

Governing Educational Synergy through Collaborative Leadership: A Case Study of an Pesantren Foundation in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze and describe the implementation of collaborative leadership strategies in enhancing synergy among educational institutions under the auspices of a foundation. Managing multiple educational units within an integrated foundation framework often faces challenges such as sectoral ego, resource disparities, and ineffective cross-unit communication. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed in this research. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis. The findings indicate that collaborative leadership plays a crucial role in establishing a shared vision, facilitating open two-way communication, and integrating work programs across educational units. The resulting synergy positively impacts operational governance efficiency, optimizes shared facility usage, and improves overall educational quality. This study is expected to provide empirical insights for foundation leaders and educational practitioners, as well as serve as a foundational reference for future research with more rigorous, meticulous, and comprehensive research designs to yield more accurate, valid, and generalizable findings regarding collaborative leadership strategies within foundation-based educational environments.

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership has become an increasingly strategic dimension of educational management because educational institutions operate within organizational environments characterized by complexity, diversity, and rapidly changing social demands. Contemporary educational leadership is no longer understood merely as the capacity of an individual leader to direct subordinates, but increasingly

involves the ability to mobilize people, distribute responsibilities, develop shared visions, and build collaborative relationships among organizational stakeholders. Recent scholarship indicates that effective educational leadership is closely associated with organizational improvement, teacher collaboration, school culture, and educational outcomes. A systematic review by Özdemir et al. (2024), for example, demonstrates that school leadership influences educational outcomes through multiple organizational and instructional pathways. Similarly, UNESCO (2024) emphasizes that effective educational leadership requires leaders not only to establish expectations and focus on learning but also to foster collaboration and develop people. Thus, leadership in contemporary education should be understood as a relational and collective process rather than an exclusively hierarchical function.

Within Islamic education, leadership possesses an additional ethical and spiritual dimension. Leadership is not simply an administrative mechanism for achieving institutional targets but also represents a form of responsibility (*amanah*) that must be exercised through justice, consultation (*shura*), mutual assistance (*ta'awun*), and brotherhood (*ukhuwah*). Recent research on Islamic-based educational leadership demonstrates that Islamic educational leadership has developed into a diverse field encompassing spiritual values, organizational practices, ethical responsibility, and contextual leadership approaches (Arar et al., 2022). In this perspective, leadership effectiveness cannot be separated from the values that guide the relationship between leaders, teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders. Collaborative leadership therefore provides a particularly relevant framework for Islamic educational institutions because it enables organizational decision-making to be connected with Islamic principles of deliberation, shared responsibility, mutual support, and collective benefit. Studies specifically addressing Islamic education have identified *shura*, *ta'awun*, and *ukhuwah* as important normative foundations for developing collaborative organizational cultures (Afkarina & Puspita, 2023).

The shift from hierarchical leadership toward collaborative and distributed forms of leadership has also become increasingly prominent in educational management research. Mifsud (2024) shows that distributed leadership has become an important area of educational leadership research because leadership responsibilities can be shared among principals, teachers, and other members of the school community. Such an approach challenges the assumption that institutional leadership must be concentrated exclusively in formal managerial positions. Instead, leadership can emerge through interactions among individuals who possess different expertise, responsibilities, and organizational roles. This perspective is particularly important for educational organizations that manage multiple units because institutional effectiveness depends not only on the competence of individual principals but also on the capacity of leaders across organizational levels to coordinate their actions and pursue common objectives.

Collaborative leadership is consequently relevant to organizational environments in which several educational units operate under a common institutional structure. When multiple schools or educational institutions are managed within one foundation, differences in organizational culture, managerial experience, leadership preferences, human resources, and institutional priorities may generate coordination problems. Without an effective collaborative mechanism, individual educational units may develop sectoral orientations, fragmented decision-making, inconsistent supervision, and unequal institutional development. Contemporary studies indicate that collaborative leadership can address these challenges by strengthening communication, participatory decision-making, shared responsibility, and stakeholder involvement. In primary education, for instance, collaborative leadership has been associated with more participatory and transparent management processes and stronger engagement of teachers, parents, and students (Sudirman & Agus, 2025). Likewise, recent evidence indicates that collaborative school development can contribute to organizational quality when leadership responsibilities and institutional development are supported by systematic collaboration (Frontiers in Education, 2025).

The importance of collaboration is also evident in the development of school culture. Collaborative leadership does not merely facilitate the completion of administrative tasks; it can reshape organizational relationships and establish a culture in which teachers and other stakeholders participate in institutional development. Kurniasih et al. (2025) found that collaborative leadership significantly contributes to the development of collaborative school culture, which subsequently supports teacher professional growth and performance. Similarly, research on teacher collaboration indicates that supportive leadership can create trust-based organizational conditions that encourage teachers to engage in professional learning and collective problem-solving (Debnath, 2025). These findings suggest that collaborative leadership can function as an organizational mechanism for integrating diverse human resources and transforming differences into institutional strengths.

The relevance of collaborative leadership becomes even stronger when educational institutions operate across organizational boundaries. Educational foundations frequently coordinate multiple units that differ in educational level, student characteristics, managerial structures, and institutional needs while simultaneously requiring all units to follow a shared vision and organizational identity. Such conditions require leadership capable of connecting different organizational actors without eliminating the autonomy and distinctive characteristics of each educational unit. Constantinides (2025) describes this dimension as boundary-spanning leadership, in which leaders must build and sustain relationships across organizational levels and boundaries. In this context, collaborative leadership can serve as a strategic mechanism for connecting educational units, coordinating institutional interests, and transforming organizational diversity into collective capacity.

This issue is particularly relevant in Islamic educational institutions because collaboration must simultaneously address managerial effectiveness and the preservation of institutional values. Research by Al Farisi et al. (2023) demonstrates that collaborative leadership in Islamic education is closely connected to communication, teamwork, stakeholder involvement, and continuous quality improvement. More recent research on Islamic vocational education similarly indicates that participatory decision-making, shared responsibility, and open communication are central mechanisms through which collaborative leadership strengthens adaptive educational management (Efendi, 2024). These findings reinforce the argument that collaborative leadership should not be regarded merely as a contemporary managerial technique but as an organizational approach that can be integrated with the normative foundations of Islamic educational management.

The phenomenon can be observed at the Darul Ihsan Menganti Islamic Boarding School Foundation in Gresik, which manages educational institutions across multiple levels, including Early Childhood Education (PAUD), Roudlotul Athfal (RA), Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI), Junior High School (SMP), Senior High School (SMA), Vocational High School (SMK), and the Al-Azhar Menganti Islamic College (STAI). The diversity of these educational units creates a complex governance environment because each institution serves students with different developmental characteristics, educational needs, competencies, family backgrounds, and socio-economic conditions. At the managerial level, the principals and institutional leaders also possess different experiences, competencies, leadership orientations, and approaches to organizational decision-making.

Nevertheless, these educational units operate within a common institutional framework. They share the broader educational vision of realizing individuals with strong faith and piety (*iman dan takwa*/IMTAQ) alongside excellence in science and technology (IPTEK). They are also connected through the Panca Jiwa of the Islamic boarding school: sincerity, simplicity, self-reliance, religious brotherhood (*ukhuwah diniyah*), and togetherness. The coexistence of organizational diversity and shared institutional values creates a distinctive leadership challenge. The central question is therefore not simply how individual principals manage their respective institutions, but how leadership at the foundation level can create coordination, trust, communication, and collective responsibility across educational units.

In this context, the role of the Foundation Chairman, KH. Mulyadi, MM., becomes strategically significant in accommodating differences among institutional leaders while maintaining a unified organizational direction. Collaborative leadership provides an analytical lens for examining how the foundation leadership builds relationships among educational units, distributes responsibilities, facilitates communication, coordinates institutional programs, and develops shared commitment toward common educational objectives. Recent research supports the importance of this approach in Islamic educational governance. Suyatman et al. (2026), for example, demonstrate that strategic collaborative leadership in madrasah settings can integrate stakeholder collaboration and distributed leadership to strengthen participatory organizational culture, public trust, and sustainable educational quality.

Despite the growing literature on collaborative leadership, an important research gap remains concerning collaborative leadership across multiple educational units managed by a single Islamic educational foundation. Much of the existing research focuses on individual schools, individual principals, teacher collaboration, or stakeholder participation within a single institutional setting. Comparatively limited attention has been given to how collaborative leadership operates across different educational levels that possess distinct managerial characteristics while sharing one institutional identity and organizational vision. This gap is particularly significant for Islamic boarding school foundations, where educational governance involves the simultaneous management of religious, academic, managerial, and organizational dimensions.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the collaborative leadership strategy for strengthening synergy among educational institutions at the Darul Ihsan Menganti Islamic Boarding School Foundation in Gresik. The study focuses on how collaborative leadership is constructed, implemented, and maintained across diverse educational units and how it contributes to institutional coordination, shared responsibility, communication, and organizational synergy. Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of collaborative leadership perspectives within Islamic educational management by connecting contemporary collaborative and distributed leadership concepts with Islamic organizational values. Empirically, it provides insight into how an Islamic educational foundation can transform institutional diversity into collective organizational strength through collaborative governance.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of collaborative leadership practices in strengthening synergy among educational institutions managed by the Darul Ihsan Menganti Islamic Boarding School Foundation in Gresik. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study focused on exploring leadership practices, interactions, experiences, perceptions, decision-making processes, and organizational relationships that cannot be adequately represented through numerical measurements. The research was designed as a qualitative case study, with the Darul Ihsan Menganti Islamic Boarding School Foundation serving as the research setting and the collaborative leadership practices implemented across its educational units constituting the central case. Recent educational leadership studies have similarly employed qualitative case study designs to investigate leadership practices through interviews, observations, and document analysis in their natural organizational contexts (Basthomi et al., 2023; Saleh, 2026).

The research site was selected purposively because the foundation manages several educational units at different levels, including PAUD, RA, MI, SMP, SMA, SMK, and STAI, while maintaining a shared institutional vision and organizational values. This organizational configuration provides an appropriate context for examining how collaborative leadership operates across educational boundaries and how institutional differences are coordinated toward common goals. The participants were selected using purposive sampling, emphasizing individuals who possessed direct knowledge

and experience concerning the foundation's leadership and institutional coordination processes. The primary participants included the foundation chairman, heads or principals of educational units, vice principals or key managerial personnel, teachers, and other relevant institutional stakeholders. Participant selection was based on their involvement in strategic decision-making, inter-unit coordination, leadership implementation, program development, and institutional evaluation. This strategy allowed the researchers to obtain information from different organizational positions and perspectives rather than relying exclusively on the perceptions of formal leaders.

Data were collected through three complementary techniques: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. First, semi-structured and in-depth interviews were conducted to explore participants' perceptions and experiences regarding collaborative leadership. The interview protocol covered several dimensions, including leadership vision, communication between educational units, mechanisms of coordination, participatory decision-making, distribution of responsibilities, conflict management, inter-unit cooperation, supervision, institutional trust, and strategies for achieving shared educational objectives. Semi-structured interviews provided sufficient structure to maintain alignment with the research questions while allowing participants to explain experiences and organizational practices in their own terms. Recent qualitative research on school leadership demonstrates that interviews are particularly useful for examining how educational leaders interpret and enact leadership within complex institutional environments (Werang et al., 2023).

Second, participant observation was conducted to examine collaborative leadership practices as they occurred in the natural organizational environment. Observation focused on leadership meetings, coordination activities, interactions between foundation administrators and educational-unit leaders, institutional discussions, program implementation, and other activities demonstrating collaboration among organizational actors. Observation was important because leadership practices are not always fully articulated during interviews; therefore, direct observation enabled the researchers to identify patterns of communication, participation, decision-making, role distribution, and interpersonal interaction that complemented participants' verbal accounts. In qualitative educational research, combining interviews with observation and documentary evidence can provide a more comprehensive understanding of leadership practices and organizational processes. Recent research on instructional leadership, for example, has combined interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis to examine leadership practices in their institutional context (Saleh, 2026).

Third, document analysis was employed to examine formal and informal evidence related to collaborative leadership and institutional governance. Documents included the foundation's vision and mission statements, organizational structures, institutional policies, meeting minutes, annual work programs, strategic plans, supervision records, program reports, coordination documents, and other relevant administrative materials. Documentary analysis enabled the researchers to compare formally stated institutional policies with practices identified through interviews and observations. This process was particularly important for identifying the extent to which collaborative leadership was embedded within organizational procedures rather than being dependent solely on individual leadership initiatives. Previous qualitative studies in educational management have similarly used documentary studies alongside interviews and observations to strengthen contextual interpretation and establish evidence regarding institutional practices (Basthomi et al., 2023).

The data were analyzed through an iterative qualitative analysis process consisting of data organization, coding, categorization, thematic development, interpretation, and conclusion drawing. Following data collection, interview recordings were transcribed and combined with observation notes and relevant documentary evidence. The researchers subsequently conducted initial coding by identifying statements, events, behaviors, and organizational practices related to the research questions. Codes with similar meanings were grouped into broader categories, such as shared vision, inter-unit communication, participatory decision-making, trust building, role distribution, conflict

resolution, coordination mechanisms, and institutional synergy. The categories were then compared across different participants and data sources to identify recurring patterns and relationships. This approach is consistent with contemporary qualitative thematic analysis, which emphasizes systematic engagement with data to develop meaningful patterns and themes rather than simply summarizing participants' statements (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Byrne, 2022).

The subsequent stage involved thematic interpretation. The researchers examined relationships among categories to construct broader themes explaining how collaborative leadership was practiced within the foundation. Thematic analysis was selected because it enables researchers to identify patterned meanings across heterogeneous qualitative data while maintaining sensitivity to the context in which those meanings are produced. Braun and Clarke (2021) emphasize that thematic analysis should be treated as a theoretically informed analytic process rather than a mechanical procedure for grouping statements. Accordingly, the analysis in this study moved beyond descriptive coding toward interpretation of how leadership strategies facilitated coordination, participation, trust, shared responsibility, and synergy among educational units. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, the study applied methodological and source triangulation. Methodological triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained through interviews, observations, and document analysis. Source triangulation was achieved by comparing information from the foundation leadership, educational-unit leaders, teachers, and other relevant participants. When inconsistencies appeared, the researchers returned to the field data and conducted further clarification to determine whether the differences reflected different perspectives, organizational positions, or actual variations in leadership practice. Member checking was also used where appropriate by presenting selected interpretations or summaries of interview findings to participants for confirmation. Recent qualitative educational research has similarly emphasized triangulation and member checking as mechanisms for strengthening the credibility of case study findings (Saleh, 2026).

The researchers also maintained reflexivity throughout the research process by continuously examining how their assumptions, interactions with participants, and interpretations could influence the construction of findings. Field notes were used to document contextual observations, emerging interpretations, and relevant reflections during the research process. This reflexive process helped distinguish between participants' empirical accounts and the researchers' analytical interpretations. The analysis was conducted iteratively, meaning that data collection and analysis informed one another until the emerging themes provided sufficient explanatory depth regarding the research questions. Finally, the findings were presented in a descriptive-interpretive narrative rather than in numerical form. The presentation emphasized the relationships among leadership practices, organizational interactions, and institutional outcomes. Direct participant statements were used selectively to illustrate important themes, while observation and documentary evidence were incorporated to corroborate interview findings. The final interpretation focused on identifying the collaborative leadership strategies used by the foundation, the mechanisms through which collaboration was established among educational units, the factors supporting or constraining institutional synergy, and the implications of these practices for Islamic educational management. Thus, the methodological design enabled the study to move from empirical descriptions of leadership practices toward an analytical explanation of how collaborative leadership can coordinate diverse educational institutions under a common Islamic educational foundation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Collaborative Leadership Practices at the Darul Ihsan Foundation

The first objective of this study was to analyze the collaborative leadership practices implemented by the Darul Ihsan Menganti Islamic Boarding School Foundation. The findings show that collaborative leadership is primarily practiced through musyawarah, regular communication, shared evaluation, and the involvement of principals and school personnel in decision-making. These practices demonstrate that leadership within the foundation is not solely oriented toward the exercise of formal authority but also toward building relationships, trust, participation, and shared responsibility among educational leaders. The Principal of SMA Al-Azhar explained that KH. Mulyadi consistently prioritizes musyawarah in coordinating the principals. Weekly meetings are held every Saturday after teaching activities to evaluate the implementation of learning during the previous week. Monthly meetings are also conducted to discuss broader educational issues, including strategies for addressing students with low motivation and hyperactive behavior. In addition, incidental meetings involving all principals are organized when urgent institutional matters require collective discussion.

The regularity of these meetings indicates that musyawarah has been institutionalized as part of the foundation's leadership mechanism rather than being conducted only when problems emerge. Weekly meetings provide a space for immediate reflection and problem-solving, whereas monthly meetings allow the leaders to discuss broader educational developments. Incidental meetings, meanwhile, provide organizational flexibility when urgent issues require rapid collective responses. Thus, musyawarah functions simultaneously as a mechanism for evaluation, communication, problem-solving, and organizational learning. This practice was confirmed by the Principal of SMK Al-Azhar, who described KH. Mulyadi as a democratic leader who gives principals autonomy in planning, implementing, and evaluating programs. At the school level, this autonomy is implemented through satminkal meetings, in which principals discuss institutional matters with teachers and staff. Similarly, the Principal of MI Al-Azhar explained that KH. Mulyadi encourages close communication between the principal and vice principals through routine discussions concerning curriculum, student affairs, teachers, and educational personnel.

The distribution of managerial autonomy is important because the foundation manages educational institutions with different levels, characteristics, and educational needs. Rather than applying exactly the same managerial decisions to every unit, KH. Mulyadi provides principals with space to interpret and implement institutional policies according to their respective contexts. This approach creates a balance between institutional standardization and managerial flexibility. The foundation maintains a common direction, while individual educational units retain sufficient autonomy to respond to their specific organizational circumstances. These findings indicate that collaborative leadership at the Darul Ihsan Foundation is not based on unilateral decision-making. Instead, leadership is exercised through consultation and shared responsibility. The foundation chairman remains the central leader, but his authority is used to facilitate participation and coordination among educational-unit leaders. The interviews further indicate that this leadership approach is accompanied by regular evaluation, enabling decisions and programs to be reviewed collectively rather than being treated as final once implemented.

The collaborative character of leadership is also visible in the relationship between the foundation and individual school leaders. Principals are not positioned merely as implementers of policies formulated at the foundation level. They are given opportunities to communicate institutional problems, propose solutions, evaluate programs, and manage their respective educational units. In this sense, the foundation chairman operates as a coordinator and facilitator of collective leadership, while

principals function as institutional leaders who translate the foundation's broader vision into concrete educational practices. This finding is consistent with Inayati et al. (2024), who explain that *musyawarah* in Islamic educational leadership can support inclusive decision-making and ethical governance. In this context, *musyawarah* is not merely a formal meeting but a mechanism for integrating the knowledge, experience, and perspectives of organizational members. The finding also corresponds with Karakose et al. (2024), who argue that distributed leadership strengthens educational organizations through shared vision, distributed decision-making, clear responsibilities, and collaborative learning.

Furthermore, the practice at Darul Ihsan demonstrates that collaborative leadership is closely connected with organizational learning. Problems emerging in one educational unit can become discussion material for other leaders, while educational developments introduced during monthly meetings can be adapted by different institutions. Consequently, regular interaction among principals does not only facilitate coordination but also creates opportunities for the exchange of managerial knowledge and educational experience. The interview findings were subsequently verified with KH. Mulyadi as the foundation chairman. The verification confirmed that the statements provided by the principals of SMA, SMK, and MI Al-Azhar accurately reflected his leadership practices. This consistency between the perspectives of the principals and the foundation chairman strengthens the interpretation that *musyawarah*, autonomy, communication, and evaluation are established characteristics of leadership within the foundation. Thus, the collaborative leadership practice at the Darul Ihsan Foundation is characterized by three main elements: consultative decision-making, regular institutional communication, and shared evaluation. These elements enable the foundation to maintain common institutional direction while allowing each educational unit to respond to its own needs. More broadly, the findings suggest that collaborative leadership at Darul Ihsan is not simply a delegation of authority but an integrated process of participation, coordination, organizational learning, and shared responsibility. Through this model, leadership authority becomes a means of connecting diverse educational units rather than separating them into independent organizational sectors.

The Role of Collaborative Leadership in Strengthening Institutional Synergy

The second objective of this study was to examine how collaborative leadership strengthens synergy among educational institutions under the Darul Ihsan Foundation. The findings show that institutional synergy is developed through communication, coordination, shared planning, participatory decision-making, and the distribution of managerial authority. These mechanisms enable educational units with different organizational characteristics to remain connected to a common institutional vision. In this context, synergy does not mean eliminating differences among educational units but creating organizational mechanisms that allow these differences to be coordinated toward shared objectives. The Principal of SMA Al-Azhar explained that the foundation's annual working meeting involves principals, teachers, and administrative staff in formulating policies, regulations, plans, and procedures. The meeting provides opportunities for participants to exchange ideas and proposals while strengthening communication among educational units. The involvement of multiple organizational actors demonstrates that planning is not exclusively performed by the foundation leadership but becomes a collective process involving different levels of the organization.

The annual working meeting is therefore an important mechanism for building institutional synergy because it creates a shared understanding of organizational priorities. Through this process, educational-unit leaders can communicate their respective needs while simultaneously understanding the needs and priorities of other units. Such interaction reduces the possibility of fragmented planning, in which each institution develops programs independently without considering the broader direction of the foundation. Shared planning consequently functions as a mechanism for aligning institutional interests with the collective mission of the organization. The Principal of SMK Al-Azhar stated that although the foundation still faces limitations in facilities and infrastructure, educational activities can

be implemented effectively because the chairman consistently encourages communication and coordination among the educational units. This finding is significant because it indicates that institutional synergy is not entirely dependent on the availability of physical resources. Organizational communication and the ability to coordinate existing resources can compensate, to some extent, for limitations in infrastructure. The leadership strategy therefore places human relationships and organizational coordination as important resources for sustaining educational programs.

The Principal of MI Al-Azhar provided a concrete example of this coordination by explaining that several activities can take place simultaneously. On one occasion, four activities were conducted at the same time, yet the activities could still be implemented effectively because communication and coordination were maintained among the relevant parties. This finding illustrates that synergy becomes particularly visible when educational institutions must manage multiple activities, actors, and resources simultaneously. Without effective communication, overlapping activities could generate scheduling conflicts, resource competition, or confusion regarding responsibilities. The findings further demonstrate that collaborative leadership creates a horizontal and vertical communication network. Vertical communication occurs between the foundation leadership and the principals, while horizontal communication occurs among principals and between educational personnel across units. This dual communication structure enables information to circulate throughout the organization. The foundation chairman provides institutional direction, principals translate this direction into unit-level programs, and teachers and staff provide feedback regarding implementation. Thus, communication becomes a continuous organizational process rather than a one-way transmission of policy.

This finding is consistent with research by Ma and Marion (2024), which found that distributed leadership can strengthen teacher collaboration, particularly when supported by professional learning and an innovative organizational climate. In their study, leadership that provides opportunities for participation creates organizational conditions that encourage educators to collaborate rather than work individually. The situation at the Darul Ihsan Foundation demonstrates a similar pattern, although collaboration occurs not only among teachers but also among foundation leaders, principals, teachers, and administrative personnel. Similarly, Khongsakun et al. (2024) found that distributed leadership can improve teaching quality through teacher autonomy and professional collaboration. This finding supports the organizational pattern at Darul Ihsan, where principals receive managerial autonomy while remaining connected to the foundation through regular communication and coordination. Autonomy therefore does not result in organizational fragmentation because it is accompanied by mechanisms that maintain institutional connectivity.

The importance of communication in establishing institutional synergy is also supported by recent research on school leadership. Liu et al. (2024) demonstrate that leadership practices can contribute to professional collaboration by creating conditions that encourage teachers to interact, exchange knowledge, and work collectively. In the context of Darul Ihsan, this principle extends beyond teacher collaboration because communication is constructed across multiple organizational levels. The foundation chairman communicates with principals, principals communicate with teachers and staff, and educational units coordinate with one another when programs involve shared resources or simultaneous activities. Institutional synergy is also strengthened through trust and relational leadership. When principals are given opportunities to participate in planning and decision-making, they are more likely to perceive themselves as organizational partners rather than merely policy implementers. This relational dimension is important in a foundation managing several educational institutions because each principal possesses different experiences, competencies, and managerial perspectives. Collaborative leadership creates a space in which these differences can be communicated and negotiated rather than becoming sources of institutional competition.

In this regard, collaborative leadership can be understood as a mechanism for transforming organizational diversity into collective capacity. The different educational units within Darul Ihsan

have distinct characteristics based on their educational levels and student populations. PAUD and RA, for example, have different managerial requirements from MI, SMP, SMA, or SMK, while STAI operates within a higher education context. Applying exactly the same managerial approach to all units would therefore be inappropriate. Collaborative leadership provides flexibility for contextual adaptation while preserving common institutional objectives. The findings also indicate that coordination at Darul Ihsan is not limited to the implementation stage. It occurs throughout the management cycle, beginning with planning, continuing through implementation, and extending to evaluation. The foundation's annual working meetings establish collective plans, communication facilitates implementation, and meetings and evaluations provide opportunities to assess outcomes and identify problems. This creates a continuous cycle of planning–coordination–implementation–evaluation. Such a cycle strengthens institutional learning because experiences from one educational unit can become information for improving practices in other units.

This pattern is supported by Galdames-Calderón (2023), who emphasizes that distributed leadership can contribute to school improvement by strengthening the leadership capacity of organizational members. When responsibility is distributed, organizational actors become more capable of identifying problems, making decisions, and contributing to institutional development. At Darul Ihsan, the autonomy provided to principals creates similar opportunities for each educational unit to develop its own managerial capacity while remaining accountable to the foundation's broader direction. Furthermore, De Jong et al. (2023) demonstrate that distributed leadership can encourage collaborative practices among teachers by enabling organizational members to seek knowledge and assistance beyond their immediate roles. This perspective helps explain why communication among educational units is important at Darul Ihsan. When one institution encounters a managerial or educational problem, interaction with other units can provide alternative perspectives and possible solutions. The foundation therefore functions not only as an administrative umbrella but also as a network through which organizational knowledge can circulate.

Another important dimension is the role of shared responsibility. The findings suggest that institutional synergy emerges because responsibility for educational success is not placed exclusively on the foundation chairman. Principals are responsible for managing their respective institutions, teachers are responsible for learning processes, and administrative staff support institutional operations. At the same time, all actors remain connected through the foundation's shared vision. This division of responsibility prevents excessive dependence on a single leader and increases organizational resilience. The interview findings were also verified with KH. Mulyadi as the foundation chairman. The verification confirmed the principals' accounts regarding the importance of communication and coordination among educational units. The consistency between the statements of the principals and the foundation chairman strengthens the interpretation that communication and coordination are not incidental practices but established components of the foundation's leadership strategy. These findings demonstrate that synergy among educational institutions is not created by making all units identical. Each institution retains its own educational characteristics, programs, leadership practices, and management needs. Synergy is instead created by connecting these differences through communication, coordination, shared planning, and collective evaluation. The foundation therefore operates as a coordinating organizational system, in which diversity among educational units becomes a potential source of institutional strength rather than fragmentation.

From a theoretical perspective, this finding extends the understanding of collaborative leadership in Islamic educational management. Collaborative leadership does not simply involve sharing decision-making authority; it also involves creating organizational structures through which different actors can communicate, coordinate resources, exchange knowledge, and develop shared responsibility. In the Darul Ihsan context, *musyawarah* provides the cultural and ethical basis for participation, while meetings, communication channels, working programs, and evaluation

mechanisms provide the organizational infrastructure for collaboration. Therefore, collaborative leadership strengthens institutional synergy through five interconnected processes: (1) shared planning, (2) cross-unit communication, (3) distributed managerial authority, (4) coordinated implementation, and (5) collective evaluation. Shared planning creates common direction; communication connects organizational actors; distributed authority provides space for contextual decision-making; coordination ensures that activities are mutually supportive; and collective evaluation enables continuous organizational learning. Communication consequently functions as the connective infrastructure that links the foundation, principals, teachers, and staff. Overall, the findings suggest that the strength of the Darul Ihsan Foundation does not primarily lie in organizational uniformity but in its ability to coordinate institutional diversity. Collaborative leadership enables different educational units to preserve their distinctive characteristics while simultaneously contributing to a shared institutional mission. This represents an important model for multi-unit Islamic educational foundations, where sustainable institutional development depends on the ability of leaders to integrate autonomy, participation, communication, and collective responsibility into a coherent governance system.

Collaborative Leadership in Supporting Educational Innovation and Human Resource Development

The third objective of this study was to analyze the contribution of collaborative leadership to educational innovation, human resource development, and the creation of a conducive learning environment at the Darul Ihsan Menganti Islamic Boarding School Foundation. The findings demonstrate that collaborative leadership operates not only through the distribution of managerial authority but also through the development of curriculum innovation, entrepreneurship, research-oriented educational practices, teacher recruitment, professional development, mentoring, and instructional leadership. These practices indicate that the foundation views educational innovation and human-resource development as interconnected components of institutional improvement. The Principal of SMA Al-Azhar explained that KH. Mulyadi's background and experience in education have influenced his strong concern for curriculum development. He encourages the school not merely to implement the government curriculum but also to develop a curriculum that provides greater benefits for teachers, educational personnel, and students. This orientation is reflected in the development of the *Ilahiyah* curriculum. The finding indicates that the foundation provides a broad institutional direction while allowing individual educational units to translate this direction into contextually relevant educational programs.

At SMK Al-Azhar, educational innovation is connected with the development of entrepreneurial competencies. The Principal of SMK explained that KH. Mulyadi's entrepreneurial experience serves as an important source of motivation for principals and staff. This influence is reflected in the development of livestock-related entrepreneurial activities within the school. This practice demonstrates that collaborative leadership can transfer not only managerial knowledge but also values, experiences, and professional orientations from institutional leaders to members of the organization. Entrepreneurship is consequently positioned as an educational competency that can be developed through practical institutional programs. Meanwhile, at MI Al-Azhar, curriculum innovation is reflected in the development of a distinctive religious education program requiring students to memorize three juz of the Qur'an. This finding demonstrates that educational innovation within the foundation does not necessarily mean technological innovation. Innovation can also take the form of curriculum differentiation based on the identity, mission, and educational needs of an institution. In this case, the religious characteristics of the institution are translated into a distinctive graduate competency.

These three examples demonstrate an important characteristic of collaborative leadership at Darul Ihsan: innovation is decentralized but remains institutionally connected. The foundation does not require all educational units to implement identical programs. Instead, the foundation provides a shared institutional direction, while principals and teachers are given opportunities to develop programs appropriate to their respective contexts. This approach allows institutional diversity to become a source of innovation while maintaining organizational coherence. The finding is consistent with Karakose et al. (2024), who explain that distributed leadership can support school improvement by involving multiple organizational actors in decision-making and by distributing leadership responsibilities. When principals and teachers are given opportunities to participate in institutional decisions, they are more likely to contribute their professional knowledge and develop contextually appropriate solutions. In the Darul Ihsan Foundation, this process can be observed in the way educational-unit leaders translate the foundation's general direction into distinctive curriculum, entrepreneurship, and religious programs.

Ma and Marion (2024) similarly demonstrate that distributed leadership can strengthen teacher collaboration through professional learning and an innovative organizational climate. Their findings suggest that innovation does not emerge solely from individual leadership initiatives but from organizational conditions that allow educators to collaborate, exchange knowledge, and experiment with new approaches. The Darul Ihsan Foundation exhibits a comparable pattern because innovation is supported through regular interaction between the foundation chairman, principals, teachers, and other educational personnel. In addition to curriculum and program innovation, collaborative leadership at Darul Ihsan promotes research-oriented educational improvement. The Principal of SMA explained that KH. Mulyadi encourages teachers to identify and analyze student problems rather than merely deliver instructional material. Teachers are expected to understand students' difficulties and develop appropriate solutions. This practice demonstrates a shift from teacher-centered problem solving toward reflective and inquiry-based professional practice.

The Principal of SMK further explained that educational problems can be transformed into research topics. Meanwhile, the Principal of MI described the foundation's aspiration for Al-Azhar to become a laboratory and reference institution for other Islamic educational institutions. These findings indicate that research is being positioned as an instrument for institutional learning and innovation rather than merely as an academic requirement. The research orientation is important because educational innovation requires an ability to identify problems systematically before developing solutions. When teachers are encouraged to investigate student difficulties, they become active producers of pedagogical knowledge. This strengthens the connection between leadership, professional learning, and educational innovation. De Jong et al. (2023) similarly emphasize that distributed leadership can facilitate collaborative professional practices by enabling teachers to seek knowledge and support beyond their immediate responsibilities. In this sense, collaborative leadership creates an environment in which educational problems can become shared learning opportunities.

The innovation process is also closely connected with human-resource development. The Principal of SMA reported that KH. Mulyadi regularly asks about teacher requirements and facilitates recruitment according to the needs of each educational unit. The principal also explained that many teachers teach subjects appropriate to their qualifications, which supports the implementation of learning. This demonstrates that the foundation's leadership considers teacher quality and appropriate placement as important components of educational management. At the SMK level, the Principal explained that principals are expected to understand the basic substance of the subjects taught in their institutions. When teachers are absent, principals are expected to be able to provide learning activities for students. This practice illustrates that leadership within the foundation combines administrative responsibility with instructional competence. Principals are not positioned solely as managers who

coordinate personnel and programs; they are also expected to understand the substance of teaching and learning.

At MI Al-Azhar, human-resource development is implemented through the mentoring of muallim and muallimah who serve as teaching assistants. These teaching assistants are gradually prepared to become full teachers in the future. The practice demonstrates that the foundation develops human resources through a gradual leadership-development process. Rather than relying entirely on experienced teachers, the institution creates a pathway through which junior educators can acquire knowledge, experience, and professional responsibility. This finding is consistent with Galdames-Calderón (2023), who emphasizes that distributed leadership contributes to school improvement by developing leadership capacity among organizational members. Leadership development therefore needs to be understood as a long-term organizational process rather than as a responsibility limited to formal leaders. The mentoring of muallim and muallimah at MI Al-Azhar illustrates this process in practice because junior educators are prepared to assume greater responsibilities within the institution.

The foundation's commitment to professional development is further demonstrated through annual teacher training. According to the Principal of SMK, the training covers instructional-material preparation, teaching strategies, mind mapping, super-memory techniques, and train-the-trainer programs. These activities indicate that teacher development is not treated as a one-time activity but as part of the foundation's continuing effort to strengthen professional capacity. The Principal of MI further emphasized that learning is not limited to students. Teachers and parents are also considered part of the educational process, and educational success is understood as requiring synergy among parents, teachers, and students. This finding broadens the meaning of collaborative leadership because collaboration is not restricted to relationships among formal organizational leaders. It extends to the wider educational community, including teachers, students, and parents.

Recent research supports this interpretation. Ma and Marion (2024) demonstrate that professional learning is an important mechanism linking leadership practices with teacher collaboration. Similarly, Galdames-Calderón (2023) highlights the importance of developing leadership capacity among teachers and other organizational members to support sustainable school improvement. These findings suggest that educational innovation becomes more sustainable when the people responsible for implementing innovation also possess the knowledge, skills, and autonomy required to develop it. Taken together, the findings show that collaborative leadership at the Darul Ihsan Foundation creates a mutually reinforcing relationship between innovation and human-resource development. Curriculum innovation requires competent teachers; research-oriented teaching requires reflective educators; entrepreneurship programs require leaders willing to experiment; and distinctive institutional programs require principals who possess sufficient autonomy to adapt the foundation's broader vision. Therefore, innovation cannot be separated from the development of human resources.

The findings also suggest that the conducive learning environment at Darul Ihsan is not determined exclusively by physical facilities. Although the Principal of SMK acknowledged limitations in facilities and infrastructure, educational programs can continue to operate effectively through communication, coordination, teacher competence, and leadership support. This indicates that organizational and human resources constitute important forms of educational capital that can sustain institutional performance even when material resources remain constrained. Therefore, collaborative leadership at the Darul Ihsan Foundation supports educational innovation through five interconnected mechanisms: (1) curriculum differentiation, (2) entrepreneurship development, (3) research-oriented problem solving, (4) continuous professional development, and (5) mentoring and leadership-capacity development. These mechanisms create an organizational environment in which principals and teachers are not merely implementers of predetermined policies but active contributors to institutional improvement. Overall, this finding demonstrates that collaborative leadership at Darul Ihsan is developmental in nature. KH. Mulyadi's leadership does not merely coordinate existing educational

activities but creates opportunities for principals, teachers, and educational personnel to develop their professional capacity and generate new educational practices. The combination of distributed authority, professional learning, mentoring, research, and curriculum innovation enables each educational unit to develop its own distinctive strengths while remaining connected to the foundation's shared institutional vision. In this way, collaborative leadership becomes an important strategic mechanism for sustaining both educational innovation and organizational capacity.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that collaborative leadership at the Darul Ihsan Menganti Islamic Boarding School Foundation is implemented through musyawarah, regular communication, participatory decision-making, managerial autonomy, and shared evaluation. The leadership of KH. Mulyadi does not rely solely on centralized authority but provides opportunities for principals, teachers, and educational personnel to participate in institutional planning and problem-solving. Regular weekly, monthly, annual, and incidental meetings function as important mechanisms for maintaining communication and ensuring that decisions remain aligned with the foundation's shared vision. Thus, collaborative leadership creates a balance between centralized institutional direction and decentralized managerial implementation across different educational units. Collaborative leadership also plays a significant role in strengthening synergy among the foundation's diverse educational institutions. Synergy is developed through shared planning, cross-unit communication, coordinated implementation, and collective evaluation. The findings show that differences in educational levels, programs, and institutional needs do not necessarily produce fragmentation when effective communication and coordination are maintained. Instead, these differences can become complementary organizational resources. The autonomy given to each principal enables contextual decision-making, while regular coordination ensures that individual institutional programs remain connected to the broader mission of the Darul Ihsan Foundation.

Furthermore, collaborative leadership contributes to educational innovation and human-resource development through curriculum differentiation, entrepreneurship programs, research-oriented problem solving, teacher training, mentoring, and leadership-capacity development. The Ilahiyah curriculum, entrepreneurial activities, Qur'anic memorization programs, research orientation, and mentoring of muallim and muallimah demonstrate that innovation is not limited to the foundation chairman but becomes a shared responsibility among educational leaders and teachers. Overall, the study demonstrates that collaborative leadership can serve as a strategic governance model for multi-unit Islamic educational foundations by integrating participation, autonomy, communication, professional development, innovation, and collective responsibility to achieve sustainable institutional synergy.

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