



Transforming Graduate Quality: The Strategic Power of Visionary Leadership in Islamic Secondary Education

Ilham Martua Hasibuan*, Budi

Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

Email : ilhampku563@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

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*Corresponding Author

This study aims to analyze the role of visionary leadership in improving graduate quality, identify strategies for integrating institutional vision into quality improvement programs, and examine the supporting and inhibiting factors affecting their implementation. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, with data collected through observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The data were analyzed using the processes of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, while source and technique triangulation were applied to ensure trustworthiness. The findings reveal that visionary leadership is effectively implemented through participatory vision formulation, consistent communication of institutional goals, and the development of academic, character-building, and religious programs aligned with quality improvement objectives. Effective strategies include integrating the institutional vision into educational practices, empowering teachers, fostering collaboration with stakeholders, and implementing continuous monitoring and evaluation. The study also identifies teacher competence, stakeholder support, and adequate facilities as enabling factors, while limited student motivation, insufficient parental involvement, and rapid technological changes remain key challenges. These findings imply that visionary leadership is essential for fostering a sustainable quality culture and strengthening institutional capacity to produce competitive graduates in a dynamic educational environment.

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INTRODUCTION

Educational quality has become one of the most critical issues in contemporary society because it determines the capacity of educational institutions to produce graduates who are academically competent, morally responsible, and capable of adapting to rapid social and technological changes. Graduate quality is no longer measured solely by academic achievement but also by critical thinking, creativity, leadership, character, collaboration, and lifelong

learning competencies. These competencies are increasingly required to respond to globalization, digital transformation, and the growing complexity of labor market demands (Kusumawati, 2026; Nadhifah, 2026). Consequently, educational institutions are expected to manage their resources strategically to ensure continuous quality improvement and sustainable institutional development (Adzimah, 2024; Holidi, 2026; Kunta, 2025). Leadership has emerged as one of the most influential determinants of educational effectiveness because school leaders establish institutional direction, build organizational culture, and mobilize human resources toward shared goals. Within this context, the principal's leadership becomes fundamental in translating institutional aspirations into measurable educational outcomes (Hikmah, 2026; Mohlas, 2025; Najiburohman, 2025). Therefore, strengthening leadership capacity is an essential strategy for improving graduate quality and ensuring the long-term sustainability of educational institutions.

Despite continuous efforts to improve educational quality, many educational institutions still encounter significant challenges in producing graduates who meet stakeholder expectations. The complexity of educational management has increased due to curriculum reforms, technological advancement, changing student characteristics, and increasing public demands for accountability. Educational institutions are expected to produce graduates who demonstrate not only cognitive excellence but also ethical values, adaptability, communication skills, and technological literacy (Fitriani, 2025; Ni'am, 2025). However, achieving these expectations requires effective leadership capable of integrating institutional vision with strategic planning and organizational practices. Visionary leadership is considered one of the most appropriate leadership approaches for addressing these challenges because visionary leaders formulate future-oriented goals, communicate institutional aspirations effectively, encourage innovation, and foster collaborative organizational cultures (Albustomi, 2025; Rahman, 2025). As emphasized in leadership literature, visionary leaders possess the ability to anticipate future challenges while inspiring organizational members to pursue shared objectives through commitment and continuous improvement. Therefore, visionary leadership plays a decisive role in sustaining educational quality and enhancing graduate outcomes.

The importance of visionary leadership can also be observed in the implementation of educational management within Islamic educational institutions. Initial field observations indicate that the madrasah principal has adopted participatory leadership practices by involving teachers, educational staff, parents, and other stakeholders in formulating institutional vision, implementing educational programs, and conducting continuous monitoring and evaluation. Leadership practices are reflected in the development of academic improvement programs, character education, religious activities, and

student achievement initiatives designed to strengthen graduate quality. These practices demonstrate that visionary leadership extends beyond administrative responsibilities and functions as a strategic mechanism for establishing an organizational culture oriented toward continuous quality improvement (Holidi, 2025; Khofsah, 2025; Shoha, 2026). Furthermore, graduate quality is closely associated with educational inputs, learning processes, institutional management, and educational outcomes that satisfy stakeholder expectations. Consequently, the principal functions not only as an educational administrator but also as an agent of change responsible for aligning institutional vision with national educational standards and sustainable educational development.

Previous studies have extensively discussed the relationship between educational management and graduate quality from various perspectives. Abdul Rojak (2022) demonstrated that effective learning management contributes significantly to improving the quality of madrasah graduates, although its implementation still requires further optimization. Likewise, Tiara Amalia (2025) reported that systematic educational financial management supports quality improvement through effective planning, implementation, and evaluation processes. Meanwhile, Miftahul Anwar (2025) found that the implementation of School-Based Management (SBM) positively influences graduate quality by strengthening curriculum implementation, enhancing teacher competence, and increasing stakeholder participation. These studies consistently indicate that educational management plays an important role in improving institutional performance (Hikmah & Mudarris, 2026; Kusumawati, 2025; Manshur, 2026). However, their primary focus remains on learning management, financial management, or school-based management, while limited attention has been given to the strategic contribution of visionary leadership in integrating institutional vision with graduate quality improvement programs, particularly within the context of Islamic secondary education.

Educational leadership research has increasingly emphasized leadership as a determining factor in educational quality; however, studies specifically investigating visionary leadership within the context of graduate quality improvement remain relatively limited. Existing studies generally examine leadership from broader managerial perspectives without explaining how visionary leadership is translated into concrete institutional programs that directly influence graduate outcomes (Syafiih, 2025). Moreover, previous research has rarely explored the mechanisms through which institutional vision is communicated, internalized, and transformed into collaborative educational practices involving teachers, administrative staff, parents, and other stakeholders. Consequently, insufficient empirical evidence is available regarding how visionary leadership contributes to creating a sustainable quality culture within madrasahs. This limitation leaves important questions unanswered concerning the strategic processes, supporting conditions, and

organizational challenges involved in implementing visionary leadership. Addressing these issues is particularly important because leadership effectiveness depends not only on managerial competence but also on the leader's ability to inspire organizational commitment, coordinate institutional resources, and sustain continuous educational improvement in increasingly dynamic educational environments.

Based on these limitations, this study offers a different perspective by positioning visionary leadership as the central analytical framework for understanding graduate quality improvement. Unlike previous studies that separately investigated learning management, financial management, or School-Based Management, this research integrates leadership, institutional vision, quality culture, and graduate quality into a comprehensive conceptual framework. The novelty of this study lies in its examination of how visionary leadership is implemented through participatory vision formulation, strategic communication, stakeholder collaboration, teacher empowerment, and continuous monitoring and evaluation as interconnected processes for improving graduate quality. Furthermore, the study simultaneously identifies the supporting and inhibiting factors affecting leadership implementation, thereby providing a more holistic understanding of leadership practices within Islamic educational institutions. This integrated perspective enriches the literature on Islamic Educational Management by demonstrating that sustainable graduate quality is not merely the result of effective management but also of visionary leadership capable of transforming institutional values into organizational practices.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study addresses three principal research questions: (1) How is visionary leadership implemented to improve graduate quality? (2) What strategies are employed to integrate institutional vision into graduate quality improvement programs? (3) What supporting and inhibiting factors influence the implementation of visionary leadership in improving graduate quality? Guided by these questions, the study aims to describe the implementation of visionary leadership, analyze the strategies used to integrate institutional vision into educational programs, and identify the factors that facilitate or constrain graduate quality improvement. It is argued that visionary leadership positively contributes to graduate quality by fostering collaborative organizational culture, strengthening stakeholder participation, empowering teachers, and aligning institutional programs with long-term educational objectives. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically by extending discussions on visionary leadership within Islamic Educational Management and practically by providing evidence-based recommendations for educational leaders seeking to establish sustainable quality improvement and produce graduates who are academically competent, morally grounded, and responsive to future educational challenges.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design using a descriptive approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of how visionary leadership is implemented to improve graduate quality within the context of Islamic secondary education (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025; Takona, 2024). A qualitative descriptive design was selected because it enables researchers to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and practices in their natural settings without manipulating the research environment. This approach is particularly appropriate for examining leadership practices, organizational processes, and contextual factors that cannot be adequately explained through quantitative measurement. By emphasizing participants' perspectives, the study sought to generate a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of visionary leadership and its contribution to graduate quality improvement.

The research was conducted at MAN 1 Padang Lawas, North Sumatra, Indonesia. This site was purposively selected because the institution has consistently implemented quality improvement initiatives through academic, character-building, and religious development programs under the direction of the madrasah principal. In addition, the institution provides an appropriate setting for examining the implementation of visionary leadership in educational management. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their knowledge, responsibilities, and direct involvement in leadership practices and graduate quality improvement programs. The participants consisted of the madrasah principal, teachers, and the Head of Administration. Data were collected through classroom and institutional observations, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and document analysis, including institutional vision and mission statements, strategic work plans, organizational documents, and reports related to educational quality improvement.

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data condensation involved selecting, organizing, and focusing relevant information according to the research objectives, while data display enabled the systematic organization of findings to facilitate interpretation of relationships among emerging themes (Gautam, 2023; Okoko et al., 2023; Salmona & Kaczynski, 2024). Conclusions were continuously verified throughout the research process to ensure consistency and credibility. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, data validity was established through source triangulation, methodological triangulation, prolonged engagement in the research setting, and careful observation. These procedures ensured the credibility, dependability, and

confirmability of the research findings while providing a rigorous understanding of the implementation of visionary leadership in improving graduate quality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results of a study conducted at MAN 1 Padang Lawas examined the role of visionary leadership in improving graduate quality. Data were obtained through direct observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation within the madrasah environment. This study focused on how the madrasah principal implements visionary leadership in guiding all members of the madrasah community to achieve educational goals, particularly in efforts to improve graduate quality. Furthermore, this study examined various factors that support and hinder the implementation of visionary leadership, as well as the efforts made by the madrasah principal to overcome these challenges.

The research involved several informants who have direct roles and involvement in the implementation of education at MAN 1 Padang Lawas. These informants included the madrasah principal as the primary informant, the vice-principal, teachers, education staff, and other parties deemed to have information relevant to the research focus. Through these interviews, researchers obtained information on how the madrasah principal formulates and communicates the vision, develops strategic programs, builds collaboration with all members of the madrasah community, and evaluates various programs aimed at improving graduate quality. This information was then reinforced by observations of activities at the madrasah and documentation related to the implementation of quality improvement programs.

As a qualitative study, this research aims not only to describe the facts found in the field but also to understand the meaning behind the various phenomena that occur. Therefore, all information obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation was analyzed in depth to provide a comprehensive picture of the madrasah principal's visionary leadership practices. The analysis was conducted through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, resulting in a more structured data collection that comprehensively addresses the research questions.

The presentation of research results in this chapter is structured based on the problem formulation established in the previous chapter. The discussion begins with a presentation of data regarding the role of the madrasah principal's visionary leadership in improving graduate quality at MAN 1 Padang Lawas. The following section outlines various factors that support and hinder the

implementation of visionary leadership. The following section describes the various efforts the madrasah principal has made to overcome these obstacles to achieve the goal of improving graduate quality. After all the data was presented, the researcher analyzed the research findings by connecting them to relevant theories and previous research findings to obtain a more in-depth discussion with a strong academic foundation.

The research findings presented in this chapter are expected to provide a concrete picture of how visionary leadership is applied in madrasah management, particularly in improving the quality of graduates at MAN 1 Padang Lawas. These research findings are expected to not only serve as evaluation material for madrasahs in developing leadership quality and educational management, but also contribute to the development of studies in the field of Islamic Education Management. Furthermore, these research findings are expected to serve as a reference for madrasah principals and other educational institutions in developing visionary, adaptive leadership that is oriented towards continuously improving graduate quality.

The Role of the Principal's Visionary Leadership in Improving the Quality of Graduates at MAN 1 Padang Lawas

Based on the results of interviews with the Principal of MAN 1 Padang Lawas, it was discovered that visionary leadership was realized through a participatory process of formulating the madrasah's vision. The principal explained that the development of the vision was not done unilaterally, but through deliberations involving various stakeholders, such as teachers, educational staff, the madrasah committee, parents of students, and student representatives. Before the vision was established, an analysis of the madrasah's condition was first conducted, identifying potential and problems faced, and considering the needs of students and the direction of the madrasah's development in the future. The results of this analysis then became the basis for establishing a vision that would serve as a guideline for all members of the madrasah.

The vision of MAN 1 Padang Lawas is "The realization of students who are faithful, pious, knowledgeable and technological, independent, and care about the environment." After the vision was formulated, the principal carried out ongoing socialization so that it could be understood and used as a guideline by all members of the madrasah. Socialization is carried out through various activities, such as teacher council meetings, the Madrasah Student Introduction Period (MATSAMA), flag ceremonies, meetings with parents and the madrasah

committee, and through information media in the form of banners or billboards displayed in strategic locations throughout the madrasah. These steps are taken to ensure that the madrasah's vision is not merely an administrative document but is truly understood and implemented in all educational activities.

In guiding teachers and educational staff to realize the madrasah's vision, the madrasah principal acts as both a mentor and a motivator. The madrasah principal routinely provides guidance on the madrasah's goals and work programs, holds regular evaluation meetings, assigns tasks according to the competencies of each teacher and educational staff member, and ensures that all implemented programs align with the madrasah's vision and mission. This ensures that every member of the madrasah community shares a shared understanding of the direction of the institution's development and their respective responsibilities.

As a form of implementing visionary leadership, the madrasah principal also implements various programs oriented towards improving the quality of graduates. These programs include improving the quality of learning through the implementation of active and innovative learning, strengthening a culture of literacy, fostering student development through olympiads, academic and non-academic competitions, and developing extracurricular activities. Furthermore, character and religious development are a key part of the madrasah program, including the promotion of congregational prayer, Quran recitation before class, morning assembly, and various social activities aimed at developing graduates with noble character, independence, and social awareness.

According to the madrasah principal, the implementation of visionary leadership has significantly contributed to improving the quality of graduates. This is evident in the increasing number of MAN 1 Padang Lawas graduates who successfully continue their education at state universities through various selection channels. This is seen as an indicator that the programs implemented by the madrasah have positively impacted the quality of its graduates.

Madrasah Principal's Strategy in Implementing Visionary Leadership to Improve Graduate Quality

Interviews revealed that the principal's primary strategy in implementing visionary leadership is to use the school's vision as the basis for developing all educational programs. This vision is integrated into learning programs, character development, academic activities, and non-academic activities, ensuring that all educational activities share a common goal: producing graduates who excel in academics, character, and skills.

The implementation of the graduate quality improvement program also involves all teachers and educational staff. The principal explained that teachers are responsible for delivering quality learning and fostering student character, while educational staff play a role in providing administrative services that support the smooth operation of all school programs. This collaboration is expected to create a conducive learning environment that supports optimal graduate quality.

To ensure the effectiveness of each program, the principal conducts regular monitoring and evaluation of all implemented activities. Evaluations are conducted on the learning process, student learning outcomes, the implementation of academic and non-academic programs, and through supervision of teacher performance. These evaluation results serve as the basis for developing follow-up actions and making improvements to programs deemed not yet achieving their intended targets.

To support the success of the graduate quality improvement program, the madrasah principal also optimizes the use of the madrasah's facilities and infrastructure. Classrooms, libraries, laboratories, and various learning facilities are utilized optimally to create an effective, innovative, and student-centered learning process. Furthermore, human resources, consisting of teachers, educational staff, and the support of the madrasah committee, are empowered according to their respective competencies to ensure the full potential of the madrasah is utilized optimally to improve graduate quality.

The madrasah principal also emphasized the importance of building partnerships with the madrasah committee, parents, and the community. This collaboration is achieved through intensive communication, ongoing coordination, and the involvement of all parties in the planning and implementation of madrasah programs. In fact, the committee and parents are involved in developing the madrasah's vision, ensuring that the resulting vision is mutually agreed upon and supported by all stakeholders.

Supporting Factors, Inhibiting Factors, and Efforts of Madrasah Principals in Improving Graduate Quality.

Based on interviews, several factors support the success of the madrasah principal's visionary leadership in improving graduate quality. The main factors cited were the principal's visionary leadership, teacher competence and commitment, the active role of educational staff, the availability of adequate facilities and infrastructure, support from the committee and parents, community participation, and the implementation of well-planned and

sustainable learning and student development programs. According to informants, the synergy of all these factors is the key to producing superior and competitive graduates.

On the other hand, the madrasah principal also acknowledged several obstacles to implementing the graduate quality improvement program. These obstacles include the persistence of students with low learning motivation, the suboptimal involvement of some parents and the community in supporting madrasah programs, and the rapid development of technology and changes in educational demands, which require madrasahs to continuously adapt to remain competitive.

To overcome these obstacles, madrasah principals undertake various efforts, including optimizing the use of available facilities and infrastructure, improving the competency of teachers and education staff through ongoing training and coaching, strengthening coordination with the madrasah committee, parents, and the community, and maintaining the supporting factors the madrasah already possesses. These steps are expected to minimize various obstacles while strengthening the implementation of programs to continuously improve graduate quality.

If a program fails to achieve its targets, the madrasah principal conducts a comprehensive evaluation of the planning and implementation process. The evaluation results are used as the basis for developing corrective measures, such as revising the program, increasing guidance for teachers and education staff, optimizing the use of facilities and infrastructure, and strengthening coordination with parents and the madrasah committee. Furthermore, regular monitoring and evaluation are conducted to ensure each program runs more effectively and optimally achieves the target of improving graduate quality.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that visionary leadership plays a central role in improving graduate quality by enabling principals to formulate a shared institutional vision, communicate it effectively, and translate it into strategic educational programs. The implementation of participatory vision formulation involving teachers, educational staff, parents, committees, and students indicates that leadership extends beyond administrative authority toward collaborative organizational governance. This finding is consistent with Burt Nanus's theory, which argues that visionary leaders formulate a compelling future direction, communicate organizational goals effectively, and mobilize institutional resources to achieve shared objectives (Mebratu et al., 2024; Soim et al., 2026;

Taufiqurrahman et al., 2025). Similarly, the findings support A'yunin and Priyono (2021), who reported that visionary leadership contributes to educational quality improvement through programs aligned with institutional vision. Likewise, Gaol et al. (2024) emphasized that principals with clear visions are more successful in establishing organizational cultures that promote educational excellence. However, the present study extends previous findings by demonstrating that the effectiveness of visionary leadership depends not only on articulating a vision but also on sustaining stakeholder collaboration, continuous communication, and systematic program evaluation. Theoretically, these findings reinforce the proposition that visionary leadership should be understood as a dynamic organizational process integrating strategic planning, collaborative governance, and continuous quality improvement rather than merely as an individual leadership characteristic.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that graduate quality is conceptualized as a multidimensional educational outcome encompassing academic competence, religious character, leadership, discipline, life skills, and adaptability to changing societal demands. This perspective supports Edward Sallis's (2015) theory of Total Quality Management in Education, which views educational quality as the result of continuous organizational improvement involving all institutional components. Rather than emphasizing examination performance alone, the madrasah integrates academic development, character education, extracurricular activities, religious programs, and student achievement initiatives into a comprehensive quality improvement strategy. These findings are consistent with Annisa and Muttaqin, who argued that educational quality is strongly influenced by leadership quality, organizational culture, and the participation of the entire school community (Arifin, 2024; Ataman, 2024; Safitri, 2024). Nevertheless, this study provides additional evidence that graduate quality is strengthened when institutional vision becomes the guiding framework for planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating educational programs. Consequently, the findings contribute theoretically by integrating visionary leadership and graduate quality into a single analytical framework, illustrating that sustainable educational quality emerges through the alignment of institutional vision with organizational culture, educational management, and continuous evaluation.

Another important finding concerns the strategic role of collaboration in supporting the successful implementation of visionary leadership. The study indicates that graduate quality improvement is facilitated by the synergy among visionary leadership, teacher competence, educational staff, adequate facilities,

parental involvement, community participation, and institutional commitment. These findings confirm that leadership effectiveness cannot be separated from organizational capacity and stakeholder engagement. Such evidence supports previous findings by Gaol et al. (2024) and A'yunin and Priyono (2021), who highlighted collaboration as an essential component of educational leadership. However, this research expands earlier studies by showing that collaboration functions not merely as organizational support but also as a mechanism for institutionalizing the shared vision across all educational activities. This finding strengthens contemporary leadership perspectives that regard educational organizations as collaborative learning communities rather than hierarchical administrative systems. From a theoretical standpoint, the study contributes to the growing body of Islamic Educational Management literature by demonstrating that visionary leadership is operationalized through participatory governance, shared responsibility, and continuous institutional learning, thereby strengthening the relationship between leadership practices and sustainable graduate quality improvement.

The study also identifies several supporting and inhibiting factors that influence the effectiveness of visionary leadership in improving graduate quality. Supporting factors include the principal's visionary leadership, teacher competence, educational staff support, adequate facilities and infrastructure, parental participation, community involvement, and the implementation of sustainable educational programs. These findings are in line with Safi'i, who reported that educational quality improvement is strongly affected by principal leadership and stakeholder collaboration (Bulqis & Fachri, 2025; Rozi, 2023). However, this study provides a broader perspective by showing that supporting factors operate as an integrated system rather than as isolated variables. In contrast, inhibiting factors such as low student motivation, limited parental involvement, and rapid technological changes indicate that graduate quality improvement is continuously challenged by both internal and external environmental dynamics. Unlike some previous studies that primarily emphasized institutional management, the present findings highlight the importance of leadership adaptability in responding to technological transformation and changing educational demands. Practically, these findings suggest that educational leaders should strengthen teacher professional development, enhance communication with parents and communities, and develop adaptive strategies that enable institutions to respond effectively to emerging educational challenges while maintaining their commitment to quality improvement.

Overall, the findings confirm that visionary leadership serves as a strategic driver for establishing a sustainable quality culture within Islamic educational institutions. The principal's role extends beyond setting institutional direction to include mobilizing resources, fostering collaboration, managing organizational change, and ensuring continuous evaluation of educational programs. This finding not only supports existing theories of visionary leadership and educational quality but also enriches the literature by demonstrating how participatory governance, stakeholder engagement, and continuous improvement interact to enhance graduate quality. Theoretically, the study contributes to Islamic Educational Management by integrating visionary leadership, quality culture, stakeholder participation, and graduate quality into a comprehensive analytical framework. Practically, the study provides evidence-based insights for school and madrasah leaders seeking to strengthen institutional performance through collaborative vision implementation and systematic quality management. The research therefore contributes both conceptually and operationally by showing that sustainable graduate quality is achieved through the synergy between visionary leadership, organizational commitment, stakeholder collaboration, and continuous institutional learning in response to evolving educational challenges.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that visionary leadership plays a fundamental role in improving graduate quality by fostering a shared vision, strengthening collaboration among stakeholders, and aligning educational programs with institutional goals. The most significant insight is that sustainable graduate quality is achieved not only through academic excellence but also through the integration of character development, leadership, and continuous quality improvement into educational practices. This study contributes to the field of educational management by extending the understanding of visionary leadership beyond vision formulation, emphasizing its implementation through stakeholder participation, strategic program integration, and systematic monitoring and evaluation. These findings enrich the literature on educational leadership, particularly within the context of Islamic educational institutions, and provide practical guidance for school leaders seeking to develop a sustainable quality culture. Nevertheless, this study is limited to a single-case qualitative investigation, which may restrict the generalizability of its findings. Future research is recommended to employ comparative, multi-site, or mixed-method approaches to validate these findings across different educational

contexts and further explore the long-term impact of visionary leadership on graduate quality and institutional performance.

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