Jurnal El-umdah

Jurnal Kajian Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir
doi: 10.26811/xxxx.xxxx.xxxx

TRANSFORMATIONAL-SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP AND AL-QUR'AN MEMORIZATION IN ISLAMIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS: A QUALITATIVE METASYNTHESIS

Anang Wahyudi Adnan
Master's Program in Islamic Education Management, Postgraduate Program, Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram, Indonesia
[1]*Correspondence Email: anangwa48@gmail.com*

Received: 2026-10-20	**Accepted:** 2026-11-13	**Published:** 2026-11-20

Abstract

Islamic schools increasingly place Al-Qur'an memorization (tahfiz) at the centre of their mission, yet leadership scholarship says little about how principals turn this spiritual practice into institutional quality. This article synthesizes 87 sources, comprising journal articles, doctoral dissertations, and institutional reports published between 2006 and 2026, to examine how transformational-spiritual leadership operates in Islamic secondary schools. Following a qualitative metasynthesis design, sources were searched in eight databases, screened against explicit criteria, appraised, and analyzed thematically. Four themes emerged: mechanisms linking memorization-based leadership to school culture, pathways to student learning and moral development, implementation and equity challenges, and barriers to sustainability. The synthesis suggests that coherence between mission and practice, shared ritual, exemplary modeling, identity formation, and distributed authority are associated with stronger commitment and student outcomes, although the evidence is largely self-selected and cross-sectional. The article proposes an integrative framework and discusses implications for Kurikulum Merdeka, leader preparation, and inclusive practice.

Keywords: *transformational leadership; Al-Qur'an memorization; Islamic secondary schools; student achievement; qualitative metasynthesis.*

p-ISSN: 2623-2529
e-ISSN: 2714-5573

A. Introduction

Education systems everywhere struggle to advance academic achievement and student well-being at the same time (OECD, 2024). In Indonesia the difficulty is sharpened by rapid social change and by competing views on how schools should balance cognitive and character development. Islamic schools form a large part of the national system (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2023), and for them faith is not a side concern but the core of institutional identity and purpose. Mainstream leadership frameworks, however, were developed mainly in secular Western organizations and tend to neglect transcendent meaning-making and theological coherence as sources of commitment (Korac-Kakabadse et al., 2002). Principals who shift from purely administrative management to spiritually grounded leadership are described as models of moral exemplification who help stakeholders internalize shared values (Mawerdeh et al., 2025), and values-driven strategic leadership and religiously grounded transformational management are described as central to school culture and character formation (Khanom et al., 2025; Mansur & Sutarno, 2022).

Studies from Lombok, Java, and other regions report that principals use Al-Qur'an memorization, or tahfiz, to reshape school culture through shared spiritual reference points, daily ritual structures, and teachers who act as moral exemplars (Ningrum et al., 2025; Syarifudin, 2025; Hasanah et al., 2024; Sahrudin & Sukandar, 2025). These findings are scattered across small case studies, many published in national journals, and they are seldom brought together or connected to international debates on educational leadership and quality assurance. This gap matters because the Sustainable Development Goals call for inclusive, equitable quality education adapted to local contexts (United Nations, 2021), and because Indonesia's Kurikulum Merdeka gives schools more room to design learning around their own missions (Kemendikbudristek, 2022; Wardani et al., 2023).

Three bodies of knowledge frame the problem. First, transformational leadership theory holds that leaders raise motivation and morality through vision, modeling, individualized consideration, and trust (Burns, 1978; Bass

& Riggio, 2006), and in schools it is associated with stronger teacher commitment and student achievement (Leithwood & Sun, 2012). Secular versions of the theory, however, often treat values as tools for performance, which fits poorly where the aim is spiritual growth (Kriger & Malan, 2010; Al-Asfour & Khan, 2014). Second, research on workplace spirituality links spiritual values to commitment and lower burnout (Al-Asfour & Khan, 2014; Warchal, 2011) but often lumps traditions together, whereas concepts such as taqwa (God-consciousness) and amanah (trust) describe how Islamic leadership connects inner faith with role modeling and community action (Beekun & Badawi, 1999; Mundiri et al., 2025), and tawhid and amanah are described as an ethical foundation of decision-making that strengthens trust among leaders, staff, and students (Rahman, 2025; Ansari et al., 2025; Lailiya & Fitriatin, 2025). Third, tahfiz is one of the oldest teaching methods in Islam, institutionalized in the madrasah by the ninth century (Makdisi, 1981). Studies link it to working memory (Black et al., 2020; Sirin et al., 2021), language ability and phonological awareness (Tarmilia et al., 2022), emotional resilience (Rozali et al., 2022), and moral reasoning (Al-Harbi, 2021), yet in the Islamic tradition these effects are secondary to its role as an embodied spiritual discipline that aligns character (akhlaq) with the teachings of the Qur'an (Hardaker & Sabki, 2016; Moodie, 2008).

This article asks how leadership strategies rooted in Al-Qur'an memorization are associated with school quality and student achievement in Islamic secondary schools. Four questions guide the synthesis: (1) which theoretical perspectives help explain how spiritual practice contributes to leadership effectiveness; (2) how memorization-based curricula shape organizational culture and student outcomes; (3) how these practices address equity and the needs of diverse learners; and (4) what challenges arise when schools institutionalize faith-based models in pluralistic settings. A qualitative metasynthesis is suited to these questions because it groups findings by theme and keeps the meanings that stakeholders attach to their practices (Thomas & Harden, 2008), in line with calls for approaches that respect local context (Schweisfurth, 2025). The contribution is an integrative

p-ISSN: 2623-2529
e-ISSN: 2714-5573

framework that treats transformational-spiritual leadership as a distinct approach with its own logic and pathways. The article does not claim that faith-integrated leadership is superior to secular models, nor that religious education should be promoted among communities that do not share the faith; it argues that for schools whose mission includes spiritual formation, this leadership merits systematic study.

B. Method

This study is a qualitative metasynthesis grounded in an interpretive worldview, which holds that educational practices are shaped by how people interpret them (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The review is treated as an interpretive synthesis that identifies patterns in how scholars have theorized and documented memorization-based leadership, rather than as an aggregation of effects (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2006; Thomas & Harden, 2008). Identification and screening were documented with the PRISMA-ScR flow logic (Tricco et al., 2018), which is a reporting guideline for scoping reviews and was used here only to make the selection steps transparent. As the study used published sources only, no ethical clearance was required.

Eight sources were searched: ERIC, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, SINTA, publications of the Islamic Research and Training Institute, and specialized Islamic education indexes. Boolean combinations covered four concept areas: educational leadership (transformational leadership, school leadership, principal effectiveness), Islamic education (madrasah, tahfiz, Qur'anic education), spirituality and organizational behavior (spiritual leadership, faith-based organizations), and school improvement (institutional quality, student achievement, organizational change). Sources published between 2006 and early 2026 in English or Indonesian were retained, with priority given to Indonesia, Southeast Asia, and comparative Islamic education. From 147 potential sources, 87 met the criteria. Included sources reported empirical data or documented practice on educational leadership, Islamic teaching, or spiritual practice in schools; purely theoretical papers, non-school settings, weak research quality, and treatments of Islam only as doctrine were excluded. The

sample comprised 64 journal articles, 12 doctoral dissertations, and 11 government or institutional reports.

Quality was appraised with an adapted set of criteria on clarity of aims, design, data, and reporting, informed by the GRADE logic of certainty in evidence (Prasad, 2023). Data were extracted into matrices recording context and population, design and sample, leadership or educational practice, key findings, and theoretical framework. The matrices were analyzed thematically by reading and comparing sources (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initial coding produced clusters on mechanisms linking spiritual practice to culture, pathways to student outcomes, implementation challenges and moderators, equity, and sustainability; a second pass compared how these operated across urban and rural schools, single schools and networks, and different resource conditions. Authors' own frameworks were preserved rather than forced into an external scheme, and an audit trail recorded coding decisions and the evolution of categories.

C. Results and Discussion

This section reports the synthesis and then interprets it. The Results describe the included sources and four themes: mechanisms linking memorization-based leadership to institutional culture, pathways to student learning and moral development, implementation challenges and equity, and barriers to sustainability. The Discussion then develops an integrative framework, considers implications for theory, policy, and practice, and states the limitations of the review. Counts refer to the number of included sources that reported a pattern and should be read as indicators of how widely a theme appears, not as effect sizes.

1. Results

Source characteristics

The 87 sources, summarized in Table 1, were published between 2006 and 2026, and 62% appeared after 2015. Indonesian sources dealt with pesantren, Islamic-oriented public secondary schools, and private Islamic institutions, which gave a range of institutional settings within the national

p-ISSN: 2623-2529
e-ISSN: 2714-5573

context, while the other regions allowed comparison where Islam represents the institutional mission or a shared faith commitment. Most studies were qualitative, which fits the aim: spiritual leadership involves meaning-making that numbers alone cannot capture, and leadership effectiveness in Islamic schools is reported to depend on context-specific practices such as spiritual awareness and moral integrity (Asiah et al., 2025; Kusumaputri et al., 2023).

Table 1. Characteristics of the 87 included sources

Characteristic	Category	Number of sources
Region	Indonesia	28
	Southeast Asia (other)	15
	Middle East	21
	Europe and North America	17
	Other regions	6
Design	Qualitative case studies	39
	Phenomenological studies	12
	Quantitative studies	18
	Mixed-methods studies	14
	Theoretical work	4
Type	Journal articles	64
	Doctoral dissertations	12
	Government or institutional reports	11

Theme 1: Mechanisms linking memorization-based leadership to institutional culture

Five mechanisms were identified. The first is theological coherence. When leaders ground school practices in Qur'anic principles, staff experience less tension between what the school says and what it does. Twenty-three sources reported that this congruence between mission and practice strengthened institutional legitimacy and reduced staff cynicism (Moodie, 2008; Mawerdeh et al., 2025; Syarifudin, 2025; Saekan & Kayadibi, 2026), and institutions without it were described as suffering low morale and turnover because stakeholders perceived hypocrisy.

The second mechanism is shared ritual participation. Daily recitation and collective prayer create a common rhythm in which synchronized action embodies shared values. Nineteen sources described such rituals as what Goffman (1959) calls performance regions, in which institutional identity is enacted collectively, and noted that ritual creates affective bonding and embodied learning that precedes explicit ideological commitment. The third is exemplary modeling, or *qudwa*, the emulation of good models. Leaders who memorize and embody Qur'anic teaching earn a different kind of respect from those who only hold a title (Jaenullah et al., 2022), and teachers repeatedly reported that a leader's own commitment to memorization persuaded them of the program's authenticity more than institutional policy did.

The fourth mechanism is identity reconstitution. Immersion in these practices gradually changes how staff see themselves, and teachers in Qur'an-centered schools described their work as being Qur'an teachers rather than teachers of subjects in a school that stresses the Qur'an, which was associated with intrinsic motivation and resistance to burnout (Succarie, 2024). The fifth is distributed authority. Instead of concentrating power in the principal, leadership spreads to anyone who shows mastery and character, forming collegial learning communities (*jama'at ta'lim*). Twelve sources reported that this reduced isolation and increased professional efficacy, particularly for teachers in difficult contexts (Harris, 2002).

Theme 2: Spiritual practice, student learning, and moral growth

Three pathways to student outcomes were found. The cognitive pathway was described in 16 quantitative and mixed-methods studies, which associated intensive memorization with working memory, phonological processing, and long-term retention, and in some studies with transfer to academic performance in other subjects (Black et al., 2020; Sirin et al., 2021; Jahangir & Nawaz, 2014). The studies used different outcome measures and designs, so their results were not pooled; they point in a consistent direction but cannot be summarized in a single effect size. Proposed explanations

include better attention through disciplined study habits, improved metacognitive monitoring through explicit recall, and repeated encoding.

The motivation and identity pathway appeared in 23 studies. Students who reached memorization targets reported gains in academic self-confidence, intrinsic motivation, and self-perception as capable learners, and this identity often carried over to other subjects: successful memorization showed that difficult goals can be achieved through sustained effort (Latipah, 2021; Azalia & Jenuri, 2025). Hafiz status, the completion of memorization, also brought formal recognition, standing among peers, and family pride, which helped protect students from disengagement, particularly in economically disadvantaged settings (Jahangir & Nawaz, 2014).

The moral development and prosocial pathway was supported by 30 studies. Using instruments such as the Defining Issues Test and the Moral Judgment Interview, researchers reported more sophisticated moral reasoning among students in Qur'an-based schools than in comparison groups, along with higher prosocial orientation, assessed through observed helping behavior and conflict resolution (Hady et al., 2025; Anwas et al., 2025). Programs that integrate tahfiz with character formation and behavioral ethics were described as holistic educational models (Turrohma et al., 2025; Ibrahim et al., 2024; Guna et al., 2024). These outcomes seem to be mediated by direct instruction in Qur'anic ethics combined with community modeling, not by memorization alone, and teachers described teachings on justice, compassion, and accountability as reference points for integrating the curriculum across subjects (Nisa et al., 2025).

Theme 3: Implementation challenges, contextual moderators, and equity

Four recurring challenges were identified. The first is unequal capacity: in large groups some students cannot memorize the entire Qur'an however hard they try, and schools that celebrate only full completion risk demoralizing them. Inclusive schools recognized partial memorization (a quarter or half of the Qur'an), presented memorization as one of several pathways to spiritual development, and gave equal recognition to alternative intellectual and service achievements. Schools that did not address this

reported demoralization, attrition, and a perception that the institution favored gifted students.

The second is religious and cultural heterogeneity. Studies in pluralistic settings documented tension when a school with a Qur'anic core served students from diverse backgrounds (Berglund & Gent, 2019). Successful schools set out explicit inclusion frameworks that presented memorization as an institutional tradition honored within a pluralistic community, offered alternative spiritual practices, and framed religious learning as enrichment rather than a condition of belonging. The third is the need for resources and expertise. Authentic memorization instruction requires teachers with advanced Qur'anic knowledge and specific training (Arifi et al., 2025), and rural and disadvantaged regions often lack qualified instructors (Mubi et al., 2024), which produced quality variation: schools with specialized teachers reported better results than those where regular staff taught memorization without training.

The fourth is sustainability and institutional continuity. Memorization initiatives often faded when founders left, especially where expectations were not built into hiring and training. Several institutions responded with succession planning, memorization expectations in teacher recruitment and evaluation, and documented pedagogical approaches.

Theme 4: Barriers, limitations, and sustainability factors

Three barriers qualify the benefits above. The first is self-selection. Most studies examined schools already committed to memorization, whose families and leaders were probably invested in the process. The four comparative studies that included schools which had abandoned memorization programs, or schools not prioritizing Islamic content, generally found smaller effects, which suggests that success depends partly on contextual fit and stakeholder commitment and does not operate universally. The second is teacher burden. Fourteen studies found that adding intensive Qur'anic instruction to a full workload created problems of curriculum and time management (Arifi et al., 2025). Schools that managed it reduced class sizes, added teaching assistants, offered additional

compensation, and set explicit boundaries so that memorization did not crowd out other pedagogical priorities.

The third barrier is measurement. Achievement studies often relied on school-administered assessments rather than independent measures, moral outcomes were frequently self-reported and open to social desirability bias, and few studies followed students beyond program completion. The positive findings should therefore be read with caution. The sources also suggest that integrating these strategies depends on a wider educational ecosystem in which leaders build collaboration with families and the community to keep values consistent (Yusran et al., 2026), strengthen staff and partnerships for long-term development (Suyatman et al., 2026), and reshape the curriculum so that structured memorization leaves room for students' own spiritual articulation (Taufikin et al., 2025).

Read across the four themes, the sources describe a similar chain. Leaders first make the school's spiritual mission visible in what they do, and ritual and modeling turn this mission into everyday experience for staff and students. Over time, teachers come to see their work through this mission, which is reflected in identity and commitment, and students gain motivation and moral orientation through memorization combined with ethical instruction and community example. The chain is conditional, however: where capacity is unequal, expertise is thin, or continuity is not planned, the same practices produce demoralization, workload strain, or decline once founding leaders depart. The themes therefore describe a set of mechanisms and the conditions that moderate them, not a guaranteed route to improvement.

2. Discussion

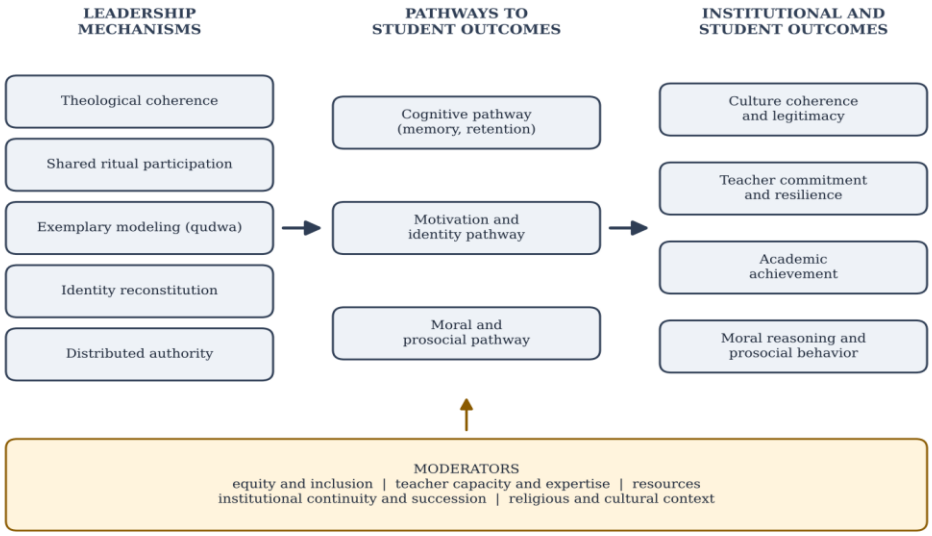


Figure 1. Integrative framework of transformational-spiritual leadership in memorization-based schools

The synthesis points to four main findings, which are brought together in Figure 1 and Table 2. First, memorization-based transformational-spiritual leadership works through exemplary modeling, shared ritual, and distributed authority, which sets it apart from standard secular approaches. Secular leadership often relies on external values and charisma, whereas spiritual leadership shifts attention toward a higher purpose and so produces a more internal form of commitment. Second, principals internalize religious inspiration through disciplinary management in which they go beyond hierarchical authority and emphasize simplicity and inclusiveness in daily decisions (Hasanah et al., 2024). Third, embedding memorization in the institutional curriculum creates an environment in which spiritual integrity acts as an internal regulatory mechanism for staff and students (Hasanah et al., 2024). Fourth, these approaches work contextually: they fit schools whose mission explicitly includes spiritual formation and whose stakeholders share faith commitments, and this signals cultural and missional coherence, not

universal superiority. Efforts to reconcile instructional governance with Qur'anic value systems point in the same direction (Pratama et al., 2026).

Table 2. Integration of theoretical domains in the transformational-spiritual leadership framework

Leadership domain	**Theoretical foundation**	**Key mechanisms**	**Outcomes reported in the sources**
Vision and values articulation	Transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006)	Leaders model Qur'anic principles; practices reflect Islamic values; staff are aligned through theological understanding rather than bureaucratic compliance	Organizational commitment; perceived institutional authenticity; adoption of institutional values
Exemplary modeling and embodiment	Islamic pedagogical tradition; spiritual authority	Leaders show personal commitment through memorization; moral authority rests on lived practice; teachers act as exemplars (*qudwa*)	Teacher professional identity; student moral development; institutional credibility; reduced doubt about the institution's claims
Ritual practice and institutional culture	Organizational culture theory; Islamic ritual theory	Daily recitation; congregational prayer; graduation ceremonies honoring hafiz status; symbols and narratives of a sacred mission	Institutional identity; shared meaning-making; sense of togetherness and belonging

Leadership domain	**Theoretical foundation**	**Key mechanisms**	**Outcomes reported in the sources**
Spirituality and meaning-making	Organizational spirituality; Islamic theology of purpose (*taqwa*)	Leadership as sacred trust (*amanah*); work imbued with noble purpose; resilience sustained by spiritual meaning rather than extrinsic reward	Intrinsic motivation; resistance to burnout; organizational citizenship

The contribution of this synthesis is best seen against earlier reviews. Systematic reviews have examined the qualities and practices of principals in Islamic schools (Said et al., 2023), transformational leadership in faith-based schools (Rahmatika et al., 2025), and leadership dynamics in Islamic-based schools in Southeast Asia (Amalia, 2026), spiritual leadership in educational organizations (Subhaktiyasa et al., 2023), and the tension between spirituality and professionalism in Islamic school leadership (Dahari & Hana, 2026), while a growing set of studies relates spiritual leadership to character formation in Qur'anic programs (Ningrum et al., 2025). None of these places memorization-based practice at the center of the analysis or traces how it connects leadership mechanisms with student pathways and with the conditions that moderate them. The framework offered here does so, and it does so across several regions and study designs, which helps to separate what appears specific to particular Indonesian settings from patterns found more widely.

These findings are relevant to the first research question. Educational leadership theory remains grounded largely in secular organizations and has not developed theories of meaning-making and transcendent motivation, which the sources suggest are central here. Memorization, understood in the Islamic tradition as disciplined spiritual formation and not only a cognitive skill, was associated in many sources with academic, moral, and motivational outcomes, but the associations come mostly from self-selected schools and cannot be taken as causal effects. The evidence nevertheless supports

considering faith-integrated practices within school improvement portfolios where they match the school's mission. Programs that valorize memorization status without recognizing other pathways, that do not develop qualified teachers, or that depend on the charisma of founding leaders were reported to be fragile. Sustainable success therefore depends on professionalizing roles such as the *musyrif*, through structured mentoring that keeps disciplinary supervision and spiritual exemplarity consistent across leadership transitions (Ariyanto & Subando, 2025), together with formalization, inclusive frameworks, and succession planning.

The four research questions can now be answered directly. For the first, the sources draw on transformational leadership, Islamic pedagogical tradition, organizational culture, and organizational spirituality, and the framework in Table 2 shows where these perspectives overlap; Islamic concepts such as amanah, taqwa, and qudwa supply the meaning-making that secular transformational theory lacks. For the second, memorization-based curricula shape culture through the five mechanisms in Theme 1 and shape student outcomes through the cognitive, motivational, and moral pathways in Theme 2, with moral outcomes depending on ethical instruction and community modeling and not on memorization alone. For the third, equity is the main area of risk: unequal capacity can turn a celebrated achievement into a source of exclusion unless schools recognize partial progress and alternative pathways. For the fourth, pluralistic settings call for explicit inclusion frameworks and for presenting the program as institutional tradition and not as a condition of belonging.

For leadership theory, the main implication is expansion. Mainstream theories explain external rewards and rules but say little about how people remain committed when they organize life around a sacred purpose (Baykal, 2019). Future work should examine Islamic traditions alongside Christian, Buddhist, and secular approaches to meaning-centered leadership (Gümüşay, 2018). The implications for quality assurance are similar. National and international frameworks increasingly apply standard indicators such as test scores, retention, and teacher qualifications across all contexts (Steiner-

Khamsi, 2016), and this can delegitimize locally coherent approaches to quality (Pyvis, 2011). While basic standards matter everywhere, for faith-integrated schools frameworks could add indicators such as alignment between mission and practice, evidence of spiritual formation among stakeholders, equitable participation, and teacher capacity in faith-specific pedagogy, which would preserve institutional coherence and accountability.

The synthesis also bears on the preparation of school leaders. Many Islamic schools are led by people trained mainly in secular educational administration who lack frameworks for understanding how spiritual practice supports institutional effectiveness (Fadhlillah & Ayuba, 2025). Leader development that combines transformational leadership theory, Islamic pedagogical traditions, organizational culture and change management, and the leaders' own spiritual formation could be offered through Islamic universities and Islamic education networks. Such programs would also examine leadership practices through an Islamic lens and avoid narrow, Western-centric paradigms, so that strategies reflect the realities of Muslim-majority school settings (Said et al., 2023).

For policy, Kurikulum Merdeka, adopted in 2022, gives schools more room to build learning around their own missions, and it allows contextually appropriate curricula within national competency standards (Wardani et al., 2023). For Islamic schools this legitimizes treating Qur'anic studies, Islamic ethics, and spiritual formation as curricular core rather than extracurricular enrichment (Rahmat, 2024). The curriculum also encourages schools to articulate the Pancasila Student Profile (Rahmadayanti & Hartoyo, 2022), and Islamic schools can describe this profile in explicitly Islamic pedagogical and theological terms instead of translating their commitments into secular language (Rambe et al., 2026). The sources suggest that when a school's religious commitments and daily lessons are aligned, families and staff are more engaged and the school is stronger, so leaders should make explicit how Qur'anic studies and ethics are integrated with national standards.

Equity needs the same attention. Memorization helps students who excel at it, and without inclusive frameworks schools risk a two-tier system

p-ISSN: 2623-2529
e-ISSN: 2714-5573

in which hafiz students receive the praise while others feel inadequate. The sources suggest five strategies: explicit frameworks presenting memorization as one valued pathway among several, such as athletics, arts, community service, academic mastery, and leadership; targeted support for students with learning differences, trauma histories, or little prior Islamic education; transparent recognition of partial progress; alternative spiritual practices for different learning modes, such as contemplative practice, service learning, and artistic expression of Qur'anic themes; and regular equity audits of whether resources and recognition reach all student groups. Schools that applied such approaches reported sustained benefits while protecting student dignity and well-being. In pluralistic settings, schools may also explain that Qur'anic study is an institutional tradition that invites but does not require personal religious commitment, so that families with other orientations can take part without coercion.

Several limitations qualify these conclusions. First, the sources come predominantly from Islamic education scholars and institutions, and secular research on faith-integrated approaches is limited, which creates a risk of confirmation bias because Islamic education journals tend to report outcomes that confirm the value of the approach. Second, most studies examined schools that had implemented memorization programs successfully, and little is known about schools that abandoned them. Third, the synthesis is qualitative: studies used too many different outcome measures and often lacked detailed data to allow effect sizes to be calculated or pooled, so quantitative values reported in individual studies are not summarized here. Fourth, longitudinal evidence is scarce; most evidence is cross-sectional or short-term. Fifth, gender-specific outcomes receive little attention, although memorization programs may engage male and female students through different mechanisms. Finally, the search covered English and Indonesian sources only, and the quality appraisal was adapted and not a validated qualitative appraisal tool.

Future research should therefore pursue five lines. Experimental or quasi-experimental designs with matched comparison groups could examine

the effects of memorization programs on achievement, moral development, and organizational outcomes. Longitudinal studies following students five to ten years after completion could assess the persistence of cognitive, motivational, and character benefits, and quantitative research with larger and more diverse samples is needed to validate these preliminary findings and the causal relations between specific leadership strategies and student development (Wathon et al., 2025). Implementation research could identify the organizational conditions, resources, and leadership practices that separate successful from unsuccessful institutionalization, and intersectional analyses could show how memorization-based leadership works for students who differ in gender, socioeconomic status, prior Islamic knowledge, and aspirations. Comparative studies of how other religious and philosophical traditions operationalize meaning-centered leadership would support broader theory-building on spirituality-informed institutional effectiveness, and studies across more school levels and demographics would avoid the limits of case-specific generalization (Prasetyo et al., 2026).

D. Conclusion

This article asked how leadership strategies rooted in Al-Qur'an memorization are associated with school quality and student achievement in Islamic secondary schools. A synthesis of 87 sources suggests that memorization-based leadership works as a coherent approach: it aligns mission and daily practice, models commitment through the leaders' own practice, builds shared ritual and identity, and distributes authority according to spiritual and intellectual growth. In the sources, these practices were associated with stronger teacher commitment, motivation, and moral development, and with academic gains in some studies. Unlike secular approaches that rely on simple motivation, they connect people to a transcendent purpose (Gümüşay, 2018).

The evidence is also limited by self-selected schools, school-administered measures, and few longitudinal designs, so the findings are best read as associations and as a framework for testing, not as proof of effect.

Institutionalizing the approach requires attention to equitable recognition across diverse students, teacher capacity, resource constraints, and continuity beyond founding leaders. For Indonesian schools working within Kurikulum Merdeka (Amalia et al., 2025), the synthesis supports treating Qur'anic studies and spiritual formation within comprehensive leadership frameworks as a legitimate option for schools whose mission and community share a faith commitment. It does not claim that faith-integrated approaches are superior; secular transformational leadership remains appropriate for schools without such a mission.

Comparative education scholarship would leave a blind spot if it dismissed faith-integrated approaches as unsuited to serious study, and proponents of memorization-based leadership must remain candid about implementation challenges, equity, and boundary conditions. Future studies that combine rigorous empirical designs, comparison across traditions, and attention to both benefits and limits will do most to refine the framework proposed here.

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