

Transformational Leadership in Integrating Quality Management Systems and a Culture of Recognition: A Case Study of Darussalam Islamic Boarding School in Martapura

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to reconstruct a model of transformational leadership in the integration of quality management systems and a culture of recognition at the Darussalam Islamic Boarding School in Martapura. A qualitative approach using a case study design was employed to understand leadership practices in context through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The study involved 12 informants consisting of school leaders, teachers/instructors, administrators, and educational staff, with fieldwork conducted over approximately four months. Data analysis was conducted thematically using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña interactive model, ensuring validity through triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. The research findings indicate that transformational leadership functions as an integrative mechanism unifying three main layers: (1) value-based leadership through moral exemplarity and the internalization of vision as the foundation of quality, (2) systemic quality integration through reflective evaluation and continuous innovation, and (3) culture of recognition reinforcement through formal and symbolic rewards grounded in religious values that strengthen intrinsic motivation. These three layers operate cyclically: values drive the system, the system shapes quality habits, and the culture of recognition maintains the sustainability of performance. Theoretically, these findings suggest that the effectiveness of quality management in Islamic boarding schools cannot be explained solely through a managerial approach, but rather through the integration of moral leadership, organizational systems, and a culture of recognition. In practice, this model may serve as a reference for other Islamic boarding schools seeking to improve quality without losing their Islamic identity. As a single-case study, the findings should be interpreted contextually and require further validation in other *pesantren* settings.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Transformational leadership is a leadership paradigm that emphasizes a leader's ability to transform the values, attitudes, and behaviors of organizational members to achieve a shared vision in a sustainable manner. This concept was first introduced by Burns [1] and later developed more systematically by Bass [2]. In its development, transformational leadership encompasses four main dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration [3]. These four dimensions make transformational leadership not merely a managerial style but a strategic approach to building a strong and adaptive organizational culture.

In the educational context, transformational leadership has been shown to have a significant relationship with improved teacher performance, organizational commitment, and the quality culture of educational institutions [4],[5]. Transformational leaders are able to create a shared vision, foster innovation, and build a collaborative work environment. This is crucial in facing the challenges of globalization, competition in educational quality, and public demands for accountability from educational institutions, including Islamic boarding schools.

Quality management in education has evolved from the concept of Total Quality Management (TQM), which emphasizes continuous improvement, a focus on stakeholders, and the involvement of all organizational components [6],[7]. In the context of *pesantren*, quality management systems refer not only to administrative procedures but also to institutional mechanisms such as standard operating procedures (SOPs), academic supervision, curriculum control, performance evaluation systems, organizational governance, and continuous quality improvement practices. In educational institutions, quality is not merely defined by academic achievements but also encompasses the quality of processes, organizational culture, and stakeholder satisfaction. Therefore, the implementation of quality management requires integration between structural systems and a supportive organizational culture.

However, the implementation of quality management systems often faces challenges when not accompanied by a strong culture of recognition. In this study, the culture of recognition refers not only to formal reward systems but also to symbolic appreciation, public acknowledgment, interpersonal trust, moral support, and spiritual motivation that reinforce organizational commitment. Recognition systems play a crucial role in strengthening both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among organizational members [8]. In motivation theory, appropriate recognition and appreciation can enhance job satisfaction, commitment, and individual performance [9]. Empirical research indicates that recognition practices aligned with the vision of transformational leadership significantly influence organizational effectiveness [7];[10].

In the context of Islamic education, particularly in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), leadership possesses unique characteristics because it is not merely administrative but also spiritual and cultural. The *kyai*, or head of the *pesantren*, serves as a central figure who shapes the values, norms, and educational orientation [11]. Therefore, the integration of quality management systems and a culture of recognition within the *pesantren*

is significantly influenced by the leadership style employed. Research indicates that transformational leadership in Islamic educational institutions can enhance the professionalism of educators and strengthen the institution's quality culture [12].

Pondok Pesantren Darussalam Martapura was selected as the research site because it is one of the largest and most historic Islamic boarding schools in South Kalimantan, with a complex and multi-layered educational structure. The *pesantren* has broad social influence, a long-standing tradition of Islamic education, and an institutional commitment to maintaining educational quality while preserving its religious identity. In addition, the boarding school has implemented organizational management practices involving academic supervision, evaluation systems, and leadership-based quality development, making it a relevant setting for examining the integration of transformational leadership, quality management systems, and a culture of recognition.

Although various studies have examined transformational leadership in education, research that specifically explains how transformational leadership simultaneously integrates quality management systems and a culture of recognition within the context of Islamic boarding schools remains limited. Existing studies tend to focus on leadership effectiveness, teacher performance, or organizational commitment separately, without providing an integrative explanation of how leadership connects moral values, institutional systems, and recognition practices into a sustainable quality culture [13]. However, according to modern organizational theory, institutional effectiveness is largely determined by the alignment between formal structures and informal organizational culture [14]. This gap indicates the need for a more comprehensive model capable of explaining the interaction between leadership, quality systems, and recognition culture in *pesantren*-based educational institutions.

Thus, research is needed that not only describes transformational leadership practices but also reconstructs an integrative model explaining how such leadership can comprehensively synergize quality management systems and a culture of recognition. This research is important because it can provide theoretical contributions to the development of a quality-based Islamic educational leadership model, as well as practical contributions to the sustainable management of Islamic boarding schools.

Based on the above discussion, this study focuses on developing a model of transformational leadership in integrating quality management systems and a culture of recognition at the Darussalam Islamic Boarding School in Martapura. This study is expected to enrich the literature on Islamic educational leadership and serve as a reference for the development of quality management in Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia.

2. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of transformational leadership practices in integrating quality management systems and a culture of recognition at the Darussalam Islamic Boarding School in Martapura, South Kalimantan. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for a holistic and contextual exploration of phenomena based on participants'

perspectives [15]. The case study design was used to examine a single social unit intensively and in depth within a real-world context [16].

The study involved 12 informants coded as W1-W12. Informants were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in leadership practices, quality management implementation, academic supervision, organizational governance, and institutional evaluation activities within the *pesantren*. The selection criteria included: (1) having a minimum of three years of service at the institution, (2) being actively involved in managerial, educational, or administrative processes related to quality management, and (3) possessing knowledge of leadership practices and organizational culture within the *pesantren*. Informants consisted of school leaders, administrators, teachers/*ustadz*, and educational staff. Data collection continued until data saturation was reached, indicated by the repetition of themes and the absence of substantially new information in the final interviews [17]. This approach aligns with the principle that qualitative research prioritizes data depth and meaning over participant quantity [18].

Table 1. Research Informants

Code	Role	Years of Service	Relevance to Quality Management
W1	Senior Representative	20 years	Institutional leadership and policy direction
W2	Senior Teacher	15 years	Academic quality and teacher performance
W3	Senior <i>Ustadz</i>	12 years	Curriculum implementation and evaluation
W4	Vice Principal/Coordinator	10 years	Vision internalization and supervision
W5	Young Religious Teacher	5 years	Operational implementation of quality culture
W6	Curriculum Staff	8 years	Academic evaluation and curriculum control
W7	Academic Administrator	9 years	SOP implementation and performance monitoring
W8	Administrative Staff	7 years	Institutional administration and coordination
W9	Dormitory Manager	11 years	Student supervision and organizational culture
W10	Student Affairs Coordinator	13 years	Student development and recognition practices
W11	Educational Administrative Staff	6 years	Documentation and evaluation systems
W12	Institutional Management Staff	14 years	Governance and organizational coordination

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all 12 informants to explore dimensions of transformational leadership, quality management integration strategies, supervision practices, and the implementation of a culture of recognition [19]. Interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and were conducted in participants' offices, meeting rooms, classrooms, and other institutional settings within the *pesantren* environment. All interviews were conducted primarily in Bahasa Indonesia, with several contextual terms expressed in Banjar language and Arabic religious expressions commonly used within the *pesantren* culture. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim to ensure analytical accuracy. Examples of interview questions included: "How does leadership influence the implementation of quality

management practices in the *pesantren*?", "How are evaluation and supervision processes conducted?", and "How does the institution provide recognition or appreciation to teachers and staff?"

Participatory observations were conducted over approximately four months during academic, administrative, and organizational activities within the *pesantren*. The observations focused on leadership interactions, evaluation meetings, academic supervision practices, religious activities, coordination forums, disciplinary practices, and forms of formal and informal recognition among organizational members [20]. An observation guide was used to maintain consistency in recording behavioral patterns, communication styles, leadership practices, and organizational culture related to quality management and recognition systems. Field notes were written systematically after each observation session to document contextual details and researcher reflections.

Document analysis was conducted to strengthen data validity through triangulation [21]. The analyzed documents included institutional vision and mission statements, standard operating procedures (SOPs), academic supervision documents, teacher evaluation reports, meeting minutes, organizational regulations, curriculum documents, performance evaluation records, reward and recognition records, and institutional quality assurance reports. These documents were examined to identify the alignment between formal institutional systems and the leadership practices observed in the field.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña [22], which includes data condensation, data presentation, and the drawing and verification of conclusions. The coding process was conducted in several stages. First, open coding was applied to identify significant statements and recurring concepts from interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents. Second, related codes were grouped through axial coding into broader thematic categories such as moral leadership, quality system integration, reflective evaluation, supervision practices, symbolic recognition, and spiritual motivation. Third, selective coding was used to connect these themes into the reconstructed three-layer model consisting of: (1) value-based leadership, (2) systemic quality integration, and (3) culture of recognition reinforcement. This thematic analysis referred to the dimensions of transformational leadership [3], the principles of continuous quality management [7], and reward and motivation theory in organizational behavior [8],[9].

Researcher reflexivity was applied throughout the research process because moral, spiritual, and cultural values strongly influence leadership and *pesantren* culture. The researchers continuously reflected on their assumptions, social backgrounds, and interpretive positions to minimize subjective bias during data collection and analysis. Reflexive notes were maintained throughout the fieldwork process to document analytical considerations and interactions with participants.

Ethical considerations were carefully maintained throughout the study. Institutional permission was formally obtained from the leadership of the Darussalam Islamic Boarding School before data collection commenced. All participants provided informed consent after receiving explanations regarding the study's objectives, procedures, and confidentiality measures. Participant anonymity was protected through the use of coded identifiers (W1-W12), and all interview data were stored securely for research purposes only.

Data validity was ensured through triangulation of techniques and sources [23], member checking, and peer debriefing to enhance the credibility and consistency of interpretations [24]. Thus, this method not only produces a phenomenological description but also constructs an integrative model of transformational leadership based on quality management within the context of Islamic boarding schools.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

The research findings indicate that transformational leadership at the Darussalam Islamic Boarding School in Martapura, South Kalimantan, is implemented systematically through the integration of leadership dimensions, the strengthening of the quality management system, and the establishment of a sustainable culture of recognition. Based on thematic analysis, three main findings were identified that form an integrative model of quality-based leadership.

Internalization of Vision and Values as the Foundation of the Quality System

Interview results indicate that the internalization of vision and values serves as the primary foundation for the integration of the quality management system at the Darussalam Martapura Islamic Boarding School in South Kalimantan. The dimensions of idealized influence and inspirational motivation appeared dominant in leadership practices. The school's leadership did not merely function as administrators but also as moral figures embodying institutional values. Exemplary conduct served as the primary instrument for transforming organizational quality culture. One informant (W1) stated: *"The leadership doesn't just give orders; they set a direct example in punctuality, commitment to teaching, and simplicity. That's what makes us follow without feeling forced."*

Another informant (W4) added: *"The vision of quality is always conveyed in study sessions and meetings, but it's not just a slogan. We are guided on how to translate it into our daily tasks."*

Thematic coding results revealed that "Leadership by Example" emerged in all 12 informants, followed by "Trustworthiness and Discipline" (11 informants), and "Internalization of Vision" (10 informants). Rather than relying solely on technical-administrative control, the findings indicate that the quality management system in the *pesantren* is rooted in moral legitimacy and value internalization.

The findings were also supported by observational and documentary evidence. During coordination meetings and religious study sessions, researchers observed that leaders consistently arrived earlier than participants, opened discussions with religious reflections related to responsibility and discipline, and directly participated in institutional activities. Observation notes further showed that leaders often emphasized collective improvement rather than punishment when discussing performance issues.

Table 2. Frequency of Main Themes from Interview Data

Theme		Number of Informants	Representative Evidence	Interpretation
Leadership Example	by	12	Leaders demonstrate punctuality, discipline, and commitment	Moral exemplarity strengthens organizational legitimacy
Trustworthiness and Discipline		11	SOPs linked with <i>amanah</i> (trustworthiness) values	Quality systems are integrated with religious ethics
Internalization of Vision	of	10	Vision consistently communicated in meetings and study sessions	Shared understanding supports institutional quality culture
Reflective Evaluation		10	Regular reflection forums and supervision practices	Evaluation functions as organizational learning
Participatory Innovation		9	Teachers involved in proposing improvements	Leadership encourages bottom-up innovation
Symbolic Recognition		11	Public appreciation and personal acknowledgment	Recognition strengthens intrinsic motivation
Spiritual Motivation		8	Work understood as part of religious service	Religious values sustain organizational commitment

Document analysis reinforced these findings. Institutional SOPs and teacher evaluation forms explicitly incorporated values such as discipline, responsibility, and trustworthiness (*amanah*) as evaluation indicators. Meeting minutes from monthly coordination forums also demonstrated that quality discussions were framed not only in technical terms but also in moral and religious language. An academic administrator (W7) explained: “*We formulate work rules by considering the value of trustworthiness. Evaluation is not about finding faults, but about maintaining trust.*”

However, several challenges were also identified. Some teachers perceived evaluation procedures as administratively burdensome, particularly during periods of accreditation preparation. Observations revealed that participation in reflective forums was occasionally dominated by senior staff, while younger teachers were sometimes hesitant to express criticism openly due to cultural respect toward senior leadership. In addition, several informants acknowledged that forms of recognition were not always perceived equally among staff members, especially regarding strategic assignments and leadership trust. These findings indicate that while the culture of recognition strengthened institutional commitment, tensions related to hierarchy and workload remained present within organizational practice.

Thus, the integration of the quality management system begins with the alignment of spiritual values and organizational work standards. The principle of continuous improvement is interpreted not merely as technical enhancement but also as a moral responsibility. Regular deliberation forums, supervision activities, and institutional meetings function simultaneously as spaces for value internalization and participatory quality control mechanisms. Conceptually, these findings indicate that the quality system in Islamic boarding schools does not function as a rigid administrative structure, but rather is integrated into the religious culture permeating the organization’s daily life.

Integration of the Quality Management System through Intellectual Stimulation

The dimension of intellectual stimulation was evident in leadership practices at *Pondok Pesantren Darussalam Martapura* through systematic efforts to encourage innovation, reflection, and continuous improvement. The boarding school leadership did not view the quality management system as a static administrative tool, but as a dynamic mechanism continuously evaluated and refined through the active participation of teachers and educational staff. Routine evaluation programs, academic supervision, and periodic reflection forums served as institutional spaces stimulating critical thinking and the renewal of educational practices.

Interview results indicate that the leadership consciously fostered a dialogic environment enabling the emergence of new ideas from different organizational levels. A senior *ustadz* (W3) stated: *“At the end of every semester, we’re always asked to submit an evaluation, not just an activity report, but also suggestions for improvement. Even small details like teaching methods or scheduling can be discussed together.”* This statement indicates that evaluation did not stop at measuring achievements but functioned as a mechanism for organizational learning. Another informant from the curriculum department (W6) added: *Supervision isn’t about finding faults. Rather, after supervision, we’re invited to discuss how to improve our teaching methods. We feel guided, not monitored.”*

Observational data confirmed this pattern. Researchers observed several academic supervision sessions in which school leaders used dialogic approaches rather than one-way evaluation. Teachers were encouraged to reflect on classroom practices, discuss learning obstacles, and propose alternative teaching strategies. In monthly coordination meetings, leaders frequently posed reflective questions such as “What needs to be improved?” rather than emphasizing mistakes or sanctions. This communication pattern created a psychologically safe environment for organizational participation. A dormitory manager (W9) stated: *“During monthly meetings, administrators always ask: ‘What do we need to improve?’ Not ‘what’s wrong.’ That question encourages us to voice our opinions.”*

Document analysis also demonstrated that intellectual stimulation was institutionalized through formal mechanisms. Evaluation reports, supervision forms, and meeting minutes documented recurring cycles of planning, implementation, reflection, and follow-up action. One meeting report showed that suggestions from teachers regarding the simplification of attendance procedures and adjustments to religious study schedules were formally adopted into institutional policy. An administrative staff member (W11) explained: *“The student evaluation format currently in use is the result of a proposal made by the teachers during last semester’s reflection session. The leadership immediately approved it and asked us to refine it further.”*

Despite these positive findings, several tensions were identified. Some staff members expressed difficulties adapting to continuous evaluation demands due to limited administrative capacity and workload accumulation. Observation findings indicated that documentation requirements occasionally increased teachers’ administrative burden, especially during periods of institutional reporting and accreditation preparation. Furthermore, while participatory discussions were encouraged, final decision-making

authority remained highly centralized in senior leadership structures, reflecting the continuing influence of traditional *pesantren* hierarchy.

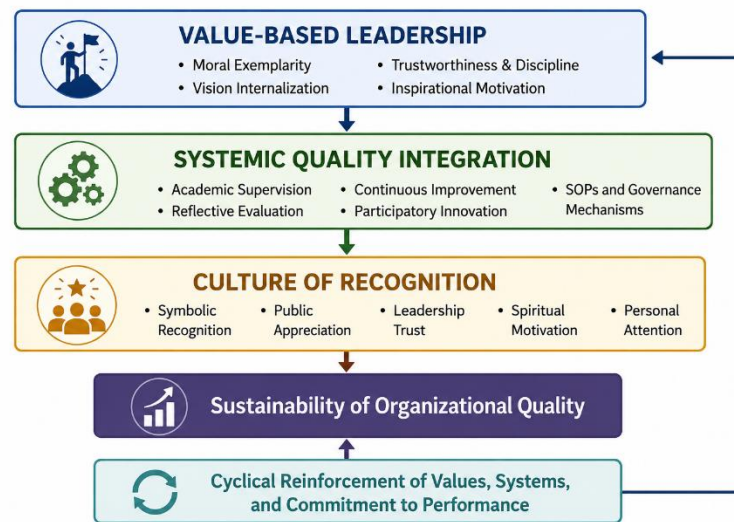


Figure 1. Integrative Model of Transformational Leadership Based on Quality in Islamic Boarding Schools

Figure 1 illustrates the integrative model of transformational leadership reconstructed from the field findings. The first layer, value-based leadership, functions as the moral foundation of the quality system through exemplary leadership, internalization of vision, and religious values. The second layer, systemic quality integration, represents operational mechanisms such as supervision, evaluation, reflective forums, and innovation processes that sustain continuous improvement. The third layer, culture of recognition reinforcement, maintains organizational commitment through symbolic appreciation, trust, public acknowledgment, and spiritual motivation. The arrows in the figure demonstrate the cyclical relationship between these three layers, values shape systems, systems cultivate quality-oriented habits, and the culture of recognition reinforces commitment to both values and performance sustainability.

Thus, intellectual stimulation is not only evident in the encouragement of innovative thinking but is institutionalized within the boarding school's quality management mechanisms. Transformational leadership serves as a driving force animating the cycle of continuous improvement through dialogue, reflection, and the courage to innovate. The quality system becomes sustainable because it is supported by adaptive leadership practices, participatory organizational culture, and moral legitimacy rooted in *pesantren* values.

The Development of a Culture of Recognition as a Quality Enhancer

Research findings indicate that the culture of recognition at the Darussalam Martapura Islamic Boarding School serves as a key driver of quality management sustainability. This culture is not only manifested through formal institutional mechanisms but also through informal symbolic, moral, and spiritual practices embedded in the daily life of the *pesantren*. The combination of these forms of recognition creates an appreciative

organizational climate that strengthens the intrinsic motivation of teachers and educational staff.

Formal recognition is expressed through strategic assignments, leadership trust, acknowledgment in official meetings, and institutional appreciation before the boarding school community. A senior teacher (W2) stated: *“We never seek recognition, but when our name is mentioned in a meeting as a disciplined or innovative teacher, it feels deeply valued and motivates us to do even better.”*

This finding indicates that public acknowledgment functions as a strong psychological motivator even without substantial material incentives. Observation data confirmed that during monthly coordination meetings and institutional forums, leaders frequently recognized teachers and staff who demonstrated discipline, innovation, or commitment to educational activities. Researchers observed that such recognition was often delivered publicly in front of colleagues, creating collective encouragement for maintaining performance quality.

Document analysis also supported these findings. Meeting minutes and institutional evaluation records showed that appreciation practices were formally integrated into organizational routines, particularly during semester evaluations, teacher coordination forums, and institutional reflection meetings. Several documents also indicated that trusted personnel were frequently assigned strategic responsibilities as a form of professional acknowledgment and leadership confidence.

Meanwhile, informal recognition appeared even more dominant in daily organizational interactions. The interpersonal closeness between leaders and members fostered a family-oriented atmosphere that strengthened emotional attachment and institutional loyalty. An administrative staff member (W8) explained: *“Sometimes the leader simply pats us on the shoulder and says, ‘Thank you for your dedication.’ That simple phrase makes us feel that this work is meaningful.”*

This kind of symbolic appreciation reflects the dimension of individualized consideration in transformational leadership, where leaders provide personal attention and emotional support to organizational members. Observations further revealed that leaders regularly engaged in informal conversations with teachers and staff after meetings, religious gatherings, and educational activities. These interactions strengthened interpersonal trust and reduced hierarchical distance within the institution.

Other findings indicate that leadership trust itself constitutes an important form of recognition. A young religious teacher (W5) stated: *“I was once entrusted with the role of activity coordinator, even though I was still new. That made me feel trusted, and I tried to fulfil that responsibility as best as I could.”*

This trust functions not merely as a structural assignment but also as a moral acknowledgment of individual capability and commitment. Such recognition encourages stronger responsibility and dedication to institutional quality. The culture of recognition in the *pesantren* is also closely connected with spiritual values. Appreciation is not primarily interpreted as material reward, but as part of worship, sincerity, and service to the institution. A student affairs manager (W10) explained: *“The leadership often reminds us that every act*

of service will be rewarded. So, we work not for the sake of compensation, but because of that awareness."

This integration of recognition practices with spiritual values distinguishes the culture of recognition in Islamic boarding schools from conventional reward systems in many formal organizations. Motivation emerges not only from institutional acknowledgment but also from the internalization of religious meaning and moral responsibility reinforced through leadership communication and exemplary conduct.

However, the findings also revealed several challenges related to recognition practices. Some informants indicated that opportunities for strategic assignments were occasionally perceived as uneven, particularly between senior and junior staff members. Observation findings also showed that younger teachers sometimes felt hesitant to express dissatisfaction openly due to the *pesantren's* strong culture of respect toward senior leadership. In addition, limited institutional resources constrained the provision of material incentives, causing recognition practices to rely heavily on symbolic and moral appreciation. Despite these limitations, most participants still perceived the recognition culture positively because of its strong alignment with religious and communal values.

Thus, the culture of recognition functions as a cultural mechanism that sustains the stability and continuity of the quality management system. Formal recognition provides organizational legitimacy, while informal and spiritual recognition strengthens emotional commitment and institutional loyalty. The combination of these dimensions creates a work environment that is appreciative, participatory, and consistently oriented toward organizational quality improvement.

Integrative Model of Quality-Based Transformational Leadership

Based on the overall field findings, this study reconstructs an integrative model of quality-based transformational leadership implemented at the Darussalam Martapura Islamic Boarding School. As illustrated in Figure 1, the model was developed inductively from interview data, participatory observations, and document analysis. The model consists of three interconnected layers that operate cyclically to sustain institutional quality: value-based leadership, systemic quality integration, and culture of recognition reinforcement.

The first layer, value-based leadership, functions as the moral foundation of the quality system. The findings indicate that values such as integrity, discipline, simplicity, and responsibility are internalized not only through formal communication but also through the exemplary conduct of leaders in daily institutional life. A senior *ustadz* (W1) stated: "*We learn discipline not from written rules, but from seeing firsthand how leaders arrive earliest and leave latest.*"

Similarly, another informant (W4) explained that the *pesantren's* vision became effective because leadership consistently demonstrated the values they promoted in practice. These findings indicate that the legitimacy of the quality management system is rooted primarily in the moral legitimacy of leadership.

The second layer, systemic quality integration, represents the operational mechanisms through which quality management is institutionalized. The findings demonstrate that supervision, reflective evaluation, coordination meetings, and follow-up

discussions function as continuous organizational learning processes. A teacher (W3) explained that evaluation activities consistently produced practical improvements in schedules, teaching methods, and institutional coordination. In addition, participatory reflection forums enabled teachers and staff to contribute ideas for institutional improvement. A curriculum staff member (W6) stated: *“We’re given the space to propose improvements. Many new policies actually stem from teachers’ suggestions during reflection forums.”* This finding demonstrates that the quality management system functions not merely as an administrative instrument, but as a participatory mechanism supported by intellectual stimulation and collaborative leadership practices.

The third layer, culture of recognition reinforcement, serves as the mechanism sustaining organizational commitment and motivation. Recognition is expressed through public appreciation, professional trust, symbolic acknowledgment, and spiritual reinforcement. An administrative staff member (W8) stated that appreciation from leadership during institutional meetings often carried stronger motivational value than material incentives. Similarly, a young religious teacher (W5) explained that being entrusted with institutional responsibility strengthened personal commitment and accountability. These findings indicate that the culture of recognition reinforces intrinsic motivation through interpersonal trust, moral appreciation, and spiritual meaning.

The interaction among these three layers forms a continuous cycle of quality sustainability. Values shape institutional systems, systems cultivate quality-oriented organizational habits, and the culture of recognition reinforces long-term commitment to both performance and institutional values. This cyclical relationship was consistently reflected across interviews, observations, and institutional documents. An academic administrator (W7) summarized this interconnectedness as follows: *“Here, when leaders set an example, we follow through. After implementation, we evaluate it together. Then those who perform well are recognized. This cycle continues.”*

Overall, these findings indicate that the effectiveness of quality management in Islamic boarding schools is highly dependent on leadership’s ability to integrate moral values, organizational systems, and recognition practices simultaneously. Transformational leadership not only improves administrative effectiveness but also strengthens collective commitment and institutional identity. In the context of Islamic boarding schools, the integration of quality management systems and a culture of recognition cannot be separated from spiritual values and the moral exemplarity of leadership. This constitutes the primary conceptual contribution of the study to the development of quality-based Islamic educational leadership theory.

3.2. Discussion

Research findings at the Darussalam Islamic Boarding School in Martapura reveal that transformational leadership operates not merely at the level of leadership behavior, but at the deeper level of organizational architecture: how values shape systems, systems shape quality habits, and those habits are sustained through a culture of recognition. This pattern indicates that the effectiveness of quality management in *pesantren* cannot be explained solely through structural or procedural approaches, but rather through the integration of

moral, managerial, cultural, and spiritual dimensions driven by leadership practices. This finding supports organizational culture theory, positioning leaders as central actors in shaping institutional values and behavioral norms [14]. At the same time, it strengthens previous studies emphasizing that transformational leadership contributes significantly to institutional commitment, organizational learning, and quality-oriented educational culture [4], [5], [27], [28].

The moral exemplarity of leaders has proven to be a major source of legitimacy for the functioning of the quality management system. Standard operating procedures (SOPs), evaluations, supervision mechanisms, and organizational discipline are accepted not merely because they are administratively binding, but because they are perceived as aligned with values consistently demonstrated by leadership. This finding expands the concept of idealized influence [3] from charismatic influence toward a normative and ethical function that embeds moral legitimacy into institutional systems. Similar findings have been identified in *pesantren* leadership studies showing that religious authority and moral consistency strongly influence organizational obedience and institutional cohesion [11], [12]. Recent empirical evidence also confirms that value-driven leadership increases institutional trust, collective commitment, and organizational acceptance of quality systems in community-based educational institutions [27], [28], [31].

However, these findings also reveal a potential institutional vulnerability. The strong dependence on charismatic and moral leadership raises important questions regarding the long-term sustainability of the quality management system when leadership transitions occur. In many *pesantren* contexts, organizational legitimacy remains strongly attached to the authority of the kyai or senior religious leaders. Consequently, institutional stability may become vulnerable if future leaders are unable to maintain comparable moral authority, participatory communication, or exemplary conduct. This finding reflects broader critiques of transformational leadership theory, which warn that excessive dependence on charismatic authority may weaken organizational sustainability if systems are not sufficiently institutionalized [2], [25]. Therefore, although moral leadership strengthens institutional integration, the sustainability of quality management ultimately requires stronger procedural institutionalization, collective governance, and transparent organizational mechanisms beyond individual leadership figures.

The findings further demonstrate that intellectual stimulation institutionalized through supervision, reflection, evaluation, and participatory forums serves as an important mechanism for sustaining continuous improvement. The principle of continuous quality improvement [9],[7] appears in the *pesantren* context not merely as a technical management strategy, but as part of collective moral responsibility. Unlike modern organizations where quality improvement is often driven by external accountability pressures, the findings indicate that quality improvement in *pesantren* is also rooted in values of trust, service, and communal responsibility. This supports previous studies emphasizing that transformational leadership promotes organizational learning through participatory reflection, collaborative problem-solving, and adaptive innovation [29], [30], [32].

At the same time, the study identified several tensions and contradictions within the implementation of the quality management system. Some participants perceived evaluation

procedures, reporting requirements, and accreditation preparation as administratively burdensome, particularly for teachers balancing educational and managerial responsibilities. Observation findings also indicated that although participatory discussion was encouraged, strategic decision-making authority remained relatively centralized within senior leadership structures. This demonstrates that participatory management and hierarchical *pesantren* culture coexist simultaneously, occasionally creating tensions between collective participation and traditional authority patterns. Such findings are consistent with previous studies showing that Islamic educational institutions often negotiate between traditional leadership structures and modern organizational governance [12], [35].

Another important finding concerns the relationship between the *pesantren*'s quality management system and formal educational quality assurance standards. Although the institutional culture is strongly rooted in religious and moral values, the mechanisms implemented at Darussalam Martapura also reflect adaptation to broader national educational standards through academic supervision, curriculum control, periodic evaluation, documentation systems, and accreditation-oriented governance. This demonstrates that *pesantren* institutions are capable of integrating traditional Islamic educational values with formal accountability frameworks without fully losing their religious identity. Similar findings have been reported in studies examining the modernization of *pesantren* governance and the adaptation of Islamic educational institutions to national quality assurance systems [7], [33], [34].

The culture of recognition identified in this study also provides important insight into how institutional commitment and organizational quality are sustained over time. However, the findings indicate that recognition, reward, appreciation, and spiritual motivation represent interconnected but conceptually distinct dimensions. Recognition refers to acknowledgment of contribution or performance; reward generally refers to structured incentives or institutional compensation; appreciation refers more broadly to interpersonal respect and positive affirmation; while spiritual motivation emerges from religious meaning, sincerity, and the understanding of work as worship or service. In the *pesantren* context, these dimensions operate simultaneously through leadership communication, symbolic interaction, and religious culture. This finding strengthens previous research showing that transformational leadership enhances intrinsic motivation through individualized consideration and interpersonal trust [25], [31], [32].

Although symbolic and moral recognition appeared highly meaningful for many participants, this study does not claim that such recognition is universally more effective than material incentives. Rather, the findings suggest that symbolic appreciation, leadership trust, and spiritual reinforcement play a particularly important role within *pesantren* organizational culture because they align with collective religious values and communal identity. Material incentives remain important, particularly in supporting institutional welfare and professional sustainability, but their motivational effects appear to function alongside symbolic and spiritual dimensions rather than replacing them entirely. This interpretation is consistent with organizational behaviour studies emphasizing that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation often interact simultaneously within institutional settings [8], [9], [26].

The findings additionally raise concerns regarding fairness and sustainability within the culture of recognition itself. Because many recognition practices operate informally through leadership trust, symbolic appreciation, and interpersonal relationships, there is potential for perceptions of unequal recognition among organizational members. Several participants suggested that strategic opportunities and public acknowledgment were sometimes perceived as unevenly distributed, particularly between senior and junior staff members. This suggests that recognition systems may require greater procedural formalization to ensure transparency, fairness, and sustainability independent of personal leadership relationships. Such challenges are also discussed in leadership and organizational culture studies, emphasizing that informal recognition systems can strengthen solidarity while simultaneously generating perceptions of favouritism if not supported by transparent institutional mechanisms [31], [36].

From the perspective of Islamic educational leadership, these findings enrich previous *pesantren* leadership studies that have generally emphasized charismatic authority and cultural influence [7], [11], [12]. This study demonstrates that charismatic and moral authority can also function as organizational mechanisms supporting modern quality management practices and institutional governance. In this sense, *pesantren* leadership should not be understood as the antithesis of modern management, but *rather* as a culturally embedded leadership model capable of integrating spiritual values, organizational culture, and quality assurance systems. This finding aligns with broader studies linking religious values, organizational commitment, leadership legitimacy, and institutional performance [35], [36].

Conceptually, this study affirms that the effectiveness of quality management in Islamic educational institutions must be understood as the result of the integration of moral leadership, organizational systems, and a culture of recognition. Without values, systems risk becoming rigid administrative mechanisms; without systems, values risk remaining symbolic rhetoric; and without recognition, organizational commitment becomes difficult to sustain over time. The interaction among these dimensions forms a cyclical mechanism that sustains institutional quality, organizational legitimacy, and collective commitment simultaneously. This integrative perspective constitutes the primary contribution of the study to the development of quality-based Islamic educational leadership theory and provides a contextual explanation for the long-term sustainability of organizational quality in *pesantren* institutions.

4. CONCLUSION

Research at the Darussalam Islamic Boarding School in Martapura concluded that transformational leadership functions as an integrative force connecting moral values, quality management systems, and a culture of recognition within sustainable organizational practices. The findings indicate that organizational quality is not supported solely by administrative mechanisms, but also by exemplary leadership that provides ethical legitimacy to institutional systems, reflective evaluation mechanisms that encourage continuous improvement, and a culture of recognition that strengthens organizational commitment and intrinsic motivation. The reconstructed model consists of three

interconnected layers operating cyclically: value-based leadership as the moral foundation, systemic quality integration as the operational mechanism, and culture of recognition reinforcement as the sustaining mechanism. Values shape systems, systems cultivate quality-oriented organizational habits, and the culture of recognition reinforces long-term commitment to institutional performance and shared values.

Theoretically, these findings confirm that leadership within *pesantren*-based Islamic education can be understood as compatible with modern quality management paradigms through the integration of moral, structural, cultural, and spiritual dimensions. This study also contributes to the development of Islamic educational leadership theory by demonstrating that organizational quality in *pesantren* is sustained not only through formal governance structures, but also through moral legitimacy, participatory organizational learning, and culturally embedded recognition practices.

Practically, the findings suggest several important implications for the development of quality management in Islamic boarding schools. Educational institutions may strengthen organizational quality by developing value-based standard operating procedures (SOPs), creating reflective and participatory evaluation forums, institutionalizing fair and transparent recognition systems, and providing leadership development programs emphasizing transformational and spiritual leadership capacities. In addition, integrating religious values with formal quality assurance mechanisms may help *pesantren* maintain institutional identity while adapting to broader educational accountability standards.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. As a single-case qualitative study, the findings should be interpreted contextually within the organizational and cultural setting of Darussalam Martapura and may not automatically represent all *pesantren* contexts. In addition, the study relied primarily on participants' perceptions derived from interviews, observations, and document analysis without quantitative validation of leadership effectiveness or organizational performance outcomes. Future research is therefore needed to examine the consistency, transferability, and adaptability of the reconstructed model across different types of Islamic boarding schools, organizational cultures, and leadership structures through multi-site and mixed-methods approaches.

Overall, the reconstructed model offers a contextually grounded framework for understanding quality-oriented leadership in *pesantren*, but further research across multiple Islamic boarding schools is needed to examine its transferability and consistency.

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