

Implementing a Kindness-Based Leadership Strategy in Islamic Elementary Education

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ABSTRACT

In the face of increasingly complex educational challenges, there is a growing demand for leadership models that integrate ethical and humanistic values, particularly in Islamic elementary schools. This study explores the operationalisation of kindness-based leadership at MI Fitrah Insani, Leles, Garut, as a strategic response to the limitations of performance-oriented and hierarchical leadership paradigms. This study addresses the gaps in the literature regarding the implementation of ethical leadership grounded in Islamic values by examining how empathy, participatory communication, and ethical responsibility shape school culture and educational quality. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and a document analysis. Triangulation of these methods enabled a comprehensive understanding of institutional dynamics, leadership practices, and their impact on school climate, teacher motivation, and student engagement. The findings reveal that kindness-based leadership at MI Fitrah Insani fosters an emotionally safe and inclusive school environment. Through participatory decision-making, structured communication, and consistent appreciation practices, the leadership model contributes to improved teacher loyalty, pedagogical innovation, and heightened student participation. Despite structural, cultural, and operational barriers such as bureaucratic rigidity and limited professional development, adaptive strategies, including ethical leadership training, policy reform, and digital communication platforms, have enhanced the effectiveness and sustainability of this model. This study concludes that kindness-oriented leadership is not merely a normative ideal but a transformative practice that aligns with Islamic ethical traditions and addresses the academic and moral dimensions of education. The findings offer practical implications for Islamic schools seeking to cultivate character-driven and ethically grounded leadership.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of increasingly complex educational challenges due to globalization and sociocultural transformation, there is increasing scholarly and institutional interest in leadership models that integrate ethical and humanistic values. Traditional performance-oriented leadership paradigms are often inadequate to meet the moral and emotional needs of students in formative educational settings, especially in Islamic school settings (Astra, 2024; Ayub et al., 2020). Empirical evidence suggests that leadership based on values such as kindness and compassion significantly impacts teacher motivation, student engagement, and overall school climate (Said et al., 2023). As such, there is increasing recognition that values-based leadership - particularly those that prioritize empathy and ethical responsibility - should be considered an essential component in the holistic development of learners in the context of Islamic education (Arar et al., 2022)

Recent literature highlights the transformative potential of leadership practices rooted in kindness and ethical principles. Ayub et al. (2020) underscore the importance of moving beyond conventional leadership towards a more inclusive, relational, and values-based model. This shift is particularly relevant in Islamic basic education, where leadership is both administrative and moral and pedagogical. The incorporation of Islamic ethical values into leadership practices has been linked to improvements in school environments and student character building (Hanan et al., 2023). Such insights demand that educational leaders embrace compassion-centred leadership to foster ethically responsive and spiritually aligned educational communities (Anwar & Umam, 2020).

The Indonesian context, particularly in Islamic primary schools, further demonstrates the need for leadership strategies aligned with Islamic ethical foundations. The principal's leadership style significantly influences public perception and parental trust in Islamic schools (Komara et al., 2023; Ulfah & Anwar, 2024). This is evident in the case of MI Fitrah Insani, Leles, Garut, which is an example of a school environment that seeks to integrate ethical leadership into its institutional framework. In such an environment, the application of virtue-oriented leadership is not only relevant but also essential to foster inclusive and morally grounded educational practices from an early age. This approach aligns with the longstanding Islamic tradition centred on compassion (*rahmah*) and moral excellence (*akhlaq*), which has historically underpinned Islamic educational thought (Hamdanah & Sholihah, 2023).

In line with the broader discourse on leadership transformation in education, there is a need to investigate how kindness-based leadership can be effectively operationalised in Islamic schools in Indonesia. Existing data suggest a strong correlation between compassion-oriented leadership and improved well-being and performance among educators and students (Astuti et al., 2020). Empirical experiences from various Islamic educational institutions show that embedding kindness into leadership practices contributes not only to academic success but also to the cultivation of character that is aligned with Islamic teachings (Hamdanah & Sholihah, 2023). These findings warrant deeper academic enquiry into the mechanisms through which ethical leadership strategies can be implemented in culturally and pedagogically appropriate ways in Islamic primary schools.

Although several studies have addressed leadership in Islamic educational institutions, the existing literature still largely focuses on administrative effectiveness and disciplinary control (Said et al., 2023). The exploration of compassion and kindness as core principles in leadership remains underdeveloped, especially at the basic education level. Astr (2024) argues that the integration of ethics in leadership not only enhances relational dynamics in school, but also facilitates a more humane and

character-oriented educational environment. Meanwhile, Hamdanah and Sholihah (2023) advocate a leadership model that goes beyond formal structures, incorporating religious and humanistic values. This suggests a clear research gap regarding the strategic use of goodness in leadership to foster spiritually rich, ethically responsive, and socially inclusive educational environments (Anwar et al., 2025; Julaiha, 2019).

This gap becomes more pronounced in studies that continue to centre on transformative and authoritative leadership frameworks, which often neglect the interpersonal and ethical dimensions essential to the mission of Islamic education (Said et al., 2023). Therefore, this study seeks to address this void by exploring how a kindness-based leadership model can serve as a foundational strategy for developing an ethically aligned school community. The MI Fitrah Insani case provides an important opportunity to examine how such leadership strategies are constructed, practiced, and sustained in real-world Islamic educational settings.

To advance scientific understanding of this domain, this study poses the following research questions: (1) How effective is the implementation of kindness-based leadership in improving the quality of education and character development at MI Fitrah Insani, Leles, Garut? (2) How does this model differ from conventional leadership practices in Islamic primary schools? (3) What are the challenges and enabling conditions for adopting such leadership approaches within the framework of Islamic values?

This study aims to critically examine existing leadership models and propose an innovative alternative rooted in the Islamic ethical tradition. Drawing on the conceptual framework of Fajriyah (2025) which combines the principles of ethical leadership with an experiential learning approach, this study seeks to identify actionable strategies to enhance the role of school leaders as agents of moral and institutional transformation.

Previous research suggests that Islamic school leadership should go beyond administrative management to encompass moral leadership that actively cultivates student character (Ansori et al., 2024; Fauzah & Faizi, 2024). This research contributes to this emerging field by offering a nuanced exploration of kindness as a transformative leadership principle that supports both academic and moral development. Specifically, it examines how kindness-oriented leadership strategies contribute to an inclusive school culture, foster relational trust, and strengthen the Islamic identity of students.

By focusing on the specific case of MI Fitrah Insani, this study seeks to generate empirical insights into the practical implementation of value-based leadership in Islamic primary schools. The findings are expected to contribute to a broader rethinking of educational leadership in the Islamic tradition, which positions goodness not as a complementary value but as a strategic imperative. This approach aligns with the goal of Islamic school education to produce individuals who are not only intellectually capable but also morally grounded.

This study investigates the implementation of kindness-based leadership as a strategic model for improving educational quality and character development at MI Fitrah Insani, Leles, Garut. In contrast to performance-oriented and hierarchical leadership practices commonly found in Islamic primary schools, this model integrates ethical leadership principles with participatory and humanistic approaches rooted in Islamic values. Drawing on the conceptual framework developed by Fajriyah (2025), which combines ethical leadership with experiential learning, the study explores how school leaders can function as moral agents of institutional change.

Building on previous findings that highlight the need for Islamic school leadership to move beyond administrative efficiency towards moral cultivation (Ansori et al., 2024; Fauzah & Faizi, 2024) this study analyses the practical enactment of kindness as a leadership principle. It specifically examines how such practices foster relational trust, promote inclusive school culture, and reinforce the Islamic identity of students. By situating leadership as an ethical commitment rather than merely a managerial function, the study responds to calls for more value-oriented educational models. This study aims to generate empirical insights into kindness-based leadership as a transformative practice

within Islamic schooling, and to propose an alternative leadership paradigm that positions goodness as a central strategic and ethical imperative in educational reform.

2. METHODS

The research method used a qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach was chosen because it allowed researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of contextual kindness-based leadership strategies within MI Fitrah Insani, Leles, Garut. Data were obtained through triangulation techniques, namely by conducting direct observations in the field, in-depth interviews with stakeholders such as principals, teachers, and parents, and document studies related to policies and managerial practices in the school (Dike et al., 2020; Kusumaputri et al., 2023). These three types of data complement each other and are expected to reveal the dynamics and complexities of the phenomenon being studied.

Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, presentation, and thematic inference to identify the main patterns that emerged from the phenomenon of kindness-based leadership. Data validation procedures were carried out through triangulation and member-checking techniques to ensure the validity and credibility of the research findings. Thus, the qualitative approach is expected to not only describe the existing conditions, but also provide critical insights that can be used as the basis for developing a more humanist and ethical leadership model in the Islamic education environment.

This study uses a qualitative research approach with a case study design, which was chosen to enable an in-depth analysis of the implementation of benevolent leadership strategies in a specific institutional context, namely MI Fitrah Insani, Leles, Garut. The case study design facilitates a holistic understanding of leadership dynamics and their influence on school culture, educational quality, and student character development in an Islamic educational environment.

Data collection was conducted through three main techniques: (1) direct field observation to document leadership interactions, school routines, and classroom activities; (2) in-depth semi-structured interviews with a total of 5 informants, including the school principal, four classroom teachers, two administrative staff, three parents, and two school committee members; and (3) document analysis covering school policy documents, meeting minutes, internal regulations, and correspondence relevant to leadership practices. This diverse set of data sources was integrated to ensure a comprehensive and multidimensional understanding of the phenomenon under study.

The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis, which consists of three sequential stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Through this process, recurring patterns and themes related to kindness-based leadership were identified and interpreted within a broader ethical and institutional context (Dike et al., 2020; Kusumaputri et al., 2023). The validity of the findings is strengthened through triangulation and member checking procedures, ensuring that interpretations accurately reflect the perspectives of informants and institutional realities (Miles et al., 2018). This methodological approach is designed to generate contextually rich insights into how benevolent leadership can be implemented as a transformative model in Islamic education.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Operational Dimensions of Kindness-Based Leadership in Islamic Primary Education

This study examines the operational dimensions of kindness-based leadership in the context of Islamic basic education through a case study of MI Fitrah Insani, Leles, Garut. Based on qualitative data obtained through in-depth interviews, field observations, and analysis of institutional documents, it was found that the principles of kindness-based leadership are not merely symbolic but are systematically implemented in managerial and pedagogical practices.

The madrasah head consistently demonstrates empathetic, open, and inclusive attitudes in interactions with teachers, students, and parents. This leadership style represents a shift from a

hierarchical to a more relational and participatory leadership pattern. The value of kindness is actualised through two-way communication mechanisms, open deliberation forums, and the involvement of all school members in decision-making. The implementation succeeded in building a culture of mutual trust and increasing transparency in the school environment (Hidayat 2024). In addition, internalised good values also strengthen the academic atmosphere that supports student character development and strengthens commitment to the vision and mission of the madrasah (Islamiyah et al., 2024).

One prominent form of operationalisation is the implementation of a structured internal communication system that ensures information disclosure and the involvement of all school elements. Regular meetings, discussion forums, and internal reporting systems enable quick and transparent access to information. This participatory communication model not only reduces the potential for internal conflict but also increases work motivation and solidarity among educators and education personnel (Salas & Masluhah, 2024). Meeting documentation shows that strategic decisions are made collectively and are responsive to the real conditions faced by schools.

Other findings show that there is a culture of rewards and appreciation that is consistently practiced by school principals for teachers and students. This includes positive feedback, verbal recognition, and symbolic rewards for academic achievement and exemplary behaviour. This practice encourages teachers' motivation and creates an environment of respect and mutual trust. Interviews with teachers indicate that these appreciative practices play an important role in building loyalty and a sense of belonging to the institution itself. This is in line with the literature which states that leadership that pays attention to emotional and social aspects can significantly increase productivity (Hidayat, 2024; Salas & Masluhah, 2024).

In terms of decision-making, the principal prioritises deliberation and openness, involving all stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and student representatives. This can be seen in the process of preparing the annual plan, where all parties provide input to determine the program priorities. This approach not only strengthens the policy's relevance but also fosters a sense of shared responsibility for achieving educational goals based on Islamic values.

Islamic values are also systematically integrated into managerial and learning practices. The principal actively instills moral values such as honesty, justice, and patience through regular training and coaching activities. The implementation of these values has positively impacted the work ethic and discipline of the school community. The curriculum and learning methods are designed to strengthen character education so that student learning outcomes include both academic and spiritual dimensions of education. Teachers are also encouraged to design value-based learning, making the learning process more meaningful and contextual (Husnurijal et al., 2024).

Although the implementation of this strategy has been effective, some challenges remain, mainly related to the different perspectives between traditional values and the demands of educational modernisation. The principal demonstrated adaptive capacity in dealing with these differences through an open deliberation. This strategy allows the harmonisation of values without ignoring the aspirations of change while encouraging managerial and pedagogical innovation.

Other supporting factors that strengthen the implementation of virtue-based leadership are the utilisation of information technology infrastructure and human resource capacity building. Digital communication tools and collaborative workspaces improve operational efficiency and speed up information flow. On the other hand, regular training and workshops strengthen teachers' competence in applying the value of kindness (Fajriyah, 2025). The synergy between technology and strengthening human resource capacity creates a more adaptive and dynamic work environment.

The long-term impact of this strategy is reflected in increased teacher participation, student engagement, and overall job satisfaction. Teachers feel valued and encouraged to innovate in learning, while students show improvements in active participation and positive behaviours. Collective reflection and regular group discussions serve as constructive dialog spaces for solving problems and

strengthening teamwork (Hidayat, 2024; Islamiyah et al., 2024). The values of personal attention and appreciation increase self-confidence and institutional pride among all school members.

The kindness-based leadership strategy implemented by the principal of MI Fitrah Insani reflects transformative leadership, rooted in Islamic values. This model has been proven to improve managerial and academic quality through a participatory, inclusive, and character development-oriented approach (Hidayat, 2024; Salas & Masluhah, 2024). The implications of this research indicate that the value-based leadership approach is not only feasible in the context of madrasah, but can also be used as a reference in the formulation of national education policies that are more humanistic and contextual (Syuhud, 2019). Thus, the operational dimension of goodness-based leadership is a promising strategic approach for developing Islamic educational institutions that are academically superior and morally strong. This research makes an important contribution to the development of alternative leadership models that can respond to the challenges of the times while maintaining the integrity of Islamic values in educational practice (I. Suryatini, E. Mulyasa, S. Yusuf, 2019; Prayitno & Tahir, 2022).

The Impact of Kindness-Based Leadership on School Climate, Teacher Motivation, and Student Engagement

The results show that the implementation of virtue-oriented leadership has a significant impact on school climate, teacher motivation, and student engagement. This approach accentuates the emotional, communicative, and participatory dimensions of leadership practice, which in turn encourages the formation of a positive, inclusive, and collaborative learning environment. Data collected through interviews, field observations, and policy document analysis show that the principal of MI Fitrah Insani has succeeded in creating an emotionally safe school ecosystem filled with relationships based on empathy, trust, and mutual respect between teachers, students, and parents.

Table 1. Kindness-Based Leadership at MI Fitrah Insani

Aspects	Key Indicators	Impact
School Climate	Open communication and a culture of empathy	Safe, trusting and inclusive emotional environment
Teacher Motivation	Appreciation, participation, and empowerment	Increased loyalty, more innovative learning methods
Student Engagement	Value-based participatory learning	Students are active, responsible, and take initiative in the learning process
Emotional Dimension	Leadership with empathy and a personal approach	Improved emotional well-being of school members
Communicative Dimension	Transparent information system and regular dialog	Effective coordination and increased trust between parties
Participatory Dimension	Involvement of teachers, students and parents in school policies	Growing sense of belonging and internal institutional cohesion

Based on the table above, in the context of school climate, the values of kindness are integrated through transparent, regular, and consistent communication strategies. This practice can reduce the escalation of internal conflicts and create a collaborative climate among stakeholders. Activities such as regular teacher meetings and open dialogue forums become spaces for the exchange of ideas that are adaptive to the dynamics of education. This reflects the principle of participatory leadership, which has been proven to contribute to the improvement of the school climate. The creation of shared reflective spaces also indicates the principal's commitment to internalising the value of compassion, which strengthens the culture of inclusion and social support within the school environment (Chandra & Arumugham, 2025).

Another positive impact is the increased teacher motivation. Kindness-based leadership is reflected in emotional support, positive feedback, and recognition of teachers' dedication. Teachers feel personally valued, which strengthens their loyalty and sense of belonging to educational institutions. This support also encourages initiatives and innovations in the development of learning methods. Teacher involvement in the decision-making process also strengthens job satisfaction and creates a productive and harmonious professional climate (Wahyudin et al., 2024).

High levels of teacher motivation directly affect the engagement of students. Motivated teachers tend to implement interactive and innovative learning approaches, thus encouraging students to actively participate in the learning process. Observations show that students have a high initiative in various classroom activities, such as collaborative assignments, Islamic value-based thematic projects, and open discussions that exercise critical thinking and self-expression. This confirms the positive relationship between humanistic leadership practices and optimal student engagement in both academic and character aspects (Nafia & Suyatno, 2020; Safutri & Siregar, 2022).

Leadership practices that emphasise kindness are also reflected in structured reward and appreciation systems. The principal regularly organises reward activities for teachers and students for academic and non-academic contributions. These awards are given in the form of appreciation letters, public recognition, and other forms of incentives that have a positive impact on individual and collective morale. Internal school policies also show that appreciation is an important strategy for strengthening the values of collaboration and building solidarity among all school members (Zahro & Shopiyah, 2021).

The integration of moral and spiritual values into leadership is crucial for building student character. The principal not only focuses on academic achievement but also actively instills Islamic values through character-building programs, strengthening religious values in the curriculum, and contextual learning practices based on daily life. As a result, students showed improvement in responsibility, cooperation, and high social awareness, which are important foundations for shaping the profile of graduates who are intellectually proficient and morally noble.

The impact of kindness-based leadership is also felt at the level of the school community as a whole. Principals who prioritise empathy and care succeed in building harmonious relationships with parents and the community. Parents' active participation in school activities and involvement in public communication forums strengthen the social network that supports the success of educational programs (Chandra & Arumugham, 2025; Komariah et al., 2021). Increased public trust in the quality of education is an indicator of success in building school-community partnerships (Billah & Karim, 2021; Mourato & Patrício, 2019).

This study confirms that kindness-based leadership has an overall positive influence on school climate, educator motivation, and student participation. The integration of Islamic and humanistic values in leadership has been shown to create a supportive, participatory, and visionary learning environment (Chandra & Arumugham, 2025; Wahyudin et al., 2024). The practical implications of these findings include the need for value-based leadership training, the preparation of internal policies that emphasise effective communication and empowerment, and the strengthening of the culture of appreciation in all institutional activities.

Thus, a leadership model that emphasises kindness is highly relevant to the development of inclusive and transformative Islamic education (Suhairi & Badrudin, 2021). A strong commitment from school principals is needed to continue developing this approach through professional capacity building, reflective dialogue and synergy with all stakeholders. This study concludes that kindness-based leadership strategies have the potential to shape an education system that is not only superior in academic achievement but also strong in the aspects of character and spirituality of students.

Barriers and Adaptive Strategies in Implementing Ethical Leadership

The implementation of ethical leadership at MI Fitrah Insani, Leles, Garut, shows complex dynamics, influenced by interrelated structural, cultural, and operational barriers.

Table 2. Barriers to Ethical Leadership Implementation

Dimension of Barriers	Key Factors	Impact on Implementation
Structural	1. Hierarchical and rigid bureaucratic system	1. Limiting principals' flexibility in innovating
	2. Focus on administrative reporting and quantitative outputs	2. Value transformation is difficult to implement
Cultural	1. The dominance of traditional values	1. Resistance to participatory and approaches
	2. Preference for authoritative leadership	2. Collaborative processes are not equally accepted
Operational	1. Limitations of value-based training	1. Teachers have difficulty implementing ethics-based learning
	2. High administrative burden	2. Lack of integration of character values in learning
	3. Parents' expectations focus on academics	

Based on the table above, structurally, this madrasah is still within the hierarchical and administrative educational bureaucracy system. Rigid procedures and internal regulations that demand full compliance with formal structures pose challenges in implementing a flexible and value-based leadership style. The head of the madrasah faces obstacles in making managerial breakthroughs because the prevailing system still prioritises administrative reporting and quantitative achievements over the transformation of values and organizational culture.

Culturally, MI Fitrah Insani is also faced with the reality of a local community that strongly maintains traditional values in its educational practices. Some teachers, parents, and community leaders still view authoritative leadership as the ideal form of leadership. When the madrasah head tries to build open communication and apply an empathy- and participation-based leadership approach, resistance arises from the view that this approach is not "firm" or "authoritative" enough. An entrenched, hierarchy-based work culture means that collaborative processes and the distribution of authority take time to be fully accepted by all the parties.

From an operational perspective, MI Fitrah Insani faces limitations in teacher professional development, particularly in terms of internalising ethical values into learning practices. The lack of training that focuses on developing soft skills, such as empathy, reflective communication, and value-based classroom management, makes it difficult for some teachers to translate the vision of ethical leadership into teaching and learning activities. In addition, the daily administrative burden and pressure of academic targets reduce the space for teachers to innovate by integrating character aspects. Parents' expectations that still emphasise academic achievement add to this pressure and minimise attention to the affective dimension of education (Jannah, 2023; Susantika & Umam, 2023).

In response to these challenges, the head of MI Fitrah Insani developed several adaptive strategies to ensure that the principles of ethical leadership could be applied gradually and contextually. One of them was the organisation of internal training that emphasised the importance of empathy, justice, and responsibility as part of teacher professionalism. The training is tailored to the local context and integrates Islamic teachings, making it easier for educators to accept and internalise (Astra, 2024).

Strengthening internal communication is also a strategic step for MI Fitrah Insani. The madrasah head regularly holds deliberation forums, both in the form of formal meetings and informal discussions, to absorb the aspirations of teachers, parents, and even students. The use of information technology through online communication groups, such as WhatsApp Groups, and academic management applications also helps accelerate the dissemination of information and ensures the active involvement of all stakeholders (Utama et al., 2023). This strategy has succeeded in building openness and strengthening the sense of belonging to the institutional vision.

Internal school policies were also gradually reformed, including the revision of teacher performance indicators. Performance evaluation is no longer only oriented towards students' academic achievements but also includes indicators of character building and strengthening Islamic values. This process involves teacher participation in the development of more holistic assessment instruments, while encouraging collective reflection on long-term educational goals (Muhtar et al., 2021; Zaim et al., 2021).

In addition to internal strengthening, MI Fitrah Insani also established partnerships with a number of external institutions, including the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Islamic organisations, and local religious leaders to support capacity building programs. Through these partnerships, the school gained inputs on new approaches to value-based leadership management, as well as access to further training and coaching for teachers and education personnel (Said et al., 2023).

To build a work culture that supports ethical values, the madrasah principal also implements an appreciation system for teachers and students who show positive behaviour and real contributions to the development of the school environment. This appreciation is given symbolically or in the form of public recognition during routine school activities. This reward system not only increases motivation but also strengthens solidarity and the collective spirit in realising a madrasah culture based on goodness (Muhtar et al., 2021).

Based on these results, the implementation of ethical leadership in MI Fitrah Insani is a gradual transformation process that requires patience, adaptive strategies, and support from all the school's components. Despite facing structural, cultural, and operational challenges, madrasahs have demonstrated the capacity to adapt through institutional innovations relevant to the local context. The madrasah principal's efforts to integrate good values into the management system, curriculum, and school culture reflect a leadership model that is not only transformative, but also contextual and rooted in Islamic values (Kamal, 2017; Khoirunnisak, 2023). With this approach, MI Fitrah Insani has slowly succeeded in building an educational ecosystem that is more humanist, collaborative, and oriented towards character building.

4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that the application of kindness-based leadership at MI Fitrah Insani, Leles, Garut, has succeeded in creating an ethical, inclusive, and transformative school ecosystem. The values of empathy, open communication, participation in decision-making, and respect for the contributions of teachers and students encourage the formation of a school climate that is emotionally safe and conducive to strengthening character and Islamic values. In addition, leadership strategies that emphasise ethics and care have a direct impact on increasing teacher motivation and student engagement. Teachers become more loyal, empowered, and innovative, making the learning process more participatory and meaningful.

However, structural, cultural, and operational constraints, such as rigid bureaucracy, traditional leadership culture, and teachers' limited professional capacity, are overcome through contextualised adaptive strategies. Efforts such as ethical leadership training, utilising communication technology, reformulating internal policies, and strengthening external partnerships are key to the success of consistently applying virtue ethics. A qualitative approach with a case study design enables a thorough analysis of the dynamics and confirms that value-based leadership is not only relevant but also effective in building a holistic and sustainable quality of Islamic education.

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of kindness-based leadership at MI Fitrah Insani, Leles, Garut, has contributed to the development of an ethical, inclusive, and transformative school ecosystem. The core values of this model include empathy, participatory decision-making, open communication, and recognition of the contributions of teachers and students. These values create an emotionally safe school climate that supports character development and reinforces Islamic values in daily educational practices. Leadership strategies rooted in ethics and care have proven to increase teacher motivation and student engagement. Teachers demonstrate higher

professional loyalty, pedagogical creativity, and collaborative spirit, enabling more meaningful and participatory learning experiences. Students, in turn, show greater engagement and stronger bonds with the school's moral mission.

Despite structural and cultural challenges—such as rigid bureaucratic procedures, a hierarchical leadership culture, and limited professional development—adaptive, contextual strategies have emerged as an effective response. These strategies include ethical leadership training, the use of digital communication platforms, policy reformulation, and strategic collaboration with external stakeholders. Through a qualitative case study approach, this research confirms that goodness-based leadership is not only compatible with the goals of Islamic education but also represents a viable and effective model for improving holistic education quality.

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