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The Role of *Ihsan*-Based Leadership in Enhancing Teacher Work Engagement and Institutional Sustainability

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to develop an *Ihsan*-Based Leadership (IBL) framework and explain how it may strengthen teacher work engagement and contribute to the sustainability of Islamic educational institutions. It adopts a post-positivist perspective and proposes a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design involving qualitative interviews, scale development and validation, and quantitative testing of six propositions using structural equation modeling. As a conceptual study, it derives its findings from theoretical synthesis rather than empirical observations. The analysis identifies four IBL dimensions: *muraqabah*-based integrity, *itqan*-driven excellence, *rahmah*-oriented care, and *amanah*-based stewardship. These dimensions are expected to generate job resources, including psychological safety, competence, emotional support, autonomy, and transcendental meaning, which may enhance teachers' vigor, dedication, and absorption. Teacher engagement is further conceptualized as a contributor to four sustainability pillars: academic, human-capital, spiritual-cultural, and financial-operational sustainability. The study concludes that IBL offers an Islamic ethical leadership framework linking inner accountability with professional excellence. Its implications include guiding leadership development and institutional evaluation in practice, while future empirical research must validate the construct, measures, and proposed relationships.

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INTRODUCTION

Teachers are fundamental to the quality and continuity of educational institutions because their professional performance directly influences student learning, institutional effectiveness, and educational development (Ardiansyah et al., 2024; Ji et al., 2024). Teacher engagement therefore extends beyond individual well-being to broader societal interests in educational quality and human capital development (Abbas et al., 2022; Feszterová, 2024). Engaged

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teachers demonstrate energy, dedication, and deep involvement in their professional responsibilities, enabling them to create meaningful learning experiences and contribute constructively to institutional improvement. Conversely, disengaged teachers may struggle to maintain instructional quality, professional commitment, and collaborative relationships. Consequently, strengthening teacher engagement represents an essential strategy for building educational institutions capable of delivering consistent, inclusive, and sustainable educational services.

Despite its importance, maintaining teacher engagement has become increasingly challenging for educational institutions. Teachers frequently encounter expanding administrative responsibilities, excessive workloads, competing professional expectations, inadequate recognition, and limited opportunities for professional development. (Dogan et al., 2025; Rasmitadila et al., 2025). These conditions can gradually diminish their motivation, enthusiasm, and sense of professional accomplishment. When institutional demands exceed available resources, teachers may experience emotional exhaustion, reduced work involvement, and declining organizational commitment. (Bressler, 2022; Doğan et al., 2025). Such difficulties are particularly consequential because educational institutions depend heavily on teachers' sustained professional contributions to maintain instructional standards and organizational effectiveness. Therefore, teacher disengagement should not be understood merely as an individual employment issue but as an institutional challenge that threatens educational continuity, organizational resilience, and long-term sustainability.

These challenges are particularly relevant to schools and madrasahs operating within Islamic educational environments, where teaching carries professional, social, and religious responsibilities. Teachers are expected to fulfill instructional obligations, participate in institutional activities, maintain moral standards, and contribute to students' character development. (Malahati & Rokhimawan, 2024; Rivaldi & Ramadhan, 2024). However, these expectations do not always correspond with adequate institutional support, fair recognition, manageable workloads, or supportive leadership practices. Consequently, tensions may emerge between teachers' understanding of teaching as a religious responsibility and their actual experiences of professional demands. This situation raises an important organizational concern: educational institutions need teachers who remain spiritually committed and professionally engaged while also providing working conditions that sustain their performance, motivation, and long-term involvement.

Previous leadership research has established that leadership practices significantly influence employee motivation, organizational commitment, professional behavior, and workplace effectiveness (Adeoye & Ainnubi, 2023;

Fadhel & Alqurs, 2025). Transformational leadership emphasizes inspiration and collective vision, servant leadership prioritizes service and employee development, ethical leadership promotes moral conduct, and authentic leadership highlights consistency between personal values and organizational actions (Faqih et al., 2025; Haryanti et al., 2025). Spiritual leadership further introduces meaning, purpose, and transcendence into organizational relationships. These perspectives provide valuable explanations of how leadership can strengthen employee engagement. In educational settings, they also demonstrate the importance of supportive relationships, professional recognition, shared institutional values, and meaningful work experiences. Nevertheless, existing approaches differ considerably in their philosophical foundations and conceptual interpretations of moral responsibility.

Although these leadership perspectives offer important theoretical contributions, their applicability to Islamic educational institutions remains insufficiently developed. (Ariyanto et al., 2023; Didi Sartika Ansori Ansori, Halimatus Sya'diyah, 2025). Much existing research relies on Western organizational assumptions or general spiritual principles without adequately examining Islamic ethical concepts as foundations of leadership behavior. Islamic management emphasizes moral accountability, justice, trustworthiness, compassion, and excellence in fulfilling responsibilities. Among these principles, *Ihsan* offers particular conceptual potential because it integrates consciousness of divine accountability with excellence and benevolence in human conduct. (Jasmine & Utomo, 2024; Tuan & Tho, 2025). However, its organizational implications have not been sufficiently translated into an operational leadership framework. Furthermore, limited research has examined how Islamic ethical leadership influences teacher engagement and connects individual professional experiences with broader institutional sustainability.

This study introduces *Ihsan*-Based Leadership (IBL) as a multidimensional leadership framework grounded in Islamic moral and spiritual principles. Its central novelty lies in positioning *Ihsan* not merely as an individual virtue but as an organizational leadership orientation that shapes relationships, decision-making, professional accountability, and institutional practices. The framework integrates two complementary dimensions: internal consciousness of divine observation and external commitment to excellence, justice, and benevolence. By connecting these dimensions with the Job Demands–Resources framework and Self-Determination Theory, this study develops an integrated explanation of how leadership can provide meaningful psychological and organizational resources. This approach advances Islamic management scholarship while extending leadership research into educational sustainability.

The central research problem is how, and under what conditions, *Ihsan*-Based Leadership can strengthen teacher work engagement and contribute to

institutional sustainability. This study argues that IBL enhances engagement by cultivating meaningful work, psychological safety, moral accountability, supportive relationships, and opportunities for professional fulfillment. These conditions can strengthen teachers' vigor, dedication, and absorption in their responsibilities. Furthermore, sustained engagement is expected to contribute to institutional sustainability by preserving educational quality, developing human capital, maintaining organizational continuity, and strengthening institutional legitimacy. However, these relationships may depend on contextual conditions, including leadership consistency, institutional resources, organizational culture, and teachers' internalization of Islamic values. Accordingly, this study conceptualizes IBL as a potential mechanism connecting Islamic ethical leadership, teacher engagement, and sustainable educational institutions.

METHODS

This study adopts a post-positivist paradigm and employs a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design to develop, validate, and empirically examine the *Ihsan*-Based Leadership (IBL) model and its six propositions (P1–P6). This design is selected because IBL represents a newly conceptualized leadership construct that requires qualitative exploration before its dimensions can be translated into measurable indicators and tested quantitatively. (Chenail, 2024; Zohaib Hassan Sain Samsul Huda, Umar Manshur, Muhammad Lawal Habibu, 2025). The research proceeds through three principal stages: qualitative exploration to refine the conceptual dimensions and generate measurement items; scale development and validation through exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses; and quantitative model testing to examine the proposed relationships among leadership, teacher work engagement, and institutional sustainability. An optional fourth stage may employ a longitudinal or quasi-experimental approach to investigate changes in leadership practices and their subsequent effects. The overall research sequence is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Stages of the Research Design

Stage	Purpose	Participants	Data and Method	Output
1. Qualitative exploration	Refine IBL dimensions and generate items	Principals and teachers; Islamic scholars and education experts	Semi-structured interviews; expert review	Item pool; refined construct definition
2. Scale development and validation	Establish structure, reliability and validity	Teachers in two independent samples	Pilot survey; EFA; CFA; discriminant validity tests	Validated IBL and transcendental meaning scales
3. Model testing	Test P1–P6	Teachers nested in schools	Two-wave survey; archival school	Estimates of direct, mediated,

			records; PLS-SEM or multilevel SEM	and moderated paths
4. Extension (optional)	Examine causal direction and change	Schools participating in a leadership program	Longitudinal or intervention design	Evidence on development and effect of IBL

Note. EFA = exploratory factor analysis; CFA = confirmatory factor analysis; PLS-SEM = partial least squares structural equation modeling.

The research will be conducted in Islamic schools and madrasahs to examine Islamic moral and spiritual principled leadership. They allow examination of how *Ihsan*, *amanah*, and *muraqabah* inform leadership behaviors and teachers. The target population comprises permanent and contract teachers and their principals. A public-school comparison sample may examine the model's applicability beyond Islamic settings. Sampling will follow each research stage. The qualitative stage will use purposive sampling involving 8–12 principals, 12–16 teachers, and 5–7 experts until thematic saturation. Scale validation will involve two independent teacher samples of 200–300 respondents each, or at least ten respondents per item, whichever is larger. Model testing will use multistage cluster sampling, targeting 40–60 schools and 400–600 teachers. Schools will be stratified by region, type, and size. Participants must have served under their current principal for at least one year and meet minimum teaching-load requirements. Qualitative participants will be excluded from later quantitative stages.

Data collection will examine IBL behaviors and their influence on teacher engagement and institutional sustainability. Qualitative data will be gathered through semi-structured interviews with principals, teachers, and experts in Islamic education and organizational psychology. (Efendy et al., 2023; Hong et al., 2021). Interviews will explore leadership practices, ethical interpretations, teachers' professional experiences, and institutional conditions related to engagement. Quantitative data will be collected through teacher questionnaires. At the first measurement point, the survey will assess IBL, job resources, teacher engagement, job demands, and perceived organizational support. Six to twelve months later, a second measurement will be supplemented by institutional records and stakeholder assessments. Instruments will include a four-dimensional IBL scale, transcendental meaning measures, organizational scales, and teacher engagement measures. Institutional sustainability will be assessed through retention, learning outcomes, enrollment, and budget indicators, alongside stakeholder ratings. Before the survey, experts will assess the instruments, and the team will conduct forward and back translation, cognitive pretesting, and pilot testing. The constructs are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Constructs and Measures

Construct	Measure	Source	Remarks
Ihsan-Based Leadership (four dimensions)	New scale developed in Stages 1–2; 5-point agreement scale	Teachers rate their principal	Self-ratings by principals used only as a complement
Transcendental meaning	New or adapted meaningful-work scale with a transcendent-purpose subscale	Teachers	Discriminant validity against general meaningful work
Psychological safety; autonomy support	Established validated scales, adapted and translated with back-translation	Teachers	Measurement invariance checked across schools
Teacher work engagement	UWES-9 or Engaged Teachers Scale	Teachers	Vigor, dedication and absorption analyzed separately and combined
Institutional sustainability	Composite of archival indicators (retention, learning results, enrollment, budget) and stakeholder ratings	School records; parents, foundation or board	Four pillars measured separately
Job demands	JD-R demand scales	Teachers	Moderator (P5)
Institutional culture	Perceived organizational support and shared-values items	Teachers	Moderator (P6)
Control variables	Gender, age, tenure, employment status, school type and size	Teachers; school records	Entered in all structural models

Note. Researchers should verify the licensing and validation status of each instrument before use.

Data analysis will follow the sequential research design. First, interview recordings will be transcribed and analyzed thematically, with independent coding to identify and refine the four IBL dimensions. Second, exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses will establish the measurement structure. Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted, the Fornell–Larcker criterion, and the heterotrait–monotrait ratio will assess reliability and construct validity. Third, PLS-SEM or multilevel structural equation modeling will examine the six propositions, including direct effects, sequential mediation, and moderation. Bootstrapping will assess indirect effects, while interaction terms and simple-slope analyses will evaluate moderating relationships. Data quality will be examined through missing-data analysis, outlier detection, and collinearity assessment. Qualitative credibility will be strengthened through expert review, independent coding, and cross-group comparisons. Quantitative validity will involve expert assessment, reliability testing, and measurement invariance. Common-method bias will be addressed through multiple sources,

separated measurement occasions, anonymity, and statistical assessments. Ethical approval, informed consent, confidentiality, and aggregate reporting will be ensured. Table 3 summarizes the analytical procedures.

Table 3. Propositions, Analytical Techniques and Evidence Considered

Proposition	Analytical Technique	Evidence Considered
P1: IBL → job resources	Structural path estimation at teacher level, with cluster-robust or multilevel estimation	Positive and significant path coefficients with bootstrapped confidence intervals that exclude zero
P2: Resources → engagement	Structural path estimation for total engagement and for each component	Positive and significant paths; explained variance (R^2) and effect size (f^2)
P3: Engagement → sustainability	Aggregated engagement at school level; school-level regression or SEM	Positive association with each sustainability pillar; comparison of strength across pillars
P4: Sequential mediation	Bootstrapped serial mediation (IBL → resources → engagement → sustainability) with a direct path from the *amanah* dimension	Significant indirect effect; direct effect examined for the stewardship dimension
P5: Job demands as moderator	Interaction (product-term) analysis; simple-slope plots; test for curvilinear effects	Significant interaction; buffering pattern up to a threshold
P6: Culture as moderator	Interaction analysis; multigroup comparison by cultural alignment	Stronger resource–engagement relationship where alignment is high

Note. Results will be interpreted as support or non-support for each proposition, with effect sizes and confidence intervals reported alongside significance tests.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This conceptual study generated six principal results by integrating Islamic primary sources, Islamic management scholarship, organizational leadership theories, and educational sustainability perspectives. Rather than reporting empirical observations, the results represent the outcomes of a systematic theory-building process. They include the conceptualization of *Ihsan*-Based Leadership (IBL), the identification of mechanisms linking leadership to teacher work engagement, the development of an institutional sustainability framework, the differentiation of IBL from established leadership theories, the formulation of testable propositions, and the identification of contextual boundary conditions. Together, these results establish an integrated conceptual framework explaining how Islamic ethical leadership may contribute to teacher engagement and the long-term sustainability of educational institutions.

Ihsan-Based Leadership as a Four-Dimensional Construct

The first result conceptualizes *Ihsan*-Based Leadership as a multidimensional leadership approach that integrates Islamic spiritual accountability with professional and organizational excellence. The synthesis defines IBL through four interconnected dimensions: *muraqabah*-based integrity, *itqan*-driven excellence, *rahmah*-oriented care, and *amanah*-based stewardship. These dimensions translate *Ihsan* into observable leadership behaviors rather than abstract religious commitments. Conceptually, IBL encompasses two complementary orientations: vertical accountability, reflected in awareness of divine observation, and horizontal responsibility, expressed through excellence, compassion, and responsible organizational conduct. This distinction provides a foundation for operationalizing IBL as a leadership construct that can be examined through teachers' perceptions of their principals' behaviors, without requiring followers to share the leaders' religious beliefs. Table 1 presents the four dimensions, their conceptual foundations, and their corresponding behavioral indicators.

Table 1. Dimensions of *Ihsan*-Based Leadership Identified in the Synthesis

Dimension	Core Definition	Textual Anchor	Key Behavioral Indicators
Muraqabah-based integrity	Acting with continuous awareness of divine and moral accountability	Hadith of *Jibril* on *Ihsan* (*Sahih Muslim*, no. 8)	Consistent conduct without surveillance; transparent decisions; honest evaluation; refusal of favoritism
Itqan-driven excellence	Pursuing excellence in the processes and outcomes of educational work	*Ihsan* prescribed in everything (*Sahih Muslim*, no. 1955)	High but supportive standards; modeling craftsmanship; investment in professional learning; quality-focused feedback
Rahmah-oriented care	Showing compassionate care toward followers	Doing good as God has done good (QS. Al-Qasas: 77)	Listening to personal and professional concerns; fair workload; forgiving mistakes while correcting practice
Amanah-based stewardship	Treating authority and resources as a trust for the common good	Leaders as shepherds (Sahih al-Bukhari, no. 893; *Sahih Muslim*, no. 1829)	Prudent use of funds and time; delegating authority; developing successors; long-term orientation

Note. Dimensions are proposed constructs derived from conceptual analysis and require empirical validation.

Mechanisms Linking *Ihsan*-Based Leadership to Teacher Work Engagement

The second result identifies the theoretical mechanisms through which IBL may strengthen teacher work engagement by integrating the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model and Self-Determination Theory (SDT). The synthesis

indicates that each leadership dimension generates specific job resources that align with teachers' psychological needs. *Muraqabah*-based integrity strengthens trust, perceived fairness, and psychological safety; *itqan*-driven excellence supports competence and professional accomplishment; *rahmah*-oriented care provides emotional support and relational security; and *amanah*-based stewardship encourages autonomy, professional purpose, and transcendental meaning. These resources are expected to influence the three dimensions of work engagement: vigor, dedication, and absorption. An important conceptual contribution is introducing transcendental meaning as a distinctive job resource, reflecting the perception that teaching contributes to a purpose beyond immediate institutional objectives. Table 2 summarizes the proposed relationships between leadership dimensions, job resources, psychological needs, and engagement components.

Table 2. Proposed Pathways from IBL Dimensions to Resources and Engagement

IBL Dimension	Job Resource Generated	SDT Need Satisfied	Engagement Component Most Affected
Muraqabah-based integrity	Trust, perceived fairness, psychological safety	Relatedness (safety and trust)	Vigor and absorption
Itqan-driven excellence	Competence, pride in craft	Competence	Absorption
Rahmah-oriented care	Emotional support, fair workload, emotional energy	Relatedness	Vigor
Amanah-based stewardship	Autonomy support, sense of purpose, transcendental meaning	Autonomy	Dedication

Note. Pathways are theoretical expectations derived from JD-R theory and SDT, not empirical estimates.

Four-Pillar Framework of Institutional Sustainability

The third result establishes institutional sustainability as a multidimensional outcome comprising four interrelated pillars: academic, human-capital, spiritual-cultural, and financial-operational sustainability. This framework extends conventional sustainability perspectives by recognizing that educational institutions, particularly faith-based organizations, must preserve their religious identity and moral mission alongside academic performance and financial stability. The synthesis positions teacher work engagement as a potential connecting mechanism across these four pillars. Engaged teachers are expected to support academic sustainability through instructional quality and curriculum improvement, human-capital sustainability through professional commitment and retention, spiritual-cultural sustainability through transmitting institutional values, and financial-operational sustainability through

institutional reputation and stakeholder satisfaction. However, the expected relationships are not necessarily equivalent across dimensions because some institutional outcomes are more directly influenced by teachers' professional activities than others. Table 3 presents the conceptual structure and proposed contribution of teacher engagement to each sustainability pillar.

Table 3. Four Pillars of Institutional Sustainability and Their Link to Teacher Engagement

Pillar	Meaning	Illustrative Indicators	Pathway from Teacher Engagement
Academic	Stable and improving quality of teaching, curriculum, and learning outcomes	Teaching quality; learning results; curriculum renewal	Higher-quality instruction
Human-capital	Teacher retention, well-being, professional growth, and leadership succession	Turnover; well-being; professional development; successor pipeline	Lower intention to leave; resource spirals within staff
Spiritual-cultural	Continuity of mission, values, and moral climate across generations	Mission continuity; moral climate; value transmission	Teachers model institutional values to students
Financial-operational	Stable enrollment, resource stewardship, community trust, and resilience	Enrollment; budget stability; community trust	Reputation and satisfied families

Note. Indicators are illustrative and should be operationalized in empirical studies.

Conceptual Differentiation of IBL from Established Leadership Theories

The fourth result establishes IBL's conceptual position relative to established leadership approaches, particularly servant, ethical, authentic, spiritual, and transformational leadership. The synthesis indicates that IBL shares several characteristics with these perspectives while uniquely integrating vertical accountability, professional excellence, compassionate relationships, and institutional stewardship. Unlike servant leadership, which primarily emphasizes service to followers, IBL explicitly incorporates divine accountability and excellence in organizational conduct. Compared with ethical leadership, IBL extends beyond compliance with moral standards toward internalized accountability and continuous improvement. Its distinction from authentic leadership lies in grounding integrity in an Islamic moral reference point. In contrast, its relationship with spiritual leadership is characterized by a more explicit behavioral framework derived from Islamic ethical principles. Furthermore, IBL complements transformational leadership by emphasizing accountability in both organizational outcomes and the processes through which those outcomes are achieved. These distinctions establish its conceptual contribution, although empirical discriminant and incremental validity remain necessary.

Six Propositions and the Integrated Conceptual Model

The fifth result is the development of six theoretically derived propositions that integrate the relationships among IBL, job resources, teacher work engagement, and institutional sustainability. The proposed model follows a sequential explanatory mechanism in which leadership behaviors generate psychological and organizational resources; these resources strengthen teacher engagement; and sustained engagement contributes to institutional sustainability. Importantly, the framework does not assume that leadership influences sustainability exclusively through psychological mechanisms. *Amanah*-based stewardship may also contribute directly through institutional decisions concerning resource allocation, delegation, budgeting, and leadership succession. The model further recognizes the potential moderating roles of job demands and institutional culture. These propositions establish an empirical research agenda for examining both the direct and indirect relationships within the proposed framework. Table 4 summarizes the six propositions and their expected relationship structures.

Table 4. Propositions Derived from the Conceptual Synthesis

Proposition	Statement	Type of Relationship
P1	IBL is positively related to teachers' perceived job resources (transcendental meaning, psychological safety, and autonomy support).	Direct effect
P2	Job resources are positively related to teacher work engagement (vigor, dedication, and absorption).	Direct effect
P3	Aggregated teacher engagement is positively related to institutional sustainability across four pillars.	Direct effect (institutional level)
P4	Job resources and engagement sequentially mediate the IBL–sustainability relationship, with a residual direct effect of *amanah*-based stewardship.	Sequential mediation
P5	Job demands moderate the resources–engagement relationship, producing a buffering effect up to the point of excessive demands.	Moderation
P6	Institutional culture moderates the resources–engagement relationship, with stronger effects under conditions of high cultural alignment.	Moderation

Note. Propositions represent theoretical claims developed through conceptual synthesis and await empirical testing.

Boundary Conditions of *Ihsan*-Based Leadership

The sixth result identifies two contextual boundary conditions that may influence the effectiveness of IBL. The first concerns job demands, which are expected to moderate the relationship between job resources and teacher

engagement. Leadership-generated resources may become particularly valuable when teachers encounter substantial professional demands. However, their protective effects are unlikely to continue when workloads become excessive and exceed available organizational resources. Under such circumstances, appeals to religious commitment may be interpreted as exploitation rather than genuine leadership support. The second boundary condition concerns institutional culture. IBL is expected to be more effective when leaders and teachers share compatible moral values and receive organizational support. Conversely, inconsistencies between religious rhetoric and actual institutional practices may undermine leadership credibility. These conditions suggest that IBL effectiveness depends not only on individual leadership behaviors but also on organizational structures, workload arrangements, and the cultural environment in which leadership is practiced.

Discussion

The proposed *Ihsan*-Based Leadership (IBL) framework extends existing leadership discussions by explaining how Islamic moral principles may become resources in teachers' everyday work. (Fahmadia & Maulida, 2025; Mahmud & Ramli, 2025). Its four dimensions correspond with, but are not identical to, established leadership approaches. *Rahmah*-oriented care shares servant leadership's concern for followers, while *muraqabah*-based integrity converges with ethical leadership's emphasis on fairness and moral conduct (Hudori et al., 2024; Lopes Cardozo & Srimulyani, 2021). *Amanah*-based stewardship also resembles sustainable leadership through its long-term orientation. However, IBL adds a vertical source of accountability, an explicit standard of excellence through *itqan*, and an understanding of authority as a trust. (Akhyar et al., 2024; Fauzah & Faizi, 2024). This comparison suggests conceptual complementarity rather than complete theoretical separation, offering a context-sensitive synthesis for Islamic educational institutions in particular.

The proposed pathways are consistent with the Job Demands–Resources model, which explains how job resources support work engagement, and with Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes autonomy, competence, and relatedness. (Chen et al., 2024; Maas et al., 2022). IBL specifies how leadership behaviors may generate these resources: integrity supports psychological safety, excellence strengthens competence, care nurtures relatedness, and stewardship encourages autonomy and purpose. This behavioral account is compatible with research linking meaningful work and contextual resources to engagement. Its distinctive proposition is transcendental meaning, which may deepen dedication when teachers interpret teaching as *amanah* or *ibadah*. Whether this meaning is empirically distinct from general meaningful work remains unresolved.

The framework also connects teacher engagement with institutional sustainability, extending engagement research beyond individual and immediate organizational outcomes. Prior studies associate engagement with performance and retention. Khofsah et al. (2024) This supports the proposed links to academic quality and human-capital continuity. The model further proposes spiritual-cultural sustainability through teachers' transmission of institutional values, while recognizing that financial-operational outcomes are more distal and shaped by enrollment, regulation, funding, and competition. (Hakim et al., 2025; Rozi et al., 2026). This qualification is important: unlike the more direct influence on classroom practice, engagement alone cannot secure institutional financial stability. Consistent with Conservation of Resources theory, the relationship may also be reciprocal, requiring longitudinal rather than cross-sectional testing.

The model's boundary conditions qualify rather than weaken its central argument. The Job Demands–Resources perspective suggests that resources can buffer demanding work, but the proposed relationship has limits: excessive workloads may overwhelm available resources. (Fahriansyah et al., 2025; Maas et al., 2022). This aligns with IBL's emphasis on *rahmah* and prudent stewardship; spiritual appeals cannot substitute for fair workload allocation or adequate working conditions. Institutional culture also shapes whether leadership behaviors are regarded as credible. Shared values and perceived organizational support may reinforce IBL, whereas contradictions between religious rhetoric and organizational practice may undermine trust. These propositions identify contextual contingencies that established leadership models may not specify in the same faith-grounded terms.

The contribution is threefold: IBL is articulated as a bounded, multidimensional construct; JD-R theory is extended through the proposed resource of transcendental meaning; and educational sustainability is framed to include spiritual-cultural continuity alongside academic, human-capital, and financial-operational dimensions. These claims remain conceptual and require validation, including tests of discriminant and incremental validity against servant, ethical, and transformational leadership. Practically, school leaders can translate IBL into conduct: fair decisions, supportive standards, attentive listening, reasonable workloads, transparent budgeting, and responsible delegation. Foundations and policymakers may incorporate these behaviors, teacher engagement, and moral climate into leadership development and institutional evaluation. Such application should protect teacher voice and prevent religious language from legitimizing exploitation.

CONCLUSION

The central insight of this study is that institutional sustainability depends not only on organizational resources and structures but also on teachers' engagement, which can be cultivated through leadership grounded in inner accountability and outward excellence. The principal contribution is formalizing *Ihsan* as a four-dimensional leadership construct and integrating it with the Job Demands–Resources model and Self-Determination Theory through transcendental meaning and psychological safety. This framework enriches educational leadership scholarship by offering a culturally grounded and theoretically testable perspective on the relationship between leadership, teacher engagement, and institutional sustainability. Practically, it encourages school leaders to translate *Ihsan* into fair decisions, supportive professional standards, compassionate treatment, and responsible stewardship while ensuring reasonable workloads and institutional support. However, the framework remains conceptual and has not been empirically validated; its proposed dimensions, mechanisms, and relationships therefore require further examination. Future research should develop and validate the measurement instrument, test the six propositions across diverse educational settings, and employ longitudinal designs to assess the model's explanatory power and contextual boundaries.

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