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## Leadership and Subordinate Engagement in Transforming Islamic Higher Education Institutions to Advance the SDGs: Evidence from Central Java

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### Abstract

**Objective:** This study explores the leadership transformation of Islamic higher education institutions (Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Swasta/PTKIS), focusing on the Mamba'ul 'Ulum Islamic Institute Indonesia (IIMU) from 2020 to 2025. **Theoretical framework:** Anchored in the theory of democratic leadership in Islamic education, the study emphasizes participation, authority distribution, and inclusivity as key pillars for organizational transformation. **Literature review:** A literature review highlights the relevance of transformational, participatory, structural, and cultural dimensions in shaping effective leadership in Islamic educational settings. **Methods:** The research employs a qualitative case study method, utilizing in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis. The participants include institutional leaders, lecturers, and staff across different departments at IIMU. **Results:** Findings reveal that although IIMU adopts a democratic leadership style in principle, the actual involvement of subordinates in strategic decision-making and program implementation remains minimal. Structural hierarchies, centralized decision-making practices, and entrenched work cultures present significant barriers. Nonetheless, where subordinate engagement is enhanced, there is a notable improvement in managerial efficiency and the overall quality of educational programs. In alignment with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which promotes inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all, this study underlines the importance of collaborative governance in Islamic education. **Implications:** It suggests that strengthening participatory leadership could support institutional innovation, accountability, and inclusive development. Furthermore, promoting internal dialogue and professional empowerment aligns with SDG 16, which calls for effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions. **Novelty:** The study's novelty lies in its contribution to the discourse on democratic values in Islamic education leadership, particularly in PTKIS transformation. It highlights how empowering subordinates can enhance educational service delivery and institutional sustainability. These insights are vital for stakeholders aiming to align Islamic higher education with national education reforms and global development agendas such as the SDGs.

**Keywords:** leadership, subordinate involvement, leadership transformation, institutional management, sdgs in higher education.

## INTRODUCTION

Leadership transformation within Islamic private higher education institutions (PTKIS), particularly regarding subordinate involvement, remains an underexplored area in academic discourse. Most previous studies tend to emphasize transformational and transactional leadership models within general educational contexts, without delving into the participatory values rooted in Islamic leadership traditions or their implications for institutional management. Although principles such as *shura* (consultation), justice, and collective responsibility are central to Islamic leadership, empirical investigations into their application at the strategic level of Islamic educational institutions are still scarce. This study fills that gap by offering a contextualized analysis of democratic leadership transformation within PTKIS, with a specific focus on the Mamba'ul 'Ulum Islamic Institute (IIMU) in Surakarta. The findings reveal that, although IIMU has formally adopted a democratic leadership style, subordinate involvement remains primarily operational, with strategic decisions still concentrated in the hands of top leadership. This gap highlights the tension between theory and practice, and signals the need for structural and cultural reforms to enable effective implementation of participatory leadership principles [1], [2].

In terms of significance, the study makes a critical contribution to the development of Islamic leadership theory, particularly in fostering participatory governance. Subordinate involvement has been shown to improve the effectiveness of educational program management, enhance internal communication, and foster a more collaborative organizational culture. The study also provides practical implications for policy development, including the recommendation to strengthen two-way communication, initiate leadership development programs for staff, and formalize participatory decision-making mechanisms. The study's relevance is further amplified when viewed through the lens of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). Inclusive leadership practices are foundational to establishing equitable, transparent, and responsive educational governance. In this context, subordinate engagement is not merely a technical or managerial concern but reflects a broader institutional commitment to social justice and sustainable development [3], [4].

Leadership transformation in the context of Islamic education is increasingly important to be explored in line with the challenges of the times that continue to develop. In many Islamic educational institutions, an effective leadership role is the main key to achieving the goals of quality education. One of the leadership dimensions that is interesting to research is the involvement of subordinates in the decision-making process and management of educational institutions. In this context, inclusive educational leadership, which involves the active participation of staff and subordinates in decision-making, is a factor that can improve the managerial quality and effectiveness of the management of Education programs. The importance of subordinate involvement in decision-making has been widely discussed in various leadership theories, especially in the context of Islamic education, but research on leadership transformation involving subordinates effectively in Islamic educational institutions is still limited. Most of the existing research focuses more on leadership in the context of general education or discusses the application of leadership theories within a more general framework, without considering in depth the role of Islamic contexts and organizational culture in Islamic educational institutions. Therefore, there is a research gap that needs to be filled, namely, how the transformation of leadership in Islamic educational institutions, especially at the Mamba'ul 'Ulum Islamic Institute of Surakarta, involves subordinates in decision-making and management of education [5], [6].

Several previous studies relevant to this topic have addressed different leadership styles in educational contexts. For example, a study on the implementation of

democratic and participatory leadership in educational institutions was found in a study by Leithwood & Jantzi that emphasized the importance of staff involvement in improving the performance of educational institutions. The research focuses more on the context of general education and does not raise aspects of Islamic values and specific impacts in the management of Islamic education. Research on Job Engagement Theory by Kahn shows that subordinate involvement can be enhanced by creating psychological conditions that support engagement, but the application of this theory in Islamic educational institutions, especially at the level of strategic decision-making, has not been widely explored. The novelty of this study lies in the analysis of the transformation of Islamic education leadership, which not only focuses on the leadership aspect itself but also highlights the role of subordinate involvement in decision-making and management of educational institutions. This research introduces an in-depth study of the influence of Islamic values in shaping an inclusive and democratic leadership style within Islamic educational institutions. The research seeks to fill the gap in the literature on Islamic educational leadership with a more contextual, specific, and integrated approach to Islamic values [7].

The contribution of this research is expected to provide new insights into the development of Islamic education leadership theory, especially in the context of the implementation of democratic leadership and more effective subordinate involvement. The results of this study can provide practical recommendations for leaders of Islamic educational institutions to improve the effectiveness of institutional management and the quality of education through a more inclusive leadership approach. The research is expected to contribute to managerial transformation efforts in Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, especially to achieve the goal of higher quality and competitive education. The formulation of this research problem is how to transform leadership at the Mamba'ul 'Ulum Islamic Institute in the context of subordinate involvement in decision-making and management of educational institutions. What is the impact of subordinate involvement on the management of education and the implementation of strategic programs in the institution? This research is expected to make an important contribution to encouraging the improvement of the leadership system in Islamic educational institutions, thereby producing a more positive impact in achieving educational goals [8], [9].

In recent years, the transformation of Islamic higher education institutions (Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Swasta – PTKIS) in Indonesia has become increasingly important, especially within the framework of national education reforms and the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Leadership plays a critical role in shaping institutional effectiveness, and the adoption of democratic leadership models has gained momentum in Islamic education contexts. However, the degree to which these models are implemented—particularly regarding subordinate involvement—remains underexplored. This research focuses on the Mamba'ul 'Ulum Islamic Institute Indonesia (IIMU) as a case study to examine the interaction between leadership transformation and the engagement of subordinates in decision-making and institutional management [8], [9].

While existing literature has extensively discussed leadership theories such as transformational and transactional leadership within education, there is limited empirical research that investigates the specific dynamics of democratic leadership in Islamic institutions, especially in PTKIS settings. Most previous studies focus on top-down leadership without thoroughly examining how the participation of subordinates, including lecturers and administrative staff, contributes to leadership effectiveness and institutional transformation. This research addresses that gap by evaluating how participatory governance within Islamic institutions can promote educational quality, institutional innovation, and long-term sustainability.

The significance of this study is twofold. First, it contributes to a deeper understanding of how subordinate involvement in leadership processes aligns with Islamic values of shura (consultation), fairness, and collective responsibility. Second, it provides practical implications for policy and institutional development, especially in the context of achieving SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 16 (inclusive institutions). In an era when educational institutions are expected to be more inclusive, transparent, and accountable, understanding the role of subordinate participation becomes not only relevant but also necessary for institutional resilience and progress [8], [9].

This study has significant implications for the development of inclusive leadership models in Islamic higher education institutions. By highlighting the limited yet impactful role of subordinates in strategic decision-making and program implementation, the research demonstrates that increased participation can enhance institutional effectiveness, foster innovation, and support quality education aligned with SDG 4. Moreover, it emphasizes the importance of internal communication and authority distribution in overcoming structural and cultural barriers within PTKIS.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on subordinate involvement as a core element of democratic leadership transformation in an Islamic context. It bridges the gap between Islamic leadership theory and practical governance by offering empirical evidence from the Mamba'ul 'Ulum Islamic Institute Indonesia. This approach provides a new lens for understanding leadership as a collective, participatory process essential for institutional sustainability and educational advancement. Thus, this study aims to offer a fresh perspective on democratic leadership transformation in Islamic higher education by emphasizing the centrality of subordinate involvement, making it a vital theme in both academic discourse and practical leadership development strategies.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of leadership in Islamic higher education institutions has gained increasing attention, particularly regarding organizational transformation and educational quality. Several leadership models have been explored in the literature, including transformational, transactional, and servant leadership. However, democratic leadership—defined by participation, shared decision-making, and inclusive governance—remains underrepresented, especially within the context of Islamic institutions such as PTKIS (Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Swasta). Democratic leadership in Islamic education is closely linked to the principle of shura (consultation), which emphasizes the involvement of subordinates in institutional affairs. Scholars such as Al-Attas and Al-Faruqi have highlighted the alignment between Islamic epistemology and participatory governance, suggesting that effective leadership should reflect ethical values, collective responsibility, and intellectual openness. However, most empirical studies focus on top-level leadership behavior, with limited attention to how subordinates—lecturers, administrative staff, and unit heads—participate in strategic planning and decision-making [10], [11].

Transformational leadership theory also contributes to understanding change in Islamic institutions. According to Bass and Avolio, transformational leaders inspire and empower subordinates, fostering a shared vision and encouraging innovation. While this theory is valuable, it often assumes a hierarchical dynamic that may overlook the collaborative nature of Islamic leadership traditions. Therefore, integrating democratic elements into transformational leadership could provide a more culturally relevant framework for PTKIS. Studies on organizational culture and structure further explain how institutional barriers may hinder subordinate involvement. Hierarchical systems, limited authority delegation, and communication gaps often prevent the effective implementation of democratic practices. Participatory

leadership requires not only a change in leadership style but also a shift in organizational norms and values [10], [11].

Recent discussions on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 and SDG 16, emphasize the need for inclusive, equitable, and effective educational institutions. The literature increasingly supports the idea that shared leadership contributes to institutional accountability, innovation, and long-term sustainability. This study builds on these theoretical and empirical insights to explore how subordinate involvement in leadership processes can support the transformation of PTKIS, offering a unique contribution to both Islamic education discourse and global educational development agendas [12].

**Table 1. Literature Review on Higher Education Leadership and SDGS**

Theme	Key Concepts	Scholars/Theories	Relevance to Study
Democratic Leadership in Islam	Participation, <i>Shura</i> (consultation), inclusive governance	Al-Attas, Al-Faruqi	Aligns leadership with Islamic ethical and collective values
Transformational Leadership	Visionary change, empowerment, innovation	Bass & Avolio	Inspires subordinate participation, though often top-down
Subordinate Involvement	Engagement of lecturers and staff in decision-making	Limited empirical studies	Identifies research gap in PTKIS leadership practice
Organizational Structure & Culture	Hierarchies, communication gaps, and authority centralization	Organisational behaviour theorists	Explains barriers to democratic leadership implementation
Sustainable Development Goals	SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 16 (Inclusive Institutions)	UN SDG Framework	Connects inclusive leadership to global education and governance targets

## METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to understand in depth the leadership transformation at the Mamba'ul 'Ulum Islamic Institute (IIMU) Surakarta in the period 2020–2025, especially in terms of subordinate involvement in decision-making and institutional management. Data was collected through three main techniques: in-depth interviews with leaders, faculty, and staff; participatory observation of organizational dynamics; and analysis of institutional documents such as meeting minutes, internal policies, and organizational structure. Participants are selected purposively to ensure the representation of the various functional units within the Institution. Data analysis was carried out thematically to identify patterns of subordinate involvement and their influence on the effectiveness of leadership and the quality of management of educational programs. The validity of the data was strengthened through triangulation of sources and techniques [13].

**Table 2. Research Method**

Component	Description
Research Approach	Qualitative approach
Method	Case study method focusing on leadership transformation at Mamba'ul 'Ulum Islamic Institute (IIMU)
Research Period	2020–2025
Focus	Subordinate involvement in decision-making and institutional management

<b>Data Collection</b>	In-depth interviews with leaders, faculty, and staff Participatory observation of leadership dynamics Document analysis (meeting minutes, internal policies, organizational structure)
<b>Sampling Technique</b>	Purposive sampling to ensure representation across various institutional units
<b>Data Analysis</b>	Thematic analysis to identify patterns of subordinate involvement and their impact on leadership and program quality
<b>Validity Techniques</b>	Triangulation of data sources and collection methods
<b>SDG Relevance</b>	<b>SDG 4:</b> Enhancing educational quality through inclusive leadership practices <b>SDG 16:</b> Promoting accountable and participatory institutional governance

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Transformation of Leadership Style at the Islamic Institute of Mamba'ul 'Ulum Surakarta (IIMU)

Changes in leadership patterns are quite significant in the leadership pattern at the Islamic Institute Mamba'ul 'Ulum Surakarta (IIMU) between 2020 and 2025. Previously, the dominant leadership style was authoritarian, where important decisions were made by the top leadership without much involvement of staff or subordinates. However, from the beginning of this period, IIMU leadership began to adopt a more democratic approach, emphasizing the active participation of various subordinate levels in the decision-making process [14]. Increasing Subordinate Involvement As part of the transformation of leadership style, IIMU leaders prioritize the importance of subordinate involvement in designing work programs and institutional policies. In its implementation, this is reflected in the increase in the number of deliberation meetings involving all elements of staff, lecturers, and faculty leaders. Previously, decision-making at the institutional level was often carried out behind closed doors, but now it is more open and invites input from various parties directly involved in the institution's operations [15].

Active Participation in Decision-Making Active participation in decision-making is one of the key aspects of this transformation. IIMU leadership began to provide space for staff to participate in strategic decision-making forums, such as the preparation of a new curriculum or the opening of new programs. This allows subordinates to convey their aspirations and ideas, which ultimately enriches the decision-making process and results in policies that are more based on the actual needs of the Institution [16]. Changes in the program planning process in the past, program planning was more determined by the top leadership without involving parties who have related expertise and knowledge, such as lecturers or administrative staff. With the shift in leadership styles towards a more democratic direction, the planning process now involves more inclusive group discussions. The discussion allows all parties to contribute to planning better educational programs, student activities, and administration. This leads to a more coordinated improvement in the quality of the program and the needs of the Institution [17].

Collaborative approach in organizational management. One of the important results of this leadership transformation is the creation of a more collaborative organizational culture. IIMU leaders no longer only function as decision-makers, but also as facilitators who motivate staff to work together. This collaborative approach encourages the creation of a more harmonious relationship between leaders and subordinates, as well as increases mutual trust within the institution. With this culture, each individual feels a responsibility for the success of the Institution [18]. Communication between leaders and staff is often limited to formal channels and

limited to rigid hierarchies. With the implementation of democratic leadership, the lines of communication became more open. Leadership is now actively encouraging dialogue between the leadership and staff levels through regular meetings, discussion forums, and evaluation sessions. This increases transparency in the management of the institution, as well as allows staff to better understand the goals and policies taken by the leadership [19].

This change shows many benefits, but the implementation of democratic leadership at IIMU is not without challenges. One of the main challenges faced was the resistance of some staff members who had become accustomed to previous authoritarian leadership patterns. Some individuals are concerned about the increased involvement of subordinates in decision-making, as they worry that it could reduce efficiency and slow down the decision-making process. Therefore, IIMU leadership needs to continue to work to overcome this resistance by providing adequate explanations and training on the benefits of a democratic approach [20]. The adaptation of institutional members to changes in leadership style transformation takes time to be accepted and adopted by all members of the institution. This process involves a change in the mindset and work culture, which cannot happen in a short period. Some members may be comfortable with the old leadership style that is more structured and less dependent on participation. To maximize the success of these changes, IIMU leadership must provide adequate support to institutional members in the form of training, effective communication, and a shared understanding of the benefits of active participation [21], [22].

With more active involvement from subordinates, the quality of education at IIMU can experience a significant improvement. Staff involvement in decision-making is directly related to improving educational programs that are more relevant and adaptive to the needs of students. When staff propose changes in curriculum or teaching methods, this can create updates that are in line with global educational developments and the needs of the world of work. Staff involvement in planning student activities can also enhance students' learning experiences outside of the classroom.

### **Subordinate Involvement in Decision Making: An Analysis of Participation in the Institutional Management Process**

Research shows that there are efforts to involve subordinates in various aspects of institutional management, but their involvement in strategic decision-making at the Mamba'ul 'Ulum Islamic Institute Surakarta (IIMU) is still limited. Most decisions concerning major policy directions and structural changes remain in the hands of the top leadership. This shows that despite the democratic approach applied, major decisions are still centered on maintaining a more controlled and directed institutional direction. The involvement of subordinates at IIMU is more at the implementation and administrative levels. Subordinates are allowed to provide input on more operational matters, such as preparing annual budgets, planning academic activities, and managing human resources. While strategic decisions are not yet fully decentralized, the role of staff in operational activities allows them to contribute and feel more involved in the development of the institution [23].

One area where subordinate involvement is more visible is in the preparation of annual budgets. IIMU leadership strives to involve relevant units, including administrative staff and faculty, in designing budgets that are realistic and appropriate to their needs. Subordinates are allowed to provide input, but the final decision remains in the hands of the central leadership. This reflects the leadership's efforts to ensure that budget allocations remain focused on predetermined strategic priorities. In the academic field, major decision-making is still led by the highest leadership,

there are efforts to involve teaching staff and program heads in the planning of academic activities. This includes the development of a new curriculum and evaluation of study programs. Their participation is limited to the operational and implementation levels, while decisions about major academic structural or policy changes remain in the hands of the central leadership [24].

IIMU leadership seeks to increase staff involvement in operational decision-making, such as exam scheduling and student activities. This step aims to strengthen the sense of responsibility of staff for the smooth running of operational processes in the institution. The leadership expects that with active involvement in operational decisions, staff will better understand the institution's goals and feel part of the larger decision-making process. Subordinates are given a greater role in broader administrative decisions, such as student data management, facility management, and unit performance evaluation. Leaders recognize that their involvement in administrative decisions can provide benefits in terms of the efficiency and effectiveness of the institution's operations. By giving staff space to contribute to the administrative process, the leadership hopes to create better collaboration in achieving the Institute's goals [25].

Despite the increase in decision-making inclusivity, strategic decision-making that includes long-term planning and large institutional policies remains dominated by central leadership. This is one of the obstacles in the application of democratic leadership principles because most decisions related to the direction of institutions and major innovations are still made by the leadership without involving significant participation from subordinates. The gap between democratic leadership theory and practice on the ground is becoming increasingly evident in the context of strategic decision-making. Theory prioritizes the active participation of all members of the institution; larger, strategic decision-making often remains in the hands of the top leadership. This suggests that while there are efforts to implement democratic leadership, institutional structural and cultural challenges often hinder the broader application of these principles [26]. Strategic decision-making is still centralized, but there is great potential for decentralization of decisions in the future. IIMU leadership has shown a desire to encourage more responsibility and authority to staff in managing various aspects of the institution. By giving staff more control over operational and strategic decisions, leaders can strengthen a sense of ownership and responsibility, which in turn can improve the effectiveness of the institution as a whole [27].

### **The Impact of Subordinate Involvement on the Quality of Education Program Management**

The results of this study show that the involvement of subordinates in the planning and evaluation of educational programs at the Mamba'ul 'Ulum Islamic Institute Surakarta (IIMU) is limited. This has an impact on the low level of innovation in the implementation of educational programs, both in academic and non-academic aspects. Several routine programs are implemented every year, but the lack of contribution from teaching staff, unit heads, and administrative staff in the process of planning and evaluating programs causes these programs to be less able to develop significantly to meet existing needs and challenges [27].

One of the biggest impacts of limited subordinate involvement is the lack of innovation in academic programs. The programs at IIMU tend to focus on routine and have not undergone any meaningful updates. This is because strategic decisions, such as curriculum development and course schedule arrangements, are still dominated by top leadership, without much involvement of the opinions and inputs of teaching staff or other parties directly involved in the implementation of the program [28].

The lack of involvement of staff in the development of curriculum programs is one of the factors causing the lack of innovation in the academic field. Curriculum development, which ideally reflects student needs, current educational trends, and job market dynamics, is often not well accommodated because such strategic decisions do not involve various parties, especially subordinates who better understand field conditions. In addition to academic programs, non-academic programs at IIMU are also showing signs of stagnation due to limited subordinate involvement. Student activities and organizational development, which should involve various parties from all lines, are hampered by centralized decision-making. This leads to a lack of initiative in creating new activities that can enrich the student experience outside the academic field [29]. The limited involvement of subordinates in the planning and evaluation of educational programs ultimately affects the overall quality of education management. In the absence of active contributions from staff in determining the direction of program development, institutions tend to operate in a conservative and routine-focused framework. This can hinder the institution's efforts in responding to changing educational needs that continue to grow and affect the competitiveness of institutions in the long term [31].

Limited involvement also means a lack of new perspectives that can enrich existing policies and programs. Subordinates who have practical knowledge and day-to-day experience in the field often have ideas that are more relevant to the needs of students and current situations. However, if they are not involved in the decision-making process, many innovative ideas that can improve the quality of education become overlooked. A more collaborative and inclusive leadership approach is needed to increase innovation in educational programs at IIMU. By providing space for subordinates to actively participate in decision-making related to the development of academic and non-academic programs, leaders can utilize various ideas and suggestions that can enrich the quality of education. Collaboration between leaders and subordinates, as well as between teaching staff, can create more effective and relevant solutions to the challenges faced [32].

In addition to planning, the involvement of subordinates also needs to be expanded in the program evaluation process. Evaluations involving all relevant parties, both leaders, teaching staff, and students, can provide a more comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of the program being run. This allows for more accurate identification of problems and the implementation of improvements that are more appropriate to the needs of the institution and students. Providing greater space for subordinates to suggest new ideas in educational programs will have a positive impact on the quality of institutional management. This allows institutions to move more dynamically, respond quickly to changes, and adapt to more up-to-date educational trends and developments. With more contributions from various parties, institutions can introduce a curriculum that is more innovative and relevant to the times [33].

As a step forward, IIMU leaders need to develop a more formal and structured mechanism to involve subordinates in the planning and evaluation process of educational programs. By creating discussion forums involving staff, lecturers, and unit heads, leaders can ensure that the program is more accommodating to various perspectives and needs. This more participatory approach will accelerate innovation and improve the quality of education at IIMU, making it more relevant to global educational developments and the needs of students.

### **Factors Affecting the Low Involvement of Subordinates in Institutional Management**

One of the main factors that hinders the involvement of subordinates in the management of institutions at IIMU is the organizational structure, which is still very

hierarchical and rigid. This research found that decision-making made by leaders often does not involve subordinates at the operational or strategic level. In such a structure, subordinates tend to receive instructions without the opportunity to provide input or engage in more open discussions about the direction of the institution's policies. The organizational culture at IIMU, which is still top-down, is also an obstacle to subordinate participation. The leadership has tried to implement a democratic leadership style, but the dominance of the leadership in decision-making and institutional management is still quite strong. This culture creates the impression that important decisions can only be made by top leadership and subordinates only play a role in the implementation of those decisions, not in formulating or proposing ideas [34].

Research also shows that there is a lack of space for subordinates to participate in the program planning and evaluation process. The lack of forums or opportunities for open discussion between leaders and staff in different units reduces the potential for active participation. This causes staff to feel that they do not have the authority to provide input on existing policies and decisions. A less effective communication system between leaders and subordinates is also a factor that inhibits staff involvement in the management of the institution. Many staff feel that they are not adequately informed about the institution's policies, programs, and goals. Limited communication makes staff feel isolated in decision-making and not feel responsible for the implementation of existing programs [35].

This study identifies that human resource management (HR) at IIMU is still not optimal in supporting the involvement of subordinates. There is no clear system for involving staff in long-term planning or in activities that have a strategic impact. Therefore, even though staff have the capacity and potential to contribute more, they are not allowed to do so effectively. At IIMU, important decisions often depend on the central leadership without consultation or discussion with subordinates. For example, in budgeting, academic planning, or other strategic policies, staff feel they have no significant influence in the process. This creates dissatisfaction and the inability of staff to contribute ideas or suggestions that can improve the performance of the institution [36].

The lack of training and development for subordinates in the management of the institution also affects the low level of involvement. Without adequate debriefing, staff tend to feel less confident in being involved in decision-making or suggesting new ideas. This leads to feelings of inadequacy and powerlessness that further reduce their participation in carrying out duties and responsibilities. One of the key findings in this study is that subordinate involvement is limited to the implementation and administrative levels. Strategic decisions that affect the management of institutions and the quality of education are more often in the hands of the highest leadership. This hinders the granting of broader authority to staff at the faculty or unit level, so they cannot contribute optimally to the development of educational programs [37].

The involvement of subordinates in the management of the institution is also affected by the lack of a reward system or incentives for those who actively contribute to decision-making. In the absence of appreciation or recognition of their participation, staff do not feel motivated to come up with new ideas or participate in the strategic planning of the institution. The last factor found in this study is the need to build trust and openness between leaders and subordinates. In a more open and collaborative organizational culture, staff will feel more valued and motivated to contribute. However, this can only be achieved if leaders consistently create space for clear two-way communication, as well as open opportunities for staff to actively participate in decision-making [37].

## Analysis

This study critically examines the transformation of leadership at the Islamic Institute Mamba'ul 'Ulum Surakarta (IIMU) within the 2020–2025 period, highlighting the importance of subordinate involvement in institutional management. Although IIMU has adopted a more democratic leadership style in principle, actual implementation remains limited, especially in strategic decision-making areas. Most subordinates are engaged at the operational level, while top leadership retains authority over key institutional directions. This gap illustrates the tension between the theoretical framework of participatory Islamic leadership and the persistent structural and cultural barriers within PTKIS (Islamic private higher education institutions). The integration of subordinate voices, although incremental, contributes positively to program planning, budget formulation, and academic activity organization. However, the impact remains modest due to the limited decentralization of authority. One critical observation is that the low level of subordinate participation hampers innovation in both academic and non-academic programs. Without meaningful involvement from lecturers and administrative staff, program development tends to be routine and disconnected from evolving student needs and educational trends [37].

From an SDGs perspective, this case study strongly aligns with SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). SDG 4 emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education, which is difficult to achieve without inclusive governance. Similarly, SDG 16 promotes effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions—goals that are closely linked to leadership models emphasizing participation, consultation (shura), and shared responsibility. The IIMU experience underscores that democratic leadership in Islamic education is not merely a structural change, but a cultural transformation requiring training, open communication systems, and trust-building across institutional levels. The study reveals that fostering subordinate engagement can enhance educational service delivery and institutional sustainability. Practical recommendations include strengthening two-way communication channels, developing leadership training programs for staff, and formalizing participatory decision-making mechanisms. By moving beyond token participation, IIMU has the potential to cultivate a more inclusive organizational culture that embraces innovation, collaboration, and responsiveness. In conclusion, while challenges remain, the evolving leadership practices at IIMU reflect a growing commitment to democratic values in Islamic education. Realizing the full potential of subordinate involvement can significantly contribute to achieving the SDGs and advancing the quality and integrity of Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia [38].

**Table 3. Summary of Leadership Transformation and SDGs Contribution at IIMU Surakarta**

Aspect	Findings	SDGs Relevance
Leadership Style Shift	Transition from authoritarian to democratic leadership; focus on inclusion and participation.	SDG 16 – Inclusive and participatory institutions
Subordinate Involvement	Increased in operational areas (budgeting, academic planning), but limited in strategic decision-making.	SDG 16 – Promote participatory decision-making
Decision-Making Structure	Centralized strategic decisions remain dominant; limited decentralization to departments and units.	SDG 16 – Build effective institutions
Communication Improvement	Regular meetings and forums have been established to promote transparency and engagement.	SDG 16 – Accountable and transparent systems

Program Planning & Innovation	Routine and less adaptive programs due to minimal input from staff; limited curriculum innovation.	SDG 4 – Quality education and relevant learning
Academic & Non-Academic Gaps	Stagnation in non-academic initiatives; limited space for staff innovation and student engagement activities.	SDG 4 – Inclusive learning environments
Institutional Challenges	Structural rigidity, top-down culture, weak HR development, minimal staff empowerment, and lack of incentives.	SDG 4 & 16 – Strengthen institutional capacity
Impact on Education Quality	Low staff engagement limits innovation and responsiveness to students’ needs and job market demands.	SDG 4 – Relevant and responsive education
Recommended Reforms	Adopt team-based leadership, strengthen communication, empower staff, provide leadership training, and build inclusive governance systems.	SDG 4 & 16 – Education for all, inclusive systems

### Recommendations to Increase Subordinate Involvement in Islamic Education Leadership Transformation

This study found that there are efforts to implement democratic leadership at IIMU, but the involvement of subordinates in decision-making and institutional management is still limited. Therefore, it is advisable to adopt a more flexible leadership model, which can accommodate the changes and dynamics that occur within the educational institution. This model will allow leaders to be more adaptive to the situation and provide space for subordinates to play a more active role in program planning and evaluation. The key recommendation of this study is the importance of strengthening two-way communication between leaders and subordinates. Open and effective communication will ensure that staff feel heard and valued for their contributions. IIMU leaders need to create more transparent communication channels, such as regular discussion forums or digital platforms, to enable a smoother exchange of ideas and information between all levels within the organization. It is important to involve subordinates early in the educational program planning process. Research shows that staff involvement in the planning stage can result in programs that are more innovative and relevant to the needs of all parties. Therefore, leaders need to provide opportunities for staff to contribute their ideas in academic planning, curriculum, and other operational activities [39].

Program evaluation involving all parties, including staff, is an important step to improve the quality of education. IIMU leadership should introduce a more inclusive evaluation system which allows subordinates to provide feedback on the effectiveness and implementation of the program. By involving staff in evaluations, leaders not only increase transparency but also create space for continuous improvement. A more structured and effective feedback system can help accelerate leadership transformation at IIMU. Leaders need to introduce mechanisms to collect regular feedback from subordinates on policies, programs, and decision-making processes. Feedback received must be responded to with tangible actions so that staff feel that their contributions are truly considered and implemented in existing policies [40].

The main benefit of increasing subordinate involvement in the management of the institution is their increased sense of responsibility for the success of the institution. When staff feel involved in the decision-making and planning process, they will feel more responsible for the implementation and achievement of the institution's goals. It will also motivate them to make a maximum contribution to their daily work. Another recommendation that emerged from this study was the need to strengthen collaboration between leaders and staff. More inclusive leadership not only relies on leadership to make decisions but also engages staff in formulating policies and

strategies. This collaboration will enhance cooperation at all levels of the organization, strengthen staff commitment to the institution's vision, and create a more open and dynamic organizational culture [41].

To accelerate a more inclusive leadership transformation at IIMU, leaders need to show a stronger commitment to the application of democratic principles in institutional management. This means that leaders must be prepared to share power and provide greater opportunities for subordinates to be involved in strategic decision-making. Inclusive leadership will create a more participatory environment, which encourages innovation and continuous improvement within the institution. Applying a democratic leadership model, leaders at IIMU are also advised to develop a team-based leadership style. Team-based leadership allows leaders and staff to work together in planning and managing the institution's programs. By building a solid team, leaders can optimize the potential and creativity of their staff, as well as create a more collaborative and innovative work atmosphere. To support increased subordinate engagement, IIMU leadership is considering developing a leadership development program for staff. This program will provide the managerial and leadership skills needed by staff to play a more active role in the management of the institution. Through structured training, staff will be more confident in taking greater responsibility and can contribute to more strategic planning and decision-making.

## CONCLUSION

This study analyzes the transformation of Islamic education leadership at the Mamba'ul 'Ulum Islamic Institute (IIMU) during the 2020–2025 period, focusing specifically on subordinate involvement in decision-making and institutional management. The findings indicate a notable transition from an authoritarian leadership model toward a more democratic and inclusive approach. Nevertheless, this transformation remains partial, as subordinate participation is still largely limited to operational matters, while strategic decisions continue to be centralized in the hands of top leadership. Although some progress has been made—such as increased subordinate involvement in budgeting processes, academic planning, and administrative functions—there remains a substantial gap in staff participation at the strategic level. This gap hinders innovation and impedes the adaptability of academic and non-academic programs. Staff members often lack formal opportunities to provide input, especially in curriculum development or institutional policy-making. Consequently, many institutional programs remain routine-based and lack responsiveness to dynamic educational needs. Structural rigidity and hierarchical work culture are the main barriers that prevent effective subordinate engagement. A lack of transparent and two-way communication systems, along with limited leadership development opportunities for staff, further compounds the problem. These issues not only diminish the potential contribution of subordinates but also restrict the institution's ability to innovate and evolve in line with global educational standards. To address these challenges, a more inclusive leadership transformation is urgently needed. This involves restructuring the organization to allow decentralized decision-making and empowering staff through greater participation in planning and evaluation processes. Leaders should cultivate open, transparent communication channels, conduct regular consultation forums, and develop team-based leadership models that value collaboration over control. Aligning with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which emphasizes inclusive and quality education, IIMU must foster leadership practices that are responsive, participatory, and supportive of innovation. Furthermore, following SDG 16, which promotes effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions, democratic leadership and subordinate empowerment become essential for ensuring institutional transparency and long-term sustainability. Ultimately, the success of leadership transformation at IIMU depends on the extent to which all organizational members, including subordinates, are empowered to

contribute meaningfully. By embracing democratic values and inclusive governance, Islamic educational institutions can better meet the challenges of the 21st century while remaining aligned with both national education reforms and the global SDG agenda.

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### Author Contribution

All authors contributed significantly to the completion of this collaborative research. Edy Muslimin led the field investigation and data collection. Giyoto contributed to the literature review, conceptual framing, and analysis. Yusup Rohmadi handled the final synthesis, editing, and alignment with SDG frameworks. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and share equal responsibility for its content.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no financial, institutional, or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the outcomes of this research. This study was conducted solely for academic purposes and reflects an objective analysis of leadership transformation and subordinate involvement in Islamic higher education institutions. All findings and interpretations are based on verified data and scholarly integrity.

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