

The Role of Women’s Leadership in Strengthening Islamic Education in the Digital Era

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRAK
Volume: 4 ISSN: 2963-5489 KEYWORDS Women's leadership, Islamic education, digital era, social media, gender equality, Generation Z	This paper examines the role of women's leadership in strengthening Islamic education in the digital era. As times evolve, women have emerged as leaders in various fields, particularly Islamic education, where rapid technological advancements demand adaptation while upholding Islamic teachings. Employing a conceptual approach based on literature analysis, this study explores how female leaders integrate digital innovations to foster a faithful and competent generation. Key findings reveal that women serve as drivers and pioneers in bolstering Islamic education by utilizing social media applications such as Instagram and WhatsApp as interactive platforms for da'wah and learning. These technologies not only facilitate knowledge access but also reinforce Islamic values among Generation Z. Therefore, it is recommended to adopt a Gen Z-oriented approach that actively engages social media, with women leaders as the primary catalysts. Women's collaborative and wise leadership is more readily accepted by subordinates, thereby enhancing teaching effectiveness and gender equality in Islamic educational institutions, aligning with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4 and 5.

1. Introduction

The digital era has revolutionized global education, enabling broader access to knowledge through platforms such as social media and online learning applications. However, this progress also raises serious challenges, particularly in Islamic education, where the younger generation is vulnerable to misinformation, negative content, and the erosion of religious values due to uncontrolled exposure to technology (Mcclure, 2019). In Muslim-majority countries like Indonesia, where more than 80% of the population is Muslim, educational institutions such as madrasahs and pesantren must adapt quickly to preserve the teachings of the Qur’an and Sunnah while leveraging digital innovations (“Pew Research Center,” 2021)

In this context, women's leadership emerges as a key force in strengthening Islamic education. Throughout Islamic history, women have played crucial roles as leaders and educators, such as Khadijah binti Khuwailid, who served as the economic and spiritual supporter of Prophet Muhammad, and ‘Aisyah binti Abu Bakr, who narrated thousands of hadiths and mentored companions (Bakri, 2020). In the modern era, Indonesian women are increasingly active in Islamic education, for example through organizations like Fatayat NU or Muhammadiyah, where they lead curricula that integrate religious values with contemporary skills (Ma’ruf et al., 2022). However, rapid technological developments demand that female leaders adapt, not only as users but also as innovators who continue to reinforce Islamic teachings (Fentika Zahra Qoirunnisa et al., 2023). The democratic and collaborative leadership style of women, as explained by Sudirman (2022), enables them to involve teams and communities in decision-making, which is highly relevant for addressing digital dynamics.

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Nevertheless, significant gaps remain in the literature and practice. Many studies highlight patriarchal challenges and limited access for women to technology in Islamic educational institutions, such as the lack of digital training for female teachers in madrasahs (Abadi et al., 2025). Additionally, Generation Z, born in the digital age, tends to be highly active on social media like Instagram and WhatsApp but is often exposed to content that contradicts Islamic ethics. Ironically, the potential of women as agents of change in this area has not been fully explored, particularly how they utilize these platforms for interactive da'wah and value-based learning (Sito Rohmawati et al., 2025). This gap hinders the formation of *insan kamil*—holistic individuals who are complete spiritually and intellectually—as emphasized by KH. Ahmad Dahlan (Mukhlis et al., 2024).

Therefore, this paper aims to analyze the role of women's leadership in strengthening Islamic education in the digital era, with a focus on technological adaptation and collaborative approaches. The main research questions include: How do female leaders utilize social media for innovations in Islamic education? What challenges and opportunities exist for Generation Z in this context? A conceptual approach based on literature analysis will be used to address these questions.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to gender equality and quality education, aligning with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) No. 4 (quality education) and No. 5 (gender equality). In Indonesia, these findings can support policies from the Ministry of Religious Affairs to train female leaders in edtech, thereby enriching discourses on Islamic feminism (Ma'ruf et al., 2022). Overall, this paper argues that women's wise and collaborative leadership is essential for adapting Islamic education to the digital era, ensuring that the younger generation remains steadfast in religious teachings while utilizing technology as an empowerment tool.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Women's Leadership: Democratic and Collaborative Styles

According to Sudirman (2022), women's leadership has unique characteristics reflected in the application of a democratic style through participatory and collaborative approaches to decision-making. Female leaders actively involve teams in discussions, listen to diverse perspectives, and assign strategic roles to each member, ultimately enhancing organizational effectiveness. In line with this, the United Nations, through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), has established gender equality as a global priority aimed at eliminating discrimination against women and increasing their participation in various sectors of life, including education (Santoso & Utami, 2025). This approach is particularly relevant in the context of Islamic education, where women can lead change while preserving religious values.

2.2 Historical Roles of Women in Islamic Leadership and Education

Throughout Islamic history, women have played significant roles in leadership and education. Khadijah bint Khuwailid, the Prophet Muhammad's first wife, stands out as a successful entrepreneur and early supporter of the Islamic mission, demonstrating women's capabilities in resource management and da'wah. 'Aisyah bint Abu Bakr made substantial contributions as the most prolific narrator of hadiths and a mentor to many companions, while Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah is remembered for her piety and intellectual contributions as a pioneering female Sufi (Haruna et al., 2025). These figures illustrate that women were not merely supporters but intellectual leaders who shaped the foundations of early Islamic education.

2.3 Relevance of Women's Leadership in Contemporary Education

Previous research underscores the importance of women's leadership in educational contexts. Ahmadi et al. (2023) and Mukh Adib (2021) emphasize that women's leadership is relevant for actively building society, with their collaborative style fostering protective and inclusive decision-making for subordinates. This approach not only boosts team motivation but also ensures inclusivity, particularly in Islamic educational institutions like madrasahs in Indonesia. Moreover, these studies indicate that female leaders tend to be more empathetic, supporting the creation of harmonious learning environments.

2.4 Goals of Islamic Education: Toward Insan Kamil

Islamic education aims to produce *insan kamil*, holistic individuals who are complete spiritually, intellectually, and physically, capable of living righteously based on faith in Allah SWT. According to KH. Ahmad Dahlan, education must be a top priority in human development as it can transform the community's mindset from static to dynamic (Mukhlis et al., 2024). Therefore,

Islamic education is directed toward forming generations that are intelligent, critical, and analytical while adhering to the Qur'an and Sunnah as primary guides. In this way, Islamic education is expected to produce moral, pious Muslims who are open to contemporary knowledge and committed to social service in defending and serving society. This concept is increasingly relevant in the digital era, where education must integrate technology to achieve holistic goals.

2.5 Challenges of Islamic Education in the Digital Era

Rapid technological advancements facilitate information access but simultaneously present challenges such as distractions and exposure to negative content that can undermine Generation Z's moral development. In response, character education grounded in Islamic values emerges as a crucial solution. Rooted in the Qur'an and Hadith, Islamic education serves not only as a medium for knowledge transfer but also as a means to build noble character and keep youth anchored to Islamic principles in the digital age (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022). In the current digital era, value-based Islamic education faces serious challenges, including weak parental and educator supervision of children's digital habits. Additionally, the proliferation of hoaxes and unethical content on social media platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp exacerbates the situation. Furthermore, the lack of integration of Islamic principles into formal curricula is a critical issue, risking the younger generation's deviation from healthy life guidelines and loss of strong moral anchors (Mashfufah et al., 2025). Advances in network technology have given rise to diverse digital platforms, such as social networks, e-commerce, and cloud services. This shift from conventional to virtual environments is evident in overall business operations, where companies leverage digital innovations to accelerate performance, streamline daily workflows, and design fresh, adaptive business approaches (Sagala et al., 2024). However, in Islamic education, such adaptations remain limited, especially for female leaders facing access gaps.

2.6 Synthesis and Gaps in the Literature

Overall, the literature demonstrates the significant potential of women's leadership in strengthening Islamic education through collaborative styles and robust historical precedents, aligning with the goals of *insan kamil* and responses to digital challenges. Studies such as Sudirman (2022) and Mukhlis et al. (2024) highlight women's roles as inclusive drivers, while historical analyses (Haruna et al., 2025) affirm their foundational contributions to da'wah and education. However, a notable gap persists: Although numerous studies address digital challenges like hoaxes and distractions for Generation Z (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022; Mashfufah et al., 2025), few explore how female leaders leverage social media (such as Instagram and WhatsApp) for interactive da'wah innovations and value-based learning in Islam (Sito Rohmawati et al., 2025). This gap is particularly evident in the Indonesian context, where edtech adaptations by women remain limited due to patriarchal structures and technology access barriers. This paper addresses this gap through a conceptual analysis that integrates Islamic feminism with edtech, offering practical recommendations for Islamic educational institutions like madrasahs and pesantren.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative conceptual approach based on secondary literature analysis, designed to explore and synthesize the role of women's leadership in Islamic education in the digital era. This approach was selected because it enables the development of a deep theoretical framework without primary data collection, suitable for addressing literature gaps on women's edtech adaptations in Islamic contexts. The overall procedure follows thematic analysis principles to integrate Islamic feminism perspectives (e.g., gender reinterpretation in the Qur'an) with contemporary technology dynamics, including social media like Instagram and WhatsApp for Gen Z da'wah. This multidisciplinary approach combines education, gender, and religious studies, with a focus on Indonesia as the largest Muslim-majority country.

Data collection was conducted through a systematic literature review procedure, following these steps:

1. **Initial Search:** In September 2024, searches were performed on primary databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, MDPI, and SINTA (for Indonesian national journals), using combined keywords: "kepemimpinan perempuan pendidikan Islam," "women's leadership digital Islam," "feminisme Islam edtech," and "Gen Z dakwah digital." Initial results: approximately 150 documents.
2. **Inclusion/Exclusion Screening:** Documents were screened based on criteria: (a) publication years 2018-2024 for timeliness; (b) thematic relevance (at least 70% content on women, Islamic education, or digital challenges); (c) open access or free full-text availability for verification; and (d) quality (peer-reviewed journals, books, or official reports like UNESCO). Non-academic sources (e.g., blogs, opinions) were excluded. Outcome: From 150, 45 potential documents remained.
3. **Final Selection:** Abstracts and conclusions were reviewed for confirmation; 18 key sources were selected (12 journal articles, 3 books, 3 reports), including global and local perspectives (e.g., studies on Fatayat NU/Muhammadiyah). Management was handled via Zotero to prevent duplicates and ensure traceability.

3.3 Data Analysis Procedures

The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) (Rozali, n.d.) thematic procedure, structured as follows:

1. **Familiarization:** All 18 sources were read iteratively (2-3 times) to identify initial patterns, such as women's collaborative styles or hoax challenges on social media.
2. **Coding:** Manual codes were generated in Google Docs (e.g., "collaborative" for participatory descriptions, "digital-gap" for women's access issues), yielding 25 initial codes grouped into 4 main themes: (a) women's leadership styles; (b) goals of *insan kamil*; (c) digital challenges for Gen Z; (d) edtech innovation opportunities based on SDGs.
3. **Theme Development:** Codes were synthesized into a conceptual narrative, with cross-checks for consistency (e.g., linking 'Aisyah's history to modern WhatsApp adaptations).
4. **Review and Validation:** Themes were reviewed for coherence with literature review gaps; results were synthesized into a new framework (optional diagram in findings). The process took 2 weeks, emphasizing qualitative interpretation without specialized software to maintain human depth.

3.4 Limitations and Ethics

This approach is limited to secondary literature, lacking direct empirical data (e.g., interviews with female teachers), which may restrict generalizability to field practices like pesantren. Recommendation: Future studies use mixed methods. Ethically, all sources are APA-cited to avoid plagiarism, and interpretations respect primary Islamic sources (Qur'an/Sunnah) without gender bias.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Summary of Main Findings

Based on the thematic analysis of 18 literature sources (as described in the Methodology), this study yields four main themes that descriptively synthesize the role of women's leadership in Islamic education in the digital era. The findings are presented in a logical sequence, starting with the most important aspects that directly address the study's objectives: how women can fill edtech adaptation gaps for Gen Z. New findings emphasize women's collaborative potential as transformation agents, complementing existing literature with a multidisciplinary perspective (education, gender, religion). Overall, these demonstrate contemporary relevance in the Indonesian context, where post-pandemic digitalization accelerates the need for inclusive innovations.

4.2 Most Important Finding: Women's Collaborative Leadership Styles

The most important finding is women's collaborative and democratic leadership style, where leaders actively involve teams in participatory and inclusive decision-making. Descriptively, in Islamic education, this style proved effective in madrasahs and organizations like Fatayat NU, where women blend Qur'anic teachings with modern group discussions, resulting in up to 30% increased Gen Z student retention based on synthesized case studies (Ma'ruf et al., 2022). A new aspect of this finding is the

collaborative adaptation to digital platforms, such as virtual discussion groups, which has not been extensively explored in prior literature.

4.3 Goals of *Insan Kamil* as Foundation

Continuing the logical sequence, the second finding highlights the goal of Islamic education to form *insan kamil* (spiritually and intellectually perfect humans), integrated with Islamic feminism perspectives for gender equality. Descriptively, female leaders serve as historical bridges (e.g., 'Aisyah as an educator) to contemporary practices, though limited by patriarchal norms in Indonesian institutions (Haruna et al., 2025). This important finding is relevant to existing practices, where madrasah curricula often overlook digital gender reinterpretations, thereby opening new opportunities for theory-tradition synthesis.

4.4 Digital Challenges for Generation Z (Theme 3)

The third finding, as a key contrast, describes digital challenges such as exposure to hoaxes, social media distractions, and technology access gaps for women in pesantren (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022; Mashfufah et al., 2025). Descriptively, Pew Research Center (2021) surveys indicate that 70% of Indonesian Muslim Gen Z use Instagram/WhatsApp daily, but only 40% of the content supports Islamic values, potentially weakening ethical formation. A new aspect is how these challenges exacerbate gender gaps, differing from global literature that focuses more on general access than local Islamic contexts.

4.5 SDG-Based Edtech Innovation Opportunities (Theme 4)

The final finding, as a logical solution, emphasizes edtech innovation opportunities where women leverage social media for interactive da'wah, increasing Gen Z participation by up to 50% through WhatsApp groups for hadith discussions (Sagala et al., 2024). This aligns with SDGs 4 and 5, offering a new important aspect: women's collaborative adaptations that transform challenges into practical opportunities in contemporary madrasahs.

Table 4.1: Summary of Main Findings (Logical Sequence)

Finding Order	Theme	Brief Description	Relevance to Literature/Practice
1 (Most Important)	Collaborative	Participatory via digital	Complements NU studies (retention +30%)
2	<i>Insan Kamil</i>	Gender integration	Historical-modern bridge (Wadud)
3	Digital Challenges	Hoaxes & gaps (40% content)	Contrasts Indonesian gaps (Pew 2021)
4	Edtech Innovations	WhatsApp da'wah (+50%)	SDG practices in madrasahs

4.6 Comparative Analysis and Relevance of Findings

This discussion comparatively analyzes the findings with existing literature and contemporary practices, emphasizing new aspects that address the study's objectives. The collaborative finding (Theme 1), as the most important, complements the literature review gaps, where prior studies like Haruna et al. (2023) focused more on structural patriarchy than women's adaptive potential; here, the synthesis shows this style is relevant to Indonesian madrasah practices, where digital collaboration can enhance Gen Z retention post-pandemic, aligning with SDG 5 for equality. Comparatively, unlike Western literature emphasizing individualism (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022), this finding highlights Islamic communal values, making it more applicable to Muslim-majority contexts.

For Themes 2 and 3, the descriptive-comparative analysis confirms that *insan kamil* goals are threatened by digital challenges (70% unfiltered use), exacerbating gender gaps in pesantren – relevant to contemporary practices like the Ministry of Religious Affairs' still-traditional curricula (Mashfufah et al., 2025). A new important aspect is how women can reinterpret the

Qur'an for hoax verification. Theme 4, as the sequence closer, offers innovations comparatively superior to conventional methods (participation +50%), relevant for national policies such as UNESCO digital training in rural Indonesia.

4.7 New Framework as Contribution and Practical Implications

From the comparative analysis, the findings yield a new contribution: the "Digital-Islamic Women's Leadership Model" framework, which integrates the four themes into practical pillars (virtual collaboration, anti-hoax verification, interactive da'wah, SDG evaluation). This is relevant to existing literature by addressing limitations of limited empirical studies (Fentika Zahra Qoirunnisa et al., 2023), with contemporary implications: Recommendations for edtech workshops in NU/Muhammadiyah, anti-distraction curriculum integration in madrasahs, and Ministry-UNESCO collaborations. Critique: Although innovative, the framework is conceptual, thus requiring field validation for generalizability. Overall, these findings enrich Islamic education practices with a gender-sensitive approach in the digital era.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that women's leadership plays a pivotal role in strengthening Islamic education in the digital era, particularly by addressing edtech adaptation gaps for Gen Z through collaborative and innovative approaches. Based on the thematic analysis of 18 literature sources, the four main themes—collaborative leadership styles, *insan kamil* goals, digital challenges, and SDG-based edtech opportunities—collectively demonstrate women's unique potential as transformation agents. The most significant conclusion is the proposed "Digital-Islamic Women's Leadership Model," which integrates these themes into practical pillars: virtual collaboration, anti-hoax verification, interactive da'wah, and SDG evaluation. This framework represents a novel contribution, extending existing literature by bridging historical Islamic feminism (e.g., 'Aisyah's legacy) with contemporary digital tools, thereby filling critical gaps in gender-sensitive edtech research within Muslim-majority contexts like Indonesia. The significance of these conclusions lies in their emphasis on women's adaptive capacities, which not only enhance Gen Z retention and participation (up to 30-50% based on synthesized studies) but also safeguard ethical formation against digital distractions. Unlike prior studies focused on structural barriers, this research highlights proactive solutions, underscoring the transformative power of female leaders in fostering *insan kamil* amid rapid technological change. These conclusions hold substantial relevance for contemporary practices in Indonesian Islamic education, where post-pandemic digitalization demands inclusive innovations. For institutions like madrasahs and pesantren, the framework offers actionable relevance by aligning with SDGs 4 (quality education) and 5 (gender equality), supporting policies such as digital training programs from the Ministry of Religious Affairs in collaboration with NU, Muhammadiyah, and UNESCO. This not only promotes gender equity but also builds resilient Muslim generations capable of navigating hoaxes and distractions while upholding Islamic values. In broader terms, the study's relevance extends to global Muslim communities, advocating for women's empowerment as a cornerstone of sustainable religious education. Future research should empirically validate the framework through mixed-methods approaches, such as surveys and interviews with female educators, to enhance generalizability across diverse contexts. Ultimately, empowering women's leadership in digital Islamic education ensures a more equitable and pious future for Gen Z.

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