



Strategic Leadership in Human Resource Management of Islamic Education: A Study of Digital Transformation

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Abstract

This study examines strategic leadership in human resource management (HRM) within Islamic education in the era of digital transformation, focusing on how leadership strategies address modernization challenges while maintaining Islamic values. The research was conducted at SMK Nurul Jadid, Probolinggo, using a descriptive qualitative approach with data collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation, and analyzed through reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that strategic leadership plays a significant role in formulating a digital vision and strengthening human resource competencies through training, mentoring, and technology integration in both learning and administrative processes. However, challenges such as limited infrastructure and resistance to digitalization remain significant, requiring adaptive leadership approaches rooted in religious values and strategic vision. The implementation of these strategies has led to improved teacher performance, more efficient administrative governance, and increased student engagement in digital-based learning. This study highlights the importance of integrating Islamic values with digital transformation as an alternative model for HRM in Islamic education and suggests further quantitative research to support evidence-based educational policy.

Keywords: Strategic Leadership; Human Resource Management; Islamic Education; Digital Transformation; Educational Management

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji kepemimpinan strategik dalam manajemen sumber daya manusia (SDM) pendidikan Islam di era transformasi digital dengan fokus pada bagaimana strategi kepemimpinan mampu menjawab tantangan modernisasi tanpa mengabaikan nilai-nilai keislaman. Penelitian dilakukan di SMK Nurul Jadid, Probolinggo, dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan dokumentasi, serta analisis data melalui reduksi, penyajian, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan strategik memiliki peran penting dalam merumuskan visi digital serta memperkuat kompetensi SDM melalui pelatihan, pendampingan, dan integrasi teknologi dalam proses pembelajaran dan administrasi. Namun demikian, tantangan berupa keterbatasan infrastruktur dan resistensi terhadap digitalisasi masih menjadi kendala yang memerlukan pendekatan kepemimpinan adaptif berbasis nilai religius dan visi strategis. Implementasi strategi tersebut berdampak pada peningkatan kinerja guru, efisiensi tata kelola administrasi, serta keterlibatan santri dalam pembelajaran berbasis digital, sehingga menegaskan pentingnya integrasi nilai Islam dengan transformasi digital sebagai model alternatif manajemen SDM pendidikan Islam.

Kata Kunci: Kepemimpinan Strategik; Manajemen Sumber Daya Manusia; Pendidikan Islam; Transformasi Digital; Manajemen Pendidikan



A. Introduction

The development of the digital transformation era has brought significant changes across various aspects of life, including Islamic education (Munir & Su'ada, 2024). Digital transformation not only involves the use of technology in the learning process but also encompasses the management of human resources (HR) within educational institutions (Ulum et al., 2025). Islamic educational institutions, including madrasahs and pesantren, are required not only to preserve their distinctive spiritual values but also to manage human resources strategically in order to remain adaptive to digital changes. According to Drucker (1999), strategic leadership refers to the ability of leaders to formulate long-term visions, anticipate changes, and make decisions that impact organizational sustainability (Hakim & Samiyah, 2025). Therefore, strategic leadership in Islamic education is highly relevant to be examined, particularly in the context of human resource management, which serves as a key determinant of institutional success.

The urgency of this study is grounded in the social reality that digital transformation has introduced new challenges, particularly in terms of competency demands for teachers, educational staff, and institutional leaders (Ismunandar, 2025). In Indonesia, a survey by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek, 2022) indicates that only about 47% of teachers feel prepared to engage in digital-based learning (Alfaruqi & Nurwahidah, 2025). This condition becomes more complex in Islamic educational institutions, which generally face limitations in infrastructure, access to training, and technological proficiency. Therefore, the role of strategic leadership is essential to ensure that human resources in Islamic educational institutions are capable of adapting to ongoing changes. The strategic management theory proposed by Barney (1991) through the Resource-Based View (RBV) emphasizes that organizational advantage depends on how resources, including human resources, are effectively managed and developed (Amaludin et al., 2025).

The main problem identified is the suboptimal implementation of strategic leadership in human resource management within Islamic educational institutions. Many madrasah principals or pesantren leaders still adopt traditional leadership patterns, resulting in human resource development that is not aligned with the demands of the digital era (Hasna et al., 2025). This phenomenon is reflected in the limited availability of technology-based capacity development programs for teachers, the lack of digital management training, and weak performance evaluation systems that are not integrated with contemporary needs. Consequently, Islamic educational institutions often lag behind in innovation and are unable to compete with more adaptive general educational institutions in responding to digital transformation. This condition underscores the importance of conducting research on strategic leadership in human resource management within Islamic education in the digital era.

Several previous studies have examined strategic leadership in education. First, a study by Alqatawenh (2020) in the *International Journal of Educational Management* highlights that strategic leadership significantly influences human resource development and the quality of educational organizations (Rosemaulidya, 2025). Second, a study by Khan et al. (2021) in *Sustainability* finds that integrating strategic leadership with teachers' digital competencies can enhance learning innovation (Ratnawati & Lestari, 2025). Third, research by Aboramadan (2022) in the *Journal of Management Development* emphasizes the importance of value-based strategic leadership in improving human resource performance in faith-based educational organizations. These studies demonstrate the significant role of strategic leadership in human resource management (Rochaendi et al., 2022); however, most focus on general education or non-religious organizational contexts, rather than specifically on Islamic education.

From the existing literature, several research gaps can be identified. First, there is a lack of studies specifically examining strategic leadership in the context of human resource management within Islamic educational institutions, particularly madrasahs and *pesantren*, which possess unique characteristics in integrating Islamic values with digital demands. Second, previous research tends to emphasize learning innovation and organizational quality, while the role of strategic leadership in shaping human resource readiness for digital transformation in Islamic education remains

underexplored. Addressing these gaps is essential to enrich academic discourse and provide practical contributions to the management of Islamic education.

The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive examination of strategic leadership in human resource management within Islamic education by emphasizing two key dimensions: Islamic spirituality as the foundation of leadership values and digital adaptation as a global demand. This study not only connects strategic leadership with human resource development but also integrates it within the broader context of digital transformation, which has become a global trend. Therefore, this research has the potential to offer a new conceptual model of strategic leadership in Islamic education that balances traditional Islamic values with the demands of digitalization.

Based on the above discussion, this study aims to analyze how strategic leadership is implemented in human resource management within Islamic education in the era of digital transformation. The primary focus is on how leaders of Islamic educational institutions formulate strategies, develop human resource competencies, and manage changes driven by digitalization. Through this objective, the study is expected to contribute theoretically by strengthening the concept of strategic leadership in Islamic education, as well as practically by providing recommendations for madrasah and pesantren leaders to improve the quality of human resource management in accordance with the demands of the digital era.

B. Method

This study employs a qualitative research design with a case study approach (Septiana et al., 2024). This approach was selected based on the research objective to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of strategic leadership in human resource management within Islamic education in the era of digital transformation. The research was conducted at SMK Nurul Jadid, located on Jalan Kiai Haji Zaini Mun'im, Karanganyar, Paiton, Probolinggo. This institution was chosen due to its distinctive characteristics as an Islamic educational institution within a *pesantren* environment, as well as its efforts to adopt various digitalization strategies in managing learning processes and human resources.

The research subjects consisted of key informants and supporting informants. The key informants included the principal as the strategic decision-maker in human resource management and vice principals in charge of curriculum and student affairs who are directly involved in the implementation of strategic leadership. Meanwhile, the supporting informants comprised teachers, administrative staff, and other educational personnel who are part of the human resource system at SMK Nurul Jadid. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, which involves selecting participants based on their roles and knowledge relevant to the research focus (Suriani et al., 2023).

Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation (Zahroh et al., 2025). Interviews were conducted to explore perspectives, experiences, and leadership strategies in managing human resources in the digital era. Observations were carried out to examine leadership practices, management systems, and technology-integrated learning processes. Documentation, including school archives, program documents, and profiles of teachers and educational staff, was used to support data triangulation. Data analysis followed the model of Miles and Huberman (1994), which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Mumpuni & Afifah, 2022). Data reduction involved selecting and focusing on information relevant to the research theme. Data display was presented in a systematic narrative form to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn by linking field data with theories of strategic leadership and human resource management in Islamic education to obtain in-depth understanding and comprehensive answers to the research questions.

Table 1. Research Instrument

Research Focus	Indicators	Data Collection Techniques
Strategic leadership of the principal in HR management	1. Formulation of strategic vision and mission 2. Decision-making based on Islamic values 3. Long-term planning	Interviews and Documentation
HR development strategies in the era of digital transformation	1. Teacher training and development programs 2. Integration of technology in HR management 3. Improvement of educators' digital competencies	Interviews, Observation, and Documentation
Challenges of strategic leadership in digitalization	1. Limited technological infrastructure 2. Resistance of human resources to change 3. Organizational culture readiness	Interviews and Observation
Impact of strategic leadership on HR effectiveness	1. Improvement of teacher and staff performance 2. Efficiency of administrative governance 3. Adaptation to digital-based learning	Observation, Documentation, and Interviews

C. Results and Discussion

The study conducted at SMK Nurul Jadid, Jalan Kiai Haji Zaini Mun'im, Karanganyar, Paiton, Probolinggo, indicates that strategic leadership plays a significant role in human resource (HR) management in the era of digital transformation. The principal, along with the vice principals, has formulated a strategic vision, developed technology-based programs, and established an adaptive HR management system in response to changing times. However, several challenges were also identified, particularly related to limited infrastructure and resistance among some human resources toward digitalization.

1. Results

a) Formulation of Vision and Digital Strategy

The findings reveal that the principal has formulated a strategic leadership vision emphasizing the integration of Islamic values with digitalization. The principal stated that digitalizing school management is essential to ensure that human resources remain competitive in the modern era (Interview, July 20, 2025).

Similarly, the vice principal for curriculum explained that the school's vision is directed toward digital-based learning through the implementation of e-learning, online administrative systems, and digital competency training for teachers (Interview, July 21, 2025).

Table 2. Strategic Leadership Vision at SMK Nurul Jadid

Vision Aspect	Formulated Strategy	HR Implication
Islamic Education	Integration of spiritual values with learning modernization	HR oriented toward balance between Islamic values and digital competence
Digital Transformation	Implementation of e-learning, online administration, information systems	Improvement of teachers' and staff's digital competence

Vision Aspect	Formulated Strategy	HR Implication
Global Competitiveness	Competency-based HR development	Enhancing performance and professionalism of educators

b) HR Development Strategies in the Digital Era

Strategic leadership at SMK Nurul Jadid focuses on HR development through training programs and technology integration. The principal noted that digital workshops are conducted regularly each semester to enhance teachers' and staff's competencies (Interview, July 20, 2025).

Teachers also reported that training in e-learning platforms and online administrative applications has helped them adapt to digital demands, although not all teachers have been able to implement them optimally (Interview, July 22, 2025).

Table 3. HR Development Strategies in the Digital Transformation Era

Strategy Aspect	Implementation	Description
Digital Competency Training	Workshops on LMS and learning applications	Teachers participate in digital training
Technology Integration	Use of Google Workspace and digital attendance systems	More efficient administration
Professional Development	Coaching-based supervision	Improvement in teaching quality

c) Challenges in HR Digitalization

The findings indicate several challenges in implementing digitalization. The vice principal for student affairs stated that limited facilities, such as internet access and devices, are major obstacles (Interview, July 23, 2025).

In addition, some teachers show resistance to digital technology, preferring traditional manual methods (Interview, July 23, 2025).

Table 4. Challenges in HR Digitalization

Challenge	Impact
Limited Infrastructure	Hinders digital training and system implementation
HR Resistance	Reduces effectiveness of digital strategies
Budget Constraints	Limits procurement of digital facilities

d) Impact of Strategic Leadership on HR Effectiveness

Strategic leadership has produced positive impacts on HR effectiveness. Teachers stated that online administrative systems make their work faster and more transparent (Interview, July 24, 2025).

Administrative staff also reported improved performance due to regular digital training (Interview, July 24, 2025).

Table 5. Impact of Strategic Leadership on HR Effectiveness

Area	Change
Teacher Performance	More adaptive to technology-based learning
Administrative Efficiency	Faster and more transparent processes
Student Learning	Increased engagement in digital-based learning

2. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that strategic leadership at SMK Nurul Jadid functions not merely as a managerial instrument but as an ideological mechanism that integrates Islamic values with the demands of digital transformation. This expands the conventional understanding of strategic leadership, which has often been viewed in technocratic terms as the ability to formulate organizational vision and strategy (Drucker, 1999). In the context of Islamic education, strategic leadership operates within two dimensions simultaneously: the normative dimension and the adaptive dimension (Maryati, 2025). This duality suggests that the success of transformation is not solely determined by the sophistication of strategies but by the leader's ability to negotiate values between tradition and modernity (Asyhari & Budianto, 2025). Therefore, strategic leadership in Islamic education should be understood not merely as a managerial practice but as a culturally embedded and value-laden process.

Furthermore, HR development strategies through digital training, mentoring, and technology integration indicate that the institution implicitly adopts the Resource-Based View (RBV) (Barney, 1991), which positions human resources as a source of competitive advantage. However, unlike the classical RBV assumption that emphasizes efficiency and productivity, this study reveals that in Islamic education, HR development is also shaped by religious values and identity. Digital competence is not a neutral construct but must be aligned with the institution's value framework. This finding challenges the dominant tendency in educational management literature to prioritize technical aspects of digitalization while overlooking cultural and spiritual dimensions. Consequently, strengthening digital competencies in Islamic education should not only focus on skill enhancement but also on the internalization of values that shape professional ethics and integrity (Zainuddin, 2025).

In comparison with Rohayati (2024), who highlights the importance of formal policies in digital HR development, this study demonstrates the limitations of a purely structural approach. While formal policies are necessary as a regulatory framework, they are insufficient to ensure successful transformation without accompanying cultural change (Pecamuya, 2026). In the case of SMK Nurul Jadid, the effectiveness of strategic leadership is largely determined by the leader's everyday practices in fostering an adaptive culture through role modeling, habituation, and intensive social interaction. This suggests that digital transformation in Islamic education is embedded in social and cultural practices rather than merely implemented through top-down policies (Fajar et al., 2025). This finding reinforces critiques of modern managerial approaches that tend to overlook the informal dimensions of educational organizations.

On the other hand, challenges such as limited infrastructure and HR resistance reveal tensions between strategic vision and practical realities. From the perspective of Kurt Lewin's (1951) change theory, resistance is an inherent part of organizational transformation (Sunariyanto et al., 2026). However, this study shows that resistance in Islamic education is more complex than in general organizational contexts. It is not only driven by technical limitations but also by concerns over changes in institutional values and identity. In *pesantren*-based environments, where tradition plays a central role, digitalization is often perceived as a threat to the authenticity of educational practices (Purnomo,

2025). Therefore, persuasive and value-based leadership approaches are more effective than coercive, instruction-based strategies.

Moreover, this study indicates that strategic leadership functions as an epistemological mediator bridging two seemingly contradictory paradigms: traditionalism and modernism. This role has received limited attention in leadership literature, which typically positions leaders as change agents. In Islamic education, leaders do not merely initiate change but also manage its meaning to ensure alignment with institutional values (Solihin & Mubarak, 2024). In this sense, strategic leadership operates as *sense-making leadership*, helping organizational members understand and accept transformation as continuity rather than disruption. This perspective contributes theoretically by expanding the concept of strategic leadership into a more reflective and context-sensitive domain.

The findings further emphasize that the success of digital transformation in Islamic education depends on the integration of strategic vision and religious values. Unlike general educational institutions that emphasize instrumental rationality, Islamic education requires value rationality in managing change processes (Puteri et al., 2026). Therefore, effective leadership models are not those that fully adopt modern management principles but those capable of contextual adaptation in line with institutional characteristics (Daus, 2025). In this regard, digitalization in Islamic education should be understood as a *value-driven transformation* rather than merely a *technology-driven transformation*.

Theoretically, this study contributes by proposing a model of strategic leadership that integrates Islamic values with digital adaptation. This model challenges the dominance of universalistic educational management paradigms that are less sensitive to cultural and religious contexts. By positioning values as a key variable in strategic leadership, this study opens opportunities for developing more contextual and inclusive theoretical frameworks. Additionally, it enriches the literature on HR management in Islamic education by demonstrating that HR effectiveness is determined not only by technical competence but also by alignment between values, culture, and organizational strategy.

Practically, these findings imply the need to redefine leadership strategies in Islamic educational institutions. Leaders must move beyond administrative and managerial roles to become cultural facilitators and guardians of values. This requires a more reflective, dialogical, and participatory leadership approach to ensure that transformation processes are inclusive and sustainable. Thus, strategic leadership in Islamic education should be positioned as a transformative force that not only drives change but also preserves value continuity amid the complexities of digital transformation (Setiawan et al., 2025).

D. Conclusion

This study finds that strategic leadership in human resource management (HRM) within Islamic education in the era of digital transformation plays a central role in enhancing teacher performance, improving administrative efficiency, and increasing student engagement. A key insight from this study is that leadership capable of integrating Islamic values with strategic vision and digital innovation is more effective in addressing the challenges of educational modernization. The main lesson highlighted is the importance of building an adaptive culture that does not merely rely on structural policies but also emphasizes mentoring, role modeling, and strengthening the digital capacities of educators.

The academic contribution of this study lies in its effort to renew the perspective of strategic leadership within the context of Islamic education by directly linking it to HRM in the midst of digitalization. Variables such as HR development strategies, resistance to change, and the impacts of digital transformation are analyzed through an approach that emphasizes the synergy between religious values and modern demands. However, this study has several limitations, as it focuses on a

single case, namely SMK Nurul Jadid, thereby limiting the exploration of broader contextual variations. In addition, the use of a qualitative approach restricts the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, further research employing quantitative survey methods is needed to provide a more comprehensive understanding and to inform more effective policy-making in Islamic education HR management.

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, it is recommended that Islamic educational institutions strengthen strategic leadership by developing sustainable digital training programs, providing adequate technological infrastructure, and establishing performance evaluation systems that are adaptive to digital changes. Furthermore, future researchers are encouraged to expand the scope of study locations and employ survey methods to ensure broader representativeness, thereby contributing to the formulation of more strategic and evidence-based policies in managing human resources within Islamic education in the digital era.

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