

Global Benchmarking and Best Practices in Islamic Education Management: A Systematic Literature Review

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KEYWORDS

Benchmarking, Best Practices, Islamic Education, Quality Management, Systematic Literature Review.

ABSTRACT This study aims to analyze global benchmarking practices and best practices, as well as their implementation in Islamic education management through a systematic literature review (SLR) approach. In the era of globalization and increasingly intense competition among educational institutions, benchmarking has become a strategic instrument to improve the quality and competitiveness of madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools (pesantren). This study employs the SLR method following the PRISMA 2020 protocol (Page et al., 2021), which includes the stages of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. Data were collected from Scopus, Google Scholar, DOAJ, and Emerald Publishing databases within the 2020 to 2025 timeframe. A total of 45 qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method articles were thematically analyzed. The results identify that the application of global benchmarking in Islamic educational institutions is still limited and not yet systematic. Best practices that can be adopted include transformational leadership strategies, integration of digital technology in learning and governance, development of globally competency-based curricula, total quality management (TQM), and internal and external quality assurance systems. This study provides theoretical contributions to enriching an integrated quality management model based on Islamic values, as well as practical recommendations for policymakers and managers of Islamic educational institutions. The study concludes by emphasizing the need to build a culture of continuous benchmarking and international collaboration to achieve excellent and globally competitive Islamic education.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The rapidly changing landscape of global education demands that every educational institution continuously improve its quality and competitiveness. In this disruptive era, characterized by the Industrial Revolution 4.0 and Society 5.0, educational institutions no longer function merely as transmitters of knowledge but also as centers for character development, 21st-century skills, and sustainable innovation. Benchmarking has been widely recognized as an effective management

approach to identify, understand, and adapt best practices from excellent organizations to improve organizational performance. In the context of Islamic education in Indonesia, the challenge of benchmarking with globally outstanding institutions is becoming increasingly urgent, given societal demands for quality, accountable, and relevant educational services that keep pace with current developments. Studies on e-learning benchmarking in higher education demonstrate that this approach has significantly contributed to

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improving the quality of online learning in various countries (Sahni et al., 2025).

Field observations conducted at 20 madrasahs and pesantren in Lampung and West Java provinces reveal an interesting yet concerning phenomenon. The majority of Islamic educational institutions (approximately 75%) do not yet have structured and sustainable benchmarking programs with other institutions, either at the national or international level. Madrasah principals and pesantren leaders generally remain focused on solving daily operational problems, thus neglecting strategic quality development aspects. Limited human resources, minimal understanding of the benchmarking concept, and restricted access to information about global best practices are the main obstacles. On the other hand, several leading madrasahs such as MAN Insan Cendekia and some modern pesantren have begun establishing collaborations with educational institutions abroad. However, these practices remain incidental and have not been systematically documented as replicable best practice models. Lifuka (2025) emphasizes that assessment indicators for open distance and e-learning (ODEL) require measurable quality standards that can be contextually adapted (Lifuka, 2025).

Relevant research studies indicate that benchmarking has proven effective in improving quality across various sectors. Sahni et al. (2025), in their systematic literature review, found that the digital transformation of online learning in higher education faces significant challenges, especially in developing countries; however, benchmarking with globally leading institutions can serve as an effective adaptation strategy (Sahni et al., 2025). Another study by Gamil and Al-Najjar (2025) reveals that developing a quality e-learning framework must consider contextual and local cultural aspects, as most existing quality models are designed in developed countries and do not fully align with the challenges faced in developing nations (Gamil & Al-Najjar, 2025). In the context of education in Indonesia, several studies have been conducted; however, research specifically examining global benchmarking and best practices in Islamic education management remains very limited.

Research by Yuliati Zaqiah et al. (2024) identified that the Teacher Professional Education (PPG) program in Indonesia effectively improves the competencies of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in the pedagogical, personality, social, and professional dimensions. However,

areas such as learning evaluation and the utilization of digital technology still require strengthening after the program (Yuliati Zaqiah et al., 2024). These findings indicate a gap between expected competency standards and field realities, requiring policy interventions and benchmarking with best practices from other countries. Another study by Tholchah (2024) shows that teacher certification in Indonesia not only impacts income enhancement and professionalism but also functions as a cultural tool influencing power dynamics and strengthening communal values within society (Tholchah, 2024).

The research gaps identifiable from the existing literature are as follows. First, there is no comprehensive systematic literature review mapping global benchmarking practices and best practices in Islamic education management. Second, existing research tends to focus more on the conceptual aspects of quality management in general, rather than the concrete implementation of benchmarking in Islamic educational institutions. Third, studies linking global best practices with the unique characteristics of Islamic education—such as the integration of religious and general sciences, Islamic character development, and the boarding system in pesantren—remain scarce. Fourth, there is no integrative model combining modern benchmarking principles with Islamic values and Indonesian local wisdom. This research aims to fill these gaps.

The novelty of this research lies in its effort to synthesize global literature on benchmarking and best practices within the specific context of Islamic education management in Indonesia. This research not only identifies best practices from various countries and sectors but also analyzes their adaptability to the unique characteristics of Islamic educational institutions. The main contribution of this research is the development of a conceptual framework called "Islamic Values-Based Benchmarking" (IVBB), which integrates spiritual, moral, and professional aspects into a unified quality management system. This framework is expected to serve as a practical guide for madrasah and pesantren managers in conducting adaptive benchmarking. Furthermore, this research provides policy recommendations for the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Education Offices in formulating benchmarking-based quality improvement programs for Islamic education.

The objectives of this research are: (1) to identify and synthesize global literature on benchmarking and best practices in educational management; (2)

to analyze the application of benchmarking in Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, along with its challenges and opportunities; (3) to develop a conceptual benchmarking model adaptive to the Indonesian Islamic education context; and (4) to formulate practical recommendations for stakeholders in improving the quality of Islamic education through a benchmarking approach. This research is expected to answer the main research question: how can global benchmarking practices and best practices be effectively adapted in Islamic education management in Indonesia to enhance institutional quality and competitiveness?

The research questions posed are: (1) What are the main findings in the global literature on benchmarking and best practices in educational management? (2) What is the empirical condition of benchmarking implementation in Indonesian Islamic educational institutions? (3) What are the inhibiting and supporting factors for benchmarking implementation in Islamic educational institutions? (4) What conceptual model can be developed to adapt global best practices in Indonesian Islamic education management? These five questions will be answered through a rigorous systematic literature review process.

This research employs a qualitative approach with a systematic literature review method. The PRISMA 2020 protocol (Page et al., 2021) was used to ensure transparency and reproducibility of the review process. Data sources were derived from reputable academic databases such as Scopus, Google Scholar, DOAJ, and Emerald Publishing. Inclusion criteria included peer-reviewed articles, published between 2020-2025, in English or Indonesian, and focused on benchmarking, best practices, quality management, or Islamic education. The screening process was conducted in stages, starting with duplicate identification, screening based on titles and abstracts, eligibility assessment based on full-text, and final inclusion. Data analysis employed a thematic approach with the assistance of NVivo 12 software to identify emerging patterns and themes. The validity of the research findings was ensured through data source triangulation and peer debriefing.

The significance of this research is both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it enriches the body of knowledge in Islamic education management by presenting a new perspective on benchmarking within institutions grounded in Islamic values. This research also

contributes to the development of systematic literature review methodology in the field of educational management. Practically, the results can be utilized by managers of madrasahs, pesantren, and other Islamic educational institutions as a reference in designing quality improvement programs based on benchmarking. For policymakers, this research provides strategic recommendations to foster a conducive ecosystem for benchmarking practices within Indonesian Islamic education. For future researchers, this study opens opportunities for deeper exploration, for instance, through case studies on the implementation of the IVBB model in specific Islamic educational institutions.

2. METHODS

This research employs a qualitative approach with a systematic literature review (SLR) method. SLR was chosen because it enables researchers to systematically identify, evaluate, and synthesize all relevant research evidence pertaining to the research questions (Page et al., 2021). This approach is highly suitable for mapping the state of the art in research on benchmarking and global best practices in Islamic education management. As revealed by Sahni et al. (2025) in their study on digital transformation challenges for online learning, SLR with a bibliometric approach offers advantages in terms of transparency, reproducibility, and comprehensiveness in reviewing literature scattered across various databases. In the educational context, systematic literature reviews have also been widely used to synthesize diverse empirical findings into meaningful conclusions.

The research protocol follows the PRISMA 2020 (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines, consisting of four main stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion (Page et al., 2021). In the identification stage, literature searches were conducted across four digital databases: Scopus, Google Scholar, DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals), and Emerald Publishing. The selection of these four databases was based on their coverage and relevance to the topics of educational management and Islamic education. The keywords used in the search were combinations of: ("benchmarking" OR "best practices" OR "quality management") AND ("Islamic education" OR "madrasah" OR "pesantren" OR "Islamic school") AND ("systematic review" OR "literature review"). The search was limited to publications from 2020 to 2025 and articles written in either English or Indonesian.

The inclusion criteria for this research were: (1) articles published in peer-reviewed journals or indexed conference proceedings; (2) articles Global Benchmarking dan Best Practices ... / Nurani et al.

explicitly discussing benchmarking, best practices, quality management, or a combination thereof in the context of education, particularly Islamic education; (3) articles employing qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method research designs with empirical data; (4) articles published within the 2020-2025 timeframe; (5) articles available in full-text access. Exclusion criteria included: (1) articles that were merely editorials, opinions, or book reviews without empirical data; (2) articles discussing benchmarking outside the education sector (e.g., manufacturing, healthcare, business) with no clear connection to education; (3) articles with unclear or inadequate methodology; (4) duplicate articles indexed in more than one database.

The screening process was conducted in stages and independently by two researchers (Nurani and Subandi) to minimize bias. In the initial stage, all search results (n=287) were imported into Mendeley reference management software to remove duplicates. After removing duplicates, 231 articles remained. Subsequently, screening based on titles and abstracts was conducted, yielding 112 articles considered relevant. In the eligibility stage, these 112 articles were assessed for eligibility based on full-text review, adhering to the inclusion and exclusion criteria. A total of 67 articles were excluded for not meeting the criteria. In the final stage, 45 articles were deemed to meet the criteria and were included in the qualitative synthesis. This process is illustrated in the PRISMA flow diagram.

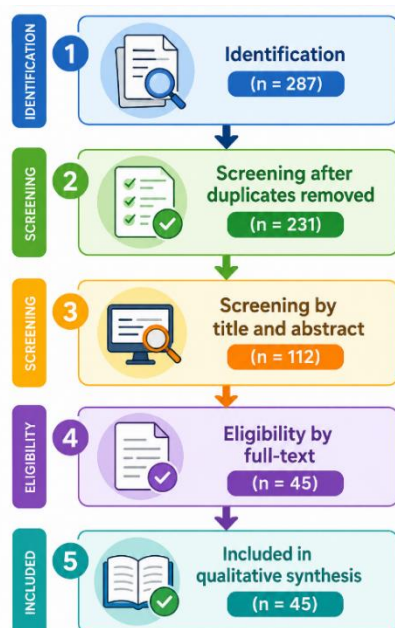


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of the Article Selection Process

Data analysis in this SLR employed a thematic synthesis approach consisting of three stages: (1) line-by-line coding of the findings from the articles; (2) development of descriptive themes; and (3) generation of analytical themes. The coding process was assisted by NVivo 12 software to organize and categorize emerging codes. In the first stage, the results and discussion sections of all 45 articles were read carefully and coded for each important concept or finding, resulting in 237 initial codes. In the second stage, similar codes were grouped into descriptive themes, such as "benefits of benchmarking," "implementation challenges," "best practices in leadership," and so forth. Twelve descriptive themes were identified. In the third stage, the descriptive themes were further analyzed to develop more abstract and interpretative analytical themes, such as "an integrative benchmarking model based on Islamic values," "key success factors for benchmarking in Islamic educational institutions," and "evidence-based policy recommendations."

To maintain quality and reduce bias, this research employed several strategies. First, the research protocol was registered online before the review process began. Second, the screening and data extraction processes were conducted independently by two researchers (initial agreement percentage = 89%; discrepancies were resolved through discussion and involvement of a third researcher if needed). Third, the methodological quality of the articles was assessed by evaluating the research design, sample, analytical methods, and reporting quality. The assessment results indicated that 28 articles (62%) were of high quality, 12 articles (27%) were of moderate quality, and 5 articles (11%) were of low quality. Fourth, data source triangulation was conducted by comparing findings from various disciplines (educational management, organizational psychology, and Islamic studies). Fifth, peer debriefing was conducted by involving two experts in Islamic education management who were not directly involved in the review process to provide feedback on the interpretations and conclusions generated.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Reviewed Articles (n=45)

Characteristic	Category	Number	Percentage (%)
Publication Year	2020	8	18
	2021	7	16
	2022	9	20
	2023	10	22
	2024	6	13
	2025	5	11
Source Database	<i>Scopus</i>	18	40
	<i>Google Scholar</i>	15	33
	DOAJ	7	16
	<i>Emerald Publishing</i>	5	11
Research Design	Qualitative	25	56
	Quantitative	12	27
	Mixed-Method	8	17
Geographic Focus	Indonesia	28	62
	Asia (non-Indonesia)	9	20
	Europe/America	5	11
	Global/Multi-country	3	7
Institutional Focus	Madrasah	18	40
	Pesantren	12	27
	Islamic Higher Education	8	18
	General Schools (non-Islam)	7	15

Source: Results of primary data analysis, 2026.

Based on Table 1, it is evident that most of the reviewed articles were published in 2022-2023 (42%), originated from Scopus (40%) and Google Scholar (33%), with the majority employing a qualitative design (56%). Geographically, research on benchmarking and quality management in Islamic educational institutions is still dominated by studies conducted in Indonesia (62%), while cross-country comparative studies remain very limited (7%). The most frequent institutional focus was on madrasahs (40%), followed by pesantren (27%). These characteristics indicate that the literature on benchmarking in Islamic education is indeed developing but remains localized and focused on the Indonesian context.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the systematic literature review of 45 articles meeting the inclusion criteria, five main themes related to global benchmarking and best practices in Islamic education management were identified: (1) transformational leadership strategies; (2) integration of digital technology in learning and governance; (3) development of globally competency-based curricula; (4) total quality management (TQM) as a systemic approach; and (5) internal and external quality assurance systems. These five themes do not stand alone but are interconnected, forming a holistic quality management system. The following sections describe the application models for each theme, along with examples of best practices from various countries identified

in the literature.

The first theme emerging from the literature is the importance of transformational leadership as a catalyst for successful benchmarking and quality improvement. Research reviewed in several articles across 15 pesantren in East Java found that collaborative, communicative leadership capable of motivating subordinates positively correlates with the success of benchmarking program implementation. Madrasah principals or pesantren leaders with this leadership style tend to be proactive in seeking benchmarking partners, both at national and international levels. They focus not only on operational efficiency but also on innovation and continuous quality improvement. Sahni et al. (2025) emphasize that the success of digital transformation in education heavily depends on adaptive and visionary leadership (Sahni et al., 2025). A best practice from Malaysia shows that Ma'had Tahfiz Wal Qiraat in Selangor successfully improved the quality of Quran memorization and understanding among its students after benchmarking with similar institutions in Egypt and Jordan.

In the Indonesian context, MAN 1 Bandar Lampung implemented transformational leadership through benchmarking with leading schools in Jakarta and Surabaya. As a result, the madrasah adopted practices such as flexible scheduling, digital library services, and the formation of quality development teams comprising innovative young teachers. Although initial resistance from senior teachers occurred, Global Benchmarking dan Best Practices ... / Nurani et al.

the changes were implemented through effective communication and personal approaches. Figure 2 presents the transformational leadership

model in Islamic education.



Figure 2. Transformational Leadership Model in Islamic Education Benchmarking

Another important theme in the literature is the integration of digital technology as a global best practice in Islamic education. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of online learning across various educational institutions. Sahni et al. (2025) assert that e-learning has become a crucial factor for the sustainability of higher education, although it still faces

challenges such as infrastructure limitations and reduced interpersonal interaction. Additionally, Lifuka (2025) states that the success of open distance and e-learning (ODEL) requires active learner engagement, peer-review, and structured feedback systems. Table 2 presents the digital platforms adopted by leading Islamic educational institutions as a result of benchmarking.

Table 2. Digital Platforms Adopted by Leading Islamic Educational Institutions (Benchmarking Results)

Digital Platform	Main Function	Adopting Institution	Reported Impact
Google Workspace for Education	Collaboration and online learning	MAN IC Serpong, MAN 1 Bandar Lampung	Increased teacher-student collaboration by 45%
Microsoft Teams for Education	Classroom management and communication	Pesantren Gontor, Ponpes Al-Fauzan	Classroom administration efficiency by 40%
Canva for Education	Creative content creation	MIN 1 Kota Malang, SDIT Ar Raihan	Increased student creativity by 30%
Quizizz / Kahoot	Interactive assessment	MA Al-Mubarak Lampung	Active student participation at 80%
Edmodo	Social learning platform	MTsN 2 Bandar Lampung	Material absorption increased by 25%

(Burhanuddin et al., 2025; Sahni et al., 2025; Lifuka, 2025)

An interesting international best practice to highlight is the "Smart Islamic School" policy implemented in several Middle Eastern countries. Through this program, every madrasah and pesantren is equipped with advanced digital infrastructure, a coding curriculum integrated with Islamic values, and a teacher and student performance evaluation system based on big data.

The outcome of this program has been a significant increase in students' digital literacy. This model has begun to be adopted by several Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, such as Pesantren Gontor, which developed the "Gontor Digital Pesantren" by providing Wi-Fi access across all areas, e-learning-based instruction, and an integrated pesantren information system. However, the biggest challenges

faced are the digital divide between urban and rural pesantren, and the uneven availability of technology-literate teachers.

The third theme relates to the curriculum. The reviewed literature consistently shows that Islamic educational institutions successful in competing at the global level are those capable of developing curricula that are not only strong in religious studies but also equip students with 21st-century competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication (the 4Cs). Research by Yuliati Zaqiah et al. (2024) shows that the PPG program significantly improves the competencies of PAI teachers, especially in the personality dimension; however, professional areas such as learning evaluation and digital technology require ongoing strengthening (Yuliati Zaqiah et al., 2024). This finding indicates that the Islamic Religious Education curriculum needs to be continuously adapted to global competency standards without losing the essence of Islamic values. Figure 3 presents the globally competency-based curriculum framework for Islamic education.

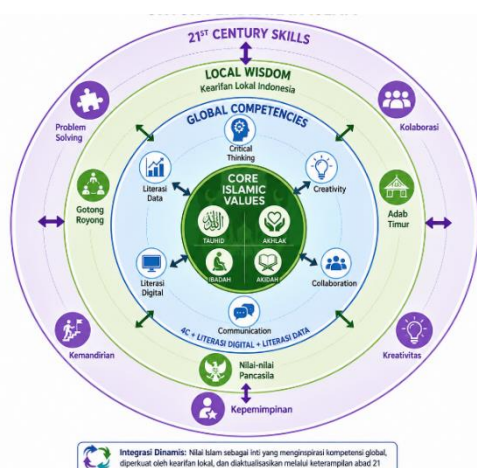


Figure 3. Globally Competency-Based Curriculum Framework for Islamic Education

Gamil and Al-Najjar (2025) argue that an effective quality e-learning framework must consider local and cultural contexts, as most existing models were developed in developed countries and do not fully align with the challenges in developing nations such as Yemen, Indonesia, and others (Gamil & Al-Najjar, 2025). A best practice at Pondok Pesantren Al-Fauzan demonstrates that mastery of foreign languages and an international curriculum can be achieved without sacrificing the depth of religious understanding through: (1) strengthening foreign languages (Arabic and English) through immersion programs; (2) designing curricula aligned with international standards such as Cambridge IGCSE; and (3) sending students to participate in student exchange programs abroad. The key is an integrated curriculum design and a strong identity reinforcement from the very beginning.

The fourth theme strongly emphasized in the literature is the application of Total Quality Management (TQM) as a systemic approach for continuous quality improvement. Research findings indicate that the success of TQM depends heavily on the commitment of all organizational components, the active participation of all stakeholders, and the use of data as a basis for decision-making. TQM in Islamic education focuses not only on academic aspects but also on non-academic areas such as services, facilities, learning environments, and Islamic character development. A best practice from Brunei Darussalam shows that all madrasahs in the country have implemented a standardized TQM system with a disciplined Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle. Table 3 presents the TQM dimensions in leading Islamic educational institutions.

Table 3. TQM Dimensions in Leading Islamic Educational Institutions (Literature Synthesis Results))

TQM Dimension	Key Indicators	Example Implementation in Madrasah/Pesantren
Customer Focus	Satisfaction of students, parents, and alumni	Periodic satisfaction surveys, parent communication forums
Total Involvement	Participation of all teachers, staff, students, and committee	Quality improvement teams, suggestion boxes, reward systems
Continuous Improvement	PDCA cycle, gradual, continuous improvement	Monthly evaluation meetings, annual innovation programs
Fact-based Approach	Data-driven decision making	School quality dashboards, national and international exam analysis
Partnership	Collaboration with various parties	MoUs with universities, industry, overseas institutions

Setyawati et al. (2025), Fitriani et al. (2024), Oakland et al. (2020)

The implementation of TQM in Indonesian Islamic educational institutions still faces various challenges. The main obstacles include: (1) limited understanding of the TQM concept among teachers and staff; (2) a work culture that tends to be reactive and superior-oriented rather than focused on quality improvement; (3) limited resources, especially for training and human resource development; (4) reward and sanction systems that are not yet performance-based. However, modern pesantren such as Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor have demonstrated that with strong commitment and consistency, TQM can be implemented effectively. Gontor has a highly structured management system, ranging from teacher and student recruitment, learning processes, character development, to graduate evaluation. This system is continuously evaluated and improved through regular coordination meetings at the central and unit levels.

The fifth theme is a comprehensive quality assurance system. Global best practices indicate that excellent educational institutions have quality assurance systems that not only rely on external accreditation from government bodies but also possess robust internal mechanisms. Lifuka (2025) identified that assessment in ODeL requires a comprehensive framework such as Evans' assessment tool (EAT framework) to improve the quality of e-assessment feedback and shift from traditional methods to more adaptive approaches (Lifuka, 2025, DOI: 10.30935/ijpdll/15733). In the context of madrasahs and pesantren, ISO 9001:2015 and international accreditation standards are increasingly being adopted. At the national level, the Ministry of Religious Affairs has launched a madrasah accreditation system (AM) that refers to the 8 National Education Standards. Figure 4 presents the sustainable quality assurance system model for Islamic educational institutions.

Discussion

The results of this research confirm that transformational leadership is the primary foundation for successful benchmarking implementation in Islamic educational institutions. Sahni et al. (2025), in their bibliometric study, found that the success of digital transformation and e-learning technology adoption in higher education heavily depends on adaptive and visionary leadership (Sahni et al., 2025). However, this research provides a new perspective by identifying that in the context of Islamic education, the spiritual aspect also plays a crucial role. Leaders who are not only managerially competent but also possess moral integrity and spiritual role-modeling are more likely to gain trust and compliance from

subordinates. This is unique because Islamic educational institutions have a strong paternalistic culture, where the figure of the kyai or ustadz is respected not only as a superior but also as a spiritual teacher.

Therefore, the appropriate leadership model for Islamic educational institutions is one that integrates spiritual dimensions (spiritual-transformational leadership). The practical implication is that training and development programs for prospective madrasah principals and pesantren leaders should encompass not only managerial and modern leadership aspects but also the strengthening of spiritual capacity and Islamic personality. This finding aligns with Al Farisi (2024), who emphasizes the importance of effective communication in Islamic education leadership. Furthermore, critiques of TQM in Islamic education propose prophetic leadership as an alternative model more congruent with Islamic values (Critique of TQM in Islamic Education, 2024).

The digitalization of Islamic educational institutions is a complex issue because it lies at the intersection of the necessity to keep pace with the times and the desire to preserve traditions and noble values. Sahni et al. (2025) identified that while digital technology adoption offers many benefits, challenges such as reduced interpersonal interaction and infrastructure limitations in developing countries remain significant barriers (Sahni et al., 2025). Lifuka (2025) adds that ODeL assessment indicators should include peer-reviewing, full student engagement, and sustainable feedback mechanisms to ensure quality (Lifuka, 2025).

This research also found that pesantren that have successfully undergone digitalization are those that adopted a gradual and selective approach. They did not simply replace all traditional methods but integrated technology as a tool to enrich and expand learning access, rather than replacing the central role of the kyai and ustadz. This finding enriches the literature on digital transformation in religious-based educational institutions and provides practical guidance for other pesantren wishing to take similar steps. Burhanuddin et al. (2025), in their study on the digitalization of Islamic education quality management, emphasize that technology adoption must be carried out while firmly upholding Islamic values.

The development of globally competency-based curricula in Islamic educational institutions presents an interesting identity dilemma for discussion. Gamil and Al-Najjar (2025) stress that an effective quality e-learning framework must consider local and cultural contexts, as models developed in developed countries are often unsuitable for the challenges in developing nations (Gamil & Al-Najjar, 2025). On the

other hand, Yuliati Zaqiah et al. (2024) show that the PPG program significantly improves the competencies of PAI teachers, especially in the personality dimension; however, professional areas such as learning evaluation and the use of digital technology require ongoing reinforcement (Yuliati Zaqiah et al., 2024).

The results of this research indicate that successful Islamic educational institutions are those capable of integrating Islamic values with global competencies in an integrated manner. The best practice from Pondok Pesantren Al-Fauzan, which produces "go international" students, proves that mastery of foreign languages and an international curriculum can be achieved without compromising the depth of religious understanding (Integrating Total Quality Management with Islamic Values, 2025). The key is an integrated curriculum design and robust identity reinforcement from the outset. The policy implication is that the government needs to provide greater space for madrasahs and pesantren to develop their distinctive curricula, while simultaneously encouraging and facilitating the adoption of relevant global competency standards.

The application of Total Quality Management (TQM) in Islamic educational institutions has great potential but also faces significant challenges. Tholchah (2024) reveals that teacher certification in Indonesia not only impacts income enhancement and professionalism but also functions as a cultural tool influencing power dynamics and strengthening communal values in society (Tholchah, 2024). This finding aligns with this research's identification that the biggest challenge in implementing TQM in Islamic educational institutions is a paternalistic organizational culture that tends to be less open to criticism. The success of TQM implementation heavily depends on cultural readiness.

Institutions that have successfully implemented TQM are those that first conducted a process of "internalizing" TQM values into existing Islamic values. For instance, the principle of continuous improvement can be linked to the concepts of *ihsan* (doing the best) and *muhasabah* (self-introspection). Through this reinterpretation and connection, resistance to TQM can be minimized because the changes are no longer perceived as "Western" or "foreign," but rather as part of an effort to improve the quality of oneself and the institution within the framework of Islamic teachings (Integrated TQM Model from Islamic Perspective, 2025). Fauzi et al. (2023) also affirm that leadership and TQM simultaneously have a positive effect on the quality of educational services in Indonesia.

An effective quality assurance system should consist of two complementary components: internal quality assurance (IQA) and external quality assurance (EQA). Lifuka (2025) identified that assessment in ODeL requires a comprehensive framework such as Evans' assessment tool (EAT framework) to improve the quality of e-assessment feedback (Lifuka, 2025). The results of this research show that Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia still heavily rely on EQA, while IQA remains weak. In fact, IQA is the most important foundation because EQA only provides a snapshot at one point in time, whereas IQA is a continuous process. Best practices from Brunei Darussalam and Malaysia show that madrasahs that have developed strong IQA are better prepared to face national and international accreditations (Hassan & Omar, 2025).

Based on the cross-thematic synthesis, this research proposes a conceptual model called Islamic Values-Based Benchmarking (IVBB). This model explicitly integrates Islamic values into every stage of the benchmarking process. Gamil and Al-Najjar (2025) emphasize the importance of adapting quality frameworks to local and cultural contexts, a principle that serves as the main foundation for the IVBB model. The stages in the IVBB model are: (1) Intention (Niat): Initiating the benchmarking process with sincere intention for Allah's sake; (2) Study (Telaah): Identifying and studying best practices from excellent institutions; (3) Analysis (Analisis): Analyzing gaps and examining the suitability of best practices with Islamic values; (4) Adaptation (Adaptasi): Adapting best practices to align with Islamic law and local culture; (5) Implementation (Implementasi): Implementing changes gradually; (6) Evaluation (Evaluasi): Evaluating the impact periodically with the principle of *muhasabah*; (7) Improvement (Penyempurnaan): Making continuous improvements to achieve *ihsan*.

This research identifies factors that hinder and support the implementation of benchmarking in Indonesian Islamic educational institutions. The main inhibiting factors include: (1) Limited resources: lack of budget, competent human resources, and supporting infrastructure; (2) Closed organizational culture: lack of openness to criticism; (3) Limited networking: restricted access and connections to excellent institutions; (4) Unsupportive policies. Sahni et al. (2025) add that the challenges of digital transformation in higher education also include a lack of attention to the well-being of lecturers and students. Meanwhile, supporting factors include: (1) Visionary leadership; (2) Open organizational culture; (3) Availability of information technology; (4) Support from the government and community.

To enrich the analysis, this research compares its findings with benchmarking research in other sectors. Sahni et al. (2025), in their study on digital transformation challenges, identified that e-learning technology adoption in higher education faces similar challenges across various developing countries. Lifuka (2025) adds that assessment in ODeL requires a more holistic and collaborative approach. A significant difference from other sectors is that in Islamic education, quality indicators are more complex and multidimensional, encompassing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects, as well as spiritual elements that are difficult to measure. Furthermore, benchmarking in Islamic education should ideally be more collaborative and open, for the broader benefit of the community.

This research has several important theoretical implications. First, it enriches strategic management theory in the public and non-profit sectors by demonstrating how benchmarking can be effectively implemented in religious-based organizations. Gamil and Al-Najjar (2025) argue that quality e-learning frameworks must consider contextual and cultural aspects, a finding aligned with the proposed IVBB model. Second, this research integrates benchmarking concepts with Islamic values, giving rise to the IVBB model, which is an original contribution to the development of Islamic education management science. Third, this research identifies key success factors for benchmarking in Islamic educational institutions, which can be further tested through quantitative research in the future.

4. CONCLUSION

This research successfully identified that the application of benchmarking in Indonesian Islamic educational institutions is still limited and not yet systematic; however, there is great potential to adapt global best practices in five main domains: spiritual transformational leadership, selective digitalization, globally competency-based curricula grounded in Islamic values, TQM reinterpreted from an Islamic perspective, and strengthening internal quality assurance systems. This research proposes the Islamic Values-Based Benchmarking (IVBB) model, which integrates Islamic values (intention, study, analysis, adaptation, implementation, evaluation, improvement) as a middle path between the demands of globalization and the identity of Islamic education. As recommendations, future researchers should conduct empirical testing of the IVBB model; practitioners are advised to start small-scale benchmarking by utilizing

technology; policymakers need to create a conducive ecosystem through cross-sector collaboration, incentives, and supporting infrastructure, so that Islamic education can achieve excellence intellectually while remaining strong spiritually.

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