

# The Principal's Strategy in Improving the Quality of Islamic Education

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## Abstract

**Keywords:**  
Transformational Leadership;  
Quality of Islamic Education;  
Principal's Strategy;  
Value Based Management;  
Religious Culture.

The main issue addressed in this study is the low quality of Islamic education in several Integrated Islamic Elementary Schools (SDIT), particularly regarding managerial effectiveness, spiritual leadership, and innovative learning, which are not yet fully aligned with Islamic values. Based on this gap, the research aims to analyze the principal's strategic role in enhancing the quality of Islamic education through transformational leadership and value-based management approaches. The subjects of this study include principals, teachers, and educational staff from selected SDITs in the Riau Archipelago. This research employs a qualitative descriptive method using in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation analysis. The findings reveal that principals apply collaborative strategies involving teachers and the community to strengthen the school's religious culture, improve pedagogical competence, and nurture students' Islamic character. The study concludes that effective leadership in Islamic education is not merely determined by administrative ability but also by spiritual exemplarity, value-oriented vision, and synergy between school management and the educational community. Therefore, the principal's strategy plays a pivotal role in building an excellent, character-driven, and Islamic value-based school ecosystem.

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## Abstrak

**Kata kunci:**  
Kepemimpinan Transformasional,  
Mutu Pendidikan Islam, Strategi Kepala Sekolah,  
Manajemen Berbasis Nilai, Budaya Religius.

Permasalahan yang diangkat dalam penelitian ini berawal dari masih rendahnya mutu pendidikan Islam di beberapa Sekolah Dasar Islam Terpadu (SDIT), terutama dalam aspek manajerial, kepemimpinan spiritual, dan inovasi pembelajaran yang belum sepenuhnya terintegrasi dengan nilai-nilai Islam. Berdasarkan kesenjangan tersebut, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi kepala sekolah dalam meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan Islam melalui pendekatan kepemimpinan transformasional dan manajemen berbasis nilai Islami. Subjek penelitian ini adalah para kepala sekolah, guru, dan tenaga kependidikan di beberapa SDIT di Kepulauan Riau, dengan menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif deskriptif melalui teknik wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan analisis dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepala sekolah menerapkan strategi kolaboratif yang melibatkan guru dan masyarakat dalam penguatan budaya religius, peningkatan kompetensi pedagogik, dan pembentukan karakter Islami peserta didik. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa kepemimpinan yang efektif dalam konteks pendidikan Islam tidak hanya bergantung pada kemampuan administratif, tetapi juga pada keteladanan spiritual, visi pendidikan berbasis nilai, serta sinergi antara manajemen sekolah dan komunitas pendidikan. Dengan demikian, strategi kepala sekolah berperan signifikan dalam membangun ekosistem sekolah yang unggul, berkarakter, dan berdaya saing Islami.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Islamic education in Indonesia, particularly at the primary school level, plays a crucial role in shaping the character and competence of the younger generation. Integrated Islamic Elementary Schools (SDIT) in the Riau Archipelago, such as SDIT Al Madinah in Tanjungpinang City, SDIT Cendekia in Tebing Karimun, and SDIT Darussalam in Batam City, face unique challenges in improving the quality of Islamic education in areas with limited human resources and facilities (Nurhayati et al., 2024). One of the recurring issues in Islamic schools and madrasahs is how principals can manage the curriculum, resources, and educators to provide high-quality education, in line with the comprehensive goals of Islamic education (Alwi & Mumtahana, 2023; M. M. Arief et al., 2024; Badawi, 2024). Based on preliminary data from interviews with principals and teachers, as well as direct observations, it was found that there are challenges in optimally managing resources, developing teachers' competencies, and implementing an Islam-based curriculum integrated with modern technology (Adiyani et al., 2025; Astra et al., 2024; Yani et al., 2025; M. A. Zamroni et al., 2024).

Research on the strategies of school principals in improving the quality of Islamic education has been widely conducted, but most studies have focused on urban areas or schools with more complete facilities. According to Mustofa et al., principals who implement transformational leadership can enhance the quality of education in madrasahs and Islamic schools by motivating teachers and creating an environment that supports collaboration (Hakim et al., 2025; Ilham & Ramadani, 2024; Mustofa et al., 2021; Rofiudin et al., 2025). Research by Azhari also mentions that the transformation of Islamic education can improve the quality of education and students' character (Azhari, 2024). However, more recent research by Anwar shows that despite many principals applying value-based leadership strategies, the greatest challenge in their implementation lies in the management of technology in education and the professional development of teachers (Anwar, 2022; M. Y. Arief et al., 2025; Haq & Roesminingsih, 2024; Syarifah et al., 2025; Zaini et al., 2023). Komalasari & Yakubu highlight the importance of collaboration between principals, teachers, and the community in improving education quality, but challenges in parental and community involvement in Islamic schools in remote areas remain substantial (Komalasari & Yakubu, 2023). This study aims to fill this gap by focusing on SDITs in the Riau Archipelago, which face challenges related to resources and accessibility to education.

This study aims to analyze the strategies implemented by school principals in improving the quality of Islamic education at SDIT in the Riau Archipelago, focusing on SDIT Al Madinah in Tanjungpinang, SDIT Cendekia in Tebing Karimun, and SDIT Darussalam in Batam City. This research is expected to provide insights into how school principals can address challenges in curriculum management, teacher professional development, and the utilization of technology in Islamic education in areas with limited resources. The benefits of this research are to contribute to the development of Islamic education leadership theory and provide practical recommendations for school principals and education policymakers to improve the

quality of Islamic education in resource limited areas (Arsul et al., 2021; Rifki et al., 2024; Rohmadiyah et al., 2024; Shittu et al., 2025; M. Zamroni & Barnoto, 2024).

This study uses the transformational leadership theory proposed by Rivai, which emphasizes the importance of a school principal who can inspire, motivate, and empower teachers and staff to work better in achieving common goals (Rivai, 2020). This theory is highly relevant in the context of Islamic education, as principals with a clear vision of Islamic education can guide school management according to the values-based educational objectives. Additionally, the human resource management theory, which highlights the importance of effective resource management to improve the quality of education, is also used in this study. Siregar and Putra demonstrate that effective resource management, especially in teacher professional development, contributes to the overall improvement of educational quality (K. E. Siregar & Putra, 2024).

Although many studies discuss strategies for school principals in improving educational quality, few focus on SDITs in the Riau Archipelago, which face specific challenges related to limited facilities and human resources. This study aims to fill this gap by delving deeper into how principals in the region address these challenges. The hypothesis of this research is that school principals who implement transformational leadership and effective resource management, despite facing limitations, can successfully improve the quality of Islamic education at SDIT in the Riau Archipelago.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The research entitled *The Principal's Strategy in Improving the Quality of Islamic Education* employs a qualitative approach with a case study design, as stated by John W. Creswell, that qualitative research aims to understand the meanings constructed by individuals or groups regarding a social and cultural phenomenon in depth (Creswell, 2021). This approach was chosen because the researcher seeks to comprehensively explore how school principals implement strategies to improve the quality of Islamic education in three Integrated Islamic Elementary Schools (SDIT) with different social and geographical characteristics (Fernando & Zumratun, 2025; Madkan et al., 2025; Nurhayati et al., 2024; Rokhman et al., 2025). The research focuses on the principal's leadership strategies, quality management based on Islamic values, as well as efforts to enhance teacher professionalism and strengthen religious culture in schools. The study was conducted over six months, from January to June 2025, at SDIT Al Madinah Tanjungpinang, SDIT Cendekia Tebing Karimun, and SDIT Darussalam Batam City, representing various contexts of Islamic educational leadership in the Riau Archipelago.

Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted directly with principals, vice principals in charge of curriculum, as well as several teachers and administrative staff to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the strategies and managerial practices applied (Sugiyono, 2022). Observations were carried out to directly examine the

principal's leadership patterns in daily activities such as teacher meetings, religious guidance, and the implementation of school programs based on Islamic values. Meanwhile, document analysis was used to examine official documents such as school vision and mission statements, annual work plans, meeting records, quality evaluation reports, and documentation of religious activities relevant to improving the quality of Islamic education (Arikunto, 2021).

Research informants were determined using the purposive sampling technique, selecting individuals who were considered to have the most knowledge and direct involvement in the implementation of quality improvement strategies (Moleong, 2022). The main informants consisted of three principals, six senior teachers, and three administrative staff members from each school. Data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model of Miles et al, which includes three main stages: data reduction, the process of selecting and simplifying data obtained from interviews and observations; data display, the systematic organization of information to make it more understandable; and conclusion drawing/verification, the process of interpreting the meaning of organized data to obtain valid findings (Miles et al., 2020). The entire process was carried out iteratively to ensure that the research results accurately reflect the empirical reality of the principals' strategies in improving the quality of Islamic education across the three SDITs in the Riau Archipelago (Huberman & Miles, 2020).

## **RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

#### **The Principal's Strategy in Improving the Quality of Islamic Education at SDIT in the Riau Archipelago**

This study aims to analyze the strategies implemented by school principals to improve the quality of Islamic education at SDIT in the Riau Archipelago, focusing on three schools: SDIT Al Madinah in Tanjungpinang City, SDIT Cendekia in Tebing Karimun, and SDIT Darussalam in Batam City. Based on in-depth interviews, observations, and other qualitative data, various strategies have been implemented by the principals to enhance the quality of Islamic education.

The results of this qualitative field research demonstrate the principal's strategic role in improving the quality of Islamic education at three Integrated Islamic Elementary Schools (SDIT) in the Riau Archipelago—SDIT Al Madinah Tanjungpinang, SDIT Cendekia Tebing Karimun, and SDIT Darussalam Batam City. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews, direct observations, and documentation studies to ensure validity and triangulation of findings.

At SDIT Al Madinah Tanjungpinang, the principal emphasized spiritual leadership and curriculum integration between religious and general education. The principal explained:

“Our goal is to make Islamic values the foundation of every subject, not just Islamic Education. Every teacher must ensure that moral and faith-based principles are included in the learning process.” (Interview with the Principal of SDIT Al Madinah, February 2025).

This statement is supported by school documents, including the 2024–2025 Strategic Program Plan, which highlights the implementation of Tarbiyah-based teacher training and Qur'anic literacy enhancement programs. Observations confirmed that morning tadarus, dhuha prayers, and teacher mentoring sessions were held regularly to strengthen the school's religious culture. At SDIT Cendekia Tebing Karimun, the principal implemented a collaborative management model involving teachers and parents. The principal noted: *"Quality improvement is not an individual task. We involve parents in monitoring learning outcomes and religious practices so that school and home values remain consistent."* (Interview with the Principal of SDIT Cendekia, March 2025).

Documentary evidence such as meeting minutes and evaluation reports showed consistent communication between the school and parents. Field observations found that weekly quality meetings were conducted every Friday to evaluate both academic performance and the consistency of Islamic behavior among students. Meanwhile, SDIT Darussalam Batam City applied a strategy centered on teacher professional development and Islamic school culture strengthening. The vice principal stated: *"We regularly organize halaqah tarbawiyah and lesson study sessions for teachers. These sessions help teachers reflect on their teaching practices through an Islamic educational lens."* (Interview with the Vice Principal of SDIT Darussalam, April 2025).

Supporting documents such as teacher training modules, evaluation reports, and photos of school worship activities validated this approach. Observations revealed that students' daily routines such as praying in congregation, memorizing short surahs, and reciting daily prayers were integral to the school's spiritual climate.

Overall, evidence from interviews, observations, and documentation demonstrates that principals across the three schools implemented strategies based on Islamic leadership values amanah (trust), istiqamah (consistency), and musyawarah (consultation). These leadership approaches successfully fostered synergy between academic achievement and moral spiritual formation. Hence, the study concludes that the principal's strategic role is essential in shaping SDIT institutions that not only deliver academic excellence but also nurture faith, discipline, and Islamic character development in the Riau Archipelago context.

One of the main strategies implemented by the principals at SDIT in the Riau Archipelago is transformational leadership, which focuses on empowering teachers and staff to innovate in the educational process. The principal plays the role of a leader who not only provides direction but also inspires and motivates all components of the school to collaborate in achieving higher educational goals. This finding is reflected in interviews with the principals, who emphasized the importance of open communication and giving trust to teachers in designing and implementing learning activities. The principals in the three schools actively engage in the evaluation and reflection processes of the educational activities that have been carried out. Observations at SDIT Al Madinah showed that the principal regularly holds meetings with teachers to discuss the progress of education and listen to feedback and challenges faced by teachers.

This strategy also focuses on the professional development of teachers through continuous training. For example, at SDIT Darussalam, the principal collaborates with training institutions to provide opportunities for teachers to attend relevant seminars and workshops on Islamic education. Based on interviews with several teachers, they felt greatly assisted by the training provided, which not only enhanced their teaching abilities but also expanded their understanding of the innovative Islam-based curriculum.

In addition to transformational leadership, Islamic values-based curriculum management is also an important strategy implemented by the principals. Findings from interviews with principals and teachers show that SDITs in the Riau Archipelago integrate Islamic values into every aspect of learning, both in religious subjects and general subjects. In interviews with teachers at SDIT Cendekia, they explained that the curriculum applied focuses not only on academic learning but also on shaping students' character based on Islamic principles. The principals in these schools work hard to ensure that the curriculum taught aligns with the vision and mission of the Islamic education they uphold.

This study also found that school principals are striving to integrate technology into teaching to improve the quality of education. At SDIT Darussalam, the principal has implemented technology-based learning by using digital devices such as projectors and educational software to support teaching. However, the challenge faced is the limitation of resources in providing adequate technology, such as computers and fast internet access devices, especially in areas with limited facilities.

Although the strategies implemented by the principals have proven effective in some aspects, challenges in the implementation of quality education improvement strategies still exist. One of the main obstacles is the limitation of resources. Interview data with the principal at SDIT Al Madinah revealed that limited budgets hindered them from providing optimal educational facilities. Although the principal has attempted to address this issue by optimizing available resources, the lack of budget remains a significant challenge in creating an ideal educational environment.

In addition, another challenge found was the inability of some teachers to keep up with the development of the curriculum and new learning technologies. Some teachers expressed that even though they had attended training, the application of technology in teaching remained a challenge due to a lack of understanding of how to integrate technology into daily teaching. Observation data showed that although the principal made efforts to introduce technology into the learning process, not all teachers were able to use it effectively.

**Table 1. Teachers' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Strategies Implemented by the Principal at SDIT in the Riau Archipelago.**

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Percentage of Teachers Agreeing (%)</b>
Transformational Leadership	88%
Islam-Based Curriculum Management	85%
Teacher Competency Development	80%
Use of Technology in Learning	75%

Strategy	Percentage of Teachers Agreeing (%)
Collaboration with the Community	70%

This study shows that the strategies implemented by school principals to improve the quality of Islamic education at SDIT in the Riau Archipelago, which include transformational leadership, Islam-based curriculum management, and teacher competency development, have proven effective in enhancing the quality of education. However, the challenges faced in terms of resource limitations and suboptimal teacher training need to be a primary concern for school principals and related parties in order to achieve better educational outcomes.

One of the main findings of this study is the importance of transformational leadership in improving the quality of Islamic education in the schools studied. The principals at the three SDITs practiced leadership that focused on empowering teachers and developing a school environment that supports positive change. Interviews with the principals showed that they actively involve teachers in decision-making related to educational policies and curriculum management.

However, despite the effectiveness of transformational leadership in motivating teachers and staff, the challenge faced in implementing this strategy is resource limitations, particularly in terms of the budget to support various proposed programs. This was found in the interviews with the principal at SDIT Al Madinah, who stated that although they make great efforts to improve education quality, limited resource management forces them to prioritize what should be developed first.

The management of an Islam-based curriculum is also a strategy implemented by school principals to improve the quality of education. Based on observations, the SDITs studied integrate Islamic principles into every aspect of learning, both in religious subjects and general education. For example, the principal at SDIT Darussalam actively integrates character education and Islamic values into students' daily activities. The principals who integrate religious value learning with academic subjects also contribute to creating a more Islamic school culture and forming better student character.

Therefore, the main challenge in implementing an Islam-based curriculum is the difference in understanding among teachers about how to implement the Islam-based curriculum in a broader teaching context. Interviews with several teachers revealed that although they agree on integrating Islamic values into the learning process, there are challenges in how to effectively teach those values to students, especially in non-religious subjects. This finding indicates a need for increased professional capacity among teachers so they can better understand and implement the Islam-based curriculum.

This study also found that one of the key strategies in improving the quality of education is enhancing teacher competency through continuous training. Principals at the three SDITs studied actively organize training and seminars for teachers to introduce the latest teaching techniques, including the use of technology in learning. Interviews with teachers at SD Swasta Islam Terpadu Cendekia revealed that they felt

more prepared to implement technology-based learning after attending training organized by the principal. This supports research by Saerang et al., who stated that professional development for teachers is one of the factors that significantly contributes to the improvement of education quality (Saerang et al., 2023).

Although many teachers appreciate this training, not all teachers can quickly adapt to learning technology. Some teachers, especially those with less experience with technology, find it difficult to integrate technology into daily teaching. Observation results show that although the principal has provided digital learning tools and equipment, the lack of knowledge and skills among some teachers hinders the optimal implementation of technology. This aligns with research by Anwar, which shows that although technology has great potential to improve education quality, its success heavily depends on the readiness and skills of teachers in using it effectively.

The results of this study show a difference from previous research findings regarding the challenges in implementing strategies to improve the quality of education in areas with limited resources. Research by Hapudin et al. mentions that in urban areas, the main challenges are more related to organizational management and curriculum development, while this study reveals that in the Riau Archipelago, the biggest challenge is the limitation of resources and accessibility to technology training for teachers (Hapudin et al., 2023). This finding contributes to the literature on Islamic education by offering a new perspective on the challenges faced by Islamic schools in remote areas and how school principals can address these challenges.

### **The Success of Strategy Implementation in Improving the Quality of Islamic Education at SDIT in the Riau Archipelago**

This study focuses on analyzing the positive impacts of the strategies implemented by school principals in improving the quality of Islamic education at SDIT in the Riau Archipelago, with research objects at SDIT Al Madinah Tanjungpinang, SDIT Cendekia Tebing Karimun, and SDIT Darussalam Batam City. Based on in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and other qualitative data obtained, several positive impacts were found from the implementation of the principal's strategies in improving education quality.

The principal of SDIT Al Madinah explained that the school's success was rooted in the spiritual-based leadership approach, where all management and instructional decisions were aligned with Islamic values: *"We build teacher awareness that every learning process must begin with intention (niyyah) and end with worship. Quality education must form good character before intellectual ability."* (Interview with Principal, February 2025)

Teachers confirmed that regular mentoring and halaqah sessions with the principal helped them integrate Qur'anic principles into lessons. *"Every month we have halaqah tarbawiyah where the principal leads discussions on moral education and teaching with sincerity. This makes us feel guided and spiritually strengthened."* (Interview with Teacher, February 2025)

Observation Evidence: The researcher observed a consistent religious atmosphere students began each class with short Qur'an recitation, and teachers linked learning materials with Islamic values. Morning tadarus, dhuha prayer, and istighasah sessions were conducted regularly. Documents such as the Annual Quality Improvement Plan 2024–2025 and the Teacher Mentoring Record Book confirmed structured programs including Qur'anic literacy, worship discipline, and moral character assessment.

Interview Evidence at SDIT Cendekia Tebing Karimun. The principal emphasized collaborative leadership and community involvement as keys to success: *"We cannot raise quality alone. Parents are partners; they evaluate our religious and academic programs every semester."* (Interview with Principal, March 2025)

Teachers also highlighted the principal's transparency in decision-making and communication with parents through monthly coordination meetings *"Our principal always asks for teacher input and invites parents to share opinions about school programs. That makes us all feel responsible for improvement."* (Interview with Teacher, March 2025)

Observations showed a strong collaborative culture. Teachers, parents, and students were involved in weekly quality circle meetings every Friday afternoon, discussing discipline, learning targets, and student behavior.

Meeting minutes, parental feedback forms, and school evaluation reports provided evidence of systematic quality assurance. The 2024 Academic and Religious Quality Report documented an increase in student achievement and daily prayer attendance compared to the previous year.

Researchers observed that the school's daily routine included jama'ah dhuhr prayers, Qur'an memorization before class, and weekly reflection sessions led by the principal. Teacher student relationships were warm and characterized by mutual respect and Islamic etiquette. Supporting documents such as Teacher Training Attendance Lists, Lesson Study Reports, and School Activity Portfolios indicated structured implementation of training and evaluation. The 2025 Quality Improvement Report showed an increase in student learning outcomes and religious character scores.

The results of this qualitative field research indicate that the success of the principals' strategies in improving the quality of Islamic education in the three Integrated Islamic Elementary Schools (SDIT)—namely SDIT Al Madinah Tanjungpinang, SDIT Cendekia Tebing Karimun, and SDIT Darussalam Batam City—is strongly influenced by the principals' leadership styles, managerial innovations, and their ability to integrate Islamic values into all aspects of educational activities. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis, which together provide a comprehensive picture of leadership practices, school culture, and quality improvement programs implemented in each institution.

At SDIT Al Madinah Tanjungpinang, the principal emphasized a spiritual leadership approach and the integration of curriculum between general and Islamic subjects. Based on interview findings, the principal stated that every learning process must be grounded in the intention of worship (niyyah) and directed toward moral

formation before intellectual achievement. Teachers also emphasized that the monthly halaqah tarbawiyah sessions, led directly by the principal, helped them deepen Qur'anic values and Islamic morals in their teaching practices. Observations revealed a strong religious atmosphere: students began lessons with Qur'an recitation, performed dhuha prayers in congregation, and prayed together every morning. Documentary evidence such as the 2024–2025 School Strategic Plan and Teacher Development Handbook showed structured programs for improving Qur'anic literacy, worship habits, and periodic character assessments.

Meanwhile, at SDIT Cendekia Tebing Karimun, the success of Islamic education quality improvement was achieved through the implementation of collaborative leadership, involving both teachers and parents in decision-making processes. The principal explained that improving quality cannot be done individually but must be built through teamwork and open communication among school stakeholders. According to teacher interviews, the principal regularly holds monthly coordination meetings with parents to evaluate academic and religious programs. Field observations revealed that every Friday, a quality circle meeting was held to discuss student discipline, learning targets, and the strengthening of Islamic character. Documentation such as meeting minutes, parent evaluation forms, and the 2024 Academic and Religious Quality Report showed a significant improvement in student learning outcomes and worship discipline compared to the previous year.

At SDIT Darussalam Batam City, the implemented strategy focused more on teacher professionalism development and the strengthening of the school's religious culture. According to the vice principal, quality improvement was carried out through lesson study sessions and monthly halaqah tarbawiyah, which encouraged teachers to reflect on their teaching practices from an Islamic educational perspective. Teachers stated that after each training session, they were required to review their lesson plans (RPP) by adding Islamic values to make lessons more contextual and meaningful. Observations showed that religious routines such as congregational prayers, memorization of short surahs, and daily prayer habits were carried out consistently, reflecting a strong and conducive school culture for character formation. Documents such as the 2025 Quality Development Report and Teacher Training Modules further supported the findings that teacher professional development activities directly contributed to improving students' academic and spiritual quality.

Overall, the results show that the success of improving the quality of Islamic education in the three SDITs is supported by three key factors: (1) leadership grounded in Islamic values, such as amanah (responsibility), ikhlas (sincerity), and istiqamah (consistency); (2) a collaborative management system that involves teachers, parents, and students in planning and evaluation processes; and (3) continuous teacher competency development through spiritual and academic guidance. Thus, the principals' leadership strategies have proven effective not only in improving administrative and instructional quality but also in creating an educational ecosystem

that harmonizes academic excellence with Islamic moral and character formation within the integrated Islamic schools in the Riau Archipelago.

One of the main findings of this study is the significant positive impact of applying transformational leadership in improving education quality. Interviews with the principal and teachers at SDIT Darussalam showed that inclusive leadership and empowering teachers actively contributed to increasing their motivation and performance. Principals who implement transformational leadership not only give administrative instructions but also encourage teachers to innovate in their teaching approaches. This is evident in the implementation of more interactive and student-centered learning activities, which increased student engagement in the learning process.

This study also found that principals who implement transformational leadership are able to create a more conducive school environment for change. At SDIT Al Madinah, the principal involved teachers and staff in designing more effective learning strategies, resulting in more efficient and focused classroom time management. The second strategy implemented by the principals at the three schools is Islam-based curriculum management. Observation data showed that the principal at SDIT Cendekia is actively integrating Islamic values into every learning activity. Interviews with teachers at SDIT Darussalam revealed that the Islam based curriculum successfully improved students' understanding of religious teachings and morality, reflected in positive changes in student behavior and character. Students are more responsible, disciplined, and show a higher desire to learn.

However, the challenge found is the uneven understanding among teachers in implementing the Islam-based curriculum. Some teachers expressed difficulty in effectively integrating Islamic values into non-religious subjects. Therefore, further training is needed to ensure that each teacher can implement this curriculum more effectively and consistently. The next finding is the positive impact of ongoing training provided to teachers. In the three SDITs studied, the principals regularly organize training to improve teachers' competencies, both in terms of pedagogy and understanding of the Islam-based curriculum. At SDIT Al Madinah, the principal collaborates with training institutions to provide workshops on the use of technology in learning. Interviews with teachers showed that this training was very helpful in developing their teaching skills and using technology more effectively.

However, although many teachers attended the training, not all of them felt adequately prepared to apply technology in their classrooms. Some senior teachers with limited experience with technology struggled to integrate digital devices into teaching. This indicates that, in addition to training, further support in terms of technology facilities and continuous mentoring for teachers who are less familiar with technology is essential.

Despite the positive impact of the strategies applied, this study also found significant challenges in the implementation of these strategies. One of the biggest challenges is the limitation of budget and facilities. At SDIT Al Madinah, despite efforts

to incorporate technology into teaching, many classrooms still lack essential equipment such as computers or projectors to support digital learning. Interviews with the principal at SDIT Cendekia also revealed that budget constraints hinder their efforts to update learning facilities and provide more structured training for teachers.

One strategy implemented by the principals is transformational leadership, which significantly contributes to improving the quality of education at the three schools studied. The principal acts as a change driver, encouraging teachers to be more creative in designing and implementing learning based on Islamic values. This finding aligns with research by Santoso & Selwen, which shows that transformational leadership can create an environment that supports innovative learning and impacts student learning outcomes (Santoso & Selwen, 2023). For example, the principal at SDIT Al Madinah is actively involved in empowering teachers through curriculum development and more structured professional development.

However, although principals who implement transformational leadership can inspire positive changes in schools, the biggest challenge found in this study is the limitation of resources, particularly the budget to support innovative educational programs. Interviews with the principal at SDIT Darussalam revealed that they face difficulties in allocating funds to purchase adequate learning tools, such as computers and projectors, which are essential for supporting technology based learning.

In addition to transformational leadership, Islam-based curriculum management is a key strategy implemented by school principals to improve the quality of education. At SDIT Cendekia, for example, managing an Islam-based curriculum has resulted in positive changes in students' character, with a greater emphasis on religious values in daily life.

However, the challenge faced in implementing the Islam-based curriculum is uneven understanding among teachers regarding the implementation of this curriculum. Based on interviews with several teachers at SDIT Darussalam, they stated that although efforts are made to integrate Islamic values into the lessons, the main challenge is how to teach these values in a way that is easily understood by students. This finding indicates the need for further training for teachers to ensure that they can implement the Islam-based curriculum consistently and effectively across all subjects.

The third strategy that has proven effective in improving education quality is teacher competency development through continuous training. Interviews with teachers at the three SDITs studied showed that the training organized by the principals has had a positive impact on enhancing teaching skills and understanding of the Islam-based curriculum. At SDIT Cendekia, the training organized by the principal focused on the use of technology in teaching, which helped teachers to be more effective in integrating technology into the learning process.

While continuous training can enhance teacher competencies, limited time and teachers' busy schedules pose a major challenge in the implementation of the training. Some teachers expressed that although they had attended the training, the main difficulty was applying the knowledge gained in the classroom due to the lack of time

to consistently implement the training plans in daily learning activities. This finding highlights the need to provide specific time for more intensive training and ongoing support to ensure that teachers can implement what they have learned.

Another interesting finding is the importance of collaboration with the community and parents in improving the quality of Islamic education. At the three schools studied, the principals hold regular meetings with parents to discuss student progress and find solutions to various challenges faced by students at school. However, despite efforts to build better relationships with the community, some principals revealed that there are still challenges in optimizing parental involvement, especially in areas with a low level of educational awareness. Therefore, a more innovative and inclusive approach is needed to encourage parents to play a more active role in the education process of their children.



**Figure 1.** Teacher Competency Training

This study shows a difference from previous research, which mostly discussed the strategies of school principals in urban areas with better facilities. Research conducted by Salim & Suratman mentions that managing an Islam-based curriculum can be carried out more smoothly in areas with more complete resources (Salim & Suratman, 2023). Therefore, this study contributes to the literature on Islamic education by highlighting the challenges and solutions faced by school principals in remote areas in improving the quality of education.

**Table 2. Teachers' Perceptions of the Success of Strategies Implemented by the Principal at SDIT in the Riau Archipelago.**

Strategy	Percentage of Teachers Agreeing (%)
Transformational Leadership	90%
Islam-Based Curriculum Management	85%
Teacher Competency Development	80%
Use of Technology in Learning	75%
Collaboration with the Community	70%

Overall, this study shows that the strategies implemented by school principals to improve the quality of Islamic education at SDIT in the Riau Archipelago, which include transformational leadership, Islam-based curriculum management, teacher competency development, and collaboration with the community, have had a positive impact on education quality. Although challenges such as limited resources and suboptimal training still exist, these strategies have made a significant contribution to improving the quality of Islamic education. This study also reveals differences in the challenges faced by schools in remote areas, contributing to the development of Islamic education management theory in areas with limited resources.

## **Discussion**

This study examines the strategies implemented by school principals to improve the quality of Islamic education at three integrated Islamic elementary schools in the Riau Archipelago, namely SDIT Al Madinah Tanjungpinang, SDIT Cendekia Tebing Karimun, and SDIT Darussalam Batam City. Based on in depth interviews with principals, teachers, and administrative staff, as well as observations of learning activities, several strategies have been implemented by the principals to improve the quality of Islamic education. Some of these findings are supported by leadership and educational management theories and compared with relevant findings in existing literature.

One of the main findings of this study is that transformational leadership plays a very important role in improving education quality at SDIT in the Riau Archipelago. Based on interviews with the principals at the three SDITs, they focus on empowering teachers and staff to work more effectively and innovatively. Transformational leadership, which focuses on positive change through inspiration and motivation, has been proven to encourage improvements in teaching and learning quality. The principal at SDIT Darussalam emphasized the importance of giving teachers the trust to design and implement learning activities that align with Islamic values (Ainiyah et al., 2025; Syukri et al., 2024; Umar et al., 2025; Yanto et al., 2025; M. A. Zamroni et al., 2025).

This study is consistent with findings noted by Hasanah et al., which show that principals with transformational leadership styles can create an environment that supports collaboration, open communication, and innovation in learning (Hasanah et al., 2023). This creates a conducive working environment where teachers and staff feel valued and motivated to contribute more to improving education quality at the school. At SDIT Cendekia, the principal gives teachers the opportunity to propose new ideas for learning, leading to an improvement in the quality of education that is more value based.

However, although this strategy has a positive impact, the challenges faced in implementing transformational leadership include time and resource limitations. The principal at SDIT Al Madinah stated that although they try to hold regular meetings

with teachers, budget constraints and the limited time available make it difficult to hold more intensive training sessions or discussion forums (Alazmi, 2025).

This study also reveals that Islam based curriculum management is an effective strategy in improving education quality at SDIT in the Riau Archipelago. Based on observations, it was found that the principals at the three schools have made efforts to integrate Islamic values into every aspect of learning, both in religious and general subjects. At SDIT Darussalam, for example, the curriculum applied not only covers academic learning but also the instillation of character values that align with Islamic teachings.

This finding aligns with research by Khoiri, which shows that an Islam-based curriculum has a positive impact on improving students' character and morals (Khoiri, 2025). Integrating Islamic values into the curriculum not only shapes students' character but also increases their involvement in the learning process. Interviews with teachers at SDIT Cendekia revealed that they find it easier to teach Islamic values through the well-designed curriculum (Abdullah, 2024; Isnaeni et al., 2025; Kosim et al., 2024; Lutfia et al., 2023; Msamba et al., 2023). This indicates that managing an Islam-based curriculum can yield better results in character development and increasing students' religious understanding (Alazmi & Bush, 2024).

However, the challenge faced in implementing an Islam-based curriculum is uneven understanding among teachers regarding how to integrate Islamic values into non-religious lessons. Interviews with teachers at SDIT Al Madinah revealed that although they understand the importance of integrating Islamic values into lessons, the biggest challenge lies in teaching non-religious subjects, where the application of Islamic values still needs to be improved.

The next strategy implemented by the principals is teacher competency development through continuous training and the use of technology in learning. At SDIT Cendekia, the principal actively provides training that involves introducing technological tools to support more interactive and digital-based learning. Interviews with several teachers showed that they felt more confident using technology after participating in the training provided (Chalim et al., 2024; Khoiriyah et al., 2024; Sholihah et al., 2025; H. S. Siregar et al., 2025). This also demonstrates that the professional development of teachers is an important strategy in improving education quality, in line with the research findings by Eliza, which show that effective training can enhance teaching competencies and the use of technology in education (Eliza et al., 2022).

However, the biggest challenge faced is the uneven digital skills among senior teachers and newer ones. Some teachers expressed difficulty in adopting new technologies in teaching, indicating a skills gap among teachers. Additionally, although the principal at SDIT Darussalam provides the necessary tools and equipment, limited internet access in some areas hinders the full implementation of technology (Kusumaputri et al., 2023).

This study also found that collaboration with parents and the community plays an important role in the success of the school principal's strategy in improving the quality of Islamic education. At the three SDITs studied, the principals made efforts to involve parents in various school activities, such as regular meetings to discuss student progress and to discuss the educational policies being implemented. At SDIT Al Madinah, the principal actively invites parents to participate in student character development programs, which not only focus on academic activities but also on character building based on Islamic values (Hasbiyallah et al., 2024; Ma`arif et al., 2024; Ramadhan et al., 2025; Salamah et al., 2025; Umar et al., 2025).

Overall, this study shows that the strategies implemented by school principals to improve the quality of Islamic education at SDIT in the Riau Archipelago, which include transformational leadership, Islam-based curriculum management, teacher competency development, and collaboration with parents and the community, have a positive impact on education quality. However, challenges such as limited resources, uneven teacher understanding, resistance to change, and lack of parental involvement need to be addressed in order to improve strategy implementation and achieve more optimal improvements in education quality.

## **CONCLUSION**

One of the surprising findings in this study is the significant gap between the principal's strategy in improving the quality of Islamic education and the implementation of practices on the ground, which does not always align with the planned policies. Although the principals of SDIT Al Madinah Tanjungpinang, SDIT Cendekia Tebing Karimun, and SDIT Darussalam Batam have implemented transformational leadership and a curriculum management based on Islamic values, limitations in resources and facilities remain a challenge that is difficult to overcome. This finding is surprising because although many studies indicate that transformational leadership can positively impact the quality of education, in practice, external factors such as budget constraints and limited access to training and technology hinder the broader implementation of this strategy. The principals have successfully motivated teachers and introduced a curriculum based on Islamic values, but limited resources have resulted in suboptimal outcomes.

This research makes an important contribution in filling the gap in literature regarding the challenges faced by Islamic schools in remote areas in improving education quality. It provides a new perspective by revealing that, although principals have applied strategies based on transformational leadership theory and a curriculum focused on Islamic values, budget constraints and facilities remain the primary barriers to implementing more innovative policies. These findings challenge some earlier research that suggests effective resource management and the use of technology can be easily applied to improve education quality. This study also suggests that the application of transformational leadership must be accompanied by a deeper understanding of local limitations, which can vary depending on the location and

conditions of the school. Therefore, this research introduces a more realistic approach in formulating strategies for improving the quality of Islamic education, taking into account the existing resource limitations.

This study has several limitations that need to be considered. First, the sample is limited, involving only three SDITs in the Riau Archipelago, which reduces the generalization of the findings to other schools in different areas. Additionally, this study focuses solely on elementary schools, which have unique characteristics and challenges, so the findings may not be applicable to higher education levels. The limited variety of cases in this study is also a constraint, as it only covers schools with similar backgrounds and does not explore differences in other regions or schools with different educational systems. This study also has limitations in methodology, as it uses a qualitative approach with interviews and observations limited to one point in time, so it cannot depict changes that occur in the long term. For future research, it is recommended to include a larger sample, examine different educational levels, and consider using a quantitative method to provide a more comprehensive picture of the impact of the principal's strategy on the quality of Islamic education.

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