Strengthening the Quality of Education through Islamic Religious Education Management: A Qualitative Analysis of Islamic-Based Schools

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze in depth the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) management as a strategy to strengthen the quality of education in Islamic-based schools. The study used a qualitative approach with a case study design at Randudongkal Islamic Junior High School. Data were collected through observation, structured interviews, and documentation studies with the principal, teachers, education staff, students, and the school committee. Data analysis was carried out through the stages of reduction, categorization, interpretation, and drawing conclusions using triangulation techniques to ensure data credibility. The results of the study indicate that strengthening the quality of education is carried out through optimizing management functions including planning, organizing, mobilizing, and supervising in PAI management. Principal leadership, teacher professionalism, curriculum, technology utilization, and school quality culture are the main determinants of the success of this management implementation. This study confirms that integrated PAI management based on a quality culture contributes significantly to improving the quality of learning processes and outcomes in Islamic-based schools.

Keywords: *Islamic Education Management, Educational Quality, Quality Culture, Islamic-Based Schools*

INTRODUCTION

Educational quality is a central issue in national and global educational development discourse. In the context of 21st-century education, quality is no longer understood narrowly as academic achievement alone, but rather as a multidimensional construct encompassing the quality of the learning process, the effectiveness of institutional governance, the competence of human resources, and the relevance of graduates to the social and moral needs of society. Schools, as formal educational institutions, are required to systematically integrate all these components through a professional and sustainable managerial approach.

In the context of Islamic schools, the dimensions of quality are even more complex. Educational quality relates not only to academic achievement and cognitive skills but also to the formation of religious character, the internalization of spiritual values, and the strengthening of students' Islamic identity. Therefore, the management of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is a strategic element in ensuring the achievement of holistic educational quality.

Normatively, Islamic Religious Education functions as a vehicle for the formation of a perfect human being, a person with a balance between intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and social dimensions. However, in practice, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning often faces structural and managerial challenges, such as traditional learning approaches, a lack of pedagogical innovation, and weak integration between the formal curriculum and school culture. This situation indicates that the issue of educational quality in Islamic-based schools lies not solely in the substance of the teaching materials, but rather in how the educational management process is implemented systematically and strategically.

Educational management is essentially the entire process of collaboration between two or more people to utilize resources effectively, efficiently, and rationally to achieve educational goals. Educational management plays a crucial role in ensuring that all components of a school, such as human resources, finances, and infrastructure, are managed optimally (Asrulla et al., 2024). Effective management can improve the quality of the teaching and learning process, staff engagement, and overall educational outcomes (Sholeh, 2016). Educational management is the process of planning, organizing, controlling, and supervising school activities to achieve predetermined educational goals (Wahyudin & Zohriah, 2023). From a modern management perspective, the success of an educational institution is largely determined by the leadership's capacity to manage its vision, build an organizational culture, and create an accountable and quality-oriented work system. Thus, management is not merely an administrative function, but a transformational instrument that determines the direction and quality of education.

Within the quality management framework, the concept of Continuous Quality Improvement emphasizes the importance of continuous improvement through systematic and reflective evaluation. Continuous Quality Improvement is a systematic process aimed at gradual and continuous improvement in educational services and student learning outcomes. The underlying principle is that all school members share responsibility for educational quality. This approach emphasizes regular performance evaluation based on specific standards or benchmarks, identifying deficiencies, and addressing them through continuous improvement (Abdillah, 2024; Nurhasanah et al., 2021; Musnaeni, 2022). Islamic schools seeking to improve the quality of their education need to internalize this principle in all aspects of management, including the management of Islamic Religious Education. This means that lesson planning must be structured, learning implementation must be based on innovative pedagogical strategies, and evaluation must be comprehensive and oriented toward quality development.

Empirical evidence shows that not all Islamic schools are able to implement educational management optimally. Some schools still face issues such as disproportionate task allocation, a lack of effective academic supervision, weak coordination between units, and limited use of learning technology. These issues impact the suboptimal quality of the teaching and learning process and educational outcomes.

Based on field findings at Randudongkal Islamic Junior High School, the implementation of educational management functions has been carried out in the form of semester planning, teacher task allocation through a principal's decree, and supervision of learning implementation. However, an in-depth analysis is needed to understand the extent to which these management practices truly contribute to strengthening educational quality systematically. In other words, it is crucial to assess whether Islamic Religious Education management has functioned as a quality strengthening strategy or remains merely an administrative routine.

Strengthening educational quality in the context of Islamic-based schools cannot be separated from the leadership role of the principal. Visionary and participatory leadership can create a collaborative work culture, encourage pedagogical innovation, and build collective commitment to quality improvement. A visionary leadership style emphasizes a leader's ability to have a clear, realistic, and inspiring vision and to mobilize all available resources to achieve shared goals (Nor & Suriansyah, 2024). Conversely, bureaucratic leadership that is less responsive to internal school dynamics can hinder the creation of a sustainable quality culture. This leadership model is rooted in the principle of organizational rationality, which emphasizes hierarchical structures, clear division of tasks, and adherence to formal rules and procedures. In practice, bureaucratic leadership is often viewed as an instrument for maintaining stability, order, and legal certainty within the organization (Septiana et al., 2026).

In addition to leadership, teacher professionalism is a crucial variable in determining educational quality. Islamic Religious Education teachers are not only required to master the teaching material but also to possess adequate pedagogical, social, and personality competencies. Teacher professionalism is reflected in their ability to design contextual learning, use a variety of methods, and conduct objective and reflective evaluations. Therefore, Islamic Religious Education management must be able to facilitate teacher competency development through academic supervision and ongoing training.

The curriculum also plays a central role in strengthening quality. An adaptive and responsive curriculum to students' needs enables the integration of Islamic values and the demands of modern developments. In a management context, the curriculum is not merely viewed as a formal document, but as a strategic instrument that must be managed dynamically through continuous planning, implementation, and evaluation.

In the digital era, the use of information technology in learning is a crucial indicator of educational quality. Islamic schools need to integrate technology into Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning processes to increase the effectiveness, interactivity, and accessibility of materials. This requires proactive management support in providing facilities and infrastructure and encouraging teachers to develop digital literacy.

Conceptually, strengthening educational quality through Islamic Religious Education management can be understood as the integration of managerial functions and Islamic values. The planning function must be based on the vision of Islamic education, the organizing function must reflect the principles of justice and professionalism, the mobilizing function must be based on the spirit of brotherhood and intrinsic motivation, and the supervisory function must prioritize accountability and continuous improvement. This integration is a hallmark of educational management in Islamic schools.

This research has strategic relevance in the context of national education policy, which emphasizes the importance of strengthening character and a culture of quality in

schools. Islamic-based schools have significant potential to support this agenda, but their success depends heavily on the quality of the management implemented. The purpose of this research is to analyze in-depth the implementation of Islamic Religious Education management in strengthening educational quality and to identify the determinants of its success. The results are expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of a quality-based Islamic Religious Education (PAI) management model, as well as practical contributions to school administrators in formulating strategies for improving educational quality.

Overall, this research positions Islamic Religious Education management not merely as an administrative function but as a transformational strategy for building sustainable educational quality. Using a qualitative case study approach, this research seeks to provide a sharp, in-depth, and contextual analysis of the dynamics of quality strengthening in Islamic-based schools.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) management as a strategy to strengthen educational quality in Islamic-based schools. A qualitative approach was chosen because this research focuses on exploring the meaning, processes, and social dynamics that occur naturally within the context of educational institutions. The case study design allows researchers to examine phenomena holistically, contextually, and in-depth within a bounded system, namely Randudongkal Islamic Junior High School.

The research location was determined purposively, considering the characteristics of the school as an Islamic-based institution that has implemented educational management functions in the management of PAI. The research subjects included the principal, vice principal, head of administration, PAI teachers and other subject teachers, as well as the school committee and students. Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, which was then developed through snowball sampling to obtain rich and relevant data. The criteria for selecting informants were based on direct involvement in the management process and learning implementation.

Data collection techniques included non-participant observation, structured and semi-structured interviews, and documentation studies. Observations were used to directly observe managerial practices and the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning process. Interviews were conducted to explore informants' perceptions, experiences, and perspectives regarding the implementation of planning, organizing, mobilizing, and monitoring functions in strengthening educational quality. Documentation included analysis of learning planning documents, organizational structures, decrees on task distribution, school work programs, and academic and non-academic achievement data.

Data analysis was conducted interactively through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, thematic categorization, and conclusion drawing. The analysis process occurred simultaneously with data collection to allow for in-depth analysis and clarification of findings. Data validity and credibility were ensured through source and method triangulation techniques, which involved comparing data from interviews, observations, and documentation. Furthermore, member checking was conducted to ensure the researcher's interpretations aligned with the informants' experiences. With this approach, the research is expected to produce findings that are accurate, contextual, and possess sufficient analytical depth.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Strategic Planning of Islamic Religious Education as a Foundation for Quality Strengthening

Planning constitutes the primary foundation of educational management, as it is through this process that institutional direction, objectives, and development strategies are systematically determined. In the context of SMP Islam Randudongkal, the research findings indicate that planning for Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam/PAI) is conducted in a structured manner at the beginning of each semester through the preparation of instructional instruments, formulation of instructional objectives, and determination of teaching methods and strategies adapted to students' characteristics. This process is not merely administrative in nature but is intentionally directed toward supporting continuous educational quality improvement.

Conceptually, planning in educational management functions as a strategic instrument that bridges institutional vision with operational practices at the classroom level. Within strategic management theory, planning is understood as a systematic process of establishing short- and long-term objectives, identifying available resources, and formulating measurable implementation steps. Islamic-based schools bear more complex responsibilities because their educational vision is not solely oriented toward academic achievement but also toward the formation of religious character and students' moral integrity.

The research findings demonstrate that PAI teachers at SMP Islam Randudongkal develop lesson implementation plans (RPP) by considering cognitive, affective, and psychomotor objectives in a balanced manner. This approach aligns with Islamic educational principles that emphasize the integration of knowledge ('ilm) and morality (akhlaq). From an educational quality perspective, this integration serves as a crucial indicator, since quality is not measured exclusively by academic scores but also by the internalization of Islamic values in students' daily behavior.

Adapting teaching methods to student characteristics constitutes one of the study's significant findings. Teachers no longer rely solely on lecture-based instruction but have begun adopting discussion-based approaches, question-and-answer techniques, and activity-based learning models. This reflects pedagogical awareness that effective learning must be participatory and contextual. Research on student-centered learning indicates that active student engagement significantly influences improved learning outcomes and intrinsic motivation.

However, regarding curriculum innovation, instructional material development remains limited to the national curriculum framework without substantial exploration of contextual local content. Curriculum development theory emphasizes that flexibility and adaptation to local needs are critical prerequisites for enhancing educational relevance. Schools capable of integrating local values, community social needs, and contemporary challenges into the curriculum tend to demonstrate stronger competitiveness in educational quality.

In addition to instructional planning, human resource (HR) planning constitutes an integral component of quality strengthening strategies. This study found that teacher placement is conducted based on competence and educational background. This practice aligns with competency-based human resource management principles, which emphasize alignment between individual qualifications and assigned responsibilities. Studies on

school effectiveness consistently show that teacher quality represents the most dominant factor in determining instructional quality (Anantyo et al., 2025).

Infrastructure planning also receives attention within PAI management. The school strives to ensure the availability of conducive classrooms, adequate instructional media, and religious facilities such as a mushalla (prayer room). From a quality management perspective, adequate facilities represent essential educational inputs contributing to the quality of both process and output. Research on school climate demonstrates that supportive physical and psychological environments positively affect student well-being (Fatonah et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, planning practices remain largely normative and have not been fully grounded in empirical data. In contemporary management practice, data-driven planning constitutes an essential standard in decision-making. Schools that systematically analyze student learning outcomes, attendance rates, and other performance indicators tend to design more accurate intervention strategies. Therefore, strengthening quantitative evaluation-based planning systems is a critical recommendation for achieving more measurable quality improvement.

Within the Total Quality Management (TQM) framework, planning must form part of a continuous cycle encompassing planning, implementation, evaluation, and improvement. The Plan–Do–Check–Act (PDCA) concept emphasizes that every planning stage must be accompanied by systematic monitoring and evaluation mechanisms (Deming, 1986). SMP Islam Randudongkal has implemented planning and execution stages effectively; however, strengthening the evaluation phase would further enhance the effectiveness of the quality cycle.

From the perspective of Islamic education, planning also encompasses spiritual and ethical dimensions. The principles of ihsan (excellence) and amanah (responsibility) serve as foundational values in educational program formulation. When planning is conducted with awareness of these values, quality orientation transcends technical considerations and assumes moral significance.

2. Organizing and Institutional Governance in Building System Effectiveness

Organizing represents a crucial stage in educational management, functioning to translate strategic planning into operational work structures. Without a clear organizational system, well-designed plans cannot yield effective implementation. Based on research findings, SMP Islam Randudongkal has implemented a relatively structured organizational system through formal task distribution, establishment of job descriptions, and teacher placement based on competence and educational background.

Theoretically, organizing aims to create role clarity, effective coordination, and work accountability. From an organizational theory perspective, clear structures minimize role ambiguity and internal conflict while enhancing program efficiency. The study reveals that task distribution at SMP Islam Randudongkal is formalized through official principal decrees accompanied by detailed responsibility descriptions for each teacher and staff member. This demonstrates the application of formalization principles within institutional governance.

Competency-based placement of PAI teachers constitutes a key strength of this organizational system. The principle of "the right person in the right place" underlies modern human resource management. Research on school effectiveness indicates that alignment between teacher competence and assigned subjects correlates positively with

instructional quality and student academic achievement (Anantyo et al., 2025). Thus, competency-based organizing significantly supports educational quality.

However, organizing extends beyond formal structure and includes interpersonal work dynamics. Organizational behavior theory highlights the importance of internal communication, trust, and collaborative work culture. The study shows that communication between the principal and teachers is relatively open, with routine coordination meetings in program implementation. Effective communication facilitates smooth PAI management execution.

Nonetheless, collaborative culture in the form of a structured Professional Learning Community (PLC) has not yet been fully institutionalized. Contemporary educational management literature identifies PLCs as effective strategies for improving quality through collective reflection and sharing of best practices. Schools that systematically implement PLCs generally demonstrate higher levels of instructional innovation. Therefore, strengthening formal collaboration mechanisms among teachers constitutes a strategic recommendation.

Within the TQM perspective, organizing must support the participation of all organizational members in quality improvement efforts. The principle of employee involvement emphasizes that quality is a collective responsibility. Although SMP Islam Randudongkal has established clear task distribution as a foundation for accountability, this system should be expanded through more measurable and transparent performance evaluation mechanisms.

Cross-unit coordination also plays an important role. Islamic Religious Education should not function independently but must be integrated within the overall school program. The study indicates that coordination between PAI teachers and teachers of other subjects exists but has not yet reached structured curriculum integration. Interdisciplinary collaboration is essential for developing holistic and contextual learning experiences.

Institutional governance is further influenced by documentation and administrative systems. Organized documentation facilitates monitoring and evaluation. SMP Islam Randudongkal has established relatively sound administrative systems, including documentation of instructional instruments and organizational structures, reflecting awareness of administrative accountability.

From an Islamic perspective, organizing is grounded in values of justice (al-'adl) and professionalism (amanah). Fair and transparent role distribution enhances organizational trust. Research indicates that high organizational trust levels correlate positively with teacher job satisfaction and institutional stability (Aygün, 2021; Boyacı et al., 2018).

However, organizing challenges may arise during leadership transitions. Systems overly dependent on specific individuals risk disruption when leadership changes occur. Sustainable organizing must therefore be built upon standardized procedures rather than personal authority.

3. Leadership and Actuating as the Driving Force of Quality Transformation

The actuating function represents the dynamic stage determining whether planning and organizing can be effectively implemented. In SMP Islam Randudongkal, research findings indicate that the principal's leadership plays a central role in mobilizing all

school components, particularly in managing PAI. Leadership is not merely administrative but transformational, participatory, and quality-oriented.

Educational leadership involves influencing and mobilizing human resources toward educational goals. Transformational leadership models are widely regarded as highly effective in school improvement because they build shared vision, inspire innovation, and cultivate adaptive organizational culture.

The principal actively motivates teachers, provides clear work direction, and facilitates dialogue in decision-making processes. This reflects participatory leadership characteristics. Research on shared leadership confirms that distributed leadership increases collective ownership and responsibility for school quality.

In practice, the principal not only supervises but also provides moral and professional support to PAI teachers, including opportunities for pedagogical development and reflective practice. Instructional leadership research demonstrates that principals directly involved in instructional development significantly influence teaching quality and student learning outcomes.

Teacher motivation also plays a crucial role. PAI teachers demonstrate high commitment to teaching and mentoring students. Research shows that intrinsic motivation exerts stronger influence on teaching quality than extrinsic motivation (Ropianah et al., 2024). In Islamic-based schools, religious values such as amanah and sincerity reinforce intrinsic motivation. However, quality mobilization remains somewhat dependent on the principal's figure. Sustainable leadership systems require institutionalized collective mechanisms.

Digital transformation presents further challenges. Although instructional variation has improved, technological integration remains under development. Visionary leadership is essential for successful technology adoption.

Leadership also plays a key role in building quality culture. Schools with strong collective commitment to continuous improvement demonstrate greater performance stability. Quality culture develops gradually through consistent leadership communication and exemplary conduct.

From an Islamic perspective, leadership embodies the principle of uswah hasanah (exemplary leadership). When principals demonstrate integrity and professionalism, these values influence teachers and students.

4. Supervision and Evaluation as Mechanisms of Continuous Improvement

Controlling ensures that processes align with planned objectives. In PAI management at SMP Islam Randudongkal, supervision is conducted through academic supervision, teacher performance evaluation, and monitoring of instructional programs.

Within modern quality management frameworks, supervision aligns with Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) and the PDCA cycle (Deming, 1986). Academic supervision includes classroom observation, feedback provision, and dialogue-based reflection. Research indicates that dialogical supervision enhances pedagogical competence.

Evaluation also involves reviewing instructional documents and analyzing student learning outcomes. Outcome-based evaluation serves as a key indicator of educational quality.

However, supervision remains largely qualitative. Quantitative performance indicators and systematic Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) have not yet been fully implemented. Evidence-based decision-making significantly improves sustainable school quality (Khotimah & Musolin, 2025).

Participatory feedback from students and parents remains limited. Expanding satisfaction surveys and participatory evaluation forums would strengthen accountability. From an Islamic perspective, supervision reflects the concept of muhasabah (self-reflection), integrating managerial and spiritual dimensions.

5. Determinant Factors and a Conceptual Model of Quality Strengthening Based on PAI Management

The findings indicate that quality strengthening through PAI management at SMP Islam Randudongkal results from systemic interaction among leadership, teacher professionalism, curriculum adaptability, infrastructure, technological utilization, and quality culture.

Leadership emerges as the most dominant factor. Research consistently confirms that leadership quality directly influences instructional effectiveness and institutional stability (Anantyo et al., 2025). Teacher professionalism remains a decisive variable in student learning outcomes. Organizational trust also significantly affects institutional stability (Aygün, 2021; Boyacı et al., 2018).

Curriculum innovation and technological integration remain areas requiring further development. Evidence-based evaluation contributes significantly to sustainable improvement (Khotimah & Musolin, 2025). Additionally, supportive school climate positively affects student well-being (Fatonah et al., 2025).

Overall, PAI management at SMP Islam Randudongkal demonstrates a transformative orientation toward quality strengthening. However, sustainable excellence requires strengthening data-driven planning, institutionalizing collective leadership, integrating digital innovation, and developing systematic performance-based evaluation mechanisms.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) management plays a strategic role in strengthening the quality of education in Islamic-based schools. The implementation of management functions, including planning, organizing, mobilizing, and monitoring, has proven to be a systemic foundation for improving the quality of learning processes and outcomes at Randudongkal Islamic Junior High School. Systematic and participatory planning provides a clear direction for the implementation of PAI learning, although it still requires strengthening in terms of curriculum innovation and a data-driven approach. Competency-based organization and a clear division of tasks support effective institutional governance and increase the accountability of teachers and education staff.

The principal's leadership is a dominant factor in moving all elements of the organization toward a culture of quality. A participatory and transformational leadership style fosters a collaborative work climate and enhances teachers' intrinsic motivation. The professionalism of PAI teachers, underpinned by moral and spiritual commitment, is a crucial force in achieving quality learning that encompasses not only academic but also

characterological aspects. Furthermore, monitoring and evaluation conducted through academic supervision have supported a mechanism for continuous improvement, although it still needs to be complemented by more measurable performance indicators and a data-driven evaluation system.

Determining factors such as leadership, teacher competence, adaptive curriculum, infrastructure support, and a culture of quality have been shown to be interrelated in shaping the education quality ecosystem. The integration of managerial functions and Islamic values is a hallmark of the quality strengthening model identified in this study. The resulting conceptual model emphasizes that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) management is not merely an administrative tool, but rather a transformational strategy capable of building a holistic, sustainable, and relevant education system to meet the demands of the times.

Therefore, strengthening educational quality in Islamic schools requires a systemic approach that integrates visionary leadership, teacher professionalism, continuous evaluation, and the internalization of a culture of quality across all institutional practices. These findings provide theoretical contributions to the development of a quality-based PAI management model, as well as practical implications for school administrators in designing more structured and sustainable strategies for improving the quality of Islamic education.

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