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Principal Leadership Based on IMTAQ in Improving Student Achievement

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ABSTRACT

This research is motivated by the urgent need for a school leadership model capable of integrating the values of Faith and Piety (IMTAQ) with student achievement improvement in the modern era, which tends to emphasize cognitive aspects. The purpose of this study is to analyze and deeply understand the principal's leadership practices in implementing an IMTAQ-based vision at Al-Khatibiyah Senior High School in Bangkalan. The research approach employs a qualitative method with an intrinsic case study design focusing on the specific context of one Islamic educational institution. Data were obtained through semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and documentation study, and validated through source and method triangulation. The research results show that the principal implements spiritual transformational leadership through moral exemplification, participatory involvement, and the ability to inspire school members to internalize IMTAQ values. Flagship programs such as Musabaqah Hifdzil Qur'an (MHQ), religious studies, and the integration of religious values in learning have proven to contribute to improving students' academic achievement and character. The novelty of this research lies in strengthening the concept of IMTAQ-based spiritual transformational leadership that integrates religious, pedagogical, and managerial dimensions comprehensively.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is the main pillar in shaping national character and improving human resource quality in the era of globalization. In the context of an increasingly competitive and digital world, the principal's leadership plays a strategic role in creating a learning environment capable of balancing intellectual, emotional, and spiritual intelligence. According to (Atika, D., Gazali, M., Najib, K., & Abubakar, 2025), the prophetic leadership model in Islamic educational institutions has proven capable of transforming teacher performance and improving student achievement through values of exemplification, justice, and moral responsibility rooted in Islamic teachings.

In Indonesia, the direction of national education policy emphasizes the importance of integration between knowledge and faith as stipulated in national education goals. The implementation of a vision based on Faith and Piety (IMTAQ) becomes a concrete effort to balance academic achievement with the formation of students' religious character. The study by (Atika, D., Gazali, M., Najib, K., & Abubakar, 2025) confirms that the implementation of IMTAQ vision in madrasas can strengthen religious culture and increase students' spiritual awareness of Islamic moral values, which impacts achievement improvement.

However, challenges in implementing the IMTAQ vision remain an empirical issue in various educational institutions, including at Al-Khatibiyah Senior High School in Bangkalan. Based on preliminary observations, a gap was found between the spirit of the IMTAQ vision and students' academic and non-academic achievement. The principal faces obstacles in synergizing spiritual values with academic achievement targets sustainably. This condition is also reflected in (Wartabone, 2025) research, which highlights the weak relationship between IMTAQ strengthening programs and the improvement of teacher performance and student achievement in Islamic-based schools.

Furthermore, the principal's leadership factor is key to success in building a religious school culture. Dewi (2024) shows that principals who can manage vision and mission based on Islamic values participatively can foster a learning environment that is characterized and productive. However, many previous studies have still focused on managerial aspects and have not extensively explored the meaning and experience of leadership that integrates IMTAQ with student achievement from a qualitative perspective (Dewi, 2024).

Moreover, Emiliya, Zainuri, & Gani (2024) found that religious activities such as "Friday IMTAQ" serve as an effective principal strategy in fostering religious culture, but have not been fully able to integrate spiritual values into measurable academic achievement. This indicates a need for a leadership model capable of connecting faith and piety values with improving learning quality and student achievement (Emiliya, E., Zainuri, A., Gani, Y. M., & Annur, 2024).

In the context of Islamic education in Indonesia, Akhyar, Zukdi, & Deliani (2024) emphasize the importance of value-based leadership in forming students' spiritual discipline. Such leadership functions not only as an organizational driver but also as a moral guide that instills the meaning of spirituality in every educational activity (Akhyar, M., Zukdi, I., & Deliani, 2024). Additionally, Afriyadi & Kholidiani (2024) assert that effective Islamic Religious Education learning management can realize religious culture in schools, so principals must act as catalysts for change of religious values into daily academic activities (Afriyadi, M., & Kholidiani, 2024).

In the local context of Al-Khatibiyah Senior High School in Bangkalan, interviews with educators show that there is still a gap between implementing IMTAQ activities such as Quranic recitation and dhuha prayer with improving student learning outcomes. This indicates that the principal's leadership aspect in orchestrating spiritual and academic values has not been optimal. This situation is consistent with findings by Supriyatno & Barizi (2020) showing that the strength of Islamic leadership values greatly determines the success of IMTAQ program implementation in primary and secondary schools (Supriyatno, T., & Barizi, 2020).

Therefore, this research is important to deeply explore how the principal's leadership at Al-Khatibiyah Senior High School in Bangkalan plays a role in improving student achievement through the implementation of an IMTAQ-based vision. A qualitative approach is used to understand the processes, experiences, and leadership strategies involved in integrating spiritual and academic values. Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich the treasury of value-based and spirituality-based educational leadership knowledge. Practically, its results can serve as a reference for principals and education policymakers in developing transformative leadership strategies capable of balancing faith vision and academic achievement in Islamic educational institutions (Nurul Fitri, U., Sartika, 2024).

The urgency of this research lies in the need to present a leadership model that not only emphasizes administrative dimensions but also spiritual-transformative according to the IMTAQ vision. The novelty of this research lies in the explorative approach to principal leadership practices that integrate faith and piety values into improving student achievement contextually at the Islamic-based high school level, which has not been extensively studied in previous research.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with an intrinsic case study type, as it focuses on one specific phenomenon, namely the principal's leadership in improving student achievement through a vision based on Faith and Piety (IMTAQ) at Al-Khatibiyah Senior High School in Bangkalan. This approach was chosen to deeply understand the context, process, and meaning of

the leadership strategies applied in real situations. According to Lestari, Fitriani, & Priyono (2024), case studies allow researchers to identify social phenomena and leadership in natural situations without direct intervention, making it suitable for describing the dynamics of relationships between principals, teachers, and students in the context of Islamic education (Lestari, W. D., Fitriani, S., & Priyono, 2024).

The selection of intrinsic case study type is based on the unique context of Al-Khatibiyah Senior High School in Bangkalan, which has an IMTAQ vision as the main foundation for all school academic and spiritual activities. This becomes academic justification for exploring the meaning of transformative leadership from an Islamic spiritual perspective.

The research was conducted at Al-Khatibiyah Senior High School in Bangkalan, Bangkalan Regency, East Java, from March to July 2025. The location was purposively selected because it has an IMTAQ-based school vision that characterizes character development and student achievement. Research subjects include the principal, vice principal for curriculum, IMTAQ supervising teachers, subject teachers, students, and parents (Sugiyono, 2017). The selection of informants uses purposive sampling, based on their direct involvement in implementing the IMTAQ vision. If needed, snowball sampling technique is used to expand data through recommendations from key informants. A similar approach was applied by Akhyar, Zukdi, & Deliani (2024) in a qualitative study on value-based leadership in Islamic education (Akhyar, M., Zukdi, I., & Deliani, 2024).

Data were collected through three main techniques:

- 1. Semi-structured interviews, conducted with principals, teachers, students, and parents to explore their understanding of leadership practices and the influence of IMTAQ vision on student achievement.
- Participatory observation, recording behavior and interactions during learning activities, IMTAQ activities (Quranic recitation, dhuha prayer, religious studies), and extracurricular activities.
- 3. Documentation study, including school vision-mission, IMTAQ programs, student achievement reports, and meeting minutes.

This combination of methods enables data source triangulation, as recommended by Dewi (2024), who emphasizes the importance of a multi-instrument approach to obtain a comprehensive picture of Islamic value-based school leadership (Dewi, 2024).

To maintain research validity and ethics, source and method triangulation, member checking, audit trail, and informed consent to all participants were applied to ensure their identity confidentiality. Triangulation was conducted by comparing interview results from various informants and matching them with observation and documentation results. Member checking was conducted by requesting confirmation from the principal and teachers on the researcher's initial interpretation results. Meanwhile, audit trail documents all research stages so that the analysis process can be traced and verified transparently. A similar validation approach was used by Emiliya, Zainuri, & Gani (2024), who emphasize the importance of data validity in school religious culture research (Emiliya, E., Zainuri, A., Gani, Y. M., & Annur, 2024).

Data analysis uses the Miles and Huberman interactive model consisting of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. The analysis process begins with open, axial, and selective coding to find main themes from interviews, observations, and documents. Next, data are presented in thematic matrices to identify relationships between leadership strategies and student achievement improvement. The final stage is iterative conclusion drawing conducted reflectively between empirical data and theory. This approach is consistent with the method used by Kusumaputri, Muslimah, & Hayati (2023) in Islamic educational leadership studies that emphasize reflective dynamics between theory and empirical data (Kusumaputri, E. S., Muslimah, H. L., & Hayati, 2023).

With this methodology, the research is expected to reveal the meaning, strategies, and spiritual values underlying the principal's leadership in integrating IMTAQ with students' academic achievement. Additionally, this approach also provides methodological contributions to the

development of Islamic educational leadership research rooted in spirituality and can serve as an implementation model for IMTAQ-based schools in Indonesia.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

A. Principal Leadership as a Driver of Student Achievement Improvement

Principal leadership has a strategic role in determining the direction and quality of education in Islamic educational institutions such as Al-Khatibiyah Senior High School in Bangkalan. In the context of IMTAQ value-based schools, the principal functions not only as an administrative manager but also as a spiritual leader who instills Islamic values and moral integrity in all school members (Trimulyo, J., Lestari, H., Rahmawati, I., & Thelma, 2024). This aligns with Sergiovanni's (1987) view that effective leadership in educational contexts must be able to integrate moral and professional dimensions to create a characterized learning community (Sergiovanni, 2013). This principle is consistent with Allah SWT's Word:

"Indeed, there has been for you in the Messenger of Allah an excellent pattern for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Last Day and [who] remembers Allah often". (QS. Al-Ahzab [33]: 21)

This verse emphasizes that exemplification is the core of Islamic leadership. The principal becomes an example in discipline and moral commitment so that all school members follow the noble values of IMTAQ.

Based on observation and interview results, the principal at Al-Khatibiyah positions himself as a role model in implementing IMTAQ values through exemplifying attitudes, discipline, and moral commitment. This is consistent with the transformational leadership theory proposed by Bass and Avolio (1994), which emphasizes the importance of inspiration through real examples (Bass, B. M., & Avolio, 1994). The Prophet Muhammad SAW said:

"A leader is a shepherd, and he will be asked about his leadership". (HR. Al-Bukhari dan Muslim)

This hadith illustrates that true leadership is service to trust. The principal instills spiritual spirit so that student achievement becomes worship, not just worldly achievement. The principal also uses a participatory approach by involving teachers and students in program planning. This consultation principle is consistent with Allah SWT's word:

"And those who have responded to their lord and established prayer and whose affair is [determined by] consultation among themselves." (QS. Asy-Syura [42]: 38)

An ideal leader must be a role model in inspiring positive behavioral change through exemplification. The principal not only directs teachers to improve learning quality but also instills spiritual spirit so that students interpret achievement as a form of worship. Thus, achievement orientation is not merely cognitive but also spiritual and affective. Integration between moral and intellectual values becomes the main foundation in forming an achievement culture (Sianipar, B. H., Nabila, A. B., Jalinus, N., & Ernawati, 2025).

In practice, the principal uses a participatory approach by involving teachers and students in achievement improvement program planning. This approach strengthens shared ownership of the school's vision, as stated by Leithwood et al. (2004), that participatory leadership can increase organizational commitment and policy implementation effectiveness (Leithwood, K., Louis, K. S., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, 2004). The principal holds regular

meetings with the teacher council to design learning outcome improvement strategies and extracurricular activities such as Musabaqah Hifdzil Qur'an (MHQ). Through this forum, each party has space to actively contribute to creating a productive and valuable learning environment. This synergy has proven to increase teacher motivation and students' competitive spirit in various academic and non-academic fields.

A key success factor of the principal's leadership in improving achievement is the ability to harmonize the school's religious and academic vision. The principal utilizes IMTAQ values as an ethical foundation for all school programs, including student achievement development. As stated by Fry (2003), spiritual leadership forms a meaningful organizational environment by fostering faith values, life calling, and sense of connection with God. In the context of Al-Khatibiyah, this spiritual leadership is realized through collective worship habituation, value reflection, and achievement assessment that measures not only academic achievement but also morals. This model creates a balance between students' moral and intellectual excellence (Fry, 2003).

Based on field findings, the principal's leadership strategy at Al-Khatibiyah Senior High School in Bangkalan can build a school atmosphere conducive to growing an achievement culture. IMTAQ-based coaching programs successfully motivate students to compete healthily and ethically. The principal acts as a motivator who instills values of diligence, honesty, and responsibility in every learning process. Thus, leadership in this school not only drives academic target achievement but also strengthens students' spiritual dimension as a manifestation of implementing the IMTAQ-based school vision. This shows integration between result orientation and process that characterizes modern Islamic educational leadership.

B. Principal Strategies in Improving MHQ Achievement

Musabaqah Hifdzil Qur'an (MHQ) achievement is one indicator of successful IMTAQ vision implementation at Al-Khatibiyah Senior High School in Bangkalan. The principal positions MHQ activities as a means of spiritual and academic development, instilling values of discipline, responsibility, and healthy competition. The main strategy applied is strengthening religious motivation through a spiritual reinforcement approach, where students are directed to make Quranic memorization a form of self-actualization and worship. This approach aligns with religious motivation theory, which confirms that spiritual orientation can strengthen achievement motivation (Deci, E. L., & Ryan, 2000). Thus, MHQ activities not only produce memorizers but also form students with noble character. This is based on Allah SWT's word:

"And We have certainly made the Qur'an easy for remembrance, so is there any who will remember?" (QS. Al-Qamar [54]: 17)

This verse shows the glory for those who strive to memorize the Qur'an. The principal instills understanding that memorization is worship and a form of closeness to Allah.

The principal also innovates in MHQ coaching patterns through collaboration between tahfidz teachers, homeroom teachers, and parents. This collaboration creates a support system that strengthens students' consistency in memorizing the Qur'an. As explained by Fullan (2016), effective collaboration between leaders, teachers, and community is key to sustainable educational transformation. In practice, the principal initiates "One Day One Verse" and "Tahfidz Motivation Day" programs to foster memorization spirit and maintain program sustainability. Parental involvement is also strengthened through student memorization progress reports communicated regularly. In implementation, the principal initiates collaboration between tahfidz teachers, homeroom teachers, and parents (Fullan, 2016). This collaboration reflects Allah SWT's command:

"And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression". (QS. Al-Ma'idah [5]: 2).

Another factor determining this strategy's effectiveness is the principal's ability to develop a religious climate and spiritual culture in the school environment. Through activities such as morning Quranic recitation, tafsir studies, and weekly value reflection, students are encouraged to make Quranic memorization part of their religious lifestyle. According to Hoy and Miskel (1987), forming a positive school culture significantly influences students' academic and moral achievement. Therefore, the principal ensures that MHQ activities do not stand alone but are integrated into the overall learning system and school religious activities. This integration strengthens spiritual orientation in every dimension of school life (Hoy, W. K., & Miskel, 1987).

Besides spiritual strengthening, the principal also applies an achievement-based approach by giving awards to students who excel in MHQ. Forms of appreciation such as certificates, scholarships, and achievement publication on school social media have proven to increase student motivation. Furthermore, positive reinforcement can strengthen desired behavior, and in educational context, awards can stimulate healthy competitive spirit. Through this award system, the principal cultivates pride and responsibility in students to maintain their memorization. This policy also creates a productive and religious competitive atmosphere (Hamzah, N., & Ridwan, 2024).

Research findings show that the principal's success in improving MHQ achievement at Al-Khatibiyah is supported by synergy between IMTAQ values, strategy innovation, and school community support. By applying spiritual, collaborative, and appreciative approaches, the principal successfully creates an effective and sustainable MHQ coaching model. This strategy reflects value-based transformational leadership focusing on behavioral change, motivation, and organizational culture. As a result, students not only excel in MHQ competitions but also show improvement in discipline, character, and their religious responsibility (Supriatna, 2025).

C. Implementation of IMTAQ-Based School Vision in Leadership

The implementation of an IMTAQ-based vision at Al-Khatibiyah Senior High School in Bangkalan becomes the main foundation for all school policies and educational activities. The principal interprets this vision as an effort to form a generation that is knowledgeable and faithful, balanced between spiritual and intellectual dimensions. This concept aligns with Nurcholish Madjid's (1992) view that Islamic education must integrate faith, knowledge, and practice in the learning process (Madjid, 1992). Through this vision, the principal seeks to internalize tawhid values in all dimensions of school organization, including student achievement improvement strategies. This creates an education system oriented not only toward results but also spiritually meaningful. The principal strives to balance spiritual and intellectual dimensions according to Allah SWT's word:

"Allah will raise those who have believed among you and those who were given knowledge, by degrees". (QS. Al-Mujadalah [58]: 11)

This verse reaffirms the importance of balance between faith and knowledge as the basis of Islamic education. The principal applies IMTAQ principles through three main pillars: exemplification, habituation, and supervision. Exemplification is shown through the principal's religious behavior and discipline as a moral model for teachers and students.

This habituation is done through daily activities such as congregational prayer, morning Quranic recitation, and collective prayer before learning begins. Supervision is conducted periodically through evaluation of students' attitudes and character. These three aspects align with Lickona's (1991) character education theory emphasizing the importance of

moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action in forming students' personalities. This approach makes IMTAQ not just a slogan but a living culture in the school environment (Thomas Lickona, 1991). This principle is consistent with the Prophet Muhammad SAW's saying:

"I was sent only to perfect noble character." (HR. Al-Bukhari in Adabul Mufrad, no. 273).

Through exemplification and habituation of daily worship such as congregational prayer, Quranic recitation, and collective prayer, tawhid values become a living culture in school. The IMTAQ vision at Al-Khatibiyah is also integrated into curriculum planning and extracurricular activities.

The principal encourages every teacher to instill religious values in learning, both through materials, methods, and evaluation. This reflects an integrative curriculum approach where Islamic values are not positioned separately from modern science but mutually reinforce. Through this integration, students can see the relationship between faith and knowledge in real life. The impact is that academic achievement increases along with the formation of strong religious character (Muslih, M., Fauyan, M., Kholis, N., & Rollie, 2024).

The principal's leadership in implementing the IMTAQ vision is also shown through teacher recruitment policies and professional training. The principal only recruits teachers with high religious commitment and moral integrity. Subsequently, teacher training programs focus on improving pedagogical and spiritual competence. This aligns with Bush's (2003) view that effective educational leadership must be able to develop teacher capacity as agents of value learning. By forming a community of religious and competent teachers, the principal creates a learning environment that supports comprehensive IMTAQ vision achievement (Bush, 2003).

Based on research results, IMTAQ vision implementation at Al-Khatibiyah Senior High School in Bangkalan has proven to improve students' moral and academic quality. The principal successfully connects religious values with the achievement evaluation system, so students feel that academic success is part of spiritual devotion. This vision-based leadership model shows a balance between task-oriented and value-oriented dimensions. Thus, the IMTAQ vision is not only a normative guide but also the driving force of all school dynamics.

D. Implications of Principal Leadership on Educational Quality Improvement

The principal's IMTAQ-oriented leadership has broad implications for educational quality improvement at Al-Khatibiyah Senior High School in Bangkalan. Spiritual values instilled through school vision strengthen teachers' and students' moral commitment to the learning process. Educational quality is not only measured by academic results but also by the formation of religious character and noble morals. As explained by Sallis (2014), true educational quality must include moral, social, and spiritual dimensions as part of total excellence. Thus, IMTAQ-based leadership makes a significant contribution to forming holistic educational quality (Sallis, 2014). Spiritual values strengthen teachers' and students' moral commitment. Allah SWT says:

"Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves". (QS. Ar-Ra'd [13]: 11).

This verse becomes the basis that educational quality change must begin with individuals' spiritual and moral change. Other implications are seen in teacher professionalism improvement through inspirational and humanistic leadership.

The principal encourages teachers to continue innovating in learning and integrating religious values into the curriculum. This approach aligns with the instructional leadership concept (Hallinger, 2003), which emphasizes the principal's role as a learning process guide.

Research results show that teachers at Al-Khatibiyah have high motivation in developing creative learning methods based on Islamic values. This forms a professional work culture oriented toward value service.

IMTAQ-based leadership also increases parents' and community participation in supporting school activities. The principal opens collaboration space with various parties in the form of parent involvement programs and social partnerships. This strengthens the school's function as a community character development center. According to Epstein (2011), parental involvement has a positive correlation with improving students' achievement and morals. With this collaborative approach, Al-Khatibiyah becomes an example of participatory and contextual Islamic education implementation with Bangkalan community social values (Epstein, 2011).

From the students' perspective, the principal's spiritual-based leadership has a significant impact on their learning motivation and moral behavior. Students feel that academic success is not merely individual effort results but also blessings from spiritual sincerity and prayer. This reflects the spiritual capital concept (Zohar, D., & Marshall, 2004), where spiritual values become motivational resources that strengthen students' psychological resilience and work ethics. Thus, the principal's leadership directly influences the formation of profiles of students with religious character and high achievement. From students' side, spiritual leadership fosters sincere learning motivation. The Prophet Muhammad SAW said:

"Indeed, actions are but by intentions, and every person will have what they intended". (HR. Al-Bukhari).

Based on all findings, it can be concluded that principal leadership at Al-Khatibiyah Senior High School in Bangkalan serves as a model of modern Islamic educational leadership capable of integrating spiritual, intellectual, and managerial dimensions (Supriyatno, T., & Barizi, 2020). Such leadership not only improves students' academic and non-academic achievement but also strengthens the system.

CONGCLUSION

This research concludes that the principal's leadership at Al-Khatibiyah Senior High School in Bangkalan plays a central role in integrating the IMTAQ vision with improving students' academic and non-academic achievement. Through transformational-spiritual leadership, the principal becomes not only a managerial driver but also a moral and spiritual example for all school members. Research results show that student achievement improvement success is supported by leadership strategies emphasizing exemplification, collaboration, and coaching based on faith and piety values.

An important finding of this research is that leadership rooted in spiritual values can create a school culture that is religious, disciplined, and competitively healthy. Programs such as Musabaqah Hifdzil Qur'an (MHQ), morning Quranic recitation, and IMTAQ coaching activities have proven to strengthen students' intrinsic motivation in achieving excellence. Additionally, collaboration between the principal, teachers, and parents becomes a main supporting factor for consistently implementing the IMTAQ vision in the school environment.

This research's contribution lies in strengthening Islamic educational leadership theory by emphasizing that spiritual and moral dimensions are the main drivers of educational quality improvement. Practically, this research provides an IMTAQ-based leadership model that can be applied to other Islamic schools to build balance between students' intellectual and spiritual intelligence. As a recommendation, future research can expand focus on the influence of spiritual leadership on teacher performance and school organizational climate in various educational contexts. It is also suggested to use quantitative or mixed-method approaches to empirically measure the impact of IMTAQ vision on learning outcomes and students' character formation.

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