



Madrasah Principal Leadership in Building a Quality Culture at Islamic Junior Secondary Schools

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Abstract

Purpose – This study explores how madrasah principals build and sustain a quality culture in Islamic junior secondary schools by examining leadership vision, exemplary conduct, academic supervision, teacher development, stakeholder participation, quality evaluation, and the integration of Islamic values.

Methodology – An interpretive qualitative multiple-case study was conducted at three Islamic junior secondary schools in Banyumas Regency, Central Java. Twenty-one participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling. Data from semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and documents were analysed through within-case and cross-case thematic analysis.

Findings – Five themes emerged: translating quality vision into institutional routines, leading through exemplary Islamic values, transforming supervision into professional learning, developing shared responsibility, and institutionalizing continuous improvement. Quality culture was strongest when relational leadership and formal management systems reinforced one another.

Implications – Madrasah principals should integrate participatory planning, developmental supervision, teacher learning, documentation, evaluation, and Islamic ethical principles into context-sensitive quality-management practices.

Originality – The study conceptualizes quality culture as a collective meaning-making and institutionalization process shaped by integrated transformational, instructional, participatory, managerial, and Islamic leadership practices.

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Introduction

Educational institutions operate within rapidly changing social, technological, and organizational environments. Schools must sustain instructional quality while responding to digital transformation, diverse student needs, public accountability, and expectations for measurable educational outcomes. Gurr et al. (2025) show that principal instructional leadership has shifted from a directive, principal-centred model toward an integrated approach that involves teachers and other school actors. This development positions the principal as an instructional leader, organizational developer, and facilitator of professional learning rather than only an administrator. School improvement also depends on the relationship between structural reform and the cultural assumptions that shape everyday practice (Mincu, 2022). Effective leadership must therefore create

an adaptive institutional environment in which members can respond to innovation and change without losing a clear educational direction (Shibiru & Bekele, 2024).

The leadership challenge is more complex in Indonesian madrasahs because these institutions carry academic, moral, religious, and social responsibilities. A madrasah must meet national educational standards while maintaining Islamic identity and developing students' character. Participatory and adaptive principal leadership can improve Islamic education by strengthening teacher motivation, student development, and a supportive learning environment (Salas & Masluhah, 2024). Leadership also determines how quality planning, organizing, implementation, supervision, and evaluation operate within the madrasah (Soetrisno & Ali, 2025). In this context, quality improvement requires principals to connect academic priorities with religious values, community expectations, and institutional accountability.

Recent studies demonstrate that leadership innovation influences how madrasahs respond to contemporary demands. Muliati et al. (2025) found that innovative leadership can translate institutional objectives into literacy movements, teacher empowerment, religious programs, and community partnerships. Creativity in leadership also affects teaching quality, educator performance, school management, and the capacity to address institutional limitations (Suratman et al., 2025). These findings suggest that the principal's role extends beyond maintaining existing systems. The principal must mobilize people and resources while ensuring that innovation remains compatible with the educational and religious identity of the madrasah.

Islamic junior secondary schools, or Madrasah Tsanawiyah, face specific quality problems because they serve students during an important stage of academic, emotional, social, and religious development. Institutional capacity differs according to location, funding, governance, human resources, and community participation. A multiple-site investigation found that managerial responsiveness, teacher professionalism, and public involvement varied across madrasahs and produced uneven quality outcomes (Tauhid, 2025). Digital transformation also creates opportunities and pressures. It can strengthen administration, curriculum implementation, teacher management, and access to learning resources when it is supported by appropriate leadership (Mahsusi et al., 2024). However, technology cannot resolve weak professional relationships or unclear quality priorities by itself.

The principal's influence on quality culture develops through daily interaction with teachers, staff, students, parents, and community representatives. Leadership practices shape how school members understand quality and whether they regard improvement as a shared responsibility. Participatory and religious leadership has been associated with stronger teacher discipline, collaboration, and professional responsibility in Islamic secondary education (Huda et al., 2025). Transformational leadership also encourages innovation, curriculum development, and active participation in Islamic educational institutions (Fitriyana, 2024). When principals communicate inclusive goals and support teachers and students, leadership can improve both academic and non-academic graduate quality (Nuryana & Nugraha, 2024).

Quality culture refers to shared values, expectations, routines, and behavioural patterns that direct institutional members toward continuous improvement. It differs from a temporary quality program because it remains visible in teaching, supervision, decision-making, communication, and problem-solving. Principals contribute to this culture by clarifying standards, modelling expected behaviour, strengthening professional capacity, and maintaining evaluation (Ismawiyah et al., 2024). School administrators also regard communication, stakeholder involvement, innovation, human-resource development, and quality control as essential cultural components (Yaraş & Gündüzalp, 2025). Participatory decision-making and harmonious professional relationships further support an effective school culture (Murtanti et al., 2024).

Previous research confirms that leadership, school culture, and teacher professionalism influence educational outcomes. A review of transformational school leadership shows that principals affect student achievement indirectly through teacher motivation, professional collaboration, and organizational conditions (Li & Karanxha, 2024). Evidence from Indonesian pesantren settings indicates that school culture mediates the relationship between instructional leadership and teacher performance (Kusumaningrum et al., 2025). Quantitative research at the junior secondary level likewise shows that transformational leadership, culture, and teacher professionalism contribute to learning quality (Setiyanti et al., 2025). Yet these studies provide limited explanations of how quality values become collective routines or how teachers interpret the principal's actions. The moral function of quality culture has received attention (Ramadhan & Hafidz, 2025), but the leadership processes that connect institutional standards, professional meaning, and Islamic values remain underexplored. This study therefore examines how madrasah principals build and sustain quality culture across Islamic junior secondary schools, with particular attention to vision, exemplary conduct, supervision, teacher learning, participation, evaluation, and Islamic ethical principles.

Literature Review

Madrasah Principal Leadership

Madrasah principal leadership is a social and organizational process through which the principal influences institutional direction, professional behaviour, educational practice, and relationships among school members. The principal interprets policy, allocates resources, supports teachers, and represents the institution before parents, foundations, government agencies, and communities. Leadership effectiveness therefore depends on the capacity to align formal authority with contextual knowledge and professional trust.

Transformational leadership provides a useful perspective because it explains how leaders move institutional members beyond routine compliance. Its central dimensions include idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. A transformational principal strengthens quality by communicating a meaningful vision, modelling professional integrity, encouraging reflection, and recognizing teachers' development needs (Qoribah et al., 2025). In madrasahs, these dimensions operate within a religious setting in which leadership credibility also depends on moral consistency.

Leadership in Islamic education is rarely expressed through a single model. The interaction of instructional, transformational, and spiritual leadership can support teacher performance and student achievement when professional and moral priorities reinforce one another (Nurabadi et al., 2021). Nevertheless, inspiration does not automatically produce quality. Managerial competence remains necessary to translate vision into schedules, responsibilities, resource decisions, monitoring, and follow-up (Sayuti et al., 2025). This study therefore treats madrasah leadership as an integrated configuration rather than an isolated style.

Transformational Leadership and Teacher Learning Culture

Transformational leadership becomes relevant when quality improvement requires changes in established habits. Teachers may need to adopt new instructional strategies, participate in professional communities, use digital platforms, revise assessment practices, or accept more systematic evaluation. The principal must explain why change matters and provide support during implementation. A principal's transformational practices can create a collaborative and reflective teacher-learning culture (Komara et al., 2025).

The cultural effect of transformational leadership depends on consistency. Teachers compare the values communicated by the principal with actual decisions about workload, recognition, discipline, and support. When words and actions are aligned, leadership builds trust. When they conflict, quality programs may be interpreted as temporary administrative demands. Transformational leadership must therefore be connected to managerial clarity and instructional follow-up.

Instructional Leadership and Academic Supervision

Instructional leadership places teaching and learning at the centre of the principal's responsibilities. It includes defining instructional goals, coordinating curriculum implementation, observing teaching, monitoring student progress, providing feedback, and supporting teacher development. Academic supervision contributes to quality culture when it functions as professional assistance rather than administrative inspection. [Adriansyah et al. \(2024\)](#) demonstrate that instructional leadership can connect supervision, mentoring, and school quality standards.

Instructional leadership depends on teacher competence and organizational culture. Evidence from public junior secondary schools indicates that instructional leadership, pedagogical competence, and school quality culture jointly affect learning quality ([Nuraini et al., 2025](#)). Collaborative supervision further supports professional growth when teachers can discuss weaknesses, receive feedback, and develop solutions without fear of unfair judgement ([Hosna et al., 2025](#)).

Islamic Educational Leadership

Islamic educational leadership places ethical conduct, responsibility, service, justice, consultation, and spiritual accountability at the centre of institutional management. It gives moral direction to modern leadership and quality-management practices. A madrasah principal must pursue institutional objectives while protecting fairness, human dignity, religious values, and community responsibility.

Service-oriented leadership strengthens governance because it encourages principals to listen, support teachers, recognize institutional needs, and place collective interests above personal authority. Servant leadership in madrasahs has been associated with teacher welfare, institutional performance, and constructive governance ([Arifandi et al., 2024](#)). Islamic values can also be strengthened through extracurricular programs when leadership provides resources, direction, and consistent institutional support ([Subaidi et al., 2024](#)).

Quality Culture in Islamic Junior Secondary Schools

Quality culture combines visible systems with less visible assumptions. Its structural dimension includes procedures, supervision instruments, documentation, evaluation, and improvement plans. Its cultural dimension includes trust, commitment, discipline, collaboration, openness to feedback, and willingness to learn. These dimensions must operate together because formal quality systems cannot be sustained without shared professional meaning.

At the MT's level, quality must integrate academic performance with religious and character development. Quality should appear in students' discipline, honesty, social responsibility, religious awareness, and respectful conduct as well as in learning outcomes. An integrated approach to curriculum, transformational leadership, and community empowerment can support sustainable madrasah development ([Elice et al., 2025](#)).

Quality culture also requires adaptation. Artificial intelligence and digital systems increasingly reshape organizational communication and leadership behaviour in schools ([Kesim et al., 2025](#)). Madrasah principals must evaluate whether technology improves learning, transparency, and

professional collaboration. Cultural intelligence is also important because principals work with stakeholders who hold different experiences and expectations (Zahdi, 2025).

Leadership Practices for Building Quality Culture

The literature identifies six connected practices. Principals communicate a shared vision, model expected values, strengthen teacher capacity, encourage participation, establish evaluation systems, and integrate Islamic ethics into institutional routines. Vision gives direction, while personal example gives the vision credibility. Supervision and teacher learning provide professional capacity. Participation develops ownership, and evaluation creates accountability.

These practices operate within unequal organizational conditions. Madrasahs differ in funding, infrastructure, teacher competence, governance, and community support. A leadership practice that succeeds in a well-resourced public madrasah may require adaptation in a smaller private institution. Context-sensitive leadership therefore involves selecting realistic priorities without lowering the institution's commitment to continuous improvement.

Research Methods

This study employed an interpretive qualitative approach with a multiple-case study design. The design was selected because the research sought to understand how madrasah principals interpreted, implemented, and institutionalized quality culture within different organizational settings. Case studies are appropriate for examining complex leadership processes in their natural environments because they retain the relationship among actions, actors, and context (Annamaloh, 2024). The research was conducted from January to May 2026 at three Islamic junior secondary schools in Banyumas Regency, Central Java. The sites consisted of one public MTs and two private MTs located in urban, peri-urban, and rural settings. They were identified as MTs-A, MTs-B, and MTs-C to protect confidentiality.

Participants were selected through criterion-based purposive sampling because the study required individuals with direct knowledge of leadership and quality-development processes. The initial participants consisted of three principals, three vice principals or quality-assurance coordinators, nine teachers, and three administrative staff members. Snowball sampling identified three additional senior teachers and committee representatives. The final sample included 21 participants. Each participant had worked with the madrasah for at least two years and had participated in quality planning or implementation. Recruitment continued until later interviews repeated established categories and no longer produced substantially different meanings. This decision followed the principle that qualitative sample adequacy depends on information richness and meaning saturation (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis. Interviews lasted approximately 45 to 75 minutes and addressed leadership vision, decision-making, teacher participation, academic supervision, professional development, Islamic values, quality evaluation, institutional barriers, and improvement strategies. Each madrasah was visited four times, producing approximately 12 to 15 hours of observation per site. Observations focused on staff meetings, teacher coordination, religious activities, academic supervision, principal-teacher interaction, and daily quality routines. Documentary evidence included annual work plans, supervision instruments, meeting minutes, accreditation documents, internal evaluation reports, and quality-improvement programs from the 2024/2025 and 2025/2026 academic years.

Trustworthiness was established through source triangulation, method triangulation, member checking, peer examination, reflexivity, and an audit trail. Interview accounts were

compared across participant groups and checked against observations and documents. Preliminary interpretations were returned to 12 key participants for factual correction and clarification. These procedures supported credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Ahmed, 2024). Two educational-management researchers reviewed selected codes and interpretations. Coding discussions were documented because explicit reconciliation procedures can improve analytical consistency in qualitative case-study work (Cole, 2024). Ethical safeguards included voluntary informed consent, pseudonyms, restricted data access, and the removal of identifying institutional information.

Data collection and analysis occurred concurrently through within-case and cross-case thematic analysis. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, anonymized, and combined with observation notes and documentary extracts. The analysis involved familiarization, initial coding, category development, theme construction, theme review, and final definition. Reflexive thematic analysis treats themes as interpretive patterns produced through systematic engagement with data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Each madrasah was first analysed independently. Cross-case matrices then compared recurring patterns, distinctive practices, enabling conditions, and barriers. A worked thematic process should make the movement from extracts to coherent themes transparent (Byrne, 2022). Analytical memos connected codes, evidence, and theoretical concepts, following an iterative movement from data organization to actionable findings (Bingham, 2023). NVivo 14 supported data organization, while the researchers retained responsibility for interpretation. The reporting pathway followed a stepwise thematic procedure to strengthen transparency (Naeem et al., 2023).

Results and Discussion

The analysis generated five interrelated themes: translating quality vision into institutional practices, exemplary leadership based on Islamic values, academic supervision as professional learning, participatory leadership and shared responsibility, and the institutionalization of continuous improvement. These themes appeared across all cases, although their forms differed according to school status, leadership experience, resources, and community involvement. The findings show that quality culture did not arise from written standards alone. It developed through repeated leadership actions, shared interpretation, professional relationships, and organizational routines.

Translating Quality Vision into Institutional Practices

All three madrasahs had formal visions that emphasized academic achievement, Islamic character, teacher professionalism, and community service. The cultural influence of these visions depended on how principals translated them into responsibilities and routines. MTs-A displayed the most structured process. Monthly coordination meetings connected the vision with annual programs, supervision, student-development targets, responsible personnel, and evaluation indicators. Teachers understood that the vision functioned as a reference for lesson planning and student mentoring rather than merely as a statement displayed on the wall.

MTs-B relied more on personal conversation, short briefings, and spontaneous classroom visits. This approach created interpersonal closeness and allowed rapid responses to operational problems. However, verbal instructions were not always supported by stable documentation, and teachers sometimes interpreted program priorities differently. MTs-C communicated its vision through religious routines and community meetings. Teachers shared a strong understanding of religious and social expectations, although academic quality indicators were less explicit.

The cross-case pattern confirms that a vision must operate through symbolic and operational mechanisms. The integrated leadership perspective described by Gurr et al. (2025) helps explain

why principals and teachers must jointly interpret instructional priorities. The findings also support Mincu's (2022) argument that structural arrangements and cultural meaning must be aligned. Written plans without shared understanding become bureaucratic, while shared enthusiasm without operational clarity becomes inconsistent.

Exemplary Leadership and Islamic Values

Participants assessed leadership credibility through discipline, fairness, accessibility, responsibility, and religious commitment. At MTs-C, the principal arrived before teachers and students, participated in morning religious activities, and directly observed the school environment. Teachers regarded this consistency as more influential than written disciplinary reminders. At MTs-A, fairness in task distribution became a central quality value. Younger teachers received opportunities to lead programs, while experienced teachers provided guidance.

At MTs-B, the principal's close personal relationships strengthened loyalty and allowed teachers to seek support. Yet the same closeness sometimes complicated the consistent enforcement of sanctions. This tension shows that relational leadership must be accompanied by transparent standards. Islamic concepts such as *amanah*, justice, consultation, and service strengthened professional meaning when principals reflected them in actual decisions.

The findings reflect idealized influence because teachers evaluated whether the principal's conduct matched communicated values (Qoribah et al., 2025). They also support the service orientation described in madrasah governance research (Arifandi et al., 2024). The study adds that religious language loses cultural force when it is not supported by fairness and consistency. Islamic values function as a quality mechanism only when they shape workload, feedback, conflict management, and institutional accountability.

Academic Supervision as Professional Learning

All principals conducted classroom supervision, but its effect differed. MTs-A implemented the most systematic process. The principal and vice principal reviewed lesson plans, observed teaching, provided private feedback, and recorded follow-up actions. Teachers who experienced difficulties with digital instruction received peer mentoring. This sequence connected observation with professional support.

At MTs-B, classroom visits did not always lead to formal feedback because the principal carried extensive administrative and external responsibilities. Teachers understood that they had been observed but were not always clear about the required improvement. MTs-C used collegial discussion and informal material sharing. The practice strengthened professional closeness, but limited documentation made long-term progress difficult to evaluate.

These findings confirm that supervision becomes culturally meaningful when it includes dialogue, feedback, follow-up, and psychological safety. Adriansyah et al. (2024) connect instructional leadership with mentoring and quality standards. The collaborative learning culture reported by Komara et al. (2025) was also visible when teachers could discuss weaknesses without fear of public blame. The present study adds that follow-up is the mechanism that converts awareness into professional change.

Participatory Leadership and Shared Responsibility

Teachers demonstrated stronger commitment when they participated in problem identification, program planning, role distribution, and evaluation. MTs-A involved vice principals, teacher representatives, administrative staff, and committee members in annual planning. Participants understood the reasons behind programs and regarded themselves as contributors rather than implementers of decisions made elsewhere.

MTs-C developed participation through consensus and close social relationships. Teachers readily volunteered to support activities, but unclear written responsibilities sometimes weakened follow-up. MTs-B displayed a more centralized pattern. Senior teachers were consulted more frequently, while younger teachers often became involved only after programs had been decided.

The findings show that participation has different levels. Information and consultation do not automatically create ownership. The participatory leadership described by [Huda et al. \(2025\)](#) becomes culturally significant when members can influence decisions. Stakeholder participation also supports quality culture ([Ismawiyah et al., 2024](#)), but the present cases demonstrate that involvement must be combined with role clarity and accountability.

Institutionalizing Continuous Improvement

The three madrasahs differed in their capacity to plan, document, monitor, and sustain improvement. MTs-A used digital attendance, shared planning documents, supervision records, and scheduled review meetings. Documentation reduced dependence on individual memory and allowed repeated problems to be identified. MTs-B prioritized teacher attendance, lesson preparation, student discipline, and essential facilities because its resources were limited. MTs-C relied heavily on community trust, internal mentoring, and support from local religious figures.

These patterns confirm that quality culture is context-dependent. Resource limitations shape the pace and form of improvement, but they do not automatically prevent it. The variation identified by [Tauhid \(2025\)](#) was reflected in the differing combinations of managerial capacity, human resources, and community participation. The findings also qualify optimistic accounts of digital transformation. Technology improved monitoring at MTs-A, while it initially increased workload at MTs-B because competence and infrastructure were uneven. This conditional pattern extends the findings of [Mahsusi et al. \(2024\)](#).

Continuous improvement became institutionalized when the madrasah recorded decisions, reviewed implementation, acknowledged weaknesses, and established follow-up actions. The quality-culture components described by Yaraş and Gündüzalp (2025) were visible in shared values, stakeholder involvement, and quality control. The present study adds organizational memory as a key component because documentation allows improvement to continue beyond a particular program or leadership period.

Cross-Case Synthesis and Theoretical Implications

The strongest quality culture developed when relational leadership and formal management systems reinforced one another. MTs-A had structured planning, supervision, participation, and documentation, although it faced the risk of bureaucratic compliance. MTs-B had strong interpersonal leadership, but centralized decisions and inconsistent documentation limited collective ownership. MTs-C had social solidarity and community trust, while informal coordination sometimes weakened accountability.

No single leadership style was sufficient. Transformational leadership developed motivation and shared meaning. Instructional leadership directed attention to teaching. Participatory leadership created ownership. Islamic leadership supplied moral legitimacy. Managerial leadership converted values into responsibilities, records, and evaluation. This integrated pattern supports the innovation and participation associated with transformational leadership ([Fitriyana, 2024](#)), but it also shows that inspiration requires organizational systems.

The qualitative findings explain how the statistical relationship among leadership, culture, teacher professionalism, and learning quality operates. The association reported by [Setiyanti et al. \(2025\)](#) appeared through repeated communication, exemplary behaviour, feedback, participation,

and evaluation. Small but consistent practices often had greater cultural influence than highly visible programs. Punctuality, fair task distribution, respectful feedback, and follow-up meetings shaped whether teachers regarded quality as a shared value.

The study therefore proposes four connected processes: quality direction, quality commitment, quality-capacity development, and quality institutionalization. Islamic values influence all four. Amanah supports accountability, consultation supports participation, justice guides task distribution, and service directs teacher and student support. Quality culture is consequently understood as a collective meaning-making process in which formal standards become stable practices through leadership, relationships, professional capacity, and organizational memory.

Practical Implications, Limitations, and Future Research

Madrasah principals should convert institutional visions into context-sensitive programs with clear responsibilities, schedules, evidence sources, and follow-up procedures. Academic supervision should include private feedback, mentoring, peer observation, and targeted teacher development. Participation should begin during problem identification, while written role distribution should protect accountability. Digital systems should be adopted according to infrastructure and teacher readiness rather than symbolic pressure.

The study involved three Islamic junior secondary schools within one regency. The findings provide contextual depth but do not represent the full diversity of Indonesian madrasahs. Student and parent perspectives were not explored to the same extent as those of principals and teachers. Future studies should investigate student interpretations of quality culture, compare public and private madrasahs across regions, and examine changes over several academic years. Mixed-method research may test the integrated leadership model while preserving attention to context and meaning.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that madrasah principals build quality culture through an integrated combination of visionary, transformational, instructional, participatory, managerial, and Islamic leadership practices. Quality culture did not develop solely from accreditation requirements, institutional documents, or formal standards. It emerged through communication, exemplary conduct, developmental supervision, teacher learning, shared decision-making, evaluation, and the consistent application of Islamic values.

Five central processes were identified. Principals translated institutional visions into practical responsibilities, strengthened credibility through fair and disciplined conduct, transformed supervision into professional learning, developed shared responsibility, and institutionalized improvement through documentation and follow-up. The cross-case comparison showed that relational leadership and formal systems must operate together. Relationships create trust and professional openness, while systems provide clarity, accountability, organizational memory, and continuity.

Islamic values strengthened the moral foundation of quality culture when they were reflected in decisions and professional relationships. Amanah, justice, consultation, discipline, and service influenced how teachers interpreted responsibility and leadership credibility. These values became ineffective when used only as symbolic language.

The study contributes an integrated model consisting of quality direction, quality commitment, quality-capacity development, and quality institutionalization. Madrasah leaders should connect institutional values, instructional improvement, professional relationships,

stakeholder participation, and context-sensitive management. Sustainable quality requires shared responsibility and routines that continue beyond a single accreditation cycle, program, or leadership period.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

“During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used ChatGPT, developed by OpenAI, to support language refinement, grammatical correction, structural organization, and improvements in the clarity of academic writing. The tool was not used to generate, modify, or interpret the empirical data or to make research decisions. The authors carefully reviewed, verified, and revised all AI-assisted content and take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, originality, and final content of the manuscript.”

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