

# Leadership in Islamic Schools in Scientific Literature: A Bibliometric Analysis

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**ABSTRACT.** This study aims to map and conceptualise the development of research on school leadership in Islamic schools through a bibliometric approach. This study analyses 150 internationally indexed scientific articles using citation analysis, keyword co-occurrence, and thematic mapping to identify publication trends, research focus, scientific structure, and dominant geographical context in Islamic school leadership research. The analysis shows that studies on Islamic school leadership have increased significantly over the last two decades, with a strong emphasis on spiritual leadership, religious values, moral legitimacy, and character development. These findings indicate that Western educational leadership theories, such as instructional, transformational, and distributed leadership, have limitations in explaining Islamic school leadership practices rooted in belief systems and spiritual values. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in affirming Islamic school leadership as an integrative, contextual model that combines managerial, pedagogical, and spiritual dimensions. Conceptually, this study expands the discourse on educational leadership by presenting a non-Western perspective grounded in values and beliefs (faith-based leadership), while also closing a research gap by providing a comprehensive mapping of the scientific landscape of Islamic school leadership as a basis for further in-depth, contextual research. The conclusion of this study affirms that Islamic school leadership is an integrative model grounded in religious and spiritual values, distinct from the Western leadership paradigm. This leadership is not only oriented toward school effectiveness but also toward safeguarding the ethical and transcendent mission of Islamic education.

**Keywords:** *Teacher surplus, human resource slack, educational quality, school leadership, education management.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Leadership in schools has long been regarded as an important factor in determining the quality of education. In the context of education, the headteacher acts not only as an administrator but also as a leader who guides the vision, shapes school culture, and improves teacher performance and student achievement (Aprilianto et al., 2025; Ariatin et al., 2023; Asy'Ari et al., 2025; Hetharion et al., 2026; Nellitawati et al., 2024; Othman et al., 2017; Pratiwi & Warlizasusi, 2023). Several international studies indicate that effective leadership is a prerequisite for schools in responding to the demands of 21st-century education, including globalisation, learning innovation, and dynamic social change (Akkaya, 2021; Amalia, 2026; Hakim et al., 2026; Rekan et al., 2025). The development of educational leadership studies globally has been marked by the emergence of various theoretical approaches that are still the subject of academic debate (Attalla et al., 2024; Bush, 2018; Hallinger, 2018; Novrianti & Sari, 2025). Instructional leadership, which was developed by Hallinger It

emphasises the role of the headteacher in directing the learning process, developing the curriculum, and improving the quality of teaching. In contrast, transformational leadership highlights the leader's ability to build a shared vision, motivate school members, and encourage continuous organisational change (Ahyani et al., 2024; Bahruddin et al., 2026; Day et al., 2016; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Yuliana et al., 2025). Meanwhile, the distributed leadership approach views leadership as a collective practice spread across various school actors, rather than centred on a single leader (Bush, 2018; Spillane, 2012). This debate emphasises that educational leadership is a complex, context-dependent concept influenced by the values and characteristics of educational institutions (Tajik, 2024).

In Islamic schools, the headmaster's leadership has broader dimensions, as it must integrate religious values with modern managerial practices (Ahmed, 2023). (Anuar, 2018) emphasise the presence of various leadership models in Malaysian Tahfiz institutions, highlighting the headmaster's strategic role in managing Islamic, value-based education. (Haikal & Setiawan, 2026; Kadir & Umiarso, 2023) Also assert that Islamic boarding schools, as the oldest form of Islamic schools, present a distinctive leadership pattern that emphasises spiritual and social development. In line with this, (Karim et al., 2025; Nurwahyuni & Za, 2025) Highlight the spiritual leadership of kyais in Islamic boarding schools as a key element in shaping students' character while maintaining the continuity of Islamic educational traditions. These findings show that principals' leadership in Islamic schools not only affects students' spiritual development but is also closely linked to school management and responses to external dynamics (Mu'alimin et al., 2026). In addition to the spiritual dimension, several studies emphasise the importance of headteacher leadership in managerial aspects. (Azzukhrufi et al., 2026) found a direct relationship between headteacher leadership and increased teacher professionalism in Islamic schools. The research by (Kartiko et al., 2025; Othman et al., 2017) also documented Islamic leadership practices in Islamic schools that balance managerial functions with the formation of a religious culture. This indicates that leadership in Islamic schools integrates religious values and managerial skills to enhance learning effectiveness and strengthen school culture.

However, the effectiveness of leadership in Islamic schools is also strongly influenced by external factors. Global challenges, such as the pandemic, have prompted school principals to adapt to online learning systems while maintaining the sustainability of value-based education (Kurniawan & Nurdin, 2023). This situation emphasises the flexibility and relevance of headteacher leadership in Islamic schools amid social change and global crises. Although publications on headteacher leadership in Islamic schools continue to increase, the literature remains limited. Most studies are empirical, focusing on specific cases, while comprehensive studies that map publication trends, main themes, and directions for scientific development remain rare.

This condition indicates a research gap: the lack of a systematic mapping of leadership research in Islamic schools within the broader landscape of educational leadership. Given that educational leadership research is supported by various theoretical approaches, such as instructional, transformational, and distributed leadership (Hallinger, 2018; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Spillane, 2012), a method is needed to elucidate the relationship between Islamic school leadership and other educational concepts. Therefore, the bibliometric method is appropriate for this study because it can provide a comprehensive overview of the knowledge structure, research trends, and relationships among themes in Islamic school leadership research. (Donthu et al., 2021) Thus, this study aims to understand the position and development of leadership research in Islamic schools within the broader context of educational leadership, as well as its relationship with the main theories and concepts in education. The results of this study are expected to enrich academic discourse and provide a practical basis for developing a headteacher leadership model in Islamic schools.

## **METHOD**

This study uses bibliometric methods to analyse the development and trends in publications on school leadership in Islamic schools. This method is relevant when a field of study shows continuous growth in publications and requires objective scientific mapping to identify trends, research focus, and the evolving knowledge structure (Zupic & Čater, 2015). Thus, this method enables a comprehensive analysis of leadership in Islamic schools, grounded in empirical evidence from scientific publications.

The documents analysed were publications indexed in the Scopus database. They were published between 2004 and 2025, considering that research on leadership in Islamic schools began to develop more consistently in the early 2000s, in line with increasing academic attention to Islamic education, educational leadership, and value-based school management. Scopus was chosen because it provides extensive coverage of international publications and complete, structured bibliographic metadata, which supports systematic literature analysis (Ertem & Aypay, 2023; You et al., 2024). Data retrieval was conducted using the keywords "leadership", "education", "Islamic education", "Islamic school", "Islamic leadership", and "boarding school".

A total of 150 documents were analysed using a bibliometric framework, covering publication performance mapping and scientific mapping, including keyword correlations and citation patterns, employing bibliometric tools. (van Eck & Waltman, 2014). The use of structured data and clear analysis steps allows research results to be traced and compared, thereby embedding the validity of the analysis directly in the bibliometric research design employed. The selection criteria for publications in this study were defined in two categories: inclusion and exclusion. In the inclusion category, publications included journal articles, conference proceedings, and books relevant to Islamic school leadership. Meanwhile, in the exclusion category, publications identified as duplicates and articles irrelevant to the theme of Islamic educational leadership were excluded from the analysis. After selection and data cleaning, a total of 150 documents from 97 publications were obtained.

The bibliometric analysis in this study was conducted in stages to describe the development of leadership studies in Islamic schools. The initial stage produced the average number of citations per document per year, indicating the level of influence and attention researchers accorded to the topic. Next, frequency analysis and research term development were used to identify the main themes and changes in research focus over time. The next stage included keyword analysis and network metrics, which aimed to examine relationships among key concepts in Islamic school leadership research. The results of this analysis were then presented as a conceptual map to visualise the clusters of themes and the structure of knowledge that had emerged. In the final stage, the bibliometric findings were interpreted to elucidate the research's implications for both the development of theory and the direction of future research in Islamic school leadership.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Result**

The data used in this study were analyzed to provide a comprehensive overview of the characteristics and quality of the literature sources that form the basis of the study. This analysis included several important indicators, such as publication timeframe, number and type of documents, publication growth rate, and citation relevance. This information is crucial for demonstrating the extent of scientific development and contribution in the field under study, while also ensuring that the data used are relevant, credible, and provide adequate analytical depth. Complete details regarding the characteristics of the research data are presented in the following table.

**Table 1 Key Bibliometric Data Information**

Description	Results
<b>Main Information about Data</b>	
Timespan	1980–2025
Sources (Journals, Books, etc.)	97
Documents	150
Annual Growth Rate (%)	6.63
Document Average Age	5.12
Average Citations per Document	6.887
References	1,298
<b>Document Types</b>	
Article	128
Book	1
Book Chapter	12
Conference Paper	2
Review	7

The research period from 1980 to 2025 shows that studies on leadership in Islamic schools continue to develop. In the early period, research focused more on conceptual aspects and Islamic leadership values derived from religious teachings. Over time, particularly since the 2000s, research has shifted toward empirical approaches, with a focus on headteacher leadership practices, religiously value-based leadership, and educational issues such as school effectiveness, teacher quality, and mental health. This indicates that Islamic school leadership is increasingly relevant in addressing contemporary educational challenges.

A total of 97 publications indicate that research on leadership in Islamic schools has appeared in various scientific channels, including journals, books, and conference proceedings. This indicates that such studies are not limited to Islamic education but also extend to educational management and leadership more broadly. This condition indicates that research on leadership in Islamic schools is interdisciplinary, as it links education, management, Islamic studies, and educational policy. A total of 150 scientific documents indicate that research on leadership in Islamic schools has developed into a significant area of study. However, compared with research on school leadership at the global level, this number remains relatively limited. This condition indicates significant opportunities for further research, particularly in the context of Islamic schools in developing countries.

The annual growth rate of 6.63% indicates that research on leadership in Islamic schools continues to increase. This signifies a rise in academic interest, particularly in the last decade. This growth aligns with global attention to values-based education, spirituality-based leadership, and the role of Islamic schools in shaping students' character and mental health.

The average age of the documents is 5.12 years, indicating that most of the research on leadership in Islamic schools is relatively recent. This shows that the studies conducted are continuously updated and keep pace with current issues. This condition indicates active scientific development, particularly in discussions of adaptive and ethical leadership and the challenges of managing Islamic schools in the post-pandemic era. An average of 6,887 citations per document indicates that other researchers have widely referenced research on leadership in Islamic schools. Although the number of citations is lower than for research on leadership in education more generally, these findings indicate that such studies are beginning to contribute to the development of value-based leadership.

In addition, the use of 1,298 references across 150 documents indicates that robust theoretical studies support research on Islamic school leadership. The large number of references indicates that this research is connected to global leadership literature, educational management, and Islamic studies, thereby strengthening its position as an academic and serious field of study.

The distribution of document types indicates that research on leadership in Islamic schools is dominated by journal articles (128 publications), suggesting that findings are more widely disseminated through scientific journals. The number of books, which is only 1 document, shows that studies on Islamic school leadership are still very limited in the form of monographs. In addition, 12 book chapters generally contribute to collective works on Islamic education and value-based leadership. Publications in the form of conference proceedings are still relatively few, only 2 documents, indicating that research dissemination is more focused on journals. Meanwhile, 7 review articles indicate the beginning of efforts to map and synthesise knowledge that is important for strengthening and maturing leadership studies in Islamic schools.

**Table 2 Average Citations per Document per Year**

No	Year	Mean TC per Doc	N (Docs)	Mean TC per Year	Citable Years
1	2004	5.00	1	0.23	22
2	2006	15.00	1	0.75	20
3	2008	46.00	1	2.56	18
4	2009	38.00	1	2.24	17
5	2010	1.50	2	0.09	16
6	2011	23.33	3	1.56	15
7	2012	4.50	2	0.32	14
8	2013	23.00	2	1.77	13
9	2014	0.00	3	0.00	12
10	2015	2.00	1	0.18	11
11	2016	24.00	1	2.40	10
12	2017	2.50	4	0.28	9
13	2018	11.44	9	1.43	8
14	2019	11.80	15	1.69	7
15	2020	12.20	15	2.03	6
16	2021	11.18	11	2.24	5
17	2022	5.14	14	1.28	4
18	2023	2.62	13	0.87	3
19	2024	1.77	30	0.88	2
20	2025	0.11	18	0.11	1

Based on Table 2, the average number of citations per year varies clearly across periods. The highest citation counts were recorded in 2008 (2.56), followed by 2016 (2.40), and 2009 and 2021, which both reached 2.24. Furthermore, 2020 had the highest citation rate (2.03), followed by 2013 (1.77), 2019 (1.69), 2011 (1.56), and 2018 (1.43). Citation counts during this period indicate that publications from those years had greater scientific impact and were frequently cited in subsequent research.

Meanwhile, lower citation rates were observed in subsequent years, namely 1.28 in 2022, 0.87 in 2023, 0.88 in 2024, 0.75 in 2006, 0.32 in 2012, 0.28 in 2017, 0.23 in 2004, 0.18 in 2015, 0.09 in 2010, and the lowest in 2014 and 2025 with values of 0 and 0.11, respectively. The low number of citations in recent years is primarily attributable to the limited citation window, as new documents have not yet had sufficient time to be widely cited. These findings indicate that the impact of citations tends to be higher for publications that have been in circulation longer than newly published research (Arar et al., 2017; Hallinger, 2011).

**Table 3 Research Terms Based on Frequency and Development over the Years**

No	Term	Frequency	Year (Q1)
1	Curriculum	6	2012
2	Islam	16	2010
3	Religion	6	2015
4	Malaysia	5	2018
5	Muslim	7	2019
6	Leadership	40	2018
7	Article	14	2019
8	Human	13	2020
9	Islamic Schools	12	2019
10	Performance	5	2020
11	Islamic Education	18	2019
12	Boarding School	6	2020
13	Islamic Boarding Schools	6	2021
14	Pesantren	7	2022
15	Islamic Boarding School	13	2022
16	Islamic Leadership	9	2022
17	Teaching	7	2018

Based on the terms in the image, leadership research in Islamic schools is grounded in several interrelated key concepts. The term leadership has the highest frequency, appearing 40 times, and began to appear frequently in journals in Q1 in 2018. This indicates that leadership is the primary focus of research, particularly in examining the principal's role, leadership styles, and their influence on the management of Islamic schools. This high frequency confirms that leadership is seen as a key factor in improving the quality and effectiveness of Islamic schools.

The terms Islam (16 times; Q1 2010), religion (6 times; Q1 2015), and Muslim (7 times; Q1 2019) indicate that leadership research is inseparable from religious values and identity. These terms emphasise that leadership in Islamic schools is understood as grounded in religious values and exercised within the Muslim community. Furthermore, the terms Islamic education (18 times; Q1 2019) and Islamic schools (12 times; Q1 2019) indicate that leadership studies are consistently associated with the broader Islamic education system and context, rather than with aspects of school management.

Several other terms denote more specific institutional contexts, such as boarding school (6 times; Q1 2020), Islamic boarding school (6 times; Q1 2021 and 13 times; Q1 2022), and pesantren (7 times; Q1 2022). The emergence of these terms indicates increased interest among researchers in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), which have more complex leadership characteristics because they encompass academic, social, and spiritual dimensions. In addition, the term Malaysia (5 times; Q1 2018) indicates that this country has become a significant context for research on Islamic school leadership.

The terms curriculum (6 times; Q1 2012), teaching (7 times; Q1 2018), and performance (5 times; Q1 2020) indicate the relationship between leadership and the learning process and school performance. This confirms that Islamic school leadership not only plays a role in organisational management but also directly influences the quality of learning and educational outcomes. Finally, the term Islamic leadership (9 times; Q1 2022) indicates a research trend that emphasises leadership models based on Islamic values.

**Table 4: Keywords and Metrics of Islamic School Leadership Networks**

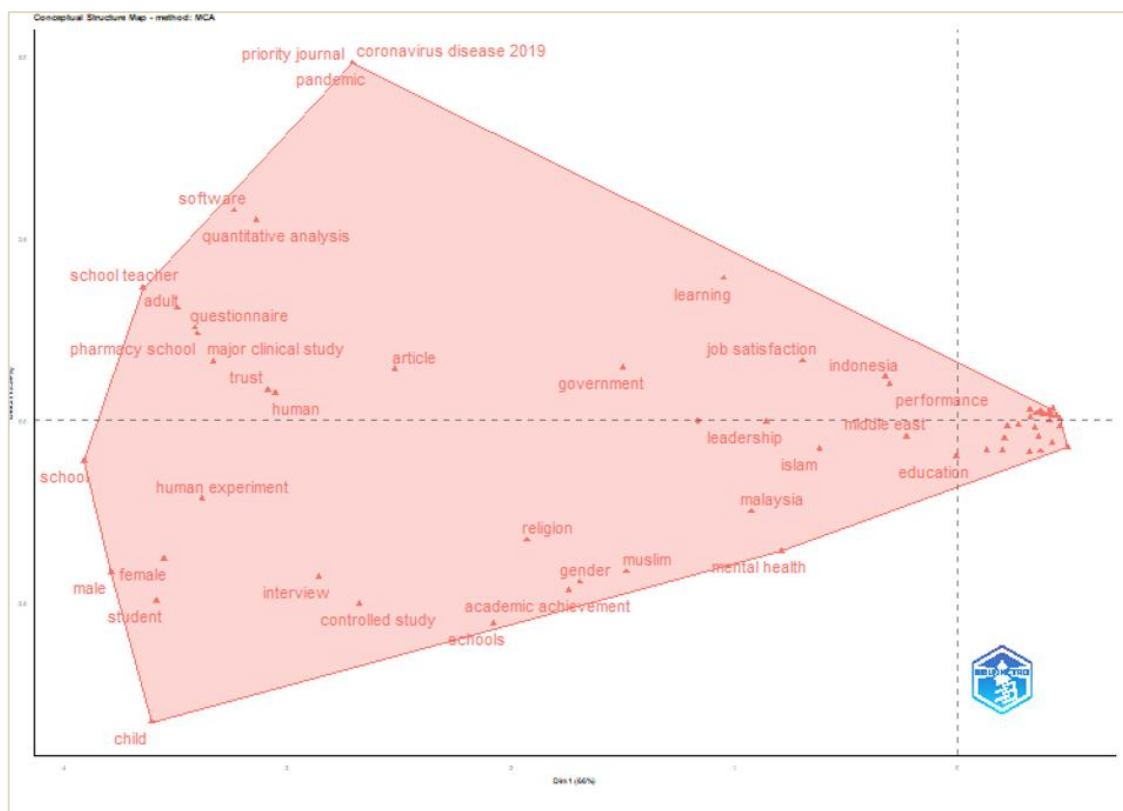
Node	Cluster	Betweenness	Closeness
Teaching	1	43.4567	0.0099
Students	1	0.0000	0.0085
Islam	2	139.1946	0.0167
Indonesia	2	67.6263	0.0143
Malaysia	2	0.0000	0.0120
Principals	2	0.0000	0.0125
Gender	2	0.0000	0.0104
Leadership	3	303.7866	0.0192
Article	3	34.4498	0.0159
Human	3	43.4235	0.0161
Human Experiment	3	7.1342	0.0139
Questionnaire	3	5.7115	0.0143
Muslim	3	1.2261	0.0135
Boarding School	3	0.0000	0.0114
Female	3	5.7156	0.0147
Religion	3	39.9096	0.0135
Male	3	2.6756	0.0141
Performance	3	0.0000	0.0114
Adult	3	1.0303	0.0130
Interview	3	0.1716	0.0132
Major Clinical Study	3	0.0000	0.0125
School Teacher	3	0.6144	0.0130
Schools	3	2.8349	0.0130
Child	3	0.8688	0.0135

Based on Table 4, keyword collaboration in leadership research in Islamic schools is evident in the relationships among terms, as indicated by cluster, betweenness, and closeness values. The keyword leadership is in cluster 3, with a betweenness value of 307.89 and a closeness value of 0.01923, indicating that it is the primary link between research topics. The high betweenness value indicates that this term often serves as a bridge between the themes of Islam, education, and school performance. Strong collaboration is also evident in Islamic-based keywords. The term Islam is in cluster 2 with a betweenness of 139.19 and a closeness of 0.01667. In contrast, Indonesia (cluster 2) has a betweenness of 67.63, and Malaysia (cluster 2) has a betweenness of 0, indicating that the contexts of these countries, particularly Indonesia and Malaysia, often appear in research on Islamic school leadership. This confirms that leadership studies are primarily conducted within the local contexts of Muslim-majority countries.

Keywords related to Islamic educational institutions show strong connections. The term Islamic schools is in cluster 4 with the highest closeness value of 1, indicating a very strong connection with other research themes. In addition, Islamic boarding schools appear in cluster 6 with a betweenness of 75.27 and a closeness of 0.01295, and in cluster 11 with a closeness of 0.00943. These figures indicate that Islamic boarding schools are an important context for leadership studies, given their complex management systems. Keyword collaboration is also evident in educational and learning outcomes. The term Islamic education is in cluster 5 with betweenness 2.4 and closeness 0.01, while education (cluster 7) has betweenness 63.10 and closeness 0.01351. Meanwhile, academic achievement in cluster 14, with a closeness of 0.00901, indicates that Islamic school leadership is often associated with student academic achievement.

In addition to academic dimensions, collaboration encompasses values and well-being. The term spiritual leadership is in cluster 4 with a closeness of 1, indicating a very strong connection between leadership and spiritual values. The keyword religion (cluster 3) has a betweenness of 39.91

and a closeness of 0.01351, reinforcing that the religious dimension is the main foundation of Islamic school leadership. Meanwhile, the term "mental health" in cluster 15, with a closeness of 0.00730, indicates that mental health issues are emerging as a new theme connected to leadership.



**Figure 1: Visualisation of Keyword Clusters on Leadership in Islamic Schools**

Figure 1 presents a conceptual map of research on leadership in Islamic schools, constructed from the interrelationships among keywords within a single analytical space. In general, this visualisation shows that the research not only focuses on leadership but is also influenced by contextual and methodological factors, as well as emerging social issues. Areas that form a large field indicate strong connections between topics, suggesting that research on leadership in Islamic schools is multidimensional.

In the centre, to the right of the visualisation, keywords such as leadership, Islam, education, performance, teachers, and Indonesia are visible. The proximity of these keywords indicates that leadership in Islamic schools is often studied in relation to education, teacher performance, and learning outcomes. The proximity of leadership to Islam and education confirms that leadership is not understood in general terms but is situated within the framework of Islamic values and Islamic school practices.

At the bottom of the visualisation, keywords such as religion, Muslim, gender, mental health, and academic achievement appear. The presence of these terms indicates that research on Islamic school leadership is also beginning to address social and psychological issues. This suggests that leadership is studied not only from structural and managerial perspectives but also in terms of its impact on mental well-being, gender equality, and the academic achievement of school members.

On the left side of the visualisation, keywords related to research approaches are shown, including questionnaire, interview, quantitative analysis, software, and controlled study. This indicates that research on Islamic school leadership often employs empirical approaches, including quantitative and mixed-methods designs. In addition, the emergence of the terms coronavirus disease 2019 and pandemic indicates that the pandemic context has influenced research direction, particularly by examining the role of Islamic school leadership in addressing crises and changes in the education system.

Overall, this visualisation illustrates that leadership research in Islamic schools is developing in a contextual and dynamic manner. Leadership is positioned as the centre of study, connected to religious values, educational practices, school performance, research methods, and global issues such as pandemics and mental health. This indicates that Islamic school leadership research is increasingly adopting a holistic approach relevant to contemporary educational challenges.

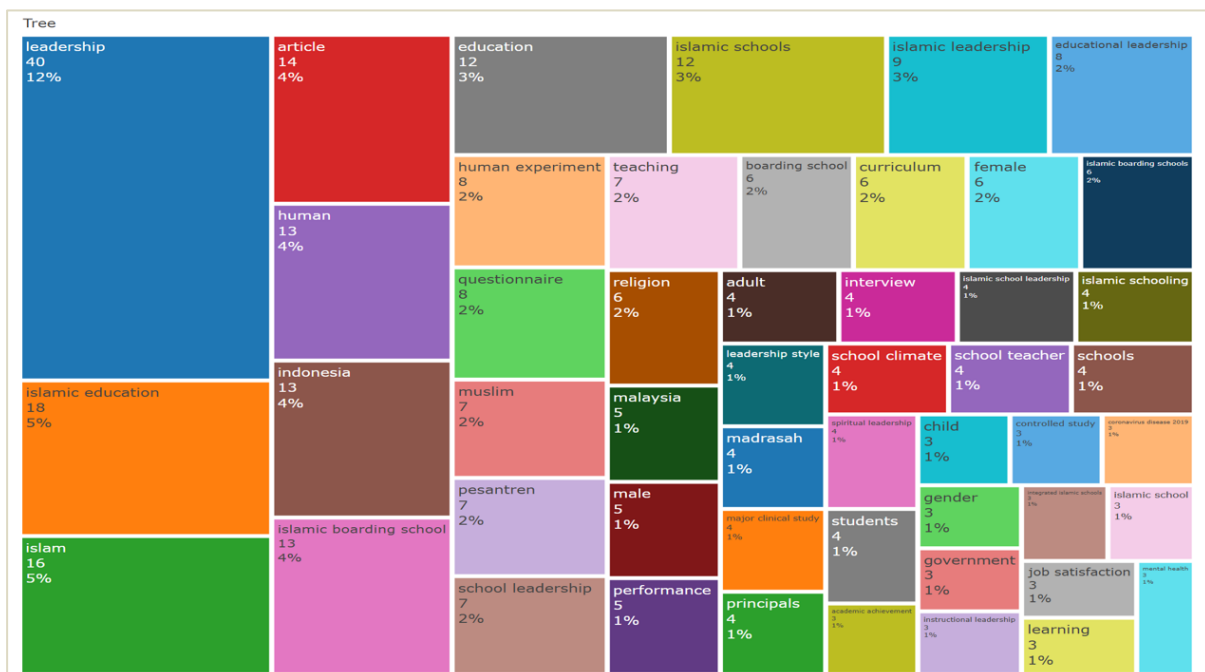


Figure 2: Treemap of Keywords in Research on Leadership in Islamic Schools

The results of the treemap analysis in Figure 2 indicate that the theme of leadership was the focus of Islamic school research, accounting for the largest proportion (12%; 40 articles). This indicates that leadership issues remain an important factor in understanding the dynamics of education, including Islamic education. Schools, work environments, and learning quality are all influenced by leadership, which is considered a strategic factor (Bush, 2018; Hallinger, 2011).

In addition, the context of Islamic education is very prominent in the treemap, as indicated by keywords such as Islamic education (18 articles; 5%), Islam (16 articles; 5%), Islamic secondary schools (13 articles; 4%), and Islamic schools (12 articles; 3%). This indicates that leadership research is rooted in the Islamic education system, which has unique cultural values and customs. This is not only done within a general framework. In situations like this, Islamic educational leadership is often understood not merely as a management process; it is also used to shape students' religious and moral character (Beekun & Badawi, 2005).

In addition, several derivative themes that emerged, such as school leadership, achievement, job satisfaction, and mental health, indicate that research has evolved from a focus on the role of leaders to an analysis of the impact of leadership on teachers and students. For example, the relationship between leadership and job satisfaction and achievement underscores the practical outcomes of leadership. Furthermore, research on the relationship between leadership and mental health highlights the practical aspects of leadership (Day et al., 2016; Martinez, 2014; Northouse, 2025).

The emergence of terms such as Indonesia and Malaysia in the literature indicates that research on Islamic school leadership has been conducted extensively in Southeast Asia, where Islamic educational institutions, such as madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools, are highly significant to the national education system (Daun & Arjmand, 2005). This indicates that contextual differences distinguish research on leadership in Islamic schools from that in public schools.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study consistently show that the leadership of principals in Islamic schools has characteristics that cannot be fully explained by Western leadership theories, which dominate the literature on educational leadership. Instructional, transformational, and distributed leadership theories are generally grounded in assumptions of organisational rationality, managerial effectiveness, and an orientation towards improving performance and learning outcomes as the primary goals of school leadership (Hallinger, 2011; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Leithwood et al., 2008; Spillane, 2006). However, the results of the bibliometric analysis in this study indicate that studies of Islamic school leadership place greater emphasis on religious dimensions, moral values, and spiritual responsibility as the primary foundations of leadership practice. This indicates a conceptual tension between the Western leadership paradigm, which is often secular, and leadership practices in Islamic schools, which are grounded in religious values and beliefs ((Adiyono et al., 2025; Ahwan & Karfida, 2025; Aryasutha et al., 2025; Hasnadi & Inayatillah, 2022; Sahin, 2018; Shah, 2013).

Theoretically, Western leadership theory often overlooks the role of religion as a source of leadership legitimacy and a shaper of educational organisational culture (Bush, 2020). In Islamic schools, headteacher leadership derives legitimacy not only from formal structures and professional competence, but also from religious integrity and moral exemplarity recognised by the school community. (Beekun, R.I. & Badawi, 2005) emphasise that, from an Islamic perspective, leadership is a mandate with ethical and spiritual dimensions; thus, leadership success is measured not only by performance but also by conformity to the values of justice, honesty, and moral responsibility. This finding aligns with (Brooks & Mutohar, 2018; Zahiri & Sahal, 2025), who show that leadership practices in Islamic schools combine managerial functions with religious value development, a conceptually distinct approach from the Western approach to educational leadership.

This study shows that leadership studies in Islamic schools not only challenge the basic assumptions of Western leadership theory but also expand the spiritual leadership model that has developed in modern leadership literature. In the Western context, spiritual leadership is generally understood as an approach that emphasises the creation of meaning in work, psychological well-being, and intrinsic motivation to improve individual and organisational performance. (Northouse, 2016). However, the results of this study indicate that spiritual leadership in Islamic schools is more normative and theological in nature, as it is directly rooted in Islamic belief. Values such as tauhid, amanah, ihsan, and an orientation towards the hereafter are not only sources of motivation but

also form an ethical framework that governs the decision-making and leadership behaviour of school principals (Daun & Arjmand, 2005).

These findings are reinforced by empirical research showing that Islamic leadership affects not only organisational performance but also affective commitment, loyalty, and character development among school members. (Mukhlisin, A., Ghozali, I., & Djastuti, 2021) found that Islamic leadership in boarding schools significantly contributes to performance by increasing emotional commitment among teachers and staff. (Karim, A., Fathurohman, O., Sulaiman, Marliani, L., Kurniawan, F.F., Nugraha, F., Muaripin, 2025) also showed that the spiritual leadership of kyais in Islamic boarding schools is the primary mechanism shaping students' character, independence, and work ethic. Thus, faith-based spiritual leadership in Islamic schools cannot be reduced to a variation of leadership styles; rather, it is an alternative leadership model with both transcendental and social goals.

The synthesis of this study's findings also confirms that school leadership in Islamic schools is strongly influenced by geographical and cultural contexts, particularly in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Middle East. In Indonesia, leadership in Islamic schools, especially in Islamic boarding schools and boarding schools, tends to be charismatic and centred on leaders who have both scientific and spiritual authority (Hariadi et al., 2024; Nawawi, 2025). In this context, leadership is exercised not only through structural mechanisms but also through social relations and religious legitimacy that are deeply rooted in local culture. In Malaysia, Islamic school leadership is relatively more institutionalised and integrated into national education policy, yet it still maintains Islamic values as the identity and basis for leadership decision-making (Anuar, 2018; Samier & ElKaleh, 2019). Meanwhile, the literature on Islamic schools in the Middle East indicates that educational leadership is generally rooted in religious authority and Islamic scholarly traditions, although empirical studies remain limited relative to those in Southeast Asia (Sumintono et al., 2023).

Based on this synthesis and critique, this study conceptualises school leadership in Islamic schools as integrative leadership that combines, simultaneously and contextually, spiritual, pedagogical, and managerial dimensions. This conceptualisation aligns with (Hallinger, 2016) view, which emphasises that educational leadership must be understood in the context of local social and cultural settings. Islamic school leadership is oriented not only towards organisational effectiveness but also towards the moral and religious mission of Islamic education, thereby serving as a bridge between academic goals, character development, and social responsibility. Thus, the findings of this study make a significant theoretical contribution by enriching the discourse on educational leadership through a non-Western, value-based perspective that has been relatively marginalised in global leadership.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study shows that school leadership in Islamic schools occupies a distinct theoretical position relative to the dominant Western educational leadership model. Through a bibliometric analysis, this study confirms that instructional, transformational, and distributed leadership theories account for only some aspects of Islamic school leadership, particularly the managerial and pedagogical dimensions. Conversely, Islamic school leadership is better understood as an integrative leadership practice rooted in religious values, moral legitimacy, and spiritual responsibility.

Empirically and conceptually, the findings of this study indicate that school leadership in Islamic schools, particularly in the Indonesian and Malaysian contexts, not only improves school effectiveness but also upholds the ethical and transcendental mission of Islamic education. Belief-based and spiritual leadership emerges as a key characteristic that distinguishes Islamic school leadership from Western approaches to educational leadership. By mapping the development, thematic focus, and geographical context of the research, this study successfully closes the research gap identified in the introduction, namely the absence of a comprehensive mapping that places Islamic school leadership within the global educational leadership theory landscape.

However, this study has methodological limitations that need to be considered. The bibliometric approach is effective at revealing scientific trends and structures. However, it has limitations in capturing the qualitative dimensions of leadership, such as leaders' subjective experiences, spiritual meanings, and relational dynamics in everyday leadership practices. Therefore, further research is recommended to integrate bibliometric analysis with qualitative or mixed-methods approaches and to expand the geographical scope, particularly in the Middle East and other Muslim countries. This effort is expected to deepen conceptual and empirical understanding of Islamic school leadership as a value-based contextual leadership model.

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