

Integrating Total Quality Management in Islamic Boarding Schools: A Qualitative Study on Teacher Management and Learning Quality Enhancement

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Abstract: As Islamic boarding schools face increasing demands for educational accountability, they are challenged to strengthen institutional governance and instructional effectiveness without compromising their distinctive religious and communal identity. This study aims to identify how Total Quality Management (TQM)-based teacher management enhances learning quality while preserving the spiritual mission and pedagogical focus of these institutions. Furthermore, it seeks to offer a contextual model of integrated quality-spiritual management wherein TQM supports educational improvement without eroding the distinctive character of the *pesantren*. The research employed a qualitative case-study design conducted at two Islamic boarding schools located in Ciamis Regency, Indonesia. Data were collected through interviews and observation from a population consisting of 57 educators across both institutions. The analysis revealed that quality in the *pesantren* context is understood holistically as the integration of instructional discipline, spiritual guidance, and character formation. Additionally, the study found that administrative simplification is necessary to protect teachers' pedagogical time and preserve meaningful interactions with students. The implementation of TQM proved to be more effective when traditional spiritual authority remained under the *kyai*'s leadership while technical and managerial tasks were distributed among other school actors. Moreover, sustainable quality improvement was heavily dependent on teacher empowerment, role clarity, and comprehensive institutional support. Overall, these findings indicate that the success of TQM depends on the institution's ability to reinterpret managerial standards as a moral-pedagogical endeavor rather than an inflexible corporate framework. The study concludes that TQM implementation in Islamic boarding schools is effective only when organically integrated with the institution's moral, spiritual, and pedagogical character rather than adopted as a rigid technical governance system.

Keywords: Total Quality Management; Teacher Management; Learning Quality; Islamic Boarding Schools.

Introduction

The growing demand for educational accountability has encouraged Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) to strengthen their institutional quality without abandoning their religious mission (Badrudin, 2022; Badrudin et al., 2021; Rusmana et al., 2024). In contemporary educational discourse, Total Quality Management (TQM) is increasingly seen as a strategic framework for continuous improvement, participatory leadership, and service quality in schools. Recent studies in Islamic education show that TQM can support better governance, stronger teaching practices, and more responsive institutional management when it is adapted to local educational culture rather than applied mechanically (Rada et al., 2024; Sudir et al., 2025).

In the *pesantren* context, however, quality is not limited to administrative efficiency or academic output. Meanwhile, it is focused on educational success that is also tied to moral formation, religious discipline, and the authority structure led by the *kyai* (Habibi et al., 2025; Wanayati et al., 2025). This focus makes quality management in *pesantren* more complex than in many formal schools, because managerial systems must work alongside spiritual values, communal traditions, and teacher devotion. To deal with the aforementioned phenomenon, a special study is needed that focuses on quality assurance in Islamic education. The study investigates how sustainable improvement depends on the alignment between institutional systems and the values that can be defined by the educational community (Komsiyah, 2021; Thoyib, 2022).

Despite the extensive discussion of TQM in educational management, a major gap remains in understanding how it is enacted through teacher management. Teachers are also educators who, as the so-called *asatidz*, become the central actors who interpret, negotiate, and implement quality standards in their daily pedagogical practices. The ultimate success or failure of TQM within these institutions is intrinsically linked to how educators experience supervision, handle their workloads, and meet pedagogical expectations within their specific institutional settings (Rada et al., 2024; Salim et al., 2024).

This issue becomes particularly urgent when TQM is implemented too rigidly. Standardization can misdirect educational focus toward paperwork and technical metrics, diminishing the relational and spiritual aspects of teaching. Such conditions often generate administrative overload for teachers/educators, create friction between data-driven management and charismatic *kyai* leadership, and widen the quality gap between larger and smaller institutions (Harismansyah et al., 2023; Herniawati et al., 2024). Therefore, quality management cannot simply mirror corporate models; it must be carefully reconstructed to fit the educational and spiritual realities of the

pesantren.

Recent studies on *pesantren* quality management have explored various dimensions, highlighting a shift beyond narrow administrative compliance. Previous studies have examined internal quality assurance models structured around specific evaluation standards (Lathifah et al., 2022), as well as the generally positive perceptions of TQM among teachers/educators (Sudir et al., 2025). Another study has underscored the role of digital innovation in supporting quality improvement (Rada et al., 2024) and the modernization of leadership styles that bridge traditional authority with democratic practices (Salim et al., 2024). Additionally, effective human resource and curriculum governance—such as improving teachers/educators' welfare and professional development—have been shown to strengthen educational outcomes (Ali & Dian, 2024; Nurmadiyah et al., 2025).

Despite these valuable insights, a significant gap remains in understanding how these various elements converge specifically within teacher management. While existing studies focus on broad institutional systems, digitalization, or generalized leadership strategies, there are limited qualitative studies that place teacher management at the very center of TQM implementation. Specifically, there is a lack of studies capturing how administrative expectations, spiritual authority, and learning quality are actively negotiated by teachers/educators in concrete, everyday school settings.

Addressing this gap, the novelty of the present study focuses on its specific analytical lens. The gap covers teacher management that is not only a supportive human resources function, but also the core arena at which TQM values connect with pedagogical quality and spiritual mission. Unlike previous studies that focus on TQM as a detached administrative system, the present study explores how managerial standards can be uniquely reinterpreted as a moral-pedagogical endeavor rather than an inflexible corporate framework. Thus, the study offers a current perspective through examining the delicate balance between technical governance and traditional spiritual leadership from the lived experiences of the teachers/educators themselves.

Further, the findings of the present study are expected to provide significant theoretical and practical impacts. Theoretically, the study enriches the discourse on TQM in faith-based education by demonstrating how quality management can be organically integrated into an institution's moral character. Practically, the study offers *pesantren* leaders and policymakers a contextual model of integrated quality-spiritual management, guiding them to support learning improvement and teacher empowerment without degrading the distinctive, traditional identity of the *pesantren*.

Therefore, in this study, the researchers formulate a research question: How does TQM-based teacher management enhance learning quality without compromising the spiritual mission and pedagogical focus of Islamic boarding schools? Based on the aforementioned research question, the study aims to identify how TQM-based teacher management enhances learning quality without compromising the spiritual mission and pedagogical focus of Islamic boarding schools. The study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically by offering a contextual model of integrated quality-spiritual management in which TQM supports learning improvement without eroding the distinctive character of the *pesantren*.

Method

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine how Total Quality Management (TQM) was integrated into teacher management and how that integration enhanced learning quality in Islamic boarding schools. A qualitative case study was considered appropriate because the study focused on understanding a bounded institutional phenomenon in its natural setting, with attention to organizational meaning, local culture, and everyday educational practice rather than variable measurement alone. Case-study design is widely used when researchers seek to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context and to preserve the complexity of participants' experiences and institutional processes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018).

The study was conducted in two *pesantren* in Banjarsari sub-district, Ciamis Regency, with the population consisting of 57 teachers/educators working across the two institutions. This population formed the institutional base of the study because teachers were the primary actors through whom quality standards, managerial expectations, and learning practices were enacted. In case-study research, participants are approached not merely as statistical units, but as information-rich actors whose perspectives help illuminate organizational routines, leadership structures, and the meanings attached to policy implementation within a specific context (Yin, 2018).

Data were gathered through observation and interview. Observation enabled the researchers to examine teachers/educators' discipline, classroom interaction, institutional routines, and quality-management practices as they unfolded in the *pesantren* environment. Interview was used to capture teachers/educators' perspectives on supervision, administrative demands, coordination patterns, and the relationship between managerial systems and learning quality. The use of multiple data-collection techniques is methodologically important in qualitative case studies because it allows the researchers to compare perspectives, deepen contextual interpretation, and avoid reliance on a single source of evidence (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018).

The data were analyzed using triangulation. In this study, triangulation referred to the comparison of findings from interviews and observation to examine recurring patterns across data sources and the two *pesantren* settings.

This analytic strategy helped identify convergences, inconsistencies, and context-specific meanings related to TQM implementation, teacher management, and learning quality. In qualitative research, triangulation is commonly used to strengthen interpretive depth and to improve the plausibility of findings by checking whether similar insights emerge from different forms of evidence (Ahmed, 2024).

To ensure the rigor of the study, the research was guided by the principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Multiple data sources supported credibility. At the same time, dependability and confirmability were reinforced by maintaining consistency between the study focus, the data-collection procedures, and the interpretation of findings. Transferability was pursued by clearly presenting the *pesantren* context and the teacher-management setting so that readers could judge the relevance of the findings to similar educational environments. In ethical terms, the study treated participants and institutions with confidentiality and academic responsibility by anonymizing the data and using it only for research.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of interview, observation, and documentation data across the two Islamic boarding schools revealed that the integration of Total Quality Management (TQM) was not understood only as a technical management reform. Rather, TQM was interpreted as a process of organizing teacher work, leadership coordination, and instructional improvement in ways that remained aligned with the *pesantren*'s spiritual mission. Through triangulation, four interrelated themes emerged: value-based quality orientation, administrative simplification for pedagogical focus, dual leadership and coordinated decision-making, and teacher empowerment and institutional sustainability. These themes indicate that teacher management became the main arena through which quality improvement was negotiated and implemented in daily educational practice.

1. Quality was defined as academic order, pedagogical discipline, and spiritual formation

Interview data showed that participants did not define learning quality only in terms of formal academic indicators. Teachers and school actors associated quality with disciplined classroom practice, teacher responsibility, moral exemplarity, consistency in religious guidance, and the ability to nurture students' intellectual and spiritual growth simultaneously. Observation findings reinforced this pattern by showing that teacher punctuality, preparedness, supervision of students' daily conduct, and continuity between classroom instruction and religious mentoring were treated as visible indicators of quality.

This finding indicates that TQM in the *pesantren* context was localized into a holistic concept of quality. The schools did not reject managerial thinking, but they reinterpreted it through a framework in which quality meant the harmony between instructional effectiveness and *tafaqquh fiddin*. In this sense, the first theme shows that TQM became acceptable when quality standards were morally anchored rather than treated as purely technical targets.

2. Administrative simplification was necessary to protect instructional time

The second theme emerged from recurring accounts of administrative burden and the need to maintain teachers' pedagogical focus. Interview data indicated that teachers/educators recognized the importance of documentation, evaluation, and reporting for monitoring institutional quality. However, they also emphasized that excessive administrative work could reduce the time available for mentoring students, preparing lessons, and maintaining meaningful educational relationships. Observation data confirmed that the most effective teachers/educators were those who balanced institutional compliance with strong classroom and pastoral presence.

Documentation and field indications further suggested that management practices were most useful when they simplified rather than multiplied bureaucratic tasks. Broader management initiatives, including single-entry reporting and administrative streamlining, were perceived as supportive because they enabled teachers to concentrate more fully on pedagogical and supervisory responsibilities. The pattern was clear: TQM strengthened learning quality only when administrative systems functioned as support mechanisms, not as burdens that displaced the educational core of teachers/educators' work.

3. Dual leadership reduced tension between spiritual authority and managerial rationality

A third theme concerned leadership structure. Interview findings showed that the authority of the *kyai* remained central in defining the *pesantren*'s spiritual direction, values, and institutional legitimacy. At the same time, observation and documentation indicated that the technical implementation of quality management increasingly relied on delegated coordination involving principals, senior teachers, or other managerial personnel. This arrangement allowed the *pesantren* to preserve its traditional leadership structure while accommodating modern demands for planning, monitoring, and evaluation.

The data, therefore, point to a dual or layered leadership pattern. The *kyai* operated as the guardian of mission and moral direction, while managerial actors handled the operational side of quality assurance. Rather than producing an open conflict between tradition and modernity, this structure enabled data, evaluation, and administrative procedures to reinforce the *pesantren's* mission.

4. Theme 4. Teacher empowerment supported institutional sustainability and learning quality

The fourth theme highlights the importance of teacher empowerment in sustaining quality improvement. Interview findings suggested that teacher management was not limited to supervision and control, but also involved efforts to maintain teacher motivation, professionalism, and institutional belonging. Participants emphasized the need for a fairer balance between service, workload, and welfare, especially in a *pesantren* context where educators are often expected to combine pedagogical duties with moral mentoring and organizational commitment.

Observation data likewise suggested that stronger coordination and clearer role division improved the consistency of learning activities. Institutional sustainability was also linked to broader empowerment strategies, including economic support mechanisms and collaboration among *pesantren* of varying capacities. These patterns suggest that TQM in *pesantren* was not only about internal efficiency, but also about building the human and institutional conditions necessary for durable educational quality (Badrudin et al., 2021; Suhartini et al., 2025).

Table 2. Summary of Main Findings by Theme and Data Source

Theme	Interview and Observation Patterns	Documentation Patterns	Meaning for Learning Quality
Value-based orientation	Quality was defined through teaching discipline, moral guidance, and service to students; teacher punctuality and preparedness were emphasized.	Institutional records reflected both academic and spiritual expectations	Learning quality was understood holistically, not only administratively
Administrative simplification	Teachers recognized reporting needs but were concerned about workload; effective teachers balanced compliance with mentoring presence.	Management systems aimed to reduce repetitive reporting and protect teaching time	TQM supported quality when bureaucracy remained functional and limited
Dual leadership structure	The <i>kyai</i> retained moral authority while managers handled technical coordination and supervision.	Formal coordination routines coexisted with value-based decision making	Quality improved when managerial discipline was reinforced, rather than weakened, by religious leadership
Teacher empowerment and sustainability	Teachers emphasized support, fairness, role clarity, and professional development.	Cooperative and collaborative support structures enhanced institutional resilience.	Sustainable teacher management strengthened the continuity of quality learning.

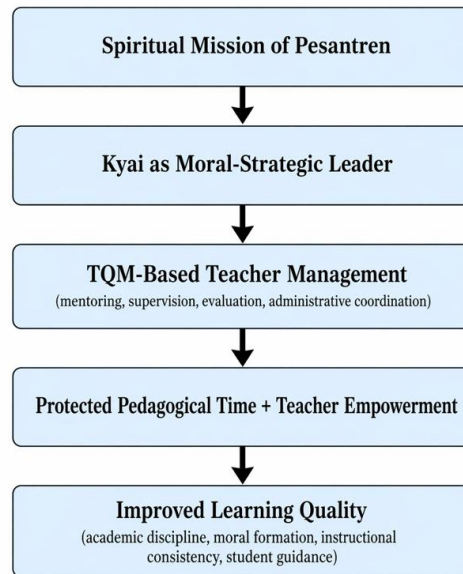


Figure 1. Conceptual Pattern of TQM Implementation in Pesantren

Overall, the findings suggest that the success of TQM in Islamic boarding schools depended less on the formal adoption of quality language than on the institutional ability to reinterpret quality in accordance with *pesantren* values. Teacher management emerged as the most critical operational domain because it connected leadership, administration, pedagogical practice, and student formation. The data also show that the major risks identified in the problem statement, such as bureaucratic overload, conflict with charismatic leadership, and the marginalization of smaller institutions, were addressed through adaptive arrangements that balanced structure with spirituality, efficiency with service, and standardization with contextual flexibility.

After highlighting the results of the study, the researchers need to answer the research question outlined in the preceding point. The aforementioned research question is: How does TQM-based teacher management enhance learning quality without compromising the spiritual mission and pedagogical focus of Islamic boarding schools? Based on the findings written in the results of the study, the integration of Total Quality Management (TQM) in Islamic boarding schools enhances learning quality by reconceptualizing managerial standards as a holistic, moral-pedagogical endeavor rather than a rigid corporate framework. Instead of reducing educational success to academic or administrative metrics, *pesantren* define quality through a synthesis of instructional discipline, character formation, and continuous spiritual guidance (Badrudin, 2022; Wanayati et al., 2025). This value-based orientation is actualized through comprehensive teacher empowerment, ensuring that educators are not only supervised but are supported through clear role divisions, fair workloads, and attention to their welfare. By maintaining educator motivation and fostering a deep sense of institutional belonging, this approach builds the human capacity necessary to sustain high-quality learning environments that remain true to the institution's spiritual roots.

In addition, this pedagogical focus is not compromised by bureaucratic demands; successful TQM implementation relies on strategic administrative simplification. By streamlining reporting and managerial tasks, the institution protects teachers' instructional time, allowing them to maintain a meaningful pastoral and pedagogical presence with their students (Rusmana et al., 2024; Suhartini et al., 2025). Furthermore, this system is governed by a dual leadership structure that thoughtfully reconciles modern managerial rationality with traditional charismatic authority. While the *kyai* retains central moral authority to safeguard the *pesantren's* spiritual mission, technical and operational responsibilities are delegated to principals, senior teachers, and other managerial personnel. Ultimately, these adaptive arrangements allow managerial discipline to reinforce, rather than erode, the communal and religious identity of the Islamic boarding school.

The answer to the aforementioned research question is based on four findings, as written in the results of the study. The first finding concerns on quality, which directly addresses the concern that TQM may commodify *pesantren* education by overemphasizing numerical indicators and formal standards. In the two *pesantren* studied, quality was not reduced to academic outcomes or bureaucratic neatness, but was understood as a synthesis of teaching effectiveness, moral example, and spiritual consistency. This interpretation is broadly consistent with recent research showing that TQM in Islamic boarding schools is viewed positively when it improves teaching quality, yet still faces challenges in learning methods, resources, and curriculum design (Sudir et al., 2025). It also resonates with broader educational evidence that quality-management practices influence performance most effectively when they are mediated by school culture rather than treated as isolated procedures (Parveen et al.,

2024).

The second finding concerns on administrative simplification, which directly addresses the concern that TQM can overburden educators and weaken meaningful teacher-student interaction. The data suggest that administrative orders were accepted only when they protected pedagogical time and reduced repetitive workload. This is important because quality systems often fail not because teachers oppose accountability, but because poorly designed procedures consume the time needed for lesson preparation, mentoring, and classroom presence. Recent research on digital innovation in *pesantren* supports this interpretation by showing that TQM-based quality improvement is strengthened when management provides adequate infrastructure, involves teachers and students, and aligns digital tools with institutional values (Rada et al., 2024).

The third finding concerns on dual leadership, that directly addresses the concern between data-based management and charismatic *kyai* authority. Rather than revealing an unavoidable clash between traditional and modern governance, the findings show that these two logics can be combined. The *kyai* remained the source of spiritual direction and institutional legitimacy, while operational responsibilities were delegated to principals, senior teachers, or managers. This pattern closely parallels recent studies of *pesantren* leadership that describe the coexistence of visionary, democratic, paternalistic, and spiritual leadership styles in modernizing Islamic boarding schools (Salim et al., 2024). It also aligns with broader school-leadership research showing that distributed leadership can indirectly strengthen teachers' instructional practices through collegiality (Hsieh et al., 2025).

The fourth finding concerns on teacher empowerment and institutional sustainability, which addresses that TQM may intensify work demands without sufficiently supporting educators. In these cases, quality improvement was more sustainable when teacher management included not only supervision and performance monitoring, but also support, role clarity, and attention to teacher welfare. This is consistent with recent evidence from Islamic boarding schools showing that effective teacher management includes welfare improvement, fair compensation, continuous professional development, supportive work environments, and regular performance evaluation (Nurmadiyah et al., 2025). It also aligns with research on TQM implementation in modern Islamic boarding schools, which highlights leadership efforts to improve teacher performance through continuous improvement, participatory decision-making, and quality-assurance systems (Al Imam, 2023).

Taken together, these findings fill an important gap in the literature. Previous studies have examined perceptions of TQM, digital innovation, modernization of leadership, curriculum management, and human resource development in *pesantren*. Those previous studies have not often explained how these elements come together through teacher management in the aforementioned institutions. Meanwhile, the present study offers an integrated TQM taken place in *pesantren* that operates through four linked conditions: a value-based definition of quality, administrative systems that safeguard pedagogy, leadership that combines moral authority with managerial delegation, and teacher empowerment that supports long-term institutional resilience. Ultimately, the present study provides both theoretical and practical value by introducing an integrated approach to quality-spiritual management. Within this framework, institutional excellence is evaluated not merely by administrative efficiency, but by a deep commitment to sustaining meaningful teaching, nurturing moral character, and providing genuine educational service.

From a practical standpoint, the discussion implies that *pesantren* leaders should avoid applying TQM as an inflexible regulatory structure. More promising strategies include simplifying administrative routines, developing collaborative supervision structures, strengthening teacher support systems, and ensuring that every quality mechanism remains aligned with the *pesantren*'s religious mission. Theoretically, the findings suggest that TQM in faith-based institutions should be understood through the interaction among organizational culture, leadership legitimacy, and human resource development, rather than procedural control alone.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the implementation of Total Quality Management (TQM) in Islamic boarding schools has proven effective when organically integrated with the institution's moral, spiritual, and pedagogical character, rather than adopted as a corporate technical governance system. The success of quality in this context is heavily centered on teacher management, where overly rigid administrative standardization risks distorting the meaning of education and distancing teacher-student interaction. Therefore, the ideal TQM model in Islamic boarding schools requires simplifying the bureaucratic system, adopting a developmental supervision approach, and fostering collaborative leadership that respects the authority of the *kiai* as the center of spiritual legitimacy and moral model. This study is limited by its focus on two *pesantren* in Banjarsari sub-district, Ciamis Regency and by its context-specific qualitative design. As a result, the findings should be understood as analytically rich rather than statistically generalizable. Overall, this study affirms that the future of quality improvement in *pesantren* depends not only on abandoning tradition, but also on reinterpreting managerial innovation through the ethical and spiritual foundations that have long sustained Islamic boarding school education.

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