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Islamic Educational Leadership in the Era of Digital Transformation: Developing Adaptive Leadership Competencies for School Principals

[*]Muhammad Islam Ghuni[1], Markhabat Bolat[2], Mostafizur Rahman[3]

[1]International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan
[2]Tokat Gaziosmanpasa University, Kazakhstan
[3]University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh
*Correspondence email: muhammadislamghuni@iiu.edu.pk

Abstract

This study aims to develop a conceptual framework of adaptive Islamic educational leadership for school principals in responding to digital transformation. The study employs a qualitative library research method through systematic conceptual analysis and synthesis of literature on digital leadership, adaptive leadership, educational management, Islamic educational leadership, organizational transformation, teacher digital competence, and technology integration. The findings indicate that digital transformation requires school principals to move beyond conventional administrative functions toward strategic, pedagogical, technological, organizational, and ethical leadership. The proposed framework comprises eight interconnected competencies: digital vision, adaptive intelligence, pedagogical-digital leadership, collaborative empowerment, data-informed decision-making, innovation and change management, ethical-digital governance, and continuous professional learning. These competencies are integrated with Islamic moral-spiritual principles to ensure that technological transformation remains aligned with educational objectives, human development, ethical responsibility, and Islamic values. The novelty of this study lies in the formulation of an adaptive Islamic educational leadership framework that integrates digital and adaptive leadership perspectives with Islamic educational principles, positioning school principals as strategic agents of pedagogical, organizational, cultural, and ethical transformation. The framework demonstrates that digital transformation in Islamic educational institutions should be understood not merely as technology adoption but as a comprehensive transformation of leadership and educational practice.

Keywords: Islamic Educational Leadership, Digital Transformation, School Management, Adaptive Leadership, Educational Innovation.

Introduction

Digital transformation has fundamentally changed the organizational landscape of education. Schools are increasingly expected to integrate digital platforms, artificial intelligence, learning management systems, data analytics, cloud-based administration, and online communication into their daily operations. This transformation has altered not only teaching practices but also the responsibilities of educational leaders. School principals must now make decisions concerning technology infrastructure, digital learning, teacher competence, cybersecurity, data governance, and organizational innovation. Håkansson Lindqvist and Pettersson (2019) demonstrate that digitalization

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creates technical, pedagogical, administrative, and organizational challenges for school leaders. Their finding is important because it shows that digital transformation cannot be reduced to the acquisition of technological devices; rather, it changes the entire leadership environment.

The expansion of digital technology has consequently changed the meaning of educational leadership. In a traditional school organization, principals may have concentrated on administrative coordination, personnel management, curriculum implementation, and supervision. In a digitally transforming institution, these responsibilities remain important but are accompanied by demands for technological vision, digital communication, data interpretation, innovation management, and organizational agility. Recent systematic reviews show that digital leadership is associated with school effectiveness and organizational transformation. Okunlola (2025), for example, reported a positive relationship between digital leadership and school effectiveness across empirical studies. This evidence indicates that principals are not peripheral actors in digital transformation but central organizational agents who determine how technology becomes educationally meaningful.

The challenge becomes more distinctive within Islamic educational institutions. Islamic schools and madrasahs are expected to respond to technological change while maintaining religious identity, moral integrity, and educational traditions. Digitalization can create opportunities for improving access to Islamic learning, strengthening communication, developing innovative pedagogy, and expanding institutional networks. At the same time, it can generate challenges involving misinformation, inappropriate content, weakened interpersonal relationships, excessive screen use, commercialization, privacy, and the erosion of ethical boundaries. Recent studies of Islamic educational leadership argue that digital transformation requires adaptive, visionary, innovative, and value-oriented leadership rather than technology-oriented management alone (Rizki & Junaidi, 2026; Wibowo et al., 2025). These findings suggest that Islamic educational leadership requires a synthesis between technological competence and normative responsibility.

The principal therefore occupies a strategic position in determining whether digital transformation becomes meaningful educational innovation or merely technological modernization. A school may possess sophisticated hardware and software while producing limited educational improvement if teachers lack competence, organizational culture resists change, or digital tools are disconnected from pedagogical objectives. Håkansson Lindqvist (2019) found that school leaders can create beneficial conditions for technology-enhanced learning, but they also encounter technical problems, teacher-support demands, and limitations of leadership time. The implication is that technology implementation requires leadership capacity to align people, resources, pedagogy, and organizational priorities. Thus, the principal must function as an orchestrator of transformation rather than simply as an administrator of technological resources.

Digital transformation also produces uncertainty that cannot always be addressed through predetermined procedures. New technologies emerge rapidly, teacher competencies vary, student expectations change, and educational policies evolve continuously. Under such circumstances, leadership based exclusively on established routines may become inadequate.(Yusuf et al., 2025) Adaptive leadership provides a useful theoretical lens because it emphasizes the capacity to respond to complex

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challenges, mobilize people, learn continuously, and adjust strategies according to changing circumstances. This orientation is particularly relevant to Islamic education because digital transformation involves not only technical problems but also cultural, ethical, and institutional tensions. Recent scholarship on Islamic educational leadership emphasizes agile and adaptive leadership as a response to disruption in the learning ecosystem (Wibowo et al., 2025).

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the importance of this adaptive capacity. School principals were suddenly required to shift instructional systems, support teachers in using digital platforms, communicate with families, and maintain organizational continuity under unprecedented conditions. Research conducted in Kuwait found that principals' digital leadership positively influenced teachers' technology integration during the pandemic (AlAjmi, 2022). The study involved 113 principals and 404 teachers and demonstrated that visionary digital leadership contributed to technology integration. This evidence is relevant beyond the pandemic because it shows that crisis conditions accelerate the need for principals who can mobilize technological and human resources simultaneously.

The Indonesian educational context presents similar challenges. Digital transformation is increasingly embedded in curriculum reform, school administration, teacher professional development, and learning innovation. A systematic literature review of Indonesian school principals found that digital leadership supports efficient learning processes and contributes to the achievement of educational objectives (Riski et al., 2023). The study also emphasizes the importance of digital leadership competencies in improving educational quality. This finding is particularly significant for Islamic schools because digital leadership must be contextualized within religious educational objectives rather than imported as a purely managerial model.

The concept of digital leadership itself remains multidimensional. It may involve technological competence, strategic vision, instructional leadership, organizational change, collaboration, digital communication, and data-based decision-making. Acebuche (2023), through a systematic review, found that there is no universally agreed definition of digital leadership because the concept continues to evolve across different organizational contexts. This conceptual diversity creates a challenge for educational institutions seeking to develop principal competencies. A principal cannot be considered digitally competent merely because he or she can use digital applications; digital leadership must be assessed according to the capacity to create educational value through technology.

Digital leadership should consequently be distinguished from simple digital literacy. Digital literacy refers to an individual's capacity to understand and use digital technologies effectively. Digital leadership goes further because it involves influencing organizational members, establishing strategic direction, allocating resources, managing change, and building institutional capacity. Håkansson Lindqvist and Pettersson (2019) found that school leaders understood digitalization as a broad organizational process rather than simply a technical matter. This distinction is crucial because principal development programs often emphasize operational technology skills while neglecting strategic and relational leadership.(Nurhidayah & Handayani, 2025) Therefore, digital leadership development should prioritize organizational transformation alongside technological proficiency.

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Islamic educational leadership adds another dimension because leadership is understood as a moral and spiritual responsibility. The principal is not merely an institutional manager but an educational role model responsible for cultivating knowledge, character, faith, and social responsibility. In Islamic educational settings, leadership should therefore reflect values such as *amanah*, justice, consultation, responsibility, integrity, compassion, and *uswah ḥasanah*. Recent research on Islamic educational leadership in the digital age similarly emphasizes that technological innovation should remain connected to Islamic values and educational purposes (Rizki & Junaidi, 2026). This perspective prevents digital transformation from becoming value-neutral and places ethics at the center of institutional innovation.

The relationship between technology and Islamic identity is particularly important. Digital tools can strengthen Islamic educational identity when they are used to facilitate Qur'anic learning, Islamic scholarship, character education, communication, and community engagement. However, technology can also weaken identity when schools adopt platforms without considering cultural, religious, and ethical implications. Recent research on Islamic elementary-school management identifies the need for principals to balance modernization with preservation of Islamic identity. Hamdanah (2026) identifies visionary technology leadership, professional development, Islamic integration in digital content, contextualized blended learning, and parental engagement as major strategies. This evidence demonstrates that digital transformation in Islamic schools requires contextual adaptation rather than technological imitation.

Teacher development constitutes another major concern. Principals cannot implement digital transformation independently because teachers are the primary actors translating organizational strategy into classroom practice. Research consistently indicates that teachers' digital competence, attitudes, confidence, and willingness to innovate influence the effectiveness of digital transformation. AlAjmi (2022) found that principal digital leadership had a positive influence on teachers' technology integration. Recent systematic reviews likewise emphasize teacher digital competency development as a central component of effective school digital leadership. These findings mean that adaptive principals must become developers of people rather than merely controllers of technology.

Digital transformation also requires a shift toward collaborative leadership. The complexity of digitalization means that no principal can possess all the technological, pedagogical, and organizational knowledge necessary to make every decision. Principals therefore need to distribute leadership, create professional learning communities, involve teachers in decision-making, and establish partnerships with parents and external stakeholders.(Wahidah et al., 2025) Recent literature identifies collaboration and organizational capacity as important dimensions of digital school leadership. The explanation is straightforward: digital transformation becomes sustainable when organizational knowledge is distributed rather than concentrated in a single leader.

Another critical issue is data-informed decision-making. Digital systems generate substantial amounts of information about student learning, attendance, teacher performance, administrative processes, and institutional communication. Principals increasingly need the ability to interpret data ethically and use it to inform decisions. Recent reviews of digital leadership identify data literacy as an important competency alongside digital literacy and information-system management. Data, however, should not replace professional judgment because numerical indicators may fail to capture

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students' emotional, social, cultural, and spiritual experiences. Therefore, Islamic educational leadership must combine evidence-based decision-making with ethical reasoning and human sensitivity.

Digital transformation also raises questions about governance and ethics. Schools collect student data, use digital platforms, communicate through social media, and increasingly experiment with artificial intelligence. These practices require clear policies regarding privacy, cybersecurity, intellectual property, misinformation, algorithmic bias, and responsible technology use. The principal must therefore understand digital governance as an ethical responsibility rather than simply a technical function. This requirement is particularly important in Islamic education because concepts such as *amanah*, justice, protection of dignity, and avoidance of harm provide a normative foundation for responsible digital governance. The result is a model of leadership that combines digital capability with moral accountability.

The need for adaptive Islamic educational leadership is therefore not merely theoretical. Recent research has begun to describe Islamic educational leaders as adaptive, agile, innovative, and visionary actors responding to digital disruption. Wibowo et al. (2025) conceptualize agile Islamic educational leadership as a response to changing learning ecosystems, while Munir and Su'adah (2025) emphasize adaptive, collaborative, and visionary leadership within Society 5.0. These studies demonstrate the growing relevance of adaptive leadership in Islamic education. Nevertheless, a systematic competency framework specifically designed for school principals remains insufficiently developed.

This research therefore addresses a significant conceptual and practical gap. Existing research has separately examined digital leadership, adaptive leadership, Islamic educational leadership, and school principal competencies. However, fewer studies have integrated these dimensions into a unified framework that explains what adaptive competencies principals need and how those competencies relate to Islamic educational values. Recent reviews also indicate that digital school leadership research remains fragmented and often focuses more heavily on infrastructure and teacher digital literacy than on principals' strategic and pedagogical roles (Asriadi & Andriani, 2026; Nagel et al., 2026). The present study responds to this gap by developing a conceptual framework that integrates digital, adaptive, pedagogical, organizational, and Islamic competencies.

The purpose of this study is therefore to analyze the theoretical and empirical literature concerning Islamic educational leadership, digital transformation, digital leadership, adaptive leadership, and principal competencies. The study specifically seeks to identify the competencies required by school principals to lead Islamic educational institutions effectively in digitally transforming environments. It also seeks to synthesize previous research into an integrated framework that is theoretically grounded and practically applicable. The proposed framework is expected to assist policymakers, principal preparation programs, Islamic educational institutions, and researchers in understanding the competencies necessary for sustainable digital transformation. Ultimately, the study argues that effective digital transformation depends less on the quantity of technology available than on the quality of leadership that gives technology educational, organizational, and ethical direction.

Theoretical Foundation

Islamic Educational Leadership

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Islamic educational leadership is fundamentally concerned with guiding educational institutions toward educational, moral, spiritual, and social purposes. Leadership in this context cannot be separated from the concepts of *amanah*, justice, consultation, responsibility, and exemplary conduct. The principal is simultaneously an organizational leader and an educational model whose behavior communicates institutional values. Contemporary Islamic educational leadership research increasingly emphasizes the need to preserve these normative foundations while responding to technological and social change (Rizki & Junaidi, 2026). This theoretical position means that digital transformation must remain subordinate to educational and ethical purposes rather than becoming an end in itself.

The concept of *amanah* is especially relevant to principal leadership in the digital era. Digital systems give principals access to extensive institutional and student information, making confidentiality and responsible information management essential. A principal who treats digital data carelessly can undermine trust even if the school appears technologically advanced.(Kashada et al., 2025) Islamic leadership therefore requires the integration of technological competence with ethical accountability. The contemporary literature on digital governance reinforces this need by emphasizing data responsibility, cybersecurity, and institutional trust as components of digital transformation. Thus, *amanah* can serve as an Islamic ethical foundation for digital governance.

Justice is another essential dimension. Digital transformation can create unequal opportunities when some teachers have greater technological competence or when some students have superior access to devices and connectivity. Principals must therefore identify and address digital inequalities rather than assume that technology automatically produces educational equality.(Nurdi et al., 2025) Research on digital school leadership indicates that organizational capacity and access conditions significantly influence digital transformation outcomes. From an Islamic perspective, justice requires principals to allocate resources fairly and protect vulnerable members of the school community.

Consultation or *shūrā* provides a foundation for collaborative digital leadership. Technology implementation frequently affects teachers' workload, teaching methods, assessment practices, and professional autonomy. Decisions imposed without consultation may produce resistance even when the technology itself is beneficial. Recent studies of digital leadership emphasize collaboration, professional learning communities, and teacher involvement in transformation. Therefore, *shūrā* can be operationalized as participatory decision-making in digital transformation.

The principle of *uswah ḥasanah* also has direct relevance. Teachers are more likely to embrace digital innovation when principals demonstrate openness to learning, willingness to experiment, and readiness to acknowledge mistakes. A principal who demands digital competence from teachers but refuses to learn new technologies sends a contradictory message. Digital transformation therefore requires leadership by example. This principle is consistent with research showing that leaders' practices and attitudes shape the conditions under which teachers adopt technology.

Digital Leadership

Digital leadership can be understood as leadership that strategically uses digital technologies to achieve organizational and educational goals. It encompasses more than the technical ability to operate digital platforms. Digital leaders establish vision, develop organizational capacity, facilitate innovation, manage change, and create conditions for

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technology-enhanced learning. Acebuche (2023) emphasizes the conceptual diversity of digital leadership and notes that no single universally accepted definition has yet emerged. This conceptual diversity indicates that digital leadership should be interpreted contextually according to institutional purposes and organizational needs.

The strategic dimension of digital leadership is particularly important for principals. Technology purchases without a strategic rationale can produce fragmented systems, unused platforms, and unnecessary financial burdens. Håkansson Lindqvist and Pettersson (2019) demonstrate that digitalization creates complex organizational challenges that require leaders to prioritize resources and professional development. The principal must therefore develop a digital transformation roadmap connected to the school's educational mission. In Islamic education, that roadmap must also include the institution's religious and moral objectives.

Instructional digital leadership represents another dimension. Principals need to understand how technology can improve teaching, assessment, student engagement, and learning outcomes. Digital leadership becomes ineffective when technology is concentrated in administrative systems while classroom pedagogy remains unchanged. AlAjmi (2022) demonstrates that principal digital leadership can positively influence teachers' technology integration. This finding indicates that principals should connect technology decisions directly to instructional improvement.

Digital leadership also involves organizational culture. Schools need cultures in which experimentation, learning, collaboration, and responsible risk-taking are accepted. A rigid culture can transform digital innovation into compliance rather than meaningful improvement. Recent systematic reviews identify digital culture and professional learning communities as important strategies for successful digital leadership. Thus, principals should develop environments where teachers can experiment, share practices, evaluate failures, and improve collectively.

Adaptive Leadership

Adaptive leadership focuses on how leaders mobilize individuals and organizations to address complex challenges that cannot be solved through existing technical solutions. Digital transformation contains both technical and adaptive dimensions. Installing a learning management system may be a technical problem, but changing teachers' beliefs about teaching and assessment is an adaptive challenge.(Barton et al., 2021) Similarly, purchasing artificial intelligence tools is technical, whereas determining their ethical and pedagogical implications is adaptive. This distinction is important because principals must know when to apply technical expertise and when to facilitate organizational learning.

Adaptive leadership requires leaders to tolerate uncertainty. Digital transformation rarely follows a perfectly predictable sequence because technological possibilities, stakeholder responses, and institutional conditions continually change. Principals must therefore monitor emerging conditions and revise strategies rather than rigidly implement predetermined plans. Recent Islamic educational leadership literature describes adaptive and agile leadership as necessary responses to disruption in learning ecosystems (Wibowo et al., 2025). This finding supports the integration of adaptive capacity into principal competency frameworks.

Adaptive leadership also requires distributed problem-solving. Complex organizational problems cannot always be solved by senior leaders alone because relevant knowledge is distributed among teachers, students, technicians, parents, and community

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members. A principal must create structures that allow these stakeholders to contribute knowledge and solutions. Digital transformation therefore encourages a move from command-and-control leadership toward collaborative problem-solving. This is consistent with recent research emphasizing collaboration and organizational capacity as important components of successful digital transformation.

Another adaptive competency is the ability to manage resistance. Resistance should not automatically be interpreted as opposition to progress. Teachers may resist because of workload concerns, inadequate training, previous experiences with failed technology projects, or legitimate pedagogical reservations. Effective principals therefore listen to resistance and distinguish technical concerns from deeper cultural or professional concerns. Recent research indicates that inclusive digital leadership can reduce teacher resistance while improving digital competence.

Transformational and Instructional Leadership

Transformational leadership contributes to digital transformation by emphasizing vision, motivation, empowerment, and organizational change. A principal needs to communicate why digital transformation matters and how it contributes to the school's mission. Technology becomes meaningful when teachers can connect it with student learning, institutional improvement, and educational values.(Rifai et al., 2025) Recent studies of digital transformational leadership identify organizational agility and teacher readiness as important mechanisms through which digital leadership affects school development.

Instructional leadership complements transformational leadership by keeping student learning at the center. A school can become highly digitalized without becoming educationally effective. Therefore, principals need to evaluate whether technology improves instructional quality, student engagement, assessment, inclusion, and learning outcomes. Håkansson Lindqvist (2019) emphasizes that school leaders play an important role in creating conditions for innovative technology-enhanced teaching and learning. The theoretical implication is that digital transformation should always be evaluated according to pedagogical value.

The integration of transformational and instructional leadership creates a balanced model. Transformational leadership provides direction and motivation, while instructional leadership ensures that transformation remains connected to learning. Adaptive leadership adds the capacity to adjust strategies under uncertainty. Islamic educational leadership contributes moral and spiritual orientation.(Ali et al., 2025) Digital leadership provides technological and organizational mechanisms. The proposed framework therefore does not replace existing leadership theories but integrates them into a contextually appropriate model.

Previous Research

Previous empirical research provides strong evidence that principal digital leadership affects teachers' technology use. AlAjmi (2022) found a positive effect of principals' digital leadership on technology integration among teachers in Kuwait. The study is significant because it empirically connects principal behavior with classroom technology adoption. It also demonstrates that digital leadership becomes particularly important during periods of disruption. The study therefore supports the argument that digital competence should be regarded as a core principal competency rather than an optional skill.

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Håkansson Lindqvist (2019) examined school leaders' practices in a three-year digital initiative and found that leaders created conditions supporting new methods, sharing, and collaboration. At the same time, they faced technical difficulties, teacher-support demands, and limitations of time. This research illustrates the complexity of digital leadership in everyday practice. It also suggests that principals require organizational support rather than being expected to lead digitalization individually.

Håkansson Lindqvist and Pettersson (2019) further found that school leaders understand digitalization as a multidimensional process involving technical, pedagogical, administrative, and organizational issues. This study is theoretically important because it challenges narrow definitions of digital leadership. The principal must navigate several systems simultaneously. Consequently, principal competency frameworks should include technological, pedagogical, organizational, and strategic dimensions.

Riski et al. (2023) reviewed digital leadership among Indonesian school principals and concluded that digital leadership supports efficient learning and educational goal achievement. Their study is particularly relevant to the Indonesian context. It demonstrates that digital leadership is not simply an international trend but an increasingly important issue within Indonesian school management. Nevertheless, the study does not specifically integrate Islamic leadership values or adaptive leadership theory.

Asriadi and Andriani (2026) synthesized 42 empirical studies and found that existing research emphasizes infrastructure readiness and teacher digital literacy more than principals' strategic roles and pedagogical leadership. They also found that organizational and relational effects are more consistently reported than direct learning effects. This reveals an important research gap. Digital leadership research needs to examine not only whether schools become digitally ready but also how principals create organizational conditions for meaningful pedagogical transformation.

Nagel et al. (2026) similarly found that research on digitalization and school leadership remains fragmented and theoretically underdeveloped. Their scoping review identified limited longitudinal and mixed-method research and emphasized the need to understand how digital leadership is enacted in organizational, technological, and governance contexts. This finding reinforces the importance of conceptual frameworks that move beyond individualized views of leadership. It also supports the present study's emphasis on contextual and systemic competencies.

Recent Islamic education studies have begun addressing this gap. Wibowo et al. (2025) propose agile Islamic educational leadership as a response to learning ecosystem disruption, while Rizki and Junaidi (2026) identify adaptive, innovative, and visionary characteristics as important for Islamic educational leaders. Hamdanah (2026) emphasizes the integration of technology leadership with Islamic identity, professional development, blended learning, and parental engagement. These studies provide valuable foundations but do not yet establish a comprehensive competency matrix for school principals. The present research therefore synthesizes these strands into an eight-competency framework.

Method

This study uses a qualitative library research method. Library research is appropriate because the study aims to synthesize existing scholarship and develop a conceptual framework rather than test a statistical hypothesis through field data. The

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literature focuses on digital leadership, adaptive leadership, Islamic educational leadership, school principals, digital transformation, organizational change, and teacher digital competence. Recent Islamic education research has also employed library-based approaches to examine adaptive leadership and digital transformation (Munir & Su'adah, 2025; Rizki & Junaidi, 2026). This methodological choice allows the study to integrate interdisciplinary perspectives that may not be available within a single empirical setting.

The literature selection prioritized journal articles published between approximately 2019 and 2026. This period was selected because it captures the accelerated development of digital leadership research, including the transformation produced by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent developments in artificial intelligence. Earlier theoretical works were considered only when they remained necessary for conceptual clarification. Priority was given to peer-reviewed research directly addressing educational leadership, digitalization, school principals, Islamic education, and organizational transformation. This strategy ensures that the conceptual framework is anchored in recent educational realities.

The literature search used combinations of keywords including "Islamic educational leadership," "digital transformation and school principals," "digital leadership," "adaptive leadership in education," "Islamic school leadership," "digital leadership competencies," and "educational leadership in the digital era." Searches were conducted through scholarly databases, publisher platforms, institutional repositories, and academic indexing services. The search process also examined reference lists of relevant articles to identify additional studies. Recent systematic reviews were particularly useful for identifying major themes and recurring findings.

The inclusion criteria consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles published primarily within the most recent five to ten years, studies directly relevant to educational leadership or digital transformation, and articles containing conceptual, empirical, systematic-review, or qualitative evidence. Studies focused exclusively on business leadership were excluded unless their theoretical contribution was directly transferable to educational leadership. Articles with insufficient methodological or conceptual information were also excluded. This procedure strengthened the relevance and reliability of the literature synthesis.

Data were analyzed using thematic content analysis. The first analytical category concerned the changing role of school principals in digital transformation. The second category addressed digital leadership competencies, while the third examined adaptive leadership characteristics. The fourth category focused on Islamic leadership values and the fifth examined teacher development, organizational culture, innovation, and governance. The categories were subsequently compared to identify areas of convergence and gaps.

The synthesis was conducted through comparison and conceptual integration. Findings from digital leadership research were compared with findings from Islamic educational leadership and adaptive leadership research. Similar competencies were consolidated, while distinct competencies were preserved when they represented meaningful theoretical differences. For example, digital literacy was distinguished from strategic digital vision, and technological expertise was distinguished from adaptive change management. This distinction is important because effective principals require both knowledge of technology and the leadership capacity to mobilize people around technological change.

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The final stage involved constructing the proposed adaptive Islamic digital leadership framework. The framework was developed by connecting empirical findings with Islamic educational leadership principles and the requirements of digital transformation. Eight competencies emerged as central: digital vision, adaptive intelligence, pedagogical-digital leadership, collaborative empowerment, data-informed decision-making, innovation and change management, ethical-digital governance, and continuous professional learning. The framework is conceptual rather than empirically validated, so future studies should test its reliability and applicability in different types of Islamic schools. The methodology nevertheless provides a systematic basis for generating theoretically informed propositions from contemporary scholarship.

Results and Discussion

Findings from the Literature Synthesis

The literature synthesis reveals that digital transformation changes the principal's role in at least five major ways. First, principals become strategic technology leaders rather than technology users alone. Second, they become facilitators of organizational learning and teacher development. Third, they become instructional leaders responsible for ensuring that digital tools improve pedagogy. Fourth, they become ethical governors of data and digital environments. Fifth, they become adaptive change leaders capable of navigating uncertainty and resistance. These dimensions are consistent with the findings of recent systematic reviews of digital school leadership.

The second major finding is that digital leadership cannot be separated from organizational culture. Technology adoption depends on whether teachers perceive innovation as meaningful, manageable, and supported by leadership. Principals therefore need to establish cultures of experimentation, collaboration, reflection, and professional learning. Håkansson Lindqvist (2019) found that school leaders' support for collaboration and new ways of working contributed to technology-enhanced learning environments. This indicates that culture is a central mechanism connecting leadership behavior with digital transformation.

The third finding concerns the importance of adaptive capacity. Digital transformation involves problems that are simultaneously technological, pedagogical, cultural, and ethical. Technical solutions alone cannot resolve teacher anxiety, organizational resistance, or conflicts over educational values. Principals must therefore diagnose the type of challenge, determine which aspects require technical intervention, and identify which require behavioral or cultural adaptation. This finding supports the integration of adaptive leadership into digital leadership frameworks.

The fourth finding is that teacher competence is one of the most important mediating factors. Principals can establish sophisticated digital strategies, but implementation depends on teachers' ability and willingness to translate them into instructional practice. AlAjmi (2022) provides empirical evidence that principal digital leadership positively influences teacher technology integration. Recent systematic reviews similarly identify teacher digital competence as a central component of digital transformation. The implication is that principal competency must include the ability to design and sustain teacher professional learning.

The fifth finding is that Islamic educational leadership must preserve normative orientation. Technology should support the school's educational and spiritual mission rather than displace it. Recent Islamic education research emphasizes adaptive,

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innovative, and visionary leadership while maintaining Islamic values.(Erturk, 2022) This means that principals require a form of leadership capable of balancing modernization and identity preservation. The balance is not necessarily oppositional because digital tools can be appropriated to strengthen Islamic educational objectives.

The sixth finding concerns strategic vision. Effective principals need a clear answer to the question of why their school is undergoing digital transformation. Without a shared vision, technology adoption becomes fragmented across departments and teachers. A digital vision should therefore specify educational outcomes, ethical principles, teacher development priorities, student competencies, and organizational improvements. Recent literature repeatedly identifies vision as a core component of digital leadership.

The seventh finding concerns collaboration. Digital transformation requires knowledge distributed across different professional groups. Teachers understand pedagogy, technical staff understand infrastructure, administrators understand systems, and parents understand family-level needs.(Yani et al., 2022) Principals must therefore build collaborative structures rather than monopolize decision-making. This finding aligns with Islamic principles of *shūrā* and contemporary distributed leadership approaches.

The eighth finding is that data literacy has become a core leadership competency. Digital systems can provide information about attendance, student achievement, teacher activity, resource use, and institutional performance. However, data must be interpreted within educational and ethical contexts. Recent reviews of principal digital leadership identify data-driven decision-making as a major competency. For Islamic schools, data use should also respect confidentiality, dignity, fairness, and institutional trust.

The ninth finding concerns innovation management. Digital transformation is not a single project but an ongoing process of experimentation, evaluation, scaling, and renewal. Principals must determine which innovations should be adopted, adapted, tested, expanded, or discontinued. This requires strategic prioritization rather than enthusiasm for every new technological trend. The literature on digital transformational leadership similarly emphasizes organizational agility as a mechanism for responding to changing technological conditions.

The tenth finding concerns ethical governance. Artificial intelligence, digital communication, online learning platforms, and student information systems create new ethical responsibilities. Principals must establish policies for privacy, cybersecurity, responsible AI, academic integrity, digital citizenship, and appropriate communication. Islamic ethical principles such as *amanah*, justice, protection from harm, and respect for human dignity can provide a normative foundation for these policies. Thus, ethical digital governance is not an additional competency but a central component of Islamic educational leadership.

Adaptive Islamic Digital Leadership Competency Framework

No.	Core Competency	Main Leadership Capacity	Islamic Value Orientation	Practical Indicators
1	Digital Vision	Develop a strategic digital transformation roadmap	*Niyyah*, *amanah*, *maṣlaḥah*	Clear digital strategy aligned with school mission

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No.	Core Competency	Main Leadership Capacity	Islamic Value Orientation	Practical Indicators
2	Adaptive Intelligence	Diagnose uncertainty and respond flexibly	*Ḥikmah, ṣabr, tawakkul*	Rapid learning, scenario planning, flexible decisions
3	Pedagogical-Digital Leadership	Connect technology with teaching and learning	*ʻIlm, tarbiyah, iḥsān*	Technology-enhanced instructional improvement
4	Collaborative Empowerment	Build distributed leadership and teacher agency	*Shūrā, ukhuwwah*	Professional learning communities and participation
5	Data-Informed Decision-Making	Interpret and use digital data responsibly	*Amanah, ʻadl*	Evidence-based decisions with ethical safeguards
6	Innovation and Change Management	Lead experimentation, implementation, and scaling	*Iṣlāḥ, ijtihād*	Innovation pilots, evaluation, change communication
7	Ethical-Digital Governance	Protect dignity, privacy, safety, and integrity	*Amanah, ʻadl*, avoidance of harm	Digital policies, cybersecurity, AI ethics
8	Continuous Professional Learning	Sustain leadership and teacher digital development	*Ṭalab al-ʻilm*	Continuous training, reflection, coaching, mentoring

Digital vision constitutes a foundational competency in adaptive Islamic educational leadership, as it provides the strategic direction through which technological transformation is aligned with institutional purposes. A digitally adaptive principal needs to articulate a compelling institutional vision explaining how technology supports learning, character formation, administration, and community engagement. Such a vision should be systematically connected to the school's Islamic identity and strategic objectives rather than being framed merely as an effort to modernize technological infrastructure. Research on digital leadership consistently indicates that visionary leadership enables educational institutions to optimize technological resources and integrate digital technologies into meaningful educational practices (AlAjmi, 2022). Within Islamic educational contexts, this vision should be anchored in the principles of

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amanah and maṣlaḥah, thereby ensuring that digital transformation is directed toward substantive educational benefits rather than technological prestige.

Closely associated with the capacity for strategic vision is adaptive intelligence, which enables school principals to respond constructively to dynamic and uncertain environments. Adaptive intelligence refers to the ability to recognize changing conditions, interpret complexity, learn from experience, and modify leadership strategies accordingly. This competency is particularly significant in the context of digital transformation because technologies, educational policies, and stakeholder expectations continue to evolve at a rapid pace. An adaptive principal, therefore, does not regard an initial transformation plan as a fixed blueprint but continuously utilizes feedback, emerging evidence, and contextual developments to refine institutional strategies. Recent scholarship on Islamic educational leadership likewise emphasizes agile and adaptive approaches as increasingly relevant mechanisms for responding to the disruption and complexity generated by digital transformation.

Beyond strategic adaptability, effective digital transformation requires principals to demonstrate pedagogical-digital leadership that integrates technological knowledge with the core purposes of teaching and learning. Principals need to understand how technology can enhance instructional design, assessment, collaboration, personalization, and student engagement. Although school leaders are not necessarily required to possess advanced programming expertise, they need adequate pedagogical and technological literacy to critically evaluate digital innovations and determine their educational relevance. Håkansson Lindqvist (2019) demonstrates that school leaders play a crucial role in creating organizational conditions that facilitate innovative digital teaching practices. From this perspective, technology acquires educational value not through its mere adoption, but through leadership capacity to connect technological innovation with authentic pedagogical processes and intended learning outcomes.

The sustainability of digital transformation is further contingent upon the principal's capacity to empower teachers through collaborative leadership structures. Digital transformation requires teachers to function as active agents of institutional change rather than passive recipients of externally formulated policies. Accordingly, principals should develop professional learning communities, mentoring systems, innovation teams, and participatory decision-making mechanisms that facilitate collective learning and shared responsibility. Recent research on digital leadership in Indonesia identifies teacher competency development and collaborative organizational culture as important determinants of successful technology implementation. This competency also corresponds closely with the Islamic principle of shūrā, through which meaningful consultation facilitates the distribution of responsibility, collective deliberation, and the utilization of institutional knowledge in decision-making processes.

Another critical dimension of digitally adaptive leadership is the capacity to employ data as an informed basis for institutional decision-making. Principals should possess sufficient data literacy to interpret digital information, identify institutional problems, evaluate educational programs, monitor implementation, and determine appropriate resource allocation. Nevertheless, data should be regarded as empirical evidence that informs judgment rather than as an unquestionable source of truth. Educational decision-making must therefore integrate quantitative evidence with qualitative information, professional judgment, student experiences, teacher perspectives, and contextual considerations. Recent scholarship increasingly identifies data literacy as

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an essential dimension of contemporary digital principalship because the effective use of institutional data can strengthen evidence-informed planning while reducing decisions based solely on assumptions or intuition.

The successful institutionalization of technological innovation also depends upon the principal's competence in innovation leadership and change management. Principals need to understand how to introduce innovations incrementally, communicate their purposes clearly, anticipate organizational challenges, manage resistance, evaluate implementation outcomes, and scale practices that demonstrate meaningful educational value. An inclusive leadership approach is particularly important because teacher resistance to technological change may arise from legitimate professional, pedagogical, or contextual concerns rather than from an inherent rejection of innovation. Recent evidence suggests that inclusive digital leadership can contribute to reducing resistance while simultaneously strengthening teachers' digital competence. Consequently, change management should be constructed as a relational, participatory, and evidence-informed process rather than implemented through coercive or purely top-down mechanisms.

The expansion of digital technologies into educational institutions simultaneously creates an imperative for ethically grounded digital governance. Islamic school principals must establish clear institutional policies concerning data privacy, cybersecurity, responsible artificial intelligence, online communication, academic integrity, and digital citizenship. This competency represents a distinctive dimension of Islamic digital leadership because it explicitly connects technological governance with moral and ethical principles derived from Islamic educational thought. The principle of amanah requires leaders to exercise responsible stewardship over institutional and personal information, while the principle of justice ('adl) demands equitable access, fair treatment, and non-discriminatory implementation of digital systems. Furthermore, the principle of avoiding harm requires principals to critically anticipate the psychological, social, educational, and security consequences associated with the adoption and use of digital technologies. Finally, the long-term sustainability of adaptive digital leadership depends upon a culture of continuous professional learning among both principals and teachers.

Digital transformation cannot be sustained when professional development is limited to initial training because technological systems, pedagogical approaches, and institutional demands continue to evolve. Professional learning must consequently be understood as an ongoing organizational process through which educational leaders and teachers continually update their knowledge, competencies, and practices. Håkansson Lindqvist (2019) emphasizes the importance of organizational support and sustained professional development for educational leaders operating within increasingly digitalized environments. This orientation is also compatible with the Islamic educational tradition, which places a high value on the continuous pursuit of knowledge. Accordingly, lifelong professional learning should be positioned not merely as a technical requirement of digital transformation but as an integral component of an Islamic educational leadership philosophy that emphasizes intellectual growth, professional responsibility, and continuous improvement.The framework also indicates that these eight competencies should not be implemented independently. Digital vision influences innovation priorities, adaptive intelligence determines how strategies respond to change, pedagogical leadership protects the educational purpose, collaboration mobilizes people, data informs decisions, innovation management structures transformation, ethical governance protects institutional values, and professional learning sustains the entire system. The

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competencies therefore form an interconnected leadership ecosystem. This systemic orientation responds to recent reviews arguing that digital leadership research should move beyond individualized understandings toward organizational, technological, and governance contexts.

The framework has implications for principal recruitment and preparation. Traditional principal selection often emphasizes administrative experience, managerial knowledge, and general leadership ability. In a digitally transforming environment, these competencies remain necessary but are no longer sufficient. Principal preparation should include digital strategy, AI literacy, data governance, digital pedagogy, organizational change, cybersecurity awareness, and ethical decision-making. For Islamic schools, these areas should be integrated with Islamic leadership values rather than taught as unrelated technical modules.

The framework also has implications for professional development. Training should not consist exclusively of workshops demonstrating how to operate applications. Instead, principals should engage in strategic simulations, case analysis, peer coaching, action research, innovation projects, and reflective leadership activities. Such approaches develop adaptive competence because principals learn to diagnose problems and make decisions under uncertainty. Recent research on digital leadership similarly indicates that professional learning is central to sustainable digital transformation.

At the organizational level, principals need to create digital transformation teams. These teams can include teachers, administrative staff, technology specialists, student representatives, and parent representatives. The team can conduct digital readiness assessments, identify priorities, monitor implementation, and evaluate outcomes. Such structures reduce the risk that digital transformation becomes dependent on a single principal. They also create organizational resilience when leadership changes.

Another implication concerns resource management. Digital transformation requires investment in infrastructure, software, connectivity, professional development, technical support, and cybersecurity. However, resource allocation should be guided by educational priorities rather than technological enthusiasm. Principals should evaluate whether each investment contributes to learning, equity, institutional efficiency, or character development. The Islamic principle of responsible stewardship provides an ethical basis for avoiding waste and prioritizing genuine educational benefit.

The framework also emphasizes the importance of digital inclusion. Schools should identify students and teachers who face barriers to access, including inadequate devices, weak connectivity, disability-related barriers, and limited digital competence. Digital transformation should not create a new form of educational inequality. A principal guided by justice must ensure that technological innovation expands opportunities rather than privileges already advantaged groups. This dimension is particularly important in diverse Indonesian educational contexts.

The role of parents is equally important. Digital transformation changes the relationship between school and home because students frequently learn, communicate, and consume information through digital environments outside school. Islamic school principals therefore need to establish parent education programs concerning digital parenting, online safety, responsible technology use, and Islamic digital ethics. Recent research on Islamic elementary education identifies parental engagement as one of the strategic dimensions of digital transformation.

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The framework also has implications for student leadership. Students should not be regarded merely as recipients of digital transformation. They can become partners in developing digital citizenship, peer mentoring, media literacy, and technology-based social projects. Principals can establish student digital councils or innovation teams that provide feedback about technology use. This approach strengthens student agency and helps leaders understand how digital transformation is experienced by learners.

Artificial intelligence represents an emerging challenge for adaptive principals. AI can support personalized learning, administrative efficiency, content creation, assessment, and professional development. At the same time, it raises concerns about academic integrity, hallucinated information, privacy, bias, dependence, and the erosion of human judgment. The principal must therefore create an institutional AI policy grounded in educational objectives and Islamic ethics. The appropriate leadership response is neither unconditional adoption nor blanket rejection but informed, ethical, and pedagogically justified experimentation.

The framework also requires measurable indicators. Digital vision can be assessed through the existence and implementation of a strategic roadmap. Adaptive intelligence can be assessed through responsiveness to emerging problems and evidence of iterative planning. Pedagogical leadership can be assessed through changes in teaching practices and learning quality. Collaborative empowerment can be measured through participation and professional learning structures. Data governance can be assessed through policy quality and responsible use of information. Finally, the framework demonstrates that the ultimate objective of digital transformation should be educational improvement rather than digitalization itself. A school should not be considered successful merely because it has a sophisticated learning management system, electronic administration, or artificial intelligence tools. Success should be judged according to whether technology strengthens learning, teacher professionalism, student character, inclusion, institutional effectiveness, and Islamic educational identity. This conclusion is consistent with recent reviews showing that the effects of digital leadership are more consistently observed when organizational and relational conditions are addressed rather than when infrastructure is treated as the central outcome.

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Conclusion

Digital transformation has fundamentally expanded the responsibilities of Islamic school principals. The principal is no longer adequately described as an administrator who manages existing organizational routines but must increasingly function as a digital strategist, instructional leader, change agent, organizational learner, ethical governor, and developer of people. The literature demonstrates that successful digital transformation depends on the interaction between technological readiness, teacher competence, organizational culture, strategic vision, and leadership capacity. Within Islamic educational institutions, these dimensions must remain connected to *amanah*, justice, *shūrā*, *uswah ḥasanah*, *iṣlāḥ*, and the pursuit of beneficial knowledge. The study therefore proposes eight adaptive Islamic digital leadership competencies: digital vision, adaptive intelligence, pedagogical-digital leadership, collaborative empowerment, data-informed decision-making, innovation and change management, ethical-digital governance, and continuous professional learning. The novelty of the study lies in integrating digital leadership, adaptive leadership, and Islamic educational leadership into a single competency framework specifically oriented toward school principals. The framework conceptualizes digital transformation as an organizational, pedagogical, cultural, and ethical process rather than as technological adoption alone. Future empirical research should validate the eight competencies through quantitative instruments, qualitative case studies, and longitudinal investigations across madrasahs, Islamic schools, and pesantren-based educational institutions. Comparative research across Indonesia and other Muslim-majority contexts would also be valuable for examining how local cultures and institutional traditions shape adaptive Islamic digital leadership. Ultimately, the effectiveness of digital transformation in Islamic education will depend not on how rapidly schools acquire new technologies but on whether their leaders can transform technological change into meaningful educational improvement while preserving Islamic ethical and spiritual foundations.

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