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# Centralized Leadership and the Pedagogical Quality of Student Teachers in Pesantren: A Systematic Literature Review

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## Abstract

Pesantren are value-based Islamic educational institutions in which leadership is centralized in the figure of the kiai, shaping organizational culture, teaching practices, and patterns of compliance. Student teachers play dual roles as learners and educators through service-based engagement, yet their pedagogical practices are formed through informal experience rather than formal professional preparation. Although studies have examined leadership and the quality of education, research linking centralized leadership with service-based pedagogical practices among student teachers remains limited. This study aims to synthesize existing evidence concerning this relationship through a systematic literature review. Publications between 2016-2025 were retrieved from Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar using Publish or Perish as a search support tool. 206 articles were identified based on relevance to the research focus, and fifteen peer-reviewed studies meeting the eligibility criteria were included for analysis. The studies were examined using VOSviewer to support keyword co-occurrence visualization and thematic analysis to synthesize concepts and relationships. The findings indicated that centralized leadership tends to limit instructional flexibility and teacher autonomy within educational settings. Teaching practices among student teachers are primarily shaped through experiential continuity and institutional traditions rather than formal pedagogical training. Collectively, the reviewed studies suggest that pedagogical quality in pesantren emerges from the interaction between centralized leadership structures and value-based institutional culture. This review contributes by integrating leadership structure, pedagogical practice, and service-based values into a contextual understanding of student teachers' development in pesantren and highlights the importance of balancing organizational authority with opportunities for pedagogical reflection and instructional development.

KEYWORDS

centralized leadership; pedagogical quality; student teachers; pesantren; value-based education.

## Introduction

Islamic educational institutions in the form of pesantren possess characteristics that distinguish them from formal educational institutions in general, particularly regarding social interaction and organizational management, which occur continuously throughout the day (Ridwan, 2020). The integration of learning, character development, and daily activities renders pesantren a holistic educational environment. Within this context, leadership assumes a central role, as it is responsible not only for managing administrative functions but also for shaping the values, norms, and daily practices of students. Consequently, leadership patterns in pesantren constitute a critical factor in determining the direction and quality of the overall educational process (Alsya'bani et al., 2024; Mas'udi, 2024).

One of the characteristics often found in pesantren is centralized leadership, where decision-making authority is concentrated in the figure of the kiai or main leader. This

model of leadership is generally based on moral legitimacy, scholarship, and traditions that have become entrenched in the pesantren system (Siregar et al., 2023). In practice, centralized leadership allows for the creation of organizational stability and value consistency, but on the other hand, it also has the potential to limit individual participation and autonomy. This structure can foster a disciplined and unified learning environment, yet may also restrict students' ability to express ideas or pursue independent study (Zainuddin et al., 2026). Thus, it is important to understand how this leadership structure influences the learning dynamics within the pesantren (Karakose et al., 2024; Mincu, 2022) .

In pesantren, students not only play the role of learners but also teachers, especially in the context of service (khidmah), which is part of the character-building process. Students are taught to perform both pedagogical functions and social roles that are inherent in the value-based education system. This dual role places them in a unique position because teaching activities are often carried out without adequate formal training, which can lead to challenges in effectively delivering educational content and managing classroom dynamics. Therefore, the pedagogical quality of student teachers becomes an important aspect that needs to be studied more deeply within the context of the existing leadership structure (Arifin, 2022; Subarno, 2024).

On the other hand, the value of devotion, rooted in the concept of sincerity, serves as the primary foundation for carrying out various activities at pesantren. This value encourages students to carry out their duties with full responsibility without expecting material rewards (Abdurrahman et al., 2025). However, within an organizational context, the value of devotion can also foster a high degree of compliance with authority, thereby potentially influencing how individuals perform their professional roles, including in teaching activities. Hence, the relationship between the value of devotion and pedagogical practice requires more critical analysis and should not be viewed solely as a positive factor (Kusumaningrum et al., 2025)Rahman, 2025(Saada & Magadiah, 2021).

Previous researches has shown that leadership styles have a significant influence on the quality of learning and pedagogical practices within educational institutions. Overly centralized leadership tends to stifle teachers' initiative and creativity, which ultimately affects the quality of the teaching and learning process. In the context of pesantren, high structural pressure can reinforce patterns of compliance rather than critical reflection (Karakose et al., 2024; Mincu, 2022).

Although various studies have examined leadership and educational quality, three important gaps remain. First, a theoretical gap exists because previous studies predominantly examine leadership through instructional, transformational, or organizational perspectives without integrating centralized leadership, service-based values, and pedagogical quality into a single analytical framework, particularly within the pesantren context (Alawiyah et al., 2024). Second, an empirical gap exists because most studies investigate principals, teachers, or organizational leadership, whereas the pedagogical role of student teachers who simultaneously function as learners and educators has received limited scholarly attention (Khamid, 2024; Subarno, 2024). This study addresses this gap by specifically examining student teachers as a distinct pedagogical group within pesantren, rather than focusing solely on formally appointed teachers or school leaders. Third, a contextual gap exists because evidence regarding centralized leadership has largely been generated from formal school settings, while the distinctive governance structure of pesantren, characterized by moral authority, institutional legitimacy, and service-based educational traditions, remains insufficiently synthesized. Furthermore, service-based values are commonly discussed as normative characteristics of pesantren rather than critically examined as factors that may constrain pedagogical practice (Ariyanti, 2026).

Accordingly, this systematic literature review aims to synthesize existing evidence regarding the relationship between centralized leadership, service-based values, and the pedagogical quality of student teachers in pesantren (Glowach, 2025). Unlike previous studies that primarily discuss pesantren leadership, teacher autonomy, or pedagogical practices as separate issues, this review integrates these perspectives to explain how leadership structures and institutional values collectively shape pedagogical practice. To achieve this objective, the review addresses the following research questions: (1) How does centralized leadership shape the pedagogical practice of student teachers in pesantren? (2) How do service-based institutional values influence pedagogical quality under centralized leadership? and (3) What recurring patterns emerge from the existing literature regarding the interaction between leadership structure, institutional values, and pedagogical quality in pesantren? The findings are expected to contribute to a more comprehensive conceptual understanding of leadership and pedagogy in Islamic boarding schools while providing directions for future empirical research.

## Methods

This study adopted a systematic literature review (SLR) to examine the relationship between centralized leadership, pedagogical practices, and value-based engagement in educational settings. The approach was selected to provide a structured and transparent synthesis of existing research findings rather than relying on a single empirical context. The review followed the standalone systematic literature review procedure proposed by Okoli (2015), which consists of problem formulation, systematic literature search, study selection based on predefined eligibility criteria, data extraction, thematic synthesis, and interpretation of the findings. This approach was selected because it provides a rigorous yet flexible framework for synthesizing evidence across diverse educational contexts while maintaining methodological transparency and analytical consistency. A systematic review allows the identification of patterns across studies while maintaining methodological rigor in article selection and analysis (Okoli, 2015).

The data were collected from three academic databases, namely Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. These databases were selected to ensure coverage of high-quality international publications as well as context-specific studies relevant to pesantren. Google Scholar records were retrieved using Publish or Perish software as a search support tool on 3 June 2026, whereas Scopus and Web of Science were accessed directly through their respective database interfaces on 4 June 2026. Only peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2016 and 2025 were included in the search. The publication period was selected to capture recent developments in educational leadership and pedagogical research while ensuring that all included studies were fully published and accessible at the time of the review.

The search strategy was developed based on the main concepts of the study, namely leadership structure, pedagogical practice, and value-based context. Keywords were combined using Boolean operators to maintain focus and relevance. The principal search strings included "centralized leadership" AND "teaching practice" AND "student teacher" AND "Islamic boarding school", "authoritarian leadership" AND "pedagogical practice" AND "teacher autonomy" AND "pesantren", and "leadership" AND "organizational values" AND "teaching practice". This approach ensured that the retrieved articles were directly related to the core variables of the study

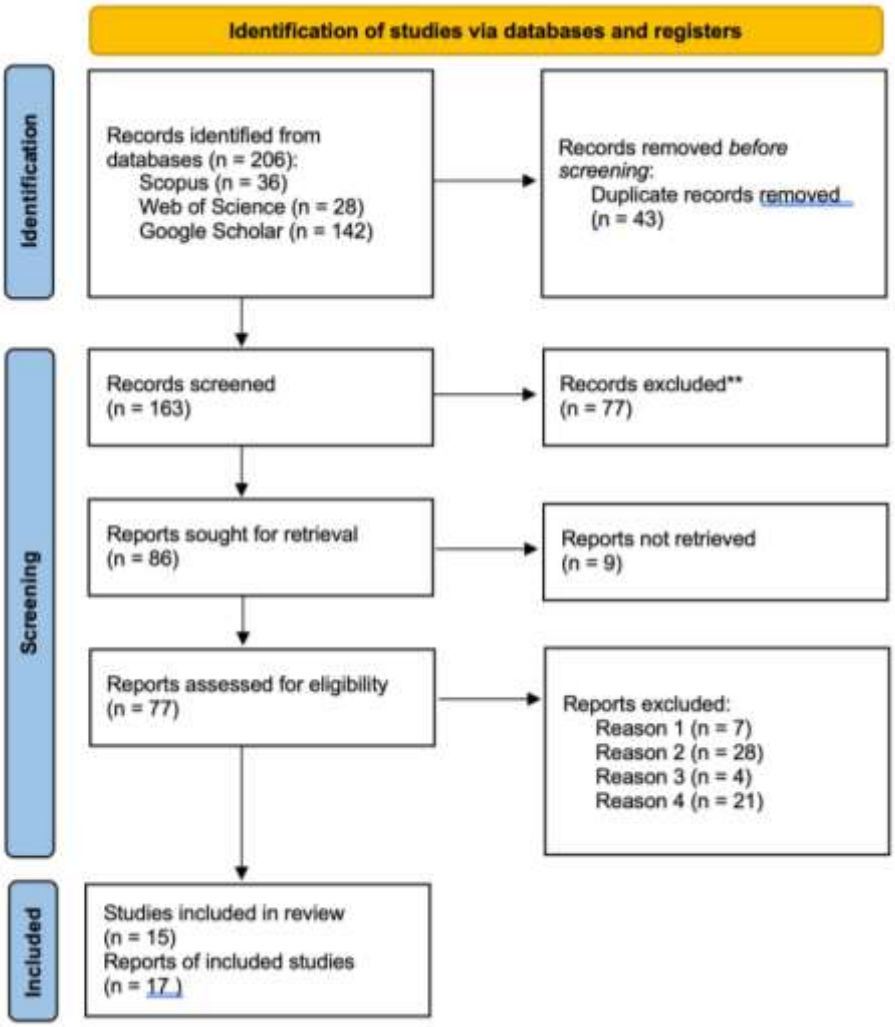



**Figure 1.** Reporting items for the systematic review using PRISMA-style flow diagram

**Table 1.** Appraisal of Methodological Transparency and Evidentiary Strength

| No | Author (Year) | Appraisal result | Relative evidentiary strength |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Hallinger (2018) | 13/14 | Strong |
| 2 | Leithwood et al. | 12/14 | Strong |
| 3 | Karakose et al. (2024) | 10/14 | Adequate |
| 4 | Mincu (2022) | 13/14 | Strong |
| 5 | Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development (2019) | 13/14 | Strong |
| 6 | Basri et al. (2024) | 14/14 | Strong |
| 7 | Hidayat et al. (2018) | 11/14 | Adequate |
| 8 | Arifin (2022) | 12/14 | Strong |
| 9 | Hasan (2025) | 11/14 | Adequate |
| 10 | Rahman (2025) | 12/14 | Strong |
| 11 | Abbas & Tan (2019) | 14/14 | Strong |
| 12 | Wekke et al. (2018) | 13/14 | Strong |
| 13 | Nguyen et al. (2017) | 10/14 | Adequate |
| 14 | Printy & Liu (2021) | 12/14 | Strong |
| 15 | Liu et al. (2021) | 12/14 | Strong |

(Karakose et al., 2024; Mincu, 2022).

206 records were initially retrieved from three databases: Scopus (n = 36), Web of Science (n = 28) and Google Scholar (n = 142). After duplicate records were removed, the remaining records (n = 163) were screened by title and abstract based on predefined eligibility criteria. Studies were included when they (1) were scholarly publications published in between 2016 and 2025 (2) examined educational leadership, pedagogical practice, teacher autonomy, student teachers, or pesantren education, (3) were available in full text, and (4) provided sufficient empirical or conceptual evidence relevant to the research objectives. Studies were excluded if they consisted of conference abstracts, editorials, book reviews, dissertations, or publications that did not provide relevant evidence concerning educational leadership, leadership structures, pedagogical practice, teacher autonomy, student teachers, or pesantren and Islamic education. Following the screening process, 15 articles satisfied the eligibility criteria and were retained for thematic synthesis because they met all inclusion criteria and provided sufficient evidence relevant to the research question (Figure 1). The adequacy of the final sample was therefore determined by the completeness of evidence relevant to the research questions and consistency of recurring themes across the included studies, rather than by a predetermined sample size.

The unit of analysis in this study was the selected research articles rather than individual participants. Relevant information from each article was systematically extracted and organized into a coding matrix consisting of publication characteristics, research context, leadership perspective, methodological approach, principal findings, and relevance to the research questions. The coding matrix was initially completed by the author and subsequently checked against the original articles to identify inconsistencies in data extraction and interpretation. Any discrepancies is identified during the

checking process were resolved through re-examination of the relevant article and discussion until agreement was reached.

Given the heterogeneous methodological and evidentiary orientations of the included publications, a single design-specific quality-appraisal instrument was not considered appropriate for all study types. Instead, the fifteen included studies were systematically assessed using seven criteria applicable across different forms of scholarly evidence: (1) clarity of the study purpose, (2) transparency of the methodological or analytical approach, (3) adequacy of the evidentiary basis, (4) coherence between the evidence presented and the conclusion drawn, (5) clarity of the study context, (6) relevance to the research questions, and (7) appropriateness of the methodological or analytical approach for the stated purpose and type of publication. Each criterion was rated as clearly as demonstrated (2), partially demonstrated (1), or not sufficiently demonstrated (0), resulting in a maximum appraisal score of 14 for each included study. The appraisal results were used to evaluate the relative methodological transparency and evidentiary strength without respectively modifying the eligibility criteria or excluding studies from the final review corpus (Table 1).

This coding process facilitated systematic comparison across studies and enhanced the transparency of the thematic synthesis (Okoli, 2015). The initial coding and thematic synthesis were conducted by the first author. The two co-authors reviewed the selected publications and cross-checked the extracted information against the original articles, while also providing conceptual and editorial input during the interpretation and development of the manuscript. The authors did not conduct independent parallel coding. Any inconsistencies identified during the cross-checking process were discussed among the authors and resolved through re-examination of the relevant publications and agreement on the interpretation.

The analysis was conducted in two complementary stages. First, VOSviewer version 1.6.20 was employed to generate a keyword co-occurrence network from the full set of retrieved records rather than only 15 included studies, after duplicate removal and before the final eligibility screening. A full counting method was applied, and the minimum occurrence threshold was set at 2 occurrences. The network was generated using the standard VOSviewer mapping procedure, without applying a thesaurus file, manual term merging, or additional exclusion of generic terms. The bibliometric visualization was used solely as an exploratory mapping technique to identify broad research trends and thematic proximity among keywords rather than as the primary analytical basis for answering the research questions. Second, thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2021) was conducted on the fifteen selected studies to synthesize evidence directly relevant to the relationship between centralized leadership, student teachers, and pedagogical quality in pesantren. Therefore, the substantive findings reported in this study were derived from thematic synthesis, whereas the VOSviewer visualization served to contextualize the broader research landscape.

## Result and Discussion

The reviewed literature indicated several recurring patterns concerning the relationship between centralized leadership and pedagogical quality in pesantren and comparable educational settings (Table 3). Across the fifteen selected studies, centralized leadership was consistently associated with limited teacher autonomy, strong institutional coordination, and continuity of instructional practices. The reviewed evidence further suggested that student teachers predominantly developed their pedagogical competencies through experiential learning and institutional traditions rather than formal pedagogical preparation. In addition, service-based institutional values were consistently described as sustaining teaching commitment while simultaneously reinforcing established instructional practices. Collectively, the reviewed studies indicated that pedagogical quality emerges from the interaction between leadership structure, institutional values, and teaching practices rather than from leadership structure alone.

Figure 2 presented a keyword co-occurrence network generated using VOSviewer to illustrate the broader conceptual landscape of research related to educational leadership and pedagogical development. The visualization identified seven thematic clusters representing major research streams within the retrieved literature. These clusters encompass pedagogical quality and learning (red), technology integration in education (green), technology-based learning systems (blue), instructional design and learning systems (yellow), artificial intelligence and educational transformation (purple), decision-making processes (light blue), and psychological factors (orange). The colors, nodes, and links in the visualization represent thematic proximity and co-occurrence relationships among terms rather direct evidence addressing the research question. Rather than representing the analytical findings of this review, these clusters provide an overview of the evolving directions of educational leadership research. The diversity of themes demonstrates that contemporary discussions on educational leadership increasingly intersect with technological innovation, instructional systems, and organizational decision-making. Within this broader landscape, the relationship between centralized leadership, pedagogical quality, and student teachers in pesantren represents the specific focus of the present review. Accordingly, the VOSviewer visualization serves as contextual evidence describing the intellectual domain in which this study is situated, whereas the thematic analysis of the selected articles provides the primary basis for the findings presented in the subsequent sections.

The bibliometric mapping indicates that educational leadership has developed into a multidisciplinary research domain encompassing pedagogy, educational technology, instructional systems, organizational decision-making, and psychological perspectives. However, despite this conceptual diversity, relatively limited attention has been devoted to understanding how centralized leadership shapes the pedagogical practices of student teachers within value-based educational institutions such as pesantren. Therefore, the subsequent thematic synthesis concentrates specifically on the selected studies addressing this contextual relationship (Table 2), enabling a more focused interpretation of the evidence relevant to the objectives of the present review.

The thematic findings should be interpreted within the broader conceptual landscape illustrated by the bibliometric mapping. Although the retrieved literature spans multiple research streams related to educational leadership, technology, instructional systems, and educational transformation, the present review synthesizes only the evidence directly relevant to centralized leadership, pedagogical quality, and student teachers in pesantren. The discussion section interprets the findings of this study within the context of existing research, explores their practical implications, evaluates the strengths and limitations, and provides recommendations for future research.

### Theme 1: Centralized Leadership Limits Instructional Flexibility

Centralized leadership structures tend to concentrate authority at the top level, which directly shapes how teaching practices are carried out. In hierarchical systems, decision-making is often restricted to leaders, leaving educators with

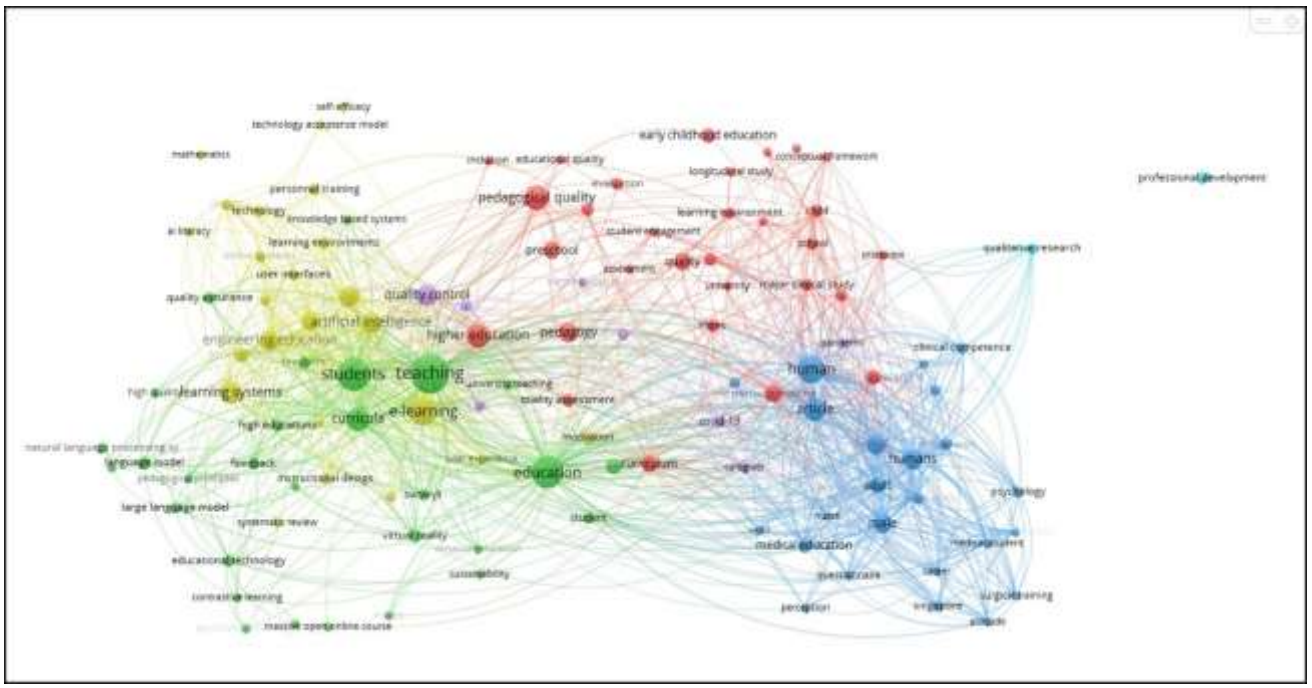



Figure 2. Keyword co-occurrence visualization generated using VOSviewer

Table 2. Characteristics of the Included Studies

| No | Author (Year) | Source | Article type | Context |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Hallinger (2018) | Web of Science | Conceptual | Educational leadership in Morocco |
| 2 | Leithwood et al. (2020) | Web of Science | Conceptual | School leadership |
| 3 | Karakose et al. (2024) | Scopus | Bibliometric and thematic analysis | Educational leadership |
| 4 | Mincu (2022) | Scopus | Conceptual | School leadership |
| 5 | Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development (2019) | Google Scholar | Research | OECD education system |
| 6 | Basri et al. (2024) | Google Scholar | Research | Pesantren in Indonesia |
| 7 | Hidayat et al. (2018) | Google Scholar | Descriptive qualitative research | Pesantren in Indonesia |
| 8 | Arifin (2022) | Google Scholar | Research | Islamic boarding school |
| 9 | Hasan (2025) | Scopus | Comparative research | Pesantren in Indonesia |
| 10 | Rahman (2025) | Google Scholar | Review | Education |
| 11 | Abbas & Tan (2019) | Scopus | Research | Islamic education in Singapore |
| 12 | Wekke et al. (2018) | Google Scholar | Qualitative research | Traditional pesantren in Indonesia |
| 13 | Nguyen et al. (2017) | Scopus | Qualitative research | School in Singapore |
| 14 | Printy & Liu (2021) | Web of Science | Quantitative research | Schools in 32 countries |
| 15 | Liu et al. (2021) | Scopus | Quantitative research | Schools in 32 countries |

limited space to adjust instructional approaches. Research consistently shows that leadership is not merely administrative but defines how teaching activities are organized and implemented within institutions. This indicates that leadership structure functions as a governing mechanism that determines the boundaries of pedagogical action (Karakose et al., 2024; Mincu, 2022) .

Empirical findings further demonstrate that centralized systems often reduce teacher autonomy, which in turn affects instructional adaptability. In such environments, educators tend to follow standardized procedures rather than engaging in reflective or context-responsive teaching. Studies comparing centralized and distributed leadership models show that shared decision-making enhances engagement and instructional quality, while centralized control limits participation and innovation. This contrast highlights that the issue is not leadership itself but how authority is distributed within the system (Nguyen et al., 2017; Printy & Liu, 2021).

In the reviewed literature, evidence from pesantren indicates that centralized leadership is reinforced not only by formal organizational authority but also by religious legitimacy, institutional tradition, and the cultural authority of the kiai (Basri et al., 2024; Hasan, 2025; Hidayat et al., 2018). These contextual characteristics distinguish pesantren from general school settings because leadership authority is closely intertwined with institutional values and service-based

Table 3. Evidence Making and Relevance to RQs

| No | Author (Year) | Leadership Type | Influence Type | RQ Relevance | Key Finding |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Hallinger (2018) | Instructional | Indirect | RQ1, RQ3 | Leadership shapes instructional climate |
| 2 | Leithwood et al. (2020) | Transformational | Indirect | RQ1, RQ3 | Influences teacher behavior, not directly students |
| 3 | Karakose et al. (2024) | General | Indirect | RQ3 | Leadership affects system conditions |
| 4 | Mincu (2022) | Strategic | Indirect | RQ1, RQ3 | Leadership defines direction and structure |
| 5 | Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development (2019) | Policy | Indirect | RQ2, RQ3 | External policy affects teaching quality |
| 6 | Basri et al. (2024) | Transformational | Direct & Indirect | RQ1, RQ2, RQ3 | Control affects participation and teaching |
| 7 | Hidayat et al. (2018) | Traditional | Indirect | RQ2, RQ3 | Teaching shaped by institutional norms |
| 8 | Arifin (2022) | Traditional and intsitutional | Indirect | RQ2, RQ3 | Informal pedagogy dominates |
| 9 | Hasan (2025) | Authority-based | Indirect | RQ1, RQ2, RQ3 | Legitimacy reinforces compliance |
| 10 | Rahman (2025) | Value-based | Indirect | RQ2, RQ3 | Values mediate teaching behavior |
| 11 | Abbas & Tan (2019) | Transformational | Indirect | RQ1, RQ2, RQ3 | Leadership shapes learning orientation |
| 12 | Wekke et al. (2018) | Administrative | Indirect | RQ1, RQ2, RQ3 | Institutional effectiveness varies |
| 13 | Nguyen et al. (2017) | Instructional | Direct | RQ1, RQ3 | Limits teacher autonomy |
| 14 | Printy & Liu (2021) | Distributed | Direct & Indirect | RQ1, RQ3 | Collaboration improves pedagogy |
| 15 | Liu et al. (2021) | Instructional | Indirect | RQ1, RQ3 | Professional learning mediates impact |

educational traditions. Consequently, centralized leadership contributes to organizational stability and continuity in teaching practices while simultaneously limiting opportunities for pedagogical experimentation and teacher autonomy. In contrast, studies conducted in formal school primarily interpret centralized leadership from the perspective of organizational effectiveness and instructional flexibility (Mincu, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2017; Printy & Liu, 2021). The thematic synthesis therefore suggests that although reduced instructional flexibility appears across different educational contexts, its underlying mechanisms differ substantially. Within pesantren, centralized leadership is sustained by institutional legitimacy and value-based commitment rather than solely by administrative authority, making its pedagogical implications context-dependent rather than universally applicable.

Theme 2: Teaching Practice Relies on Experiential Continuity

Across the reviewed studies, teaching practices involving student teachers were consistently characterized by experiential learning rather than structured pedagogical preparation (Arifin, 2022; Hidayat et al., 2018; Rahman, 2025).

Student teachers generally developed instructional competence through observation, repeated teaching practice, and participation in institutional routines, reflecting an apprenticeship-based learning process embedded within pesantren traditions. Although studies conducted in broader educational contexts similarly recognize experiential learning as an important component of teacher development (Samundeeswari et al., 2024), the reviewed evidence indicated that within pesantren this approach frequently constitutes the primary mechanism of pedagogical development rather than a complement to formal professional preparation (Arifin, 2022; Mincu, 2022).

The reliance on experience creates continuity in teaching practices, as new educators tend to replicate existing methods. While this ensures consistency, it also limits the introduction of new instructional strategies. Studies on educational quality indicate that effective teaching requires not only experience but also the integration of pedagogical knowledge and innovation. Without this balance, instructional quality becomes uneven and dependent on individual capability rather than systematic development ((Leithwood et al., 2020).

This thematic pattern is consistently reflected across the reviewed studies concerning pesantren, which emphasize experiential continuity as the principal mechanism through which student teachers acquire pedagogical competence (Arifin, 2022). In contrast, experiential learning in the pesantren context is embedded within institutional routines and is closely connected to the continuity of established educational practices (Hidayat et al., 2018). This contextual distinction explains why pedagogical quality in pesantren depends largely on institutional teaching traditions and accumulated practice rather than formal pedagogical qualification.

Theme 3: Devotion Sustains but Also Stabilizes Teaching Practice

Value-based engagement, particularly in the form of devotion, plays a central role in shaping behavior within educational institutions. Individuals participate in teaching activities not only as a task but as part of a moral or institutional commitment. Research on value-based leadership shows that such values strengthen organizational cohesion and motivate individuals to contribute beyond formal expectations. This explains why teaching roles can be sustained even in the absence of formal incentives (Hidayat et al., 2018; Rahman, 2025) .

However, the same values that sustain engagement also reinforce stability in existing practices. When teaching is framed as a form of service, individuals are less likely to question established methods. Leadership studies emphasize that organizational culture can both enable and constrain change, depending on how values are interpreted within the system. In this case, devotion acts as a stabilizing force that maintains continuity in teaching practices (Hidayat et al., 2018; Wekke et al., 2018).

In pesantren contexts, devotion is deeply embedded in daily

life and institutional identity. This creates a strong sense of responsibility among student teachers, which supports the sustainability of teaching activities. At the same time, it limits the emergence of critical reflection, as questioning practices may be perceived as misalignment with institutional values. The findings suggest that devotion is not inherently problematic, but its role in shaping pedagogical practice needs to be understood in relation to its stabilizing effect.

This result is consistent with studies on organizational culture, which show that strong value systems can enhance cohesion while limiting change. However, in contrast to secular educational settings where values are often negotiated, devotion in pesantren is more deeply embedded and less subject to reinterpretation. This distinction explains why teaching practices remain stable over time.

Theme 4: Pedagogical Quality Emerges from Structural and Normative Interaction

The final theme highlights that pedagogical quality is shaped by the interaction between leadership structure and value-based context. Neither factor operates independently; instead, they jointly influence how teaching is conducted. Leadership provides the structural framework, while values shape how individuals act within that framework. This interaction reflects broader findings in educational leadership research, where organizational conditions and cultural context jointly determine educational outcomes (Hallinger, 2018; Mincu, 2022).

Studies consistently show that teaching quality is closely linked to leadership practices and institutional environment. Effective leadership can enhance instructional quality by supporting collaboration, innovation, and professional development. Conversely, highly centralized systems with limited autonomy tend to produce stable but less adaptive teaching practices. This suggests that pedagogical outcomes are the result of systemic conditions rather than individual effort alone (Karakose et al., 2024; Leithwood et al., 2020) .

In pesantren, the interaction between centralized leadership and strong value systems creates a distinctive educational dynamic. Teaching practices are sustained through a combination of authority and commitment, resulting in consistency across time. However, this combination may also limit the development of more adaptive and reflective pedagogical approaches. Therefore, improving pedagogical quality requires not only addressing structural aspects but also reconsidering how values are enacted within teaching practices. Previous research generally examines leadership and pedagogy as separate variables. The present findings extend this perspective by showing that their interaction, mediated by values, is more relevant in understanding teaching outcomes in pesantren. This contributes a more integrated explanation compared to studies that focus solely on leadership effectiveness or teacher competence (Karakose et al., 2024; Mincu, 2022).

Limitations and Cautions

This study should be interpreted within the methodological boundaries of a systematic literature review. The findings were synthesized from fifteen peer-reviewed studies and therefore reflect the scope, contexts, and methodological characteristics of the available literature rather than direct empirical observations from pesantren. Consequently, the conclusions do not imply universal relationships applicable to all Islamic boarding schools but instead represent recurring patterns identified across the reviewed studies. Furthermore, the reviewed literature encompasses diverse educational contexts, including general educational institutions and pesantren. Although the thematic synthesis specifically emphasizes evidence relevant to pesantren, contextual differences among the included studies should be considered when interpreting the findings. Finally, the bibliometric visualization generated using VOSviewer was employed solely to illustrate the broader conceptual landscape of educational leadership research and should not be interpreted as the principal source of evidence. The substantive findings of this review were derived exclusively from the thematic synthesis of the selected studies.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research is recommended to conduct empirical investigations within pesantren settings using qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method approaches to validate the conceptual relationships identified in this study. Further studies may also explore alternative leadership models that support pedagogical flexibility while maintaining institutional values and organizational stability. In addition, future researchers are encouraged to examine broader contextual factors such as teacher autonomy, organizational culture, digital adaptation, and student engagement to develop a more comprehensive understanding of pedagogical quality in Islamic boarding schools.

## Conclusion

This study synthesized how centralized leadership is discussed in relation to the pedagogical practices of student teachers within value-based educational environments, particularly in Islamic boarding school. The findings show that leadership structure, teaching practice, and value-based engagement operate as an interconnected system. Centralized leadership shapes the boundaries of instructional practice, while teaching is largely sustained through experiential continuity and reinforced by value-driven commitment. As a result, pedagogical quality is not determined by a single factor but emerges from the interaction between structural control and normative values.

This review contributes theoretically by integrating evidence on centralized leadership, pedagogical quality, and service-based institutional values into a coherent explanation of student teacher development within pesantren. The findings extend previous leadership literature by demonstrating that the pedagogical implications of centralized leadership are context-dependent and should be interpreted in relation to institutional legitimacy and value-based educational traditions rather than administrative authority alone. From a practical perspective, the review suggests that efforts to improve pedagogical quality in pesantren should strengthen reflective teaching practices and pedagogical development while respecting the existing institutional culture and leadership structure. These findings also provide a conceptual foundation for future empirical studies examining the relationships among leadership, institutional values, and pedagogical quality in pesantren.

## Author contributions

Najma Zahira conceptualized the study, designed the research framework, conducted the literature research, performed article screening and thematic analysis, interpreted the findings, prepared the bibliometric visualization, drafted the manuscript, and revised the manuscript following the reviewers' comments. Susi Hendriani supervised the overall research process, contributed to the refinement of the research design and interpretation of the findings, critically reviewed the manuscript, and provided substantial academic guidance throughout the study. Machasin Machasin contributed to the development of the theoretical framework, critically evaluated the methodological approach, reviewed the intellectual content of the manuscript, and approved the final version for publication. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

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