



THE STRATEGY OF ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN THE ERA OF GLOBAL COMPETITION: A CASE STUDY AT MTsS JABAL NUR

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Abstrak

Pendidikan merupakan sarana utama bagi suatu bangsa untuk membangun sumber daya manusia yang mampu bersaing di dunia yang berubah dengan cepat, dan pesantren memikul tugas khas untuk memadukan prestasi akademik dengan pembentukan karakter Islami. Seiring dengan meningkatnya tuntutan persaingan global, kepemimpinan pimpinan pesantren menjadi faktor penentu bagi kemampuan madrasah di bawah naungannya untuk mempertahankan dan meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan yang diselenggarakan. Penelitian ini mengkaji strategi yang diterapkan oleh pimpinan Pesantren Jabal Nur dalam meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan di MTsS Jabal Nur, sebuah madrasah tsanawiyah swasta yang berlokasi di dalam lingkungan pesantren tersebut di Desa Paloh Lada, Kecamatan Dewantara, Kabupaten Aceh Utara. Penelitian ini juga mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor pendukung dan penghambat strategi tersebut serta menganalisis dampaknya terhadap kualitas pendidikan. Pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain deskriptif digunakan dalam penelitian ini. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan kepala madrasah serta wakil kepala madrasah bidang kurikulum dan kesiswaan, dan dokumentasi catatan institusi; data kemudian dianalisis melalui tahapan reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan, dengan kredibilitas yang diperkuat melalui triangulasi sumber dan teknik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa strategi kepemimpinan tersebut diwujudkan melalui perencanaan pendidikan yang sistematis, pengembangan kompetensi guru secara berkelanjutan, penguatan budaya mutu dan karakter siswa, peningkatan sarana dan prasarana, serta integrasi teknologi ke dalam proses pembelajaran. Strategi ini didukung oleh komitmen pimpinan, dukungan guru dan staf, budaya religius pesantren yang kuat, keterlibatan orang tua dan masyarakat sekitar, serta antusiasme belajar siswa; di sisi lain, strategi ini juga menghadapi tantangan berupa keterbatasan fasilitas dan pendanaan, pesatnya perubahan teknologi, kesenjangan kemampuan akademik siswa, serta tekanan globalisasi yang lebih luas. Strategi tersebut telah menghasilkan peningkatan yang terukur dalam hal kedisiplinan siswa, kompetensi guru, pembentukan karakter Islami, kepercayaan masyarakat terhadap madrasah, serta prestasi akademik maupun non-akademik, yang menunjukkan bahwa strategi kepemimpinan tetap menjadi instrumen kunci bagi sekolah berbasis pesantren untuk meningkatkan kualitas pendidikannya tanpa kehilangan identitas religiusnya.

Kata Kunci: Strategi Kepemimpinan, Pesantren, Kualitas Pendidikan, Persaingan Global.

Abstract

Education is the principal instrument through which a nation builds human resources capable of competing in a rapidly changing world, and Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) carry the distinctive task of reconciling academic achievement with the formation of Islamic character. As the demands of global competition intensify, the leadership exercised by the head of a pesantren becomes the decisive factor in whether a madrasah under its supervision can sustain and improve the quality of the education it provides. This study examines the strategy adopted by the leadership of Pesantren Jabal Nur in improving the quality of education at MTsS Jabal Nur, a private Islamic junior secondary school located within the pesantren in Paloh Lada Village, Dewantara Sub-district, North Aceh Regency. The study further identifies the factors that support and hinder the strategy and analyzes its impact on educational quality. A qualitative approach with a descriptive design was employed. Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews with the head of madrasah and the vice-heads for curriculum and student affairs, and documentation of institutional records, and were analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, with credibility strengthened through source and technique triangulation. The findings show that the leadership's strategy is realized through systematic educational planning, sustained development of teacher competence, the strengthening of a quality culture and student character, the improvement of facilities and infrastructure, and the integration of technology into the learning process. The strategy is sustained by the leadership's commitment, the support of teachers and staff, the pesantren's strong religious culture, the involvement of parents and the surrounding community, and students' enthusiasm for learning, while it continues to contend with limited facilities and funding, the rapid pace of technological change, disparities in students' academic

ability, and the wider pressures of globalization. The strategy has produced measurable gains in student discipline, teacher competence, the formation of Islamic character, public trust in the madrasah, and both academic and non-academic achievement, indicating that leadership strategy remains the pivotal instrument through which a pesantren-based school can improve the quality of its education without losing its religious identity.

Keyword: Leadership Strategy, Islamic Boarding School, Educational Quality, Global Competition

INTRODUCTION

Education is the principal instrument through which human resources are shaped into a competitive and value-driven citizenry. It is through education that individuals acquire not only knowledge but also the attitudes, values, and skills required to participate in social, national, and civic life, while also developing the character and personal potential needed to face a rapidly changing environment. Education is therefore expected to prepare a generation capable of confronting global change, and every educational institution is consequently required to continuously improve the quality of the education it offers so that its graduates remain excellent, competitive, and relevant.

The era of global competition has brought rapid and complex change to education: rising expectations of graduate competence, accelerating developments in science and technology, and management systems that demand professionalism and accountability. An educational institution can no longer content itself with routine instruction; it must be managed effectively, efficiently, and with a clear orientation toward quality, and that quality is substantially determined by the strength and vision of its leadership (Apriyanti & Subiyantoro, 2025).

Pesantren, as institutions of Islamic education, occupy a distinctive position in this landscape. They are known for cultivating character, religious values, discipline, and moral formation among students, yet they are equally required to adapt to the demands of modern education without abandoning the Islamic values that define their identity (Nasution, 2024). The quality of education within a pesantren is shaped, above all, by the leadership of the pesantren itself: the leader functions as the principal decision-maker, the architect of policy, and the figure who

mobilizes teachers, staff, and students toward the institution's educational goals (Sofyan et al., 2024). The strategy that a pesantren leader designs and implements, therefore, becomes the central mechanism through which educational quality is improved.

Leadership strategy in education encompasses the planning, implementation, and continuous evaluation of educational programs. The success of any effort to improve educational quality depends heavily on a leader's capacity to design and apply strategies suited to an institution's conditions, needs, and potential, spanning curriculum development, the professional growth of teachers, the strengthening of institutional culture, and the effective management of facilities and infrastructure (Nasution, 2024). MTsS Jabal Nur, a private Islamic junior secondary school situated within Pesantren Jabal Nur in Paloh Lada Village, Dewantara Sub-district, North Aceh Regency, faces this same pressure of global competition. As a private madrasah, it must continually improve the quality of its education to retain public trust and remain competitive with other institutions, since that trust is strongly influenced by the quality of service and the caliber of graduates a school produces (Jamilah, 2024). Community expectations have likewise grown more demanding: graduates are now expected to combine academic excellence with Islamic character, life skills, and readiness to face global challenges, which requires pesantren leadership to balance the reinforcement of religious values with the mastery of knowledge and technology, so that Islamic education remains anchored in religious values while still answering the demands of the present era (Rokhimah, 2023).

Within Islamic thought, leadership is regarded as a trust (amanah) to be discharged

with full responsibility, a principle reflected in QS. An-Nisa (4:58), which commands that trusts be delivered to those entitled to them and that judgment among people be rendered with justice, and reinforced by the Prophet's saying that "every one of you is a shepherd, and every shepherd is responsible for his flock" (Bukhari and Muslim). Read together with QS. Al-Hasyr (59:18), which enjoins believers to consider what they have prepared for tomorrow, these sources frame strategic planning in education as an act of both managerial competence and religious accountability. It is against this theoretical and empirical background that the present study was undertaken, seeking to describe the strategy employed by the leadership of Pesantren Jabal Nur in improving the quality of education at MTsS Jabal Nur, to identify the factors that support and hinder that strategy, and to analyze the impact the strategy has produced on the quality of education, so that the findings may serve as a reference for pesantren leaders and madrasah administrators seeking to design leadership strategies that are both effective and adaptive to global challenges.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive design, chosen because the objective was to obtain an in-depth understanding of the strategy applied by the leadership of Pesantren Jabal Nur in improving the quality of education at MTsS Jabal Nur amid the pressures of global competition. Qualitative inquiry emphasizes a deep understanding of social and educational phenomena within their natural setting, with the researcher functioning as the principal instrument, which made it possible to obtain a comprehensive picture of pesantren leadership practice, educational policy, and the realistic implementation of quality-improvement strategies (Rasidi, 2022). The descriptive character of the study directed attention to the facts, processes, and phenomena occurring in the field, including how the pesantren leadership designed, implemented, and evaluated its strategy, in

line with Moleong's (2021) view that qualitative descriptive research seeks to understand social phenomena from the perspective of the research subjects themselves rather than through numerical measurement alone.

The research was conducted at Pesantren Jabal Nur, specifically at MTsS Jabal Nur, between May and July 2026. The site was selected for its strategic relevance in producing a generation adaptive to global competition, for the central role the pesantren leadership plays in the planning and supervision of education there, and for its accessibility to observation, interviews, and documentation. The principal subjects of the study were the Head of MTsS Jabal Nur, the Vice-Head for Curriculum Affairs, and the Vice-Head for Student Affairs, selected through purposive sampling as the informants considered most knowledgeable about the pesantren's leadership strategy (Sugiyono, 2020). Data were collected through three techniques: non-participant observation of leadership and teaching-learning activities; semi-structured interviews, recorded with the informants' consent and transcribed for analysis (Moleong, 2021); and documentation of the pesantren's vision and mission, work programs, organizational structure, and archival records of educational activities. The data obtained consisted primarily of qualitative material, comprising primary data from observation and interviews and secondary data drawn from institutional documents and relevant literature.

1. The credibility of the data was established through source and technique triangulation, cross-checking information obtained from the head of madrasah, the vice-heads, and institutional documents, supplemented by member checking in which interview results and initial interpretations were returned to informants for verification. Data analysis followed the interactive qualitative model of Miles,

Huberman, and Saldaña (2020), consisting of data reduction, in which material from observation, interviews, and documentation was simplified and focused on information relevant to the research questions; data display, in which the reduced data were organized narratively and in tabular form; and conclusion drawing and verification, in which preliminary conclusions were tested against the triangulated data before being finalized.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESEARCH RESULTS

General Profile of MTsS Jabal Nur

Pesantren Jabal Nur was founded in 1991 by community leaders of Gampong Paloh Lada together with Tgk. H. Muhammad Amin Mahmud (Abu Tumin), the leader of Dayah Al-Madinatuddiniyah Babussalam in Blangbladeh, Bireuen Regency, as a branch institution located adjacent to the PT Arun housing complex in Krueng Geukueh. In 2003, the pesantren's teaching and learning program shifted from a purely traditional curriculum to an integrated system combining traditional and modern instruction, a change that received strong support from educators, entrepreneurs, and the wider community; the first cohort of students began instruction on 21 July 2003, and the pesantren was formally inaugurated on 11 September 2003. MTsS Jabal Nur, the madrasah tsanawiyah operating under the pesantren, is guided by the vision of forming a generation of Muslims with noble character and high intellectual, spiritual, and emotional intelligence, pursued through three missions: optimizing the study of classical Islamic texts (kitab kuning) and their application in daily life; instilling knowledge alongside noble character through effective supervision; and implementing a curriculum responsive to students' needs and community expectations. The madrasah is led by a head of madrasah who operates under the guidance

of the pesantren leadership and is assisted by vice-heads, teachers, and administrative staff, all of whom are expected to serve not only as instructors but as role models who support students' academic and character development.

The Leadership Strategy for Improving Educational Quality

Observation, interviews, and documentation converged on five interrelated components through which the pesantren leadership pursues the improvement of educational quality at MTsS Jabal Nur, summarized in Table 1 and discussed in turn below.

Table 1. Components of the Pesantren Leadership Strategy

Strategic Component	mentation	Involved
Systematic educational planning	Periodic coordination meetings to design the academic calendar, semester programs, and teaching schedules	Pesantren leadership, head of madrasah, vice-heads, teachers
Teacher competence development	Participation in MGMP subject-teacher forums, training, workshops, and academic supervision	Head of madrasah, Vice-Head for Curriculum, teachers
Character formation and discipline	Daily religious habituation (Qur'an recitation, congregational prayer), enforcement of madrasah regulations	Vice-Head for Student Affairs, teachers, homeroom teachers
Technology utilization	Use of laptops, projectors, and digital media in instruction and administration	Teachers, Head of madrasah, Vice-Head for Curriculum

Strategic Component	Implementation	Involved
Facilities and infrastructure development	Phased improvement of learning facilities within available funding	Pesantren leadership, head of madrasah

Source: Field observation, interviews, and institutional documentation, 2026.

a. Systematic Educational Planning

The Head of MTsS Jabal Nur, Mukhlisuddin, S.Pd.I., explained in an interview conducted on Monday, 18 May 2026, that every educational program at the madrasah begins with careful planning developed through coordination meetings involving the pesantren leadership, the vice-heads, and the teaching staff, so that each program has a clear purpose and answers both students' needs and the madrasah's vision and mission. He noted that planning is preceded by an analysis of existing conditions and needs, spanning instruction, teacher quality, and student character, with input from teachers and other stakeholders taken into account before a program is finalized, and with evaluation of prior programs forming a continuous part of the planning cycle. This account was corroborated by the Vice-Head for Curriculum, Herlina, S.Pd., who described the routine preparation, at the start of every semester, of the semester program, academic calendar, teaching schedule, and lesson materials, together with coordination among subject teachers to ensure alignment with the prevailing curriculum. Observation confirmed that these planning instruments were indeed produced and used as operational guidance, indicating that planning functions as the foundational strategy from which the madrasah's other quality-improvement efforts proceed.

b. Teacher Competence Development

Teachers at MTsS Jabal Nur were observed to participate actively in subject-teacher forums (MGMP), training sessions, and periodic instructional supervision

conducted by the head of madrasah. Mukhlisuddin explained that teacher competence is treated as a priority because teachers not only deliver subject matter but also guide and shape students' character, and that the madrasah therefore facilitates teachers' participation in MGMP activities, training, workshops, and seminars organized both internally and by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, complemented by internal coordination and supervision to identify and resolve instructional difficulties. Herlina added that these activities allow teachers to exchange experience with peers from other madrasahs and to update their pedagogical methods, while ongoing coordination between the curriculum office and teachers tracks progress and obstacles as they arise. The consistency of these accounts, together with direct observation of MGMP participation and supervision practice, indicates that teacher development is pursued through a combination of external professional engagement and internal mentoring, and that stronger teacher competence translates directly into more effective classroom instruction.

c. Character Formation and Student Discipline

Students were observed engaging in daily religious routines, including Qur'an recitation before lessons begin, congregational prayer, and brief religious talks (kultum), and in general compliance with madrasah regulations on punctuality and dress. The Vice-Head for Student Affairs, Mahdalena, S.Pd., explained in an interview on 18 May 2026 that character formation is a central concern at the madrasah because education is expected to shape attitude and conduct, not only academic ability, and that this is pursued through the daily habituation of worship, discipline in following madrasah rules, and the cultivation of a sense of responsibility, sustained through cooperation among the madrasah, teachers, and the wider school community. Students who struggle to meet expected standards of discipline receive

graduated, educational rather than purely punitive guidance, so that they come to understand the value of discipline rather than merely fear its enforcement. Mukhlisuddin concurred that educational success is measured not only by academic achievement but also by students' character and conduct, and that character formation is pursued jointly by the head of madrasah, teachers, homeroom teachers, and parents. Taken together, these findings indicate that character formation at MTsS Jabal Nur proceeds through consistent daily habituation, teacher exemplification, and enforcement of madrasah regulations, and has visibly shaped a school culture supportive of disciplined and responsible conduct.

d. Utilization of Educational Technology

Observation showed that a number of teachers have begun to use laptops, projectors, and digital instructional media in the classroom. Mukhlisuddin described the use of technology as an unavoidable necessity in the present era of global competition, one that helps the madrasah improve the quality of instruction and supports teachers in carrying out their duties more effectively, while stressing that its adoption must remain proportionate to teachers' and students' capacities and that its benefits extend to administrative tasks such as preparing lesson materials and processing data. Herlina added that technology helps teachers draw on a wider range of learning resources and present material in a more interactive way, thereby improving both students' comprehension and the efficiency of teachers' administrative work. Together, these findings suggest that the integration of technology at MTsS Jabal Nur functions on two levels, enriching classroom instruction while easing the administrative burden on teachers, and contributes to preparing the madrasah for the demands of a technologically driven, globally competitive educational environment.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

As Mukhlisuddin summarized, “the success of our educational programs cannot be separated from the cooperation of everyone involved; the support of teachers, staff, parents, the community, and the students' own enthusiasm for learning are the main factors that have helped us improve the quality of education at MTsS Jabal Nur.” The factors that support and hinder the leadership's strategy, as identified through the study, are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors of the Leadership Strategy

Supporting Factors	Inhibiting Factors
Strong commitment of the pesantren leadership to improving educational quality	Limited facilities and infrastructure
Active support from teachers and education staff	Limited funding for institutional development
A strong pesantren culture reinforcing discipline and Islamic values	The rapid pace of technological change
Support from parents (wali santri) and the surrounding community	Disparities in students' academic ability
Students' enthusiasm and motivation for learning	The broader pressures and influence of globalization on youth character

Source: Field observation, interviews, and institutional documentation, 2026.

Mahdalena observed that the success of educational programs depends not on the madrasah alone but on cooperation with parents and the community, since parental involvement strengthens the madrasah's

efforts to guide students both academically and in character, and that the pesantren's religious culture of discipline and positive habituation further supports the formation of well-rounded students. Mukhlisuddin, for his part, identified the principal challenge as reconciling the rapid advance of technology with the preservation of the Islamic values that define the madrasah's character, noting that while technology offers substantial benefits, it also demands vigilant supervision, character reinforcement, and cooperation between teachers and parents to ensure that students use it wisely, alongside the more familiar constraints of limited facilities and funding that require continued, incremental improvement. Neither leader treated these obstacles as insurmountable; rather, both described them as challenges to be addressed through sustained cooperation, the optimal use of available resources, and continued efforts to strengthen student character.

Impact of the Strategy on Educational Quality

The strategy implemented by the pesantren leadership was found to have produced measurable, positive change across five dimensions of educational quality at MTsS Jabal Nur. First, student discipline has improved, reflected in greater punctuality and more consistent compliance with madrasah and pesantren regulations governing academic and religious activities. Second, teacher competence has strengthened, as sustained training and mentoring have improved teachers' classroom management, instructional delivery, and evaluation practice. Third, students have visibly developed Islamic character, expressed through more consistent politeness, responsibility, honesty, respect for teachers and peers, and social concern, cultivated through daily religious habituation such as congregational prayer and Qur'an recitation. Fourth, public trust in the madrasah has grown, evidenced by stronger community support for its activities and rising parental interest in enrolling their children, which in turn provides the madrasah with a foundation

for continued development. Fifth, both academic and non-academic achievement have increased, with students showing improved learning outcomes alongside growing participation and accomplishment in extracurricular and religious activities. As Mukhlisuddin summarized, "alhamdulillah, the programs we have implemented have shown good results – student discipline continues to rise, teacher competence continues to develop, students' Islamic character is increasingly visible, and community trust in the madrasah is likewise growing." Taken together, these outcomes indicate that the leadership's strategy has functioned effectively across academic, character, and institutional dimensions, strengthening the madrasah's overall competitiveness in the era of global competition.

DISCUSSION

The strategy applied by the leadership of MTsS Jabal Nur closely follows the core functions of educational management, namely planning, implementation, supervision, and evaluation, undertaken systematically and with the involvement of the madrasah's full range of stakeholders. This finding is consistent with Tiwa's (2022) view that strategic management is fundamentally a process of planning and resource management directed toward the effective and efficient attainment of educational goals, and with Usman's (2022) and Mulyasa's (2021) accounts of strategy as a systematically designed sequence of decisions and actions, realized here through careful planning, sustained teacher development, cultural and character reinforcement, and the optimal management of facilities and infrastructure. The active involvement of teachers and staff in both the planning and the implementation of these programs further suggests that the leadership exercised at MTsS Jabal Nur is participatory in character, consistent with Mulyasa's (2021) observation that effective educational leadership rests on a leader's capacity to

influence, mobilize, and empower the whole school community.

The supporting and inhibiting factors identified in this study likewise correspond to the wider literature on educational institutional performance. Usman (2022) argues that institutional success depends on effective leadership, the cooperation of the entire school community, and adequate resource management, a pattern mirrored in the commitment, cooperation, and cultural strength observed at MTsS Jabal Nur; while Mulyasa (2021) identifies limited facilities, infrastructure, and resources as a common constraint on quality improvement, precisely the constraint that the madrasah's leadership continues to manage through incremental resource optimization and sustained cooperation rather than allowing it to erode institutional commitment.

The positive outcomes observed – improved discipline, stronger teacher competence, the formation of Islamic character, growing public trust, and rising achievement are consistent with Mulyasa's (2021) contention that educational quality is best evidenced by an institution's capacity to manage its components so as to produce both effective learning processes and high-quality graduates, and with Usman's (2022) observation that a quality institution is one whose services meet both students' needs and community expectations, reflected here in the rising confidence parents and the surrounding community have placed in MTsS Jabal Nur. These findings also resonate with the Islamic conception of leadership as *amanah* (trust) articulated in QS. An-Nisa (4:58), which enjoins that trusts be discharged to those entitled to them and that judgment be rendered with justice; with QS. Ar-Ra'd (13:11), which teaches that Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves, underscoring that the improvement observed at MTsS Jabal Nur has been the product of deliberate and sustained effort rather than incidental change; and with QS. Al-Mujadilah (58:11), which affirms the elevated standing

of those endowed with knowledge, together with the Prophet's teachings that every leader is accountable for those under his charge and that the best among people are those who bring the greatest benefit to others. Read together, these sources indicate that the leadership strategy at MTsS Jabal Nur is grounded not only in sound principles of educational management but also in Islamic values of accountability, justice, effort, and service, values that together explain why the strategy has proven effective in improving educational quality while preserving the madrasah's religious identity.

CONCLUSION

The leadership of Pesantren Jabal Nur improves the quality of education at MTsS Jabal Nur through a coherent strategy comprising systematic educational planning, sustained development of teacher competence, the strengthening of character and discipline among students, the improvement of facilities and infrastructure, and the integration of technology into teaching and administration, all carried out through the participatory involvement of the pesantren leadership, the head of madrasah, the vice-heads, and the teaching staff. The strategy is sustained by the leadership's own commitment, the active support of teachers and staff, the pesantren's strong religious culture, the involvement of parents and the surrounding community, and students' enthusiasm for learning, even as it continues to contend with limited facilities and funding, the rapid pace of technological change, disparities in students' academic ability, and the wider pressures of globalization – constraints that the madrasah has managed to keep from undermining its progress through sustained cooperation among all stakeholders. The strategy has, in turn, produced measurable improvement in student discipline, teacher competence, the formation of Islamic character, public trust in the institution, and both academic and non-academic achievement, confirming that leadership remains the pivotal factor in determining whether a pesantren-based school can improve its educational quality without compromising its religious identity. On this basis, the pesantren leadership is encouraged to sustain and further innovate upon its existing strategies and

to broaden its partnerships in support of facility development; teachers and staff are encouraged to continue strengthening their professional, pedagogical, social, and personal competence; students are encouraged to sustain their discipline and enthusiasm for learning; parents and the community are encouraged to continue extending their support and cooperation; and future researchers are encouraged to examine pesantren leadership and educational quality improvement in other institutional settings so as to build a more comprehensive body of evidence on this subject..

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