



The Strategic Role Of Visionary Leadership In Islamic Educational Institutions In The Vuca Era

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A B S T R A C T

Rapid and unpredictable changes have positioned education within the VUCA era, characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. Islamic educational institutions are required to adapt to these changes while maintaining Islamic values and educational objectives. In this situation, leadership becomes a crucial factor in determining institutional resilience and competitiveness. This study aims to examine the role of visionary leadership in strengthening Islamic educational institutions in the VUCA era. This research uses a qualitative library research method by analyzing scientific journals, books, and relevant academic literature as the primary data sources. The study focuses on exploring the concept of visionary leadership and its implementation in Islamic educational institutions facing rapid social, technological, and educational transformation. The findings indicate that visionary leadership plays a strategic role in encouraging institutional adaptability and innovation. Visionary leaders are able to integrate Islamic values with digital transformation, promote technology-based learning, and strengthen organizational culture through collaboration and continuous improvement. In addition, visionary leadership contributes to the development of human resources by enhancing teacher professionalism, creativity, and collective commitment toward institutional goals. The study also reveals that Islamic educational institutions led by visionary leaders tend to be more responsive to educational disruption, more capable of maintaining institutional identity amid globalization, and more effective in creating sustainable educational innovation. Therefore, visionary leadership can be considered a transformative leadership model that is highly relevant for Islamic educational institutions in addressing the challenges of the VUCA era.

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1. Introduction

Islamic educational institutions currently face highly complex challenges in line with global dynamics characterized by uncertainty, accelerated change, and disruption in various sectors of life. This phenomenon is known as VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity), a global condition full of turmoil, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (Wulansasi et al., 2019), (Saefudin, 2023). The VUCA era demands that educational institutions, including Islamic educational institutions, undergo a comprehensive transformation to remain relevant and capable of fulfilling their role in shaping a generation with Islamic, adaptive, and superior character (Bahri, 2022), (Arifah et al., 2022), (Umamur, 2025). Therefore, leadership plays a central role in determining the direction and sustainability of educational institutions. Visionary leadership becomes highly strategic and

crucial. Visionary leadership is not only oriented towards short-term achievements, but also encompasses the ability to see the future, predict the direction of change, and formulate a transformative vision for the institution's progress. A visionary leader in the context of Islamic education must be able to integrate Islamic values with the contemporary challenges facing the institution, as well as build an organizational culture that is innovative and responsive to change.

Visionary leadership is not just about administrative management, but rather about a leader's spiritual, intellectual, and social abilities in shaping the direction and future of an institution. Visionary leaders are expected to be able to develop adaptive learning strategies, develop quality human resources, and maintain the relevance of the curriculum to current needs (Trisnia et al., 2025), (Natajaya, 2025). In the VUCA era, challenges such as the digitalization of education, changes in student character, moral crises, and competition between institutions must be responded to with leadership that is not only firm and wise, but also has the courage to innovate (Taliwuna et al., 2024), (Putri et al., 2024).

However, previous studies have largely discussed visionary leadership in general organizational contexts and have not specifically examined its strategic role within Islamic educational institutions facing VUCA challenges. In practice, many Islamic educational institutions still experience limitations in leadership adaptability, digital transformation, and innovation readiness due to conventional management patterns, limited leadership competence, and resistance to organizational change (Taliwuna et al., 2024; Putri et al., 2024). This condition indicates a research gap regarding how visionary leadership can function as a transformative strategy in strengthening the resilience and competitiveness of Islamic educational institutions in the VUCA era. Therefore, this article aims to analyze conceptually and contextually the role of visionary leadership as a driving force for change and innovation in Islamic educational institutions amid global uncertainty.

2. Research Methods

This research uses a library research method. Library research is a type of qualitative research conducted by collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data from various literature sources, including books, scientific journals, proceedings, and other digital sources relevant to the research topic (Saefullah, 2024), (Azizah, 2022). This method was chosen because the main objective of this research is to explore theoretical concepts and previous scientific findings related to visionary leadership and leadership challenges in the VUCA era. Through literature review, researchers can deepen the scientific ideas that have developed, as well as compile a synthesis of thoughts that are conceptual and reflective.

The steps taken in this research include: a) Identifying Topics and Focus of the Study The researcher formulated the main topic, namely the strategic role of visionary leadership in facing the challenges of the VUCA era in Islamic educational institutions, b) The researcher collected various library sources relevant to the topic, both from Islamic educational leadership books, national and international scientific journals, academic articles, and official documents from educational institutions. c) The researcher selected sources that were credible, up-to-date, and had high relevance to the research theme. d) The researcher mapped and reviewed in depth the main ideas from each literature, and looked for common threads that connected the concepts and e) The results of the analysis were then synthesized into a complete conceptual explanation, which explains how visionary leadership can be a strategic factor in responding to the dynamics of VUCA in Islamic educational institutions.

Through a library research approach, this study not only reveals the theories and views of experts, but also attempts to build a critical and integrative framework of thought that can be used as a reference for academics, education practitioners, and policy makers in developing the quality of Islamic educational leadership strategically and sustainably.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Visionary Leadership as Innovation in Educational Institutions

Visionary leadership in educational institutions is a key force driving innovation and transformative change. A visionary leader not only performs administrative functions but also serves as a guide for the institution's future by developing a far-reaching vision and inspiring all elements of the organization to move in that direction (Hamid, 2022), (Hamid et al., 2025). Visionary leadership in Islamic educational institutions is a strategic foundation in facing the dynamics of the times, especially in the VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity) era which is full of uncertainty and complexity (Utama, 2023), (Yusuf et al., 2024). In this context, the role of leaders is no longer limited to routine management, but rather as agents of change who are able to read the direction of global developments and translate them into adaptive and sustainable institutional strategies.

Visionary leaders build an organizational culture that is innovative, collaborative, and responsive to challenges and opportunities. They create a work climate that supports experimentation, continuous learning, and comprehensive quality improvement. With this kind of leadership, educational institutions are not only able to survive amidst change but also excel and become pioneers in the development of science, technology, and moderate and inclusive Islamic values (Lellya, 2025). (Edward & Frinaldi, 2024). Furthermore, visionary leadership is closely linked to the ability to build networks and strategic partnerships. A leader with foresight will encourage cross-sector collaboration with government, the business world, the global community, and other educational institutions to broaden the institution's horizons and competitiveness. Therefore, visionary leadership is not only necessary but also imperative for Islamic educational institutions that wish to remain relevant and excel in facing the challenges of the times. Visionary leaders are the primary drivers of institutional transformation, which not only impacts educational quality but also creates a generation that excels intellectually, spiritually, and socially (Islam et al., 2025), (Jannah & Inayati, 2025).

Visionary leadership in Islamic educational institutions is inseparable from the spirit of innovation. In fact, innovation is one of the key characteristics of effective visionary leadership. Visionary leaders see change not as a threat, but as an opportunity for growth and development (Arkaan et al., 2022). In this context, innovation becomes a strategic tool to realize the grand vision that has been designed by the leader and becomes the direction of movement for all elements of the institution (Solihan et al., 2024). Innovation in educational institutions doesn't happen suddenly. It stems from a strategic thinking process that begins with the courage to step out of one's comfort zone, see opportunities amidst challenges, and formulate new, more adaptive and solution-oriented strategies (Mashuri, 2020), (Arini et al., 2025). Visionary leaders play a crucial role in this process because they possess the distinctive characteristics of forward-thinking, sensitivity to change, the ability to anticipate trends, and the courage to make major decisions that are high-risk but have a significant impact on the institution's progress. In the context of Islamic education, innovation does not mean abandoning traditional values or religious teachings. On the contrary, visionary leaders strive to instill Islamic values in a more contextual way that aligns with the needs of the times. (Marjuni, 2021; Maulana, 2024). This can also be seen from the development of an integrative curriculum that combines religious knowledge and general knowledge, the use of digital technology in value-based learning, and the implementation of an IT-based management system that still reflects Islamic ethics and morals (Mulyanto et al., 2023; Nandarifa & Hidayah, 2024).

Visionary leaders are also able to create an organizational culture that is open to new ideas. They encourage teachers to continue learning, provide space for educators to innovate, and involve all components of the institution in the strategic decision-making process (Subni et al., 2024). Under visionary leadership, educational institutions not only survive the challenges of the times, but are able to become pioneers of relevant and meaningful change (Janah et al., 2024). For example, in facing the

digital era and the Industrial Revolution 4.0, a visionary leader at an Islamic educational institution will respond quickly by strengthening teachers' digital capacity, providing online learning platforms, and facilitating collaboration between institutions in developing modern and Islamic educational content. Thus, visionary leadership is the primary foundation for creating sustainable innovation, addressing the challenges of the times, and maintaining the institution's relevance amidst the currents of globalization and the uncertainties of the VUCA era (Arkaan et al., 2022).

3.2. Visionary Leadership Addresses the Challenges of Complexity and Uncertainty (VUCA)

The VUCA era, characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, demands an unusual leadership model (Afkarina et al., 2023). In the context of Islamic educational institutions, this condition can be seen from the rapid changes in educational policies, the development of digital technology, public demands for quality education, and increasingly pluralistic socio-religious dynamics (Darmansah et al., 2024). In situations like this, visionary leadership is the key to maintaining the direction and continuity of the institution (Arkaan et al., 2022). In facing these various dynamics, visionary leaders are not only tasked with carrying out routine managerial functions, but must be able to map out long-term strategic directions, make decisions in times of uncertainty, and create a space for innovation that is responsive to changing times (S. Lestari et al., 2023). Visionary leadership provides a clear future orientation and inspires all elements of the institution to unite in one collective vision (Annisa & Muttaqin, 2024).

A visionary leader will ensure that the core values of Islamic education are maintained, while being able to adapt to technological advances and social developments (Arkaan et al., 2022; Hartono et al., 2025). He understands that maintaining the relevance of institutions in the VUCA era is not just about maintaining traditions, but also transforming them into new, contextual and applicable forces (Hasanah et al., 2025). This can be seen in facing the uncertainty of the curriculum or learning methods due to technological developments, visionary leaders will encourage the development of a digital curriculum based on Islamic values, teacher training in modern pedagogy, and integration between Islamic science and contemporary knowledge (Annisa & Muttaqin, 2024; Herliawati et al., 2024). In this way, the institution not only survives, but also grows into a center of educational excellence that provides solutions to the challenges of the community.

In addition, a visionary leader will create a flexible yet solid organizational structure, encourage active participation from all school or madrasah members, and build a broad network with strategic partners, both at the national and global levels (Syahwal, 2020; Zebua et al., 2024). He sees complexity as an opportunity to enrich his managerial approach, not as an obstacle. In an ambiguous environment, where policy directions or social trends often change rapidly, a visionary leader remains grounded in strong principles, yet is willing to take strategic risks for the advancement of the institution (Annisa & Muttaqin, 2024). He makes vision the foundation of decision making and dares to respond to uncertainty with adaptive and sustainable strategies (A. W. Lestari et al., 2023). Thus, visionary leadership is a strategic answer for Islamic educational institutions in facing the VUCA era. It ensures that institutions are not trapped in the rigidity of the past, but continue to move forward, grounded in values, a future orientation, and a strong spirit of innovation.

Visionary leaders excel at seeing the opportunities behind every challenge. They don't dwell on the present, but instead think ahead, considering various future possibilities. While other educational institutions might stagnate due to the uncertainty of change, visionary leaders act as navigators, providing strategic and inspiring direction (Annisa & Muttaqin, 2024). With futuristic thinking skills and sharp strategic analysis, visionary leaders are able to turn challenges into momentum for institutional transformation (Arkaan et al., 2022). He not only responds to change but also initiates it. In the world of Islamic education, which is now increasingly connected to global issues such as digitalization, religious moderation, and 21st-century competencies, visionary leaders emerge as key actors in shaping the future of dynamic, inclusive, and competitive institutions (Kastaji et al., 2024).

Such a leader also possesses high emotional and spiritual intelligence. He or she is able to build trust and loyalty from all elements of the institution teachers, educational staff, students, parents, and the wider community by presenting a vision that is not only rational but also touches on meaning and values (Sunardi et al., 2025). They inspire, not command; they guide, not merely direct. In practice, visionary leaders encourage cross-functional and cross-generational collaboration and create healthy dialogue to foster a shared understanding of the institution's direction (Ilham et al., 2025). He doesn't hesitate to involve various parties in the policy formulation and decision-making process. Through this participatory approach, the formulated vision becomes shared, not just the property of the leadership.

In addition, visionary leaders build systems that support innovation, starting from efficient governance, continuous HR training and development programs, to the use of information technology for efficiency and transparency (Arkaan et al., 2022). He places quality as the top priority, while upholding Islamic values in every aspect of policy and implementation (Firdhayanti et al., 2022). With a combination of far-sighted vision, the ability to manage change, and strong value integrity, visionary leaders bring Islamic educational institutions into institutions that are not only relevant today, but also ready to lead in the future (Kastaji et al., 2024). In the context of the VUCA era, this is the type of leader who does not merely survive, but creates a new future for Islamic education that is superior, humanistic, and transformative.

There are several steps that visionary leaders take in facing VUCA as follows: a) When facing volatility, visionary leaders are able to respond quickly but remain focused. They develop structural flexibility and adaptive policies so that the institution is not easily shaken when policy or social turmoil occurs. b) In conditions of uncertainty, visionary leaders instill a culture of anticipation and data-based decision-making. They encourage the study of future projections and strengthening research, so that the institution can prepare alternative scenarios to face the uncertainty that arises. c) To address complexity, visionary leaders simplify managerial processes without sacrificing quality, and form collaborative work teams across divisions. They are also able to identify problem nodes in the system and develop a cross-disciplinary approach to overcome them. d) When facing ambiguity, visionary leaders make the institution's vision the main compass. With a clear direction, every institutional step becomes more focused even though external conditions often change without clarity. Furthermore, open and inspiring communication from the leader will increase the sense of trust and steadfastness of all members of the institution in the face of uncertainty (Annisa & Muttaqin, 2024; Arkaan et al., 2022; Hasanah et al., 2025).

The above explanation fully explains that visionary leadership can transform VUCA conditions from a source of anxiety into a catalyst for positive transformation. It leads institutions not merely reactively, but proactively and with vision. In an increasingly uncertain global environment, Islamic educational institutions need visionary leaders to continue fulfilling their roles as moral educators, intellectual developers, and guardians of contemporary Islamic values.

3.3. Obstacles to Visionary Leadership in Islamic Educational Institutions

Visionary leadership has a strategic role in bringing Islamic educational institutions towards changes that are relevant to the demands of the times (Annisa & Muttaqin, 2024). However, in its implementation, various obstacles hinder the optimal realization of visionary leadership. These obstacles can be internal or external, directly impacting the process of change within Islamic educational institutions (Nurhasnah et al., 2024). Internally, one of the main obstacles is the lack of leadership capacity that truly understands the visionary concept as a whole (Zebua et al., 2024). Many educational leaders are still stuck in an administrative and routine mindset, without the courage to make breakthroughs or strategic innovations (Annur et al., 2025).

This is influenced by low managerial and technological literacy, making it difficult for leaders to respond to the dynamics of the times that demand digital transformation and technology-based learning (Mesiono et al., 2024). Furthermore, a lack of awareness of the importance of long-term vision is also a hindering factor in effectively implementing visionary leadership. Many leaders of Islamic educational institutions focus more on achieving short-term targets, such as student graduation, administrative fulfillment, and accreditation, without considering the institution's strategic direction in facing future challenges (Manzil & Muttaqin, 2024). As a result, educational institutions run without a clear direction, only oriented towards annual routines without relevant vision updates.

Lack of leadership training and mentoring is also a significant issue (Haditama et al., 2024). In many cases, in an institution there are still many practices of seniority and loyalty, not because of strategic competence and visionary thinking abilities (Fadhilun et al., 2025). As a result, when faced with change, they tend to be passive and unresponsive to developments in the global education sector. Equally important, limited internal collaboration is also a barrier. In institutions that haven't cultivated a strong teamwork culture, leaders often work alone without the full support of their subordinates (Raka et al., 2023). As a result, the vision sought to be developed cannot be realized collectively due to the lack of a sense of ownership among the entire academic community toward a common goal. To overcome these internal obstacles, institutional management reforms are needed that encourage increased leadership capacity through visionary training, Islamic-value-based leadership development, and strengthening an innovative culture within educational institutions (Haditama et al., 2024). This transformation must begin with a paradigm shift in the leader himself from being merely an administrative manager to an agent of change who is able to inspire, motivate, and bring Islamic educational institutions towards highly competitive progress at the national and global levels.

In addition, not understanding the culture and vision and mission of the organization makes an organization stagnant (Laksono et al., 2022). Lembaga pendidikan Islam sering kali terjebak dalam budaya kerja yang kaku dan birokratis, yang tidak mendukung tumbuhnya kreativitas dan inovasi (Abdurrahman et al., 2025). The vision for change brought by leaders often lacks support due to resistance from the institution's members, including educators, administrative staff, and students themselves. A lack of effective and participatory communication between leaders and all elements of the institution also prevents the vision from being properly internalized (Indrianto, 2021). A stagnant organizational culture often creates a collective mindset that is resistant to change, where any form of innovation is perceived as a threat to the comfort of the status quo. In the context of Islamic educational institutions, this is evident in the tendency to maintain old ways of managing the institution, adopting learning methods, and adopting hierarchical interpersonal relationships. This situation creates an environment less conducive to the growth of initiative, creativity, and a spirit of renewal.

Resistance to the vision of change brought by a leader is not always caused by direct rejection of the idea, but can also occur due to a lack of understanding or distrust of the institution's ability to realize the vision (Jahidi & Hafid, 2017). If the vision isn't communicated clearly, concretely, and in a way that addresses the real needs of the institution's citizens, it will be difficult for them to feel involved and ownership of the vision. As a result, the proposed changes become little more than mere talk without concrete implementation at the operational level. The lack of space for dialogue and participation in the decision-making process further exacerbates this situation (Judijanto et al., 2020). Leaders who do not open two-way communication channels, both formally and informally, will lose the trust of their subordinates (Mahmudah, 2015). In the long term, this creates apathy, weak work motivation, and distances educators and education staff from the collective spirit of building institutions.

A vision will only come to life if it is lived and fought for together, not just imposed from above (Muhajirin et al., 2024). An organizational culture that does not reward innovation prevents fresh ideas from academics from developing (Nugroho, 2024). When creativity is not accommodated or even suppressed, innovation will stagnate, and institutions will fall behind in global competition. In this context, leaders need to create an organizational climate that supports innovation, is inclusive of new ideas, and open to change. To address this issue, transforming organizational culture is imperative (Susanti & Addinpujoartanto, 2024). A leader is needed who is able to build shared values, strengthen mutual trust, and encourage collaboration and involvement of all elements of the institution (Muhajirin et al., 2024). Building a flexible, adaptive, and progressive work culture is a strategic step in implementing visionary leadership that is able to answer the challenges of the times in Islamic educational institutions.

Externally, challenges stem from the lack of policy and regulatory support that fosters the autonomy of educational institutions to develop innovatively. Reliance on a uniform national education system sometimes hinders institutions' flexibility in adapting to local and global contexts. Limited resources, including funding, infrastructure, and qualified human resources, also pose serious obstacles to realizing effective visionary leadership. Understanding these challenges, it is crucial for Islamic educational institutions to develop sustainable leadership empowerment strategies. This can begin with improving leadership competency, strengthening an organizational culture based on progressive Islamic values, and developing systems that are adaptive to change. Only with strong, contextual, visionary leadership can Islamic educational institutions emerge as agents of transformation in facing the ever-evolving demands of the times.

4. Conclusion

Visionary leadership plays a vital strategic role in enabling Islamic educational institutions to survive and thrive in the VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity) era. In these uncertain and rapidly changing conditions, visionary leaders are able to direct change with a clear vision, adaptive strategies, and the ability to inspire all elements of the institution. Visionary leaders are not only tasked with managing administration but also act as agents of change, driving cultural, structural, and pedagogical transformation. They are able to read the dynamics of the times, translate them into contextual policies, and create an innovative, collaborative, and highly competitive educational ecosystem. However, the success of visionary leadership depends heavily on the support of organizational culture, quality communication, and the readiness of all human resources within the institution. Therefore, it is crucial for Islamic educational institutions to build a progressive leadership system, strengthen a culture of innovation, and enhance the capacity of human resources to respond to the challenges of the times with resilience and wisdom.

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