Bulletin of Science Education

Vol. 6, No. 3, December 2026
https://attractivejournal.com/index.php/bse/index

Visionary and Sustainable Leadership in Madrasahs Addressing Twenty First Century Challenges

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ARTICLE INFO
Article history:
Received
August 14, 2026
Revised
September 15, 2026
Accepted
November 02, 2026

Abstract

Madrasahs face demands for digital transformation, twenty-first-century skills, and improved educational quality while maintaining their Islamic identity. These challenges require leadership that connects long-term direction with organizational capacity to sustain change. This article analyzes the integration of visionary and sustainable leadership in madrasahs and develops strategies for its contextual application. The study employs a qualitative literature-based approach using narrative synthesis and thematic analysis of educational leadership, Islamic education, digital transformation, and organizational sustainability literature. The analysis examines relationships among vision, professional capacity, collaborative culture, governance, and continuity of change. The synthesis suggests that visionary leadership provides strategic direction, whereas sustainable leadership emphasizes collective capacity, succession, knowledge documentation, and responsible resource use. Their integration is formulated through needs-based planning, continuing professional development, stakeholder partnerships, the institutionalization of Islamic values, and reflective evaluation. The proposed framework connects shared vision, capacity development, institutionalized practices, and evaluative feedback within an adaptive process. Amanah, justice, deliberation, and prophetic values provide ethical foundations for priority setting and equitable support. An implementation matrix presents examples of monitoring evidence to help institutions connect objectives with action. These indicators are conceptual proposals rather than field measurements. The article concludes that continuity should be designed when a vision is formulated rather than added after implementation. The framework does not establish causal relationships or empirical effectiveness, and incomplete search documentation and contextual heterogeneity limit generalization. Comparative and longitudinal research is needed to examine integration mechanisms, particularly continuity after leadership transitions and implications for learning quality and educational equity. Initial application should proceed in stages that reflect teacher readiness, institutional resources, and locally identified educational needs.

Keywords: Visionary Leadership; Sustainable Leadership; Madrasah; Islamic Education; Digital Transformation

Published by CV. Creative Tugu Pena
ISSN 2774-4299
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INTRODUCTION

Madrasahs face demands to strengthen learning quality while maintaining the orientation of Islamic education. Technological change, the need for twenty-first-century skills, and community expectations require leadership that connects educational purposes with organizational readiness. The issue extends beyond purchasing digital devices to how change is managed for teachers and students. A vision must therefore be translated into realistic priorities, shared responsibilities, and continuing institutional learning. This makes the relationship between future direction and organizational continuity a central concern in madrasah development.

Visionary leadership provides direction by articulating and communicating a desirable future. In discussing the madrasah principal as a visionary leader, Shobri (2025) places quality and institutional integrity at the center of attention. An educational vision needs to explain the intended graduate profile, service quality, and opportunities for school members to contribute. Its value consequently depends on its connection with decisions and learning practices. An ambitious statement has limited organizational meaning when teachers cannot identify how it relates to their everyday responsibilities.

Change that depends on an individual principal may lose continuity during leadership succession. Undocumented programs, knowledge concentrated in individuals, and unclear responsibilities can weaken institutional resilience. This article uses sustainable leadership to describe the maintenance of educational quality, collective capacity development, leadership succession, and responsible resource use. The concept encompasses organizational continuity as well as social and environmental responsibility. It does not imply that every existing program should continue indefinitely; continuity requires retaining valuable practices while revising those that no longer serve educational purposes.

Digital transformation illustrates why these approaches need to be connected. Digital literacy concerns the quality of electronic resource use rather than device operation alone (Nurjanah et al., 2017). Principals need to direct technology toward pedagogical needs, while continuity requires teacher support, technical assistance, and maintenance funding. Differences in access and professional competence make uniform strategies insufficient. Technology selection should consider institutional readiness, family access, and equivalent learning alternatives. Otherwise, a forward-looking program may create additional barriers for the very students it intends to support.

Islamic identity provides an ethical foundation for change. Amanah requires accountability, justice guides equitable opportunities, and musyawarah creates space for shared deliberation. Studies of prophetic leadership discuss the relevance of prophetic values to educational and contemporary organizational leadership (Faujiah et al., 2024; Thoyibah & Hajizah, 2025). These values should inform budgeting, teacher support, communication, and student services. Their practical translation prevents religious commitments from becoming merely rhetorical additions to strategic documents. Ethical consistency also gives stakeholders a basis for assessing whether innovation serves the institution's educational mission.

The source literature approaches leadership from several perspectives. Royhatudin et al. (2020) examine transformational leadership in madrasa-based

management; Rusman (2025) addresses instructional leadership in Islamic education; and Yaqin et al. (2025) connect religious values with sustainable environmental education through Adiwiyata programs. These perspectives provide complementary foundations, although their contexts and analytical purposes differ. Findings from one institution cannot automatically establish the effectiveness of a comprehensive madrasah leadership model. Their contribution here lies in informing a conceptual relationship among direction, teaching, values, and continuity.

The analytical need addressed here concerns the mechanisms connecting a long-term vision with continuity in practice. The article asks how visionary and sustainable leadership can be integrated to address twenty-first-century challenges in madrasahs. It aims to explain relevant leadership characteristics, identify sustainability principles, and formulate integrative strategies. Its contribution is a conceptual framework linking strategic direction, capacity development, institutionalization, and reflective evaluation, with Islamic values as an ethical foundation. The framework is presented as an analytical proposal requiring contextual adaptation and empirical examination.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative literature-based design with narrative synthesis and thematic analysis. The units of analysis are concepts, arguments, and practical implications in literature on educational leadership, madrasahs, digital transformation, and organizational sustainability. The study does not collect primary data, conduct interviews or classroom observations, or measure changes in learning outcomes. Accordingly, results refer to conceptual synthesis rather than evidence of intervention effectiveness in a particular madrasah. This distinction determines the scope of the conclusions and the language used to express their implications.

The source manuscript reports searches using Google Scholar, Scopus, SpringerLink, and JSTOR with the terms visionary leadership, sustainable leadership, madrasah leadership, Islamic education, 21st century education, and educational transformation. Contemporary literature receives primary attention, while earlier sources inform context and foundational concepts. However, search dates, retrieval totals, and screening records are unavailable in the source documentation. The study is therefore positioned as a narrative review rather than a systematic review claiming comprehensive coverage. No retrieval counts or screening flow are reconstructed without supporting records.

Source relevance is considered in relation to leadership concepts, change mechanisms, Islamic educational contexts, and institutional implications. Literature addressing other settings is used cautiously for comparison rather than as direct evidence about madrasahs. The analysis distinguishes conceptual explanations, practices reported in previous studies, and recommendations developed in this article. This distinction prevents shared terminology from being treated as evidence of equivalent research designs, institutional conditions, or evidential strength. The synthesis gives priority to arguments that can be connected explicitly with the research question.

The analysis groups content into visionary direction, professional capacity, collaborative culture, governance, and continuity of change. Relationships among

these themes are interpreted to develop an integrative framework and proposed implementation indicators. Cross-source comparison helps assess argumentative consistency and contextual limits. Since a formal quality appraisal protocol and independent coding records are unavailable, no inter-rater reliability or causal certainty is claimed. Incomplete search documentation and source heterogeneity remain part of the interpretation. The resulting framework is intended to guide further inquiry rather than replace empirical validation.

The choice of narrative review should be distinguished from systematic review designs requiring documented search and screening protocols. Literature review guidance helps clarify alignment between synthesis purposes and review type, while thematic analysis provides a conceptual basis for grouping patterns and interpreting relationships. These methodological references clarify the analytical position; they do not replace missing search documentation or establish independent coding that was not recorded (Snyder, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The synthesis produces the central proposition that vision and sustainability operate through an interdependent relationship. Vision explains the purpose of change, while sustainability concerns the capacities, arrangements, and relationships that allow that purpose to be pursued consistently. In madrasahs, both must connect with learning quality and Islamic identity. This framework extends the interpretation of leadership from the principal's individual actions to an organizational process involving teachers, administrative staff, students, families, and community partners. Its explanatory emphasis is on how future direction becomes a shared and revisable practice.

The first characteristic of visionary leadership is the capacity to interpret future needs without overlooking current conditions. Principals need to consider teacher competence, students' learning experiences, available facilities, and community expectations before setting priorities. Shobri's (2025) discussion of quality and integrity supports locating vision within institutional responsibility. A vision emphasizing digital excellence, for example, should explain the intended learning changes and the support required rather than simply specify device acquisition targets. This connection makes strategic ambition more intelligible and actionable for school members.

The second characteristic is communicating vision as a process of building shared understanding. Meetings and written statements do not guarantee that teachers understand the implications for instruction. Deliberation should enable teachers to describe difficulties, propose alternatives, and help determine the sequence of change. Resistance need not immediately be interpreted as opposition to improvement. It may instead reveal workload pressures, uncertain responsibilities, or unmet support needs. A visionary leader can use such information to revise implementation while retaining the educational purpose of the initiative.

The third characteristic concerns support for teaching and learning. Principals connect professional development with classroom needs rather than equate improvement with training attendance. Rusman (2025) situates instructional leadership within Islamic educational management; this perspective helps keep transformation focused on learning processes. Collaborative lesson review, peer

observation, and reflection on student work can be proposed as connecting mechanisms. Their organization should account for teachers' time and existing capacity. The relevant question is whether professional learning helps teachers make better instructional decisions in their own setting.

In digital transformation, visionary leadership needs to distinguish technological access, quality of use, and educational benefit. Nurjanah et al. (2017) provide a basis for attending to digital literacy in electronic resource use. In practice, teachers need to evaluate material credibility, select suitable media, and protect student information. Platform adoption should begin with an identifiable learning problem. Offline alternatives or shared access remain relevant where connectivity and device ownership are uneven. These considerations place inclusion and educational value within technology decisions from the outset.

Critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication are learning orientations that need to be connected with the madrasah curriculum. Priyanti's (2019) discussion of innovative twenty-first-century learning provides context for these needs. Projects and problem-solving activities can be considered where they fit learning objectives and teacher readiness. Islamic values can inform group responsibility, honest source use, and attention to social benefit. This article does not conclude that a single instructional approach automatically improves all these skills. Appropriate assessment and contextual evidence are still required.

The first sustainability principle is continuity of direction combined with adaptive capacity. Madrasahs need to preserve commitments to quality while reconsidering programs that have become less relevant. Policy or leadership changes need not erase previous practices, but continuity does not justify retaining programs without evaluation. Decisions to continue, revise, or discontinue initiatives should consider educational purposes, practitioners' experiences, and resource use. Sustainability is therefore a learning process rather than repeated activity. This interpretation allows an institution to remain coherent without becoming resistant to necessary change.

The second principle is distributing leadership capacity. Delegated tasks require authority, mentoring, and clear accountability. Curriculum coordination, professional learning facilitation, and program leadership can provide opportunities for teachers to develop leadership competence. The transformational perspective in madrasa-based management discussed by Royhatudin et al. (2020) is relevant to this concern. However, distributing responsibilities should not become the transfer of administrative burdens without support. Its value depends on whether teams can make responsible decisions and whether the principal creates the conditions for such decisions to be informed and collaborative.

Succession is a practical consequence of developing shared capacity. Madrasahs can prepare prospective coordinators through mentoring, planned role rotation, and documentation of important decisions. Handover records should explain program purposes, unfinished work, partnerships, budgets, and unresolved issues. These proposals aim to reduce knowledge loss when personnel change. Leadership transition can then become an opportunity to review strategy while retaining valuable institutional experience. The continuity sought is the preservation of organizational learning rather than unquestioned loyalty to a predecessor's program or management style.

The third principle is a collaborative culture that creates space for reflection. Collaboration requires agendas connected to learning, opportunities to share experience, and feasible follow-up. Routine meetings that do not address actual problems may simply add to workload. Principals can support teachers in testing a limited improvement, reviewing its consequences, and sharing what they learn. Implementation difficulties should become material for improvement while professional responsibility remains clear. Such a culture helps an institution retain knowledge about both successful practices and conditions under which those practices are less effective.

The fourth principle is accountable governance. Amanah can be translated into transparent policy reasoning, clear budget responsibilities, and reviewable reporting. Justice requires attention to teachers and students who need additional support. Studies of prophetic leadership in Islamic educational institutions provide context for connecting values with organizational practice (Faujiah et al., 2024; Susiyanti et al., 2025). Nevertheless, religious language in a policy does not by itself demonstrate equitable implementation. Stakeholders still need opportunities to evaluate how decisions distribute resources, responsibilities, and educational opportunities.

Sustainability also includes environmental and social responsibility. Yaqin et al. (2025) discuss the integration of religious values into environmental education through Adiwiyata programs. Their relevance to this framework lies in connecting values with habits and resource management. Facility maintenance, waste reduction, and environmental activities can contribute to madrasah culture. However, environmental initiatives do not automatically demonstrate successful succession or continuity across the whole organization. Each dimension requires appropriate indicators and evidence. Keeping these dimensions distinct makes the concept of sustainable leadership more precise and useful for evaluation.

The first integrative strategy is a roadmap connecting vision, needs, programs, and evaluation. Planning begins with an assessment of conditions followed by the selection of feasible priorities. Hamid's (2023) discussion of quality management provides context for attending to educational improvement processes. In implementation, targets need designated responsibility and evidence of progress. Indicators such as completed mentoring, use of reflection findings, and follow-up actions are more informative than activity totals alone. These are proposed indicators, not measurements generated by the present review.

The second strategy is staged, needs-based professional development. Principals require managerial competence to organize priorities, support, and monitoring, while teachers need relevant pedagogical and digital development. Bashori (2019) discusses principal leadership in educational service quality, helping situate capacity development within institutional service. Training can be followed by mentoring and review of practical application. Certificate counts alone cannot explain changes in practice or continuity of organizational competence. A sustainable approach also considers time for participation, opportunities to practice, and access to support after formal training ends.

The third strategy is partnership with educational purposes and explicit responsibilities. Perdana (2018) examines the educational ecosystem in character development, providing a basis for considering support beyond the institution. Parents can contribute through communication about student development, while

health services, local government, and other partners may address specific needs. Partnership arrangements should fit the educational level and local context. Clear purposes, student protection, and assessment of benefit help ensure that collaboration extends beyond signed agreements. These arrangements also make it easier to maintain relationships during personnel changes.

The fourth strategy embeds Islamic values in everyday decisions. Siddiq can inform truthful reporting, amanah responsible resource use, tabligh clear communication, and fathanah informed judgment. Thoyibah and Hajizah (2025) discuss the relationship between prophetic leadership and modern transformational leadership. This article develops their implications as ethical guidance rather than a validated measurement scale. Moderation also supports respect for differences and inclusive participation. The practical task is to connect each value with identifiable conduct so that organizational members can discuss its meaning and assess its implementation.

The fifth strategy is adaptive resource management. Madrasahs with limited facilities can begin with priority programs, shared facilities, and internal capacity development. Such choices should follow learning needs rather than assume that every innovation requires substantial investment. Funding decisions must consider maintenance, staff time, and technical support. Electronic resources also require the capacity to evaluate and use information appropriately (Nurjanah et al., 2017). Efficiency is therefore connected with equitable service and quality, rather than reduced expenditure alone. The appropriate sequence will differ across institutions.

Table 1 summarizes the relationships among challenges, visionary direction, sustainability mechanisms, and proposed monitoring evidence. The matrix is an author-developed synthesis rather than survey data or observational findings. It helps principals trace connections between plans and implementation support. Indicators should be agreed upon in relation to local baseline conditions. The article does not prescribe numerical targets because no institutional baseline data are available to justify them. Its practical value is in structuring questions and responsibilities rather than supplying a universal performance score.

Figure 1 presents integration as an iterative mechanism: shared vision directs capacity development, capacity supports institutionalized practice, and evaluation informs revisions to vision and programs. Islamic ethics guide the entire process. The sequence is analytical; several processes may occur simultaneously in practice. Continuity is expected to be more achievable when change is supported by shared knowledge, procedures, and working relationships. These connections remain propositions for field investigation. The diagram does not represent a statistically tested model or establish a causal sequence among the components.

Table 1. Leadership integration matrix and proposed monitoring evidence

Dimension	Challenge	Visionary direction	Sustainability mechanism	Proposed evidence
Digital	Unequal access	Inclusive learning	Mentoring and access alternatives	Access and usage records
Professional	Uneven capacity	Learning quality	Learning communities and mentoring	Practice review and follow-up
Succession	Leader dependence	Shared leadership	Role rotation and handover	Role and program records
Governance	Limited support	Equitable priorities	Transparent budgeting and review	Allocation and expenditure reports

Dimension	Challenge	Visionary direction	Sustainability mechanism	Proposed evidence
Partnership	Fragmented support	Educational ecosystem	Partner roles and communication	Activities and benefits records
Islamic values	Abstract commitments	Institutional integrity	Ethical practice and reflection	Decision and service records

The theoretical implication is a distinction between strategic direction and the mechanisms through which organizational capacity is renewed. Visionary leadership explains orientation, while sustainable leadership emphasizes how that orientation is maintained and revised over time. Transformational, instructional, and prophetic perspectives help explain empowerment, attention to learning, and ethical foundations (Royhatudin et al., 2020; Rusman, 2025; Faujiah et al., 2024). The framework does not merge these perspectives into an already validated new theory. It organizes their contributions around the shared problem of meaningful and enduring institutional change.

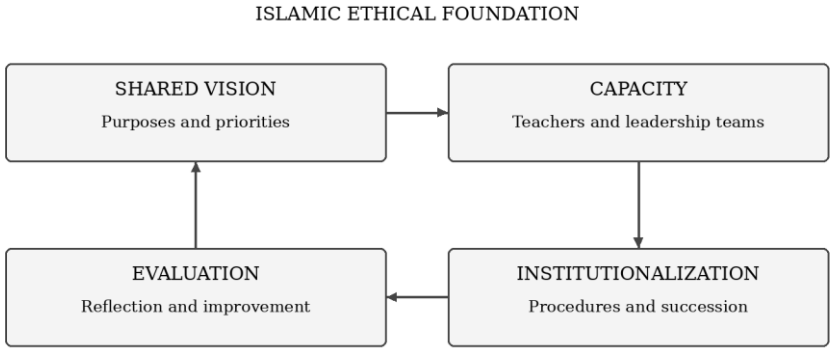


Figure 1. Visionary and sustainable integration in an adaptive madrasah process

Practically, principals can use the framework to assess readiness before expanding an innovation. Relevant questions concern clarity of purpose, teacher preparation, budget support, documentation, and responsibility for program continuation. Supervisors and educational authorities can use similar questions to design assistance. Where support is insufficient, staged implementation provides a more defensible approach than simultaneous expansion. Decisions also need to consider the risk of leaving behind groups with the least access. Readiness assessment should thus support inclusion rather than become a reason to delay assistance indefinitely.

The main limitations concern the narrative design, incomplete search documentation, and differences among source contexts. The study provides no data for calculating effects on achievement, motivation, or institutional resilience. Future research can use comparative madrasah case studies to investigate relationships among vision, succession, and teaching practices. Longitudinal work spanning principal transitions is needed to examine continuity. Interviews, observations, program records, and budget documents can provide complementary evidence. Such inquiry should also examine unsuccessful initiatives and uneven benefits, rather than select only institutions considered successful.

Visionary direction should be considered alongside contextual planning and quality management. Studies of madrasah competitiveness, Islamic educational planning, and total quality management offer perspectives on relationships among

purposes, institutional conditions, and service processes. Within the proposed framework, vision should become monitorable priorities that reflect local needs and implementation capacity (Rahmadani Roudotul Janah, 2024; Anam et al., 2025; Iqbal, 2025).

Pesantren leadership provides useful comparisons, although its institutional context must be distinguished from that of madrasahs. Transformational kiai leadership, visionary leadership in the context of pesantren legislation, and policy-based institutional renewal identify areas for examining authority, identity, and organizational adaptation. Their relevance concerns how change can respect institutional character; findings across these settings are not treated as interchangeable evidence (Fathiyyah & Khusna, 2024; Nadia & Pahlevi, 2023; Samudera, 2023).

Institutional identity also involves relationships among character education, civic values, and moral development in digital settings. Literature addressing Pancasila, Islamic educational values, and the moral implications of visionary leadership broadens the normative basis of the discussion. For madrasahs, these relationships direct attention to role modeling, social responsibility, and ethical technology use, while separate evidence remains necessary to assess changes in student behavior (Marbawi, 2018; Royhatudin, 2020; Denindra & Hasan, 2025).

Implementation capacity and curriculum design connect vision with learning experience. Literature on madrasah management and teacher professionalism provides context for organizational readiness, while discussions of twenty-first-century instructional design and full-day schooling identify questions about time, activities, and evaluation. Since source settings and educational levels differ, recommendations require adaptation. Increasing activity duration does not in itself demonstrate improved educational quality (Fadhil, 2017; Usman, 2015; Raihan, 2025; Nuzula et al., 2024).

Department-level educational leadership, the integration of spirituality with e-leadership, and leadership models in Islamic schools provide comparisons of how educational responsibility is framed. University department research does not represent madrasah conditions, but it helps formulate questions about role allocation and learning support. Spirituality and Islamic school contexts direct attention to consistency between values and practice. These comparisons support a context-sensitive interpretation rather than direct generalization (Frisk et al., 2023; Sutrisno, 2024; Febrina et al., 2024).

Situational approaches and discussions of change management in workplace organizations complement questions about implementation readiness. A practitioner account of situational leadership is used as a conceptual introduction, while employee motivation research serves as a cross-sector comparison. Neither provides direct evidence of sustainable leadership effectiveness in madrasahs. A limited implication is that changing responsibilities and work practices require attention to differences in the support practitioners need (Kruse, 2019; Andani & Astuti, 2025).

Sustainable leadership foundations clarify that continuity cannot be assessed solely by whether a program survives. Attention is also needed to meaningful learning, shared leadership, justice, diversity, and resource renewal. Mapping the knowledge base on sustainable leadership indicates the breadth of this field. In madrasahs, these principles can inform reflective questions about whether

innovation protects human capacity and educational opportunity (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004; Hallinger & Suriyankietkaew, 2018).

School leadership research helps explain why leadership influence needs to be examined through organizational and learning conditions. Syntheses addressing successful leadership, leadership for learning, and transformational school leadership provide foundations for connecting direction, empowerment, and instructional support. This article uses these relationships to explain possible mechanisms rather than transfer effect estimates from earlier research to madrasahs that have not been investigated (Leithwood et al., 2020; Hallinger, 2011; Leithwood & Sun, 2012).

Rapid change also highlights collaborative capacity and organizational arrangements. Discussion of leadership during crisis directs attention to networks and shared work, while digital transformation reviews examine change beyond device adoption. Since part of the digital literature addresses business settings, its application to madrasahs is limited to ideas about adapting processes, resources, and organizational capabilities. Educational purposes and equitable services remain the basis for evaluation (Harris, 2020; Vial, 2019; Verhoef et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

Integrating visionary and sustainable leadership offers a conceptual framework for addressing twenty-first-century madrasah challenges while retaining the identity of Islamic education. Vision gives development its direction, while sustainability requires shared capacity, succession, collaborative culture, accountable governance, and responsible resource management. Their connection is developed through realistic planning, professional support, partnerships, and evaluation linking purposes with teaching practices. Islamic values provide an ethical foundation for setting priorities and distributing support. The key implication is that a future-oriented vision requires organizational arrangements that enable learning, adaptation, and continuity.

The resulting framework is a literature-based synthesis and does not empirically establish model effectiveness. Its application requires adaptation to each madrasah's baseline conditions, capacity, and needs. Principals can begin with limited priorities supported by clear responsibilities, implementation assistance, and monitoring evidence. Comparative field research and longitudinal observation are needed to examine integration mechanisms, continuity after leadership transitions, and implications for educational quality and equity. These investigations would clarify where the framework is useful, what conditions support it, and which elements require revision.

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