

Leadership in Digital Management at Ar-Risalah Islamic University, Padang

Mohammad Raihan

Universitas Negeri Padang
raihanbatam24@gmail.com

Ahmad Rivauzi

Universitas Negeri Padang
ahmadrivauzi@fis.unp.ac.id

Corresponding Author: Mohammad Raihan

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Abstract

This study analyzes the leadership of the Ar-Risalah Learning Centre (ALC) in managing digital transformation at Ar-Risalah Islamic University, Padang. The study employs a qualitative approach with a single-case study design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, moderate participant observation, and document analysis with ALC leadership, teachers, and educational staff. Analysis was conducted through data reduction, data presentation, and the drawing and verification of conclusions. The results of the study indicate that the ALC functions as a *middle-management unit that bridges the foundation's strategic policies and the school's managerial and pedagogical practices*. The ALC exercises leadership through moral-technological exemplarity, the repeated articulation of a digital vision, the stimulation of innovation, individual mentoring, and continuous oversight of digital systems. Digital transformation in schools is not merely the implementation of technology. It is an institutional process that integrates digital competencies, organizational governance, work culture, and Islamic values. This study formulates the *Operational Islamic Digital Transformational Leadership* (OIDTL) model, a framework for operational-level digital transformational leadership grounded in Islamic values. This model emphasizes that the success of digitalization in Islamic schools is not determined solely by technological infrastructure or top-level leadership policies, but rather depends on operational units that integrate competency development, system oversight, mentoring, and the establishment of a digital work culture. This work culture is grounded in the values of trustworthiness, exemplary conduct, consultation, empathy, and reconciliation. The findings contribute to the study of *digital leadership*, Islamic educational leadership, and digital transformation management in Integrated Islamic Schools.

Keywords: digital leadership; transformational leadership; digital transformation.

Introduction

Educational institutions in various countries face pressure to undergo digital transformation, making the digitization of school management a fundamental necessity rather than merely an administrative add-on. In this context, digital leadership has emerged as a conceptual response to these changes. A systematic review by Peng et al.,¹ Over the past decade, documents the growth of digital leadership studies in schools, focusing on leaders' ability to integrate technology, manage organizational change, and empower teachers. Karakose et al.,² Position *digital leadership* as a core competency for school principals in addressing technological disruption.

The adoption of educational technology is frequently examined through the lens of transformational leadership developed by Bass and Riggio.³ This framework encompasses four dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Antonopoulou et al. demonstrate that transformational leadership influences the adoption of digital technology through organizational readiness and teacher engagement.⁴ Zhang, Chen, and Xu found that technology-oriented leadership mediates the relationship between institutional vision and daily digital practices, making this framework a primary reference in studies of digital transformation in schools.⁵

Digital leadership frameworks developed in Western contexts cannot be applied directly to Islamic educational institutions. These institutions operate within a distinct value framework: their leaders are required not only to manage technology but also to ensure that modernization proceeds in harmony with Islamic principles. Brooks and Mutohar developed a framework for *Islamic school leadership* rooted in socio-religious

¹ Y Peng et al., "Charting the Evolving Landscape of Digital Leadership in Education: A Systematic Literature Review," *Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development* 8, no. 8 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.24294/jipd.v8i8.5925>.

² T Karakose et al., "A Review of the Conceptual Structure and Evolution of Digital Leadership Research in Education," *Education Sciences* 14, no. 11 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14111166>.

³ Bernard M Bass and Ronald E Riggio, *Transformational Leadership* (Psychology press, 2006).

⁴ H Antonopoulou et al., "Teachers' Digital Leadership and Competencies in Primary Education: A Cross-Sectional Behavioral Study," *Education Sciences* 15, no. 2 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15020215>.

⁵ Y Zhang, D Chen, and J Xu, "The Relationship between Faculty Members' Perceptions of Technology Leadership and Their Technology Integration into Higher Education Evidence from China," *British Educational Research Journal* 51, no. 6 (2025): 2837–70, <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.4204>.

and contextual values.⁶ Alazmi developed and validated the *Islamic-Oriented Educational Leadership* (IOEL) scale and found that leadership grounded in Islamic values positively correlates with teacher engagement and school performance.⁷ Arar and Haj-Yehia trace the roots of Islamic educational leadership back to the golden age of Islamic civilization and point out that its moral and pedagogical dimensions are often overlooked in contemporary leadership theory.⁸ Othman et al., in their study of the *Islamic Integrated Education System* model in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore, demonstrate that the integration of religious and general knowledge is a distinguishing feature of integrated Islamic educational institutions, which requires a leadership approach capable of synthesizing these two domains.⁹

Studies on the digitization of Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia have grown over the past decade, although the focus remains divided across various types of institutions. Regarding madrasahs, Hudaa et al. assert that the success of digital transformation depends on leaders' ability to integrate modern governance with Islamic culture.¹⁰ Studies on pesantren address leadership issues from various perspectives. Riski and Ach Syaikh identify the digital leadership model in Islamic boarding schools as fostering more inclusive and innovative educational practices. Wahyu Ramadhan and Yusnaili Budianti¹¹ note that technology adoption at the Modern Ibadurrahman Islamic Boarding School aligns with a leadership style characterized by visionary, democratic, paternalistic, and spiritual traits. Andi Warisno formulated the Barakka framework, which

⁶ M C Brooks and A Mutohar, "Islamic School Leadership: A Conceptual Framework," *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 50, no. 2 (2018): 54–68, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220620.2018.1426558>.

⁷ Ayesah A Alazmi, "School Leadership in Context: The Influence of Islamic Values and Beliefs on Kuwaiti School Principal Practices," *International Journal of Leadership in Education* 28, no. 3 (2025): 618–38.

⁸ K Arar and K Haj-Yehia, "Perceptions of Educational Leadership in Medieval Islamic Thought: A Contribution to Multicultural Contexts," *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 50, no. 2 (2018): 69–81, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220620.2017.1413341>.

⁹ A Othman et al., "Islamic Integrated Education System Model in the Malay Archipelago: Implications for Educational Leadership," *Intellectual Discourse* 25, no. 1 (2017): 203–26, <https://www.scopus.com/pages/publications/85021763988?origin=resultlist>.

¹⁰ S Hudaa et al., "Achieving Excellence: The Role of Digital Transformation in Madrasah Management and Islamic Culture," *Cogent Arts and Humanities* 11, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2024.2304407>.

¹¹ Wahyu Ramadhan and Yusnaili Budianti, "Integrating Information Literacy into Islamic Boarding School Curriculum: A Study at Ibadurrahman Pesantren at Stabat," *JIPi (Jurnal Ilmu Perpustakaan Dan Informasi)* 10, no. 2 (2025): 595–606.

links technology adoption to spiritual principles and managerial accountability.¹² Bahri et al. identified six moral leadership capabilities shaped by Maduran pesantren through experiential learning and mentoring.¹³

International literature adds two important conceptual notes. Abubakari et al. (¹⁴ Applied the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to Muslim students in Brunei and found that perceived educational compatibility and digital self-efficacy determine technology adoption in Islamic education, two factors rarely discussed. Lightfoot, in an analysis of ICT reform in the Middle East, warns that technology policies will fail without institutional reform.¹⁵ At the pedagogical level, Muhid and M. Arifin demonstrate that integrating flipped-classroom-based blended learning into tahfiz instruction at SMP Al-Furqon enhances motivation and the effectiveness of memorization, thereby showing that digitalization can extend even to traditional religious practices.¹⁶

These studies expand our understanding of the digitization of Islamic schools, but they are limited to pesantren, madrasah, dayah, and Islamic higher education. Integrated Islamic Schools (SIT), as a contemporary model, have not yet been the subject of much research. A recent study on SIT, by Wawang Haerudin and Tajuddin Noor, “¹⁷ At an SMPIT in East Kalimantan, this study examines the internalization of Islamic work ethics and the exemplary leadership of the principal (*uswah hasanah*), rather than digital leadership or the role of operational units in digital transformation.

This study fills that gap by examining the leadership of the Ar-Risalah Learning Centre (ALC) at SIT Arrisalah Padang through a case study approach. ALC is a unit established by the Ar-Risalah Waqaf Foundation with a mandate to develop human

¹² Andi Warisno et al., “Transformative Islamic Education Management in Madrasah and Pesantren Integrating Tradition and Digital Innovation,” *Journal of Cultural Analysis and Social Change*, 2025, 276–89.

¹³ R Bahri et al., “Moral Leadership Development in Indonesian Islamic Boarding Schools: A Comparative Study of Two Pesantren,” *British Journal of Religious Education*, 2026, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2026.2627921>.

¹⁴ Mussa S Abubakari et al., “Analysing Technology Acceptance for Digital Learning in Islamic Education: The Role of Religious Perspective on ICT,” *Journal of Computing Research and Innovation* 8, no. 1 (2023): 1–16.

¹⁵ Michael Lightfoot, *Education Technology Policies in the Middle East* (Springer, 2016).

¹⁶ A Muhid and M Arifin, “Transformation of Al-Qur’an Memorization Learning in the Digital Age through the Blended Learning Flipped Classroom Approach,” *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 3 (2025): 594–606, <https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v8i3.193>.

¹⁷ Wawang Haerudin and Tajuddin Noor, “Internalization of the Values of Religious Character in Learning Activities as an Effort of Characteristics Islamic Manners,” *Al-Afkar, Journal For Islamic Studies*, 2022, 268–80.

resource competencies and support the institution's digital management. Institutionally, ALC is situated between the foundation's strategic policies and the school's day-to-day managerial practices, a position that makes it a potential middle-management actor in digital transformation. A prominent institutional characteristic of ALC is its explicit mandate to integrate Islamic values into every development program it manages. How this position and mandate are implemented in actual leadership practice and what their theoretical implications are remain empirically unknown and form the focus of this study.

Three main questions guide this study: (1) What are the patterns of ALC leadership in digital management at SIT Arrisalah Padang? (2) How does ALC develop HR digital competencies and a digital work culture, and (3) How does ALC maintain a balance between technology-based modernization and Islamic values as the institution's identity?

This study offers three contributions. Theoretically, this research expands the literature *on digital leadership* and *Islamic educational leadership* by proposing leadership dimensions at the operational unit level as a category of actors that has not been sufficiently articulated. Empirically, this study provides field evidence on the contemporary Indonesian institutional model of Islamic education, which is rarely examined from the perspective of digital leadership. Practically, this study examines whether and how digital leadership at the operational level can align with Islamic values as the institution's identity; these findings are expected to serve as a reference for Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia and Southeast Asia.

Research Methodology

This study employs a single-case study design with a qualitative approach to explore the meaning, processes, and dynamics of ALC leadership in digital management at SIT Arrisalah Padang.¹⁸ This design is appropriate because ALC leadership practices are embedded within the institutional context of SIT Arrisalah, a unit that bridges the foundation's strategic policies with the school's managerial practices.¹⁹ Participants were selected through *purposive sampling* based on direct involvement in the ALC program, participation in digital training or mentoring, and at least 1 year of work experience at

¹⁸ Robert K. Yin, *Studi Kasus: Desain Dan Metode* (Jakarta: Rajawali Pers, 2015).

¹⁹ John W Creswell and Cheryl N Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches* (Sage publications, 2016).

SIT Arrisalah Padang.²⁰ Thirteen informants were involved: one ALC leader as a key informant, nine teachers (T1–T9), and three educational staff members (ES1–ES3).

Data were collected from November 23, 2025, to February 5, 2026, using three methods: semi-structured interviews, moderate participant observation, and documentation review. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all informants and focused on four themes: ALC leadership styles, digital competency development, digital work culture, and the integration of Islamic values into digital management. With the informants' consent, the interviews were documented through detailed interview notes, selective audio recordings where permitted, and post-interview field notes. These materials were used to identify key themes, reconstruct informants' perspectives, and select illustrative statements relevant to the research focus. Moderate participant observation focused on training implementation, coordination patterns, and the daily use of digital systems. Documentation review included organizational structures, training modules, foundation policies, meeting minutes, and digital platform archives.

Analysis utilized the Miles and Huberman interactive model:²¹ Data reduction involved thematic coding, data presentation in matrices and interconceptual diagrams, and the continuous derivation and verification of conclusions until conceptual saturation was achieved.

The validity of the findings is assessed using Lincoln and Guba's criteria: credibility through source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and *member checking*; transferability through *thick description*; dependability through *an audit trail*; and confirmability through tracing interpretations back to the raw data.²² All informants provided *informed consent* before the interviews; identities were anonymized using codes.²³ Institutional permission was obtained from the Ar-Risalah Waqaf Foundation and the leadership of SIT Arrisalah Padang before data collection.

²⁰ Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice* (Sage publications, 2014).

²¹ Matthew B Miles, A Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldana, *Qualitative Data Analysis* (sage, 2014).

²² Yvonna S Lincoln and Egon G Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (sage, 1985).

²³ Patricia Fusch, Gene E Fusch, and Lawrence R. Ness, "Denzin's Paradigm Shift: Revisiting Triangulation in Qualitative Research," *Journal of Social Change* 10, no. 1 (2018): 19–32, <https://doi.org/10.5590/josc.2018.10.1.02>.

Results and Discussion

Thematic coding of the interviews, field observations, and documentation yielded four themes: (1) exemplary conduct and moral-technological integrity; (2) collective vision and motivation; (3) stimulation of innovation and individual mentoring; and (4) a model of digital transformational leadership at the operational level grounded in Islamic values. Each theme is presented using a claim–evidence–analysis framework that connects ALC practices with the literature *on digital leadership, Islamic educational leadership, and the digitization of Islamic schools in Indonesia.*

Exemplary Conduct and Moral Integrity

This section covers moral-technological integrity internalized through operational forums. ALC leaders consistently position the value dimension as an inseparable part of technical competence. In field notes from an internal coordination forum, a leader emphasized that mastery of an application without disciplined use does not meet the institution’s expected standards. One educator described this experience as follows:

"In every meeting with leadership, they always remind us that technology is merely a tool to facilitate work; technology still requires values such as honesty, trustworthiness, and so on. This message is also frequently conveyed during casual conversations during breaks." Interview, (G-3: December 5, 2025)

A similar pattern was reported in the administrative context. Observations of educational staff managing the school’s data system showed that administrative data is not used as the sole reference for decision-making; contextual considerations such as student conditions and the dynamics of the learning environment are still integrated.

ALC leadership drives digital transformation as active participants, not as distant directors. During coordination meetings and training sessions, leaders use presentation applications and learning platforms when interacting with teachers and educational staff, so that staff can see that leadership is also adaptive. Teachers affirmed this pattern in interviews, and field observations confirmed it as a routine practice rather than merely a rhetorical artifact of the interview.

According to Bass and Riggio,²⁴ the dimension of *“idealized influence”* operates through *role-model behavior*, whose effectiveness depends on the alignment between stated and practiced values. Some field phenomena indicate that in a digital context,

²⁴ Bass and Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*.

identification is not merely symbolic; it must be manifested in observable technological practices. Digital role modeling must go hand in hand with *uswah hasanah*, not merely instructions.

Mohan Tanniru and Jesús Peral identify *excellence in professional practice* as a core construct.²⁵ Karakose mapped 174 articles from Web of Science and Scopus and demonstrated a shift from passive *e-leadership* to active exemplary leadership post-pandemic.²⁶ This trend aligns with and expands upon findings regarding ALC; active digital leadership can operate at the *middle management* level, not just among school principals, who were the focus of both studies. Antonopoulou, in a survey of 105 elementary school teachers in Greece, found correlations between transformational leadership and both teacher satisfaction and the adoption of digital practices.²⁷

This theme also encompasses moral-technological integrity. ALC leadership emphasized that digitalization must not erode values. In internal forums, leadership emphasized proper conduct in digital groups and positioned professional attitude and responsibility as pillars inseparable from technical competence. Educational staff confirmed a similar pattern in the administrative realm; trustworthiness and discipline in data management are understood as part of efforts to uphold Islamic values in schools.

These findings align with the views of Brooks and Mutohar, who reject the dichotomy between modern managerial rationality and Islamic ethics. Brooks and Mutohar formulate the integration of values at the conceptual level; ALC demonstrates its practical mechanisms at the operational unit level. The integration of values in technology at ALC is embedded in practice, not codified as rules.²⁸ The instruments are the consistency of leadership in daily routines, internal forums, training, and administrative decisions.

Findings by Muawanatul Hasanah et al. emphasize the role of the principal's exemplary conduct (*uswah hasanah*) as the primary factor in reinforcing the Islamic work ethic, which is itself shaped by spiritual expectations, the organizational environment, and

²⁵ Mohan Tanniru and Jesús Peral, *Digital Leadership in Education* (England: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2021), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-83982-306-020211008>.

²⁶ Karakose et al., "A Review of the Conceptual Structure and Evolution of Digital Leadership Research in Education."

²⁷ Antonopoulou et al., "Teachers' Digital Leadership and Competencies in Primary Education: A Cross-Sectional Behavioral Study."

²⁸ Brooks and Mutohar, "Islamic School Leadership: A Conceptual Framework."

cultural norms. Their institutional context aligns with SIT Arrisalah, thereby mutually confirming the findings. The difference lies in the role models: Muawanatul Hasanah et al. focus on the principal, while ALC demonstrates that moral-technological exemplary behavior can be institutionalized through professional units. It is this shift from a single actor to structural actors that makes exemplary behavior more consistent and serves as an important note for SIT literature, which generally centers on the figure of the school principal.²⁹

Brooks and Ezzani propose *critical spirituality* in leadership that integrates spiritual values with reflective and contextual educational practices. ALC illustrates *critical spirituality* in the digital realm: leaders do not accept digitalization as a neutral technical process, nor do they reject it in the name of preserving tradition.³⁰ Alazmi and Bush develop this idea through the *values-constitutive Islamic-Oriented Educational Leadership* (IOEL) model: Islamic values are constitutive of managerial practices, not merely an ethical add-on.³¹ Alazmi validates a scale that operationalizes this framework.³² The ALC phenomenon in the field illustrates the *values-constitutive* character of digital transformation that Alazmi and Bush have not yet explored. The integration of Islamic values in ALC is not added afterward; rather, it shapes how technological decisions are planned and implemented from the very beginning.

Collective Vision and Motivation

ALC leadership communicates the vision for digitalization in various forums with a key message: facilitating access to information and improving the quality of education. Teachers emphasize that the psychological effect of this articulation reduces fear of technology when the direction of change is understood as something meaningful for the institution, rather than as an administrative demand. This pattern is consistent with the leadership's acknowledgment that ALC's early years were focused on strengthening human resource competencies: technology will not succeed without human readiness.

²⁹ Siti Muawanatul Hasanah et al., "Forging Qur'anic Character: A School Principal Leadership Model-Insights," *Nidhomul Haq: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam* 9, no. 1 (2024): 28–42.

³⁰ Melanie C Brooks and Miriam D Ezzani, "Islamic School Leadership: Advancing a Framework for Critical Spirituality," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 35, no. 3 (2022): 319–36.

³¹ Ayeshah A Alazmi and Tony Bush, "An Islamic-Oriented Educational Leadership Model: Towards a New Theory of School Leadership in Muslim Societies," *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 56, no. 3 (2024): 312–34.

³² Alazmi, "School Leadership in Context: The Influence of Islamic Values and Beliefs on Kuwaiti School Principal Practices."

The psychological effects of articulating this vision are reflected in several interviews. Informants from the teacher group described a gradual shift in perception from initial resistance toward meaningful acceptance. A teacher who, upon first joining the ALC program, admitted to feeling unconfident using digital platforms stated:

"When I first joined, I was among those who didn't fully understand technology. In my view, technology was too rigid and had shortcomings because it only emphasized analysis without human involvement. However, after receiving guidance and direction from leaders and colleagues, alhamdulillah, I've now begun to understand how the digital platform works, and it truly makes my work easier." (G-6, interview: December 7, 2025)

A similar resistance, though with a different nuance, was expressed by another teacher whose objection was not to the technical aspects but to the implications regarding values. The teacher stated:

"Honestly, at first I was worried that the use of digital platforms would change the governance of education at Arrisalah. In my view, reliance on technology would actually cause educational institutions to lose their true values." (G-5, interview: December 10, 2025)

These two statements indicate that resistance to technology adoption among teachers is not monolithic: some stem from technical limitations, others from concerns about values. The articulation of vision carried out by ALC needs to address these two barriers differently. The fact that these two teachers ultimately described a shift in perception suggests that the vision articulated by ALC functions responsively to the diversity of these barriers, a mechanism not explicitly theorized by Bass and Riggio in their formulation of *inspirational motivation*.

This finding expands the dimensions of Bass and Riggio's *inspirational motivation*.³³ However, it does not distinguish between a vision declared once (*one-shot*) and a vision articulated repeatedly in operational interactions (*iterative*). The ALC case demonstrates that at the operational unit level, inspirational motivation functions not as a *top-down* declaration, but as a repeated articulation that takes staff readiness into account. The effectiveness of *inspirational motivation* lies in the continuity of communication, not in the strength of the initial declaration.

Zhang, Chen, and Xu (2025) identified six mechanisms of *technology leadership* that mediate the vision and practices of *modeling citizen behaviors, strategic planning, policy orientation, feedback input, professional development, and resource support* at the

³³ Bass and Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*.

faculty dean level.³⁴ ALC's findings extend these mechanisms to the SIT context and clarify one aspect not explicitly addressed in Zhang et al.'s study: how the vision–practice mediation is institutionalized. In ALC, mediation is carried out by a unit designed for that purpose, with regular coordination meetings, recurring training sessions, and discussion forums serving as spaces for continuous articulation. All six of Zhang et al mechanisms are embodied in ALC's practices.

Navaridas-Nalda et al. emphasize the consistent articulation of vision as a prerequisite for adopting technological innovations.³⁵ But do not address the structural question: through what kind of organization is such consistency maintained? ALC provides one answer: an implementing unit with formal authority to organize forums to articulate the vision. Without such a structure, articulation tends to be sporadic and dependent on opportunity.

This finding aligns with Abubakari et al., who studied Islamic educational institutions in Brunei using an extended version of the Technology Acceptance Model and identified perceived educational compatibility, the perception that technology aligns with the Islamic educational context, as a determinant of adoption intention, alongside *digital self-efficacy*. At the psychological level, the perception of compatibility reduces cognitive barriers. At ALC, this perception does not arise on its own; it is constructed through the articulation of a vision that links technology to institutional goals and Islamic values. ALC leadership shapes the perception of alignment in education. Abubakari's framework explains why a vision works for individuals; the ALC case complements it by highlighting collective mechanisms that sustain this perception.³⁶

This theme also encompasses the spiritual meaning of work. Educational staff interprets digitalization not only as a means of procedural efficiency but also as a form of accountability: work within a digital system is understood as an effort to uphold professional trust and Islamic values. This pattern aligns with the leadership of Abdul Karim, a pesantren visionary who constructs a dual meaning of managerial practices:

³⁴ Zhang, Chen, and Xu, "The Relationship between Faculty Members' Perceptions of Technology Leadership and Their Technology Integration into Higher Education Evidence from China."

³⁵ Fermín Navaridas-Nalda et al., "The Strategic Influence of School Principal Leadership in the Digital Transformation of Schools," *Computers in Human Behavior* 112 (2020): 106481.

³⁶ Abubakari et al., "Analysing Technology Acceptance for Digital Learning in Islamic Education: The Role of Religious Perspective on ICT."

functional (efficiency) and spiritual (*barakah*).³⁷ The ALC case extends these findings to the SIT context, which differs from pesantren in that it integrates the national curriculum with Islamic education in a unified manner. In pesantren, the spiritual construction of meaning around managerial practices is already ingrained in the kiai's leadership tradition. In SITs, a similar construction must be deliberately cultivated through professional units such as the ALC. The collective motivation for digital transformation at SIT Arrisalah operates on two levels that mutually reinforce managerial effectiveness (access, quality) and spiritual commitment (trust, Islamic responsibility), with the ALC serving as the unit that unites both.

Innovation Stimulation and Individualized Mentoring

The two dimensions of transformational leadership, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration, overlap in the ALC at the practical rather than the conceptual level. Intellectual stimulation occurs through mentoring that addresses staff members' specific needs. Teachers emphasize that the most defining characteristic of the ALC is continuous mentoring, not one-off training sessions. Digital learning innovation grows through a gradual process supported by long-term working relationships, not through a single intervention.

Of the nine teachers interviewed, eight cited post-training mentoring, rather than the training itself, as the most influential factor in changing their teaching practices. This pattern suggests that *the transfer of learning* does not occur in a single formal session, but rather through a series of ongoing, contextual interactions. A senior teacher with over ten years of experience who previously rarely used technology in the classroom described his journey as follows:

"I am one of the senior teachers here. As is often the case, most senior teachers are not tech-savvy. Furthermore, as a senior teacher, I sometimes find that the way to deal with limited technological skills is not by learning, but by viewing technology as a threat to the values of teaching. However, some training and mentoring provided by the institution have helped me understand that technology is not meant to replace the human role, but to make things easier." (G-9), interview, December 15, 2025)

³⁷ Abdul Karim, "MANAGERIAL INSPIRATION IN THE TRADITIONAL PESANTREN," *UMRAN - Journal of Islamic and Civilizational Studies* 3, no. 3-1 SE- (December 18, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.11113/umran2016.3n3-1.150>.

Meanwhile, teachers who have recently joined the institution describe their mentoring experiences from a different perspective, not as resistance to technology, but as a process of adapting to the institution's overall work culture:

"When I first joined this institution, some colleagues here provided mentoring. The stages included learning about the school's work culture, administrative management, and I didn't hesitate to ask how to handle students in the classroom. After a few months, thank God, I was able to adjust. On several occasions, the mentoring took the form of discussions among fellow teachers." (G-8), interview: December 20, 2025)

The differences in narratives between senior teachers and newly joined teachers reinforce the findings regarding the adaptive nature of ALC's mentoring. Senior teachers require conceptual reframing to shift the perception of technology from a threat to a tool. In contrast, new teachers need a more comprehensive cultural orientation that goes beyond technical aspects. The fact that ALC can provide different forms of mentoring for different needs demonstrates that the mechanism of "*individualized consideration*" in this context is organic and relational, not merely procedural.

These findings clarify how *intellectual stimulation* and *individualized consideration* operate. In Bass and Riggio's formulation, "³⁸ The four transformational dimensions are presented as distinct analytical categories. ALC data show that, in the context of school digital transformation, these two dimensions function as an integrated mechanism: stimulation is delivered through personalized mentoring, and that mentoring, in turn, generates stimulation. This finding indicates that at the operational level, the analytical separation of these two dimensions must be balanced by practical interdependence.

Findings by Huda et al. indicate that the success of madrasah digitalization depends on integrated management encompassing teacher recruitment, student admission systems, customized curricula, and achievement coaching, with *teacher professional development* by external trainers as a key component. Findings in this study expand upon these by identifying the concrete mechanism of such integration: a continuous mentoring system managed by a professional operational unit.³⁹ At the policy level, a practical counterpart is found in units such as the ALC. Riski, Chande, and Adriantoni found in modern Islamic boarding schools that school principals who successfully integrated

³⁸ Bass and Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*.

³⁹ Huda et al., "Achieving Excellence: The Role of Digital Transformation in Madrasah Management and Islamic Culture."

digital leadership created a more inclusive and innovative environment.⁴⁰ Mahsusi and Riski focus on individual actors and have not yet explained the organizational structure managing this integration. ALC offers a structural solution: an implementing unit with authority for training, mentoring, supervision, and facilitation. The combination of these four functions allows *intellectual stimulation* and *individualized consideration* to operate synergistically, rather than as a training program separate from mentoring.

Bahri et al.'s comparative study of two Islamic boarding schools in Madura provides a relevant pedagogical perspective. They identified three effective approaches to developing students' moral leadership: experiential learning, *mentoring*, and direct training. Although the context is character building, these three approaches have clear parallels with the mechanisms for developing digital competencies at the ALC: direct training (digital literacy sessions), mentoring (personalized post-training guidance), and experiential learning (digital practices in daily work that are reflected upon together).⁴¹ These similarities indicate that effective pedagogical approaches to character formation in Islamic boarding schools can be adapted to develop digital competencies in Islamic schools, provided they are part of a continuous cycle. The pedagogical traditions of Indonesian Islamic schools provide a conceptual foundation for contemporary digital transformation, rather than being merely imported from modern management frameworks.

These findings align with Bush's argument regarding the importance of *middle leadership* in school improvement. Bush argues that the educational leadership literature has, for too long, focused on top-level leadership while neglecting the crucial role of middle leaders in bridging strategic policies and day-to-day practices.⁴² ALC reinforces this argument in the context of Islamic education in Indonesia, a context that has not been explored in the mainstream Anglo-American-based *middle leadership* literature. These findings also indicate that *middle leadership* in digital transformation cannot be conceptualized merely as individual leaders; it must be understood as an operational unit

⁴⁰ A Riski and A Chande, "Implementation of a Digital Leadership Model in Improving the Quality of Islamic Boarding Schools," *Munaddhomah* 5, no. 2 (2024): 185–94, <https://doi.org/10.31538/munaddhomah.v5i2.566>.

⁴¹ Bahri et al., "Moral Leadership Development in Indonesian Islamic Boarding Schools: A Comparative Study of Two Pesantren."

⁴² Tony Bush, "The Importance of Middle Leadership for School Improvement," *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* (SAGE Publications Sage UK: London, England, 2023).

with integrated functional authority. Asrarun Nafis et al., in their study on the transformation of learning at *teungku dayah* in Aceh, demonstrate that a paradigm shift in traditional leaders' approach to technology is a prerequisite for the success of Islamic education digitization.⁴³ The ALC case confirms these findings in a different context (modern SIT versus traditional dayah) and shows that in SIT, this shift is mediated by a unit designed for that purpose. SIT has an institutional structure to manage this change that is not always available in a traditional dayah.

ALC does not merely function as a training unit. Documentation indicates that ALC also serves as a supervisor and evaluator in the implementation of digital systems and as a facilitator of organizational cultural change. The combination of the four roles, designer, implementer, supervisor, and facilitator, creates a structural position that enables the ALC to bridge the gap between the foundation's policies and practices in the classroom and administrative offices. This pattern answers the research question: the implementing unit at SIT translates policies into technology-based managerial practices through a combination of formal authority (training, supervision) and relational modalities.

The Model of Operational Digital Transformational Leadership Based on Islamic Values

These three themes converge into one main theoretical synthesis: the ALC leadership pattern cannot be understood through a single framework. The transformational framework, which encompasses four dimensions of leader behavior, does not capture the digital or Islamic values dimensions. The digital leadership framework explains the digital dimension but focuses on top-level leadership. The Islamic educational leadership framework explains the values dimension but has not yet articulated the digital dimension. These three frameworks explain different aspects; none covers the entire configuration. This study proposes the Operational Islamic Digital Transformational Leadership (OIDTL) model to explain leadership within operational units in the digital transformation of Islamic schools.

⁴³ Asrarun Nafis, Mohd Nasir, and Ruslan Razali, "Transformasi Pendidikan Dayah Dalam Menghadapi Dinamika Era Globalisasi; Analisis Lpi Mudi Mesjid Raya Samalanga JURNAL AT-TARBIYYAH: JURNAL ILMU PENDIDIKAN ISLAM ISSN: 2460-9439 (P) ISSN: 2807-4149 (E)" 01, no. 2022 (2024): 21–30.

The OIDTL model has four constitutive characteristics. First, OIDTL operates at the middle-management level: not top leadership or teachers as end users, but rather the operational units between them that possess substantive operational authority. This characteristic distinguishes it from mainstream digital leadership literature and extends the middle leadership argument to the realm of digital transformation in Islamic schools.

Second, OIDTL integrates four transformational dimensions with Islamic values, sincerity, trustworthiness, justice, consultation, exemplary conduct, empathy, and reconciliation as guiding principles for technological decision-making. This integration is constitutive, not additive: Islamic values shape how the four dimensions are practiced. These characteristics operationalize the argument of values-constitutive leadership in the digital realm.

Third, this model has a bridging orientation that connects top leadership's strategic policies with managerial and pedagogical practices in schools through four functions: program design, training implementation, system oversight, and cultural facilitation. Without integrating these four functions, this relationship tends to be fragmented, a finding consistent with previous studies on technology integration in schools.

Fourth, this model operates through continuous mentorship that adapts to staff's varying needs. Meaningful digital transformation does not occur through a single intervention but through learning supported by long-term relationships. This mechanism operationalizes the findings regarding professional development and resource support, with one important caveat: the key to effectiveness is sustainability, not the quantity of training.

The model's theoretical contributions are formulated into three testable propositions. First, within the SIT context, the effectiveness of digital transformation depends not only on top-level leadership, as argued in mainstream literature, but also on the quality of operational units that integrate these four functions. This proposition extends the argument regarding middle leadership into the digital realm. Second, the transformational dimensions operate within the context of Islamic schools as an integrated mechanism, not as separate categories: exemplary leadership, vision, stimulation, and mentoring mutually shape one another through the medium of Islamic values. This proposition requires adapting the transformational model at the operational level. Third, the integration of values and technology in the digital leadership of Islamic

schools is constitutive rather than additive: Islamic values shape how technological decisions are made and implemented. This proposition operationalizes the model of Islamic educational leadership in the digital realm and extends the concept of critical spirituality to the practice of technological transformation.

The first proposition is reinforced internationally by a study of ICT reform in three Middle Eastern countries, which concluded that technological policy aspirations cannot be realized without more fundamental institutional reform. Optimism about a technology-driven future, the study shows, often replaces substantive structural reform with disappointing results. From the context of SIT Indonesia, this finding reinforces the logic of OIDL: the emphasis on institutionally implemented units constitutes the structural reform in question. This conclusion holds across contexts: technology alone is insufficient, as is the vision of top leadership; what is required is an institutional structure that sustainably connects the two.

This study has several limitations. *First*, as a single-case study, these findings cannot be generalized to all SITs in Indonesia. The ALC model is influenced by the specific characteristics of the Ar-Risalah Waqaf Foundation's policy framework, staff composition, and local dynamics. Transferability depends on the reader's assessment of contextual similarities, not on automatic assumptions. *Second*, not all teachers undergo digital transformation at the same pace; some require longer mentoring, and participation in collaborative forums varies among individuals. This heterogeneity is not a failure of ALC leadership but a common pattern in organizational transformation.

Theoretical, Practical, and Policy Implications

The findings yield three types of implications. At the theoretical level, the OIDL model offers a framework for understanding the leadership of operational units in the digital transformation of Islamic schools, a category of actors that has not yet been articulated in the literature on digital leadership, Islamic educational leadership, or the digitalization of Indonesian Islamic schools. This contribution complements existing frameworks, not replacing them, by adding a level of analysis that has been under-researched. Future researchers can develop the model through cross-SIT comparative studies or quantitative studies that operationalize the four OIDL characteristics as measurable variables.

At the practical level, these findings have implications for foundations and SIT administrators. The success of digital transformation does not depend solely on the vision of top leadership or the availability of infrastructure. A structurally designed implementation unit is needed to bridge the gap between strategy and practice. The establishment of a unit similar to an ALC, combining functions of design, implementation, oversight, and facilitation, can serve as an effective institutional instrument. Leadership of this unit should be filled by individuals who combine technological competence, relational skills, and Islamic moral integrity, as reflected in the profile of a values-constitutive leader.

At the policy level, these findings are relevant to the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and the Integrated Islamic Schools Network (JSIT). Policies that focus solely on providing devices and project-based training tend not to yield sustainable transformation. This perspective aligns with arguments for a reflective-ethical approach to educational digital transformation and with the idea that deeper institutional reform is a prerequisite for the success of technology policies. A more strategic approach encourages institutional capacity building through two channels: incentives for schools that establish digital human resource development units, and programs to enhance the leadership competencies of those units. Focusing on the institutional dimension, rather than solely on the technological dimension, is more likely to yield sustainable digital transformation in Indonesia's Integrated Islamic Schools.

Conclusion

This study concludes that ALC's leadership in digital management at SIT Arrisalah Padang reflects a pattern of digital transformational leadership at the middle-management level. ALC does not merely perform the technical functions of digital training; it also connects the foundation's strategic policies with daily managerial practices at the school. This leadership pattern is evident through moral-technological exemplarity, the repeated articulation of a digital vision, the stimulation of innovation, and continuous individual mentoring. Digital transformation in Islamic schools cannot be supported solely by technological infrastructure and top-level leadership policies. It requires an operational unit that manages change consistently, relationally, and contextually.

Theoretically, this study proposes the *Operational Islamic Digital Transformational Leadership (OIDTL)* model. This model asserts that Islamic values

such as trustworthiness, exemplary conduct, consultation, empathy, and reconciliation are not merely ethical add-ons in digitalization but rather foundational principles that shape how technology is planned, used, and evaluated. In practice, Islamic educational institutions, particularly Integrated Islamic Schools, need to establish an operational unit with a clear mandate to develop digital competencies, oversee systems, and foster a digital work culture. Only in this way can digitalization proceed as institutional modernization that aligns with the institution's Islamic identity.

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