Islamic Transformative Leadership: The Role of School Principals in Encouraging Curriculum Innovation in Islamic-Based Schools

🆔 **Zainal Abidin*[1)]**, 🆔 **Ahmad Qusairi[2)]**, 🆔 **Iqmal Wahyudi[3)]**

[1)] UII Dalwa
[2)] UII Dalwa
[3)] Yarmouk University
✉ zainalabidin@uiidalwa.ac.id* (Correspondence)

Article Information	Abstract
	This study aims to examine in depth the role of the principal in implementing Islamic Transformative Leadership to encourage curriculum innovation at SMPN 4 Bangil, Pasuruan, while also emphasizing its significant contributions and implications for the development of character-based, innovative Islamic education. A qualitative approach with a case study method was used to gain a comprehensive understanding through in-depth interviews and direct observation over two months (February-March 2025). The study participants consisted of the principal and 10 teachers, who were purposively selected based on their experience, active involvement, and knowledge of the innovation process in the school. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and documentation of school activities, and then analyzed thematically to identify patterns and relationships between Islamic leadership strategies, organizational culture, and the success of curriculum innovation. The results show that the principal plays a central role as an inspiration, role model, and motivator in instilling Islamic values , such as justice, sincerity, and morality, across all aspects of school activities, thereby increasing active teacher participation in curriculum innovation by up to 90%. Teacher empowerment strategies, effective communication, and the instilling of moral values are the main factors supporting the success of Islamic-based innovation. These findings provide practical recommendations for educational leaders to adopt Islamic Transformative Leadership as an essential leadership model in creating a resilient, innovative, and character-driven Islamic school ecosystem, thereby strengthening the quality and relevance of Islamic education in the future.

INTRODUCTION

The background of this research is rooted in the challenges in developing curriculum innovation in Islamic-based schools in Indonesia (Shofiyyah et al. 2023; Muhammad and Nugraheni 2022). Although Islamic principles are at the core of these

schools' identities, the process of curriculum innovation that integrates these values often faces significant obstacles, such as resistance to change and the absence of a leadership model that effectively bridges religious values with the demands of modern educational innovation (Huda 2024). For example, the success of educational innovations based on Islamic values has been proven to be able to improve the quality of the teaching and learning process and build the character of students according to Islamic teachings (Alazmi 2025). However, studies that specifically examine the role of Islamic leadership in the curriculum innovation process are still limited.

In this context, the success of Islamic-based educational transformation depends heavily on the type of leadership that is able to inspire teachers and the entire school community, based on strong moral and spiritual values (Abidin et al. 2022). Leadership based on Islamic values needs to be studied specifically because previous findings show that the integration of Islamic values in leadership practices can strengthen the organizational culture of schools and increase the motivation and creativity of teachers and students, a fact that is crucial for the success of innovation (Alzoraiki et al. 2024; Asad et al. 2021). However, there are still not many studies that specifically examine the practice of Islamic transformative leadership that emphasizes moral and spiritual aspects as the driving force of curriculum innovation in Indonesia.

Several previous studies by Bass and Riggio (2006) showed that transformational leadership is able to increase the creativity and motivation of teachers and students. Arifin et al. (2018) stated that integrating Islamic values into leadership practices can strengthen a school's organizational culture. However, studies specifically examining the role of Islamic leadership in the curriculum innovation process are still limited.

Therefore, this study is relevant and unique because it aims to explore and analyze in depth how the principal at SMPN 4 Bangil, Pasuruan, applies the concept of Islamic transformative leadership in driving curriculum innovation. The focus of this case study on SMPN 4 Bangil directly highlights the concrete practices and strategies used in the local context of Islamic-based schools in Indonesia, thereby providing empirical insights for the development of an effective Islamic educational leadership model, integrated with local culture and values, and enriching the literature on moral and spiritual-based leadership. This research is important to address this gap and confirm that the integration of authentic Islamic values can increase motivation, creativity, and the sustainability of educational innovation.

The method used in this research is a qualitative approach with a case study design (Qusairi et al. 2025; Abidin et al. 2025), which involved in-depth interviews and direct observation of the principal and five teachers at SMPN 4 Bangil for two months, from February to March 2025. The variables studied included: (1) the application of Islamic

transformative leadership principles, (2) curriculum innovation development strategies, and (3) Islamic value-based organizational culture. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and documentation, and then analyzed thematically to understand the relationship between variables and the context of practice in the field (Price and Smith 2021; Striepe 2021).

In summary, preliminary results indicate that the principal acts as the primary driving force, capable of inspiring, building effective communication, and instilling Islamic values as the foundation for every innovative policy and practice in the school. This research makes an important contribution by offering insights into effective Islamic leadership practices in the educational context, while also enriching the literature on moral and spiritually-based leadership models (Karim et al., n.d.; Suhendi et al. 2025). Temuan ini diharapkan dapat menjadi dasar untuk pengembangan model kepemimpinan pendidikan Islami yang lebih luas dan aplikatif di masa depan.

This study still leaves several unanswered questions, such as students' and parents' perceptions of innovations driven by Islamic leadership, and the long-term impact of these practices on students' character and academic achievement. These findings open up opportunities for further research that could broaden the scope and examine the long-term effectiveness of Islamic values-based leadership in improving the quality of national education.

The population of this study consisted of the principal and ten teachers working at SMPN 4 Bangil, Pasuruan. Sampling was conducted purposively, selecting the principal and teachers deemed most knowledgeable about the process of implementing Islamic transformative leadership and curriculum innovation at the school. This sample selection was based on their experience and direct involvement in innovative activities and the application of Islamic values within the school environment (Ahmad and Wilkins 2025; Baltes and Ralph 2022).

The main instruments used in this study were a semi-structured interview guide and an observation sheet. The interview guide was designed to explore participants' perceptions and experiences regarding leadership strategies, the implementation of Islamic values, and the curriculum innovations implemented. The observation sheet was used to record direct practice and dynamics within the school environment during the innovation process (Cañadas 2023; Belina 2023).

Data collection took place over two months, from February to March 2025. Initially, the researcher introduced and explained the research objectives and procedures to informants. Subsequently, in-depth interviews were conducted and audio-recorded, each lasting approximately 45 minutes to an hour. Direct observations were conducted during teaching and learning activities and teacher meetings to obtain a realistic picture of field practice.

Data analysis includes the process of coding and thematic interpretation of interview and observation results (Xu and Zammit 2020; Morgan and Nica 2020). The data were analyzed inductively to identify key themes related to the implementation of Islamic leadership and curriculum innovation, as well as the relationships between variables. Furthermore, to ensure the validity and reliability of the data, the researcher triangulated data and sources and conducted member checks with interview participants (Papavasileiou and Dimou 2024; Natow 2020). Furthermore, the interview recording and transcription process was conducted carefully and transparently to avoid interpretation bias. The primary assumption of this study is that the principals and teachers involved are capable of providing honest and accurate information regarding leadership practices and innovation in their schools.

The statistical methods used are descriptive and qualitative without complex statistical testing (Guest et al. 2020; Pyo et al. 2023). The data obtained is described in narrative and thematic form, thus facilitating interpretation of the processes and factors that influence the success of Islamic leadership in encouraging curriculum innovation (Brooks and Ezzani 2022; Aliyah et al. 2024). The main constraints in this methodology are the limited number of samples and the geographical coverage, which is limited to only one school, so the results are contextual and need to be expanded in further research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The main findings of this study provide a comprehensive overview of the role of the principal at SMPN 4 Bangil in implementing effective Islamic transformative leadership principles as a basis for encouraging curriculum innovation in the school environment. This study shows that the principal not only functions as an administrative manager, but also as a primary inspiration capable of motivating and inspiring all elements of the school through exemplary behavior, open communication, and the integration of Islamic values in every school activity. This central role is supported by observational findings that show the principle is always present in every moral activity (for example, congregational Dhuha and Dhuhur prayers), data that directly fosters collective commitment. This role is a key factor in the success of building a school organizational culture oriented towards morals and spirituality, which is the main foundation in every innovation process carried out.

The Islamic values-based leadership implemented by the principal at SMPN 4 Bangil demonstrates that the success of curriculum innovation does not solely depend on technical strategies or administrative aspects, but is also strongly influenced by the underlying moral and spiritual strengths. The principal acts as a role model in implementing Islamic principles, for example, through exemplary practice of honesty, justice, and compassion. The success indicator of this exemplary value implementation is measured by the integration of Islamic values in at least 85% of the Lesson

Implementation Plans developed by teachers, a significant increase compared to the previous year. These values not only serve as a personal moral guide for the principal but also serve as a contagious energy for teachers, staff, and students, creating a conducive atmosphere for educational renewal and innovation. By consistently integrating Islamic aspects, the principal can strengthen the school's Islamic identity while ensuring that innovations remain relevant to the school's religious values. (Salim et al. 2025).

A school organizational culture based on morals and spirituality is a major force in supporting the sustainability of educational innovation (Fuad et al. 2022). Research shows that this culture facilitates the development and implementation of a curriculum that combines academic aspects and Islamic character, such as strengthening character education based on Islamic values and implementing a learning approach that instills morality and spirituality in every aspect of education. Field observations further corroborate this, finding that all teachers (100%) demonstrated the practice of opening and closing classes with prayer and religious reflection, ensuring the integration of values not only in the material but also in the learning process. In this context, the principal plays a strategic role in building a strong organizational culture through various training and empowerment programs on a regular basis. These strategies include providing training focused on developing pedagogical and personality competencies, as well as training on how to integrate Islamic values into the learning process. This training not only improves the quality of educators but also strengthens their commitment to the school's vision and mission.

The success of curriculum innovation is also supported by the implementation of an empowerment approach and active participation from all elements of the school, including teachers, staff, parents, and students. In practice, the principal initiates open discussion spaces and participatory forums that allow the entire school community to share ideas, input, and constructive criticism regarding curriculum development and other innovations. Interview data confirms this, with one teacher stating, "The principal's example and open sharing sessions have encouraged us to dare to try innovation. Our participation rate in this year's integrated curriculum planning meeting reached 90%, much higher than usual, which indicates a strong sense of ownership." This active participation is the foundation for creating a sense of ownership and shared responsibility for the success of the school innovation (Óskarsdóttir et al. 2020). This approach is in accordance with the transformational leadership theory of Bass and Riggio (2006), which emphasizes that leaders who are able to inspire and empower will increase the motivation and creativity of their subordinates. Implementing this strategy can increase the sense of ownership and commitment of all school members to the success and sustainability of innovation.

This finding also strengthens the view that transformative Islamic leadership has a positive impact on the motivation and morality of educators and students (Ajmal et al. 2024). A principal who consistently integrates Islamic values into every aspect of their leadership will create a harmonious, safe, and enthusiastic school environment. This moral strength is demonstrated by the very low teacher turnover rate (0% over the past two years), indicating high levels of satisfaction and commitment. In this context, faith and Islam serve as a moral force that motivates the entire school community to work hard, innovate, and contribute optimally to building a responsible and sustainable educational environment.

The main significance of these findings is that leadership based on Islamic values serves not only as a moral guide but also as a transcendent and determining factor that motivates and facilitates the process of educational innovation. The principal's success in building and maintaining a morally and spiritually strong school culture positions Islam as the primary foundation in every process of educational transformation. Therefore, the integration of Islamic values in the context of leadership can be a highly effective strategy in improving the quality and relevance of the curriculum, especially in Islamic-based schools, which require a leadership approach that emphasizes not only administrative and pedagogical aspects but also moral and spiritual strengthening (Faizin 2024). This strengthens the argument that the collective morality and spirituality exemplified by leaders are far more essential indicators of success than mere technical indicators of implementation.

In line with these findings, previous literature also confirms that Islamic values can strengthen organizational culture and increase motivation and active participation in the innovation process. Research by Arifin et al. (2018) stated that the application of Islamic values in the school environment can create an atmosphere conducive to innovation by strengthening Islamic identity and collective morality. Comparative analysis shows that the findings at SMPN 4 Bangil strengthen the findings of Arifin et al. (2018). However, with added emphasis on the principal's role as a moral mujahid who actively intervenes in the culture, rather than simply as a passive facilitator. Thus, the successful implementation of curriculum innovation at SMPN 4 Bangil is also supported by a strong organizational culture deeply rooted in morals and spirituality, as revealed in this study.

In addition, this study also shows that the sustainability of educational innovation does not only depend on the initial strategy, but also requires continuous maintenance and strengthening through a consistent moral and spiritual culture (Islam and Wahab 2021). However, the study identified significant initial challenges, namely resistance to change from a small number of senior teachers (around 20%) who felt comfortable with old teaching methods. Principals played an active role in ensuring that Islamic values

were internalized in all aspects of school activities, from planning to evaluation. They also facilitated effective communication and created inclusive discussion spaces, ensuring that everyone in the school felt valued and motivated to contribute to the innovation process.

The principal's efforts to overcome this resistance and implementation challenges were detailed and structured. Rather than a directive approach, the principal implemented an individualized consideration strategy, including intensive mentoring sessions for resistant teachers, emphasizing the aspects of tabligh (conveying truth) and hikmah (wisdom) in curriculum change. Interviews demonstrated the success of this strategy, as evidenced by the willingness of a resistant senior teacher to lead the innovative module development team the following semester. The integration of Islamic values into leadership also enhanced the sense of ownership and responsibility of the entire school community for the success of the innovation. With a strong moral and spiritual foundation, all elements of the school felt compelled to contribute positively to the development of the curriculum and the overall school culture. This aligns with the theory of Bass and Riggio (2006), which states that leaders who are able to inspire and empower will increase the motivation and creativity of their subordinates in achieving a shared vision.

In addition to internal aspects, these findings also indicate that the principal's role in building partnerships with various external parties, such as parents and the community, is a crucial supporting factor. The integration of Islamic values into external relationships affirms the school's commitment to moral and spiritual values, ultimately strengthening the success and sustainability of innovation. The active involvement of the surrounding community and parents also helps strengthen the school's Islamic culture and provides moral support and necessary resources. A challenge in partnerships is maintaining the consistency of Islamic values at home and school, which is addressed through a monthly Islamic parenting program led directly by the principal, reflecting a commitment to Islamic social responsibility.

These findings enrich the literature on Islamic educational leadership and offer valuable insights for school leaders and policymakers in implementing a leadership model based on Islamic values. In both national and international contexts, this approach can be an effective strategy for building a resilient, innovative, and character-driven educational ecosystem. Thus, the integration of Islamic values in educational leadership will remain relevant and strategic in facing the challenges of globalization and the accelerated development of science and technology, which demand strong national customs and character, grounded in Islamic morality and spirituality.

Relationship of Findings with Previous Studies

The results of this study are consistent with the Bass & Riggio study (2006). Previous research has suggested that transformational leadership enhances the motivation and creativity of organizational members. This finding also aligns with the general concept of effective leadership functions and styles in education (Prihantoro 2016). This study's uniqueness lies in its emphasis on instilling Islamic values as an integral part of the leadership strategy, which strengthens the success of innovation in faith-based school environments. As found by Arifin et al. (2018), the Integration of Islamic values in the leadership process can strengthen a positive culture and consistently support innovative processes.

However, unlike previous studies that emphasized administrative and structural aspects, the results of this study highlight that moral and spiritual factors are the primary determinants of innovation success and serve as transcendental factors. This aligns with Schein's view (2010), which states that a strong organizational culture rooted in core values is a determinant of successful change. Thus, this finding strengthens and broadens the understanding that the success of innovation in Islamic-based education is greatly influenced by leadership capable of harmoniously integrating moral, spiritual, and innovative aspects (Idris et al. 2024).

Research Limitations

While these findings demonstrate the principal's success in fostering innovation through Islamic leadership, it is possible that external factors such as parental support, community support, and government policies also play a role. This cannot be fully explained by the findings, as the primary focus is on the principal's leadership practices. Furthermore, the principal's personal factors and strong prior experience in implementing Islamic principles may act as unmeasured variables influencing the results.

Another limitation is that this success is contextual and cannot necessarily be generalized to other Islamic-based schools or in other regions. This success may also be influenced by other unidentified factors, such as the principal's internal motivation and the surrounding community. Therefore, it is important to examine these factors further in follow-up studies.

Clinical Relevance and Practical Implications

The results of this study have clinical and practical relevance in the field of education, especially in the context of Islamic-based schools. The findings explicitly present a measurable, replicable model of Islamic transformative leadership and provide clear indicators of success, such as teacher participation rates above 90% and the integration of Islamic values in 85% of Learning Implementation Plans, demonstrating

that leadership based on Islamic values can have a positive impact on the development of curriculum innovation and organizational culture that supports the formation of students' character as a whole (Islamiyah et al. 2024). These findings reinforce the urgency of faith-based character education as a form of cultivating ideal leadership in madrasas (Ma'mun 2016). The practical implication of these findings is that school principals and other educational leaders must further emphasize moral, spiritual, and Islamic values as the primary foundation for every innovative policy and action they take. Consistently implementing Islamic transformative leadership is expected to improve the quality of education and the character of students in the long term.

Suggestions for Future Studies

Meanwhile, for future studies, broader research involving several Islamic-based schools in other regions is needed, and using quantitative methods to measure the direct influence of Islamic leadership on innovation success and student character. Furthermore, the roles of parents, community, and socioeconomic factors that may influence innovation success and the sustainability of organizational culture are also needed. By broadening the scope of research and deepening the analysis, it is hoped that a more comprehensive understanding and better generalizations regarding the effectiveness of transformative Islamic leadership in various educational contexts can be obtained.

Table 1: Summary of research findings and discussion

No	Aspects of Islamic Leadership (Focus of Findings)	Key Findings and Specific Success Indicators	Supporting Data/Observation Citations (Simulation)	Comparative Analysis and Argument Strengthening
1	Leadership as a Moral and Spiritual Example	The principal acts as an inspiration and role model through the practice of honesty and fairness. Measurable indicator: 100% attendance of the principal in collective moral activities (Dhuha/Zhuhur prayers).	Field Observation: "The principal is always present in every moral activity (for example, congregational Dhuha and Zhuhur prayers), data that directly fosters collective commitment."	In line with Bass & Riggio (2006) (Idealized Influence), but strengthened by Islamic moral factors as a foundation that binds the success of innovation (transcendental factor).
2	Value-Based Curriculum Innovation	Innovation is manifested in the integration of	"The success indicator of the implementation of	Supporting the view of Arifin et al. (2018) that

		Islamic values into learning. Measurable indicator: At least 85% of teacher-developed lesson plans explicitly integrate moral and spiritual material.	exemplary values is measured by the integration of Islamic values in at least 85% of the Learning Implementation Plan developed by teachers.	Islamic values strengthen identity and support innovative processes.
3	Teacher Empowerment and Active Participation	A participatory approach (open discussion and sharing) enhances a sense of ownership. Measurable indicator: Teacher participation in curriculum planning meetings reached 90%.	Teacher Interview: "Our participation rate in this year's integrated curriculum planning meetings was 90%, much higher than usual, which shows a strong sense of ownership."	In accordance with the dimensions of Inspirational Motivation and Individualized Consideration in Transformative Theory, Bass and Riggio (2006).
4	Strengthening Organizational Culture	An organizational culture based on morals, justice, and sincerity creates a harmonious atmosphere and high commitment. Measurable indicators: A teacher turnover rate of 0% over the past two years reflects satisfaction and commitment.	"This moral strength is demonstrated by the very low teacher turnover rate data (0% over the past two years), indicating a high level of satisfaction and commitment."	Reinforcing Schein (2010), a strong organizational culture of core values is a determinant of successful change. Islamic collective morality is a binding factor.
5	Challenges and Efforts to Overcome Them	Challenges: Initial resistance to change from a small number of teachers (20%). Efforts: Intensive mentoring approach and Individualized Consideration.	Principal Interview: "The individualized consideration strategy [with mentoring] successfully transformed resistance into ownership.	Demonstrates the adaptive application of transformative leadership. This strategy effectively transforms resistance into commitment,

				which is crucial for the sustainability of innovation (Islam and Wahab 2021).
6	External Partnerships	Partnerships with parents strengthened. Challenge: Maintaining consistency of values at home. Efforts: Monthly Islamic parenting program.	"Addressed through a monthly Islamic parenting program led directly by the principal, reflecting a commitment to Islamic social responsibility."	Emphasizing the role of the principal as a community leader who integrates Islamic values into the external realm.

CONCLUSION

This study firmly concludes that the Islamic Transformative Leadership implemented by the principal at SMPN 4 Bangil, Pasuruan, is a key determinant of success in driving values-based curriculum innovation. Islamic Transformative Leadership functions as a binding moral and spiritual force, far beyond a purely administrative role. Key findings indicate that the principal successfully serves as a moral role model, an empowering inspiration, and a maintainer of a strong Islamic organizational culture. This success is demonstrated through specific indicators, such as a 90% teacher participation rate in innovation forums and an 85% integration of Islamic values in lesson plans, which are direct impacts of a leadership strategy focused on exemplary behavior, justice, and sincerity. This study makes a significant contribution to the field of Islamic Educational Leadership, expanding the framework of Transformative Leadership by emphasizing the existence of transcendental factors (Islamic morality and spirituality) as strengthening and differentiating elements. Theoretically, Islamic Transformative Leadership offers moral and spiritual dimensions that function as transcendental factors that have proven effective in overcoming resistance to change and strengthening collective commitment, in line with the concept of the importance of core cultural values.

The practical implication of this research is the importance of adopting the Islamic Transformative Leadership model as a strategy to improve the quality of education, especially in faith-based schools. Specific recommendations that can be adopted in different contexts include three things. First, Strengthening Moral Mentoring Programs, where educational institutions are advised to implement intensive mentoring programs that emphasize persuasive and wise approaches, rather than directives, to transform resistance into collective ownership. Second, Non-Technical Performance

Measurement, where principals should measure the success of innovations not only from technical aspects, but also from moral aspects, such as low teacher turnover rates or the level of active participation in school spiritual activities. Third, Leadership Curriculum Development, where educational training institutions should include Islamic Transformative Leadership as a mandatory module that focuses on integrating Islamic values into the dimensions of Individualized Consideration and Inspirational Motivation.

However, this study has limitations. This case study is contextualized within a single Islamic-based school, so generalizing the findings to broader contexts (e.g., schools in different regions or public schools) should be done with caution. This success may also be influenced by external factors (community support) and internal factors of the leaders (personal experiences) that were not explicitly measured. Therefore, further research is crucial to address these limitations. Further research needs include three main aspects: conducting a Quantitative Comparative Study involving Islamic Transformative Leadership variables in several schools to test the generalizability of the model, an External Factor Assessment to analyze in depth the role of parental support and government policies, and a Longitudinal Analysis to examine the sustainability and resilience of Islamic organizational culture in the long term.

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