



Prophetic Leadership and Akhlak-Based School Culture Transformation in an Indonesian Islamic Senior High School

Kun Nurachadijat¹, Muh. Hasan Marwiji², Ai Siti Nurmiati³, Samsiah⁴, Mamdukh Budiman

^{1,2,3,4} STAI Kharisma Cicurug, Sukabumi, Indonesia

⁵Universiti Muhammadiyah Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study examines how prophetic leadership characterized by siddiq (honesty), amanah (trustworthiness), tabligh (transparency), and fathanah (wisdom) transforms school culture at an Islamic senior high school in Sukabumi, Indonesia. Data were collected through interviews with 15 participants, 12 days of observation, and document analysis over four months. The principal manifested prophetic characteristics through role modeling, participatory policy-making (shura), value-based assessment, and moral rewards. Findings reveal a four-stage transformation process: initiation, internalization, strengthening, and institutionalization. Measurable outcomes associated with the leadership approach include accreditation improvement from B to A (character component 78%→92%), teacher attendance rising from 89% to 95%, a 40% reduction in disciplinary cases, and a 20% enrollment increase. This study offers an empirically grounded model integrating Islamic values into sustainable quality management. As a single-case study, findings require cautious transferability. Future multi-case research across madrasah types and validated prophetic leadership assessment instruments are recommended.

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ABSTRAK

Studi kasus kualitatif ini mengkaji bagaimana kepemimpinan profetik bercirikan siddiq (jujur), amanah (terpercaya), tabligh (transparan), dan fathanah (bijaksana) mentransformasi budaya sekolah di sebuah Madrasah Aliyah di Sukabumi, Indonesia. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara dengan 15 partisipan, observasi selama 12 hari, dan analisis dokumen selama empat bulan. Kepala madrasah memanifestasikan karakteristik profetik melalui keteladanan, pengambilan kebijakan partisipatif (syura), penilaian berbasis nilai, dan penghargaan moral. Temuan mengungkap proses transformasi empat tahap: inisiasi, internalisasi, penguatan, dan institusionalisasi. Hasil terukur yang terkait dengan pendekatan kepemimpinan ini meliputi peningkatan akreditasi dari B ke A (komponen karakter 78%→92%), kenaikan kehadiran guru dari 89% menjadi 95%, penurunan kasus disiplin siswa sebesar 40%, dan peningkatan pendaftaran siswa sebesar 20%. Penelitian ini menawarkan model empiris yang mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai Islam ke dalam manajemen mutu berkelanjutan. Sebagai studi kasus tunggal, temuan memerlukan kehati-hatian dalam transferabilitas. Penelitian multi-kasus di berbagai jenis madrasah dan instrumen penilaian kepemimpinan profetik yang tervalidasi direkomendasikan.

KATA KUNCI

Kepemimpinan Profetik, Budaya Mutu Berbasis Akhlak, Madrasah Aliyah, Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah, Manajemen Mutu

Introduction

The quality of education in Islamic senior high schools has become a central concern globally, particularly in Muslim-majority countries where madrasahs are expected to produce graduates with strong moral and spiritual character (Obet & Shunhaji, 2025; Alwi Yusron et al., 2025). In Indonesia, national accreditation standards often prioritize administrative compliance over the cultivation of *akhlak* (moral excellence), creating a gap between managerial efficiency and ethical formation (Elmali & Tuna, 2024; Hamid & Rahman, 2025). This gap has led to growing interest in leadership models that integrate Islamic spiritual values with school management practices (Dinata & Andriani, 2025; Anggraeni et al., 2025).

The urgency of this issue is particularly pronounced in Indonesian Islamic senior high schools (*Madrasah Aliyah*), where principals face the dual challenge of meeting national quality standards while preserving Islamic identity (Suwandi et al., 2024; Paulus et al., 2024). Initial observations indicate that many madrasahs still rely on transactional or bureaucratic leadership styles that neglect the spiritual dimension of school culture (Suharyanto H. Soro et al., 2025; Nurlela et al., 2025). This study focuses on a specific Islamic senior high school in West Java that has been recognized for its excellence in character education and has implemented an *akhlak*-based quality culture under a principal known for prophetic leadership. Located in a suburban area, Cisaat District, Sukabumi, the school serves students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and is situated near several *pesantren*, reinforcing its religious environment. This context provides a rich case for understanding how prophetic values operationalize cultural transformation.

Recent literature has increasingly recognized the need to integrate Islamic values into educational leadership. Studies on prophetic leadership outcomes have shown positive correlations with teacher performance and student achievement. Anggraeni et al. (2025) conducted a quantitative study and found a significant positive correlation with teacher performance and student achievement. Ibrahim Obet and Akhmad Shunhaji (2025) examined the prophetic leadership model at MTs Abu Bakar Al-Islamy Sumbawa, identifying humanization, liberation, and transcendence as key dimensions. Irfan Hilmi et al. (2025) studied prophetic leadership at Global Islamic School Yogyakarta, concluding that principals who practice *siddiq*, *amanah*, *tabligh*, and *fathanah* significantly improve educational quality and student character.

Another strand of research has focused on principal leadership in building school culture. Geniza Aidilla Syuaira and Makmur Syukri (2024) found that principal leadership significantly improves teacher performance in state Islamic senior high schools. Nuryasmi et al. (2025) demonstrated that principal leadership and school culture contribute 76% to the quality of educational services. However, these studies tend to examine leadership styles or character education separately, without systematically linking prophetic leadership to the *process* of school culture transformation. Additionally, critical voices such as Dinata and Andriani (2025) have argued that prophetic leadership offers a more integrative framework for Islamic education compared to Total Quality Management, but their work remains conceptual rather than empirically grounded in the transformation process.

Despite these contributions, a significant gap remains. Existing studies on prophetic leadership in Islamic schools are largely conceptual, descriptive, or quantitative, and they rarely provide in-depth, qualitative case studies that document how prophetic characteristics drive cultural transformation (Fera Anggraini & Saiful Bahri, 2025; Suwandi et al., 2024). Moreover, most research focuses on the impact of leadership on

teacher performance or student achievement, but few examine how prophetic leadership specifically shapes the transformation of school culture rooted in *akhlak* values (Herman Janudin et al., 2024; Zulfadli et al., 2025). There is also a lack of empirical evidence on the strategies principals employ to translate prophetic values into cultural change and how these strategies influence stakeholder behavior and institutional reputation (Muli Prima Aldi M et al., 2026; Nia Dewanti Simanjuntak et al., 2026). Additionally, prior studies have not adequately addressed the *process* of cultural transformation: how prophetic leadership initiates, embeds, strengthens, and institutionalizes *akhlak*-based values in madrasah settings (Teguh Prasetyo & Ahmad Marzuki, 2024; Muhammad Al Qadri et al., 2024). This gap is critical because without a clear process model, the concept of prophetic leadership remains abstract and fails to produce sustainable cultural change (Yuriyan Dinata & Tuti Andriani, 2025; Abd Azis et al., 2025).

This study addresses the identified gap by offering an empirical, in-depth case study of prophetic leadership in transforming school culture at an Indonesian Islamic senior high school. The novelty lies in three dimensions. First, while prior research has examined prophetic leadership outcomes (Anggraeni et al., 2025; Irfan Hilmi et al., 2025), no study has empirically documented the *process* of cultural transformation through a four-stage model: initiation, internalization, strengthening, and institutionalization operationalized through specific prophetic strategies: role modeling (*uswah hasanah*), participatory policy making (*shura*), value-based performance assessment, and moral reward systems. Second, existing studies focus on urban or fully integrated Islamic schools; this study provides contextual knowledge from a suburban madrasah located near a *pesantren* with limited resources. Third, this research operationalizes prophetic concepts into a practical change management framework, bridging Islamic ethical theory and organizational change literature.

Unlike previous studies that treat prophetic leadership as a normative ideal, this research examines the actual process of cultural change. The scholarly contribution is threefold: (1) it provides an empirically grounded model of prophetic leadership for school culture transformation; (2) it offers practical guidance for madrasah principals; and (3) it contributes to the discourse on value-based leadership in faith-based educational institutions.

This qualitative case study seeks to answer three research questions: (1) How does the principal actualize prophetic leadership characteristics (*siddiq, amanah, tabligh, fathanah*) in daily practices? (2) What strategies does the principal employ to transform school culture into an *akhlak*-based quality culture? (3) How does prophetic leadership contribute to sustainable school culture transformation?

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. The next section presents the research method. The findings section presents the results as a four-stage transformation process. Subsequently, the discussion interprets these findings using transformational leadership theory (Bass & Avolio) and Schein's model of organizational culture. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the main findings, acknowledges limitations, and offers recommendations.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a single-case study design (Yin, 2018). The qualitative approach is chosen because the research aims to explore, describe, and interpret the complex and context-bound phenomenon of prophetic leadership in transforming school culture within a natural setting. A case study design allows for an in-depth, holistic investigation of how a school principal manifests *siddiq, amanah, tabligh, and fathanah* in daily practices and how these drive

cultural transformation. The single-case design is justified because the selected school represents an exemplary case of prophetic leadership applied to school culture transformation, making it a revelatory case for theory building in Islamic education management.

The research was conducted at an Islamic senior high school (*Madrasah Aliyah*) in Sukabumi, West Java, Indonesia. The school was purposively selected because: (a) the principal has been recognized by the local education office for exemplary prophetic leadership; (b) the school has successfully implemented an *akhlak*-based quality culture for at least three academic years; and (c) the school's suburban location near several *pesantren* provides a distinct religious environment rarely examined in leadership studies. To protect confidentiality, the school is referred to by the pseudonym "MA Al-Falah." The unit of analysis is the principal's prophetic leadership practices and their role in transforming school culture.

Data collection was carried out over four months, from January to April 2026, to capture the full cycle of leadership practices, including daily routines, policy-making, and periodic evaluations. Three main techniques were used:

1. *Semi-structured interviews*: Conducted with 15 purposively selected participants: the principal (P); the vice principal for curriculum (WK); the quality assurance coordinator (QA); three Islamic Education and *Akidah Akhlak* teachers (G1, G2, G3); two administrative staff (A1, A2); four students (S1–S4); and three parents active in the school committee (O1–O3). Selection criteria included having at least one year of experience interacting with the principal and willingness to participate. Each interview lasted 45–90 minutes and was audio-recorded with informed consent.
2. *Participant observation*: Conducted over 12 school days, focusing on the principal's daily routines, teacher-student interactions, quality-related meetings, and school assemblies. Field notes were taken during and immediately after observations.
3. *Document analysis*: Included the school's vision and mission statement, quality manual, SPMI policy documents, meeting minutes, award records, disciplinary logs, accreditation reports (2024 and 2025), and enrollment data (2024–2026).

Data analysis followed the thematic analysis framework of Braun and Clarke (2006), adapted for case study research. The process proceeded through six phases: (1) familiarization through repeated reading of transcripts and field notes; (2) initial coding using both inductive codes (derived from the data) and deductive codes (derived from prophetic leadership concepts and cultural transformation literature); (3) searching for themes by grouping related codes; (4) reviewing themes against the data; (5) defining and naming final themes; and (6) producing the report. NVivo 14 software was used for coding and theme organization.

To ensure transparency in model derivation, all codes were organized into a coding matrix that traced the progression from raw data to the four-stage model (see Table 1 in Results). For example, codes such as "principal greeting students daily," "arriving before 7 AM," and "public *dhuha* prayer" were grouped under the category "visible role modeling," which contributed to the theme "initiation stage."

The research team consists of five researchers with backgrounds in Islamic education management and qualitative research. The first author (KN) has extensive experience in madrasah quality assurance and has worked with the school on previous accreditation initiatives. This prior relationship provided access and trust but also required reflexive attention to potential bias. To mitigate this, data collection and analysis were triangulated

across multiple team members, and preliminary findings were reviewed by academic colleagues not affiliated with the school. A reflective journal was maintained throughout the research process.

To ensure trustworthiness, four criteria were addressed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was enhanced through triangulation of data sources (interviews, observations, documents), triangulation of methods, and member checking. Member checking involved returning preliminary findings to five key informants (principal, QA coordinator, one teacher, one student, and one parent) to verify accuracy. Peer debriefing was conducted with two academic colleagues. Transferability is supported by thick descriptions of the research context, participants, and processes. Dependability was achieved through an audit trail documenting all research decisions, data collection logs, coding schemes, and analytical memos. Confirmability was ensured by maintaining reflexivity, grounding interpretations in data (direct quotes and document evidence), and avoiding undue influence from personal biases.

Ethical approval was obtained from the research ethics committee of the researcher's home institution (reference number: 012/KE/III/2026), and formal permission was granted by the school principal and foundation board. All participants were informed about the purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits before signing informed consent forms. For student participants under 18, parental consent was also obtained. Participation was voluntary, and informants could withdraw at any time without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed by using pseudonyms for the school, all participants, and any identifying information in documents. Data were stored in password-protected files accessible only to the research team.

Results and Discussion

Results

Stage 1: Initiation – Setting the Vision for Akhlak-Based Culture

The principal initiated cultural transformation by articulating a clear vision rooted in prophetic values. P stated: "When I first arrived, I saw that the school had good administrative systems but lacked a shared moral language. I decided to make akhlak the center of everything we do" (interview, 12 Jan 2026). Document analysis of the school's revised vision and mission statement (2024) confirmed the explicit inclusion of *siddiq*, *amanah*, *tabligh*, and *fathanah* as core values. WK explained: "The principal held a two-day workshop with all teachers to reinterpret the school's vision. He asked us, 'What kind of graduates do we want?' The answer was not just smart but honest and trustworthy" (interview, 10 March 2026). Observation of the initial workshop (15 Jan 2026) confirmed that the principal facilitated participatory discussions. This initiation stage was marked by the principal's personal example: arriving at school before 7 AM daily and greeting each teacher and student at the gate. S2 observed: "Seeing the principal every morning makes me want to come on time too" (interview, 5 Feb 2026). Thus, the initiation stage established the foundational vision through both verbal articulation and visible role modeling.

Stage 2: Internalization – Embedding Values through Policies and Participation

The second stage involved translating prophetic values into concrete policies and practices through participatory mechanisms. QA explained: "The principal formed a quality culture team consisting of teachers, students, and parents. Every policy related to akhlak is discussed in weekly meetings" (interview, 15 Jan 2026). Document analysis of meeting minutes (January–April 2026) showed that 12 policies were approved through consensus, including a new "Honesty Pledge" for exam periods. O1, a parent committee

member, stated: "We feel heard. The principal asks for our opinions before deciding" (interview, 25 April 2026). S3 confirmed: "Student representatives are invited to the meetings. We once proposed a peer-tutoring program for moral issues, and the principal approved it" (interview, 22 April 2026). Additionally, the principal integrated akhlak into teacher performance appraisals. WK explained: "Teacher appraisals now include indicators of how well they integrate akhlak into their lessons" (interview, 10 March 2026). Document analysis of the teacher assessment rubric showed criteria such as "uses moral examples in teaching" and "demonstrates amanah in administrative tasks." G1 confirmed: "My evaluation last semester included a section on akhlak integration. It made me more conscious about my teaching" (interview, 20 Jan 2026). This internalization stage embedded prophetic values into institutional policies and daily practices, ensuring they were not merely rhetorical.

Stage 3: Strengthening – Reinforcing Values through Rewards and Training

The third stage focused on reinforcing prophetic values through moral rewards and professional development. P stated: "Each month, we select one teacher and one student who best exemplify amanah, siddiq, or ihsan. They receive a certificate and small prize" (interview, 5 April 2026). Observation of a monthly assembly (25 March 2026) confirmed that awards were given publicly. S4, a recipient, said: "I felt proud. Now I try to be honest even more" (interview, 25 March 2026). G2 added: "The teacher award motivates me. It's not about the prize but the recognition of my efforts in character education" (interview, 1 Feb 2026). To address teacher competence gaps, the school initiated monthly value-based pedagogy workshops. Observation of a teacher training session (12 April 2026) showed teachers practicing how to integrate moral examples into mathematics and science lessons. QA stated: "The principal also created a direct WhatsApp channel for parent reporting, so parents can share concerns about student behavior at home" (interview, 8 April 2026). O2 confirmed: "I can now report if my child is dishonest at home, and the school follows up. This strengthens what is taught at school" (interview, 20 March 2026). This strengthening stage reinforced prophetic values through recognition, capacity building, and school-home collaboration.

Stage 4: Institutionalization: Sustaining Akhlak-Based Culture through Habituation and Trust

The fourth stage saw the akhlak-based culture become habituated and institutionalized, producing observable outcomes in school culture, teacher professionalism, student behavior, and stakeholder trust. WK observed: "The school now has a shared language of akhlak. Teachers and students talk about amanah and siddiq naturally" (interview, 10 March 2026). Document analysis of the BAN-S/M accreditation report (2025) showed that the school scored 92% in "School Culture and Character," up from 78% in 2023, an improvement that coincided with the implementation of the leadership approach. P stated: "The culture has changed from compliance-oriented to value-oriented. People do the right thing because they believe in it, not because they fear punishment" (interview, 5 April 2026).

Teacher professionalism showed positive trends. G3 reported: "I have become more conscious of my own behavior. I arrive early, prepare lessons better, and treat students more respectfully" (interview, 25 Feb 2026). QA confirmed: "Teacher attendance improved from 89% to 95% in one year. Also, three teachers enrolled in master's programs in 2025, compared to none in 2023" (interview, 8 April 2026). Student moral behavior also showed improvement. S3 stated: "I used to skip dhuha prayer. Now I do it

every day because the principal leads by example" (interview, 22 April 2026). G1 added: "We have seen a 40% reduction in disciplinary cases, especially lying and cheating" (interview, 20 April 2026). Document analysis of the disciplinary log (2024 vs 2025) confirmed a decline from 47 to 28 cases.

Stakeholder trust increased substantially. O1 said: "My child now returns excess change when shopping. That never happened before" (interview, 25 April 2026). O2 stated: "I trust the school completely now. The principal is transparent, and my child's behavior has improved" (interview, 20 March 2026). QA added: "New student enrollment increased by 20% this year. Parents cite the school's character program as the main reason" (interview, 8 April 2026). Document analysis of enrollment data showed 320 students in 2025/2026 compared to 267 in 2024/2025.

Table 1. Four-Stage Model of School Culture Transformation through Prophetic Leadership

Stage	Key Strategies	Evidence (with codes)
1. Initiation	Vision articulation, role modeling	Vision statement (document); principal greeting students daily (P, S2, observation)
2. Internalization	Participatory policy (shura), value-based assessment	Quality culture team (QA, O1, S3, minutes); teacher rubric (WK, G1, document)
3. Strengthening	Moral reward system, teacher training, parent reporting	Monthly awards (P, S4, G2, observation); workshops (QA, observation); WhatsApp channel (O2)
4. Institutionalization	Habituation, sustained practices	Shared akhlak language (WK); accreditation 78%→92% (document); attendance 89%→95% (QA, document); disciplinary cases 47→28 (G1, document); enrollment 267→320 (QA, document)

Discussion

The Prophetic Leadership as a Spiritually Augmented Form of Transformational Leadership

The finding that the principal demonstrates *siddiq*, *amanah*, *tabligh*, and *fathanah* aligns with Bass and Avolio's transformational leadership framework, but with a distinct Islamic spiritual dimension. The manifestation of *siddiq* through admitting mistakes and keeping promises resonates with the "idealized influence" dimension, where leaders act as role models and earn trust (Ibrahim Obet & Akhmad Shunhaji, 2025). However, unlike secular transformational leadership, the principal's *siddiq* is rooted in religious accountability (*hisab ukhrawi*), not merely organizational effectiveness. This distinction is critical because it suggests that the moral authority of prophetic leaders derives from divine obligation rather than managerial expediency.

The amanah characteristic personal review of financial reports and delegation with monitoring reflects both "idealized influence" and "individualized consideration." This supports Suwandi et al. (2024) that effective principal leadership in Islamic schools requires a combination of styles, but the present study shows that amanah is uniquely grounded in spiritual responsibility (tawakkal), treating every task as a trust from God. This resonates with Husnul Haniyah and Slamet Lestari (2025), who demonstrated that Islamic value-based principal leadership significantly improves teacher professionalism and school quality.

The tabligh characteristic of open communication, inviting feedback, and responding in writing aligns with the "inspirational motivation" dimension. Paulus et al. (2024) found that participative leadership significantly affects the quality of educational services. The present study extends this by showing that tabligh creates institutional mechanisms for feedback and response, fostering shared accountability. The fathanah characteristic, using data from daily behavior checklists and parent surveys to make decisions, reflects "intellectual stimulation." Herlina Ekawati et al. (2024) found that principal instructional leadership significantly affects lesson planning quality. However, the present study adds a spiritual dimension: the principal's wisdom is not merely technical but also ethical, seeking fair solutions that consider all stakeholders. Thus, prophetic leadership can be understood as a spiritually augmented form of transformational leadership, uniquely suited to Islamic educational contexts.

The four-stage transformation process initiation, internalization, strengthening, institutionalization maps onto Edgar Schein's three levels of organizational culture: artifacts, espoused values, and basic underlying assumptions.

The initiation stage corresponds to creating new artifacts: the principal's daily greetings, revised vision statement, and visible role modeling. Schein argues that leaders create culture by introducing new behavioral routines. The principal's consistent arrival before 7 AM and public dhuha prayer created new artifacts that signaled the importance of discipline and spirituality.

The internalization stage aligns with embedding espoused values into policies. The participatory policy-making (shura) and value-based teacher assessments transformed the school's espoused values siddiq, amanah, tabligh, fathanah from abstract ideals into operational criteria. This finding supports Destisari Nurbani et al. (2025), who showed that strategic principal leadership in data-driven and value-based school planning enhances educational quality.

The strengthening stage moral rewards, teacher training, and parent reporting reinforced both artifacts and espoused values, creating what Schein calls "secondary articulation and reinforcement mechanisms." Dewi Puspitasari (2024) noted that principals in Islamic schools use rewards to reinforce positive behavior, but the present study shows that rewards are explicitly tied to prophetic values rather than generic performance.

The institutionalization stage represents the deepest level: basic underlying assumptions. When teachers and students began to "talk about amanah and siddiq naturally" (WK, interview, 10 March 2026), and when parents trusted the school completely, the akhlak-based assumptions had become taken-for-granted. This stage produced observable improvements: accreditation improvement from B to A (character component 78%→92%), teacher attendance increase from 89% to 95%, a 40% reduction in disciplinary cases, and a 20% rise in enrollment. While these outcomes are associated with the leadership approach, it is important to acknowledge that other factors such as external accreditation requirements, community religious norms, and broader educational policies may have also contributed.

It is important to consider alternative explanations for the observed changes. The suburban setting near pesantren may have predisposed the community to accept prophetic leadership more readily than in urban secular contexts. Additionally, the school's accreditation drive may have independently motivated some of the documented improvements. The principal's personal charisma and prior reputation may have also played a role. These boundary conditions suggest that the four-stage model may not be directly transferable to schools with weaker religious environments or less committed leadership. However, the consistency of the findings across multiple data sources strengthens the association between prophetic leadership and cultural transformation.

This article makes three original contributions. First, it provides an empirically grounded four-stage model of school culture transformation through prophetic leadership. Unlike previous studies that treat prophetic leadership as a normative concept (e.g., Ibrahim Obet & Akhmad Shunhaji, 2025; Irfan Hilmi et al., 2025), this study shows how cultural transformation actually occurs from initiation to institutionalization. The model bridges Islamic ethical theory and organizational change management, offering a template for madrasah principals seeking to transform their school culture. Second, the article contributes contextual knowledge from a suburban Indonesian madrasah located near a pesantren. Most research on prophetic leadership focuses on urban or fully integrated Islamic schools (e.g., Ach. Saifullah & Prim Masrokan, 2025; Duwi Habsari Mutamimah et al., 2025). The suburban context of MA Al-Falah with limited budget, mixed urban-rural characteristics, and proximity to pesantren provides insights into how prophetic leadership functions in resource-constrained settings where the religious environment is naturally supportive but material resources are scarce. Third, the study advances theoretical integration by demonstrating how prophetic leadership operationalizes Islamic concepts (shura, muhasabah, uswah hasanah, muraqabah) into a practical change management framework, challenging secular leadership paradigms.

For madrasah leaders, the study implies that transforming school culture requires more than policy documents; it requires visible moral leadership (uswah) and a staged process. Principals must be willing to be the first to arrive, the first to admit mistakes, and the most consistent in demonstrating Islamic values. For teacher training institutions, the findings suggest the need for courses on value pedagogy and leadership for cultural change. The uneven teacher competence in integrating akhlak into non-religious subjects indicates a gap in pre-service and in-service training. For policymakers (Ministry of Religious Affairs, BAN-S/M), the study implies that accreditation instruments should explicitly include indicators of school culture transformation, not only infrastructure and cognitive test scores.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that prophetic leadership at MA Al-Falah was associated with a systematic four-stage cultural transformation: initiation (vision setting and role modeling), internalization (embedding values through participatory policies and value-based assessment), strengthening (moral rewards, teacher training, and parent reporting), and institutionalization (habituation and stakeholder trust). The principal consistently manifested the four prophetic characteristics—siddiq, amanah, tabligh, and fathanah—through daily actions: greeting students every morning, personally reviewing financial reports, communicating openly, and using data for wise decision-making. These traits were operationalized through four synergistic strategies: leading by example (uswah hasanah), participatory policy-making (shura), value-based performance assessment, and a moral reward system. Despite challenges such as limited funds and uneven teacher competence, the principal's strong commitment and the

school's religious environment enabled observable cultural transformation. The results show that school accreditation improved from B to A (character component rising from 78% to 92%), teacher attendance increased from 89% to 95%, three teachers started master's degrees, student disciplinary cases dropped from 47 to 28 (a 40% decrease), and new student enrollment rose by 20% (from 267 to 320). These measurable outcomes, triangulated across multiple data sources, provide evidence that prophetic leadership is strongly associated with school culture transformation, improving both students' moral character and the school's institutional quality.

This article offers three main contributions. First, it provides a real-life, empirically grounded four-stage model of school culture transformation through prophetic leadership in an Indonesian madrasah, showing how honesty, trust, openness, and wisdom can drive sustainable cultural change. Second, it connects prophetic leadership with transformational leadership theory (Bass & Avolio) and Schein's model of organizational culture, demonstrating that spiritual values are not separate from good management—they are the foundation of cultural transformation. The study also provides a simple framework linking four prophetic traits to four transformation stages, which can be used in other schools. Third, the qualitative approach combining interviews, observations, documents, and stakeholder feedback can be replicated by other researchers studying Islamic leadership and cultural change. For madrasah principals, this study offers a practical guide to leading cultural transformation with values. For teacher training institutions, it shows the need to develop prophetic traits and change management skills in future school leaders. For policymakers (Ministry of Religious Affairs and BAN-S/M), it suggests that principal selection and school accreditation should include prophetic leadership indicators and cultural transformation metrics, not just technical skills.

This study has several limitations that must be acknowledged. It only examines one school in one district of West Java, so the results cannot be statistically generalized. The research was conducted over only four months, so the long-term sustainability of the cultural transformation remains unknown. Additionally, because the data mostly came from interviews (self-reported), there is a possibility that some participants gave socially desirable answers even though triangulation with observations and documents was conducted. Future research should study more madrasahs of different types (public, private, pesantren-based) in different regions to test the transferability of the four-stage model. Longer studies are needed to track whether the akhlak-based culture continues when a new principal takes over. It would also be useful to create a standard assessment tool for prophetic leadership and cultural transformation to help select and evaluate principals. Finally, experimental studies could test whether training programs on prophetic leadership and change management actually improve school outcomes.

AI Disclosure

The authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) for language editing, grammar improvement, and readability enhancement during the revision process. The authors reviewed and edited all AI-generated suggestions and take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the final manuscript. No AI tools were used for data analysis, interpretation, or the generation of research findings.

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Author Contributions (CRediT)

CRediT: Kun Nurachadijat: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Writing – original draft, Project administration. Muh. Hasan Marwiji: Formal analysis, Validation, Visualization, Writing – review & editing. Ai Siti Nurmiati: Investigation, Methodology, Writing – review & editing. Samsiah: Supervision, Resources, Validation, Writing – review & editing. Mamdukh Budiman: Supervision, Writing – review & editing, Formal analysis.

Disclosure Statement / Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no potential conflict of interest related to this article. No financial, professional, institutional, personal, or other relationship could reasonably be perceived as influencing the research, interpretation, or publication of this article.

Notes on Contributors

Kun Nurachadijat is a lecturer in Islamic Education Management at STAI Kharisma Cicurug, Sukabumi, Indonesia. She holds a Master's degree in Islamic Education and specializes in madrasah quality assurance and educational leadership. Her research interests include prophetic leadership, school culture, quality management in Islamic education, and character education.

Muh. Hasan Marwiji is a lecturer at STAI Kharisma Cicurug, Sukabumi, Indonesia. He holds a Master's degree in Islamic Education with a focus on curriculum development and teacher professionalism. His research interests include Islamic education curriculum, teacher performance, and instructional leadership.

Ai Siti Nurmiati is a lecturer at STAI Kharisma Cicurug, Sukabumi, Indonesia. She holds a Master's degree in Islamic Education and specializes in educational psychology and student moral development. Her research interests include character education, student motivation, and Islamic educational psychology.

Samsiah is a lecturer at STAI Kharisma Cicurug, Sukabumi, Indonesia. She holds a Master's degree in Islamic Education and specializes in school management and educational evaluation. Her research interests include educational quality assurance, school administration, and institutional transformation.

Mamdukh Budiman is affiliated with Universiti Muhammadiyah Malaysia. He holds a Doctorate in Education Management and specializes in comparative Islamic education and institutional transformation. His research interests include Islamic educational leadership, cross-cultural educational studies, and higher education quality management.

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