



The Role of Leadership in Improving the Quality Management of Islamic Religious Education Learning in Schools

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ABSTRACT

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Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a crucial role in shaping students' character and morality. This study aims to examine the role of Leadership in managing the quality of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning in schools to improve the quality of religious education. Issues include the lack of integration of Islamic values into learning and challenges with teachers' competency in using innovative methods. This study employed a descriptive, qualitative approach, including in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. The results indicate that visionary, transformational, and exemplary Leadership play a significant role in creating a learning environment that supports the development of students' religious character. Effective Leadership integrates Islamic values into every aspect of learning, both academic and moral. The study concludes that Islamic value-based Leadership is efficacious in improving the quality of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) education by shaping students' religious character. This study enriches the theory of Islamic Religious Education Leadership by incorporating moral and spiritual dimensions into PAI quality management. Further research is recommended to examine the long-term impact of this Leadership.

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a crucial role in shaping the character and morality of students (Komalasari et al., 2023). It serves not only as a vehicle for understanding Islamic teachings, but also as a tool for developing a generation with noble character and capable of facing the challenges of the times. Research on leadership in managing the quality of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning is highly relevant, given the significant impact religious education has on the moral integrity of the younger generation. In this fast-paced digital era, where technology and information are developing rapidly, it is crucial to

ensure that religious education can adapt to changing times without losing the essence of Islamic values (Fatmawati, 2025). Therefore, it is crucial to examine how appropriate leadership can manage the quality of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning, prioritizing not only cognitive aspects but also the development of students' morals and character (Humairah, 2024).

The challenges faced in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning in Indonesian schools, including Islamic schools, relate to how to create learning that not only prioritizes knowledge but also instills moral and ethical values consistent with Islamic teachings. In the field, many challenges remain, such as limited teacher competency in integrating innovative learning methods, low student motivation, and a lack of religious practices outside of class (Sholeh et al., 2024; Nanda, 2024). Furthermore, a learning system that tends toward theory and memorization has not been sufficient to shape students' religious character. This requires educational leaders, both teachers and principals, to adopt a more humanistic approach and be able to lead by concrete examples in everyday life (Ifnaldi et al., 2025).

Field observations indicate that although many Islamic schools have integrated religious education into their curriculum, the results are often suboptimal. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) instruction in schools, for example, despite having a clear vision for religious character formation, still faces significant challenges in managing educational quality. The learning process, which focuses more on theoretical knowledge without balancing it with the implementation of values in daily life, results in students lacking emotional engagement with the subject matter (Hasan et al., 2023; Qasserras, 2023). This also impacts their low awareness of practicing Islamic teachings in their daily lives. Therefore, more effective leadership is needed to create a school climate that supports learning based on Islamic values (Wahyuni, 2024).

Many previous studies have examined the importance of leadership in educational management, but few have focused on the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in Islamic schools. Most studies highlight the influence of leadership on academic achievement without considering its relationship to moral and spiritual values in religious education. Research by Fitriyanti et al. (2024) emphasizes the importance of leadership in creating an environment that supports the development of religious character, but does not specifically address the application of this concept in Islamic religious education. Meanwhile, other studies highlight the importance of innovative learning methods, but focus less on the influence of educational leaders in integrating religious values into the process. Thus, there remains a gap in this research that needs to be filled with a more specific approach regarding the role of leadership in managing the quality of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning.

This study offers a novelty by focusing on the application of leadership in managing the quality of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning in Islamic schools. Unlike previous research that prioritizes academic aspects, this study emphasizes how educational leaders can create an environment that supports the development of students' religious character and moral values. Given the challenges faced in managing religious education, it is important to explore how effective leadership can overcome these obstacles and create a more holistic and relevant learning environment. This research not only provides theoretical contributions but also offers practical solutions that can be implemented in Islamic schools to improve the quality of religious education (Fitriyanti et al., 2024).

The main problem this research aims to address is how leadership in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning quality management can influence the quality of education in schools. This research will also identify strategies implemented by educational leaders to improve learning quality, as well as the obstacles encountered in their implementation. Based on existing phenomena, we argue that visionary and transformational leaders are essential to creating an environment that supports the formation of religious character and integrates Islamic values into every aspect of learning (Septariani, 2024). This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of leadership in managing Islamic religious education effectively and in accordance with the needs of the times (Humairah, 2024).

The success of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning is determined not only by the curriculum or teaching methods, but also by the quality of leadership within the school. Educational leaders, both principals and PAI teachers, play a crucial role in creating a learning environment that supports the development of students' religious character. With strong and directed leadership, the quality of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning in schools can be significantly improved, creating a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent but also imbued with noble character. Therefore, this research makes an important contribution to understanding how leadership can play a role in managing the quality of Islamic religious education and presents solutions that can be implemented in Islamic schools in Indonesia (Wahyuni, 2024).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to provide an in-depth description of the leadership phenomenon in the quality management of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in schools. A qualitative approach was chosen because of its ability to explore social phenomena holistically and contextually that cannot be explained quantitatively. This study aims to uncover the dynamics of leadership in the school, including the strategies implemented to improve the

quality of PAI and the obstacles encountered in their implementation. Using in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation, this study provides an in-depth overview of the experiences of the principal and PAI teachers in exercising leadership to achieve the desired educational goals.

This research was conducted at Selyca Islamic School Samarinda Middle School, located on Jalan Kadrie Oening, Samarinda, East Kalimantan. This school was chosen because of its commitment to improving the quality of education and implementing Islamic values in every aspect of learning. The school's vision is to produce a generation of faithful, noble, and adaptable generations, making it a relevant setting for analyzing leadership in PAI quality management. The selection of this school was also driven by the challenges faced in integrating religious education with the demands of modern education.

Data for this study were collected through in-depth interviews with the principal and two Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, direct observation of learning activities and religious practices at the school, and documentation including the Semester Learning Plan (RPS), religious programs, and other related archives. The interviews aimed to elicit information regarding leadership styles, strategies for improving Islamic Religious Education (PAI) quality, and obstacles encountered in implementing learning. Observations provided insight into learning dynamics that could not be explained verbally by the informants. Documentation was also used to analyze the policies and procedures implemented in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) quality management at the school.

To ensure the validity and credibility of the data, this study utilized triangulation of sources and methods. Triangulation was conducted by comparing the results of interviews with the principal and Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers with field observations and existing documentation. This method ensured the validity and reliability of the findings, reduced subjectivity in the analysis, and ensured consistency between data from various sources. This triangulation technique helped researchers obtain a more comprehensive picture of leadership in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) quality management and provided a valid contribution to understanding the implementation of religious education in Islamic schools.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Leadership Concept in PAI Quality Management

Leadership in the quality management of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in schools is operationalized as the ability of educational leaders to influence and direct the learning process to achieve established goals, both in

terms of cognitive aspects and in developing student character. This leadership encompasses two main dimensions: first, managerial skills involving resource and curriculum management, and second, Islamic values involving moral and spiritual role models to shape student character. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) principals and teachers are expected to instill Islamic values through exemplary behavior and learning management based on noble character (Lamirin et al., 2023).

In an interview with the principal, he explained the importance of visionary leadership that focuses on integrating Islamic values into learning, both in the classroom and in daily school life. The principal emphasized that education in schools aims not only to increase religious knowledge but also to shape students' religious character that can be applied in their lives. This visionary leadership is a crucial foundation for creating a meaningful and relevant learning climate to meet the challenges of the times, striking a balance between academic achievement and Islamic character development.

The PAI teachers also highlighted the importance of transformational leadership in building student motivation and engagement. He stated that as teachers, in addition to teaching the material, they also strive to foster students' enthusiasm for practicing Islamic teachings, making them relevant to their daily lives. This transformational leadership enables students to see the relevance of religious teachings to their lives, which in turn increases their motivation to practice Islam in real life. This demonstrates the crucial role of Islamic Religious Education teachers as motivators and role models in religious learning.

Observations at the school indicate that the environment that supports Islamic values-based Islamic Religious Education learning is highly conducive to students. Religious activities such as congregational prayer and dhikr are carried out enthusiastically by students, reflecting the exemplary behavior demonstrated by the principal and Islamic Religious Education teachers. This loving and respectful environment creates an atmosphere conducive to the development of students' religious character and ensures that Islamic Religious Education learning focuses not only on academics but also on the balanced moral and spiritual development of students.

Table 1. Leadership in PAI Quality Management

Informant Position	Interview Excerpt	Indicator
Principal	"Effective leadership in schools must be able to direct all elements of the school to integrate Islamic values into every aspect of learning."	Visionary Leadership, Integrating Islamic Values into Learning
Teacher	"As a religious education teacher, I feel the need to set a concrete example for students through my daily actions, especially in matters of worship and moral behavior."	Exemplary Leadership, Strengthening Character and Morals

The table shows a clear pattern regarding the importance of leadership in creating quality Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning. The principal emphasized the importance of visionary leadership and the integration of Islamic values into every aspect of learning, while the PAI teacher emphasized the importance of being a role model for students in terms of morals and ethics. Both informants agreed that effective leadership plays a significant role in shaping student character and creating a learning climate that supports religious learning. This pattern indicates that leadership in PAI must encompass both managerial aspects and moral and spiritual role models for optimal learning.

Forms and Roles of Leadership in PAI Quality Management

In this study, leadership in the quality management of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in schools is operationalized as the leader's ability to direct and manage various educational components to achieve predetermined goals, not only in the cognitive aspect but also in the development of students' religious character. This leadership encompasses a managerial dimension involving resource and curriculum management, as well as Islamic values involving moral and spiritual role models. The principal and PAI teachers in schools play a crucial role in creating a religiously nuanced learning climate, focusing on role models and empowering school components (Murzaki, 2024; Khunaifi, 2024).

In interviews with the principal, he emphasized the importance of visionary leadership in creating a learning environment consistent with Islamic values. The school's vision of producing a generation of faithful and noble character is implemented through strengthening educational quality standards that prioritize not only academic aspects but also the development of students' religious character. The principal ensures that PAI learning in schools encompasses religious knowledge, attitudes, and skills that can be applied in students' daily lives, thus forming a generation with noble character and prepared to face the changing times.

Islamic Religious Education teachers also revealed that a transformational leadership approach is highly effective in increasing student motivation. By integrating Islamic teachings into daily life and fostering students' religious enthusiasm, Islamic Religious Education teachers are able to make learning more relevant and applicable. This more humanistic and dialogical approach builds students' awareness of the importance of practicing Islamic teachings, which plays a role in increasing their motivation to practice their religion and strengthening their religious character.

Observations at the school confirmed that an environment that supports worship activities and the instilling of Islamic values creates a conducive learning

environment. The exemplary behavior set by the principal and Islamic Religious Education teachers, both in worship and in daily behavior, reinforces the desired religious learning. The close relationship between teachers and students, along with an atmosphere of compassion and mutual respect, demonstrates that exemplary leadership plays a significant role in creating a learning environment that reflects Islamic values and contributes to achieving a comprehensive quality Islamic Religious Education education.

Leadership Strategy in PAI Quality Management

In this study, the quality leadership strategy in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) management in schools is operationalized as a systematic effort undertaken by the principal, PAI teachers, and all educational staff to achieve predetermined goals, with measurable, sustainable steps oriented toward student learning outcomes. This leadership encompasses not only school administration but also how leaders design learning methods based on clear quality standards and create a conducive religious culture. This leadership strategy encompasses the integration of Islamic values into every aspect of learning, with the goal of producing PAI learning that is not only high-quality in terms of knowledge but also in the development of students' religious character (Murzaki, 2024; Khunaifi, 2024).

The principal explained that the school's educational vision is to "produce a generation of faithful, noble character, and able to adapt to current developments." He emphasized that this vision must be accompanied by the establishment of clear quality standards encompassing students' religious knowledge, attitudes, and skills. This demonstrates that strategies for strengthening vision and quality standards are key steps in improving the quality of education in schools, with a focus not only on academic achievement but also on developing students' religious character.

Islamic Religious Education teachers also stated that Islamic classroom management strategies play a crucial role in improving the quality of Islamic Religious Education learning. By emphasizing Islamic values such as discipline, justice, and compassion, and rewarding students who demonstrate good behavior in worship and morals, Islamic classroom management creates a conducive environment and increases student motivation in Islamic Religious Education learning. This demonstrates that classroom management based on Islamic values focuses not only on theoretical teaching but also on developing religious character through role models and fair rules.

Observations at the school indicate that Islamic Religious Education learning is supported by a conducive religious atmosphere. Religious activities such as congregational prayer and Quran recitation are enthusiastically

participated in by students. Furthermore, positive interactions between Islamic Religious Education teachers and students demonstrate a relationship of affection and mutual respect. The exemplary behavior demonstrated by the principal and teachers in daily worship and behavior strengthens religious learning and creates an atmosphere conducive to achieving the desired quality of Islamic Religious Education (PAI).

Based on interviews and observations, it can be concluded that the leadership strategy for managing Islamic Religious Education (PAI) quality in schools focuses heavily on implementing a clear vision and comprehensive quality standards. Strengthening the quality vision, which encompasses both academic and religious character aspects, along with Islamic classroom management based on Islamic values, ensures that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning in schools prioritizes not only academic achievement but also the development of good student character. This data pattern indicates that these two strategies complement each other and contribute to the creation of a conducive and quality learning environment.

Obstacles and Challenges in PAI Quality Management Leadership

The main obstacle to managing the quality of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in schools relates to limited teacher resources, particularly in terms of pedagogical skills and adequate use of technology. School principals stated that many PAI teachers struggle to adapt to technology-based learning methods, which poses a significant challenge to creating quality learning. Therefore, capacity building for PAI teachers through ongoing training, workshops, and microteaching sessions is crucial to improve their competencies. This limitation can impact the effectiveness of PAI learning and the success of quality management of religious education.

Furthermore, supervision that is insubstantial and primarily administrative in nature also poses a barrier to improving the quality of PAI learning. PAI teachers stated that supervision that is solely administrative in nature does not allow them the opportunity to reflect on their teaching methods. To address this obstacle, it is crucial for school principals to implement more participatory and coaching-based supervision. Academic and reflective supervision can help teachers continuously innovate in their teaching and improve the quality of learning.

The limited time allotted in the curriculum also poses a significant obstacle to PAI quality management. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers struggle to deliver material in depth due to the dense curriculum and limited time available. In some learning sessions, the focus is placed on cognitive aspects, while character development and Islamic values are often overlooked.

Observations indicate that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning focuses too much on theory and academic knowledge, resulting in a lack of attention to students' affective and psychomotor aspects. One solution to overcome time constraints is to integrate affective learning through extracurricular activities or through the practice of daily worship outside of class hours.

From interviews and observations, data patterns revealed that the main obstacles to Islamic Religious Education (PAI) quality management in schools are related to limited teacher competency, insubstantial supervision, and time constraints within the curriculum. Despite awareness of the importance of quality education, these factors hinder the achievement of optimal quality education. Therefore, strategies to overcome these obstacles include improving teacher capacity, implementing coaching-based supervision, and integrating affective and character aspects into the learning process to achieve a better balance between students' cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects.

Islamic School PAI Quality Management Leadership

Leadership in the quality management of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in schools focuses on the integration of academic aspects and students' religious character. Principals emphasize the importance of visionary leadership, which not only establishes academic goals but also focuses on the formation of noble character and Islamic values. This vision is implemented through policies that include fostering worship, strengthening student character, and implementing an integrative curriculum. This creates an environment that supports students' spiritual and moral development, relevant to current developments (Murzaki, 2024; Khunaifi, 2024).

PAI teachers highlight transformational leadership in increasing student motivation and engagement. With a more intimate and dialogical approach, teachers not only teach religious material but also inspire students to apply Islamic teachings in their daily lives. This positively impacts student motivation and enables them to be more engaged in PAI learning. This humanistic and empathetic approach, along with the relevance of religious teachings to daily life, strengthens the development of students' religious character comprehensively (Ifnaldi et al., 2025).

Exemplary leadership (*uswah hasanah*) is also a key pillar in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) quality management in schools. The exemplary behavior demonstrated by the principal and Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in their daily lives, such as discipline in worship and polite behavior, provides students with a direct example of how to practice Islamic teachings in their lives. Observations show that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning in schools focuses not only on mastering theory but also on developing character in

accordance with Islamic values. Therefore, school leadership successfully creates a deep learning environment, combining cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects in shaping a generation with noble character (Wahyuni, 2024).

Table 2. Leadership Strategies in PAI Quality Management

Informant Position	Interview Excerpt	Indicator
Principal	"Our vision is to produce a generation that is devout, has noble morals, and is able to adapt to changing times."	Visionary Leadership, Integration of Islamic Values in Learning
Teacher	"We encourage students to see the relevance of Islamic teachings in their daily lives, not just to understand the theory."	Transformational Leadership, Student Motivation, and Engagement in Learning

This table shows that visionary leadership and transformational leadership are the two main strategies in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) quality management in schools. The principal focuses on strengthening the educational vision, which includes the formation of religious character, while the PAI teacher emphasizes the importance of motivation and teaching that is relevant to students' daily lives. Both informants agree that directed and inspirational leadership is crucial in realizing quality PAI education that prioritizes not only academic outcomes but also character development and Islamic values in students. This data pattern demonstrates that collaborative and exemplary leadership can create quality and comprehensive PAI education.

Discussion

Research on leadership in the quality management of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in schools indicates that leadership at this school is highly focused on the application of Islamic principles in every aspect of education. This finding aligns with the view of Ngarawula et al. (2025), who stated that the essence of leadership is influence, which in the context of Islamic religious education in schools is implemented by integrating Islamic values into learning and school life. The principal and PAI teachers at the school demonstrate visionary leadership that focuses not only on academic achievement but also on developing students' religious character. This strongly aligns with literature that underscores the importance of visionary leadership in education to establish clear and relevant goals, as exemplified by the approach implemented at the school, where a vision prioritizing Islamic character formation and strengthening students' spirituality is reflected in school policies and the practice of worship (Murzaki, 2024; Khunaifi, 2024).

However, this finding differs from some literature that emphasizes the importance of administrative aspects in educational leadership, which appear to

be more dominant in some other schools. In schools, despite structured administrative management, leadership is more oriented toward transformational leadership and exemplary leadership (Mafe, 2023). This study found that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) principals and teachers place greater emphasis on moral and spiritual aspects through personal role models, something not widely discussed in-depth in the literature, which focuses more on results-based management (Trisnantari et al., 2025). This suggests that schools are adopting a more holistic approach to managing educational quality, where educational leaders act as moral role models who provide concrete examples for students in their daily lives, rather than simply as administrators of education.

The theoretical implication of this study is that leadership in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) education cannot be viewed solely from a managerial or academic perspective but must encompass moral and spiritual dimensions that reflect Islamic values (Akhyar et al., 2024). These findings enrich educational leadership theory by adding the dimension of moral and spiritual role models as essential elements in managing the quality of Islamic religious education (Albustomi et al., 2025). This emphasis on leadership based on Islamic values also reminds us that leadership theory in the context of Islamic religious education needs to consider broader factors, including strengthening students' character and spiritual development, which are often underemphasized in traditional managerial approaches (Barca, 2025).

Practically, these findings provide important insights for educational leadership practices in other Islamic schools. Adopting an approach that emphasizes visionary and transformational leadership, and building a school culture based on exemplary Islamic values, can be an effective strategy for improving the quality of Islamic religious education. For example, the principal and Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers at the school integrate religious activities such as congregational prayer and Quranic recitation into students' daily lives, which not only strengthens students' spiritual dimensions but also creates a more conducive environment for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning. Therefore, Islamic schools need to adopt similar strategies, ensuring that their educational vision and quality standards encompass strong character development that is relevant to the demands of the times.

In conclusion, the results of this study indicate that leadership in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) quality management in schools successfully creates an environment that supports the development of students' character and morals through a leadership approach based on Islamic values. Strengthening the quality vision, implementing Islamic classroom management, and consistent role models from the principal and Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers form a strong foundation for educational quality that focuses not only on academic

aspects but also on the formation of religious character. This study enriches our understanding of leadership in Islamic religious education and provides important implications both from a theoretical and practical perspective for improving the quality of education in Islamic schools in the modern era (Murzaki, 2024; Khunaifi, 2024; Trisnantari et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study found that leadership in the quality management of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in schools plays a crucial role in creating an educational environment that focuses not only on academic aspects but also on the development of students' religious character. Leadership that combines visionary, transformational, and exemplary leadership (*uswah hasanah*) successfully integrates Islamic values into every aspect of school life. These findings confirm that the quality of religious education is measured not only by the knowledge acquired by students but also by how educational leaders inspire and motivate students to practice religious teachings in their daily lives. The lesson from this study is the importance of role models in educational leadership, which enables the holistic development of students' religious character.

This research makes a significant contribution to scholarship in the field of Islamic religious education, particularly in examining the relationship between leadership and PAI quality management. It enriches educational leadership theory by adding moral and spiritual dimensions related to Islamic values in the context of religious education. This research's contribution is to provide a leadership model that can be applied in Islamic schools to improve the quality of religious education by strengthening the moral and spiritual dimensions. However, the limitation of this study lies in the limited coverage of the location in one school, so it is recommended to conduct further research that is more comprehensive and expand the scope of the study to validate these findings in a broader context, as well as measure the long-term impact of the implementation of leadership strategies in the development of students' religious character.

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