



Beyond Borrowed Theories: Reconstructing Islamic Educational Leadership Through the Khalīfah Rā'in Paradigm

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ABSTRACT

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Leadership in Islamic educational institutions requires a paradigmatic foundation that integrates religious principles, ethical responsibility, and organizational governance. However, existing approaches frequently adopt modern leadership theories without sufficiently establishing their foundations in Qur'anic interpretation and hadith analysis. This study aims to reconstruct khalīfah and rā'in as an integrated paradigm of Islamic educational leadership and develop a conceptual model grounded in Islamic sources. Using qualitative library research and critical-comparative analysis, the study examines Qur'anic verses, classical and contemporary exegesis, Nusantara interpretations, authentic hadith, and relevant leadership and governance theories. The findings reveal that khalīfah encompasses human potential, an ethically conditioned office, and a collective test, while *ri'āyah* represents accountable care for those entrusted to a leader. These concepts converge in tawhīd and establish a triadic relationship among God, the leader, and the led. The resulting model comprises six dimensions: istikhlāf, 'ilm, ḥukm bi al-ḥaqq, ri'āyah, ibtilā' and mas'ūliyyah, and falāḥ. The study contributes methodological criteria for deriving managerial principles from Islamic texts and offers theoretical and practical implications for leadership accountability, institutional governance, and ethical decision-making. Future empirical research is needed to validate the model and develop reliable measurement instruments.

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a decisive factor in determining the quality, accountability, and sustainability of educational institutions. Beyond administrative coordination, leadership shapes institutional priorities, professional

relationships, and educational outcomes, making its underlying paradigm important to society. A bibliometric and thematic review of instructional leadership demonstrates a shift from directive models toward integrated approaches while retaining principals as leaders of leaders (Gurr et al., 2025). Leadership is also increasingly understood as a practice distributed across organizational levels (Mifsud, 2024). In Islamic educational institutions, this responsibility extends beyond organizational performance because leaders must safeguard religious values while responding to educational demands. A study of two pesantren illustrates how pedagogical orientations influence leadership styles, ranging from authoritative-patriarchal to deliberative approaches (Hemay et al., 2025). Therefore, establishing a coherent leadership paradigm is essential for responsible educational governance.

The importance of leadership becomes clearer when considering the relationship between authority, ethical responsibility, and institutional accountability. Educational leaders exercise considerable influence over personnel, resources, curricula, and students' development; consequently, their legitimacy and moral orientation affect entire educational communities. However, leadership effectiveness cannot be evaluated exclusively through organizational achievement when institutions also carry religious and ethical responsibilities. Research has identified tensions between imported leadership frameworks and the epistemological foundations of Muslim educational communities (Arar et al., 2026; Bush, 2025). Decolonial scholarship further argues that secularly oriented leadership preparation can marginalize alternative epistemologies and generate epistemic injustice for Muslim students (DeCuir, 2025). These concerns demonstrate that leadership models require contextual and philosophical justification. Accordingly, reconstructing Islamic educational leadership from authoritative religious sources is important for developing governance that integrates institutional effectiveness, ethical integrity, and accountability before God.

A fundamental problem emerges when Islamic educational leadership adopts established theories without critically examining their underlying assumptions. In Indonesia, transformational leadership has been examined in madrasahs (Nifasri, 2025), authentic leadership in state Islamic senior high schools (Handono & Nurochmah, 2023), and Islamic leadership as a predictor of lecturer performance. This pattern reflects textual justification, whereby religious texts support theories whose conceptual foundations remain externally established. Meanwhile, positive leadership constructs frequently overlap and combine behavioral descriptions with evaluative judgments, creating difficulties in determining causal relationships (Fischer & Sitkin, 2023; Fischer et al., 2024). Authentic leadership's conception of the true self remains contested (Goody et al.,

2024), while transformational leadership faces criticism regarding universal claims. Religious perspectives also remain peripheral to organizational psychology (Dik et al., 2024), despite continuing interest in spiritual leadership and organizational performance (Vedula & Agrawal, 2024).

Previous scholarship has increasingly explored leadership grounded in Islamic traditions, but important conceptual and methodological limitations remain. A systematic review identifies spiritual foundations, including *taqwā* and *ikhlaṣ*, alongside administrative principles such as *amānah*, *ṣidq*, *raḥmah*, *ṣabr*, *ʿadl*, and *syūrā* (Arar et al., 2026). Alazmi and Bush (2024) developed an Islamic-oriented educational leadership model, while Hilal et al. (2025) identified distinctive relationships between distributed leadership, hierarchical delegation, consultation, and Islamic accountability. Research has also examined women's leadership through *amānah* and ethical stewardship (Hidayah et al., 2025), guardianship (Lahmar, 2024), and theocentric perspectives (Amatullah, 2024). Indonesian studies address prophetic leadership (Fathih et al., 2024), *Pancajiwā* (Mahfudhoh et al., 2023), collective leadership and regeneration (Hanum OK et al., 2023), and succession beyond family lineage. Nevertheless, these contributions rarely establish an integrated paradigm through systematic scriptural interpretation and rigorous hadith criticism.

Further examination reveals interconnected gaps concerning textual sources, conceptual development, and theoretical dialogue. Studies connect Qur'anic passages about Adam and David with knowledgeable, just, and trustworthy leadership (Hadiyan et al., 2026; Setiawan et al., 2025), while *istikhlāf* has been examined as an ethical framework for civilization (Wan Ismail & Berghout, 2024) and *khilāfah* within democratic discourse (Ibrahim et al., 2024). Research on Tafsir al-Azhar addresses contextualization, reception, and authoritarianism (Mujahidin et al., 2024; Rozi et al., 2024; Shomad et al., 2024), alongside developments in Indonesian thematic exegesis (Kaltsum & Amin, 2024). However, these discussions remain insufficiently connected to educational leadership. Moreover, the governance tension between external control and organizational trust remains relevant to Islamic institutions. The mechanisms of *murāqabah* and *ḥisāb* offer an important but underdeveloped perspective for addressing this tension.

This study advances a textually grounded reconstruction of Islamic educational leadership by integrating *khilāfah* and *rāʿin* into a unified paradigm. Its novelty lies in establishing explicit criteria for transferring religious concepts into managerial analysis, distinguishing textual meaning from contemporary institutional application, and integrating scriptural interpretation with critical engagement in leadership theory. Rather than treating Islamic values as supplementary characteristics of established leadership models, the study

conceptualizes them as foundations determining leadership legitimacy, ethical evaluation, and institutional purpose. It also develops a six-dimensional framework comprising *istikhlāf*, *‘ilm*, *ḥukm bi al-ḥaqq*, *ri‘āyah*, *mas’ūliyyah*, and *falāḥ*. By connecting divine responsibility, knowledge, justice, care, accountability, and ultimate success, this framework offers an alternative for understanding leadership in madrasahs, pesantren, and Islamic higher education institutions.

Accordingly, this study addresses four research questions: how should *khalīfah* and *rā’in* be interpreted within an Islamic educational leadership paradigm; how reliable and contextually appropriate is the frequently cited *kullukum rā’in* hadith; how does this paradigm converge with or differ from transformational, servant, ethical, and authentic leadership, as well as agency and stewardship theories; and how can an integrated model be constructed for educational institutions? The central argument is that *khalīfah* and *rā’in* represent complementary dimensions of leadership grounded in *tawḥīd*. The former establishes the vertical dimension of divinely entrusted authority, while the latter establishes the horizontal dimension of caring for those entrusted to one's responsibility. Together, they produce a triadic relationship involving God, the leader, and the led. This paradigm may resemble modern theories behaviorally while differing in its ontological, epistemological, and axiological foundations.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative library research design using descriptive and critical-comparative analysis. This design was selected because the research aims to reconstruct a conceptual paradigm of Islamic educational leadership rather than examine relationships between variables through empirical fieldwork. The descriptive approach identifies the meanings of *khalīfah* and *rā’in*, while critical-comparative analysis examines their theological foundations and implications in relation to modern leadership theories. The research integrates thematic exegesis, hadith **takhrij** and interpretation, and an integrative-interconnective approach. Furthermore, the double movement framework provides an interpretive basis for connecting the historical and textual contexts of religious sources with contemporary educational institutions. This combination enables the study to develop a textually grounded conceptual model while maintaining critical engagement with established management theories.

As a library-based study, the research did not involve a geographical field site. Its research setting consisted of documentary sources selected according to their authority, relevance, and contribution to the reconstruction of Islamic educational leadership. Primary sources comprised the Qur'an, using the 2019

translation published by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia; Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, following the Dār Ṭauq al-Najāh edition; and Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, following the numbering established by Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī. Additional primary materials included two hadith commentaries, eight exegetical works representing classical, modern-contemporary, and Nusantara traditions, and a lexicon of Qur'anic vocabulary. Secondary sources consisted of journal articles published between 2022 and 2026, carrying DOIs and appearing in reputable Scopus-indexed journals or nationally accredited Sinta 1–2 journals. Selection focused on Islamic educational leadership, *khalīfah*, *amānah*, modern leadership critiques, and agency–stewardship governance.

Data were collected through documentary research, textual identification, and systematic recording of relevant passages and scholarly interpretations. First, Qur'anic verses containing derivatives of the roots kh-l-f and r-'-y were identified and classified according to linguistic form, textual location, and semantic nuance. Second, QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 30–33, Ṣād [38]: 26, and al-An'ām [6]: 165 were examined alongside supporting verses and interpretations from the three exegetical traditions. Third, the kullukum rā'in hadith was traced through the two ṣaḥīḥ collections by comparing transmission lines, textual variants, and narrative contexts. Supporting hadith were included only when classified as ṣaḥīḥ or ḥasan. Relevant secondary publications were documented and categorized according to their theoretical contributions. Before Qur'anic concepts were transferred into the managerial domain, their interpretations were assessed using three justification criteria: explicit textual meaning as an office, general applicability beyond a specific event, and consistency with authoritative exegetes and hadith commentators.

Table 1. Justification Criteria for Transferring Qur'anic Concepts into the Managerial Domain

Condition	Test question	Example of application
Explicit meaning of office	Does another verse or hadith explicitly give the concept the meaning of an office?	QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 30 is disputed (al-Qurṭubī reads it as an office, Ibn Kaṣīr as succeeding generations); QS. Ṣād [38]: 26 meets the condition explicitly
General applicability	Is the principle free from being bound to a single event or figure?	The prohibition against following <i>hawā</i> applies to every decision-maker
Consistency with exegetical authority	Is the application consistent with the understanding of authoritative exegetes and hadith commentators?	<i>Khalīfah</i> is understood as a mandate-holder appointed by God (<i>khalīfah min Allāh</i>), not as a substitute for God (<i>khalīfah 'an Allāh</i>)

Table 1 presents the three criteria used to evaluate whether Qur'anic

concepts can be transferred legitimately into educational management. The first criterion requires textual evidence supporting the interpretation of a concept as an office or mandate, thereby preventing unjustified equivalence between general human characteristics and institutional leadership positions. The second criterion assesses whether a principle extends beyond a particular individual or historical circumstance. The third criterion ensures that managerial applications remain consistent with authoritative Qur'anic exegesis and hadith commentary. Collectively, these criteria serve as safeguards against selective interpretation and the uncritical appropriation of religious terminology. Principles satisfying these requirements are formulated as conceptual propositions and subsequently translated into dimensions and indicators of Islamic educational leadership.

Data analysis followed three interconnected procedures: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. During data condensation, relevant textual evidence was selected, classified, and compared according to semantic meanings, exegetical interpretations, hadith authenticity, and theoretical relevance. Data display involved organizing the evidence into comparative matrices examining leadership legitimacy, ethical standards, accountability mechanisms, and institutional purposes. The findings were then compared with transformational, servant, ethical, and authentic leadership, as well as agency and stewardship theories, to distinguish behavioral similarities from ontological, epistemological, and axiological differences. The validated principles informed the construction of a six-dimensional model comprising *istikhlāf*, *'ilm*, *ḥukm bi al-ḥaqq*, *ri'āyah*, *mas'ūliyyah*, and *falāḥ*. Trustworthiness was strengthened through source triangulation across exegetical traditions and hadith transmission lines, cross-checking hadith numbering across editions, and consistent Arabic–Latin transliteration following the 1987 Joint Decree of the Indonesian Ministers of Religious Affairs and Education and Culture.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The Meaning of Khalīfah and Rā'in: From Semantics to Exegesis

The semantic analysis identifies two complementary fields of meaning underlying the concepts of khalīfah and rā'in. The root kh-l-f fundamentally denotes being behind, from which the meanings of coming after, succeeding, and receiving a mandate develop. Succession may occur because the preceding individual is absent, deceased, or incapable, but it may also signify an honor bestowed upon the appointed individual. Within the Qur'anic context, khilāfah involves a grantor, a recipient, a domain of responsibility, and an evaluation of performance. It therefore denotes more than occupying a position: it establishes

a relationship between authority and responsibility. The root r-'-y, meanwhile, denotes shepherding, protecting, and caring for something entrusted to one's supervision. Its semantic implications include trust, care, and compliance with standards. Accordingly, khalīfah emphasizes the basis of a mandate, whereas rā'in emphasizes the obligations arising from that mandate.

Table 2. Derivatives of the Root kh-l-f in the Qur'an

Form	Example verses	Nuance of meaning
<i>khalīfah</i> (singular)	QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 30; Şād [38]: 26	Holder of a mandate, whether the human species or an individual
<i>khalā'if</i> (plural)	QS. al-An'ām [6]: 165; Yūnus [10]: 14; Fāṭir [35]: 39	Generations succeeding one another; collective <i>khilāfah</i>
<i>khulafā'</i> (plural)	QS. al-A'rāf [7]: 69, 74; al-Naml [27]: 62	Successor generations; in QS. al-A'rāf [7]: 69 and 74, after peoples who were destroyed
<i>istakhlafa, yastakhlifu, mustakhlafin</i> (verbal noun: <i>istikhlāf</i>)	QS. al-Nūr [24]: 55; al-Ḥadīd [57]: 7	Conferral of a mandate; wealth and power as a trust

Table 2 shows that the Qur'anic derivatives of kh-l-f encompass individual appointment, generational succession, and the conferral of responsibility. The distinction indicates that khilāfah cannot be reduced to a single institutional position. Its meaning depends on the textual context, including whether the passage concerns humankind collectively, successive generations, or an individual entrusted with authority. Across these usages, the concept retains an association with succession and responsibility. This semantic range provides the basis for distinguishing khilāfah as human potential, as an individual office, and as a test of how authority is exercised.

The semantic analysis of r-'-y further demonstrates that care involves both responsibility and standards of performance. QS. al-Mu'minūn [23]: 8 describes those who preserve their trusts and covenants using rā'ūn, connecting the concept of care with amānah. QS. al-Ḥadīd [57]: 27 uses the expression fa-mā ra'auhā ḥaqqā ri'āyatiḥā, indicating that an entrusted responsibility can be fulfilled inadequately. Thus, *ri'āyah* is not simply the act of supervising others; it requires appropriate treatment and the fulfillment of entrusted obligations. A rā'in is consequently understood as a guardian responsible for something that is not exclusively his or her own, with care evaluated against applicable standards. Translating rā'in simply as leader obscures the relationship between guardianship, trust, and accountability.

Three Layers of Meaning of Khilāfah

The exegetical analysis identifies three interconnected meanings of khilāfah: the potential of humankind, an ethically conditioned individual office, and a collective test. These meanings emerge from the different contexts of QS.

al-Baqarah [2]: 30–33, Şād [38]: 26, and al-An'ām [6]: 165.

Table 3. Exegetical Matrix of the Three Khilāfah Verses

Verse	Layer of meaning	Exegetical findings	Principle derived
QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 30–33	Potential of humankind as a species	Al-Ṭabarī (2000) collects the meanings of successor to earlier beings, generations succeeding one another, and upholder of God's law; Ibn Kaşīr (1999) inclines toward succeeding generations; al-Qurṭubī (1964) treats the verse as the basis for the obligation to appoint a leader; <i>Tafsīr al-Manār</i> , through 'Abduh's view, emphasizes the potential of reason and knowledge (Riḍā, 1990)	Power is a mandate; eligibility rests on knowledge; the potential for corruption is controlled through education
QS. Şād [38]: 26	An ethically conditioned individual office	<i>Khilāfah</i> is attached to David's political and judicial authority; Shihab (1992) notes the plural "We" (<i>innā ja'alnāka</i>), which suggests the community's involvement in the appointment	Mandate, decisions based on truth, prohibition of <i>hawā</i> , and awareness of <i>ḥisāb</i>
QS. al-An'ām [6]: 165	A collective test through hierarchy	Differences in rank are acknowledged, but their purpose is stated: <i>li yablūwakum</i> (to test you); the verse closes with the pair <i>sarī' al-'iqāb</i> and <i>ghafūrun raḥīm</i>	Office is a field of testing, not a privilege; accountability includes both sanction and forgiveness

Table 3 demonstrates that the three passages provide distinct but complementary foundations for understanding khilāfah. QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 30–33 concerns the capacity of humankind and the significance of knowledge; Şād [38]: 26 establishes an explicit relationship between an individual office and ethical obligations; and al-An'ām [6]: 165 situates differences in authority within a framework of testing and accountability. Taken together, the passages distinguish the human capacity for responsibility from the formal exercise of authority and the evaluation of its consequences. This differentiation prevents the direct equation of every human being with a particular institutional office while preserving the ethical principles that can inform leadership.

At the first level, the exegetical findings reveal different interpretations of the direction of legitimacy. One interpretation understands Adam as a khalīfah appointed by God to implement divine commands and connects the verse with the obligation to appoint a leader. Other interpretations emphasize generations

succeeding one another. The concept of succession can also convey honor bestowed upon those entrusted with responsibility. These meanings can be reconciled by distinguishing *khalīfah min Allāh*, a vicegerent appointed by God, from *khalīfah ‘an Allāh*, a substitute for God. The former denotes entrusted authority, whereas the latter implies substitution for the divine, which is incompatible with the understanding of God as ever-living and continuously governing creation. The managerial implication is that an appointed leader remains a servant and trustee whose policies are open to evaluation and criticism. Divine appointment does not make a leader infallible or exempt from institutional accountability. The meanings of divine mandate and generational succession can therefore coexist without being treated as mutually exclusive.

The Nusantara exegetical materials also connect succession with the responsibility to manage the earth. This interpretation supports a reading of *khalīfah* that incorporates both continuity between generations and the practical obligations attached to human stewardship. However, the examination of the Nusantara exegetical tradition in this study remains limited in scope and requires further textual elaboration.

QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 31–33 provides a pedagogical sequence that connects knowledge with eligibility for responsibility. The angels raise the possibility that humankind will cause corruption and shed blood. The response is demonstrated through the teaching of names to Adam, the presentation of those names to the angels, the acknowledgment of the angels' limited knowledge, and Adam's subsequent explanation. The sequence moves from teaching to assessment and demonstration. Adam's eligibility is therefore associated with knowledge rather than merely lineage, strength, or possession of authority. Nevertheless, because the passage concerns the creation of humankind, it does not directly establish that every school principal or university rector occupies the office of *khalīfah*. The appropriate application is to derive general principles concerning knowledge, responsibility, and the management of human potential without collapsing the distinction between a universal human capacity and a specific institutional appointment.

QS. Šād [38]: 26 explicitly establishes *khilāfah* as an individual office and identifies four interconnected elements: appointment, judging among people according to truth, avoiding *hawā*, and accountability on the Day of Reckoning. The prohibition against following *hawā* identifies uncontrolled personal inclination as a threat arising from within the decision-maker. Leadership failure is therefore not attributable solely to external pressure or competition; it may also result from the leader's own desires. QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 124 further establishes a condition of eligibility by excluding wrongdoers from God's covenant. Together, these passages indicate that authority requires ethical qualification and cannot be

legitimized solely by lineage or inheritance. The exercise of leadership must remain consistent with truth and justice, while the leader's personal inclinations must be restrained by standards beyond individual preference.

QS. al-An'ām [6]: 165 completes the three-layer interpretation by presenting differences in human standing as a test. The verse connects differences in rank with the obligation to demonstrate how entrusted capacities and authority are exercised. Its concluding reference to punishment and forgiveness establishes two possible dimensions of accountability: consequences for wrongdoing and the possibility of divine forgiveness. Institutional authority consequently becomes a field in which ethical responsibility is tested. Possessing greater power does not establish moral superiority; it increases the importance of evaluating how that power is used. The three verses collectively establish the conceptual foundations of mandate, competence, ethical decision-making, and accountability.

The Meaning of Rā'in in Hadith Commentaries

The examination of hadith commentaries identifies three central elements in the meaning of rā'in: guardianship (ḥifẓ), trust (amānah), and commitment to welfare (iltizām al-ṣalāḥ). A rā'in is responsible for protecting what has been entrusted to his or her supervision and ensuring that its interests are fulfilled. This obligation extends to religious, worldly, and other matters relevant to the entrusted responsibility. The concept therefore includes both the preservation of those under one's care and the active pursuit of their welfare. It is not sufficient for a leader merely to occupy a supervisory position or issue instructions. The responsibility entails acting justly, protecting the entrusted community, and fulfilling its legitimate interests. These elements establish the conceptual relationship between *ri'āyah* and amānah: care is the practical expression of trust, while the fulfillment of care provides a basis for evaluating whether the trust has been honored.

Synthesis: Two Sides of One Paradigm

The combined semantic, exegetical, and hadith findings establish khalīfah and rā'in as two complementary dimensions of one leadership paradigm. Khalīfah explains the relationship between the leader and the grantor of the mandate, while rā'in explains the relationship between the leader and those entrusted to the leader's care. The first emphasizes the basis and conditions of authority; the second emphasizes the ethical obligations arising from its exercise.

Table 4. The Vertical and Horizontal Dimensions of the Khalīfah–Rā'in Paradigm

Aspect	Vertical dimension (<i>khalīfah</i>)	Horizontal dimension (<i>rā'in</i>)
Core question	On whose mandate do I lead?	How do I treat those I lead?
Nature of leadership	Trust and test	Care (<i>ri'āyah</i>)
Source of legitimacy	Divine mandate and eligibility through knowledge	Sincerity (<i>naṣ iḥ ah</i>) and justice
Principal threat	<i>Hawā</i> and forgetting the Day of Reckoning	Deceit (<i>ghisysy</i>) and neglect
Form of accountability	<i>Ḥ isāb</i> before God	<i>Mas'ūl 'an ra'iyyatihi</i> at every level

Table 4 shows that the vertical and horizontal dimensions address different but inseparable questions. The vertical dimension establishes why authority is entrusted and the standards by which its exercise is evaluated. The horizontal dimension establishes how the entrusted authority must be expressed through care, sincerity, and justice. Their integration means that neither divine mandate without responsible care nor care without an ethical standard is sufficient to constitute the complete paradigm. Both dimensions converge in *tawḥīd*: human authority is entrusted rather than absolute, and those under a leader's supervision must be treated as trusts rather than as instruments of personal interest. This synthesis provides the conceptual basis for a triadic relationship involving God, the leader, and the led.

The Kullukum Rā'in Hadith: Takhrij, Context, and Textual Variants

The central hadith examined in this study is narrated from 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar. Its central statement declares that every person is a *rā'in* and every person is accountable for the community or responsibility entrusted to that person's care. The narration identifies the imam, a man responsible for his family, a woman responsible within her household, and a servant responsible for the master's property as examples of this principle.

The hadith is recorded in both Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī and Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim and is therefore *muttafaq 'alaih*. The comparison identifies three principal transmission routes: the al-Zuhrī-Sālim route in al-Bukhārī's narration, the Nāfi' route in another al-Bukhārī narration, and the Nāfi' route in Muslim. These routes provide the basis for examining differences in wording, the structure of responsibility, and the scope of the entrusted obligations.

Table 5. Main Lines of Transmission of the Kullukum Rā'in Hadith

Narration	Book and chapter	Chain (abridged)	Distinctive wording
al-Bukhārī no. 893	<i>Kitāb al-Jumu'ah</i> , chapter on Friday	Bisyr ibn Muḥammad ← 'Abdullāh ibn al-Mubārak ←	Al-Zuhrī-Sālim line: <i>al-imām, fī baiti</i>

Narration	Book and chapter	Chain (abridged)	Distinctive wording
	prayer in villages and towns	Yūnus ← al-Zuhrī ← Sālim ← Ibn 'Umar (opening words only); the full text and the account of Ruzaiq through the suspended (<i>mu'allaq</i>) addition of al-Laiš ← Yūnus ← Ibn Syihāb ← Sālim ← Ibn 'Umar	<i>zaujihā, al-khādim</i> ; contains the account of Ruzaiq
al-Bukhārī no. 2554	<i>Kitāb al-'Itq</i> , chapter on the disapproval of arrogance toward slaves (<i>karāhiyat al-taṭ āwul 'alā al-raqīq</i>)	Musaddad ← Yaḥyā ibn Sa'īd ← 'Ubaidullāh ibn 'Umar ← Nāfi' ← Ibn 'Umar	Nāfi' line: <i>al-amīr allaḏī 'alā al-nās, wa waladihi, al-'abd</i>
Muslim no. 1829	<i>Kitāb al-Imārah</i> ; chapter heading supplied by the commentator: the virtue of the just ruler	Qutaibah ibn Sa'īd and Muḥammad ibn Rumḥ ← al-Laiš ← Nāfi' ← Ibn 'Umar	Nāfi' line, wording consistent with no. 2554

Table 5 shows that the hadith's central principle is transmitted through more than one route, including the al-Zuhrī–Sālim and Nāfi' lines. Comparing these routes makes it possible to identify differences in wording without losing sight of their shared emphasis on responsibility. The transmission through two major ṣaḥīḥ collections and the recognized standing of these routes provide a strong textual basis for the analysis. The variations also demonstrate the importance of examining individual narrations rather than assuming that every version contains precisely identical wording or contextual details.

The account of Ruzaiq is included in al-Bukhārī's narration no. 893 through an additional narration of al-Laiš. Ruzaiq ibn Ḥukaim, who held authority over Ailah and managed cultivated land with a group of workers, wrote to Ibn Syihāb al-Zuhrī while the latter was in Wādī al-Qurā with Yūnus. Ruzaiq asked whether he could establish Friday prayer in the community. Ibn Syihāb instructed him to do so and cited the kullukum rā'in hadith as the basis for his response. The account identifies the practical relationship between authority and religious responsibility in a community outside a major urban center. It also establishes the relevance of *ri'āyah* to individuals responsible for managing community affairs. Within educational institutions, the corresponding principle applies to leaders at different levels, including principals, dormitory supervisors, and classroom teachers, each of whom bears responsibility for the community under their supervision.

The comparison of transmission routes also reveals differences in the hadith's textual details. The al-Zuhrī–Sālim route refers to the imam, the woman

in her husband's household, and the servant, whereas the Nāfi' route uses al-amīr allaẓī 'alā al-nās, includes wa waladihi, and uses al-'abd. The al-Zuhrī route also contains an additional statement concerning a man responsible for his father's property, accompanied by uncertainty in the transmission of that wording. The differences require careful treatment because not every supplementary expression has the same level of certainty within the narration.

Table 6. Textual Variants Across the Two Lines of Transmission

Element	Al-Zuhrī–Sālim line (al-Bukhārī no. 893)	Nāfi' line (al-Bukhārī no. 2554; Muslim no. 1829)
Highest leader	<i>al-imāmu rā'in</i>	<i>al-amīr allaẓī 'alā al-nās rā'in</i>
Woman	Shepherd in her husband's house	Shepherd over her husband's house and his child (<i>wa waladihi</i>)
Servant or slave	<i>al-khādim</i> over his master's property	<i>al-'abd</i> over his master's property
Closing	An addition concerning a man over his father's property, with the narrator's doubt (<i>wa ḥ asibtu an qad qāla</i>), followed by the repetition <i>wa kullukum rā'in</i>	Emphasis with the particle <i>alā</i> : <i>alā fa kullukum rā'in wa kullukum mas'ūlun 'an ra'iyatihi</i>

Table 6 identifies variations concerning the highest authority, household responsibility, terminology for a servant, and the closing statement. The inclusion of *wa waladihi* in the Nāfi' route brings the care of children explicitly into the description of responsibility. This wording provides a textual basis for considering child development and education within the wider scope of *ri'āyah*. The uncertainty attached to the additional statement about a man's responsibility for his father's property means that this detail should not carry the same interpretive weight as wording established without that qualification. The placement of al-Bukhārī's narration no. 2554 in a chapter concerning the prohibition of arrogance toward slaves further highlights the ethical importance of responsibility toward those in a subordinate position.

The repeated statement that every person is accountable for the entrusted community creates a symmetrical structure of responsibility. The imam, household members, and servants are all included within the principle, although the scope of their responsibilities differs. No level of authority is entirely exempt from accountability, and responsibility is not confined to the highest institutional position. For educational management, this structure provides a basis for distributed responsibility across organizational levels. Its distinctive feature is that accountability extends beyond relationships between subordinates and superiors to encompass responsibility before God. Supporting hadith further

clarify the relationship between competence, office, sincerity, and justice.

Table 7. Supporting Hadith on the Dimensions of Leadership

Dimension	Hadith	Narration	Meaning for educational leadership
Trust and competence	<i>Izā wussida al-amru ilā ghairi ahlihi fa-ntaḡ ir al-sā'ah</i>	al-Bukhārī no. 59	Entrusting affairs to those unqualified for them is a betrayal of trust
Office as a burden	<i>Innahā amānah, wa innahā yauma al-qiyyāmah khizyun wa nadāmah</i>	Muslim no. 1825	The Prophet declined Abū Ḥarr's request for office because he was weak for it; piety does not automatically confer eligibility
Prohibition of seeking office	<i>Lā tas'ali al-imārah</i>	al-Bukhārī no. 7146; Muslim no. 1652	Office given without being sought receives God's help
Sanction for failed <i>ri'āyah</i>	<i>Mā min 'abdin istar'āhullāhu ra'iyatan fa lam yaḡ uṭ ḡā bi naṡ iḡ ah</i>	al-Bukhārī no. 7150; with the wording <i>wa huwa ḡāsy</i> : al-Bukhārī no. 7151 and Muslim no. 142	The word <i>istar'ā</i> derives from <i>r'-y</i> ; care demands sincerity
Justice within one's sphere of responsibility	<i>Inna al-muqṣiṭ īn ... allaḡina ya'dilūna fī ḡ ukmihim wa ahlīhim wa mā walū</i>	Muslim no. 1827	Justice is measured in decisions, in the family, and in whatever one is entrusted with

Table 7 demonstrates that the supporting narrations reinforce five connected dimensions: competence, the burden of office, restraint in seeking authority, sincere care, and justice. These dimensions indicate that leadership is not an entitlement detached from responsibility. Appointment requires suitability, while the exercise of authority requires sincere care and equitable treatment. Failure to fulfill these obligations carries consequences beyond immediate organizational outcomes. Together, the narrations establish a practical ethical framework for evaluating whether authority is exercised as a trust.

A Critical Framework for Comparing Leadership Paradigms

The synthesis of the textual findings establishes that the khalīfah-rā'īn paradigm can be compared with modern leadership theories at the behavioral level while maintaining a distinct conceptual foundation. The analysis considers transformational, servant, ethical, authentic, and instructional leadership, as well

as agency and stewardship theories. The comparison focuses on the underlying sources of legitimacy, standards of decision-making, mechanisms of accountability, and ultimate objectives.

Table 8. Behavioral Convergence Between Modern Leadership Theories and the Khalīfah–Rā’in Paradigm

Theory	Behavioral convergence	Textual basis
<i>Transformational</i>	Idealized influence parallels <i>uswah ḥ asanah</i> ; the moral uplift of followers parallels <i>tazkiyah</i>	QS. al-Aḥzāb [33]: 21; al-Jumu‘ah [62]: 2
<i>Servant</i>	Prioritizing the growth of those led parallels <i>ri‘āyah</i>	The <i>kullukum rā’in</i> hadith; the hadith of Ma‘qil ibn Yasār
<i>Ethical</i>	Moral exemplarity and justice parallel <i>amānah</i> and <i>‘adl</i>	QS. al-Nisā’ [4]: 58; the <i>al-muqsiṭ īn</i> hadith
<i>Authentic</i>	Self-awareness parallels <i>muḥ āsabah</i>	QS. al-Ḥasyr [59]: 18
<i>Instructional</i>	The leader as learner and director of learning parallels the <i>‘ilm</i> dimension	QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 31–33

Table 8 shows that several behaviors emphasized in modern leadership theories can be connected with principles found in Islamic texts. Exemplary conduct, attention to the welfare of others, ethical decision-making, self-examination, and educational guidance all have corresponding textual foundations. However, behavioral correspondence does not establish that the theories share the same underlying paradigm. The comparison therefore distinguishes similarities in observable conduct from differences in the source of legitimacy, the standard by which actions are evaluated, and the ultimate purpose of leadership.

At the ontological level, the khalīfah–rā’in paradigm is structured as a triadic relationship involving God as the grantor of the mandate, the leader as its holder, and the people entrusted to the leader's care. At the epistemological level, the standard of decision-making is not exhausted by social expectations or the leader's self-understanding but is evaluated against al-ḥaqq. At the axiological level, institutional performance remains important but is not the ultimate objective. The orientation is *falāḥ*, understood as well-being and success in this world and the hereafter. These distinctions establish the conceptual foundations for constructing an integrated model of Islamic educational leadership.

Constructing the Khalīfah–Rā’in Model of Educational Leadership

The synthesis produces one central proposition: educational leadership is a divinely entrusted responsibility expressed through care for the institutional community and evaluated through accountability in this world and the hereafter.

Three related propositions follow. First, eligibility for leadership depends on knowledge and appropriate competence rather than lineage, seniority, or ambition. Second, responsibility extends across institutional levels, from the highest leader to teachers and educational staff. Third, the prevention of leadership deviation requires internal ethical awareness reinforced by institutional accountability. The six dimensions translate these propositions into a conceptual model suitable for further empirical development.

Table 9. Six Dimensions of the Khalīfah–Rā'in Model of Educational Leadership

Dimension	Meaning	Textual basis	Institutional indicators
<i>Istikhlāf</i> (mandate)	Leadership is a trust from God, not a possession or a right	QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 30; al-Ḥadīd [57]: 7	Office is regarded as a trust; readiness to be replaced; the institution is not personalized
<i>ʿIlm</i> (the leader as learner)	Eligibility to lead is demonstrated and renewed through knowledge	QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 31–33	Understanding of curriculum and instruction; a culture of learning; data-informed decisions
<i>Ḥukm bi al-ḥaqq</i> (ethics of decision-making)	Decisions are made on the basis of truth and justice, with <i>hawā</i> restrained	QS. Ṣād [38]: 26; al-Nisā' [4]: 58; the <i>al-muqsiṭīn</i> hadith	Fair teacher selection and student admission; freedom from conflicts of interest; decisions that can be justified
<i>Ri'āyah</i> (care)	Guarding, protecting, and nurturing those who are led with sincerity	The <i>kullukum rā'in</i> hadith; the hadith of Ma'qil ibn Yasār; QS. al-Mu'minūn [23]: 8	Attention to teacher welfare; services for weaker students; no data manipulation
<i>Ibtilā'</i> and <i>mas'ūliyyah</i> (test and accountability)	Office is a test for which one is accountable to God and to the institution	QS. al-An'ām [6]: 165; Yūnus [10]: 14; the hadith of Abū Zarr	Honest performance reporting; periodic <i>muḥāsabah</i> ; openness to criticism and audit
<i>Falāḥ</i> (orientation)	Success is measured by well-being in this world and the hereafter for the whole institutional community	QS. al-Mu'minūn [23]: 1	Academic quality aligned with character formation; values are not sacrificed for achievement

Table 9 operationalizes the conceptual findings into six dimensions with distinct but interrelated functions. *Istikhlāf* establishes the basis of authority; *ʿilm* identifies the importance of knowledge and continuing learning; and *ḥukm bi al-ḥaqq* governs ethical decisions. *Ri'āyah* translates the mandate into practical care,

while *ibtilā'* and *mas'ūliyyah* establish the testing and accountability dimensions. *Falāḥ* directs the entire model toward a broader understanding of success. The proposed institutional indicators provide starting points for developing empirical instruments, but their validity and reliability must be established through subsequent research.

The six dimensions form a single structure. *Istikhhlāf*, rooted in *tawḥīd*, serves as the foundation; *'ilm*, *ḥukm bi al-ḥaqq*, and *ri'āyah* constitute the three process pillars; *ibtilā'* and *mas'ūliyyah* form the control layer; and *falāḥ* provides the ultimate orientation.



Figure 1. The Khalīfah–Rā'in Model of Educational Leadership.

Figure 1 illustrates the model as a vertically integrated structure. At the foundation, *istikhlāf* establishes leadership as a divine trust rooted in *tawḥīd*. The control layer, comprising *ibtilā'* and *mas'ūliyyah*, emphasizes that office is a test requiring accountability to God and the institution. Above it, the three process pillars—*'ilm*, *ḥukm bi al-ḥaqq*, and *ri'āyah*—represent leading with knowledge, deciding according to truth, and caring with sincerity. The structure culminates in *falāḥ*, which directs leadership toward the well-being of the whole institutional community in this world and the hereafter. The arrangement indicates that institutional success depends on the integration of foundation, process, control, and orientation rather than on any single leadership behavior.

The model also identifies precedents for integrating leadership and education in prophetic practice. Muṣ'ab ibn 'Umayr and Ibn Ummi Maktūm were sent to Medina to teach the Qur'an, illustrating the role of education in

community formation. The dispatch of Mu'āz ibn Jabal to Yemen likewise involved guidance concerning the sequence of preaching and teaching. These examples demonstrate the connection between delegation, preparation, and educational responsibility.

Institutional Applications and Research Limitations

The model identifies different points of application across madrasahs, pesantren, and Islamic higher education institutions. In madrasahs, the principal's responsibilities include instructional leadership, teacher welfare, and attention to students who are falling behind. In pesantren, the framework emphasizes the conditions of leadership eligibility, succession, and the distribution of responsibility beyond family lineage. In Islamic higher education, it emphasizes ethical accountability and the need to prevent rankings and performance indicators from replacing educational purposes.

Table 10. Application of the Model to Three Types of Islamic Educational Institutions

Institution	Distinctive challenge	Key dimensions	Direction of application
Madrasah	Leadership tends to be administrative and accreditation-oriented	<i>ʿIlm and riʿāyah</i>	The principal as instructional leader; attention to non-permanent teachers and students who are falling behind
Pesantren	Lineage-based succession and highly personal leadership	<i>Istikhlāf</i> and the distribution proposition	Lineage does not automatically confer eligibility; authority is shared with teachers (<i>ustāz</i>) and administrators
Islamic higher education institution	Bureaucratization and ranking pressures	<i>Falāḥ</i> and <i>masʿūliyyah</i>	Rankings are not the ultimate goal; honesty in performance reporting and academic data

Table 10 shows that the model does not prescribe identical managerial actions for every institution. Instead, it connects the same foundational paradigm to different organizational challenges. Madrasahs require particular attention to instructional quality and care; pesantren require attention to succession and the distribution of authority; and Islamic higher education institutions require accountability that prevents rankings from becoming the ultimate purpose. Across all three settings, the common requirement is to align institutional decisions with entrusted responsibility, ethical standards, and the welfare of the educational community.

This study has three principal limitations. First, it is conceptual library research, so the proposed model has not yet been tested empirically. Second, the examination of Nusantara exegesis, particularly Tafsir an-Nur and Marāḥ Labīd, remains limited and would benefit from more extensive direct textual analysis. Third, the application of the double movement approach is confined to narrative and interpretive contexts and does not constitute a comprehensive historical analysis of the circumstances of revelation. These limitations establish priorities for future studies, including empirical validation of the six dimensions, deeper comparative analysis of Nusantara exegesis, and more extensive contextual investigation.

Discussion

The findings extend existing approaches to Islamic educational leadership by organizing religious values into a coherent paradigmatic structure. Arar et al. (2026) identify a spiritual core comprising *taqwā* and *ikhhlās*, alongside administrative principles such as *amānah*, *ṣidq*, *raḥmah*, *ṣabr*, *ʿadl*, and *syūrā*. The present study advances this framework by positioning *istikhlāf* as the foundation that explains why these principles are binding, while *riʿāyah* translates entrusted authority into obligations toward the educational community. Similarly, Alazmi and Bush (2024) developed an Islamic-oriented educational leadership model through grounded theory and expert engagement. The approaches are complementary: their model contributes to empirical and professional understanding, whereas the present framework emphasizes traceability to Qur'anic interpretation and hadith analysis. The theoretical contribution lies in connecting foundational values, managerial processes, accountability, and ultimate educational purposes within one integrated paradigm.

The distinction between *khalīfah* as human potential, individual office, and collective test provides a more differentiated interpretation than approaches that directly translate Qur'anic terminology into leadership characteristics. Previous studies have connected QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 30 and Ṣād [38]: 26 with knowledgeable, just, and trustworthy leadership (Hadiyan et al., 2026; Setiawan et al., 2025). The present findings refine this interpretation by establishing different conditions for transferring textual principles into institutional management. This distinction is important because a universal description of human responsibility does not automatically establish the legitimacy of a particular administrative position. The proposed justification criteria therefore offer a methodological contribution to Islamic educational research by distinguishing textual meaning from managerial application. Practically, these criteria encourage institutional leaders and researchers to explain the religious and ethical foundations of leadership practices rather than merely attaching Qur'anic terminology to pre-existing organizational constructs.

The interpretation of *rā'in* also extends previous discussions by identifying care as an accountable obligation rather than a general leadership disposition. Hilal et al. (2025) found that distributed leadership in Muslim contexts commonly involves hierarchical delegation and selective consultation, while the present findings emphasize that responsibility extends to every individual entrusted with a specific domain. The account of Ruzaiq illustrates how responsibility can be exercised within a community under delegated authority without being confined to the institution's highest leader. This interpretation complements research on collective leadership and regeneration in pesantren (Hanum OK et al., 2023) and documented succession beyond the founder's lineage. Its practical implication is that teachers, dormitory supervisors, and administrators should be recognized as accountable participants in educational governance, with clearly defined responsibilities and sufficient authority to protect the welfare of those under their supervision.

The comparison with modern leadership theories demonstrates that behavioral similarities do not necessarily indicate equivalent paradigms. Transformational, servant, ethical, authentic, and instructional leadership share certain practices with the proposed framework, including exemplary conduct, care, justice, self-examination, and educational guidance. Nevertheless, the *khalifah rā'in* paradigm differs in its account of legitimacy, moral knowledge, and ultimate purpose. Critiques of positive leadership constructs identify conceptual overlap and difficulties in establishing causal direction (Fischer & Sitkin, 2023; Fischer et al., 2024). Authentic leadership also faces questions concerning the moral reliability and knowability of the true self (Goody et al., 2024), while transformational leadership has been criticized for universal claims shaped by particular social positions). The theoretical implication is that Islamic leadership requires independent paradigmatic foundations rather than behavioral resemblance alone.

The relationship between *istikhlāf*, *murāqabah*, and *ḥisāb* offers a distinctive contribution to governance theory. Agency theory emphasizes monitoring and control, whereas stewardship theory highlights trust and organizational commitment. Research suggests that external accountability mechanisms may be insufficient in social-sector organizations and that psychological ownership can encourage stewardship behavior. The proposed framework acknowledges human vulnerability to wrongdoing while grounding responsibility in the understanding that institutional authority is entrusted rather than personally owned. Unlike stewardship approaches centered on organizational identification, *istikhlāf* establishes accountability to God alongside institutional obligations. This does not eliminate audits, supervision, or performance evaluation; instead, it integrates these mechanisms with internal ethical awareness. Practically, Islamic educational institutions can combine transparent reporting, independent evaluation, and opportunities for criticism with

leadership development that cultivates self-accountability and sincere care.

The model's practical contribution lies in translating its six dimensions into potential institutional indicators for madrasahs, pesantren, and Islamic higher education. In madrasahs, *'ilm* and *ri'āyah* support instructional improvement and attention to vulnerable teachers and students, complementing the continuing emphasis on principals as leaders of leaders (Gurr et al., 2025). In pesantren, *istikhlāf* and distributed responsibility provide a basis for evaluating succession beyond lineage while recognizing established traditions of prophetic leadership and *Pancajiwa* (Fathih et al., 2024; Mahfudhoh et al., 2023). In Islamic higher education, *falāh* and *mas'ūliyyah* encourage institutions to treat rankings as intermediate indicators rather than ultimate objectives, consistent with understandings of authority as *amānah* (Hidayah et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the model remains conceptual and requires empirical validation. Future research should develop reliable measurement instruments, test the relationships among its six dimensions, and examine their applicability across diverse institutional contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that *khalīfah* and *rā'in* constitute an integrated paradigm of Islamic educational leadership grounded in Qur'anic exegesis and hadith analysis. The principal lesson is that educational leadership should be understood not as personal possession or merely an instrument of organizational effectiveness, but as a divine trust that requires knowledge, justice, sincere care, and accountability before God. The study contributes to scholarship by establishing justification criteria for transferring Qur'anic concepts into educational management, critically distinguishing behavioral similarities from paradigmatic differences in modern leadership theories, and developing a six-dimensional model comprising *istikhlāf*, *'ilm*, *ḥukm bi al-ḥaqq*, *ri'āyah*, *ibtilā'* and *mas'ūliyyah*, and *falāh*. Nevertheless, its conceptual nature means that the model's validity and practical applicability have not yet been empirically established, while the interpretation of Nusantara exegesis requires further examination. Future research should develop and validate measurement instruments and test the model across madrasahs, pesantren, and Islamic higher education institutions. The implications of these findings are both theoretical and practical: theoretically, they provide an internally grounded framework for advancing Islamic educational leadership research; practically, they offer institutional leaders a basis for muḥāsabah, evaluating leadership succession, distributing authority responsibly, strengthening the welfare of educational communities, and ensuring transparent performance reporting without sacrificing ethical and spiritual purposes.

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