ELMIRA: Journal of Educational Transformation
Volume x Number x, Month (2026) | pp. 56-70
DOI:



Islamic Educational Leadership For Improving Educational Quality

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Keywords:
Islamic educational leadership; educational quality; Islamic values; quality management; conceptual model

Abstract

Educational quality extends beyond student achievement to include learning processes, institutional governance, educator capacity, and the ethical purposes of education. This article develops a conceptual framework of Islamic educational leadership for improving academic, institutional, and human-resource quality. It adopts an integrative literature review with a conceptual orientation. The analysis combines foundational leadership and quality-management theories with recent empirical studies and reviews on school leadership and Islamic education. Content analysis identifies key values and practices, comparative analysis examines the relationship among leadership approaches and quality-management principles, and conceptual synthesis connects these elements. The resulting model comprises five layers: Islamic value foundations, leadership practices, quality-management processes, educational-quality outcomes, and contextual evaluation and feedback. Amanah guides accountability, justice directs fair treatment and resource allocation, shura supports meaningful participation, and ihsan encourages ethical excellence and continuous improvement. The framework generates six propositions for empirical testing. It does not estimate causal effects, and researchers should validate its mechanisms across different types of Islamic educational institutions.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Educational quality should not be reduced to student test scores. It also concerns the relevance of institutional goals, the quality of teaching and learning, educator competence, governance, resource use, and responsiveness to community needs. Harvey and Green (1993) describe quality through several meanings, including excellence, consistency, fitness for purpose, value for money, and transformation. These meanings require educational institutions to define quality indicators in ways that reflect their educational missions. Recent research in Indonesian madrasahs also describes quality as a combination of academic processes, character formation, institutional practices, and community relations (Mu'alimin et al., 2026).

Leadership connects institutional goals with daily educational practice. School leaders set priorities, coordinate resources, support teachers, monitor learning, and organize improvement. Research on instructional and distributed leadership in Jakarta links principal practices with teachers' professional development (Amzat et al., 2022). Studies of distributed leadership also show that teacher leadership and professional learning communities can strengthen teacher self-efficacy and collaborative learning (Zheng et al., 2023). These findings suggest that leadership influences quality through organizational and professional processes rather than through position or authority alone.

The association between leadership and student outcomes remains meaningful but complex. A three-level meta-analysis of 493 effect estimates from 108 studies reported a small average relationship between school leadership practices and student outcomes, while highlighting instructional management, teacher capacity, and stakeholder engagement as relevant practices (Tan et al., 2024). A cross-national meta-analytical study using data from 75 countries further examined how instructional leadership relates to student achievement across cultural contexts (Pietsch et al., 2025). Shen and Wu (2025) also found that estimated leadership effects depend on conceptual models, outcome measures, and methodological choices. These results caution against treating leadership as a single direct cause of educational quality.

Islamic educational leadership adds a normative dimension to the managerial responsibilities of school leaders. The Qur'an connects the fulfillment of trusts with just judgment (Q. 4:58), praises consultation in collective affairs (Q. 42:38), and commands justice and excellence (Q. 16:90; Abdel Haleem, 2004). The hadith literature also presents leadership as a responsibility for those under one's care (Al-Bukhari, n.d.; Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, n.d.). These principles provide ethical direction for decisions about learning, staff development, institutional resources, and accountability.

Recent studies have expanded the discussion of Islamic leadership and educational quality. Arara et al. (2026) identify a spiritual core and administrative principles in Islamic educational leadership. Imamah et al. (2026) connect amanah, shura, justice, and ihsan with integrated quality management. Other studies examine Islamic leadership values during school reform (Mawardi et al., 2025), leadership and quality culture in madrasahs (Rifa'i & Syahputra, 2025), and quality-management practices in Islamic schools (Wibowo & Misbah, 2025). Research on Islamic educational decision-making also links shura, amanah, justice, and public benefit with institutional policy (Rini et al., 2025).

These contributions provide a useful basis, but they approach different parts of the relationship. Some studies identify Islamic leadership values, while others examine instructional leadership, quality-management systems, or institutional outcomes. A more explicit conceptual account can clarify how normative values shape leadership practices, how practices enter recurring management processes, and how those processes relate to academic, institutional, and human-resource quality. This article addresses that task through the following main question: How can Islamic educational leadership be conceptually constructed to improve educational quality on the basis of an integrative literature review? It contributes a five-layer framework, a set of operational dimensions, and six propositions for further empirical testing.

2. METHOD

This article uses an integrative literature review with a conceptual orientation. An integrative review allows researchers to combine theoretical, conceptual, and empirical literature to develop a more comprehensive explanation of a research problem. Whittemore and Knafl (2005) identify a sequence that includes problem formulation, literature search, source evaluation, analysis, and presentation of synthesis. Accordingly, this article does not use a case-study, survey, or experimental design. It also does not claim to be a full systematic review or meta-analysis.

The units of analysis comprise Islamic educational leadership, amanah, justice ('adl), consultation (shura), ihsan, transformational leadership, instructional leadership, ethical leadership, participative leadership, and educational quality management. The source base includes foundational works by Burns (1978), Bass (1985), Deming (1986), and Sallis (2002), methodological literature, recent reviews of Islamic educational leadership, and empirical studies on school leadership, teacher development, and educational quality. The Qur'an and hadith serve as normative sources; they do not substitute for empirical evidence about organizational effectiveness.

The targeted search used combinations of English and Indonesian terms, including Islamic educational leadership, Islamic leadership values, educational leadership, instructional leadership, transformational leadership, educational quality, quality management in education, kepemimpinan pendidikan Islam, nilai kepemimpinan Islam, and mutu pendidikan. The author examined accessible academic discovery records, publisher pages, journal platforms, and repository metadata. Relevant records came from publications available through publishers such as SAGE, Wiley, Emerald, Taylor & Francis, and academic journal portals. Scopus and Web of Science served as priority indexing references where bibliographic information was accessible. However, this preparation did not produce complete institutional database exports or a reproducible count of all retrieved records.

The review included sources that directly addressed educational leadership, Islamic leadership values, quality management, or educational outcomes; provided verifiable publication information; and offered a clear conceptual or empirical contribution. The review excluded unsupported opinion pieces, records with unverifiable bibliographic metadata, and publications that mentioned leadership or quality without substantive relevance to the research question. Selection considered topical relevance, publication credibility, type of evidence, and the contribution of each source to the conceptual argument.

The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, content analysis identified definitions, values, leadership practices, mechanisms, and quality indicators in each source. Second, comparative analysis examined the connections and limits among transformational, instructional, ethical, and participative leadership and total quality management. Third, conceptual synthesis integrated Islamic values with leadership practices and quality-improvement processes. The synthesis generated a five-layer model and six propositions. Because the article is conceptual, these propositions represent theoretically reasoned statements rather than statistical findings or tested causal relationships.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Concepts and characteristics of Islamic educational leadership

This article defines Islamic educational leadership as a process through which leaders influence, direct, coordinate, and empower members of an educational institution in line with educational purposes and Islamic values. The definition combines a managerial dimension and a normative dimension. The managerial dimension explains how leaders set direction, manage resources, make decisions, and monitor organizational processes. The normative dimension explains why leaders exercise authority, which values guide their decisions, and to whom they remain accountable. Islamic educational leadership therefore requires more than adding religious symbols or language to administrative routines. Its values must shape decisions and organizational consequences.

Transformational leadership explains how leaders build shared vision, strengthen motivation, encourage innovation, and develop organizational members (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). Its strengths help institutions manage change, but transformation alone does not guarantee justice or accountability. A leader may mobilize an institution around a compelling vision while neglecting participation, equitable opportunity, or student interests. Islamic values therefore provide ethical standards that guide the use of leadership influence. Recent research on Islamic educational leadership similarly connects spiritual commitments with observable administrative principles and practices (Arara et al., 2026).

Instructional leadership places teaching and learning at the center of institutional activity. Leaders establish academic goals, monitor instruction, support teachers, and maintain conditions that enable learning. Hallinger (2011) explains that leadership for learning depends on values, context, leadership focus, and the distribution of leadership responsibilities. Recent evidence also associates instructional leadership with teacher professional learning, learning climate, self-efficacy, and collaborative practice (Liu & Hallinger, 2024; Savaş & Demirkasımoğlu, 2024). These findings underline the need to connect institutional vision with the core work of teaching.

Ethical leadership adds role modelling, honesty, fairness, and responsible decision-making. Brown et al. (2005) explain ethical leadership through social learning: organizational members observe leaders' conduct and learn which standards the institution rewards. Participative leadership adds structured opportunities for teachers, administrative staff, students, parents, and communities to contribute to decisions. Studies of Islamic secondary schools report that teachers value exemplary conduct, interpersonal relations, shura, and professional development during management reform (Mawardi et al., 2025). The resulting leadership profile combines moral integrity, accountability, justice, consultation, attention to learning, human development, and continuous improvement.

3.2. Islamic values and their translation into leadership practice

Four values guide the framework: amanah, justice ('adl), consultation (shura), and ihsan. These values reinforce one another, but they perform different managerial functions. Amanah governs responsibility for mandates and resources. Justice governs fair treatment and distribution. Shura governs deliberation and participation. Ihsan governs the quality of action and commitment to improvement. This functional distinction helps institutions translate normative principles into observable management practices.

Table 1. Translating Islamic values into educational-management practices.

Islamic value	Normative basis	Managerial translation	Observable indicators
Amanah	Qur'an 4:58; hadith on leadership responsibility	Accountability for mandates, transparent budgeting, clear duties, and consistency between commitments and actions	Resource-use reports; named task holders; documented follow-up to evaluation
Justice ('adl)	Qur'an 4:58 and 16:90	Fair access, equal treatment, objective assessment, and protection against discrimination	Transparent selection criteria; reasonable workloads; equitable learning access
Shura	Qur'an 42:38	Stakeholder consultation, deliberation, shared roles, and feedback mechanisms	Decision forums; teacher and parent participation; documented follow-up
Ihsan	Qur'an 16:90	High work standards, responsive services, reflection, innovation, and continuous improvement	Review cycles; professional development; evidence-informed process improvement

Amanah requires leaders to use their authority and institutional resources in accordance with their mandate. In education, it includes responsible budgeting, transparent information, clear assignments, and willingness to accept evaluation. Institutions should demonstrate amanah through accountability mechanisms, such as resource-use reports, explicit role descriptions, and follow-up on evaluation findings. The hadith on each person's responsibility for those under their care reinforces this obligation (Al-Bukhari, n.d.; Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, n.d.).

Justice guides leaders to make objective decisions and treat institutional members fairly. In education, justice concerns access to learning services, professional-development opportunities, workload distribution, performance assessment, and the treatment of students. Justice does not always require identical resource allocation. Leaders should consider different needs and barriers so that each member has a fair opportunity to achieve educational goals. This principle provides an ethical basis for proportionate resource allocation and justified affirmative action.

Shura requires leaders to involve people affected by a decision in the deliberative process. Participation does not remove the leader's responsibility or justify avoiding difficult decisions. Leaders remain responsible for final decisions, but they should consider the practical knowledge of teachers, staff, students, parents, and community members. Meaningful consultation requires adequate information, fair opportunities to speak, documentation, and clear follow-up. Research on professional learning communities shows that instructional leadership and procedural justice can strengthen collective professional learning (Liu & Hallinger, 2024; Zheng et al., 2023).

Ihsan encourages institutional members to perform their duties well and exceed minimum standards. In quality management, ihsan supports organizational learning, careful processes, student-oriented services, and continuous improvement. However, ihsan should not become a demand for unlimited productivity. Leaders must connect excellence with fair working conditions, professional support, and rational resource use. Ihsan promotes ethical excellence rather than numerical performance at the expense of staff well-being. Recent conceptual work also positions ihsan as a foundational value for integrated quality management in Islamic educational institutions (Imamah et al., 2026; Puteri Amanah et al., 2026).

3.3. The relationship between leadership and educational quality

Educational quality is a multidimensional construct. Harvey and Green (1993) show that stakeholders may understand quality as excellence, consistency, fitness for purpose, value, or transformation. Islamic educational institutions should also consider knowledge development, character formation, social responsibility, and spiritual integrity. These dimensions do not replace academic standards or sound governance. They broaden the purposes of quality so that institutional measures remain consistent with educational identity and student needs.

Total quality management offers a set of processes for translating leadership commitments into organizational routines. Sallis (2002) discusses the relevance of leadership, teamwork, measurement, strategy, and self-evaluation in education. Deming (1986) emphasizes system improvement, consistency of purpose, competence development, and the removal of barriers to effective work. Contemporary comparisons of TQM and EFQM in secondary education also identify leadership as a central factor in quality enhancement (Anastasiou & Ntokas, 2024). These frameworks require critical adaptation: students and parents are important stakeholders, but education cannot be reduced to market-style customer satisfaction. Institutions must balance stakeholder needs, academic standards, public responsibility, and the ethical purposes of Islamic education.

Leadership relates to quality through several intermediate mechanisms. First, leaders establish organizational direction and priorities. Second, they develop the capacities of teachers and support staff. Third, they create conditions that support learning, including collaboration, procedural fairness, and responsible use of evidence. Fourth, they connect evaluation with program improvement. Recent studies show that instructional leadership and distributed leadership can support teacher development (Amzat et al., 2022), while procedural justice strengthens the relationship between instructional leadership and professional learning communities (Liu & Hallinger, 2024). The relationship between context, leadership, and student outcomes also depends on institutional autonomy, accountability, and school climate (Kemethofer et al., 2023).

The evidence does not support a simple claim that stronger leadership always produces higher achievement. Tan et al. (2024) reported a small average relationship across 108 studies. Pietsch et al. (2025) examined instructional leadership and achievement across countries and time, while Shen and Wu (2025) showed that estimated effects vary with conceptual models and outcome measures. A recent meta-analysis of 128 high-quality studies found that teacher professional-development interventions can improve student achievement on average, but results vary substantially across settings (Visscher et al., 2025). Together, these findings support a mechanism-based account: leadership contributes to quality when it strengthens teaching, professional capacity, institutional conditions, and improvement routines.

Leadership therefore improves quality not through charisma or vision statements alone. Strategic decisions must influence students' learning experiences and educators' working conditions. Leaders need to translate vision into academic targets, resource allocation, service standards, professional development, and evidence-informed evaluation. Islamic values establish the moral boundaries and purposes of leadership, while quality-management theories provide tools to organize processes. The two perspectives complement one another, but neither replaces the other.

3.4. Leadership strategies and the five-layer conceptual model

Quality-improvement strategies can be organized across three connected dimensions. Academic quality concerns teaching, learning, and student development. Institutional quality concerns governance, services, resources, and internal quality assurance. Human-resource quality concerns the competence, commitment, ethics, and collaboration of educators and support staff. This distinction supports analysis, but implementation should connect all three dimensions.

Table 2. Leadership strategies and indicators of educational quality.

Quality dimension	Leadership strategy	Quality-management practice	Monitorable indicators
Academic quality	Set learning goals; lead instruction; strengthen academic supervision	Curriculum planning; learning monitoring; assessment analysis; instructional follow-up	Lesson-planning quality; learning progress; assessment development; equitable outcomes
Institutional quality	Strengthen participative governance; uphold trust and justice; align plans and budgets	Operating standards; internal audits; risk management; reporting; service evaluation	Procedural compliance; transparency; resource use; stakeholder feedback; corrective action
Human-resource quality	Model ethical conduct; develop educators and staff; strengthen collaboration	Competency mapping; professional learning; mentoring; learning communities; fair appraisal	Competence; professional-learning participation; collaboration; commitment; work quality

For academic quality, leaders should make teaching and learning operational priorities. They should establish measurable goals, monitor lesson planning and classroom practice, provide learning resources, and connect assessment evidence with instructional improvement. Academic supervision should move beyond administrative checking toward professional support. Teachers should use assessment to understand student progress rather than only to produce rankings. Research links instructional leadership with professional learning and student outcomes, although the size of the relationship depends on context and measurement (Pietsch et al., 2025; Savaş & Demirkasımoğlu, 2024; Tan et al., 2024).

For institutional quality, leaders should build systems that maintain consistent policies and services. These systems include strategic planning, budget alignment, standard operating procedures, internal quality assurance, risk management, reporting, and follow-up. Amanah guides transparency and accountability. Justice guides resource allocation and procedural fairness. Shura strengthens decision legitimacy and information flow. Quality assurance should not stop at accreditation documents. It should help institutions identify problems, assign corrective actions, and assess their effects. Recent studies in Indonesian madrasahs highlight the importance of instructional supervision, stakeholder involvement, and context-sensitive responses to resource and technology constraints (Mu'alimin et al., 2026; Rifa'i & Syahputra, 2025).

For human-resource quality, leaders should develop educator and staff capacity through competency mapping, mentoring, needs-based training, professional learning communities, collegial supervision, and fair recognition. Justice requires proportionate access to development. Shura gives staff a channel to express professional needs. Amanah requires performance assessment to use transparent standards. Ihsan encourages continuous improvement in work practices. Evidence indicates that teacher professional development works best when programs apply coherent learning principles and connect professional learning with actual instructional needs (Amzat et al., 2022; Visscher et al., 2025).

The three dimensions require indicators that extend beyond final outcomes. Institutions should monitor inputs, processes, outputs, and outcomes in a balanced way. Inputs include educator competence, facilities, budgets, and policy support. Processes include teaching quality, coordination, decision-making, and services. Outputs may include learning results, program completion, and academic products. Outcomes may include sustained learning, character development, community trust, and institutional capacity. Measures should reflect local context and should not use a single indicator to represent the whole meaning of quality.

The literature synthesis produces a five-layer model. The first layer contains Islamic values: amanah, justice, shura, and ihsan. The second layer contains leadership practices that combine transformational, instructional, ethical, and participative orientations. The third layer contains quality-management processes: planning, organizing, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and improvement. The fourth layer contains academic, institutional, and human-resource quality outcomes. The fifth layer contains evaluation and feedback that consider institutional context, resources, regulations, and stakeholder needs. Recent studies on quality management in Islamic schools support the need to connect management systems with local educational and religious purposes (Mu'alimin et al., 2026; Wibowo & Misbah, 2025).

Sustaining the proposed model requires continuous evaluation and institutional learning. Leaders should use evaluation findings to identify gaps between intended standards and actual practices, determine the factors underlying those gaps, and establish evidence-based improvement priorities. Feedback from teachers, educational staff, students, parents, and other stakeholders should inform subsequent decisions. This process also requires periodic review of leadership practices to ensure that Islamic values remain embedded in institutional policies, professional relationships, and quality-management procedures. Accordingly, quality improvement becomes a continuous cycle in which accountability, collective participation, and reflective practice reinforce one another, enabling Islamic educational institutions to maintain quality while responding to changing educational demands.

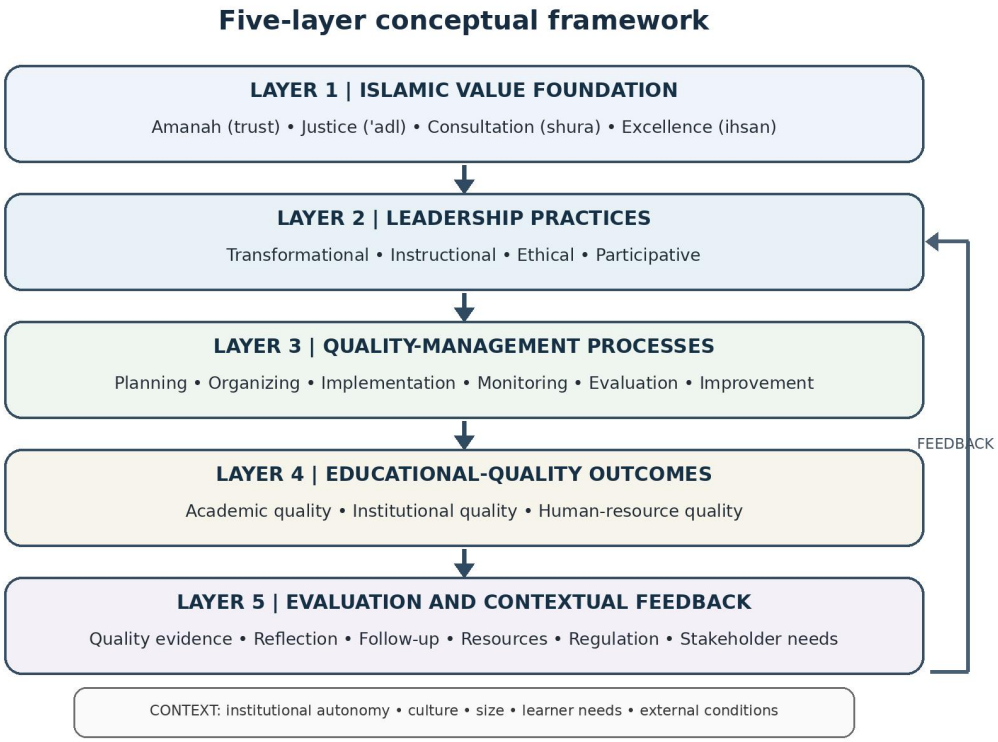

Figure 1. Five-layer conceptual model of Islamic educational leadership for improving educational quality.

The model explains how values become quality outcomes. Islamic values provide the ethical basis for leaders to establish goals and limits. Leadership practices translate that basis into influence, instructional direction, role modelling, and participation. Quality-management processes turn those practices into planned, monitored, and evaluated activities. Quality outcomes show progress in academic performance, institutional governance, and human-resource capacity. Feedback returns evaluation evidence to subsequent decisions. The relationships among the layers are iterative rather than strictly linear. Evaluation may require leaders to reconsider priorities, processes, or available support.

The model also recognizes context as a condition that shapes the strength of relationships among layers. Leadership authority, available resources, institutional size, organizational culture, regulations, student characteristics, and community relations influence the scope of leadership action. The same value may generate different practices in different settings. A small institution may conduct shura through direct meetings, whereas a large institution may require representation, formal consultation procedures, and structured communication. Contextual adaptation should preserve the underlying ethical principles. Research on school autonomy and accountability also shows why leaders must adjust their responses to institutional conditions (Kemethofer et al., 2023).

The model generates six propositions for future empirical research. These propositions are not statistical findings. Researchers can operationalize and test them through indicators that fit the level and character of each educational institution.

Table 3. Conceptual propositions for empirical testing.

Code	Proposition	Focus for empirical testing
P1	Internalizing amanah, justice, shura, and ihsan strengthens ethical consistency in leadership decisions.	Decision transparency; procedural justice; participation; consistency of conduct
P2	Transformational, instructional, ethical, and participative practices connect Islamic values with quality-management routines.	Vision; academic supervision; role modelling; participation; coordination
P3	Quality-management routines mediate the relationship between leadership practices and educational-quality improvement.	Planning; monitoring; evaluation; follow-up; use of evidence
P4	Teacher and staff development strengthens the relationship between leadership and academic quality.	Competence; professional learning; collaboration; instructional practice
P5	Institutional and environmental conditions moderate the relationship between leadership practices and quality outcomes.	Resources; autonomy; institutional size; culture; regulation; social context
P6	An integrated feedback system supports continuous improvement across academic, institutional, and human-resource quality.	Evidence completeness; evaluation participation; follow-up accuracy; program continuity

3.5. Managerial implications

The framework offers a practical sequence for institutional leaders. First, leaders should identify the values that guide institutional decisions and define how each value appears in routine practices. Second, they should examine whether leadership activities combine strategic direction, instructional focus, ethical conduct, and participation. Third, they should connect these practices with measurable quality-management processes. Fourth, they should review evidence across academic, institutional, and human-resource dimensions and use the results to revise institutional priorities. This sequence can help madrasahs, pesantren, Islamic schools, and Islamic universities assess the consistency among vision, decisions, processes, and quality evidence.

For policy makers and leadership-development providers, the framework suggests that leadership programs should extend beyond administrative compliance. Programs should strengthen instructional supervision, evidence-informed decision-making, conflict management, organizational justice, participative communication, and accountability. Quality measurement should examine the processes that support improvement rather than focusing only on documentation. Recent Indonesian studies describe how Islamic values can guide school reform and quality management when institutions connect them with practical leadership routines (Mawardi et al., 2025; Mu'alimin et al., 2026; Rifa'i & Syahputra, 2025).

3.6. Theoretical contributions

The framework extends Islamic educational leadership from a set of normative principles to a mechanism-based account of organizational quality. It distinguishes four analytical functions: Islamic values provide ethical orientation; leadership approaches translate values into practices; quality management organizes practices into repeatable processes; and multidimensional indicators assess institutional outcomes. This distinction avoids treating Islamic leadership as a fifth leadership style alongside transformational, instructional, ethical, and participative leadership. Instead, Islamic leadership provides the normative orientation that guides the use of those practices. This approach is consistent with recent conceptual work that places Islamic values at the foundation of integrated quality management (Arara et al., 2026; Imamah et al., 2026).

The framework also links academic, institutional, and human-resource quality within one model. It treats feedback and context as recurring components rather than final additions. This emphasis responds to research showing that leadership effects depend on organizational conditions, professional capacity, and the way researchers conceptualize educational outcomes (Pietsch et al., 2025; Shen & Wu, 2025; Tan et al., 2024). The six propositions provide a basis for future studies to test mediation, moderation, and contextual variation without assuming that the proposed relationships already have empirical confirmation.

3.7. Limitations

This article has several limitations. First, it integrates conceptual literature and empirical evidence from different educational contexts. The model therefore does not establish that all proposed mechanisms operate with equal strength in madrasahs, pesantren, Islamic schools, and Islamic universities. Second, the review used targeted and purposive selection. It does not report complete database exports, search-result counts, deduplication records, or record-level exclusion decisions. It therefore cannot claim to be a comprehensive systematic review. Third, the article has not tested construct validity, mediation, or moderation empirically. Fourth, educational-quality indicators may vary according to institutional mission, educational level, and local conditions. Future research should document a systematic search protocol and test the propositions through comparative, longitudinal, or mixed-methods designs.

4. CONCLUSION

This review defines Islamic educational leadership as a process of influencing and managing educational institutions in line with educational purposes and the values of amanah, justice, shura, and ihsan. Each value performs a distinct managerial function. Amanah guides accountability, justice directs the fair distribution of opportunities and resources, shura strengthens participation, and ihsan promotes ethical excellence and continuous improvement. These values should shape institutional decisions and work systems rather than remain only as statements of identity.

Islamic educational leadership can integrate transformational, instructional, ethical, and participative practices. This integration connects organizational vision with teaching and learning, role modelling, and stakeholder participation. Quality management provides the process through which leadership practices enter planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and improvement. These processes support academic, institutional, and human-resource quality.

The article proposes a five-layer conceptual model consisting of Islamic value foundations, leadership practices, quality-management processes, educational-quality outcomes, and contextual evaluation and feedback. The model provides a basis for further research, but it does not establish causal relationships. Researchers should test the six propositions across different types of Islamic educational institutions to clarify the mechanisms, indicators, and contextual conditions that shape the contribution of Islamic educational leadership to educational quality.

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