

# STRENGTHENING ACADEMIC CULTURE IN URBAN MADRASAH ALIYAH: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY BASED ON TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT AT MADRASAH ALIYAH YOGYAKARTA

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Strengthening Academic Culture In Urban Madrasah Aliyah: A Multiple Case Study Based On Total Quality Management At Madrasah Aliyah Yogyakarta Licensed Under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License

## Abstract

The strengthening of academic culture in urban Madrasah Aliyah has become an urgent agenda amid increasing institutional competition, public accountability demands, and the transformation of Islamic secondary education in Indonesia. While numerous studies have addressed school quality improvement, limited research specifically examines how Total Quality Management (TQM) is systematically operationalized to construct a sustainable academic culture within urban madrasah settings. This study aims to explore and critically analyze the implementation of TQM principles in strengthening a sustainable academic culture across selected urban madrasah contexts. Using a qualitative multiple case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with principals, teachers, and quality assurance teams, supported by classroom observation and institutional document analysis. The findings demonstrate that academic culture strengthening is not merely programmatic but structurally embedded through five interrelated dimensions: visionary leadership grounded in quality commitment, continuous improvement in pedagogical practices, data-driven evaluation systems, collaborative teamwork mechanisms, and integration of Islamic values with academic performance standards. The study argues that TQM in urban madrasah functions as a cultural transformation framework rather than a managerial tool alone. This research contributes to the development of Islamic education management by contextualizing TQM within the sociocultural dynamics of urban madrasah and offering an integrative model that bridges managerial efficiency with value-based educational orientation. The findings offer both conceptual refinement and practical implications for enhancing a competitive yet value-driven academic culture in Islamic secondary education institutions.

**Keywords:** Academic Culture; Total Quality Management; Urban Madrasah Aliyah; Educational Quality; Islamic Education Management

## A. Introduction

The quality of education has become a central concern in the development of Islamic educational institutions, particularly Madrasah Aliyah, which function as formal Islamic secondary schools in Indonesia (Ira Faramisti, 2024). In urban Muslim contexts, Madrasah Aliyah are increasingly challenged to meet global academic standards while preserving Islamic identity and values (Syihabudin et al., 2024). Rapid social transformation, digital exposure, and competitive educational environments require Islamic schools to continuously adapt while maintaining their religious foundations (Jamil, 2023; Yulianto, 2024). This condition positions urban Madrasah Aliyah at the intersection of educational modernization and religious continuity.

Urban Muslim communities are characterized by pluralism, high competition, and intense engagement with digital culture, all of which shape students' learning environments and expectations (Malizal, 2025). These dynamics compel Islamic schools to develop adaptive educational strategies that balance academic excellence with moral and spiritual formation (Taufikin et al., 2025). Therefore, strengthening academic culture in urban Madrasah Aliyah becomes a strategic necessity rather than merely an institutional choice.

Existing literature on quality development in Islamic education can be broadly categorized into three streams. The first stream emphasizes quality management and institutional effectiveness (Sudir et al., 2025), highlighting leadership, continuous improvement, and stakeholder involvement as key determinants of educational quality (Supriyadi et al., 2023). The second stream focuses on academic culture as a foundation for producing disciplined, critical, and morally grounded students, positioning academic culture as an internal driver of educational quality ((Nasrulloh et al., 2021); (Tikhonova et al., 2023). The third stream addresses the adaptation of Islamic education to global and urban challenges, arguing that curriculum innovation and governance reform are necessary to respond to rapid social transformation while safeguarding religious identity (Hamzah & Jusoh, 2025). Although these studies offer valuable insights, they tend to be discussed separately, with limited integration between quality management frameworks, academic culture development, and the specific realities of urban Madrasah Aliyah.

A growing debate in Islamic education studies concerns whether quality-oriented management models, such as Total Quality Management (TQM), can be harmonized with Islamic educational values (Elham Malik, 2025; Putri, 2020). Proponents argue that TQM enhances institutional effectiveness through systematic planning, continuous improvement, and collaborative leadership, which can be aligned with Islamic principles such as *ihsan* (excellence) and *amanah* (responsibility) (Susilowati, 2025). Critics, however, caution that managerial approaches rooted in corporate logic may risk marginalizing the spiritual and moral dimensions of Islamic education. Despite this debate, empirical evidence on how TQM-based quality programs shape academic culture in urban Madrasah Aliyah remains limited. Therefore, it is necessary to sustain the quality assurance of education (Haningsih, 2024). Most existing studies address quality management or Islamic values in isolation, leaving a gap in understanding how these elements are practically integrated within specific urban madrasah contexts.

This study addresses this gap by examining how a TQM-based quality program is implemented to strengthen academic culture in an urban Madrasah Aliyah in Yogyakarta. Specifically, this study asks: How is Total Quality Management implemented in strengthening academic culture in an urban Madrasah Aliyah? How do school leaders integrate Islamic values into the quality management system? What challenges and adaptive strategies emerge in sustaining academic culture in a dynamic

urban context?

This study is expected to contribute conceptually by integrating TQM principles with Islamic educational values into a framework for strengthening academic culture. Methodologically, it provides an in-depth qualitative multiple-case study of quality management practices in urban Madrasah Aliyah. Practically, the study offers strategic insights for school leaders and policymakers in developing quality-oriented Islamic secondary education that aligns professionalism, spirituality, and social responsibility.

Conceptually, this research integrates TQM principles with Islamic educational values into a contextualized framework of academic culture strengthening. Methodologically, it employs a qualitative multiple case study to enable cross-case comparison across diverse governance contexts. Practically, it offers strategic insights for policymakers and school leaders in aligning managerial professionalism with spiritual and moral commitments in Islamic secondary education.

To provide a contextual foundation, this research was conducted in three prominent urban Aliyah Madrasah in the Yogyakarta region: Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 1 Yogyakarta, Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 4 Sleman, and Madrasah Aliyah Sunan Pandanaran Sleman. MAN 1 Yogyakarta is widely recognized for its academic achievement and competitive student admission; MAN 4 Sleman shows systematic quality assurance practices; and MA Sunan Pandanaran integrates the tradition of pesantren with formal academic excellence. These institutions represent a diverse model of governance—public state madrasas and pesantren-based private madrasas—while sharing an urban socio-cultural environment characterized by academic competition and strong religious identity (Asror et al., 2024; Bulkani et al., 2025). This diversity of institutional characteristics provides a rich comparative basis for examining how TQM-based quality programs shape academic culture in different urban madrasah settings.

## B. Methods

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a multiple-case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of how quality education programs are implemented to enhance academic culture within *Madrasah Aliyah*, located within urban Muslim communities. A qualitative approach was selected to capture stakeholders' meanings, values, and lived experiences within their natural school contexts (Creswell, 2015). The case study design enabled an in-depth understanding of context-specific quality management practices and their influence on academic culture development.

The research was conducted at selected Madrasah Aliyah in Yogyakarta, which was purposively selected based on three criteria: (1) active engagement in institutional quality improvement programs inspired by TQM principles; (2) location within an urban Muslim community characterized by social diversity and academic competition; and (3) demonstrated leadership commitment to strengthening academic culture.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation of key stakeholders involved in quality management and academic culture development. The inclusion criteria were: (a) holding a formal role in school leadership or academic management; or (b) active involvement in the implementation of quality programs. The sample comprised 15 informants, including the principal, vice principals for curriculum and quality assurance, quality assurance coordinators, teachers, and student representatives. Informant recruitment continued until data saturation was achieved, indicated by the repetition of themes and the absence of substantially new

information in later interviews. Saturation was reached after the 13th interview, and two additional interviews were conducted to confirm thematic stability.

Table 1. Profile of Informants

Code	Role	Data Sources
I1	Principal	Interview, Documents
I2	Vice Principal (Curriculum)	Interview, Observation
I3	Vice Principal (Quality)	Interview, Documents
I4-I10	Teachers (various subjects)	Interview, Observation
I11-I13	Quality Assurance Team	Interview, Documents
I14-I15	Student Representatives	Interview, Observation

Triangulation was conducted by systematically comparing findings across interviews, observations, and documents to enhance credibility of the findings (Chand, 2025). Data were collected through three complementary techniques to facilitate methodological triangulation:

1. In-depth semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders to explore perceptions, strategies, and challenges in implementing TQM-based quality programs.
2. Participant observation of academic activities, quality meetings, and school programs related to academic culture development.
3. Document analysis of quality plans, evaluation reports, standard operating procedures, and institutional policies.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles et al., 2014). Operationally, the analysis involved the following steps:

1. Transcribing interviews and organizing field notes and documents.
2. Open coding to identify initial meaning units (e.g., “continuous improvement,” “teacher collaboration,” “Islamic values integration”)
3. Axial coding to group related codes into categories (e.g., leadership commitment, quality assurance mechanisms, academic discipline)
4. Thematic development to generate core themes explaining how TQM strengthens academic culture
5. Verification through iterative comparison of themes with raw data and peer debriefing.

An audit trail was maintained, including coding manuals, analytic memos, and decision logs, to enhance dependability. Peer debriefing with two qualitative research colleagues was conducted to review coding consistency and theme interpretation.

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional authority. Informed consent was secured from all participants before data collection. Participants were informed about the voluntary nature of participation, their right to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality of their responses. Pseudonyms and codes were used to protect identities, and the school’s name was anonymized in reporting to safeguard

institutional confidentiality. All data were securely stored and accessed only by the research team.

## C. Findings and Discussion

### 1. Findings

This study involved three urban Madrasah Aliyah in Yogyakarta: Madrasah Aliyah Sunan Pandanaran (MA-SP), MAN 4 Sleman (MAN4-S), and MAN 1 Yogyakarta (MAN1-Y). All three institutions operate in urban Muslim communities characterized by intense academic competition and strong exposure to digital culture.

MA-SP operates under an Islamic boarding school foundation, integrating pesantren culture into its academic life. It holds an "A" accreditation and emphasizes Qur'anic character, language proficiency, and ICT integration. MAN4-S and MAN1-Y are state Islamic senior secondary schools with well-established quality assurance systems and partnerships with universities and local education offices. These contextual differences shape how Total Quality Management (TQM) principles are operationalized in strengthening academic culture across the three sites (Efendi, 2022; Sudir et al., 2025).

#### a. Cross-case Themes on Strengthening Academic Culture through TQM

The field research conducted in three *Madrasah Aliyah* located in urban Yogyakarta revealed a dynamic process of implementing quality education programs aimed at developing a strong and religiously grounded academic culture. Analysis across the three cases identified three major themes: (1) leadership and institutional commitment; (2) integration of Islamic values in quality management; and (3) community participation in sustaining academic excellence. While these themes were present across cases, variations were found in their implementation strategies and intensity.

##### 1) Leadership and Institutional Commitment

Across the three madrasahs, leadership commitment emerged as a decisive factor in strengthening academic culture. Principals institutionalized quality standards, established internal quality assurance teams, and conducted routine academic supervision. However, leadership styles differed across institutions: MA-SP emphasized spiritual reinforcement within pesantren culture, while MAN1-Y and MAN4-S emphasized managerial professionalism and performance indicators.

Quality improvement in madrasahs is not merely understood as an administrative obligation, but is positioned as part of spiritual devotion. The principal of MA-SP emphasized this perspective by stating:

*"Quality improvement is part of worship. If teachers perceive their duties as worship, they will not work carelessly."*

This statement indicates that the orientation toward quality at MA-SP is grounded in strong religious values (Maksum et al., 2025). Quality is not viewed solely as the achievement of performance indicators, but as a manifestation of moral and spiritual responsibility before God. This perspective strengthens teachers' intrinsic motivation to perform their professional duties with sincerity, discipline, and commitment (Safitri, 2024).

This finding is further supported by observational data, which revealed the implementation of regular *mujahadah* practices at MA-SP. These spiritual activities

function as a medium for internalizing values such as sincerity, discipline, and collective responsibility. Thus, the culture of quality is not constructed solely through formal managerial mechanisms, but also through sustained spiritual habituation embedded in daily institutional life.

Meanwhile, at MAN1-Y, quality assurance documents demonstrated the presence of annual performance targets and periodic evaluations. This indicates that quality enhancement is reinforced through systematic and measurable managerial approaches. Clearly defined targets and continuous evaluation serve as strategic instruments to ensure the consistent achievement of academic quality standards.

At MAN4-S, leadership commitment is reflected in the institutional transformation toward a research-based and skill-oriented madrasah. The vice principal stated:

*“MAN 4 Sleman is a research-based madrasah. We facilitate students from proposal writing, mentoring discussions, to submitting research competitions at provincial, national, and even international levels.”*

This statement illustrates that leadership at MAN4-S actively institutionalizes academic culture through structured research mentoring and the establishment of the Manesa Young Research (MAYORS) club. Students are not only encouraged but systematically guided through proposal development, supervision, and participation in academic competitions. This reflects a proactive quality leadership model aligned with continuous improvement principles in TQM.

Based on these findings, it can be interpreted that leadership in urban Madrasah Aliyah operates in a dual capacity: as a managerial authority responsible for regulating systems and institutional performance, and as a moral-spiritual role model who instills meaning and values into educational practices. The integration of managerial and spiritual dimensions contributes significantly to the development of discipline, professionalism, and academic commitment within the madrasah environment.

This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Amtu et al. (2020), which highlights the strategic role of leadership in shaping a quality culture in Islamic educational institutions. Leadership extends beyond technical and administrative functions, encompassing the internalization of spiritual values as the foundation of organizational culture. Therefore, quality in Islamic education is constructed not only through formal systems but also through exemplary leadership and the cultivation of spiritual awareness within the institution.

## **2) Integration of Islamic Values in Quality Management**

TQM principles were contextualized within Islamic values across all three cases. Continuous improvement was framed as *islah* (*self-improvement and reform*), while accountability was interpreted as *amanah* (*trust and responsibility*). MA-SP integrated spiritual routines into quality assurance processes, whereas MAN1-Y and MAN4-S embedded Islamic ethics into professional development programs. The implementation of quality standards in madrasahs is not merely understood as a technical instrument for measuring performance, but also as part of a spiritual responsibility with transcendental dimensions. The Vice Principal for Quality at MAN1-Y explained:

*“We use quality standards, but we remind teachers that accountability is amanah before God.”*

This statement indicates that accountability in the madrasah context extends beyond administrative responsibility to the institution, encompassing moral and spiritual accountability before God. This perspective provides deeper meaning to quality assurance practices, encouraging teachers to fulfill standards not merely as formal obligations but as expressions of ethical and religious commitment (Syamsiah et al., 2024).

This finding is further supported by document analysis at MA-SP, which revealed that quality indicators were explicitly linked to students' religious character development (Aminullah et al., 2025; Muhammad et al., 2021). This reflects an integration of cognitive and spiritual dimensions within the quality framework, where educational success is measured not only by academic achievement but also by the formation of moral and spiritual character.

At MAN4-S, the integration of Islamic values into quality management is manifested through the method of role modeling (*keteladanan*) and value habituation embedded in daily academic practices. Islamic values such as religiosity, integrity, independence, nationalism, and cooperation are systematically internalized through teacher behavior and institutional routines. As stated by the vice principal:

*"The best method to improve students' character is through example and modeling from teachers and staff, followed by practice and habituation of core values such as religiosity, integrity, independence, and cooperation."*

This statement shows that quality management at MAN4-S is not solely implemented through formal standards, but through ethical exemplarity demonstrated by educators. Teachers are positioned as moral agents whose conduct directly shapes students' academic discipline and character formation. Based on these findings, it can be interpreted that at MAN4-S, Islamic values transform Total Quality Management (TQM) into a character-oriented quality culture. TQM functions not only as a managerial control mechanism but also as a framework for cultivating moral awareness, academic integrity, and collective responsibility within the madrasah.

More broadly, these findings indicate that the integration of Islamic values has transformed Total Quality Management (TQM) from a purely technical and procedural framework into a deeper moral-spiritual commitment. This integration enhances teachers' intrinsic motivation and fosters a collegial culture grounded in shared professional and spiritual responsibility.

This finding supports the argument proposed by (Imroni, 2025; Udhma & Minarti, 2025), who emphasizes that quality management in Islamic education gains stronger legitimacy when aligned with spiritual values such as *ihsan* (excellence) and *amanah* (trust and responsibility). Therefore, quality in Islamic education is not merely a managerial construct, but a manifestation of ethical and spiritual commitment embedded within institutional culture.

### **3) Community Participation and Urban Educational Challenges**

Urban contexts provided both resources and pressures. MAN1-Y leveraged partnerships with universities and alumni networks, while MA-SP mobilized parents and pesantren networks for mentoring and religious programs (Wahyuni et al., 2025). However, all schools faced challenges related to sustaining consistency amid high expectations and social diversity. Community participation therefore plays a crucial role in strengthening the culture of quality in madrasahs, particularly in urban contexts where expectations for educational excellence are significantly heightened.

At MAN4-S, community participation operates within a unique urban-rural transitional context. Although administratively located in the urban area of Yogyakarta, many students come from surrounding rural and mountainous regions, particularly from Pakem and nearby villages. This socioeconomic heterogeneity significantly influences the madrasah’s quality developments strategies.

Based on these findings, it can be interpreted that community participation at MAN4-S is characterized by strong contextual responsiveness. The madrasah does not merely receive community expectations passively but actively transforms them into institutional innovation. Thus, academic culture is strengthened not only within formal structures but also through dynamic interaction with the surrounding socio-cultural environment.

This finding is further supported by documentation analysis at MAN1-Y, which revealed the existence of alumni-supported academic mentoring programs. Alumni involvement reflects a sustained collective responsibility in maintaining and enhancing educational quality. Such support strengthens students’ academic capacity while extending the learning ecosystem beyond formal classroom boundaries.

Moreover, observations at MA-SP recorded active parental involvement in *halaqah tarbawiyah* and digital literacy programs. This participation demonstrates that parents function not merely as recipients of educational services but as strategic partners in fostering students’ character and competencies. Direct community engagement contributes to the creation of a collaborative and sustainable educational environment.

Based on these findings, it can be interpreted that community participation significantly strengthens academic culture by extending quality initiatives beyond institutional boundaries. However, the dynamic and demanding nature of urban environments also requires madrasahs to adopt adaptive and sustainable strategies to respond effectively to evolving societal expectations.

As shown in Table 2 this finding aligns with the study conducted by Shvardak (2025), which highlights the dual role of urban communities as both enablers and challengers in improving the quality of Islamic education. While community support enhances institutional capacity and social capital, heightened expectations simultaneously require continuous innovation and quality improvement efforts.

Table 2. Quality control principles

Components	Data Excerpts	Interpretation	Literature
Leadership commitment	Principal MA-SP: “Quality improvement is <i>ibadah</i> .”	Leadership integrates managerial and spiritual authority	(Amtu et al., 2020)
Islamic values in TQM	VP Quality MAN1-Y: “Accountability is <i>amanah</i> .”	TQM gains moral legitimacy	(Imroni, 2025)
Community participation	Teacher MAN4-S: “Urban parents demand excellence and morality.”	Community context (rural-urban heterogeneity) shapes adaptive quality and character-building strategies	(Shvardak, 2025)

### **b. Cross-Case Patterns and Differences**

Based on the results of research at MA-SP, MAN1-Y, and MAN4-S, a common pattern was found in strengthening academic culture based on Total Quality Management (TQM). All three madrasahs implement a quality assurance system as an instrument of institutional management, interpreting quality not only as a professional achievement but also as a religious responsibility, and involving the community as a strategic partner in supporting the sustainability of academic culture. Thus, quality is understood as a systemic and normative construct that integrates managerial and spiritual dimensions (Malik, 2025).

Despite similarities in their underlying principles, the three madrasahs demonstrate differences in their implementation approaches. MA-SP emphasizes the strengthening of spiritual rituals and pesantren culture as the foundation of academic discipline (Musaddad, 2024). Practices such as religious habits, internalization of sincerity values, and moral exemplarity function as key mechanisms shaping the work ethic of teachers and students. In this context, quality emerges from collective spiritual awareness that becomes institutionalized within the daily culture of the madrasah.

Unlike MA-SP, MAN1-Y prioritizes a more structured, formal quality assurance system, supported by strong external partnerships (Stensaker & Matear, 2025). This approach emphasizes strategic planning, measurable performance targets, periodic evaluations, and collaboration with alumni and other stakeholders. Quality in this context is constructed through systematic and accountable administrative mechanisms, reinforced by external networks to enhance academic competitiveness (Taufik et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, MAN4-S adopts a contextual and transformative approach by integrating research-based programs, skill development, and character education within a continuous improvement framework (Efendi, 2022). While maintaining a structured quality cycle (planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and improvement), MAN4-S emphasizes research mentoring through the Manesa Young Research (MAYORS).

This approach reflects adaptive leadership that responds to the socio-economic heterogeneity of students, many of whom come from rural and mountainous areas surrounding Yogyakarta. Academic culture at MAN4-S is therefore strengthened not only through formal quality assurance mechanisms but also through contextual responsiveness, teacher role modeling, and the integration of religious values into daily academic practices (Lestari & ., 2025). Quality, in this context, is constructed as a dynamic and evolving process that aligns institutional innovation, community expectations, and students' moral development.

## **2. Discussion**

Across the three cases, Madrasah Aliyah Sunan Pandanaran (MA-SP), MAN 4 Sleman (MAN4-S), and MAN 1 Yogyakarta (MAN1-Y), the strengthening of academic culture was identified through a recognizable qualitative analytic model following Miles and Huberman's interactive framework, supported by systematic triangulation of interviews, observations, and document analysis. Through iterative cycles of data condensation, display, and verification, the analysis revealed how Total Quality Management (TQM) principles were translated into everyday institutional routines that were both managerial and religiously meaningful. At MA-SP, continuous improvement was embedded in daily spiritual practices, such as collective prayers, Qur'anic literacy programs, and teacher reflection meetings. At MAN1-Y, quality

targets and performance reviews were integrated with ethical commitments articulated in school charters and professional development sessions.

The strengthening of academic culture was operationalized through observable indicators that cut across the three schools, including improved student discipline, routinized reading and research habits, strengthened academic integrity (e.g., reduced plagiarism and strengthened assessment ethics), and the institutionalization of collaborative learning among teachers and students (Mu'alimin et al., 2026). These indicators were embedded within TQM cycles of planning, implementation, evaluation, and continuous improvement (Aruna et al., 2025). In this sense, academic culture was not treated as an abstract value but as a set of patterned practices reinforced through quality assurance mechanisms, leadership routines, and professional learning communities (Haningsih et al., 2022). At MAN4-S, TQM principles were operationalized through a structured cycle of planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and improvement, which was integrated with research-based programs and character habituation. The establishment of the Manesa Young Research (MAYORS) club institutionalized academic inquiry as a routine practice, supported by systematic mentoring from proposal development to competition submission at provincial and national levels (Muttaqin et al., 2025). This operationalization aligns with quality-management studies emphasizing leadership commitment and continuous improvement as drivers of school quality (Supriyadi et al., 2023), while extending them by showing how such practices gain legitimacy when embedded in religiously meaningful routines in Islamic schools (Abikenov et al., 2025).

At the same time, the analysis considered alternative explanations that might independently account for the observed strengthening of academic culture. The boarding school system at MA-SP, external accreditation demands at MAN1-Y and MAN4-S, and selective student admission processes could plausibly foster discipline and academic performance regardless of TQM implementation. However, cross-case comparison indicates that these structural conditions alone do not sufficiently explain the consistent improvements in collaborative learning, reflective teaching practices, and ethical commitments observed across the three schools. The distinguishing factor lies in how leadership teams translated TQM cycles into shared moral commitments, thereby sustaining changes beyond mere compliance with accreditation requirements or boarding school routines. This suggests that TQM functions as an enabling organizational framework that organizes and amplifies existing institutional strengths, rather than serving as the sole causal driver of educational outcomes.

Analytically, Islamic values were integrated through a conceptual framework that positioned TQM cycles (plan-do-check-act) alongside Islamic ethical constructs. *Ihsan* (excellence) framed continuous improvement as a moral striving rather than a managerial target; *amanah* (trustworthiness) grounded accountability and quality assurance as ethical obligations; and *istiqamah* (consistency) oriented sustainability of reforms beyond short-term performance pressures. Through this framework, managerial practices such as performance reviews, quality audits, and improvement plans were interpreted as forms of religious-ethical practice (*muhasabah*), transforming quality management into a spiritual discipline rather than a purely technical procedure. This integration challenges studies that treat TQM as a secular managerial tool (Rosinawati et al., 2021) and supports calls to contextualize quality frameworks within socio-religious settings (Handrianto et al., 2025; Wanto et al., 2022).

The urban context functioned simultaneously as an opportunity and a pressure across MAN1-Y and MAN4-S through partnerships with universities, alumni

networks, and community organizations, while MA-SP leveraged strong pesantren-parent collaboration. Urban competition and digital exposure intensified performance pressures and accountability demand across all three schools. Leaders reported that sustaining *istiqamah* required adaptive strategies to manage high expectations and social diversity. These findings corroborate contextual-education theories that institutional practices are shaped by socio-cultural environments (Rijal, 2025) and extend prior work by showing that urban resources can be strategically mobilized to reinforce academic culture when mediated by strong ethical leadership (Salam et al., 2022).

The findings support two analytic propositions. First, leadership practices that translate TQM cycles into religious routines (e.g., integrating quality reviews with collective reflection and Qur'anic literacy standards) are more likely to institutionalize academic culture than managerial reforms alone (Siregar, 2023; Subandi, 2021). Second, urban partnerships become durable enablers of academic culture when governed by quality assurance units that align performance indicators with Islamic values. The implications for urban madrasah governance are clear: empowered Quality Assurance units should integrate TQM cycles with religious-ethical reflection to ensure consistency (*istiqamah*), performance indicators should align academic outcomes with character education, and structured partnerships with universities, alumni, pesantren networks, and parents should be institutionalized as strategic pillars of quality culture (Pangaribuan et al., 2023). In this way, modernization strengthens rather than dilutes the madrasah's religious mission, positioning quality management in Islamic education as a spiritual-ethical commitment rooted in *ihsan* and *amanah*.

#### D. Conclusion

This study concludes that strengthening academic culture in urban Madrasah Aliyah is most effective when Total Quality Management (TQM) is contextualized within Islamic ethical-spiritual values and enacted through committed leadership and active community engagement. Across the three cases—Madrasah Aliyah Sunan Pandanaran (MA-SP), MAN 4 Sleman, and MAN 1 Yogyakarta—a consistent pattern emerged: quality improvement was not understood merely as technical compliance but as a moral commitment grounded in the principles of *ihsan* (excellence), *amanah* (trustworthiness), and sustained through *istiqamah* (consistency). When TQM cycles were embedded within institutional routines, such as reflection meetings, literacy programs, research mentoring, and performance evaluations, academic culture became institutionalized as a shared ethical practice rather than merely a procedural obligation.

Although the three madrasahs shared a common quality framework, their enactment of TQM reflected distinct institutional ecologies. MA-SP integrated quality routines with pesantren-based spiritual discipline, creating an immersive moral-academic environment. MAN 1 Yogyakarta emphasized structured accountability systems and strong urban partnerships to enhance competitiveness and measurable performance. MAN 4 Sleman adopted a contextual and transformative approach by integrating research development and adaptive leadership strategies responsive to students' diverse socio- backgrounds (Syafri & Bin Budin, 2025; Syukron et al., 2020; Taj et al., 2024). These variations indicate that while TQM provides a shared managerial framework, its effectiveness depends on leadership's capacity to align managerial standards with religious values and local institutional realities.

The implications extend across policy, managerial, and pedagogical dimensions.

At the policy level, quality assurance frameworks for urban madrasahs should integrate managerial standards with Islamic ethical indicators, ensuring that academic achievement, character formation, research culture, and Qur'anic literacy are treated as interconnected dimensions of educational quality. At the institutional level, school leadership should empower Quality Assurance units not merely as administrative mechanisms but as strategic drivers of institutional culture, embedding evaluation processes within ongoing moral reflection and long-term sustainability. At the pedagogical level, teachers play a decisive role in translating quality systems into classroom practice through reflective, collaborative, and integrity-based learning approaches that harmonize academic rigor with ethical and spiritual formation.

This study is limited by its focus on three madrasahs within a specific regional context, which restricts statistical generalization. The qualitative design, while providing rich analytical depth, may also be influenced by the researcher's interpretation despite the use of systematic triangulation. Nevertheless, the findings offer transferable insights for similar urban madrasah settings characterized by competitive academic environments and strong religious identities. Rather than proposing universal prescriptions, this study advances an analytically grounded model demonstrating that quality management in Islamic education becomes most impactful when professionalism, faith, and social responsiveness are harmonized. In this sense, TQM in urban Madrasah Aliyah functions not merely as a managerial innovation but as a framework for reaffirming Islam's holistic vision of knowledge within contemporary educational contexts.

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#### **F. Author Contributions Statement**

This research was designed and conceptualized by Sri Haningsih, who was also primarily responsible for conducting field research, data collection, preliminary analysis, and data interpretation. Anisah Budiwati helped identify and formulate key findings and actively contributed to the conceptual and theoretical analysis of the data. Nurkhamimi Zainuddin made a significant contribution to the development of the theoretical framework and discussion of the research findings.

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