



The Dynamics of Women's Leadership Based on Islamic Values: A Sociological Analysis of Educational Institutions at the SMP IT Boarding School and SMP Al Islam Mujahidin in Cilacap

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Abstract

This study examines the institutional context surrounding Islamic values-based women's leadership in two private Islamic junior high schools in Cilacap, Central Java, Indonesia. Using a qualitative comparative documentary case study with a sociological orientation, the research analyzes scholarly publications, official educational records, accreditation data, institutional profiles, and publicly accessible materials. Data were organized through a document-review matrix and examined using thematic coding, within-case analysis, cross-case comparison, and sociological interpretation. The analysis focused on four interconnected themes: institutional legitimacy and Islamic school identity; discipline, character development, and religious culture; community communication and social capital; and gender-responsive leadership conditions. The findings indicate that the institutional space surrounding women's leadership is shaped not only by individual capacity but also by the interaction of Islamic values, organizational arrangements, religious practices, and relationships of trust among schools, foundations, parents, and communities. The two cases share a common Islamic educational orientation but demonstrate different institutional configurations, suggesting that similar religious identities do not necessarily generate identical conditions for leadership legitimacy and authority. The study contributes a sociological perspective that connects women's leadership in Islamic education with institutional legitimacy, religious culture, and social capital. Practically, it highlights the importance of inclusive organizational support, transparent communication, and collaborative institutional relationships. Because the study relies on documentary evidence, future field-based research is needed to examine how these conditions are experienced and negotiated in everyday leadership practice.

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership in Islamic educational institutions is increasingly shaped by a tension between formal organizational demands and the moral expectations attached to religious schooling (Bahri et al., 2025; Ezzani et al., 2023; Karim et al., 2024). Schools are expected to demonstrate effective governance, educational quality, accountability, and adaptability while simultaneously cultivating adab, spirituality, discipline, and religious identity. Within this context, women's leadership presents an important and sometimes contested dimension of educational authority because leadership legitimacy may be influenced by organizational structures, gender expectations, and religious interpretations. Recent scholarship has shown that women's progression into educational leadership continues to be affected by structural barriers, unequal recognition, cultural expectations, and persistent gendered assumptions about authority (Akinola & Naidoo, 2024; Ayyildiz & Banoglu, 2024). At the same time, studies of Muslim women's leadership demonstrate that religious values can provide both resources for authority and contexts within which women's leadership must negotiate established social expectations (Koburtay et al., 2023; Lahmar, 2024a; Samier & ElKaleh,

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2021). This creates an important paradox: women may possess substantial capacities for educational leadership, yet the legitimacy of their authority can depend on how their roles are recognized within gendered, religious, and institutional environments. In Islamic schools, therefore, leadership cannot be understood solely through the question of who occupies a formal position, but also through the processes by which authority becomes morally and socially legitimate. Examining these processes is particularly important for understanding how women's leadership is situated within institutions where educational governance and religious values are deeply interconnected.

The issue becomes more significant in private Islamic schools, where institutional sustainability often depends on relationships among foundations, school leaders, teachers, parents, and surrounding communities (Yugo, 2025). Unlike purely bureaucratic understandings of schooling, Islamic educational institutions frequently operate through formal administrative structures alongside networks of trust, religious identity, and collective expectations (Hasan, 2024; Sugianto et al., 2026). School leaders must consequently respond to national educational standards while maintaining the distinctive moral character expected by families who choose Islamic education. Research on Islamic school leadership has emphasized the importance of spirituality, ethical responsibility, social justice, and value-based governance in shaping institutional practice (Rahman, 2025). Other studies indicate that religious culture is sustained through everyday practices, including worship routines, moral habituation, teacher-student relationships, discipline, and the institutionalization of shared values (Namira & Hayat, 2026). These practices are not merely symbolic because they influence how school communities interpret credibility, responsibility, and educational quality. Consequently, the leadership environment of Islamic schools represents a social arena in which formal authority must continually interact with moral expectations and collective trust. This institutional complexity provides an important context for examining how women's leadership can be interpreted within the structures and cultures of local Islamic education.

The cases of SMP IT Buah Hati Boarding School and SMP Islam Al Mujahidin in Cilacap illustrate the relevance of investigating leadership within such institutional configurations. Both schools are private Islamic junior high schools, yet their institutional identities are shaped by different foundation affiliations, organizational histories, and educational orientations documented in official educational and accreditation sources. The schools are connected to formal systems of state recognition while also presenting distinctive Islamic identities associated with religious formation, character development, discipline, and community expectations (Jusubaidi et al., 2024). Their contexts therefore demonstrate that an Islamic school's legitimacy cannot be reduced to legal status or accreditation alone, because parents and communities may also evaluate schools through the consistency of their values and the quality of their everyday educational practices. Documentary materials concerning the two institutions further point to the importance of disciplinary formation, character education, and pesantren or boarding-oriented educational narratives in constructing institutional identity. Such conditions make leadership a relational rather than exclusively individual process, since institutional programs depend on cooperation among multiple actors (Breaugh et al., 2023; Kinder et al., 2021; Suroya et al., 2026). From this perspective, women's leadership is relevant not simply as a matter of gender representation but as an analytical lens for examining the relationship between authority, values, organizational culture, and social legitimacy. A sociological reading of these institutional contexts can therefore help explain the conditions under which leadership authority may be supported, negotiated, or constrained.

The urgency of this topic is also associated with continuing changes in educational governance and the growing demand for schools to demonstrate both institutional quality and social responsiveness (Jones et al., 2021; Meikle & Morris, 2022). Islamic schools are increasingly required to manage curriculum change, accountability, student welfare, parental communication, and organizational development without losing the religious orientation that differentiates them from other educational institutions. Leadership is central to this process because institutional values must be translated into concrete routines, rules, relationships, and decision-making practices. Recent studies have emphasized that effective leadership in Muslim educational contexts cannot be separated from the beliefs and values that give meaning to organizational decisions (Alazmi, 2025; Lahmar, 2024). However, the presence of values alone does not automatically generate effective governance, as their influence depends on how they are interpreted and embedded in institutional practice. Similarly, research on women in educational leadership suggests that collaboration,

resilience, mediation, authenticity, and organizational support are important, but these capacities operate within specific social and structural conditions rather than independently of them (Cimene et al., 2024; García-Vidal et al., 2025). This indicates the need to move beyond individualized explanations of leadership and examine the institutional environments that shape the possibility of leadership effectiveness. For local Islamic schools, such an approach is urgent because the interaction between gender, religious values, organizational structures, and community trust remains insufficiently understood.

Previous research provides a substantial foundation for understanding women's leadership, although its dominant focus has been directed toward barriers to leadership progression and women's experiences within broader educational systems. Studies have examined the glass ceiling, gendered career obstacles, unequal access to leadership positions, work-life pressures, and organizational cultures that influence women's advancement (Kossek & Lee, 2022; Smith et al., 2022). Other research has investigated women's leadership through resilience, collaboration, authenticity, emotional work, and the navigation of contradictory organizational expectations (Tragantzopoulou et al., 2025). Research focusing specifically on educational leadership has also demonstrated that women's experiences vary across social, cultural, and national contexts, making it difficult to treat female leadership as a universal or homogeneous phenomenon (Liao & Luo, 2021; Mohebi et al., 2026). These studies have made an important contribution by showing that leadership opportunities and authority are shaped by gendered institutional arrangements. Nevertheless, much of this literature concentrates on higher education, national educational systems, or general patterns of women's leadership progression. As a result, less attention has been directed toward the institutional dynamics through which women's leadership is situated in local religious schools characterized by strong moral cultures and close community relationships. This limitation suggests the importance of examining leadership not only as an individual experience but also as a practice embedded in a particular institutional field.

A parallel body of scholarship on Islamic educational leadership has generated important insights into spirituality, ethical governance, critical religious leadership, social justice, and the role of Islamic values in educational practice. Alazmi (2025) propose an Islamic-oriented leadership model that highlights the importance of values and beliefs in shaping school leadership, while Lahmar (2024) emphasize critical spirituality as an important framework for understanding Islamic school leadership. International research has further demonstrated the relevance of social justice and contextual interpretation in studies of Islamic educational leadership (Arar et al., 2022), whereas systematic reviews have identified a range of leadership qualities and practices associated with effective principals in Islamic schools. Recent studies also show how religious moderation, pesantren culture, emotional and moral development, and spiritual leadership influence educational practices in Muslim institutions (Setiawan et al., 2026). However, these studies do not consistently integrate a gender-sensitive perspective with the sociology of educational institutions. Conversely, sociological approaches highlight the importance of habitus, social capital, organizational structures, and social networks in shaping educational practices and institutional development (Abate & Mishore, 2024; Romito, 2023). The critical gap, therefore, lies at the intersection of these three fields: women's educational leadership, Islamic values-based leadership, and the sociology of local Islamic schooling. Existing research has not sufficiently explained how religious-cultural habitus, foundation structures, social capital, and community legitimacy shape the institutional conditions surrounding women's leadership in local Islamic junior high schools.

Addressing this gap requires an analytical approach that avoids reducing women's leadership either to personal characteristics or to formal gender representation (Phipps & Prieto, 2021). The present study positions leadership within the interaction among institutional structures, moral legitimacy, religious culture, and social relationships. Rather than claiming to capture the lived experiences or direct leadership practices of women without field-based evidence, this documentary analysis examines the institutional conditions and publicly documented configurations relevant to understanding women's leadership in two Islamic schools. The study consequently focuses on three interconnected dimensions: the role of Islamic values as a potential source of moral legitimacy, the relationship between organizational structures and religious-cultural practices, and the contribution of social capital to institutional trust and educational governance. This perspective draws on the sociology of educational institutions to interpret schools as social arenas in which actors, values,

structures, and networks mutually shape institutional practice (Trinidad, 2024). It also responds to calls for greater contextual sensitivity in the study of both women's leadership and Islamic educational leadership (Wijaya Mulya & Sakhiyya, 2021). By comparing two local Islamic junior high schools, the study seeks to generate a more institutionally grounded understanding of how gendered authority may be interpreted within value-laden educational environments. In this sense, the research advances an analytical proposition that women's leadership in Islamic schools is best understood through the relationship among values, organizational conditions, and social legitimacy rather than through formal position alone.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the institutional dynamics surrounding Islamic values-based women's leadership at SMP IT Buah Hati Boarding School and SMP Islam Al Mujahidin Cilacap through a comparative documentary and sociological approach. More specifically, it examines how Islamic values are represented as sources of moral legitimacy, how institutional structures and religious culture shape the context of leadership, and how social capital and community relations contribute to institutional trust. The study contributes theoretically by bringing together scholarship on women's leadership, Islamic educational leadership, and the sociology of educational institutions within a single analytical framework. This integration expands existing discussions by emphasizing that leadership legitimacy in religious schools should be understood as a socially produced and institutionally embedded process. Practically, the analysis highlights the importance of participatory governance, systematic documentation, teacher support, fair distribution of authority, and gender-responsive organizational arrangements in strengthening school leadership. The findings are expected to provide a conceptual basis for foundations and school communities to recognize that support for women's leadership requires not only formal appointment but also adequate authority, institutional resources, collaborative networks, and mechanisms of accountability. Because the study is based on documentary evidence, its conclusions are interpretive and provisional, thereby providing a foundation for subsequent research using interviews, observation, and other forms of field-based inquiry. Through this contribution, the study seeks to clarify how the interaction of spirituality, professionalism, care, governance, and social trust can inform a more humane and sustainable understanding of leadership in Islamic educational institutions.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative comparative documentary case study with a sociological orientation. The design was selected because the study aimed to examine the institutional conditions surrounding Islamic values-based women's leadership rather than to measure leadership effectiveness statistically or to claim direct access to the lived experiences of women leaders. The analysis focused on two private Islamic junior high schools in Cilacap and interpreted documentary evidence concerning institutional identity, organizational structure, religious culture, discipline, character development, community relations, and gender-responsive leadership conditions. A documentary approach was considered appropriate because the available evidence consisted of scholarly literature, official educational records, accreditation data, institutional profiles, and publicly accessible documents rather than interviews, surveys, or direct observations. The comparative case orientation enabled the study to identify similarities and differences between the two institutional contexts while avoiding the assumption that schools with similar Islamic identities necessarily operate through identical social structures. The sociological perspective further positioned each school as an institutional arena in which formal authority, religious-cultural values, social capital, and community expectations interact. Accordingly, the analysis did not treat women's leadership as an isolated individual characteristic but examined the institutional configurations that may shape the legitimacy and operational space of women's leadership. The findings were therefore interpreted as documentary and sociological propositions requiring subsequent verification through field-based research.

Research Setting and Period

The study was situated in two private Islamic junior high schools in Cilacap, Central Java, Indonesia, namely SMP IT Buah Hati Boarding School and SMP Islam Al Mujahidin Cilacap. These sites

were selected because both institutions operate within Islamic educational environments in which formal school governance intersects with religious values, foundation structures, character formation, discipline, and community expectations. Despite their shared status as private Islamic schools, the two institutions possess different organizational histories, foundation affiliations, and educational orientations, thereby providing an appropriate basis for comparative analysis. Institutional information was examined through official sources, including the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, Dapodik, and BAN-PDM, together with publicly accessible institutional materials relevant to the schools' educational identities and activities. The documentary collection and analysis were conducted using the most recent accessible records available during the preparation of the study, with particular attention to institutional data published or accessible through 2025–2026. Earlier institutional materials were retained only when they provided relevant information concerning the establishment, educational orientation, or documented activities of the selected schools. Because the study relied exclusively on documentary and publicly accessible evidence, no direct field visits, interviews, participant observations, or interventions were undertaken. The temporal scope was therefore defined by the availability, relevance, and traceability of the documents rather than by a conventional period of participant-based data collection.

Population, Sampling, and Units of Analysis

The source population comprised two categories of documentary material: scholarly publications addressing women's leadership, educational leadership, Islamic educational leadership, Islamic values, social capital, religious culture, habitus, and the sociology of educational institutions, as well as official or publicly accessible documents concerning the two selected schools. The documentary sample was selected through purposive sampling based on substantive relevance to the research objectives and the capacity of each source to provide traceable evidence for cross-case interpretation. Sources were included when they had a clearly identifiable author or institutional publisher, contained information directly related to the analytical dimensions of the study, and provided sufficient contextual detail to support interpretation. Official institutional sources were prioritized for factual claims regarding legal status, school identity, accreditation, and formal institutional characteristics. Scholarly sources were used primarily to construct the conceptual and sociological interpretation of the documentary findings, whereas institutional profiles and publicly available activity materials were treated as representations of organizational narratives rather than independent proof of leadership effectiveness. Sources were excluded when their authorship or institutional origin could not be verified, when they duplicated information already available from more authoritative records, or when they did not provide sufficient relevance to the two cases or the analytical framework. The primary unit of analysis was therefore not an individual leader or participant but the documented institutional configuration surrounding leadership, including relationships among values, organizational structures, religious culture, discipline, social networks, public legitimacy, and gender-responsive leadership conditions.

Research Instrument and Analytical Framework

The principal research instrument consisted of a structured document-review matrix combined with a thematic coding framework developed from the objectives of the study and the conceptual literature on women's leadership, Islamic values, and the sociology of educational institutions. For each source, the review matrix recorded the document identity, publication or institutional source, date where available, type of evidence, institutional context, relevant textual information, analytical category, and evidentiary limitations. To ensure direct alignment between the research objectives, documentary evidence, and the subsequent Results and Discussion, the coding framework was organized into four interconnected analytical themes: (1) institutional legitimacy and Islamic school identity, (2) discipline, character development, and religious culture, (3) community communication and social capital, and (4) gender-responsive leadership conditions. The first theme examined documented institutional identity, formal recognition, Islamic values, moral legitimacy, and organizational positioning. The second focused on discipline, character formation, religious habituation, worship routines, and boarding or pesantren-oriented educational practices. The third examined school-parent communication, foundation and community relationships, social networks, collaboration, and institutional trust. The fourth was used to interpret documentary evidence concerning the institutional conditions surrounding women's authority, role distribution,

organizational support, acceptance, legitimacy, and gender-responsive leadership strategies. This framework ensured that the coding process remained theoretically informed while maintaining a clear distinction between documented institutional facts and subsequent sociological interpretation.

Trustworthiness of the Documentary Instrument

Because the study did not employ a standardized questionnaire or psychometric measurement scale, conventional statistical procedures such as Cronbach's alpha or construct validity testing were not applicable. Instead, the quality of the documentary analysis was strengthened through content alignment, source triangulation, traceability, and systematic comparison. Content alignment was established by ensuring that each analytical theme corresponded directly to the research objectives and theoretical dimensions of women's leadership, Islamic educational leadership, social capital, habitus, and institutional legitimacy. Source triangulation was applied by comparing factual information across official educational databases, accreditation records, institutional materials, and relevant scholarly publications whenever the available evidence allowed such comparison. A source hierarchy was also applied, with official government and accreditation documents given greater evidentiary weight for institutional facts than secondary media or self-presentational materials. Cross-case consistency was examined by applying the same analytical themes and documentary review procedures to both schools, while an audit trail was maintained through the document-review matrix to ensure that the relationship between the source, extracted information, coding category, and interpretation remained traceable. These procedures enhanced the credibility and dependability of the analysis while recognizing the limitations of documentary evidence.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted through systematic stages of source identification, source verification, information extraction, and documentary classification. Potentially relevant scholarly and institutional sources were first identified according to the analytical focus on women's leadership, Islamic values, institutional legitimacy, religious culture, discipline, character development, social capital, community communication, and gender-responsive leadership conditions. Each source was subsequently verified by examining the identity of its author or publishing institution, traceability, relevance to the research questions, and suitability for comparative analysis. Official data from Kemendikdasmen, Dapodik, and BAN-PDM were used primarily to establish institutional identity, legal status, and accreditation-related information, whereas institutional profiles and publicly accessible activity materials were examined for evidence concerning educational orientation and organizational narratives. Relevant information was then extracted into the document-review matrix according to its documentary source and analytical relevance. A distinction was maintained between verifiable institutional facts, organizational self-representations, and theoretically informed interpretations. Finally, the extracted evidence was classified into the four analytical themes and organized for within-case and cross-case comparison. Documents containing insufficient or inadequately verifiable information were excluded from central factual claims but could be retained as contextual material when their limitations were explicitly acknowledged.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed through thematic coding, within-case analysis, cross-case comparison, and sociological interpretation. The extracted documentary material was repeatedly reviewed to identify evidence relevant to the four analytical themes, after which initial codes were grouped into broader thematic categories. Each school was first analyzed independently to preserve its distinctive institutional context before a cross-case comparison was conducted to identify convergent patterns and contextual differences. The comparative findings were then interpreted through the concepts of women's leadership, Islamic values, habitus, social capital, and institutional legitimacy. Documented institutional facts were used to support descriptive findings, whereas broader claims concerning leadership were framed as analytical propositions or institutional possibilities rather than direct evidence of individual women's lived practices. No statistical software was required because the study did not involve numerical testing; instead, the structured coding matrix served as the principal tool for organizing and comparing the documentary evidence. The final

analytical stage synthesized the identified patterns to explain how values, institutional structures, religious culture, discipline, social capital, and community trust may shape the institutional context surrounding women's leadership in the two Islamic schools.

To provide a concise overview of the overall research process, the main stages and analytical outputs are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of the Research Procedure

Stage	Main Activity	Analytical Output
1. Research Focus	Defined the institutional dynamics of Islamic values-based women's leadership and selected two Islamic junior high schools as comparative cases.	Research focus and case selection
2. Analytical Framework	Integrated women's leadership, Islamic values, and the sociology of educational institutions to establish the analytical framework.	Four analytical themes
3. Source Selection	Identified and purposively selected relevant scholarly and institutional documents based on relevance, traceability, and evidentiary authority.	Documentary dataset
4. Data Extraction and Coding	Extracted relevant information using a document-review matrix and classified the evidence into four analytical themes.	Organized thematic evidence
5. Comparative Analysis	Conducted within-case analysis followed by cross-case comparison to identify similarities and contextual differences.	Comparative findings
6. Sociological Interpretation	Interpreted the findings through institutional legitimacy, religious culture, social capital, habitus, and women's leadership.	Analytical propositions and conclusions

The four analytical themes comprised institutional legitimacy and Islamic school identity; discipline, character development, and religious culture; community communication and social capital; and gender-responsive leadership conditions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Institutional Legitimacy and Islamic School Identity

The first documentary finding indicates that the institutional identities of the two schools are constructed through a combination of legal status, private-school status, foundation affiliation, and an Islamic educational orientation. Official Kemendikdasmen data list SMP IT Buah Hati Boarding School as a private junior high school in Tritih Kulon, North Cilacap, with NPSN 69991321, while SMP Islam Al Mujahidin is listed as a private junior high school in Gumilir, North Cilacap, with NPSN 70028587. Differences in address and foundation affiliation show that the schools occupy different social fields, although both promote an Islamic educational identity in the Cilacap area. Female leadership therefore does not operate in a vacuum; it must interpret the institution's founding history, foundation networks, parental aspirations, and community expectations of an Islamic school. The legitimacy of female leaders is consequently tied to their capacity to maintain the institution's moral and administrative standing. (Kemendikdasmen, 2026a, 2026b).

The first finding also reveals differences in institutional context that may influence leadership styles and priorities. SMP IT Buah Hati Boarding School was established on 2 September 2019,

operates under the Khonsa Foundation, and holds an A accreditation based on its 2021 BAN-SM record. SMP Islam Al Mujahidin has an establishment decree dated 28 April 2022, operates under the Al Mujahidin Cilacap Foundation, and is recorded as holding an A accreditation in BAN-PDM data valid through 2029. Differences in institutional age carry sociological consequences: newer schools are generally still building reputation, systems, and public trust, whereas more established schools tend to require quality consolidation. For female leaders, both situations demand legitimacy-building work, although their institutional priorities differ. (BAN-PDM, 2026a, 2026b).

The context of these facts is visible in the need for both schools to manage an Islamic identity while meeting modern institutional standards. Dapodik data show that both schools are included in the national education data system, meaning that their existence is not only socially recognized but also connected to state governance. At the same time, an Islamic school identity requires evidence beyond legality; parents assess schools through discipline, adab, Qur'anic memorization, safety, communication, and teachers' care. Female leaders stand between these two regimes of evaluation: the state's administrative regime and the community's moral regime. Alignment between administrative governance and the community's moral experience is therefore an essential precondition for public trust. (Dapodik, 2025a, 2025b).

Discussion: If the institutional identities of the two schools display strong configurations of foundation affiliation, legality, accreditation, and Islamic orientation, female leadership must be understood as agency operating within social structures rather than as a stand-alone personal style. Female leadership becomes effective when leaders can read the field: who holds authority in the foundation, how teachers respond to policies, what parents expect, and which values the school community most highly prizes. This discussion extends leadership literature by emphasizing that gender concerns not only career barriers but also the ways actors construct legitimacy within value-laden institutions. Sociological analysis thus allows female leaders to be seen as producers of institutional practice rather than merely occupants of administrative positions. (Biehl, 2023; Gunter, 2022; Painter & Werhane, 2023; Sum, 2026).

The first hypothesis—that Islamic values provide a source of legitimacy for female leadership—can be accepted conceptually, provided that those values are translated into consistent practice. The literature on Islamic school leadership indicates that spiritual values can provide a leadership framework, but they must also be approached critically so that they do not remain symbolic. In the two schools examined, Islamic values provide female leaders with a moral language for directing discipline, adab, and community communication. Legitimacy, however, does not arise from normative quotations alone; it emerges from consistency among words, decisions, and the experiences of school members. Female leadership gains strength when it presents Islam as an ethic of governance rather than merely an ornament in student-admissions brochures. (Alazmi, 2025; Brooks & Ezzani, 2022; Lahmar, 2024; Mohamed, 2022).

2. Discipline, Character Development, and Boarding/Pesantren Culture

Results: The second documentary finding indicates that a culture of discipline and character development constitutes an important arena for female leadership. A report on activities at SMP IT Buah Hati Boarding School describes marching-drill and flag-ceremony training delivered by personnel from the local Military District Command (Koramil) as part of developing students' character, discipline, neatness, responsibility, mental resilience, and solidarity. Meanwhile, the publicly accessible profile of SMP Islam Al Mujahidin describes it as a pesantren-based junior high school with a vision of producing intelligent, high-achieving, skilled, and independent graduates. These data show that local Islamic education operates through two languages: the language of civic discipline and that of pesantren formation. In this context, female leadership connects discipline, morality, and quality through an educational approach that is both firm and humane. (BatamClick, 2024; SMP Islam Al Mujahidin Cilacap, 2022).

The relationship among the analyzed components is evident in the connection between discipline, Islamic values, school reputation, and parental trust. Well-managed discipline strengthens the school's image as an orderly institution; Islamic values provide a moral basis so that discipline does not become symbolic violence; the school's reputation gives parents confidence that their children's development is systematic; and parental trust provides social support for program continuity. Within a female-leadership framework, this relationship requires mediation: leaders must understand teachers' demands, parents' concerns, students' needs, and foundation policies.

Discipline that is only harsh is easily rejected, whereas Islamic values that are merely gentle but lack structure can quickly dissipate. Relational leadership is therefore needed to maintain balance. (Kemendikdasmen, 2026a, 2026b).

This relationship operates in the context of private Islamic schools competing for educational quality and public trust. The A accreditation held by both schools provides symbolic capital indicating that the institutions meet particular standards, but formal standards do not automatically guarantee consistent daily culture. The strengths of Islamic schools are typically tested through routine matters: teacher attendance, classroom cleanliness, firm enforcement of rules, habituation of worship, communication with parents, and responses to student problems. Female leaders play a central role in ensuring that the values claimed by the school become monitorable working mechanisms. In other words, female leadership can serve as the nexus that transforms values into routines, routines into culture, and culture into reputation. This process requires consistency if values are to become a sustainable culture. (BAN-PDM, 2026a, 2026b).

Discussion: If discipline and character development occupy a central position in the two schools, female leadership works effectively when school values are translated into collective practice. Discipline is not merely a rule concerning arrival time; it is a sociological process that shapes the habitus of students, teachers, and parents. Literature on spiritual leadership in pesantren and critical Islamic educational leadership emphasizes that Islamic educational leadership must move from symbols to pedagogical practice. Female leaders can act as intermediaries between school policy and students' daily experiences. They can enforce rules while preserving the dimension of care. Such a model is important so that discipline does not become rigidity and compassion does not become permissiveness. (Ismail et al., 2024; Karim et al., 2025; Selçuk, 2023; Supriyono et al., 2025).

The second hypothesis—that social capital constitutes the infrastructure of female leadership—can also be accepted. Social capital in the form of foundation trust, teacher loyalty, parental participation, and community reputation supports female leaders in implementing programs. In studies of Islamic educational quality, social capital explains why schools with limited resources can continue to develop when they possess strong networks of trust. Social capital, however, does not arise automatically; it must be produced through communication, consistency, transparency, and the distribution of roles. Female leaders who can manage social capital can transform community expectations into energy for renewal. Conversely, without social capital, sound policies risk remaining formal documents without implementation. (Dewi et al., 2023; El Junusi et al., 2024; Hanif, 2015, 2022).

3. Community Communication, Social Capital, and Gender-Responsive Strategies

Results: The third documentary finding indicates that female leadership has a strategic opportunity to consolidate teacher-parent communication and the habituation of Islamic values. Dapodik data and official references identify both schools as private institutions that need stronger social networks to maintain program stability. In private Islamic schools, communication is not an ancillary matter; it is the infrastructure of trust. Parents entrust their children to schools not only to learn mathematics or Indonesian, but also to develop adab, receive guidance in worship, and remain safe. Female leaders can play an important role because many educational leadership practices require empathy, patience, firmness, and sensitivity to the social atmosphere. This opportunity becomes effective, however, only when it is supported by systems, authority, budgets, and a fair division of labor, rather than being imposed as an allegedly natural attribute of women. (Dapodik, 2025a, 2025b).

The strategic implication of this finding is the need to strengthen participatory leadership, quality documentation, teacher mentoring, and gender-responsive school deliberation forums. Participatory leadership prevents school decisions from depending on a single figure; quality documentation ensures that good practices are not lost when teachers change; teacher mentoring helps translate Islamic values into pedagogy; and gender-responsive deliberation forums allow women's experiences to be recognized as institutional knowledge. In the two relatively young schools that are continuing to build their reputations, these strategies can strengthen organizational sustainability. Female leaders should not merely be given a platform; they also require instruments data, teams, authority, and protection from bias. Without such support, leadership responsibilities will be disproportionate to the institutional instruments available. (Kemendikdasmen, 2026a, 2026b).

The principal value or opportunity of these strategies lies in their capacity to make female leadership an institutional mechanism for safeguarding quality and character. Character-development activities at SMP IT Buah Hati Boarding School and the pesantren profile of SMP Islam Al Mujahidin suggest that both schools possess narrative capital for developing disciplined, religious, and socially oriented education. The challenge is to transform that narrative into evaluation systems, teacher development, student protection, and parental involvement. Female leadership can drive consolidation because it has the potential to combine administrative work, emotional communication, and sensitivity to values. This opportunity must nevertheless be understood critically: the success of female leaders is not a justification for normalizing excessive workloads, but a basis for building fairer and healthier school structures. (BatamClick, 2024; SMP Islam Al Mujahidin Cilacap, 2022).

Discussion: If opportunities for communication and mentoring provide strategic space for female leadership, Islamic schools need to develop a gender-just organizational culture. Gender justice in Islamic educational leadership does not mean uncritically imitating secular leadership models; rather, it means ensuring that women's capacities, experiences, and knowledge are recognized as part of institutional authority. Literature on female ulama, gender-just religious authority, and the experiences of Indonesian female leaders shows that women often contribute through mediation, network maintenance, and the production of moral authority. In schools, these contributions can strengthen quality when they receive formal space, recognition, and systemic support. Without formal support, women's contributions risk receiving unequal recognition within decision-making structures. (Arquisola & Rentschler, 2023; Hanif & Syarifah, 2022; Kuehn, 2023; Nisa & Saenong, 2022).

The third hypothesis that Islamic values-based female leadership contributes to quality and character can be accepted with the proviso that Islamic values operate as an institutional ethic. Islamic values must protect students' dignity, encourage deliberation, strengthen moderation, and direct decisions toward educational well-being. Literature on tolerance, religious moderation, and Islamic education indicates that healthy religious values do not close the space for criticism but refine the way schools resolve problems. In the context of the two schools in Cilacap, female leadership has the potential to become an integrative mechanism connecting religiosity, professionalism, and community engagement. This article contributes by affirming that female leadership in Islamic schools is not a peripheral issue, but an important lens through which to understand the future of humane Islamic educational governance.

Table 2. Summary of Research Findings

Finding	Indicator	Sociological meaning	Implication
Institutional legitimacy	Legal status, foundation, accreditation, Dapodik data	Female leadership operates within specific formal-social structures	Triangulation of official documents and primary data is required
Discipline and character	Marching-drill/flag-ceremony training (PBB/TUB), pesantren culture, graduate vision, value habituation	Islamic values and discipline become an arena of leadership negotiation	A non-repressive educational model of discipline is required
Community communication	School-parent-foundation relations, quality documentation, deliberation forums	Social capital becomes the infrastructure of female leadership effectiveness	Participatory and gender-responsive leadership is required

Table 3. Summary of the Analysis of Research Findings

Analytical aspect	Key finding	Hypothesis confirmation	Theoretical contribution
Value-based legitimacy	Islamic values provide a moral language for female leadership	Supported when values become practice rather than symbols	Extends Islamic leadership theory through a gender perspective

Analytical aspect	Key finding	Hypothesis confirmation	Theoretical contribution
Social capital	Foundations, teachers, parents, and communities form the infrastructure of leadership	Supported when leaders are able to build trust	Connects female leadership with the sociology of schooling
Quality and character	Discipline, religious culture, and community communication shape school reputation	Supported when backed by a gender-responsive system	Offers a model of female leadership as an institutional mechanism

Discusion

The findings demonstrate that institutional legitimacy constitutes a fundamental condition shaping the space in which Islamic values-based women's leadership can acquire authority. The comparative evidence shows that legal recognition, accreditation, foundation affiliation, and Islamic institutional identity operate simultaneously, indicating that leadership legitimacy is socially constructed rather than derived solely from formal position. This interpretation is consistent with organizational sociology, which views schools as institutional arenas where structures, relationships, and normative expectations influence how authority is recognized and exercised (Trinidad, 2024). It also supports recent research showing that women's leadership remains shaped by institutional arrangements and gendered expectations rather than individual competence alone (Akinola & Naidoo, 2024; Ayyildiz & Banoglu, 2024; Mohebi et al., 2026). However, the present findings extend this perspective by suggesting that, in Islamic schools, legitimacy must also be negotiated through moral consistency and the ability to align administrative governance with religious expectations. Thus, Islamic values may become a source of leadership legitimacy, but only when they are embedded in observable institutional practices rather than functioning as symbolic organizational rhetoric (Alazmi, 2025; Lahmar, 2024a; Ezzani et al., 2023).

A second important finding concerns the role of discipline, character development, and religious culture as mechanisms through which institutional values are translated into everyday educational practice. The evidence from both schools suggests that discipline is not merely an administrative instrument for regulating behaviour but a social process through which institutional habitus is reproduced among students, teachers, and families. This interpretation resonates with sociological perspectives emphasizing that organizational culture becomes durable when shared norms are repeatedly enacted and incorporated into routine practices (Romito, 2023; Trinidad, 2024). Similarly, recent studies of Islamic and pesantren-based education underline that religious values gain educational significance when they move beyond formal declarations and become embedded in habituation, moral formation, and psychosocial relationships (Namira & Hayat, 2026; Setiawan et al., 2026). The present study therefore supports the argument that value-based leadership requires the transformation of abstract moral principles into consistent institutional routines, while extending previous literature by linking this process specifically to the institutional conditions surrounding women's authority. Its practical implication is that women's leadership can contribute to sustainable school culture when organizational systems enable a balanced integration of firmness, care, accountability, and pedagogical sensitivity, rather than reducing discipline to either rigid control or permissiveness.

The findings further indicate that social capital functions as an institutional infrastructure for leadership legitimacy and program implementation. Relationships among foundations, teachers, parents, and surrounding communities provide resources that cannot be replaced solely by formal authority because institutional decisions require trust before they can become collective action. This result is consistent with relational leadership theory, which emphasizes that leadership effectiveness emerges through interconnected relationships rather than from the isolated capacity of a single leader (Kinder et al., 2021; Breaugh et al., 2023). It also corresponds with research on women's leadership showing that collaboration, resilience, and relational dynamics may strengthen leadership capacity when supported by an enabling organizational environment (Cimene et al., 2024; Tragantzopoulou et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the current analysis adds a critical qualification: relational capacity should not be interpreted as an inherently feminine characteristic, because such an assumption risks reproducing gender stereotypes and obscuring the organizational conditions required for leadership effectiveness. Instead, social capital should be understood as collectively

produced through transparency, communication, consistency, and equitable participation, meaning that women leaders require institutional access to networks and decision-making resources rather than expectations that they should naturally perform additional relational labour.

Community communication emerges as another central finding because, within private Islamic schooling, trust is continuously shaped by how institutions communicate educational, moral, and organizational commitments to parents and communities. The analysis suggests that communication is not an auxiliary administrative activity but a mechanism through which institutional legitimacy is maintained, particularly when families evaluate schools according to both educational quality and the credibility of their religious and character-based commitments. This finding supports studies emphasizing that Islamic educational institutions operate through a combination of formal governance and broader social relationships grounded in trust, shared identity, and collective expectations (Hasan, 2024; Yugo, 2025; Sugianto et al., 2026). It also complements scholarship on Muslim women's leadership, which has demonstrated that women may construct authority through mediation, moral credibility, and the negotiation of complex cultural expectations (Koburtay et al., 2023; Samier & ElKaleh, 2021). The contribution of the present study lies in repositioning these capacities as institutional resources rather than personal traits, because effective communication depends on access to information, formal authority, organizational support, and legitimate participation in decision-making. Consequently, gender-responsive leadership requires schools to institutionalize participatory forums and transparent communication systems so that women's knowledge and perspectives become recognized components of governance rather than invisible contributions operating outside formal authority.

Another significant interpretation concerns the relationship between Islamic values and educational quality, particularly the finding that religious identity alone does not automatically produce legitimate or effective leadership. Previous scholarship has emphasized spirituality, ethical responsibility, social justice, and value-based governance as important dimensions of Islamic educational leadership (Arar et al., 2022; Ezzani et al., 2023; Rahman, 2025). The present findings broadly support these arguments but introduce a more critical institutional interpretation by showing that values influence leadership only through processes of organizational translation, including policies, routines, accountability mechanisms, teacher support, and interactions with families. This means that a school may strongly articulate Islamic values while still experiencing a gap between institutional discourse and daily practice if those values are not supported by adequate structures and consistent implementation. In this respect, the study extends Islamic leadership theory by proposing that values should be understood not simply as internal moral orientations but as institutional ethics whose credibility depends on their visible consequences for educational relationships and governance. Such an interpretation is particularly relevant to women's leadership because moral legitimacy can expand women's authority in religious institutions, yet the same religious environment may also constrain authority when gendered expectations determine whose interpretation of institutional values is considered legitimate.

The comparative dimension also reveals that a shared Islamic identity does not generate identical conditions for leadership legitimacy or authority. Differences in organizational history, foundation affiliation, institutional development, and educational orientation suggest that women's leadership must be interpreted within specific social fields rather than through universal assumptions about either gender or Islamic education. This conclusion aligns with research demonstrating that women's leadership experiences vary substantially across cultural, national, and institutional contexts (Liao & Luo, 2021; Wijaya Mulya & Sakhiyya, 2021; Lahmar, 2024a). It also reinforces sociological arguments that institutional structures and networks shape the opportunities available to organizational actors and influence the forms of authority that become possible or credible (Trinidad, 2024; Romito, 2023). The present study therefore challenges approaches that explain women's leadership primarily through individual resilience or personal leadership style, because such explanations cannot adequately account for why similar competencies may produce different outcomes across institutional settings. Its conceptual novelty lies in integrating women's leadership, Islamic values-based leadership, and the sociology of educational institutions to argue that leadership legitimacy is produced through the interaction of moral resources, organizational arrangements, and social recognition.

The findings also point to the importance of gender-responsive organizational support as a condition for converting women's leadership potential into institutional capacity. Research on gendered leadership barriers has consistently shown that women may face unequal recognition, restricted access to authority, and organizational expectations that create additional burdens even when formal opportunities for leadership are available (Akinola & Naidoo, 2024; Ayyildiz & Banoglu, 2024; Phipps & Prieto, 2021). The present analysis supports this broader literature while suggesting that formal appointment is insufficient in value-laden educational institutions unless women leaders are also supported by clear authority, access to organizational resources, collaborative teams, and mechanisms that protect their participation from bias. This distinction is theoretically important because it shifts the analytical focus from the numerical presence of women in leadership positions to the institutional conditions that determine whether authority can actually be exercised. At the same time, the documentary nature of the evidence requires caution: the study identifies institutional conditions and analytical possibilities rather than directly demonstrating how individual women leaders experience discrimination, negotiate authority, or influence organizational outcomes. Accordingly, future field-based research should examine these processes through interviews, observations, and broader comparative designs in order to test whether the institutional propositions identified here correspond with the lived experiences of women leaders and other stakeholders.

Overall, the findings position women's leadership in Islamic education within a broader global debate concerning the relationship between gender, institutional culture, values, and educational governance. Rather than portraying women leaders as inherently more caring, collaborative, or morally oriented, this study argues that such capacities become institutionally meaningful only when organizational structures recognize, support, and distribute authority fairly. This perspective contributes to recent international scholarship by moving beyond the dominant focus on barriers to women's advancement and examining how legitimacy itself is socially produced within religious educational environments (Koburtay et al., 2023; Lahmar, 2024a; Tragantzopoulou et al., 2025). The analysis therefore fills an important gap at the intersection of women's educational leadership, Islamic values, and the sociology of local Islamic schooling, particularly in contexts where moral authority and community trust are closely connected to organizational sustainability. The evidence suggests that the most productive model is not one in which Islamic values are assumed to automatically empower women, but one in which values, structures, and social capital are deliberately aligned to create legitimate and equitable conditions for leadership. Within this framework, the study offers a conceptual perspective in which women's leadership becomes an institutional mechanism for connecting ethical governance, religious culture, community trust, and educational quality, while maintaining the critical recognition that these propositions remain interpretive because the study is based on comparative documentary evidence rather than direct observation of leadership practice.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the institutional context surrounding Islamic values-based women's leadership in the two private Islamic junior high schools is shaped by the interaction of institutional legitimacy, religious culture, discipline and character development, community communication, social capital, and gender-responsive leadership conditions. Rather than presenting women's leadership as an individual capacity operating independently of its environment, the findings suggest that its institutional space and legitimacy are closely connected to shared Islamic values, organizational arrangements, patterns of religious habituation, and relationships of trust between schools, foundations, parents, and wider communities. The comparative analysis further indicates that similar Islamic institutional identities do not necessarily produce identical leadership contexts, as each school develops its own configuration of organizational history, educational orientation, social relationships, and cultural practices. The study therefore contributes to the discussion of women's leadership in Islamic education by offering a sociological perspective that links leadership with the institutional structures and social resources through which authority and legitimacy are shaped. Practically, the findings highlight the

importance of strengthening inclusive organizational support, transparent communication, value-based leadership practices, and collaborative relationships to create institutional environments that can support women's leadership more effectively. However, because the analysis is based on documentary evidence, the conclusions should be understood as interpretive propositions rather than direct representations of women leaders' lived experiences or leadership practices. Future research should therefore employ interviews, observations, or broader comparative field studies to examine how these institutional conditions are experienced and negotiated by women leaders and other educational stakeholders in practice.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Agus Suwanto Conceptualization, methodology, data curation, formal analysis, investigation, and writing original draft preparation. Muh. Hanif Conceptualization, methodology, supervision, validation, interpretation of findings, writing review and editing. Both authors contributed to the comparative documentary analysis, discussed the findings and their theoretical interpretation, revised the manuscript critically, and approved the final version for publication.

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