

Visionary Leadership Strategies of a Madrasah Principal in Sustaining Organizational Culture Amid Digital Transformation: A Case Study in a Pesantren-Based Madrasah

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study explores the visionary leadership strategies of a madrasah principal in sustaining organizational culture amid digital transformation in a pesantren-based madrasah. It focuses on how institutional values are preserved while digital tools are integrated into teaching, administration, and communication.

Methods – A qualitative single-case study was conducted at MTs Pondok Pesantren Darunnajah Ulujami, South Jakarta, from April to June 2026. Data were collected through semistructured interviews with eight stakeholder groups, participant observation, and institutional documents. Data were analysed using the interactive model of Miles et al. (2020), supported by triangulation, member checking, and an audit trail.

Findings – The principal sustains organizational culture through seven interconnected strategies: reaffirming core values, reinforcing the institutional vision, modelling expected behaviour, broadening participation, institutionalizing practices, strengthening professional learning, and adopting technology selectively. The findings also show that familial relationships may weaken accountability and that evaluation remains more activity-oriented than outcome-oriented.

Research Implications – Digital transformation in pesantren-based madrasahs requires leadership strategies that integrate technological change with cultural preservation. The seven strategies provide an interpretive framework for understanding visionary leadership in culturally grounded educational settings.

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Introduction

Madrasah in Indonesia are being asked to digitise teaching, administration, and parent communication while remaining accountable for the religious character of their graduates. The risk this creates is less a technical failure than cultural drift: new tools can change how people communicate, who holds institutional knowledge, and which practices are rewarded faster than the institution can decide whether those changes fit its values. Sustaining madrasah culture under digital transformation is therefore a leadership problem that needs empirical study rather than assumption. A school is a workplace with a memory. Alongside timetables and syllabi it carries values, habits, symbols, and unspoken rules about how people treat one another. In madrasah and pesantren settings that memory does heavier work, because the institution is judged on academic results and on the character of its graduates at the same time. Schein and Schein (2017) describe culture through three connected layers: visible artefacts, stated values, and the basic assumptions members no longer question. Reading a madrasah through those layers keeps the analysis away from a catalogue of ceremonies and closer to the reasons a practice survives.

Indonesian madrasah have moved a long way from the image of a closed traditional school. Their mandate now covers general competence, literacy, technology, accountable administration, and religious formation. Hasbi et al., (2025) show that quality improvement in Islamic higher education depends on organizational culture working together with integrated quality management rather than on management systems alone.

Ma'arif et al. (2025) reach a similar conclusion in pesantren, where a knowledge management system improved language outcomes only when the surrounding culture supported it, and Muspawi et al. (2025) find teacher job satisfaction responding to the work environment and to culture. Culture here is a condition of performance, not a soft residue. Taken together, these studies share one pattern: culture decides whether management systems, knowledge tools, or quality procedures produce results. They differ in setting, from higher education to pesantren and schools, but almost all of them measure culture as a variable at one point in time rather than observing how it is reproduced day to day. That leaves open the question this study pursues, namely how a leader keeps a culture in place while the systems around it change.

Digital transformation arrived on top of that expanded mandate. Anwar and Saraih (2024) argue that digital leadership in education works through knowledge sharing and emotional intelligence rather than through equipment, and Kamaruddin et al. (2024) trace a path from digital leadership and culture through job satisfaction to performance.

Ruhana et al. (2026) find that a digital work environment raises productivity only in combination with satisfaction and culture, Kamaroellah & Anwar (2025) report the same

dependency for technological media, and Amaliyah et al., (2025) Sahlimar et al. (2025) show that archive digitalisation succeeds when knowledge governance is settled first. Documenting digital anxiety among finance staff during the digitalisation of Indonesian state-owned enterprises. In boarding madrasah these general findings take a specific form. The institution has to control which digital content reaches students who live on site, organise communication with parents who are physically distant, keep academic and dormitory records for students around the clock, and protect institutional data that is often held in individual staff accounts. Each of these touches the values the pesantren claims to protect, which is why digital change there is a cultural question as much as a technical one.

Visionary leadership offers a way of reading how schools handle this pressure. (Karwan et al., (2021) define it as the capacity to picture a future state, put it into language others can act on, and hold the organization to that direction. (Hermawan et al., (2025) place it at the centre of educational re-engineering, Subaidi et al., (2023) show it improving quality in private Islamic primary schools, Memon et al. (2024) connect it to governance under technological disruption, and Huma et al., (2026) tie it to change management strategy in Nairobi secondary schools. Al Ajmi (2024) reports that principals need a defined skill set to deliver a national education strategy,

Muhimmah (2022) documents how leadership values built an inclusive higher education culture, and Song and Wang (2026) show visionary leadership reducing career inaction through thriving at work. Evidence from other systems points the same way, including a study of leadership style and work commitment at Universitas Doktor Husni Ingratubun (2024), the comparative reform history of Ead (2025), and the nursing leadership review by Sherwood et al. (2022). Across this literature three dimensions recur, and this study adopts them as its operational definition for reading the data: articulation, the formulation of a future direction in language staff can act on; communication and modelling, the repetition of that direction in routine decisions and in the leader's own conduct; and institutionalisation, the conversion of direction into roles, procedures, indicators, and learning systems. These dimensions suit the madrasah principal because the role combines religious and moral authority, which favours articulation and modelling, with administrative accountability, which demands institutionalisation.

The literature also carries warnings.(Lister (2004), reviewing Maccoby's account of the productive narcissist, describes, a leader whose vision inspires and destabilises in roughly equal measure, while (Alam, 2022a, 2022b) (Alam et al., 2025) separate ornamental figureheads from managerial leaders and ask which of the two actually runs the institution. Praptiestrini et al., (2024) treat visionary leadership as a moderator rather than a direct cause of lecturer behaviour. Vision without institutional machinery is decoration, and that caution shapes the analytical frame used here. The analysis distinguishes three forms a vision can take: vision as rhetoric, stated in documents and

speeches; vision as system, written into roles, procedures, and indicators; and vision as documented practice, visible in repeated behaviour that can be traced in observation and records. The findings are read against these three forms.

Culture and leadership reach performance through people. Abbas et al. (2024) link transformational leadership to innovative performance in Punjab colleges, (Wahyudi et al., 2016) find participative leadership, culture, and innovation acting together on organizational commitment, and (Tiong et al., (2024) position innovation capability as a mediator and culture as a moderator between leadership style and employee performance. (Maisyaroh et al., 2024) connect leadership and culture to teacher creativity and then to students' digital skills. Motivation research is compatible: (Shahhosseini & Taghizadeh, 2016) show an entrepreneurial university culture forming even under unfavourable conditions, Ikram et al., (2025) identify motivation as a driver of performance management, Nguyen et al. (2024) find public service motivation and person-job fit improving state sector performance, and Tossavainen et al., (2021) show self-efficacy shaping student task performance.

What the field still lacks is a close account of the small moves that carry a vision into habit. Syam et al., (2025) proposed visionary leadership strategies for sustaining madrasah culture in the Industry 4.0 era, but through a literature review rather than fieldwork. The present study takes the same problem into a single school and asks three questions. First, how do values, norms, and everyday practice build the culture of MTs Pondok Pesantren Darunnajah Ulujami? Second, what pressures threaten the continuity of that culture? Third, how does the principal formulate, communicate, and institutionalise strategies that hold identity steady while the school learns to work digitally? Berger & Luckmann (1991) supply the process language for the third question through externalisation, objectivation, and internalisation. The study makes two contributions. Empirically, it offers a seven-component account of visionary leadership derived from fieldwork, including the points at which that leadership fails to produce change. Conceptually, it extends the layered model of Schein and Schein (2017) by showing how leadership practice moves values between layers, and it derives from this implications for madrasah leadership policy.

Methods

The study is a qualitative single case study. Yin (2018) recommends the design when a study asks how and why questions, when the researcher cannot control events, and when the phenomenon cannot be separated from its setting. All three conditions apply here. The site is MTs Pondok Pesantren Darunnajah Ulujami in South Jakarta, a junior secondary madrasah inside a boarding pesantren. The case was bounded to the leadership practice of the principal and to the maintenance of madrasah culture between April and June 2026. Foundation policy and the wider pesantren enter the analysis only

where they constrain what the principal can decide. The site was chosen as an information-rich case: it is a pesantren-based madrasah in a metropolitan setting that has introduced digital tools for teaching, administration, and parent communication while explicitly maintaining its pesantren identity, so the tension the study examines is visible there in concentrated form.

Participants were selected purposively for direct involvement in leadership or cultural practice. The set covered the principal (KM), the vice principal (WKM), senior teachers (GS), junior teachers (GM), a dormitory supervisor (PG), an administrative officer (TU), a parent committee representative (KO), and students at different stages of their schooling (PD). Inclusion required at least one year at the institution, involvement in programme planning or delivery, and willingness to speak on record under a pseudonym. Teachers were grouped as senior or junior according to their length of service at the school, and the student informants ranged from newly enrolled students to ninth-grade students, so that the account of culture would include both those still learning its rules and those who had lived with them longest. Saturation was judged at the level of categories: recruitment continued until additional interviews stopped producing new categories and only added examples to existing ones. Informant codes (KM, WKM, GS, GM, PG, TU, KO, and PD-1 to PD-3) are used throughout the Results.

The researchers combined semistructured interviews, participant observation, and document study. Interviews were held at the school and covered core values, the future the principal wants for the school, decision making, technology use, and the way newcomers learn what matters. Quotations are presented in English translation and are attributed by informant code. Every interview was recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and coded anonymously. Observation covered lessons, staff meetings, morning assembly, dormitory routines, teacher coaching, and the use of messaging groups, with field notes separating description from interpretation. Repeated events were prioritised over one-off ceremony so that culture would not be inferred from a single display. Documents were included where they stated, planned, or recorded cultural or leadership practice; they comprised the vision and mission statement, the strategic plan, annual work programmes, the student code of conduct, meeting minutes, academic reports, and publicity material.

Analysis followed the interactive model of Miles et al. (2020). Condensation began during fieldwork through the selection of meaning units, first cycle coding, analytic memos, and the grouping of codes into categories such as core value, routine, vision communication, modelling, participation, digitalisation, familial culture, and evaluation. Display took the form of informant by theme matrices and a chronology of change. Conclusions were tested against rival explanations and negative cases, so that a claim made by the principal was retained only when teacher accounts, observation, or documents supported it. Berger & Luckmann (1991) framed the interpretive stage. Codes

and their definitions were kept in a codebook that grew from the categories above as analysis proceeded. To illustrate the path from data to theme, the junior teacher's statement that an indicator is often simply done or not done (GM) was coded as activity-based indicator, grouped under the category evaluation, and contributed, together with the work programme documents and the vice principal's account (WKM), to the theme of the evaluation gap. Observation episodes cited in the Results are coded O-01 to O-08.

Credibility rested on source and technique triangulation, prolonged engagement, member checking, and peer debriefing. Thick description supports transferability, a record of design decisions supports dependability, and an audit trail linking each claim to a quotation, a field note, or a document supports confirmability. Creswell and Poth (2018) note that an explicit researcher position strengthens interpretive work, so the researchers recorded their prior assumptions about pesantren life in a reflexive journal. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the use of their words, and their right to withdraw. Ethical clearance was granted by the Faculty of Education, Universitas Negeri Jakarta. Informants were identified only by role codes, and accounts that could identify a particular teacher, such as the remarks on uneven tolerance and on correcting senior colleagues, are reported as from an anonymous informant.

Result

1. A religious foundation translated into observable conduct

Culture at the site begins with religious commitment and then becomes visible in conduct. Documents state the aim of forming students with religious understanding, good character, knowledge, and readiness for social life. The principal treats that statement as a behavioural standard rather than a curricular one. *"Being Islamic is not measured by the number of religious subjects. What matters more is whether the values appear in how a teacher teaches, how a student speaks, respects other people, keeps the place clean, and finishes what they were asked to do."* (KM)

Teachers describe the same standard in shorter form. A senior teacher said that knowledge has to arrive with adab, and that a clever student who does not respect teachers and classmates has not yet succeeded in the terms the pesantren uses (GS). Observation supported both accounts. At the start of one lesson the class monitor called the group to stand and greet the teacher, the lesson opened with a prayer, and a late student waited at the door for permission before entering. The teacher asked why he was late and gave advice without embarrassing him (O-01). Students do not all read these routines the same way. One newer student explained that he followed the rules at first because he was afraid of being reprimanded, and only later began to see the point of asking permission and speaking carefully (PD-1). That gap marks the stage at which a rule becomes a value. The account is retrospective, so it suggests a perceived shift in meaning without establishing when the shift occurred or whether all students experience it.

Discipline carries the value into the calendar. The code of conduct organises the day from early morning until night and links prayer, study, language practice, sport, and rest. As the vice principal put it, discipline at the school covers worship, cleanliness, assignments, and language, because students live on site and every part of the day is a teaching space (WKM). Supervision is layered across the principal, teachers, homeroom teachers, dormitory supervisors, and student officers. In one observed morning session, three late students were asked to stand at the back, and afterwards the dormitory supervisor asked about their sleep schedule rather than punishing them (O-02).

Consistency is where the system strains. A senior teacher observed that some teachers are strict and others lenient, and that students eventually learn with whom a rule can be negotiated (GS). The principal did not dispute this, saying the rules are shared but their application still needs to be aligned (KM). Discipline here is strong at the level of documents and routine, and uneven at the level of enforcement.

Responsibility and independence follow from boarding life. Observation of classroom cleaning found six students working while one joined in only after the monitor reminded him (O-03), and a ninth-grade student described his own shift from forgetting his equipment to preparing it without prompting (PD-3). These examples show both independent action and continuing dependence on reminders; they do not justify a claim that responsibility has become universal.

Shared work is visible among staff too, since several teachers helped with event equipment that fell outside their assigned duties (O-04). This willingness rests on the familial closeness among staff examined in Section 3.

The groups describe this culture differently. Leaders speak about identity, vision, and succession, teachers about adab and personal example, dormitory supervisors about habituation, administrative staff about orderly service, new students about rules, and senior students about independence.

2. Communicating the vision and leading by example

The vision the principal communicates joins two directions that could easily pull apart. He states that the madrasah must keep its pesantren identity without falling behind, and that students should be secure in religious values and adab while also competent in academic subjects, languages, technology, and leadership (KM). Teachers recognise the general direction. What a senior teacher wanted clarified was the annual priority and the measure of success (GS).

Communication runs through work meetings, teacher coaching, supervision, parent meetings, digital channels, and ordinary conversation. The vice principal noted that the vision returns at the annual work meeting, at the start of the school year, and during programme evaluation, and that the principal connects specific decisions back to

institutional purpose (WKM). One observed meeting opened with a review of the previous month, after which the principal reminded coordinators that every programme must serve character formation and quality before they reported progress (O-05). Distribution is uneven. An administrative officer said that programme information reaches his section, but that discussion of why a programme exists tends to stay among leaders and teachers (TU).

Translation into operational targets is the weaker link. Work programmes name activities, assign responsibility, and set dates, yet many indicators still record only whether an activity took place. A junior teacher said the indicator is often simply done or not done, and that the effect on learning or behaviour is not always measured (GM). Such indicators confirm that a programme ran but say nothing about whether teaching practice or student conduct changed. Indicators of change would record, for instance, whether coached teachers apply a new strategy in observed lessons, or how student lateness and rule violations shift over a semester.

Modelling supplies the legitimacy that documents cannot. A senior teacher valued the principal's presence at activities rather than instructions issued from a distance (GS). In one observation the principal arrived before the meeting began, greeted teachers as they came in, used a digital file to display attendance and programme data, and asked coordinators for clarification without assigning blame (O-06). The same practice attracted a negative case. One informant said that rules are supposed to apply equally, but that certain people find tolerance easier to obtain, and that this affects morale (anonymous informant). Credibility here depends on perceived fairness as much as on personal conduct.

Participation follows a similar pattern. Teachers join meetings, programme design, and evaluation, while strategic decisions remain with the leadership and the foundation, with teacher input requested beforehand (WKM). Observation of one meeting found three teachers responding actively while most listened, with brief contributions appearing only when the principal asked individuals directly (O-07). Space for participation therefore exists structurally, but contribution within it was uneven. Read together with the junior teacher's remark that criticism is often withheld out of awkwardness (GM, Section 3), this pattern suggests that seniority and the perceived safety of criticism shape who speaks, an interpretation developed in the Discussion. Evaluation closes the loop imperfectly, and the principal named the difficulty himself, which is making sure evaluation results are documented and acted on rather than only discussed (KM).

3. Familial culture and digital pressure

Closeness among staff functions as social capital. A senior teacher explained that when work is urgent, teachers do not argue about the boundaries of their job descriptions

because they feel part of one family (GS). An administrative officer valued the same closeness for making coordination quick and informal (TU).

The cost appears in accountability. A junior teacher said that criticism is often withheld out of awkwardness and handled informally instead of in evaluation forums (GM). Another informant put it more directly, noting that a long-serving or well-liked colleague is harder to correct, so familial feeling gets read as a reason not to be firm (anonymous informant). Observation of one evaluation meeting recorded a discussion of late reporting in which no one named a responsible party, the conversation moved to a general appeal for commitment, and no deadline was agreed (O-08). The principal accepts the tension, describing familial culture as something that should support professionalism rather than replace it (KM).

Generational difference shapes the response to technology. Junior teachers try new applications quickly, while senior teachers are more careful and ask for support. As one senior teacher said, the problem is not resistance but pace, because a new system arrives before the previous one is understood (GS). A junior teacher agreed that training alone is not enough once teachers begin using a tool (GM).

Digitalisation reached three areas, each with its own evidence. In classrooms, digital media widened the range of material, and a junior teacher described using video, presentations, and online quizzes while still screening content for suitability (GM). Students felt the benefit and the confusion. One said material is easier to follow with video or images, but that assignments sent through messaging groups get mixed up with other information (PD-2). These are perceptions of usefulness and clarity; the study has no comparison of learning outcomes.

In administration, an officer reported faster data handling alongside fragmented storage, since data still sits in several places (TU). Digitalisation and integration are therefore not the same thing. Fragmented storage also implies a risk that this study did not examine directly: records kept in individual staff accounts rather than institutional systems may be lost when staff change, which makes data governance a question for further inquiry.

In communication, messaging groups accelerated information and lengthened the working day. A teacher noted the difficulty of separating urgent messages from those that can wait (GS), and the parent representative asked for information to be organised so that important notices are not lost in volume (KO). The evidence concerns perceived communication load; it does not establish clinical anxiety or a measured increase in working hours.

The school's stance towards technology is conditional. The principal said the madrasah does not want to reject technology, but that it must stay under the control of

educational purpose, with rules for its use and attention to pesantren values (KM). Two sides of the same tool emerged from the data. Technology strengthens culture when it documents good practice, improves teaching, speeds coordination, and secures institutional records. It weakens culture when it is used without guidance, displaces face-to-face contact, raises the communication load, concentrates knowledge in one or two people, and widens the competence gap between staff.

4. An integrated strategy

The principal's practice reads as seven linked components rather than a list of initiatives. Table 1 sets them out with the evidence behind each. The components are descriptive and interpretive categories derived from this case; they are not a standardised model, a ranking of effectiveness, or a causal test.

Table 1. Components of the observed visionary leadership strategy

Component	Observed practice	Main evidence
Value restatement	Naming non-negotiable values and converting them into observable conduct	KM interview; PD-1; O-01, O-02; code of conduct; induction material
Vision communication	Linking routine decisions to institutional purpose in meetings and coaching	WKM, GS, and TU interviews; O-05
Personal example	Attending activities, using the systems he asks staff to use, correcting directly	GS interview; O-06; anonymous informant (negative case)
Participation	Involving staff in programme design and evaluation by area	WKM and GM interviews; O-07
Institutionalisation	Written duties, procedures, records, and follow-up mechanisms	TU, WKM, and GM interviews; work programme documents; O-08 (negative case)
Professional learning	Training with follow-up coaching and exchange between age groups	GM and GS interviews; supervision records
Selective digital adoption	Assessing benefit, value fit, readiness, security, and sustainability before use	KM, GM, TU, and KO interviews; PD-2

The components operate as a sequence rather than in parallel. Value restatement supplies the content that vision communication repeats and personal example makes credible. Participation and professional learning give staff the understanding and the capability to act on it. Institutionalisation fixes the result in roles, procedures, and records, and selective digital adoption applies the same values as a filter on new tools. Evaluation should feed back into every component, and it is the weakest link at this site, so the cycle often stops at institutionalisation without correcting itself.

The principal explained the logic of value restatement in concrete terms. Values have to be made specific, he said, because if the school says discipline, the form it takes must be clear, and if it says adab, it has to show in how people speak to one another (KM). On participation he was equally direct, noting that not every decision has to be made jointly, but that the people who run a programme need to understand the reasoning and have a chance to comment (KM). On technology he applied a filter rather than an appetite, saying the school does not have to use every new application and that whatever it chooses must solve a real problem and remain usable over time (KM).

Two limits qualify the picture and shape how the whole strategy should be read. First, evaluation still reports activity more often than change, which the vice principal identified as the school's next move (WKM). Because the school cannot yet show what its programmes change, the seven components are best understood as practices the principal enacts and staff recognise, not as a strategy whose effects have been demonstrated. Second, the principal is not the only actor, since some decisions require coordination with the pesantren or the foundation (KM). Components that depend on resources or policy, such as digital infrastructure and staffing, are partly outside his control, so the strategy describes what a principal can do within those bounds rather than what the institution as a whole does. Cultural continuity may also owe much to established dormitory routines, staff cooperation, and foundation expectations, and these rival explanations caution against a purely leader-centred reading.

Discussion

The layered reading of culture proposed by Schein and Schein (2017) fits the case, though the interesting part is the relationship between layers rather than the layers themselves. Prayer, uniforms, and the daily schedule are artefacts. The vision statement and the code of conduct are stated values. Beliefs about the connection between knowledge, worship, and character are basic assumptions. Culture here is strong where the three agree and weak where they do not, which is why inconsistent enforcement of discipline damages more than the rule in question. Berger and Luckmann (1966) explain the mechanism. Values are externalised through policy and leader conduct, objectivated as rules and routines, then internalised through correction and example. The student who obeyed out of fear and later understood the reason had moved through that sequence in one school year. Combining these frames yields the analytical model of this study. Leadership practice acts on culture by externalising basic assumptions as stated values, objectivating stated values as artefacts and systems, and supporting their internalisation through example and correction, while evaluation supplies the feedback that tells the leader where the layers have drifted apart. Each of the seven components occupies a place on this cycle, and the evaluation gap marks the point where the cycle is broken. The student who obeyed out of fear and later understood the reason is consistent with

internalisation, although a retrospective account cannot verify the sequence over time. The model is therefore a framework for examining the case, not a validated developmental or causal model.

Vision worked in this case because it was repeated in ordinary decisions rather than announced annually. Hermawan et al., (2025; Karwan et al., 2021) treat articulation and strategic translation as parts of one practice; this case refines that view by locating the break point precisely, in the conversion of direction into measurable targets. Subaidi et al., (2023) reported quality gains once visionary leadership reached programme level, whereas the present evidence suggests that reaching programme level is not sufficient while indicators record only activity. The case is also consistent with the cautionary reading of Lister(2004.) Praptiestrini et al., (2024), who treat vision as a moderating rather than a sufficient condition, although a single qualitative case cannot test a moderating effect, and boarding routines and foundation policy remain plausible influences on behaviour. Where systems, records, and follow-up were in place, the vision produced behaviour. Where they were absent, it produced agreement without change.

The familial culture finding is easy to romanticise. Closeness produced quick coordination and voluntary help, which matches what Wahyudi et al., (2016) report about participative leadership and commitment and what Shahhosseini & Taghizadeh, (2016) found about culture forming under difficult conditions. The same closeness suppressed direct feedback. Ruhana et al. (2026), (Amaliyah et al., 2025; Kamaroellah & Anwar, 2025) describe organizational culture as the condition that decides whether a technical takes hold, and the negative evaluation case here shows the reverse effect, where culture stopped a management procedure from working. The workable position is not to trade warmth for procedure but to give the warmth a structure, with named responsibility, agreed deadlines, and written records. (Al Ajmi, 2024; Muhimmah (2022)) describe leadership skill sets and value based practice that point the same way. In practice this could take three forms. The first is a regular evaluation forum with a written agenda, evidence attached to each issue, a named person in charge, and a deadline recorded in the minutes. The second is a feedback channel that staff can use privately before the meeting, so that issues are discussed as problems of practice rather than as personal blame. The third is a follow-up log, reviewed at the next meeting, that records what was completed and what obstacles remain. None of these requires staff to abandon the familial idiom; they give it a procedure. They are proposals derived from the findings, not interventions whose effects were observed.

Digital transformation at this site behaved as an organizational question rather than an equipment question, Anwar & Saraih (2024) argue and what Tiong et al., (2024) demonstrate through job satisfaction, innovation capability, and culture as intermediate conditions. Maisyaroh et al., (2024) trace the chain further, from leadership and culture through teacher creativity to students' digital skills. Two risks surfaced in the field data

that the studies cited above, which concentrate on the benefits of digital leadership and digital work environment Kamaroellah & Anwar (2025) largely leave out. More applications produced more copies of the same data, and continuous messaging created a pressure that resembles the digital anxiety Hardanti et al. (2026) documented during enterprise digitalisation. On this evidence we interpret the principal's selective stance as defensible rather than conservative, since it asks what a tool does for teaching, which values it strengthens or threatens, what capability users need, and how the school will keep it running.

Amaliyah et al., (2025) place archive management in relation to culture and knowledge governance, which offers a useful comparison for the storage problem observed here. The practical inference is that tool adoption should be accompanied by institutional ownership of data, access rules, backup responsibilities, and agreed communication priorities. The data do not show a security incident, nor that technology has weakened the institution's core religious values.

Capability is where the strategy stands or falls, because teachers can accept a direction and still be unable to act on it. The junior teacher who said training alone is not enough once teachers begin using a tool (GM) was describing what Timperley et al. (2007) found: professional development changes practice when it is sustained and connected to student outcomes, and, as

Putnam and Borko (2000) explain, when it is situated in the setting where teachers work. At this site the need is specific. Senior teachers asked for support with pace rather than for persuasion (GS), while junior teachers adopted tools quickly but still had to screen content for suitability (GM). A professional learning community organised around this exchange

Stoll et al., 2006; Vestal (2016) would let senior teachers contribute pedagogical judgement and junior teachers digital fluency. Change in practice would then be observable, for example in whether coached teachers select and sequence digital material in observed lessons and whether assignments reach students through one agreed channel rather than mixed into messaging groups (PD-2). Because such capability is held by the group rather than by individuals, it also outlasts any single leader (Hargreaves, 2012), which matters for the succession concern raised below.

Supervision connects learning to accountability, and it is the least developed part of the strategy established clinical supervision as a developmental cycle rather than an inspection, and Glickman et al., (2001) show how supervision and evaluation can be separated so that one supports growth while the other protects standards. Singerin (2021) found that collaboration-based academic supervision with peer evaluation improved pedagogical competence and school performance in Indonesian schools, with principal motivation acting as a moderator. Evidence from outside education is offered here only

as a limited analogy, not as the basis of the recommendation: peer supervision has also worked among community health workers in resource-constrained settings Nakibaala et al. (2022) where, as in a boarding madrasah, staff work long hours in close-knit teams with little access to external supervisors. Ketonen et al., (2020) showed that peer assessment develops feedback literacy, Double et al. (2020) found a positive effect on academic performance across control group studies, and He et al., (2014) add the reflective dimension that turns feedback into changed practice. For a school where teachers hesitate to criticise one another directly, a structured peer supervision cycle offers honest feedback that nobody has to break the familial norm to use. A workable cycle would involve an agreed focus, peer observation, an evidence-based conversation, one feasible revision, and a later review; the evaluation meeting in which no owner or deadline was set (O-08) is the reason for making that final review step explicit.

Motivation research explains why some staff engage and others merely comply. Nguyen et al. (2024) found public service motivation and person-job fit improving state sector performance, Ikram et al., (2025) identified motivation as a driver of performance management, Tossavainen et al., (2021) showed self-efficacy shaping task performance, Abbas et al. (2024) connected leadership behaviour to innovative performance in colleges, and Song and Wang (2026) show visionary leadership reducing career inaction through thriving at work. Teachers who understand the purpose of a programme and feel able to deliver it will invest in it, while those who receive only instructions do the minimum. That is the difference the administrative officer described when he said the reasoning stays among leaders and teachers.

Uneven participation has more than one possible explanation. The pattern in O-07 may reflect seniority or reluctance to criticise colleagues, as the junior teacher's remark suggests (GM), but it may also reflect the agenda, the time available, familiarity with the topic, or an expectation that the principal will decide. The administrative officer's account of uneven access to programme reasoning (TU) is more directly supported than any claim about motivation or fear. Inviting individuals by name, circulating the agenda in advance, and allowing private responses would help distinguish these explanations, and further observation would be needed before attributing silence to hierarchy.

Evaluation is the condition running through all seven components, and it is the weakest. Moving from activity reporting to outcome evidence would give the other six something to correct against. The model also differs from the heroic reading of leadership. Ead (2025) shows in his comparison of Eliot and Taha Hussein that reform reputations attach to individuals while the work is distributed, and

Sherwood et al. (2022) describe the same distribution in nursing leadership. The principal holds coherence. The culture is held by everyone.

The original contribution of this study is an empirically grounded, seven-component account of how a madrasah principal carries vision into habit, together with evidence of where that process breaks down, most clearly in the evaluation gap. Relative to Syam et al., (2025) whose literature review proposed comparable strategies for the Industry 4.0 context, it moves the question from prescription to observed practice. Three practical implications follow. Schools should audit their culture by naming core values, the practices that support them, the practices that contradict them, and the areas with no written record. They should build a digital roadmap organised around educational purpose, teacher capability, data security, and continuity rather than around procurement. And they should treat succession planning as cultural work, so that values do not depend on one principal.

The study has several methodological limitations. It examines a single site, so the findings are not statistically generalisable, and transferability depends on how closely another madrasah resembles this one. Informants may have offered socially desirable accounts of a respected institution, and power relations between the principal, teachers, and students may have shaped what they were willing to say, despite the safeguards described in the Method. Fieldwork also covered only three months (April to June 2026) within one semester, which cannot capture annual cycles such as the start of the school year or a change of leadership.

Conclusion

In answer to the first question, culture at MTs Pondok Pesantren Darunnajah Ulujami rests on religious commitment translated into adab, discipline, responsibility, independence, shared work, and an orientation towards quality, and it reaches behaviour through routine, supervision, and personal example. Consistency remains partial, since staff apply rules differently and some students still need reminders, so cultural continuity is better understood as an ongoing practice than as a completed achievement.

In answer to the second question, the continuity of that culture is threatened by uneven enforcement between staff, by familial closeness that softens accountability, and by digital tools introduced without guidance, which fragment data and lengthen the working day.

In answer to the third question, the principal sustains the culture through seven linked components: value restatement, vision communication, personal example, participation, institutionalisation, professional learning, and selective digital adoption, with technology admitted on grounds of educational benefit, value fit, user readiness, security, and sustainability. Evaluation runs through all of them and is the weakest link, because a school that measures whether activities happened, rather than what changed, cannot tell which parts of its strategy are working.

The study contributes a field-based account of how vision becomes habit and where it stalls, although its single-site, qualitative design limits generalisation. Further research using multiple sites and longer observation should test whether the seven components survive a change of principal, which is the real test of whether a culture has been institutionalised or merely led.

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