



Fostering Educational Excellence: Strategic Total Quality Leadership in Enhancing Institutional Performance within Islamic Secondary Education

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ABSTRACT

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School leadership is a critical factor in improving educational quality by fostering effective management practices and sustainable institutional development. This study aimed to examine the implementation of quality-based leadership by exploring the principal's strategies, the challenges encountered during implementation, and its contribution to enhancing students' academic achievement and non-academic potential. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, involving the principal, teachers, and educational staff as research participants. Data were collected through observations, interviews, and documentation and were analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña interactive model, including data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings revealed that quality improvement was achieved through strengthening a quality culture, implementing academic supervision, enhancing teachers' professional competencies, and optimizing academic and extracurricular programs. The implementation process faced several challenges, including limited facilities and infrastructure, an underdeveloped quality culture, variations in teachers' competencies, and insufficient institutional funding. Despite these constraints, quality-based leadership contributed to improving instructional quality, strengthening student discipline, increasing learning motivation, and fostering students' academic and non-academic achievements. These findings imply that sustainable quality-oriented leadership is essential for promoting continuous school improvement and strengthening institutional effectiveness.

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INTRODUCTION

Education plays a fundamental role in developing high-quality human resources and serves as one of the primary determinants of national progress (Adzimah, 2024; Holidi, 2026; Nadhifah, 2026). Beyond equipping learners with knowledge and technical competencies, education contributes to character

formation, value internalization, and the holistic development of individual potential. Consequently, educational quality has become a strategic indicator reflecting the ability of educational institutions to produce graduates who are academically competent, morally responsible, and capable of adapting to rapid social and technological changes (Hikmah, 2026; Kusumawati, 2026; Najiburohman, 2025). As public expectations regarding educational outcomes continue to increase, schools and madrasahs are required to implement effective governance systems that ensure continuous quality improvement. This issue is particularly significant because educational quality influences not only students' future opportunities but also social welfare, economic competitiveness, and sustainable national development. Therefore, strengthening institutional leadership has become an essential strategy for ensuring that educational institutions remain responsive, accountable, and capable of delivering high-quality educational services.

The increasing demand for educational excellence has encouraged educational institutions to move beyond merely organizing teaching and learning activities toward establishing professional, effective, and quality-oriented management systems. Within this context, the role of the school principal or madrasah leader extends beyond administrative responsibilities to encompass strategic planning, organizational development, and the creation of a collaborative institutional culture (Fitriani, 2025; Mohlas, 2025). However, many educational institutions continue to encounter challenges in implementing sustainable quality management due to disparities in leadership capacity, limited organizational commitment, and inadequate resource allocation. These problems hinder institutional efforts to improve teaching effectiveness, teacher professionalism, and student achievement. As a result, educational institutions often struggle to maintain consistent quality standards despite growing societal expectations. Addressing these challenges requires leadership approaches that integrate quality management principles into institutional decision-making, thereby enabling schools and madrasahs to foster continuous improvement and organizational effectiveness.

The condition of education in Indonesia continues to reflect various structural and managerial challenges associated with educational quality. Information published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology indicates that issues persist regarding students' competencies, teachers' professionalism, and the effectiveness of institutional governance. These concerns are further supported by the results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022, which demonstrate that Indonesia remains below the average performance of OECD member countries in several learning domains (Ni'am, 2025; Rahman, 2025). At the institutional level, many schools and madrasahs still experience limitations in educational facilities, underdeveloped quality cultures, and leadership practices that have

not fully encouraged organizational transformation (Albustomi, 2025; Rahman, 2026). Such conditions reveal a substantial gap between the expected characteristics of high-quality educational institutions and the realities encountered in practice. Consequently, strengthening quality-oriented leadership has become increasingly important for ensuring sustainable institutional improvement.

Previous studies have consistently identified school leadership as one of the most influential determinants of educational quality improvement. Mulyasa argued that professional leadership contributes significantly to the establishment of a quality culture while simultaneously enhancing the effectiveness of educational management systems (Mulyasa, 2023). Similarly, Wahjosumidjo emphasized that school principals function as central figures whose managerial competencies determine institutional productivity and organizational success (Khofsah, 2025; Shoha, 2026). In addition, Nurul Hidayati demonstrated that implementing quality management practices in madrasahs positively affects students' academic achievement by improving institutional performance and learning effectiveness. Collectively, these studies confirm that leadership and quality management are closely interconnected and play substantial roles in improving educational outcomes. Nevertheless, they predominantly focus on leadership effectiveness or quality management independently rather than examining how both dimensions interact within a comprehensive quality-based leadership framework.

Despite these valuable contributions, several limitations remain evident in previous research. Most existing studies have treated leadership, teacher professionalism, organizational culture, and quality management as separate variables without exploring their integration into a unified leadership model capable of sustaining institutional quality improvement. Consequently, empirical evidence explaining how quality-based leadership simultaneously strengthens organizational culture, develops teachers' professional competence, and improves educational quality remains limited, particularly in Islamic junior secondary schools (Holidi, 2025; Manshur, 2026). Furthermore, many previous investigations primarily emphasize administrative leadership or school-based management while paying insufficient attention to leadership strategies that systematically promote continuous quality improvement. These limitations indicate a significant research gap because educational institutions require practical leadership models capable of responding to increasingly complex educational challenges through integrated organizational development and sustainable quality assurance mechanisms.

Responding to these limitations, the present study introduces a quality-based leadership perspective that integrates strategic leadership, organizational quality culture, teacher professional development, and continuous educational quality improvement within a single analytical framework. Unlike previous

studies that examined these components separately, this research investigates how the madrasah principal implements quality-oriented leadership strategies to strengthen institutional governance while simultaneously supporting students' academic and non-academic development. This integrated perspective represents the novelty of the study because it positions leadership not merely as an administrative function but as a comprehensive mechanism for institutional transformation. Consequently, the findings are expected to enrich the field of Islamic Educational Management by providing empirical evidence regarding sustainable quality leadership practices and offering practical recommendations for improving governance in Islamic educational institutions.

Based on the issues discussed above, this study investigates the implementation of quality-based leadership in an Islamic junior secondary school by examining the leadership strategies employed by the madrasah principal, the challenges encountered during implementation, and their contributions to improving students' academic and non-academic achievements. The study argues that educational quality can be strengthened when school leadership systematically integrates quality culture, academic supervision, teacher professional development, and institutional collaboration into everyday managerial practices. Therefore, this research seeks to answer how quality-based leadership is implemented, what obstacles emerge during its execution, and how such leadership contributes to sustainable educational quality improvement. The findings are expected to provide both theoretical contributions by expanding the discourse on quality-oriented educational leadership and practical implications for policymakers, school leaders, and educational practitioners seeking effective strategies to improve the governance and performance of Islamic educational institutions.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to obtain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of quality-based leadership in improving educational quality (Fahmi, 2024; Mulyana et al., 2024; Salmona & Kaczynski, 2024). A qualitative approach was selected because it enables researchers to explore leadership practices comprehensively within their natural setting, emphasizing participants' experiences, institutional processes, and organizational contexts rather than numerical measurements. This design was considered appropriate for examining leadership patterns, quality improvement strategies, implementation challenges, and their contributions to educational quality. The research was conducted at an Islamic junior secondary school located in Probolinggo, Indonesia. The site was purposively selected because it has consistently implemented quality-oriented leadership practices while demonstrating continuous efforts to improve both academic and non-academic

educational outcomes, making it a relevant setting for investigating the relationship between leadership and institutional quality improvement.

Research participants consisted of the madrasah principal, teachers, and educational staff selected through purposive sampling based on their roles, responsibilities, and knowledge regarding the implementation of quality-based leadership. The principal served as the primary informant, while teachers and educational staff acted as supporting informants to provide comprehensive perspectives on leadership practices and quality improvement initiatives. Data were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews and direct observations of leadership practices, whereas secondary data were obtained from institutional documents, including the school profile, annual work programs, activity reports, records of students' academic and non-academic achievements, and other relevant documents related to educational quality management. Data collection employed three complementary techniques, namely interviews, observations, and documentation, to ensure comprehensive coverage of the research phenomenon. Interviews explored leadership strategies, quality improvement initiatives, and implementation challenges; observations focused on leadership practices, organizational culture, and interactions among school members; while documentation provided supporting evidence for the empirical findings.

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. During the data condensation stage, the collected information was selected, categorized, simplified, and organized according to the research objectives. Subsequently, the organized data were systematically presented through narrative descriptions to facilitate interpretation and identify emerging themes related to quality-based leadership. The final stage involved drawing and verifying conclusions through continuous comparison between the empirical findings and the collected evidence to ensure the consistency and credibility of the interpretations. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, data validity was established through source triangulation, technique triangulation, and persistent observation. These validation strategies enabled the researcher to compare information obtained from different participants, data collection methods, and repeated field observations, thereby increasing the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the research findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Quality-Based Leadership Strategies Implemented by the Madrasah Principal

The findings revealed that improving educational quality constitutes the primary focus of the madrasah principal's leadership. Evidence from interviews,

observations, and institutional documentation demonstrated that the principal consistently communicated the school's vision, strategic objectives, and quality targets through coordination meetings, teacher development sessions, and periodic program evaluations. This practice indicates that leadership extends beyond routine administrative responsibilities and functions as a strategic mechanism for cultivating a shared commitment to continuous quality improvement among all school stakeholders (Kamilah, 2026; Zulhadi & Afdal, 2025). Rather than emphasizing compliance with administrative procedures, the principal promoted collaborative decision-making and institutional accountability, enabling teachers and educational staff to actively participate in achieving the school's educational objectives. Consequently, quality improvement became embedded within the organizational culture rather than remaining an isolated managerial initiative.

These findings support the concept of Total Quality Management (TQM) proposed by Jerome S. Arcaro, who argues that educational quality can only be achieved when all members of an educational institution share a collective commitment to continuous improvement. Within the TQM framework, school leaders function as change agents responsible for creating an organizational culture that prioritizes quality, innovation, and collaboration (Fadere et al., 2024; Hussen & Onia, 2024). In this study, the principal translated these principles into practice by aligning teachers' perceptions with the institutional vision and ensuring that every educational program reflected the school's quality standards. Such leadership demonstrates that educational quality is not merely the outcome of effective administration but also the product of shared organizational values supported by visionary leadership.

Another important strategy identified in this study is the systematic implementation of academic supervision as an instrument for improving instructional quality. Classroom supervision was conducted regularly through classroom observations, reviews of lesson plans, monitoring of instructional implementation, and constructive feedback aimed at strengthening teachers' pedagogical competencies. Unlike evaluative supervision intended solely to assess teacher performance, the observed supervision emphasized professional assistance and continuous capacity building. Teachers perceived the supervision process as an opportunity to improve instructional planning, classroom management, and learning evaluation rather than as an administrative obligation. Consequently, supervision fostered reflective teaching practices and encouraged teachers to continuously enhance their professional performance (Shudiq & Maulidy, 2025; Suhermanto, 2024; Zahro, 2024).

The implementation of academic supervision was complemented by continuous professional development initiatives. Teachers were encouraged to participate in professional training programs, Subject Teacher Consultative Forums *Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran*, workshops, and other competency development activities designed to improve instructional effectiveness. These findings are consistent with Nanang Fattah's perspective that sustainable educational quality depends largely on systematic human resource development rather than short-term institutional interventions. By facilitating teachers' participation in professional learning communities, the principal demonstrated that instructional quality is fundamentally linked to teachers' professional growth and lifelong learning. Continuous investment in teacher competence not only enhances instructional practices but also contributes to institutional adaptability in responding to educational changes.

Beyond teacher development, the principal adopted a comprehensive strategy by strengthening both academic and non-academic programs to support students' holistic development. Various academic enrichment activities were integrated with extracurricular programs intended to develop students' talents, leadership skills, creativity, and character formation. This approach reflects Joseph M. Juran's quality management perspective, which emphasizes that organizational quality should be measured by an institution's ability to satisfy stakeholders' needs through systematic and sustainable improvement processes. In the educational context, stakeholders expect schools not only to produce academically successful graduates but also individuals possessing strong moral values, leadership capacities, and social competencies. Therefore, quality improvement was interpreted as a multidimensional process encompassing academic excellence, personal development, and character education.

The study further indicates that quality-based leadership is closely aligned with Islamic educational values. The principal emphasized that organizational improvement requires continuous self-development, institutional commitment, and collective responsibility among all members of the madrasah. This perspective corresponds with Qur'an Surah Ar-Ra'd (13:11), which states that Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves. Within the context of educational leadership, this verse highlights that sustainable quality improvement cannot be achieved through structural changes alone but requires internal transformation characterized by commitment, discipline, and collaborative efforts. Consequently, leadership becomes both a managerial and moral responsibility, encouraging every member of the institution to actively contribute to organizational excellence. These

findings reinforce the argument that quality-based leadership in Islamic educational institutions integrates managerial effectiveness with ethical and spiritual values, thereby fostering a sustainable culture of continuous improvement.

Challenges in Implementing Quality-Based Leadership for Educational Quality Improvement

Although the implementation of quality-based leadership has contributed positively to educational improvement, the findings indicate that the process continues to encounter several organizational challenges that influence the effectiveness and sustainability of quality management initiatives. One of the primary obstacles identified in this study is the limited availability of educational facilities and infrastructure, particularly instructional media and learning resources that support innovative teaching practices. Classroom observations revealed that inadequate facilities constrained teachers' ability to implement diverse instructional methods and integrate technology into the learning process. As a result, several quality improvement initiatives could not be fully implemented despite the principal's commitment to institutional development. These findings suggest that effective educational leadership must be supported by adequate physical resources to ensure that strategic plans can be translated into meaningful educational practices.

This finding is consistent with the perspective of Husaini Usman, who argues that the success of school-based management depends largely on the availability of sufficient institutional resources. Educational quality cannot be separated from the adequacy of facilities because infrastructure directly influences the effectiveness of teaching, learning, and school management. Well-equipped educational environments enable teachers to adopt innovative instructional approaches, enhance student engagement, and improve learning outcomes. Conversely, inadequate facilities restrict institutional capacity to implement continuous quality improvement programs, thereby reducing the overall effectiveness of educational services (Mustafa & Maulana, 2024; Samsi, 2025). Therefore, improving educational infrastructure should be regarded as a strategic priority that complements leadership efforts in achieving sustainable institutional quality.

Another significant challenge identified during the study relates to differences in teachers' professional competencies and their readiness to respond to educational developments. While several teachers demonstrated creativity by adopting student-centered instructional approaches and continuously improving their pedagogical practices, others continued to rely predominantly on conventional teaching methods. Such variations affected the consistency of

instructional quality across classrooms and created disparities in students' learning experiences. This condition indicates that leadership initiatives alone are insufficient to achieve educational excellence unless accompanied by continuous professional development that addresses the diverse competencies of teaching staff. Consequently, school leaders are required to establish systematic mentoring, coaching, and professional learning opportunities that encourage all teachers to develop comparable levels of instructional competence.

These findings support Syaiful Sagala's argument that teacher quality represents one of the most decisive factors influencing educational quality improvement. According to this perspective, sustainable institutional development requires continuous investment in teachers' professional competencies through structured training, reflective practice, and collaborative learning communities. Without systematic professional development, efforts to improve educational quality tend to progress slowly because instructional effectiveness remains dependent upon individual teacher capacity rather than institutional standards (Hasanah et al., 2024; Maisuroh & Jamil, 2024). The present findings therefore reinforce the importance of integrating leadership strategies with comprehensive teacher development programs to ensure consistent educational quality across the institution.

The study also found that establishing a sustainable quality culture remains an ongoing challenge within the madrasah. Although quality-oriented policies had been introduced, their implementation was not consistently reflected in daily institutional practices. This inconsistency was evident in variations in teacher discipline, differences in administrative compliance, and uneven implementation of instructional planning. Such findings indicate that organizational culture cannot be transformed solely through formal regulations; instead, it requires continuous reinforcement, collective commitment, and active participation from all members of the institution. Building a quality culture therefore represents a gradual organizational process that extends beyond leadership directives and depends on shared values and consistent behavioral practices.

This finding aligns with Edward Sallis' theory of quality management, which emphasizes that a quality culture can only flourish when every member of an organization shares responsibility for continuous improvement. If responsibility for quality enhancement rests exclusively on institutional leaders, sustainable organizational transformation is unlikely to occur because quality management requires collective ownership and collaboration throughout the organization. Accordingly, quality-based leadership should empower teachers and educational staff to become active participants in institutional improvement rather than passive recipients of administrative policies. Such participation

strengthens organizational commitment and promotes the sustainability of quality improvement initiatives.

Finally, the findings indicate that educational quality is influenced not only by internal institutional conditions but also by external environmental factors. The study revealed that parental involvement in supporting educational activities remained relatively limited, while financial constraints restricted the implementation of several strategic programs designed to improve institutional quality. These conditions illustrate that educational quality is a shared responsibility requiring collaboration among schools, families, communities, and policymakers. Sustainable quality improvement therefore cannot rely exclusively on school leadership but must also involve external stakeholders who contribute resources, support, and shared commitment toward educational development. This collaborative perspective strengthens institutional resilience and increases the likelihood that quality improvement initiatives can be maintained over time despite existing organizational limitations.

Impact of Quality-Based Leadership on Students' Academic and Non-Academic Development

The findings demonstrate that the implementation of quality-based leadership has generated substantial improvements in both academic and non-academic aspects of student development. From an academic perspective, the study identified greater teacher discipline in preparing instructional plans, stronger responsiveness to supervisory feedback, and more systematic implementation of teaching and learning activities. Classroom observations further revealed that a well-organized learning environment encouraged greater student engagement and participation throughout the instructional process. These improvements indicate that quality-oriented leadership not only strengthens institutional management but also directly influences the quality of classroom instruction, thereby creating learning conditions that facilitate higher academic achievement.

Interviews with teachers and school staff further revealed that the madrasah principal consistently implemented coaching, academic supervision, and professional guidance as integral components of instructional leadership. These activities contributed to improvements in lesson planning, instructional delivery, classroom assessment, and teachers' professional commitment. The findings support E. Mulyasa's argument that effective school leadership significantly influences the quality of teaching and learning by motivating teachers, strengthening instructional supervision, and promoting continuous evaluation (Hasanah et al., 2024; Maisuroh & Jamil, 2024). When school leaders consistently perform these leadership functions, teachers become more

motivated to enhance their instructional performance, ultimately improving students' academic outcomes. Thus, academic achievement should be understood not merely as a reflection of students' abilities but also as the outcome of effective educational leadership that promotes instructional excellence.

To summarize the major findings, the contributions of quality-based leadership to students' development are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The Impact of Quality-Based Leadership on Student Development

Aspect	Research Findings	Impact on Students
Academic Achievement	Teachers demonstrated greater discipline in preparing instructional plans and actively accepted supervisory feedback.	Learning became more structured, resulting in improved academic performance.
Non-Academic Development	Extracurricular activities and character-building programs were implemented more effectively.	Students' talents, interests, and character developed more comprehensively.
Student Discipline	School regulations were consistently implemented through regular monitoring and evaluation.	Students became more disciplined, responsible, and consistent in their behavior.
Learning Environment	Intensive communication was established between the principal and teachers.	A more positive, organized, and conducive learning environment was created.
Quality Culture	Continuous supervision, motivation, and institutional evaluation were consistently implemented.	Overall educational quality improved across multiple institutional dimensions.

Source: Research Findings.

The findings presented in Table 1 indicate that the impact of quality-based leadership extends beyond improving students' academic achievement. Equally important, it contributes to character development, the strengthening of student discipline, and the enhancement of talents and interests through well-designed extracurricular and character education programs. These findings suggest that educational quality should be viewed as a multidimensional concept encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes rather than academic performance alone. The effectiveness of the principal's leadership in coordinating educational programs, motivating teachers, and promoting institutional collaboration emerged as a key factor in achieving these comprehensive educational outcomes.

The positive influence of quality-based leadership was also evident in students' non-academic development. Religious habituation programs, extracurricular activities, and collaborative learning experiences provided students with opportunities to cultivate discipline, teamwork, leadership, and responsibility. These findings are consistent with the perspective of Daryanto,

who argues that educational quality should be evaluated not only through academic success but also through an institution's ability to develop students' character and social competencies (Adhinugraha et al., 2024; BR & Tarmidiyono, 2023). Similarly, the present findings indicate that quality-oriented leadership creates educational environments that promote holistic student development by integrating academic excellence with character education.

Furthermore, the study demonstrates that a disciplined and supportive learning environment is closely associated with the principal's leadership practices. Continuous supervision, regular evaluation, and effective communication between school leaders and teachers contributed to strengthening organizational culture while simultaneously improving educational quality. This finding is consistent with W. Edwards Deming's philosophy of continuous quality improvement, which emphasizes that organizational excellence is achieved through systematic evaluation, consistency, and collaborative commitment. The results therefore indicate that changes in leadership practices can directly influence teachers' professional behavior, students' learning experiences, and the overall effectiveness of educational institutions.

Despite these encouraging outcomes, the findings also reveal that the positive effects of quality-based leadership were not experienced uniformly by all students. Individual differences in learning ability, limitations in educational facilities, and varying levels of parental support continued to influence students' educational outcomes. These factors indicate that leadership alone cannot fully determine institutional success but should be complemented by adequate infrastructure, competent teachers, supportive families, and collaborative stakeholder engagement. Nevertheless, the overall findings demonstrate that quality-based leadership has made a meaningful contribution to improving instructional quality, strengthening student discipline, fostering character development, and enhancing both academic and non-academic achievement. Consequently, the study confirms that quality-oriented leadership represents a strategic foundation for sustainable educational improvement within Islamic educational institutions.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that quality-based leadership plays a pivotal role in fostering sustainable educational quality through the development of a quality culture, continuous academic supervision, teacher professional development, and the optimization of academic and non-academic programs. The findings highlight that effective leadership extends beyond administrative functions by promoting institutional collaboration and continuous improvement, thereby

enriching the discourse on quality management within Islamic educational institutions. Despite these contributions, the study is limited to a single madrasah and employs a qualitative approach, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Future research is recommended to involve multiple educational institutions, adopt mixed-methods or comparative designs, and examine the long-term impact of quality-based leadership on institutional performance and student outcomes.

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