



Educational Leadership and Holistic Adab Formation in Cambodian Tahfiz Schools: A Comparative Study of MTDU and MTDH

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ABSTRACT

This study explains the role of educator leaders in cultivating students' adab (moral discipline and etiquette) at two Cambodian Islamic boarding schools, Maahad Tahfiz Darul Ulum (MTDU) and Maahad Tahfiz Darul Hadith (MTDH), in a post-conflict Muslim-minority society. Drawing on classical Islamic theories of character formation, such as the works of Ibnu Miskawaih and Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, and underpinned by Hallinger's Instructional Leadership Model, this research explores the manner in which leaders act as moral role models and institutionalists in order to transform pupil behavior. In undertaking a qualitative multiple-case study, data were obtained through semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation of eight influential educational leaders. Thematic analysis yielded six prominent leadership roles, including moral modeling, disciplinary enforcement, spiritual mentorship, and institutional innovation through routines and rituals. Despite parental and external cultural pressure oppositional to their endeavor, the leaders demonstrated spiritual resilience in successfully ushering student transformation through relational engagement, moral accountability, and cultural reinforcement. This study contributes to the emerging debate on faith-based leadership and character education with the offer of a contextualized model of Islamic educational leadership for post-conflict and minority-Muslim settings. Practice and policy recommendations include training educational leaders as muaddibin, integrating value-based norms, and recognizing Tahfiz schools as important actors in integral education.

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INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly fragile world in which youth violence, behavioral disorders, and educational disaffection are on the rise globally, the topic of character education for schools could not be more relevant. According to the World Health Organization (2020), individuals aged 10 to 29 years contribute to nearly 42% of global homicides annually, and that depicts an alarming pattern among young people. The issue extends well past casual delinquency,

engaging thoroughly with educational failings in moral and ethical growth. Across Asia generally, some 70% of students report experiencing violence within school environments (Rishi, 2015), yet another indicator of how social-emotional development has been shortchanged in formal education systems.

Character education, therefore, has become a central aspect of well-rounded learning. The Islamic *adab*—accepting manners, ethics, and civility—is at the center of this philosophy. Knowledge in Islamic education not contaminated by moral tact is lacking (Al-Attas, 1984). The concept that education should sharpen minds and also enhance the soul has been emphasized by thinkers such as al-Ghazali, Ibn Miskawaih, and Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas. These perspectives converge on the basis that true education (*ta'dib*) is an ethical, not merely intellectual, process. Teachers and educational officials, here, are more than teachers; they are *muaddib*, moral examples who are responsible for instilling right conduct as well as intellectual maturation.

This study is located in this practice and theory confluence, with special concern for how Tahfiz boarding school education leaders build *adab* in Cambodia's Maahad Tahfiz Darul Ulum (MTDU) and Maahad Tahfiz Darul Hadith (MTDH) schools. Cambodia provides a unique post-conflict and minority-Muslim environment where formal Islamic education tends to be marginalized, under-resourced, and absent from national education policy. Despite such restrictions, MTDU and MTDH have proved most effective in reforming students with disciplinary backgrounds into civilized individuals pursuing higher Islamic studies across the Muslim world. The uniformly moral outcomes produced by these institutes raise serious questions about the leadership models and methods followed.

The inspiration for this study is from a trend seen where parents are sending more defiant children to Tahfiz schools hoping to reform them by way of exposure to religion and moral rectitude. Even though this trend is creating alarm in some regions, MTDU and MTDH have received such challenges with open arms, in most instances accepting fee-less students and relying instead on economic plans within. Still, surprisingly few studies investigate the ways instructional leaders in these schools contribute to the tangible moral transformation of students, especially in minority and post-conflict contexts like Cambodia.

This study, therefore, aims to explore and document the leadership roles which educational leaders use in shaping *adab* at MTDU and MTDH. It seeks to determine the leadership styles, pedagogy, and cultural processes whereby students internalize *adab*. Based on both classical Islamic educational theory and contemporary models of leadership such as Hallinger's Instructional Leadership Model, the research will provide a comprehensive insight into moral leadership in religious board school contexts. The research aims to contribute one step further to the broader discourse on educational leadership, character education, and the role of faith-based schooling in modern societies.

METHOD

This study is guided by two complementary theoretical frameworks: classical Islamic moral philosophy and contemporary educational leadership theory. These theories supply an integrated account of how educational leaders influence the development of *adab*—a concept in Islamic pedagogy encompassing ethics, discipline, and refined manners—within Islamic school settings. The core of Islamic heritage lies in the understanding that education is not only the transmission of knowledge but also the cultivation of good character. This is articulated through the works of the classical Muslim thinkers like Ibn Miskawaih whose book

Tahzib al-Akhlaq maintains the moral cultivation of the soul through conscious practice, guidance, and correction. Miskawaih postulated that character development comes from specific ethical instruments, including encouragement and commendation for good behavior, mild reproach for ill conduct, and imitation of good models. All these concepts are of utmost importance in contemporary Tahfiz schools, where teachers are not only needed to instruct but also serve as moral role models to their pupils.

To complement this conservative perspective, the study also borrows from Hallinger's Instructional Leadership Model, a well-respected model of educational research that encapsulates three key leadership functions: defining the mission of the school, managing instructional programs, and creating a positive learning climate. Though its development was originally in a secular setting, this model has since been used in Christian education to include spiritual, moral, and academic objectives. In Islamic schools, these leadership dimensions are stretched to encompass the function of developing students' moral outlook in a systematic routine, pedagogical consistency, and richly spiritual institutional culture. Thus, with the aim of integrating both Miskawaih's moral development theory and Hallinger's instructional leadership model, the present study theoreticalizes educational leaders as strategic administrators and moral cultivators whose values and actions are central to the construction of adab by students.

The research employs a qualitative multiple-case study design, which is particularly handy in investigating complex social phenomenon in its original setting. This approach is justified by the need to acquire close understanding of how educational leadership operated within the specific cultural, religious, and socio-economic conditions of two Islamic boarding schools in Cambodia: Maahad Tahfiz Darul Ulum (MTDU) and Maahad Tahfiz Darul Hadith (MTDH). Both institutions are well known for their effort to reform student behavior and instill Islamic ethics, despite the fact that they are working in a minority-Muslim, post-conflict environment with limited resources. As such, the case study approach enables the researcher to analyze in detail the interface between leadership practices and moral growth among students.

This question lies within an interpretivist epistemological framework, with the understanding that knowledge is jointly constructed based on social interaction and context. As opposed to attempting generalizability, the research would seek to generate rich, dense findings that capture educational leaders' lived realities in their contexts. The participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that only those directly involved in character education and leadership—such as principals, senior teachers, and disciplinary coordinators—were included. Eight participants from both institutions contributed to the data corpus.

Data collection was carried out through two primary methods: semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations. The interviews explored participants' views on moral leadership, school culture, and the strategies they employed in guiding student behavior. Conducted in Bahasa Melayu and Khmer (with translation where necessary), these interviews were recorded, transcribed, and subsequently analyzed thematically. Observational data was gathered during school rituals, teaching sessions, Qur'an memorization periods, and disciplinary routines, enabling the researcher to witness first-hand the expressions of leadership and moral instruction. In addition, institutional documents such as student handbooks and staff timetables were reviewed to support triangulation.

Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase procedure, beginning with familiarization and progressing through coding, theme development, review, definition, and synthesis. NVivo software was used to manage and categorize the data systematically. Themes were identified both inductively from the data and deductively based on the theoretical frameworks, particularly focusing on elements of instructional leadership and moral cultivation.

To ensure the study's trustworthiness, several strategies were employed. Credibility was supported through member checking and prolonged engagement in the research sites. Transferability was enhanced by providing thick descriptions of the school contexts, participants, and cultural settings. Dependability and confirmability were maintained through the use of an audit trail, as well as discussions with academic peers to cross-validate interpretations. Ethical approval was granted by the concerned institutional authorities, and informed consent was procured from all the participants prior to their involvement. Pseudonymity was used for hiding identity, and care was taken so that data collection would not disrupt the spiritual or emotional purity of students.

Finally, theoretical and methodological underpinnings of this study provide an academic and context-relevant approach to examining how minority-Muslim, post-conflict school leaders cultivate adab among students. By combining traditional Islamic personality theories of character formation with modern leadership theories, and applying them to a qualitative case study design, the study contributes extensively to the literature in Islamic education, faith-based leadership, and character building in disadvantaged educational landscape.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Leadership and the Moral Mission of Islamic Education

Islamic education has historically been understood in terms of three related concepts: *ta'līm* (teaching), *tarbiyah* (nurturing), and *ta'dīb* (adabualiddob rearing). Among these, *ta'dīb* is commonly viewed by the traditional scholars such as Al-Attas (1984) to be the ultimate aim of education, where the attainment of one's character is inseparable from intellectual development. Educational administrators, in this conception, are no longer figures of authority but *muaddibin*—moral and spiritual mentors who are tasked with instilling virtuous character in students. This idealization interrupts modern schooling systems that are prone to separating moral education from academic success.

This paradigm is also supported by recent empirical studies. Yusufali (2021), in a study of Islamic schools in the United States, argued that effective school missions instill *ta'dīb* at all levels, from curriculum design to interpersonal relationships, requiring school leaders to embody Islamic values in practice. Similarly, Rahman (2025) underscored that in Islamic boarding schools, leaders exert moral influence through direct modeling of moral actions, ritual participation, and consistent moral talk, and affirm the argument that leadership in these institutions is spiritual and virtue-based.

Contemporary Models of Leadership in Faith-Based Schools

The last few years have witnessed an emerging body of work that explores the specific leadership traits needed in Islamic faith schools. One such notable contribution is that of Ezzani et al. (2023), who carried out a review of Islamic school leadership across the globe and

concluded that the best leaders incorporate social justice, equity, and moral purpose values into their leadership approach. Their assessment suggested that Islamic school educational leadership is not just functional but integrally connected to a broader ethical vision that positions leaders as facilitators of faith and moral responsibility.

Again, a precious contribution is that of [Zahiri and Sahal \(2025\)](#), who propose integrating Islamic Sharia values within strategic school leadership models. According to their studies, successful leaders in Islamic schools not only deal with pedagogical procedures but also act as moral gatekeepers, regulating the spiritual environment of the school. They utilize Islamic conceptual models of leadership centered on sincerity (*ikhlas*), trust (*amanah*), and consultation (*shura*) in their administrative behaviors and interactions.

These frameworks are supplemented by [Alazmi and Bush \(2024\)](#), who created an Islamic-inspired educational leadership model rooted in Qur'anic ethics and prophetic practice. The model positions leader attributes such as *tawakkul* (trust in God), humility, and servant leadership as the bedrock for morally directing schools. The premise is that Islamic leadership is not a role; it is an *amanah*, a trust given to humans who are to be held morally and spiritually accountable.

Leadership as a Cultural Force in Shaping Character

Adab development of students cannot be separated from the school culture in general—a domain that is under the direct influence of leadership responsible for education. [Fauzah and Faizi \(2024\)](#), in their study of Southeast Asian Tahfiz schools, observed that school leaders behaved as direct moral role models who practiced what they attempted to instill in their students. Their leadership is performative and spiritual, including routine ritual leadership (i.e., prayer and Qur'an recitation), verbal and non-verbal praise and correction, and disciplinary admonishment based on Islamic ethics. These findings resonate with classical models such as Ibn Miskawaih's, in which he advocated the application of admiration, reward, and admonishment in character formation.

Similarly, [Nurjanah et al. \(2024\)](#) examined leadership charisma in madrasahs and found that successful leaders maintain emotional closeness with students, implement systematic habits grounded in Islamic rituals, and cultivate spirituality closeness. These leaders tend to practice informal mentorship and use prophetic anecdotes as behavioral references—practices that significantly influence students' internalization of *adab*.

In line with these observations, [Fournier \(2021\)](#) researched U.S.-based Islamic schools and reported on how minority-Muslim school leaders have to perform the double task of holding on to moral identity and academic legitimacy. The leaders operate in tense socio-political contexts that tend to marginalize expressions of religion. In spite of that, through continuous cultural leadership and moral integrity, they are able to keep their schools focused on character development and Islamic values.

Value-Based Leadership in Post-Conflict and Minority Contexts

The Cambodian context of this study has analogs in other minority-Muslim or post-conflict settings. [Amin \(2024\)](#), in a comparison of Islamabad's faith-based and secular schools, highlighted how values-based Islamic leadership styles—such as self-discipline, peace, and respect for others—were reflected in improved student discipline and interpersonal peace. For him, moral education in such schools occurs not just through didactic teaching, but also through longitudinal modeling and values-based socialization by school leaders.

Rahman (2025) expanded this narrative by reviewing Islamic leadership dynamics in marginal schools and concluded that even in low-resource environments, value-based leadership can drive substantial behavioral reform. Through what he called "spiritual resilience," leaders internalize adversity as part of their religious duty, thereby transmitting discipline, patience, and ethical endurance to their students. Although the recent literature has deepened our understanding of Islamic educational leadership, several gaps remain. First, most studies are based in urban, relatively well-resourced environments, and do not sufficiently address the realities of rural or post-conflict Islamic schools such as those in Cambodia. Second, there is limited empirical work on how classical Islamic moral training theories (e.g., Ibn Miskawaih or Al-Attas) are operationalized in modern institutions. Lastly, while instructional and transformational leadership models have been adapted to Islamic contexts, their effectiveness in forming *adab* remains under-theorized. This study addresses these gaps by focusing on two Tahfiz institutions in Cambodia—MTDU and MTDH—exploring how their leaders cultivate *adab* in a challenging socio-economic and religious minority setting. It contributes to a more nuanced and contextualized theory of Islamic educational leadership grounded in both tradition and modern empirical insight

This study explored the roles of educational leaders in shaping students' *adab* (moral discipline) in two Cambodian Islamic boarding schools, Maahad Tahfiz Darul Ulum (MTDU) and Maahad Tahfiz Darul Hadith (MTDH). Eight educational leaders were interviewed, and three structured observational sessions were observed. Six overarching themes and thirteen sub-themes emerged. It is from these findings that a multidimensional interaction between leadership behaviors, institutional culture, and student transformation emerges.

One of the key findings of the study is that educational leaders in MTDU and MTDH perceive themselves as more than just administrators. They play formal and informal roles—as teachers, leaders, disciplinarians, mentors, substitute parents, and even friends. These roles adhere to classical Islamic educational tradition, especially those of Al-Ghazali and Miskawaih, who lay immense emphasis on the teacher as a *mu'addib*—a moral model of character and conduct. Study respondents noted that the *adab* of the students significantly enhanced when they were guided by leaders who engaged with them outside the classroom, for instance, during hostel routine, meals, or morning assemblies. This integration of leadership in daily activities among the students is related to Maskaweh's character training practice prescribing closeness, admiration, and discipline as principal strategies.

Another emergent theme was the individual efforts of educational leaders to shape student behavior. These efforts were such activities as "leading by example," "guiding the way," and "building relationships." Leaders explained placing themselves voluntarily as role models in prayer, study, and service. One teacher, for instance, was observed using Socratic questioning in a Fiqh lesson to confront ethical thought among the students, offering rewards not only for correct answers but for courage of participation. These approaches are Hallinger's (2010) component of "fostering a positive school learning environment" and Al-Attas's (1980) emphasis on *ta'dib*—educating the entire person, mind, body, and soul.

The study also revealed a set of conscientious responsibilities educational leaders carried out, including systems of praise, reward, warning, and punishment. These systems, grounded in both Islamic tradition and modern educational psychology, were consciously utilized to approve wanted behavior. Praise was generally public, with admonishments private in order to preserving dignity, a principle consistent with Islamic ethics. These interventions were perceived by educational leaders as necessary to build students' intrinsic

motivation, a view also supported by Berkowitz (2012), who emphasized the role of structured reinforcement in character education.

A significant institutional practice observed was the establishment of "Service Day," a structured activity where students engage in activities like gardening, cleaning, and small building construction. Although some parents initially objected, seeing these activities as manual labor unfit for their children, leaders presented these activities as moral exercises in humility, responsibility, and giving back to the community. This is also consistent with Debois (2020), who asserted that whole-school participation in character-building activities enhances the power of moral education. The practice is also supported by Islamic teachings emphasizing service and cleanliness as forms of worship.

The fifth theme unearthed was student willingness which is a key moderating variable in the effectiveness of character development. Interviewees remarked that student engagement increased when leaders built rapport, listened carefully, and recognized small achievements. These practices resonate with literature on relational trust and emotional safety in schooling, confirming once again that character change is relational, not merely instructional (Kipp, 2019; Francom, 2013).

The final theme, challenges, mentioned two main obstacles: the school's unislamic social environment and parental resistance to certain character-building activities. Because of Cambodia's pluralistic and occasionally secular social environment, students are exposed to temptations and behaviors that are unIslamic, including gambling and nightclubs near school areas. These leaders spoke of this external environment as a consistent source of challenge, echoing the research of Berkowitz (2012) and Clinton (1996), who explained the impact of the community on youth behavior. Parental disapproval, especially for service-related initiatives, was also seen as a barrier. While there was some initial resistance, the majority of parents subsequently reversed their stance following noted improvements in discipline and behavior among their children.

These findings confirm that character education is not a solitary act but a cultural ecosystem in which leadership, routines, symbolic behavior, and relational ethics converge. The study confirms the contention by Al-Attas (1984) that education in the real sense (*ta'dib*) cannot be divorced from moral formation. In addition, the study contributes empirically to the nascent faith-based leadership scholarship by illustrating how Islamic educational leaders in minority-Muslim, post-conflict settings are transforming at-risk students into disciplined and morally upright citizens.

The results of the research affirm once more that Islamic boarding school leadership is not a static administrative role but an adaptive moral pursuit. Educational leaders at MTDU and MTDH are simultaneously disciplinarians, caregivers, spiritual guides, and institution builders. What they perform adheres to both traditional Islamic moral philosophy and contemporary theory of leadership. Ibnu Miskawaih's character development process—praise, imitation, and stern correction—is starkly applied through approaches such as formalized routines, behavioral reinforcement, and one-on-one mentoring. These findings are consistent with prior research by Al-Attas (1984), who argued that *ta'dib* is Islamic education's very essence, wherein the educator is a moral nurturer rather than a fact conveyor.

From a contemporary theory view, the practices observed in MTDU and MTDH prove responsive to Hallinger's (2010) model of instructional leadership, especially in establishing a school climate of support for learning and morality. Leaders in the two schools were careful to establish a vision of moral excellence and align rituals, routines, and relationships with this

vision. For example, the use of Service Day as a tool for developing humility and responsibility is not symbolic but points to the embeddedness of character development in institutional practice (Debois, 2020).

Interestingly, school culture played a determining role in shaping student *adab*. Similar to other Southeast Asian Tahfiz centers, as indicated by Fauzah and Faizi (2024), unspoken rules, repeated rituals, and customary role modeling by leaders better shape behavioral norms than written teachings. In MTDU and MTDH, leaders incorporated moral messages into routine tasks, thereby transforming ordinary moments into ethical spaces for development. This aligns with the hidden curriculum theory, where the work proposes that what learners acquire informally—via social interaction and cultural signs—surpasses formal instruction in shaping moral behavior (Berkowitz, 2012).

However, the study also revealed major challenges. For example, there is the external community surrounding the schools—Cambodian urban society with exposure to secular forces and behavior hazards such as gambling, nightlife, and media. This supports Clinton's (1996) argument that the surrounding community context has a strong influence on student behavior, so much so that school administration cannot control. Furthermore, the initial resistance of some parents to character-building activities, such as hard work and extended religious practices, suggests an overall tension between traditional Islamic education and contemporary parental desire, especially in contexts characterized by multiple societies (Fournier, 2021). Despite these difficulties, the education leaders at each institution were exemplars of what Rahman (2025) has termed "spiritual resilience"—the capacity to stand firm in moral leadership in the face of environmental or structural challenge. Their strategy was not reactive but deliberate, consistent with both Islamic and modern pedagogical theory.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that educational leadership in Cambodian Islamic boarding schools plays a multi-faceted and critical role in the development of students' *adab*. Drawing upon both classical Islamic sources and modern instructional leadership theory, the study discerned that educational leaders are moral exemplars, institutional architects, and compassionate mentors. Their influence extends beyond formal instruction in classrooms to the hidden curriculum and everyday interactions through which students' moral comportment, sense of responsibility, and sense of community are shaped. The character transformation observed at MTDU and MTDH—particularly among students with a prior behavioral history—attests to the success of holistic moral leadership in post-conflict and minority contexts. Through structured routines, strict discipline, and spiritual orientation, the school leaders were capable of instilling in students a moral compass based on Islamic values. The transformation was not accidental but the result of principled leadership guided by firmly held ethical and pedagogical convictions. More generally, the findings underscore the need for education policy and leadership preparation programs that focus on *ta'dīb*, as well as character education—especially in Islamic schools that are located in secular or resource-deprived environments. The study contributes to the growing body of literature attesting that leadership grounded in moral vision and cultural authenticity can lead the way towards transformative student development.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

Theoretically, the study validates the importance of merging classical Islamic moral philosophy with modern leadership theory. Although Hallinger's instructional model provides a formalized model for school leadership, it achieves moral depth and cultural specificity when merged with Miskawaih's or Al-Attas's conceptions of ethical formation. Subsequent studies can explore other theoretical models—such as servant leadership or prophetic pedagogy—to further enhance this synthesis. In practice, the study offers a replicable model for Islamic schools in similar minority-Muslim or post-conflict situations. The emphasis on moral modeling, teacher-student closeness, communal ritual, and regimes of discipline suggests that even in times of economic and social austerity, vigorous leadership can produce actual character transformation. Schools attempting to reproduce such a result can spend money on the professional advancement of *muaddibin*—managers who do not merely administer but embody moral instruction.

Policy-wise, education departments and Islamic groups should recognize and assist Tahfiz centers' moral and social impact. This includes establishing leadership development programs specifically tailored to meet the needs of Islamic boarding schools, taking character education as a measurable product in school evaluations, and constructing coalitions between schools and homes to cement moral lessons beyond the school gate. Lastly, this study reveals that leadership founded on moral clarity, spiritual accountability, and institutional intentionality can affect not only behavior but identity as well. During the era of moral uncertainty and educational fragmentation, the role of such leadership is not only needed but more than ever now must be made manifest.

Based on the findings of this study, future research in Islamic educational leadership should consider expanding comparative investigations across different regional and sociopolitical contexts. Though this study explored Cambodian Tahfiz schools within the context of a post-conflict, Muslim-minority setting, comparative studies with Islamic schools within similar marginalized settings—e.g., Southern Thailand, Myanmar, or certain African nations—can help determine if leadership models observed here are unique to such contexts or constitute part of a general global pattern of thriving faith-based education ([Rahman, 2025](#); [Fournier, 2021](#)).

There is also a critical need to develop targeted leadership training programs that teach school principals to serve as *muaddibin*, i.e., moral leaders and spiritual guides, not merely policy implementers. These need to incorporate traditional Islamic moral philosophy—e.g., Ibn Miskawaih's *Tahzib al-Akhlaq* and Al-Attas's theory of *ta'dīb*—along with recent models of instructional leadership like Hallinger's, to train leaders capable of instilling ethical vision into administrative routines ([Hallinger, 2010](#); [Al-Attas, 1984](#)).

It is suggested further research be conducted on the subtle yet powerful impact of institutional culture on character. Results of this study affirmed that rituals, everyday routines, symbolic actions, and relationship ethics constitute a "hidden curriculum" that deeply influences students' moral formation. Future ethnography or longitudinal studies may document how these implied cultural elements evolve and shape adab in Islamic schools over time ([Berkowitz, 2012](#); [Fauzah & Faizi, 2024](#)). Parental attitudes and participation also deserve focused examination. This study found initial resistance by some parents to character education activities like service learning, which indicated school-purpose vs. family-expectations conflict. As these tensions are better understood, Islamic schools might be able

to craft better home-school alliances that remove moral education from the classroom (Clinton, 1996; Amin, 2024).

Also, in order to further strengthen the empirical foundation of this field, future researchers can design and apply measures to quantify the impact of moral leadership. Mixed-methods research complementing qualitative insight with quantitative measurement—such as surveys measuring responsibility, discipline, and ethical reasoning—would allow stakeholders to evaluate and enhance models of character education more precisely (Yusufali, 2021; Debois, 2020). Lastly, there is scope for exploring other theoretical models of educational leadership that may have the potential to be mapped to Islamic pedagogical and moral goals. Servant leadership, transformational leadership, and prophetic pedagogy offer theories that prioritize humility, moral purpose, and relational interaction. Testing these theories in Islamic settings may lead to fuller, more nuanced models of school leadership in moral education (Alazmi & Bush, 2024; Zahiri & Sahal, 2025).

Briefly stated, follow-up studies not only have to affirm and build on this investigation, but to deepen as well the theory, practice, and policy dimensions of Islamic educational leadership. The combination of religious integrity, organizational discipline, and cultural authenticity in MTDU and MTDH is a compelling paradigm well worth further study, development, and application.

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