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Reassessing the Assumed Relationship Between Religious Practice and Student Leadership Character in Islamic Boarding Schools

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Abstract

This study is motivated by the limited research on the relationship between Islamic Religious Education practices and leadership character, despite the widespread assumption that religious commitment contributes positively to students' character development within Islamic educational institutions. The study aims to analyze the relationship between Islamic Religious Education practices and leadership character among students in a boarding school context. The research adopts a quantitative ex post facto design, with a sample of 31 students enrolled in the boarding school program at MAN 2 Surakarta selected through a total sampling technique. Data were collected using structured questionnaires measuring religious practice and leadership character and analyzed through descriptive statistics and simple linear regression using IBM SPSS Statistics 31. The findings reveal that students demonstrated relatively high levels of religious practice (M = 33.23) and positive leadership character (M = 18.29). However, the regression analysis indicated that Islamic Religious Education practices did not significantly predict leadership character (β = 0.060, *p* = 0.749; R^2 = 0.004). These findings challenge the commonly accepted assumption that stronger religious practice necessarily leads to stronger leadership character and instead support leadership development theories emphasizing the importance of experiential learning, social participation, and organizational involvement. The study concludes that religious practice functions primarily as a moral foundation rather than a direct determinant of leadership character. The implications encompass theoretical contributions by extending the literature on Islamic education, character education, and youth leadership development, as well as practical recommendations for Islamic boarding schools to integrate religious formation with structured leadership experiences through student organizations, mentoring programs, and leadership-based activities. Additionally, this study identifies future research opportunities involving broader samples, additional explanatory variables, and mixed-method approaches to better understand leadership character development in Islamic educational settings.

Keywords :
Islamic religious education;

Abstrak

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leadership character; islamic boarding school; character education; religious practice

*hubungan antara praktik Pendidikan Agama Islam dan karakter kepemimpinan, meskipun terdapat anggapan umum bahwa komitmen keagamaan memberikan kontribusi positif terhadap pengembangan karakter siswa di lembaga pendidikan Islam. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis hubungan antara praktik Pendidikan Agama Islam dan karakter kepemimpinan di kalangan siswa dalam konteks sekolah asrama. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kuantitatif ex post facto, dengan sampel sebanyak 31 siswa yang terdaftar dalam program sekolah asrama di MAN 2 Surakarta yang dipilih melalui teknik sampling total. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan kuesioner terstruktur yang mengukur praktik keagamaan dan karakter kepemimpinan, kemudian dianalisis melalui statistik deskriptif dan regresi linier sederhana menggunakan IBM SPSS Statistics 31. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa siswa menunjukkan tingkat praktik keagamaan yang relatif tinggi (M = 33,23) dan karakter kepemimpinan yang positif (M = 18,29). Namun, analisis regresi menunjukkan bahwa praktik Pendidikan Agama Islam tidak secara signifikan memprediksi karakter kepemimpinan (β = 0,060, *p* = 0,749; R^2 = 0,004). Temuan ini menantang asumsi yang umum diterima bahwa praktik keagamaan yang lebih kuat secara otomatis mengarah pada karakter kepemimpinan yang lebih kuat, dan sebaliknya mendukung teori-teori pengembangan kepemimpinan yang menekankan pentingnya pembelajaran berbasis pengalaman, partisipasi sosial, dan keterlibatan dalam organisasi. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa praktik keagamaan berfungsi terutama sebagai landasan moral, bukan sebagai penentu langsung karakter kepemimpinan. Implikasinya mencakup kontribusi teoretis dengan memperluas literatur mengenai pendidikan Islam, pendidikan karakter, dan pengembangan kepemimpinan pemuda, serta rekomendasi praktis bagi pesantren untuk mengintegrasikan pembinaan keagamaan dengan pengalaman kepemimpinan terstruktur melalui organisasi siswa, program bimbingan, dan kegiatan berbasis kepemimpinan. Selain itu, penelitian ini mengidentifikasi peluang penelitian di masa depan yang melibatkan sampel yang lebih luas, variabel penjelas tambahan, dan pendekatan campuran (mixed-method) untuk lebih memahami pengembangan karakter kepemimpinan dalam lingkungan pendidikan Islam.*

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INTRODUCTIONS

The rapid transformation of society in the twenty-first century has intensified the demand for leadership competencies among young people. Globalization, technological advancement, and increasingly complex social challenges require future generations not only to master academic knowledge but also to demonstrate leadership, collaboration, communication, and problem-solving skills. International organizations such as UNESCO and OECD have consistently highlighted these competencies as essential for preparing young people to navigate contemporary society and contribute to sustainable social development. In this context, leadership is no longer viewed merely as an organizational function but as a fundamental life skill that enables individuals to influence others positively, make responsible decisions, and respond effectively to social challenges. Nevertheless, concerns regarding the development of youth leadership remain prevalent in many educational settings. Leadership character among adolescents is often constrained by limited opportunities for participation, responsibility, and meaningful social engagement.

Consequently, educational institutions are increasingly expected to cultivate leadership character as part of their broader mission of preparing students for the demands of the twenty-first century.

Recent scholarship on Positive Youth Development (PYD) further emphasizes that leadership development constitutes an important indicator of successful adolescent growth. Lerner et al. (Lerner et al., 2005) argued that positive youth development involves the cultivation of competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring, which collectively contribute to meaningful social participation. Supporting this perspective, Geldhof et al. (Geldhof et al., 2014) demonstrated that positive youth development is associated with constructive community engagement and character formation. Likewise, Damon (Damon, 2008) emphasized that adolescents who develop a strong sense of purpose are more likely to exhibit responsibility, initiative, and leadership-oriented behaviors. These findings suggest that leadership character should be viewed not merely as an organizational skill but as an important developmental outcome during adolescence. According to (Northouse, 2025) leadership involves a process of influence that occurs within groups to achieve common goals, indicating that leadership development requires not only knowledge but also character, social competence, and practical experience.

Within Islamic education, character development occupies a central position in the educational process. Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam/PAI) is intended not merely to transmit religious knowledge but also to foster faith, morality, and responsible behavior. The ultimate goal of Islamic education is the development of individuals who are able to integrate faith (iman), knowledge (ilmu), and practice (amal) in their daily lives. Contemporary scholars have emphasized that Islamic education should move beyond knowledge transmission toward transformative learning experiences that encourage reflection, internalization, and personal growth. Sahin (2018) argued that Islamic education should facilitate critical engagement with religious values rather than focusing exclusively on doctrinal instruction. Similarly, Tan (Tan, 2014) emphasized the importance of meaning-making processes through which students actively interpret and internalize religious teachings. From the perspective of character education, moral values become meaningful only when they are practiced consistently within authentic social contexts (Arthur et al., 2021; Nucci, 2024). Berkowitz's character education framework further suggests that effective character formation requires the integration of values, habits, and social experiences rather than reliance on cognitive understanding alone. Therefore, Islamic Religious Education is often assumed to contribute significantly to the formation of positive character traits, including responsibility, discipline, integrity, and leadership.

One educational environment frequently associated with intensive character formation is the boarding school. Unlike conventional schools, boarding schools provide a comprehensive educational ecosystem in which students experience continuous interaction with academic, religious, and social learning environments. Daily activities typically include congregational prayers, Qur'anic recitation, religious studies, moral habituation programs, and structured communal living. Such experiences allow religious values to be reinforced not only through formal instruction but also through routine practices and social interactions. Previous studies have demonstrated that boarding school environments play a significant role in strengthening students' religious character and moral development. Huda et al. (Huda et al., 2024) found that extracurricular activities in Islamic boarding schools contribute substantially to character education through the cultivation of discipline, responsibility, and cooperation. Similarly, Nurhaliza et al. (Nurhaliza et al., 2024) reported that institutional leadership and religious culture strengthen students' religious character through systematic supervision and role modeling. Pahrurroji (Pahrurroji, 2025) further highlighted the effectiveness of boarding school curricula in integrating character education into students' daily lives, while Susanto et al. (Susanto et al., 2025) demonstrated that educational

management practices within boarding schools support the development of students' religious commitment and positive behavior. Collectively, these studies suggest that boarding schools provide a conducive environment for character formation through the continuous internalization of religious values.

This argument is further supported by recent studies in Islamic boarding school education. Hadi and Prayogi (Hadi & Prayogi, 2025) found that Islamic school culture plays a crucial role in strengthening students' religious character through the internalization of institutional values and norms. Similarly, Harahap (Harahap, 2025) demonstrated that the Living Qur'an approach contributes to character formation by integrating Qur'anic values into students' everyday experiences. Astuti and Winarti (Astuti & Winarti, 2026) reported that moral education programs in Islamic boarding schools support the development of adolescents' social character, while Kartiko et al. (Kartiko et al., 2026) emphasized the importance of habituation, role modelling, and communal culture in shaping students' moral dispositions. These findings reinforce the argument that boarding schools function not only as educational institutions but also as character-building ecosystems.

A considerable body of literature has examined the relationship between Islamic education, religiosity, character formation, and youth development. Research focusing on Islamic Religious Education generally reports positive contributions to students' character development. Hidayat et al. (Hidayat et al., 2025) found that Islamic Religious Education contributes significantly to the formation of students' religious character, while Chadijah et al. (Chadijah et al., 2026) demonstrated that the integration of religious values into educational practices strengthens moral behavior and character development. Likewise, (Hamid & Bahari, 2025) reported that Islamic-based character education positively influences the development of desirable student characteristics. Other studies have emphasized the importance of religiosity in adolescent development. Hardy et al. (Hardy et al., 2022) found that religious motivation is associated with positive psychosocial outcomes and prosocial behavior among adolescents, whereas King and Boyatzis (King & Boyatzis, 2015) argued that religious and spiritual development plays a significant role in identity formation during adolescence. Meanwhile, leadership studies have highlighted the importance of organizational participation and experiential learning. Kholis et al. (Kholis et al., 2024) reported that student leadership programs enhance leadership competencies, while Azahar et al. (Azahar et al., 2025) and (Muslim et al., 2025) emphasized the contribution of leadership training, self-leadership, and social engagement to leadership development.

Within Islamic boarding school settings, leadership has also been identified as an important factor in student character development. Dian et al. (Dian et al., 2024) found that kiai leadership contributes significantly to the development of students' character through guidance, supervision, and role modelling. Likewise, Humaisi and Thoyib (Humaisi & Thoyib, 2025) reported that charismatic leadership strengthens educational quality and reinforces students' moral development. Hamdan and Helmi (Hamdan & Helmi, 2026) further demonstrated that educational leadership plays an important role in cultivating discipline, responsibility, and commitment among students. These findings suggest that leadership itself constitutes an influential educational variable within Islamic boarding school environments. Collectively, these findings suggest that religiosity, character education, and leadership development are important dimensions of adolescent growth; however, they are often examined independently rather than as interconnected constructs.

Despite the growing body of literature, several important gaps remain. Existing studies predominantly examine the contribution of Islamic Religious Education to character formation, the role of boarding school culture in strengthening religious values, or the influence of leadership on student character development. Meanwhile, studies on adolescent religiosity primarily focus on identity formation, psychosocial development, and prosocial behavior. Consequently, religious practice, leadership character, and boarding school

education have largely been examined as separate constructs. More importantly, empirical evidence investigating whether students' religious practices directly contribute to leadership character remains scarce. Therefore, the widely accepted assumption that stronger religious practice necessarily leads to stronger leadership character has yet to be adequately verified, particularly within Islamic boarding school settings where religious activities are highly institutionalized. This issue is particularly important in boarding school settings, where students are exposed to intensive religious activities and value-based education.

Drawing upon leadership development theory, Day et al. (Day et al., 2021) argued that leadership competencies develop through experience, participation, social interaction, and opportunities to exercise responsibility. Likewise, Kouzes and Posner (Kouzes & Posner, 2012) emphasized that leadership is learned through practice rather than inherited solely through values or beliefs. These perspectives suggest that while religious practice may provide an important moral foundation, leadership character may also depend on contextual and experiential factors that extend beyond religiosity itself. Therefore, the relationship between religious practice and leadership character warrants further empirical investigation.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to examine the relationship between Islamic Religious Education practices and leadership character among students enrolled in the boarding school program at MAN 2 Surakarta. Specifically, the study seeks to re-examine the widely accepted assumption within Islamic education literature that higher levels of religious practice necessarily contribute to stronger leadership character. By focusing on a boarding school context, this study contributes to the growing literature on Islamic education, character formation, and youth leadership development. Furthermore, the study offers empirical evidence regarding whether religious practice functions as a direct predictor of leadership character or whether leadership development may be influenced more strongly by other educational and social experiences.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach using an ex post facto research design to examine the relationship between Islamic Religious Education practices and leadership character among students in the boarding school program of MAN 2 Surakarta. The ex post facto design was selected because the study investigated naturally occurring phenomena without manipulating the independent variable. The study aimed to determine whether religious practice significantly predicts leadership character among boarding school students.

Data Collection

Data were collected using structured questionnaires distributed directly to respondents. The questionnaires consisted of two instruments: the Islamic Religious Education Practices Questionnaire and the Leadership Character Questionnaire. The religious practice instrument measured students' engagement in worship activities, Qur'anic recitation, religious discipline, and the implementation of Islamic values in daily life. Meanwhile, the leadership character instrument assessed responsibility, initiative, cooperation, communication, decision-making, and the ability to influence peers positively.

Respondents completed the questionnaires under the supervision of the researcher to ensure data completeness and accuracy. The collected data were subsequently coded and entered into IBM SPSS Statistics version 31 for statistical analysis.

Subjects and Research Locations

The subjects of this study consisted of students enrolled in the boarding school program at MAN 2 Surakarta during the 2025/2026 academic year. Because the population was

relatively small, a total sampling technique was employed, allowing all members of the population to participate in the study. Consequently, the sample comprised 31 students.

The study was conducted at MAN 2 Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia. The institution was selected because it implements a boarding school program that integrates formal secondary education with intensive Islamic religious activities, making it an appropriate context for examining the relationship between religious practice and leadership character.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in several stages. First, descriptive statistical analysis was performed to determine the levels of religious practice and leadership character among students. Second, prerequisite analyses, including normality and linearity tests, were conducted to ensure that the data met the assumptions required for parametric testing.

Finally, simple linear regression analysis was employed to examine the extent to which Islamic Religious Education practices predicted leadership character. Statistical significance was determined at the 0.05 level. All analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 31.

Research Instruments

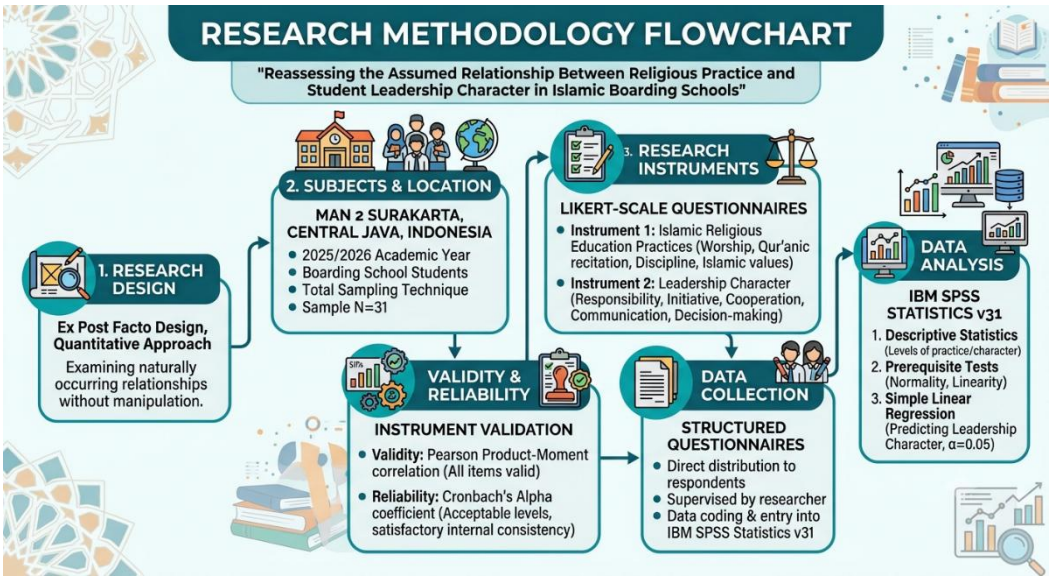
Two research instruments were utilized in this study. The first instrument measured Islamic Religious Education practices and was developed based on indicators of religious observance, including worship implementation, Qur'anic engagement, religious discipline, and the application of Islamic values in social interactions. The second instrument measured leadership character and consisted of indicators related to responsibility, initiative, communication, cooperation, decision-making, and leadership behavior.

Both instruments employed a Likert-scale format and were designed to capture students' perceptions and behaviors related to the variables under investigation.

Validity and Reliability

Instrument validity was examined using the Pearson Product-Moment correlation technique. The validity test results indicated that all questionnaire items met the required validity criteria and were therefore suitable for measuring the intended constructs.

Instrument reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The results demonstrated that both instruments achieved acceptable reliability levels, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. Consequently, the instruments were considered reliable and appropriate for data collection purposes.



Gambar 1 Method

RESEARCH RESULT

Religious Practice among Boarding School Students

Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to determine the level of Islamic Religious Education practices among students enrolled in the boarding school program at MAN 2 Surakarta. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Religious Practice

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Median	Mode
Religious Practice	14	40	33.23	34	37

The results indicate that students demonstrated a relatively high level of religious practice, as reflected by a mean score of 33.23 out of a maximum possible score of 40. The median score of 34 and mode of 37 further suggest that most students consistently engaged in religious activities and practices. The relatively high concentration of scores in the upper range indicates that religious observance was a prominent characteristic among students participating in the boarding school program.

This finding reflects the educational environment of the boarding school, where religious activities are systematically integrated into students' daily routines. Through structured programs such as congregational prayers, Qur'anic recitation, religious learning sessions, and other forms of religious habituation, students are continuously encouraged to practice Islamic values in their everyday lives. These results suggest that the boarding school system successfully facilitates the implementation of Islamic Religious Education beyond classroom instruction and into students' daily behavior.

Leadership Character among Students

Descriptive statistical analysis was also conducted to examine students' leadership character. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Leadership Character

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Median	Mode
Leadership Character	13	22	18.29	18	17

The findings indicate that students generally demonstrated positive leadership character. The mean score of 18.29, with a median of 18 and a mode of 17, suggests that most respondents possessed leadership-related qualities at a moderate to relatively high level. Indicators such as responsibility, cooperation, communication, initiative, and positive peer interaction were reflected in students' responses.

Although the scores were not uniformly high across all respondents, the descriptive results indicate that leadership character had developed among students within the boarding school environment. This finding suggests that students had acquired various leadership-related dispositions that may support their participation in educational, social, and organizational activities.

Regression Analysis

To examine the relationship between Islamic Religious Education practices and leadership character, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted. The results are presented in Tables 1–3.

Table 3. Model Summary

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.060[a]	.004	-.031	3.415

The model summary indicates a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.060, suggesting a very weak relationship between religious practice and leadership character. The coefficient of determination (R^2 = 0.004) indicates that Islamic Religious Education practices explained only 0.4% of the variance in students' leadership character, while the remaining 99.6% was attributable to other factors not examined in this study.

Table 4. ANOVA Results

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.213	1	1.213	.104	.749[b]
	Residual	338.207	29	11.662		
	Total	339.419	30			

The ANOVA results show an F-value of 0.104 with a significance value of 0.749. Since the significance value exceeded the 0.05 threshold, the regression model was not statistically significant. Therefore, Islamic Religious Education practices did not significantly predict students' leadership character.

Table 5. Coefficients

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	50.806	9.226		5.507	.000
	TOTAL_X1	.037	.114	.060	.322	.749

The regression coefficient for religious practice was positive (B = 0.037), indicating that an increase in religious practice was associated with a slight increase in leadership character. However, the effect was extremely small and statistically insignificant (β = 0.060, t = 0.322, p = 0.749). Accordingly, the study failed to reject the null hypothesis, indicating that Islamic Religious Education practices did not have a significant effect on leadership character among boarding school students at MAN 2 Surakarta.

DISCUSSION

Religious Practice in the Boarding School Context

The findings indicate that students in the boarding school program at MAN 2 Surakarta demonstrated a relatively high level of Islamic Religious Education practice. This result suggests that religious values have been successfully internalized through the educational processes implemented within the boarding school environment. The relatively high level of religious practice reflects students' active engagement in various religious activities,

including worship, Qur'anic recitation, religious learning, and the application of Islamic values in their daily interactions.

The findings are consistent with the distinctive characteristics of boarding school education, which integrates academic learning with continuous religious formation. Unlike conventional schools, boarding schools provide a structured environment where religious activities are embedded within students' daily routines. Consequently, students are exposed to repeated opportunities to practice religious teachings through both formal instruction and informal social interactions. Such conditions facilitate the internalization of religious values and encourage students to develop religious habits that become part of their everyday behavior.

This finding supports previous studies highlighting the effectiveness of boarding school environments in fostering religious character and moral development. Hadi and Prayogi (Hadi & Prayogi, 2025) argued that Islamic school culture plays a significant role in strengthening students' religious character through the reinforcement of shared values and institutional norms. Similarly, Harahap (Harahap, 2025) found that the Living Qur'an approach contributes to character formation by encouraging students to experience and apply Qur'anic teachings in daily life. Within boarding school settings, religious learning is therefore not limited to cognitive understanding but extends to practical implementation and behavioral habituation.

The present findings are also in line with Astuti and Winarti (Astuti & Winarti, 2026), who reported that moral education programs in Islamic boarding schools contribute positively to the development of adolescents' social character. Likewise, Kartiko et al. (Kartiko et al., 2026) emphasized that character formation in pesantren environments is strengthened through habituation, role modelling, and communal culture. These studies collectively suggest that the success of boarding school education lies not only in delivering religious knowledge but also in creating an environment that continuously reinforces religious values through practice and social interaction.

From the perspective of Islamic education, the findings support Sahin's (Sahin, 2018) argument that religious education should move beyond the transmission of doctrinal knowledge and encourage meaningful engagement with religious values. Similarly, Tan (Tan, 2014) emphasized that Islamic education becomes effective when students are able to internalize religious teachings and translate them into daily actions. Therefore, the relatively high level of religious practice observed in this study may be interpreted as evidence that the boarding school environment has successfully facilitated the integration of faith, knowledge, and practice among students.

Leadership Character among Students

The findings further indicate that students generally demonstrated positive leadership character. This result suggests that students possessed leadership-related dispositions such as responsibility, cooperation, communication, initiative, and the ability to interact constructively with peers. Although leadership character was not found to be significantly influenced by religious practice, the descriptive findings show that leadership qualities had developed among students within the boarding school environment.

One possible explanation is that boarding schools provide students with various opportunities to participate in collective activities that require collaboration, responsibility, and social interaction. Through daily communal life, organizational involvement, extracurricular activities, and peer relationships, students are encouraged to develop interpersonal competencies that are closely associated with leadership development. Consequently, leadership character may emerge through students' engagement in social experiences rather than through religious practice alone.

These findings are consistent with previous studies emphasizing the importance of leadership within Islamic educational institutions. Dian et al. (Dian et al., 2024) found that the leadership of kiai contributes significantly to student character formation through supervision, guidance, and role modelling. Similarly, Humaisi and Thoyib (Humaisi & Thoyib, 2025) reported that leadership practices within Islamic boarding schools influence students' moral development and educational engagement. Hamdan and Helmi (Hamdan & Helmi, 2026) further demonstrated that educational leadership plays a crucial role in cultivating responsibility, discipline, and commitment among students. Collectively, these studies indicate that leadership functions not only as an administrative process but also as an important educational mechanism for character development.

The findings can also be understood through contemporary leadership development theory. Northouse (Northouse, 2025) defines leadership as a process of influencing others toward the achievement of shared goals. Likewise, Day et al. (Day et al., 2021) argued that leadership competencies develop through participation, experience, and opportunities to exercise responsibility. From this perspective, leadership character is not merely an individual trait but a developmental outcome shaped by social interaction and experiential learning. Students who are actively involved in group activities, organizational responsibilities, and collaborative tasks are therefore more likely to develop leadership-related competencies.

The positive leadership character observed among students in this study indicates that the boarding school environment provides conditions that support leadership development. However, the findings also suggest that leadership character may be influenced by multiple educational and social factors beyond religious practice. This observation becomes particularly important for understanding the relationship between religious practice and leadership character, which is examined in greater detail in the following section.

Reassessing the Relationship Between Religious Practice and Leadership Character

The findings of this study indicate that Islamic Religious Education practices did not significantly predict students' leadership character. The regression analysis revealed a significance value of 0.749, which exceeded the established threshold of 0.05, indicating that religious practice was not a statistically significant predictor of leadership character among students in the boarding school program of MAN 2 Surakarta. Furthermore, the coefficient of determination (R^2 = 0.004) showed that religious practice explained only 0.4% of the variance in leadership character, suggesting that other factors played a substantially greater role in shaping students' leadership development.

At first glance, these findings may appear inconsistent with the dominant assumption within Islamic education literature that stronger religious commitment contributes positively to character formation. Numerous studies have reported that religious education and religious values support the development of moral behavior, discipline, responsibility, and positive social attitudes. Likewise, boarding school environments are frequently regarded as ideal settings for character formation because they provide continuous opportunities for worship, moral habituation, and value internalization. However, the present findings suggest that the relationship between religious practice and character development may not be uniform across all dimensions of character. While religious practice may contribute to moral and spiritual development, its direct contribution to leadership character appears to be more limited.

One possible explanation is that leadership character represents a distinct developmental construct that requires experiences beyond religious observance. According to Northouse (Northouse, 2025), leadership is fundamentally a process of influencing others toward the achievement of shared goals. Such influence requires interpersonal competence, communication skills, decision-making abilities, initiative, and social responsibility. These competencies are not acquired solely through religious rituals or personal devotion but are

developed through repeated interaction within social and organizational contexts. Similarly, Day et al. (Day et al., 2021) argued that leadership development emerges through experience, participation, and opportunities to exercise responsibility rather than through knowledge acquisition alone. Consequently, students may demonstrate high levels of religious practice while simultaneously possessing varying levels of leadership competence depending on their social experiences and opportunities for leadership engagement.

The findings can also be interpreted through the perspective of experiential leadership development. Kouzes and Posner (Kouzes & Posner, 2012) emphasized that leadership is learned through practice and experience. Individuals become effective leaders not simply because they embrace desirable values but because they are provided with opportunities to apply those values in real situations. Within boarding school environments, students may participate intensively in religious activities such as congregational prayers, Qur'anic recitation, and religious study sessions. Nevertheless, these activities do not automatically provide opportunities for decision-making, organizational management, conflict resolution, or collective problem-solving, all of which are central components of leadership development. Therefore, religious practice may serve as a moral foundation for leadership without functioning as a direct determinant of leadership character.

The present findings are also consistent with developmental perspectives on adolescent religiosity. Hardy et al. (Hardy et al., 2022) reported that religious commitment contributes positively to psychosocial well-being and prosocial behavior among adolescents, while King and Boyatzis (King & Boyatzis, 2015) highlighted the role of religious and spiritual development in identity formation. These studies suggest that religiosity contributes primarily to the development of personal values, meaning systems, and moral orientations. Leadership character, however, involves additional dimensions associated with social influence, organizational participation, and interpersonal effectiveness. Consequently, although religious practice may strengthen moral responsibility and ethical awareness, the development of leadership character may require complementary experiences that extend beyond religious activities alone.

Another important consideration relates to the characteristics of the boarding school environment itself. The relatively homogeneous religious culture observed within boarding school settings may reduce variability in students' religious practices. Because most students participate in similar religious routines and are exposed to comparable institutional expectations, religious practice may not function as a distinguishing factor explaining differences in leadership character. Instead, variations in leadership character may be more strongly associated with students' involvement in student organizations, extracurricular activities, peer-group interactions, leadership responsibilities, and opportunities to assume organizational roles. These factors were not examined in the present study but may represent important predictors of leadership development in future research.

Therefore, the findings of this study do not suggest that religious practice is unimportant. Rather, they indicate that religious practice alone may be insufficient to explain the development of leadership character among boarding school students. In this regard, religious practice should be viewed as a moral and ethical foundation that supports leadership development, while leadership competencies themselves may emerge through social participation, organizational engagement, experiential learning, and opportunities to exercise responsibility. This interpretation challenges the simplistic assumption that stronger religious practice automatically leads to stronger leadership character and highlights the need for a more comprehensive approach to leadership development within Islamic educational institutions.

Implications for Islamic Education and Boarding School Programs

The findings of this study provide several important implications for the development of Islamic education and boarding school programs. Although students demonstrated relatively strong religious practices and positive leadership character, the absence of a significant relationship between the two variables suggests that leadership development cannot be explained solely by the intensity of religious practice. This finding encourages a more nuanced understanding of character formation within Islamic educational settings and challenges the assumption that religious observance automatically translates into leadership competence.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings contribute to ongoing discussions regarding the relationship between religiosity and character development. Previous literature in Islamic education has frequently emphasized the positive contribution of religious values to students' moral formation and personal development (Sahin, 2018; Tan, 2014). Likewise, character education scholars argue that values and virtues constitute essential foundations for responsible behavior (Arthur et al., 2021; Berkowitz & Bier, 2007; Nucci, 2024). However, the present study indicates that leadership character may represent a distinct dimension of character development that requires additional developmental processes beyond religious practice. In this regard, religious practice should be understood primarily as a moral and ethical foundation that supports leadership development rather than as a direct determinant of leadership character itself.

The findings also reinforce perspectives from leadership development theory. Day et al. (Day et al., 2021) argued that leadership competencies emerge through experience, participation, and opportunities to exercise responsibility, while Northouse (Northouse, 2025) emphasized that leadership involves social influence processes that develop through interaction with others. Similarly, Kouzes and Posner (Kouzes & Posner, 2012) highlighted that leadership is learned through practice rather than acquired solely through the internalization of values. Consequently, students may possess strong religious commitments without necessarily demonstrating higher levels of leadership character if they are not provided with sufficient opportunities to engage in leadership-related experiences. This interpretation helps explain why religious practice alone accounted for only a very small proportion of the variance in leadership character observed in this study.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that boarding school programs should move beyond an exclusive focus on religious habituation and incorporate more structured leadership development initiatives. Religious activities such as congregational prayers, Qur'anic recitation, tahfidz, tahsin, and religious study circles remain essential because they cultivate moral awareness, discipline, and spiritual commitment. Nevertheless, these activities should be complemented by educational experiences that allow students to practice leadership in authentic contexts. Such experiences may include student council participation, student organization management, peer mentoring programs, collaborative projects, community service initiatives, and leadership-based extracurricular activities. Through these activities, students are provided with opportunities to make decisions, solve problems, coordinate group activities, and assume responsibility for collective outcomes.

The findings further suggest that boarding schools should adopt a more integrated approach to character education. Rather than treating religious education and leadership development as separate domains, educational programs should create intentional connections between religious values and leadership practice. Students should not only learn about responsibility, honesty, cooperation, and service from religious teachings but should also be given opportunities to translate those values into concrete leadership behaviors. Such integration may strengthen the relevance of religious learning while simultaneously enhancing students' leadership capacities.

Based on these findings, this study proposes a conceptual framework for leadership character development in Islamic boarding schools. The framework suggests that religious practice functions as a moral foundation that nurtures ethical awareness, discipline, and personal responsibility. However, leadership character develops more effectively when this moral foundation is combined with leadership experiences, organizational participation, and social engagement. Therefore, leadership character should be viewed as the product of an interaction between religious values and experiential learning opportunities rather than as a direct outcome of religious practice alone.

Limitations of the Study

Despite providing valuable insights into the relationship between Islamic Religious Education practices and leadership character, this study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study involved a relatively small sample consisting of 31 students from the boarding school program of MAN 2 Surakarta. Although total sampling was employed to represent the entire population within the program, the limited sample size may restrict the generalizability of the findings to broader educational contexts.

Second, the study focused exclusively on religious practice as the independent variable. The regression analysis indicated that religious practice explained only a very small proportion of the variance in leadership character ($R^2 = 0.004$), suggesting that other factors may play a more substantial role in leadership development. Variables such as organizational participation, leadership experience, peer interaction, self-efficacy, communication skills, extracurricular involvement, and school leadership climate were not examined in the present study and may provide additional explanatory power.

Third, the study relied on self-report questionnaires as the primary data collection instrument. Although validity and reliability tests indicated that the instruments were appropriate for research purposes, self-reported responses may be influenced by social desirability bias, particularly within a boarding school environment where religious behavior is strongly encouraged and socially valued.

Finally, this study employed a quantitative ex post facto design, which limited the ability to explore students' lived experiences and the complex processes through which leadership character develops. Future studies may benefit from mixed-method or qualitative approaches that investigate how religious values, social interactions, organizational participation, and leadership experiences interact in shaping students' leadership character.

Therefore, future research is encouraged to involve larger and more diverse samples, incorporate additional explanatory variables, and employ more comprehensive methodological approaches to obtain a deeper understanding of leadership character development within Islamic educational institutions.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study aimed to examine the relationship between Islamic Religious Education practices and leadership character among students enrolled in the boarding school program at MAN 2 Surakarta. The findings revealed that students demonstrated relatively high levels of religious practice, as reflected in their active engagement in worship activities, Qur'anic learning, and the implementation of Islamic values in daily life. The results also indicated that students generally possessed positive leadership character, particularly in terms of responsibility, cooperation, communication, and initiative. However, the regression analysis showed that Islamic Religious Education practices did not significantly predict leadership character ($\beta = 0.060$, $p = 0.749$), with religious practice explaining only 0.4% of the variance

in leadership character (R^2 = 0.004). These findings suggest that while religious practice contributes to students' moral and spiritual development, it does not necessarily function as a direct determinant of leadership character.

This study provides several important contributions to the field of Islamic education and character development. First, it extends existing discussions on the relationship between religiosity and character formation by demonstrating that different dimensions of character may be influenced by different developmental processes. Second, the study offers empirical evidence from a boarding school context, an educational setting that has often been assumed to promote both religious commitment and leadership development simultaneously. Third, the findings challenge the widely accepted assumption that stronger religious practice automatically leads to stronger leadership character. Instead, the study supports leadership development perspectives that emphasize the importance of experiential learning, organizational participation, social interaction, and opportunities to exercise responsibility. Based on these findings, this study proposes a conceptual understanding in which religious practice serves as a moral foundation, while leadership character develops through the interaction between religious values and leadership experiences.

Several recommendations can be proposed for future research. First, future studies should involve larger and more diverse samples from different Islamic educational institutions to improve the generalizability of findings. Second, additional variables such as organizational participation, leadership experience, peer interaction, self-efficacy, school climate, and extracurricular involvement should be examined to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of leadership development. Third, longitudinal, mixed-method, or qualitative approaches are recommended to explore more deeply how religious values and educational experiences interact in shaping leadership character over time. Such investigations may contribute to the development of more effective character education models that integrate spiritual formation with experiential leadership development within Islamic educational contexts.

Pernyataan Etika & Peran Penulis (CRediT Statement)
Penulis Satu (Mar'atus Sholihah): Konseptualisasi, Metodologi, Penulisan – draf asli.
Penulis Dua (Isfihani): Kurasi data, Validasi.
Penulis Dua (Iffah Mukhlisah): Kurasi data, Validasi.

Kebijakan Data
Data yang mendukung temuan penelitian ini tersedia dari penulis korespondensi berdasarkan permintaan yang wajar.

Persetujuan Etik
Penelitian ini telah disetujui oleh Komite Etik IIM Surakarta dan mematuhi standar etika penelitian pada manusia.

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