

THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP OF ISLAMIC HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERS IN INDONESIA IN IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF ARABIC LANGUAGE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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Abstract. Leadership in higher education is widely recognized as a strategic factor influencing institutional governance, academic culture, and program quality; however, the relationship between leadership in Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKI) in Indonesia and the quality of Arabic Language Education Programs (PBA) has not yet been conceptually synthesized within a unified analytical framework. This study aims to develop a conceptual understanding of how institutional leadership relates to PBA quality through governance mechanisms and academic policy. Using a Narrative Literature Review approach, this study synthesizes empirical and theoretical publications from 2015 to 2025, focusing on leadership models in higher education, leadership within Islamic higher education in Indonesia, and key quality indicators of Arabic Language Education Programs, including curriculum aligned with Outcome-Based Education and the national qualifications framework, faculty professionalism, the development of *bi'ah lughawiyah* (Arabic language environment), and internal quality assurance systems linked to accreditation. The findings indicate that while no single study directly examines the relationship between PTKI leadership and PBA quality, consistent patterns suggest that strategic leadership is associated with curriculum reform and organizational change, transformational leadership with faculty commitment and academic culture, innovative leadership with institutional adaptability, and managerial capacity with the sustainability of quality assurance cycles. This study proposes a multi-level leadership model (rector–dean–head of study program) that conceptualizes PBA quality as the result of coordinated policy integration, governance structures, and institutional culture, highlighting the systemic and mediating role of leadership in shaping program quality within Islamic higher education in Indonesia.

Keywords: Higher education leadership; Islamic higher education; Curriculum reform; Internal quality assurance; Academic governance.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Leadership in higher education is widely recognized as a strategic factor that shapes institutional policy, academic culture, and the overall quality of teaching, research, and community engagement. International scholarship shows that transformational leadership is particularly effective in driving organizational change, increasing faculty motivation, and fostering an innovative university environment [1]. Within quality management frameworks, leadership is considered a critical prerequisite for sustainable quality assurance, as the success of Total Quality Management and academic governance largely depends on the commitment, vision, and managerial capacity of institutional leaders [2].

In the Indonesian context, several studies have similarly emphasized the importance of leadership in improving higher education quality. Razak et al. [3] found that leadership and faculty performance significantly contribute to institutional quality. Kurniadin [4] highlighted the importance of leadership behavior in the management of Islamic higher education institutions. At the academic leadership level, Ali and Syahri [5] demonstrated that visionary leadership by rectors or institutional heads plays a key role in enhancing faculty professionalism through supervision, training, and curriculum development.

Furthermore, studies in Indonesian higher education institutions indicate that leadership competence plays a critical role in strengthening governance mechanisms, improving strategic planning, and enhancing institutional effectiveness. Rony et al. [6] showed that weaknesses in managerial competence particularly in communication, coordination, and human resource systems—directly affect institutional performance and the pursuit of academic excellence. Their findings suggest that effective leadership contributes to more integrated governance structures and sustainable institutional development. In the context of institutional transformation, Hadiati et al. [7] similarly emphasize that leadership supports the development of collaborative and adaptive academic cultures rooted in shared institutional values.

Despite these contributions, most existing studies examine higher education quality in general terms and do not specifically address the quality of Arabic Language Education Programs (PBA) as strategic academic units within Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKI). In practice, the quality of Arabic language education programs in Indonesia is assessed through distinctive indicators. These include curriculum alignment with the national qualifications framework, Outcome-Based Education (OBE), and the national “Independent Learning–Independent Campus” policy [8]; faculty professionalism and performance [3], [5]; the development of an academic atmosphere and structured Arabic language environment (*bi'ah lughawiyah*) [9], [10]; as well as the implementation of an Internal Quality Assurance System and its alignment with national accreditation standards [2], [11].

Several studies on the development of structured Arabic language environments within Islamic higher education indicate that students' language proficiency is strongly influenced by program governance and institutional support for sustained language practice [9], [10]. Likewise, the implementation of the national independent learning curriculum in an Arabic Language Education department at a state Islamic university demonstrates that curriculum reform requires effective managerial coordination to significantly enhance graduate competencies [8]. However, the structural relationship between institutional leadership at the level of rector, dean, and head of department and the quality of Arabic Language Education Programs as an integrated academic system has not yet been conceptually synthesized within a comprehensive analytical framework.

Addressing this gap, this article positions itself at the intersection of higher education leadership, institutional governance in Islamic higher education (PTKI) in Indonesia, and quality development in Arabic Language Education Programs. Using a Narrative Literature Review approach, this study synthesizes empirical and theoretical findings to explain how institutional leaders influence program quality through curriculum policy, human resource management, academic culture formation, the development of structured language environments, and the implementation of internal quality assurance systems.

Although previous studies have examined higher education leadership and program quality separately, there is still no systematic conceptual synthesis integrating institutional leadership within Islamic higher education (PTKI) and the quality of Arabic Language Education Programs within a unified analytical framework. This article contributes conceptually by proposing a multi-level leadership model (rector–dean–head of department) that explains how policy mechanisms, governance structures, and quality culture mediate improvements in program quality. By situating Arabic Language Education Programs within the broader national higher education system including regulatory frameworks, internal quality assurance mechanisms, and accreditation processes this study moves beyond a descriptive review and offers an analytical synthesis

that clarifies the structural relationship between institutional leadership and program quality in a contextual and systemic manner.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a Narrative Literature Review (NLR) approach to examine and synthesize studies relevant to the role of leadership in Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKI) in Indonesia in improving the quality of Arabic Language Education Programs (PBA). The NLR approach was selected because the objective of this study was not to conduct a comprehensive systematic mapping of the literature or to calculate quantitative effect sizes, but rather to develop a conceptual synthesis explaining the mechanisms linking institutional leadership and program quality within the Indonesian higher education system [12], [13].

Unlike systematic reviews, which require exhaustive search procedures and strict replicability, NLR is selective and interpretative, emphasizing substantive relevance and coherence of argumentation [14], [15]. This approach allows for the integration of diverse empirical and theoretical findings to construct a coherent and contextually grounded conceptual framework [13]. Given that the issue of leadership in Islamic higher education (PTKI) and the quality of Arabic Language Education Programs is closely related to national regulations, institutional governance, and academic culture, NLR was considered the most appropriate approach to produce an in-depth analytical synthesis.

The literature search was conducted using two primary databases: Google Scholar and GARUDA (*Garba Rujukan Digital*). Google Scholar was used to identify both national and international literature related to higher education leadership and quality management, while GARUDA was used to obtain articles specifically focused on the Indonesian context, including empirical studies on Islamic higher education institutions (PTKI) and Arabic Language Education Programs (PBA). The use of these two databases was complementary: Google Scholar expanded theoretical coverage, whereas GARUDA strengthened contextual relevance within Indonesia [14], [16].

The search keywords included combinations of the following terms: “PTKI leadership,” “leadership in Islamic higher education,” “transformational leadership in higher education,” “higher education quality,” “Internal Quality Assurance System,” “study program accreditation,” “Arabic Language Education Program,” “PBA curriculum,” “*bi’ah lughawiyah*,” and “MBKM in PBA.” The reviewed literature was limited to publications from 2015 to 2025 to capture recent developments in higher education leadership and quality reform in Indonesia.

The initial search across both databases yielded 130 articles relevant to the research keywords. These articles were screened in stages through title and abstract review to assess thematic relevance. Articles that did not address higher education leadership, were not situated within the context of Islamic higher education institutions (PTKI) or did not have substantive relevance to the quality indicators of Arabic Language Education Programs were excluded. Further selection was conducted through full-text reading to ensure conceptual and contextual relevance. This process resulted in a set of articles that met the criteria for in-depth analysis within the narrative synthesis.

The selection was purposive and based on alignment with the research focus, namely the relationship between leadership in Islamic higher education institutions (at the levels of rector, dean, and head of study program) and five quality indicators of Arabic Language Education Programs: (1) curriculum quality, (2) graduate competence and competitiveness, (3) faculty professionalism, (4) academic atmosphere and structured Arabic language environment (*bi’ah lughawiyah*), and (5) quality assurance systems and accreditation. Within the NLR framework, the selection did not aim to include all available publications, but rather to identify studies most relevant to explaining the conceptual mechanisms linking leadership and program quality [12], [13].

The analysis was conducted through narrative synthesis by carefully examining each selected article to identify the leadership models discussed, the institutional context, and the quality indicators addressed in each study. The findings were then classified into conceptual themes representing the relationship between leadership and the five quality indicators of PBA. This process was directed toward formulating a multi-level leadership model (rector–dean–head of study program) that explains how policy, governance, and quality culture within Islamic higher education institutions (PTKI) in Indonesia mediate improvements in the quality of Arabic Language Education Programs. This approach emphasizes cross-study meaning integration and analytical framework development rather than quantitative comparison, consistent with the characteristics of a Narrative Literature Review [15], [16].

3. RESULTS

Mapping the Literature on Leadership in Islamic Higher Education (PTKI) and the Quality of Arabic Language Education Programs

The synthesis of the literature indicates that relevant studies can be grouped into three main clusters: (1) strategic and transformational leadership in higher education, (2) leadership within the context of Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKI) in Indonesia, and (3) studies on the quality of Arabic Language Education Programs (PBA) related to curriculum, faculty professionalism, bi'ah lughawiyah (Arabic language environment), and quality assurance systems.

In the first cluster, research on strategic leadership highlights the importance of visionary direction, governance structures, and performance management in shaping higher education institutions. Empirical evidence from Indonesian universities demonstrates that strategic leadership significantly influences institutional performance as measured through accreditation standards [1]. Noer [17] further demonstrated that strategic leadership significantly affects organizational change in universities, including curriculum adjustments and human resource development through structured change management processes. Basri et al. [18] and Pecamuya [19] similarly position academic leadership as a driver of institutional vision, strategic decision-making, and policy adaptation in response to the dynamic demands of higher education systems.

In the second cluster, studies within the Indonesian PTKI context show a consistent relationship between leadership and institutional quality. Razak et al. [3] identified a positive and significant association between leadership and quality performance in state Islamic universities (UIN and IAIN). Complementing this perspective, Noer [1] demonstrated that strategic leadership significantly influences organizational performance in higher education institutions, particularly in areas related to governance, curriculum management, human resources, and institutional effectiveness as measured by national accreditation standards. In a related study, Noer [17] emphasized that institutional transformation in higher education is significantly shaped by strategic leadership, which drives organizational change through structured processes of planning, implementation, and evaluation. These findings indicate that governance strengthening and institutional effectiveness are closely linked to leadership capacity at the strategic level. Khurniawati and Dwiyanto [20] further highlighted the characteristics of innovative leadership in improving governance quality within private Islamic higher education institutions (PTKIS).

In the third cluster, studies on the quality of Arabic Language Education Programs indicate that quality improvement is associated with curriculum design, the strengthening of structured language environments, and the implementation of quality assurance mechanisms. Rosyid [9] and Mahmudah et al. [21] demonstrated that the development of bi'ah lughawiyah through synergy between academic programs and student organizations contributes to improving students' language competence. Taubah [24] emphasized the importance of institutional commitment in maintaining a consistent language environment. Irma and Suparto [22] showed that accreditation-based quality systems encourage stronger governance practices and internal quality culture in higher education institutions.

Overall, this mapping shows that while leadership and institutional governance have been extensively studied in Indonesian higher education—including within PTKI contexts—and while the quality of Arabic Language Education Programs has been examined through curriculum, academic environment, and quality assurance perspectives, no single study directly integrates these two domains within a unified analytical framework. The existing literature therefore provides important conceptual and empirical foundations, but the structural relationship between institutional leadership in PTKI and the quality of Arabic Language Education Programs remains analytically underdeveloped.

Leadership and Curriculum Quality in Arabic Language Education Programs

Noer [17] demonstrated that strategic leadership significantly influences organizational change in higher education, including curriculum adjustment as part of broader institutional transformation. Noer [1] further showed that strategic leadership contributes to the improvement of academic performance by strengthening institutional vision, governance structures, curriculum management, and human resource development within the framework of accreditation-based quality indicators. These findings suggest that curriculum development in higher education is not an isolated pedagogical activity, but rather a component of structured institutional governance shaped by leadership capacity at the strategic level.

Within the specific context of Arabic Language Education Programs, curriculum quality has likewise been linked to structured institutional mechanisms. Mahmudah et al. [21] found that curricula aligned with the national qualifications framework and Outcome-Based Education principles were implemented through

systematic language environment design and cooperative learning strategies. Extending this perspective, Yahya et al. [8] demonstrated that curriculum reform in Arabic Language Education Programs operates within structured governance and institutional policy frameworks. Their study on the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar curriculum at an Islamic university reveals that curriculum transformation requires systemic academic planning, credit restructuring, coordination across institutional units, and alignment with national higher education regulations. The findings indicate that changes in curriculum design are not merely pedagogical adjustments but involve administrative adaptation, academic coordination, and leadership at the program level.

Taken together, these studies indicate that curriculum reform in Arabic Language Education Programs takes place through institutional interpretation of national policy, structured governance mechanisms, and coordinated managerial decision-making. Therefore, curriculum quality in PBA cannot be separated from leadership-driven governance processes that integrate strategic direction, policy alignment, and operational management within higher education institutions.

Leadership and Faculty Professionalism in Arabic Language Education Programs

Razak et al. [3] found that leadership and faculty performance simultaneously contribute significantly to higher education quality. Similarly, Rony et al. [6] showed that weaknesses in managerial competence among institutional leaders negatively affect coordination effectiveness and hinder the achievement of institutional quality goals. These findings underline the structural linkage between leadership capacity and academic performance at the institutional level.

Empirical evidence from Indonesian higher education further supports this relationship. Zebua et al. [23] demonstrated that transformational leadership contributes to the improvement of faculty competence, academic productivity, and collaborative organizational culture. Their study indicates that leadership practices characterized by inclusivity, motivational engagement, mentoring, and strategic vision are associated with measurable improvements in faculty certification, publication output, and professional development. Complementing this perspective, Kurniadin [4] found that leadership effectiveness in Islamic higher education institutions is significantly influenced by creativity, integrity, organizational climate, and compensation systems, which together strengthen institutional commitment and academic performance. These findings suggest that leadership particularly within Islamic higher education contexts plays a central role in shaping faculty engagement and institutional effectiveness.

Extending this discussion, Noer [1] emphasized that strategic leadership enhances faculty competence and organizational capacity by strengthening governance structures, institutional vision, and human resource management. This perspective links leadership practices not only to individual faculty development but also to broader institutional performance measured through accreditation-based quality indicators.

Overall, the literature consistently demonstrates a relationship between leadership capacity, faculty professional development, and academic quality. However, these studies do not specifically analyze faculty professionalism within Arabic Language Education Programs as a distinct academic unit, leaving room for a more focused conceptual synthesis in this field.

Leadership and the Development of *Bi'ah Lughawiyah*

Rosyid [9] and Mahmudah et al. [21] demonstrated that *bi'ah lughawiyah* is an important instrument in improving students' language competence in Arabic Language Education Programs. Taubah [24] emphasized that the creation of a language environment requires institutional commitment and policy support.

Although these studies do not explicitly analyze the role of rectors or deans, the development of *bi'ah lughawiyah* takes place within departmental policies and broader institutional support. This indicates that the language environment, as a quality indicator of Arabic Language Education Programs, does not operate independently but is integrated within academic program governance structures.

Leadership, Internal Quality Assurance, and National Accreditation

Irma and Suparto [22] demonstrated that transformation toward outcome-based accreditation systems encourages the strengthening of governance structures and the development of internal quality culture within higher education institutions. This perspective highlights that accreditation reform functions not merely as an external evaluation mechanism, but as an institutional driver for structured quality management.

Complementing this view, Noer [1] emphasized that institutional performance in higher education is assessed through structured accreditation standards covering vision and mission, governance, curriculum, human resources, facilities, research, and community service. The study further demonstrated that strategic

leadership significantly contributes to strengthening these dimensions, thereby reinforcing the alignment between governance practices and accreditation-based performance indicators.

In a related analysis, Noer [17] explained that institutional transformation in higher education encompasses curriculum reform, improvements in academic staff competence, organizational restructuring, and the strengthening of governance mechanisms. These transformation processes are significantly shaped by strategic leadership through structured change management and coordinated institutional planning.

Taken together, these findings indicate that curriculum reform, internal quality assurance mechanisms, and accreditation orientation operate within broader frameworks of strategic leadership and institutional governance. Rather than functioning as isolated technical procedures, quality assurance and accreditation processes are embedded within leadership-driven institutional transformation aimed at improving overall academic performance and sustainability.

Overall, the literature shows that the relationship between leadership in Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKI) and the quality of Arabic Language Education Programs is not directly examined in a single study. However, consistent patterns emerge indicating that strategic and transformational leadership is associated with curriculum reform, faculty professional development, strengthening of academic culture, and integration of quality assurance systems. Meanwhile, studies on Arabic Language Education Programs demonstrate that program quality is linked to curriculum design, development of *bi'ah lughawiyah*, and accreditation systems. Therefore, this literature synthesis does not claim a direct causal relationship but rather identifies a conceptual interconnection between institutional leadership and the quality indicators of Arabic Language Education Programs through governance mechanisms and academic policy frameworks within the context of Islamic higher education in Indonesia.

4. DISCUSSION

Reconstructing the Leadership Mechanism of Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKI) in Relation to the Quality of Arabic Language Education Programs

Unlike the results section, which maps findings thematically, this section situates those findings within a more integrative analytical framework. The literature synthesis indicates that leadership in Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKI) operates through a multi-level configuration involving strategic, transformational, and managerial roles simultaneously. In relation to the quality of Arabic Language Education Programs (PBA), each leadership dimension has distinct implications for different quality indicators.

Strategic leadership, as demonstrated by Noer [17] and contextualized within PTKI studies, operates primarily at the level of institutional direction-setting and organizational change. Its orientation lies in aligning long-term vision, strengthening governance structures, restructuring curricula in accordance with national standards, and reinforcing the institutional positioning of study programs within the broader higher education system. In the context of Arabic Language Education Programs, this role is reflected in decisions related to curriculum alignment with the national qualifications framework, accreditation requirements, and broader policy frameworks governing higher education. In this sense, strategic leadership shapes structural design and policy direction rather than day-to-day instructional practices.

Transformational leadership operates primarily at the level of organizational culture and interpersonal engagement rather than directly altering formal curriculum structures. As evidenced by Zebua et al. [23], leadership practices emphasizing motivation, collaboration, mentoring, and participatory decision-making strengthen faculty professionalism and institutional adaptability. Similarly, Kurniadin [4] highlighted the importance of organizational climate, leadership integrity, and governance mechanisms in shaping effective academic environments within Islamic higher education institutions. Together, these studies indicate that while strategic leadership determines institutional direction and policy orientation, transformational leadership facilitates the internalization of change through faculty motivation, collaborative culture, and strengthened professional commitment among academic actors.

Innovative and adaptive leadership, as illustrated in the studies of Pecamuya [19] and Khurniawati and Dwiyanto [20], underscores the institution's capacity to respond to external dynamics, including technological development and evolving accreditation requirements. Within Arabic Language Education Programs, this dimension is relevant to the development of instructional innovation, cooperative learning strategies, and responsiveness to national initiatives such as the Independent Learning–Independent Campus policy. Innovative leadership therefore expands institutional flexibility while remaining anchored within structured governance frameworks.

When these findings are examined alongside studies on *bi'ah lughawiyah* [9], [10], [24], it becomes evident that the language environment is not merely a pedagogical tool but part of the broader governance ecosystem of the program. The development of *bi'ah lughawiyah* becomes effective when departmental policies, faculty roles, student engagement, and institutional support operate coherently. This reinforces the view that the quality of Arabic Language Education Programs is constructed through the integration of policy direction, academic culture, and program-level management.

In terms of quality governance, the literature on accreditation-based performance reform [22] and the empirical findings of Noer [1] indicate that effective higher education management requires structured strategic leadership capable of integrating vision-setting, governance practices, human resource development, and organizational control mechanisms within a coherent institutional framework. Leadership, in this context, is understood not merely as personal charisma but as the strategic capacity to align institutional policy, academic management, and accreditation-oriented performance standards in pursuit of sustainable quality improvement.

Conceptually, this synthesis suggests that the relationship between leadership in Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKI) and the quality of Arabic Language Education Programs is mediating and systemic in nature. Leadership at the levels of rector, dean, and head of study program does not operate in a linear manner toward quality outcomes; rather, it functions through governance mechanisms that influence curriculum alignment, faculty professionalism, academic climate, and quality assurance structures. The multi-level model derived from this review indicates that program quality results from both vertical coordination (from institutional vision to program implementation) and horizontal integration (among curriculum, human resources, academic culture, and quality assurance mechanisms). Within the limitations of a Narrative Literature Review, this model should be understood as a conceptual construction based on literature synthesis rather than an empirically tested causal model.

Furthermore, the theoretical contribution of this study lies in positioning higher education leadership within the distinctive framework of Islamic higher education institutions. Unlike general higher education leadership models that primarily emphasize organizational effectiveness and competitiveness, leadership in PTKI operates at the intersection of national regulatory demands, contemporary quality assurance systems, and institutional identities shaped by Islamic traditions. In the context of Arabic Language Education Programs, leadership therefore directs curriculum alignment and accreditation processes while functioning within institutions that integrate academic quality standards with Islamic institutional character. The proposed multi-level leadership model thus represents a contextual synthesis reflecting the governance dynamics of Islamic higher education institutions as both academic and value-oriented organizations.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the literature synthesis, leadership in Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKI) in Indonesia can be understood as closely related to the quality of Arabic Language Education Programs through mechanisms of governance, academic policy, and institutional culture. This relationship is not direct; rather, it is articulated through several quality indicators, including curriculum quality aligned with Outcome-Based Education (OBE) and the national qualifications framework, faculty professionalism, the development of *bi'ah lughawiyah* (Arabic language environments), and the integration of Internal Quality Assurance Systems (SPMI) with national accreditation orientation. The literature indicates that strategic leadership contributes to organizational change and curriculum reform; transformational leadership is associated with strengthening faculty performance and commitment; innovative leadership supports the development of adaptive academic culture; and institutional managerial capacity is linked to sustaining quality cycles through planning, implementation, evaluation, and continuous improvement. Accordingly, the quality of Arabic Language Education Programs in PTKI can be positioned within a multi-level leadership framework (rector–dean–head of study program) that integrates policy, resources, and quality systems in a coordinated manner.

The conceptual implications of this study emphasize that leadership in Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKI) should not be reduced to administrative functions alone but rather understood as a strategic variable in the development of program quality. Efforts to enhance the quality of Arabic Language Education Programs require alignment of outcome-based curriculum planning, strengthening faculty capacity-building initiatives, structural support for the development of *bi'ah lughawiyah*, and integration of internal quality assurance systems with accreditation orientation and continuous evaluation. An adaptive and collaborative leadership approach grounded in Islamic values is particularly relevant in the PTKI context, which faces modern academic demands while maintaining its institutional identity.

Future research should empirically examine the proposed multi-level leadership model in relation to the quality of Arabic Language Education Programs using quantitative or mixed-methods designs focused specifically at the program level. Comparative studies across Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKI) are also important to identify variations in leadership practices and their relationship with curriculum outcomes, graduate competence, and the effectiveness of *bi'ah lughawiyah*. In addition, in-depth exploration of the role of the head of study program as an operational actor bridging institutional policy and the implementation of program quality could further enrich understanding of leadership dynamics within the context of Islamic higher education in Indonesia.

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