

The Role Of Mastermind Leader In Building Islamic Culture At Muhammadiyah Tanjung Redeb Senior High School

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the role of the mastermind leader in developing Islamic school culture at SMA Muhammadiyah Tanjung Redeb. The study responds to the increasing need for educational leadership models that are not only managerial but also capable of designing, transforming, and sustaining Islamic values within school organizations. This research employed a qualitative case study approach. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observation, and document analysis involving the principal, vice principals, Islamic education teachers, teachers, and students. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis through the stages of data familiarization, coding, theme development, interpretation, and verification. The findings reveal that the mastermind leader plays five strategic roles: (1) as an Islamic cultural architect who formulates institutional vision, (2) as a value transformer who integrates Islamic principles into school practices, (3) as a moral role model who demonstrates exemplary leadership behavior, (4) as a mobilizer who develops collective participation through distributed leadership, and (5) as a sustainability builder who institutionalizes Islamic culture through continuous evaluation and regeneration. This study contributes to Islamic educational leadership literature by proposing the mastermind leader concept as an integrative framework combining transformational, instructional, distributed, strategic, and Islamic value-based leadership perspectives. The study implies that sustainable Islamic school culture requires visionary leadership supported by collaboration, institutional commitment, and value internalization.



Introduction

School culture has become one of the most significant factors influencing the quality and sustainability of educational institutions. School culture is not limited to formal regulations, institutional symbols, or routine activities. Rather, it represents a complex system of values, beliefs, norms, practices, relationships, and shared meanings that shape the behavior of all school members. A strong school culture provides direction for teachers, students, educational staff, and leaders in understanding institutional goals and translating them into daily practices. Within this context, school principals hold a strategic position because their leadership decisions, communication patterns, ethical behavior, and

professional commitment significantly influence the formation of organizational culture (Plaku & Leka, 2025).

In contemporary educational discourse, leadership is increasingly understood not merely as an administrative function but as a cultural and transformative process. School leaders are expected to become agents of change who can formulate visions, mobilize collective commitment, develop professional communities, and create meaningful learning environments. Leadership effectiveness is therefore closely related to the ability of principals to construct and sustain organizational cultures that support educational values and institutional identity. Research on educational leadership demonstrates that leaders play a central role in shaping school norms, strengthening collaboration, and establishing shared commitments among school communities (Arar, Sawalhi, & Yilmaz, 2022).

In Islamic educational institutions, school culture development requires a stronger orientation toward spiritual, ethical, and moral values. Islamic school culture is not merely represented through religious ceremonies, collective prayers, Quranic recitation programs, Islamic dress codes, or religious celebrations. These practices become meaningful only when Islamic values are internalized within decision-making processes, interpersonal relationships, classroom interactions, leadership behavior, and institutional policies. Therefore, Islamic school culture should be understood as a comprehensive system where faith (iman), worship (ibadah), morality (akhlaq), responsibility, justice, discipline, and social awareness become integrated into everyday educational practices.

Islamic educational leadership emphasizes that school leaders should function not only as managers but also as moral guides, role models, and value-driven change agents. Leaders in Islamic schools are expected to connect organizational goals with Islamic principles, ensuring that educational development focuses not only on academic achievement but also on the formation of ethical and spiritually grounded individuals. The concept of Islamic-oriented educational leadership highlights that leadership in Muslim educational contexts requires the integration of accountability, trust (amanah), justice, consultation (shura), service, and moral responsibility as foundations of decision-making and organizational management (Alazmi & Bush, 2024).

Recent studies on Islamic school leadership indicate that effective leaders combine personal spirituality with professional competence. Spiritual commitment alone is insufficient to transform school culture unless it is translated into strategic planning, organizational practices, teacher development, and institutional policies. Islamic leaders must possess the capacity to interpret religious values within contemporary educational challenges and transform those values into practical systems that influence school life. Islamic school leadership therefore requires both internal moral integrity and external organizational competence (Brooks & Ezzani, 2022).

The development of Islamic school culture also requires collaborative and participatory leadership approaches. Contemporary educational research increasingly emphasizes that sustainable school improvement cannot rely solely on individual leaders. Instead, leadership must involve collective engagement among principals, teachers, students, parents, and educational stakeholders. Distributed leadership theory explains that leadership practices emerge through interactions among organizational members rather than being concentrated exclusively in formal positions. Through collaboration, shared responsibility, and professional trust, schools can develop stronger cultures and more sustainable improvement processes (Nadeem, 2024).

The integration between transformational, instructional, and distributed leadership perspectives provides a comprehensive framework for understanding contemporary school leadership. Transformational leadership emphasizes vision development, motivation, commitment, and organizational change. Instructional leadership focuses on

teaching quality, curriculum improvement, and teacher professional development. Distributed leadership highlights collaboration, shared responsibility, and collective capacity building. The combination of these approaches enables school leaders to influence not only academic improvement but also cultural transformation within educational organizations (Bellibaş, Kılınç, & Polatcan, 2021).

For Islamic schools, this integrated leadership approach becomes increasingly important because cultural transformation requires systematic processes. Islamic values cannot be institutionalized only through formal statements or religious programs. They must be embedded through leadership modeling, organizational routines, teacher practices, student experiences, and institutional systems. A leader must therefore possess the ability to design cultural strategies, coordinate organizational actors, create collective awareness, and maintain consistency between institutional values and daily practices.

Within Muhammadiyah educational institutions, the development of Islamic culture has a distinctive historical and philosophical foundation. Muhammadiyah education aims to integrate religious knowledge, scientific development, moral formation, and social responsibility. The Muhammadiyah educational model does not separate religious education from general education but seeks to develop holistic individuals who possess faith, intellectual competence, ethical awareness, and social contribution. Consequently, Islamic culture in Muhammadiyah schools should be developed as an integrated educational ecosystem rather than as isolated religious activities (Hamami & Nuryana, 2022).

SMA Muhammadiyah Tanjung Redeb represents an important context for examining how Islamic school culture is developed through leadership practices. As part of the Muhammadiyah educational network, the school faces the challenge of translating institutional Islamic values into concrete educational practices. The existence of Islamic identity alone does not automatically guarantee the formation of Islamic culture. Strong leadership is required to ensure that Islamic values become embedded within school governance, classroom activities, teacher behavior, student interaction, and community engagement.

In this study, the concept of the mastermind leader is introduced to describe a strategic educational leader who functions as an architect of organizational culture. The term refers to a leader who possesses the ability to formulate vision, analyze institutional conditions, design strategic interventions, coordinate stakeholders, distribute leadership roles, and ensure the sustainability of cultural transformation. The mastermind leader does not represent an authoritarian figure who controls every activity. Instead, this concept describes a leader who creates systems that enable collective participation while maintaining alignment with Islamic values.

The concept of the mastermind leader is developed through a synthesis of transformational leadership, strategic leadership, instructional leadership, distributed leadership, and Islamic educational leadership perspectives. Existing literature has extensively examined these leadership approaches separately; however, limited studies have explored how these dimensions interact in the specific process of developing Islamic school culture. Therefore, this study positions the mastermind leader as an integrative conceptual framework for understanding how school leaders design, mobilize, and institutionalize Islamic values within educational organizations.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a case study design to explore the role of the mastermind leader in developing Islamic school culture at SMA Muhammadiyah Tanjung Redeb. A qualitative case study was selected because the research

focuses on understanding leadership practices, organizational values, cultural processes, and social interactions within their natural context (Nurhayati, Dina Liana, 2025). This approach enables researchers to examine how school leaders construct meanings, implement strategies, and influence cultural transformation through everyday leadership practices (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Case study research is particularly appropriate for educational leadership studies because it allows an in-depth investigation of complex organizational phenomena that cannot be separated from their institutional and social contexts (Yin, 2022). Similar studies on Islamic school leadership have also applied qualitative case study approaches to investigate how principals develop organizational culture through leadership practices, values, collaboration, and institutional strategies (Efendi, 2025).

The research was conducted at SMA Muhammadiyah Tanjung Redeb, selected as the research site because the school represents an Islamic educational institution that seeks to strengthen religious identity and institutional culture through leadership practices. The participants were selected purposively based on their involvement and understanding of the development of Islamic school culture (Nurhayati, Latif, & Anwar, 2024). The informants consisted of the principal as the main leader, vice principals, Islamic education teachers, teachers, and students who were directly involved in school cultural activities. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted to explore leadership vision, strategic planning, decision-making processes, role distribution, and mechanisms for internalizing Islamic values. Observations focused on leadership behavior, religious routines, teacher-student interactions, and cultural practices within the school environment. Meanwhile, documentation analysis included school vision and mission documents, religious activity programs, regulations, organizational structures, and other institutional records related to Islamic culture development. The combination of interviews, observations, and documentation strengthens data credibility through methodological triangulation (de Jong et al., 2023). Research in Islamic educational contexts confirms that these techniques are effective for revealing the relationship between leadership practices and cultural formation in faith based schools (Sulisworo, A'yun, & Maryani, 2024).

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the principles of Braun and Clarke (2022), which involve six stages: data familiarization, initial coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition, and report development (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This analytical process was used to identify patterns related to the role of the mastermind leader, including vision formulation, cultural strategy development, leadership modeling, stakeholder mobilization, distributed leadership practices, and sustainability of Islamic values within the school organization. The validity of the findings was ensured through source triangulation, technique triangulation, and member checking by confirming interpretations with research participants. Thematic analysis was considered suitable because this study aims to understand experiences, meanings, and leadership processes rather than measure causal relationships statistically (Said, Sharif, & Abdullah, 2023). Previous studies examining Islamic school leadership and organizational culture have similarly applied thematic analysis to identify how principals construct value-based cultures and manage institutional transformation (Munifah & Purwaningrum, 2022).

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that the role of the mastermind leader in developing Islamic school culture at SMA Muhammadiyah Tanjung Redeb is reflected through five interconnected leadership practices: (1) constructing an Islamic cultural vision,

(2) transforming values into institutional practices, (3) demonstrating exemplary leadership, (4) mobilizing collective participation, and (5) ensuring cultural sustainability. The concept of the mastermind leader emerged from the empirical findings as a strategic leadership pattern in which the principal functions not only as an administrator but also as a cultural architect who designs, directs, and maintains the development of Islamic values within the school organization. This finding confirms that school leaders play a central role in shaping organizational culture because leadership decisions influence shared beliefs, behavioral norms, and institutional practices (Plaku & Leka, 2025).

1. The Mastermind Leader as an Islamic Cultural Architect

The first finding indicates that the principal at SMA Muhammadiyah Tanjung Redeb acts as a cultural architect by formulating an Islamic-oriented school vision and translating it into strategic programs. The principal does not position Islamic culture as an additional program but integrates Islamic values into the school's identity, management system, learning process, and social interactions. The development of Islamic culture is implemented through religious routines, ethical discipline, teacher role modeling, student character development, and institutional policies that reflect Muhammadiyah values.

This finding demonstrates that the effectiveness of Islamic school leadership depends on the ability of leaders to connect religious values with organizational practices. Islamic educational leadership requires leaders to transform theological principles into practical educational actions through vision building, moral responsibility, and organizational commitment (Alazmi & Bush, 2024). Islamic leadership studies also emphasize that principals in Islamic schools should become value-oriented leaders who combine spiritual commitment with professional managerial competence (Said, Sharif, & Abdullah, 2023).

The role of the mastermind leader identified in this study extends beyond conventional leadership concepts because the principal functions as a designer of cultural systems. The leader analyzes institutional conditions, determines cultural priorities, develops strategic programs, and ensures that Islamic values become embedded in daily school life. This finding supports previous research showing that principals influence school culture by creating shared meanings, strengthening organizational identity, and developing collective commitment among school members (Sumiran et al., 2022).

2. Transforming Islamic Values into School Practices

The second finding shows that the development of Islamic school culture occurs through the transformation of abstract values into concrete institutional practices. Islamic values such as discipline, responsibility, honesty, respect, cooperation, and spiritual awareness are not only communicated through formal statements but are reinforced through routines and interactions. The principal ensures that Islamic values become visible through teacher behavior, student activities, classroom practices, and school management procedures.

The findings indicate that cultural transformation requires consistency between institutional vision and daily practices. The principal's role as a mastermind leader appears through the ability to establish alignment between what the school declares and what the school practices. This process involves designing programs, monitoring implementation, and strengthening collective awareness among teachers and students. Similar findings indicate that leadership contributes to organizational culture development when leaders create value-based environments characterized by trust, collaboration, and continuous improvement (Efendi, 2025).

Furthermore, Islamic school culture cannot be developed through symbolic religious activities alone. It requires continuous internalization through organizational experiences. Leaders must create opportunities where students and teachers experience Islamic values as part of institutional life. This finding supports the argument that Islamic educational leadership involves critical spirituality, where religious values are translated into ethical practices, social responsibility, and educational transformation (Brooks & Ezzani, 2022).

3. Leadership Modeling and Moral Example

The third finding demonstrates that personal example is a fundamental mechanism in developing Islamic culture. Teachers and students perceive the principal's behavior as an important reference for understanding institutional values. The principal demonstrates commitment through religious practices, professional discipline, respectful communication, fairness in decision-making, and active involvement in school activities.

The importance of leadership modeling reflects the principle that organizational culture is strongly influenced by what leaders consistently demonstrate rather than what they formally communicate. Leaders become symbols of institutional values, and their daily behavior shapes how organizational members interpret expected norms. Research on Islamic school principals shows that excellent leaders are characterized by integrity, commitment, communication ability, justice, and the capacity to become moral examples for school communities (Said et al., 2023).

The findings also reinforce the concept of transformational leadership, where leaders influence followers through inspiration, ethical commitment, and shared vision. Transformational leaders encourage members to move beyond individual interests and contribute to collective organizational goals (Bellibaş et al., 2021). In the context of SMA Muhammadiyah Tanjung Redeb, the mastermind leader strengthens Islamic culture by combining transformational influence with Islamic moral responsibility.

4. Mobilizing Collective Participation through Distributed Leadership

The fourth finding reveals that the development of Islamic culture is not conducted individually by the principal but through distributed leadership practices. The principal involves vice principals, Islamic education teachers, classroom teachers, student organizations, and other school members in implementing cultural programs. The distribution of responsibilities creates shared ownership and prevents Islamic culture development from depending solely on the principal's personal leadership.

This finding supports distributed leadership theory, which explains that effective school improvement occurs when leadership responsibilities are shared among multiple actors within the organization. Leadership becomes a collective process involving interaction, collaboration, and professional trust rather than merely a formal authority structure (Nadeem, 2024). Research also indicates that distributed leadership enhances teacher involvement and professional development because teachers receive opportunities to participate in decision-making and organizational improvement processes (Bektaş, Kılınç, & Gümüş, 2022).

At SMA Muhammadiyah Tanjung Redeb, the mastermind leader does not eliminate other leadership roles but strategically coordinates them. The principal creates a leadership network where each member contributes according to their expertise and responsibility. This approach strengthens cultural sustainability because Islamic values become collective commitments rather than individual initiatives.

5. Maintaining Sustainability of Islamic School Culture

The fifth finding indicates that sustainability is a major characteristic of the mastermind leader. The principal focuses not only on initiating Islamic cultural programs but also on maintaining continuity through evaluation, regeneration, and institutionalization. Programs are continuously reviewed to ensure their relevance and effectiveness.

The sustainability mechanism includes strengthening teacher capacity, involving new members of the school community, maintaining communication, and ensuring that cultural values remain consistent despite organizational changes. This finding confirms that successful school culture development requires long-term leadership strategies rather than short-term programs. Previous research emphasizes that principals contribute to sustainable school improvement when they establish systems that support collaboration, learning, and shared responsibility (de Jong et al., 2023).

Discussion

The findings contribute to the understanding of educational leadership by introducing the concept of the mastermind leader as an integrative leadership model for Islamic school culture development. Unlike traditional leadership perspectives that emphasize a single leadership style, the mastermind leader combines strategic vision, transformational influence, instructional orientation, distributed practices, and Islamic moral foundations. The first theoretical contribution of this study is the expansion of Islamic educational leadership theory. Previous studies have discussed Islamic leadership through concepts such as spirituality, ethics, and value-based management. However, this study demonstrates that Islamic leadership also requires strategic cultural engineering. A leader must understand how values move from philosophical principles into organizational systems, behavioral patterns, and institutional traditions. This finding strengthens the argument that Islamic educational leadership should be understood as a process of value transformation rather than merely religious administration (Arar et al., 2022).

The second contribution concerns the relationship between leadership and school culture. Previous research has demonstrated that principals influence school culture through vision, communication, and organizational practices. However, this study highlights the strategic role of the principal as a mastermind leader who designs cultural mechanisms. The leader does not simply respond to existing culture but actively constructs, directs, and sustains cultural transformation. The third contribution relates to the integration of distributed leadership and Islamic values. Distributed leadership studies generally focus on collaboration, professional learning, and school improvement. This research extends the discussion by showing that distributed leadership can also function as a mechanism for Islamic value internalization. When leadership responsibility is shared, Islamic culture becomes a collective practice rather than a principal-centered program.

The findings have practical implications for Islamic educational institutions. School principals should develop leadership competencies that include strategic planning, cultural management, communication, spiritual leadership, and collaborative capacity. Islamic schools need leaders who can balance religious identity with modern organizational demands. The mastermind leader framework provides an alternative perspective for understanding how Islamic schools can strengthen their institutional culture in a sustainable manner.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the role of the mastermind leader is a strategic factor in developing Islamic school culture at SMA Muhammadiyah Tanjung Redeb. The mastermind leader is not merely understood as a school principal who performs managerial responsibilities but as a cultural architect who designs, directs, and sustains the internalization of Islamic values within the school organization. The findings demonstrate that Islamic school culture is developed through a continuous process involving vision formulation, value transformation, leadership modeling, collective participation, and institutional sustainability.

The study highlights that the development of Islamic culture requires leadership that integrates transformational, instructional, distributed, strategic, and Islamic value-based leadership dimensions. The principal plays an important role in translating Islamic principles into concrete school practices through policies, religious programs, teacher development, student activities, and daily interactions. The success of cultural transformation does not depend only on formal religious programs but on the consistency between institutional values, leadership behavior, and the experiences of school members.

The concept of the mastermind leader contributes theoretically by offering an integrative perspective for understanding leadership in Islamic educational institutions. Unlike conventional leadership approaches that emphasize specific leadership styles separately, this concept explains how leaders strategically combine vision, moral authority, collaboration, and organizational design to build sustainable Islamic culture. The study also expands discussions on Islamic educational leadership by emphasizing the process of transforming religious values into institutional systems and collective practices.

Practically, this study suggests that Islamic schools need leaders who possess not only administrative competence but also cultural intelligence, spiritual awareness, strategic thinking, and collaborative capacity. Sustainable Islamic school culture can only be achieved when leadership becomes a collective movement involving principals, teachers, students, and the wider school community. Therefore, the mastermind leader model provides an alternative framework for strengthening Islamic educational leadership and developing value-based school cultures in contemporary educational contexts. Future research may examine this leadership model across different Islamic schools using comparative approaches or mixed-method designs to develop a broader empirical framework.

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