaders, public communication strategies, conflict management within organizations, and an exploration of the dormitory's shared vision and mission. Additionally, the training program should incorporate discipline-building activities and teamwork exercises, including outdoor or outbound activities that strengthen collaboration and group cohesion. (Walewangko et al., 2023)

Although the leadership potential of room leaders cannot be fully optimized through a short-term training program conducted over only a few days, such initiatives provide essential foundations. They offer room leaders an understanding of professional leadership practices within the dormitory setting, enabling them to fulfill the mandate given by supervisors and residential mentor, and to guide their peers toward the realization of the dormitory's developmental goals.

2. Developing a System of Appreciation and Periodic Evaluation

As in any organization, the dynamics of organizational life within the STAI Ali bin Abi Thalib Surabaya dormitory are inseparable from various challenges and developments that occur over time. In this context, the room leader holds a central position in determining the stability and direction of these dynamics. Their ability to interpret instructions, regulations, and responsibilities assigned by dormitory supervisors and residential mentor, as well as their capacity to guide the residents under their leadership, plays a crucial role in determining the success of the dormitory as an environment that supports students' academic and spiritual development.

To perform these responsibilities effectively, a room leader is required to deploy their full leadership and communication competencies. These demands inevitably require substantial time, energy, and concentration, especially since room leaders simultaneously carry the academic responsibilities of a student. Therefore, every effort and contribution made by room leaders in fulfilling their mandate should be recognized and appreciated. Providing appreciation from dormitory administrators demonstrates that the room leader's performance is genuinely acknowledged and valued.

Periodically delivered appreciation has been shown to increase motivation, enhance work quality, and reduce the potential for decreased enthusiasm or burnout (futura) in carrying out leadership duties. (Febrianty et al., 2023) Forms of appreciation may include verbal recognition, such as monthly nominations for the best room leader, or the provision of access to special facilities or privileges either individually or collectively. In addition, financial bonuses or reductions in administrative burdens may also serve as effective alternatives for rewarding room leaders' contributions.

However, even with high levels of effort, room leaders may still encounter shortcomings or make mistakes. At this point, the evaluation system carried out by supervisors, residential mentor, and dormitory administrators becomes critically important. Ignoring minor errors may create "time bombs" that hinder the effectiveness of room leaders' performance in the future. Conducting periodic evaluations, weekly or monthly, allows the dormitory management to diagnose potential obstacles early based on feedback from room leaders. This process enables programs or rules that are no longer relevant to be adjusted according to current dormitory conditions.

Furthermore, evaluation of room leaders' performance provides important insights into the effectiveness of management and the allocation of human resources, allowing them to be aligned with the dormitory's needs. (Bara Jonathan Rihi Hina et al., 2024) A systematic and continuous evaluation process ultimately supports the creation of a more conducive and productive dormitory environment.

3. Strengthening Synergy Among Dormitory Supervisors, Residential Mentor, and Administrators

Dormitory supervisors (pembina), residential mentor, and dormitory administrators hold strategic positions above room leaders within the organizational hierarchy. Every program and regulation implemented by room leaders is the result of agreements established by these three parties. They collaborate in designing, approving, implementing, and overseeing the dormitory's operational and developmental programs. Strong synergy among these key actors ensures system reliability within the STAI Ali bin Abi Thalib Surabaya dormitory organization. This is because their roles are interdependent and cannot function effectively in isolation. The absence of a supervisor would eliminate the highest authority needed to regulate the dormitory; similarly, the absence of a residential mentor would create a significant gap between supervisors and administrators, leading to severe

miscommunication. Meanwhile, the absence of dormitory administrators would weaken the influence of supervisors and residential mentor in the eyes of students, potentially leading to perceptions of authoritarianism.

To strengthen synergy among supervisors, residential mentor, and administrators, a formal, routine, and systematic communication structure is required. Open, clear, and consistent communication between dormitory management and room leaders in particular and residents in general has been shown to effectively build a conducive environment and increase residents' sense of responsibility. (Risky & Fazila, 2025) Therefore, supervisors, residential mentor, and administrators should schedule regular weekly or monthly meetings as a forum for reflection, evaluation, and joint planning. Such forums provide opportunities to align visions, assess existing challenges, and formulate collaborative solutions.

Synergy can also be strengthened through collaborative efforts in character formation and spiritual development. Dormitory supervisors hold strategic roles in guiding disciplinary practices and spiritual behavior. A study found that supervisors can effectively nurture students' religious character through exemplary conduct, advice, and worship habituation, even when their presence is limited to certain key moments. (Astuti, 2025) Meanwhile, residential mentor who live among and interact with students daily serve as facilitators of character habituation through consistent presence, supervision, and personal motivation. Dormitory administrators, as student representatives, can implement concrete programs such as waking students for prayer times, providing khutbah and public-speaking training, and organizing mandatory language activities. Through such shared responsibilities, character development becomes an integrated activity involving all elements of the dormitory structure.

CONCLUSIONS

This study found that room leaders occupy a strategic micro-level leadership position within the dormitory-based student development system at STAI Ali bin Abi Thalib Surabaya. Their proximity to students enables them to perform several interconnected functions, including supervising daily activities, coordinating room life, communicating between students and dormitory management, implementing dormitory regulations, and influencing student behavior through personal example. These findings indicate that the room leader is not merely an administrative

extension of dormitory management but an actor who operates directly within the students' immediate residential environment.

At the same time, the implementation of these roles is constrained by three main categories of challenges. First, differences in leadership competence, communication ability, public speaking skills, and sense of responsibility affect the capacity of room leaders to guide and coordinate their members. Second, diverse responses and interpersonal dynamics among room residents require room leaders to develop more persuasive, consistent, and human-centered approaches. Third, structural factors, including non-selective appointment processes, limited preparation, layered coordination, insufficient monitoring, and limited appreciation, affect the consistency with which room leaders can perform their responsibilities. Thus, the findings answer the research objectives by showing that the effectiveness of room leaders depends not only on their formal responsibilities but also on their personal competencies, interpersonal interactions, and the organizational support surrounding them.

This study has several limitations. First, it was conducted in a single dormitory at STAI Ali bin Abi Thalib Surabaya, which limits the transferability of the findings to other dormitory-based educational institutions with different organizational and cultural contexts. Second, the study focused primarily on the perspectives of room leaders, residents, and dormitory personnel; therefore, the findings do not capture broader perspectives from students' academic or family environments. Third, the study employed a qualitative descriptive design and therefore does not measure the extent to which room leadership directly affects specific student development outcomes.

Future research could examine room leadership in multiple dormitory-based institutions to enable comparative analysis across different organizational contexts. Further studies may also investigate the relationship between room leadership competencies and measurable student development outcomes, such as discipline, responsibility, social behavior, or participation in dormitory activities. Longitudinal research could additionally explore how leadership training, mentoring, and institutional support influence the development of room leaders and the sustainability of their leadership practices over time.

Based on the findings, dormitory management should consider strengthening room leaders through systematic preparation and leadership training, regular mentoring and evaluation, clearer coordination mechanisms, and appropriate recognition of their responsibilities and contributions. Such measures may help create a more consistent and supportive environment for room leaders to carry out their developmental functions.

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