



Trust-Based Leadership and The Effectiveness of Decision-Making in State Islamic Junior Secondary Schools: a Multi-Site Phenomenological Study in Jambi, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Teacher trust in school leadership is widely regarded as a precondition for sound institutional decision-making, yet the mechanism through which trust translates into decision-making effectiveness remains under-theorised in Islamic-school (madrasah) settings. This study examines how teacher trust in the principal shapes the effectiveness of decision-making across three State Islamic Junior Secondary Schools (Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri / MTsN) in Jambi Province, Indonesia. Adopting a qualitative, multi-site phenomenological design, data were generated through participant observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and documentary study involving principals, teachers, and administrative staff, and analysed using the interactive model of data condensation, display, and verification. Trustworthiness was secured through prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and source, method, theory, and time triangulation. The analysis integrates the *five-faces-of-trust* framework, the team-effectiveness model that positions a *climate* of trust as the most fundamental contextual element, and the ability-benevolence-integrity model of trustworthiness.. The study advances a *comprehensive-trust* construct that fuses rational and relational trust, identifies *visibility* as a sixth, context-sensitive face of trust, and formalises a self-reinforcing *trust-based leadership loop*. A counter-intuitive contribution is that leadership accountability – openly admitting and collectively revising erroneous decisions – strengthens rather than erodes trust. The paper offers an evidence-based Trust-Based Leadership model with practical implications for principal selection, training, and evaluation.

INTRODUCTION

The madrasah occupies a strategic position in Indonesia's national education system, charged with forming learners who are at once faithful, knowledgeable, and of upright character. Within the service relationship between a school and its community, trust is a foundational element of the bond between teachers and the principal. In organisational settings, trust encourages prudent risk-taking, smooths communication, enhances group effectiveness, and lifts productivity (Zand, 1972; Colquitt et al., 2019). Teachers who trust their leader are more open in voicing ideas, more receptive to feedback, and more committed to the institution's vision (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Leadership is a decisive factor in the success of any educational organisation (Yukl, 2013). Effective principals do not rely on authority alone; they cultivate trust, communication, and motivation, drawing as needed on transformational, transactional, and situational approaches (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Burns, 1978). In Indonesia the principal is formally a teacher entrusted with additional duties, yet bears substantial responsibility for the direction and quality of the institution. The success or failure of a madrasah frequently hinges on the quality of the principal's leadership, particularly the capacity to build teacher trust and to make effective decisions amid limited resources and rigid regulation (Handford & Leithwood, 2013).

Decision-making is a core managerial function whose effectiveness depends substantially on the degree of trust in the leader: trust helps avoid bias, supports data-informed and feedback-open deliberation, and enables integrative negotiation among the competing interests of teachers, students, and parents (Robbins & Coulter, 2018; Datnow & Hubbard, 2016). Where teachers participate in decisions, their sense of ownership over the resulting policies rises (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). Trust, leadership style, and decision-making effectiveness thus form three interlocking conditions for a successful school.

Despite this consensus, the precise pathway by which teacher trust becomes decision-making effectiveness in madrasah contexts has rarely been mapped empirically (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2015). A preliminary grand tour across three MTsN in Jambi surfaced concrete symptoms of low trust: passive teachers and a culture of silence in meetings, oppositional cliques, resistance to innovation, perceptions of authoritarian leadership, weak teamwork, and shallow commitment to the institutional vision. These symptoms motivate the present study.

Accordingly, this study pursues four questions: (1) What is the texture of teacher trust in principal leadership across the three sites? (2) What pattern characterises principals' decision-making? (3) How does teacher trust relate to decision-making effectiveness? and (4) Which factors determine teacher trust? The contribution is threefold – a *comprehensive-trust* construct, the identification of *visibility* as a sixth face of trust, and the formalisation of a reciprocal *trust-based leadership loop*.

The Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs has consistently foregrounded integrity, transparency, and accountability in madrasah governance. Yet the ideals expressed in policy have not always been realised in everyday leadership

practice. The gap between policy aspiration and lived practice—between an institutionalised language of trust and the observable symptoms of its absence—is precisely the space this study seeks to illuminate. By foregrounding trust as a lived, relational phenomenon rather than a normative slogan, the analysis offers grounded guidance for principals operating under real constraints (Coulson-Thomas, 2022).

Three considerations sharpen the study's relevance. First, the principal in the Indonesian madrasah is structurally a teacher with added duties, so leadership authority is not guaranteed by position but must be earned through perceived competence and character; trust is therefore constitutive of the role rather than ornamental. Second, decisions in resource-constrained madrasah carry high stakes for limited budgets, staffing, and student welfare, so the quality of deliberation has immediate consequences. Third, Jambi's distinctive blend of Islamic and Malay deliberative culture makes consultation a culturally expected, not merely instrumental, norm—rendering the province a revealing site for studying how trust and consultation interlock.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Trust and the five faces of faculty trust

Trust is a multidimensional, cross-disciplinary construct generally understood as the willingness of a trustor to accept vulnerability to the actions of a trustee, based on the expectation that the trustee will act benevolently, reliably, competently, honestly, and openly (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000; Deutsch, 1958). Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's (1999) foundational study of faculty trust distilled, alongside a general willingness to risk vulnerability, five faces of trust—benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness—validated across trust in the principal, in colleagues, and in clients. Tschannen-Moran (2014) later emphasised that this willingness toward vulnerability rests on the trustor's confidence that the trustee will display these qualities. The present study adopts these faces as its analytical backbone while remaining attentive to locally salient dimensions (Tarter & Hoy, 1988).

Antecedents of trustworthiness

Complementing the five faces, the trustworthiness literature locates the perceived trustworthiness of a trustee in three antecedents—ability, benevolence, and integrity—filtered through the trustor's disposition to trust (Mayer et al., 1995). Ability denotes domain-specific competence; benevolence is the belief that the trustee wishes the trustor well beyond egocentric motives; integrity is the perception that the trustee adheres to an acceptable set of principles. A parallel tradition distinguishes disposition-based, cognition-based, and affect-based trust, underscoring that trust is at once calculative and emotional (Colquitt et al., 2019; Baratella et al., 2023). These strands inform the study's distinction between rational and relational determinants of teacher trust.

Climate of trust and team effectiveness

The team-effectiveness tradition treats trust as a contextual prerequisite for group performance (Robbins & Judge, 2019). In this model, team effectiveness is shaped by three interacting categories—context (adequate resources, leadership and structure, a *climate* of trust, and evaluation systems), composition (member

abilities, personality, role allocation, diversity, and size), and process (common purpose, specific goals, team efficacy, identity, cohesion, conflict, and social loafing). A *climate* of trust within the context category is the most fundamental enabler: without it, members hesitate to share ideas, take risks, or accept collective decisions.

Crucially, trust is valuable not only in aggregate but in its distribution: where trust is asymmetric, small coalitions can form that erode cohesion even when overall trust is high (Klein et al., 1994). Excessive, undifferentiated trust may also dampen individual ownership of ideas. A healthy *climate* of trust therefore requires leaders to balance collaboration with recognition of individual contribution—an insight that frames this study's attention to how principals distribute voice across faculty and that connects the macro-level construct of organisational trust with the micro-level behaviour of everyday meetings (Newstrom & Davis, 2002).

Trust, decision-making, and the engine of cooperation

Decision-making effectiveness denotes the degree to which a decision attains its intended goals optimally, weighing accuracy, speed, and impact, and is indicated by stakeholder involvement, accurate information use, and implementability (Robbins & Coulter, 2018). Prior school-trust research links high principal-teacher trust to stronger performance because decisions are backed by active teacher involvement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Trust is, fundamentally, the mechanism that generates cooperation: as work shifts toward voluntary collaboration, trust becomes correspondingly more decisive (Zand, 1972). Trust also operates across levels of analysis—individual, team, and organisation—so its antecedents may differ depending on whether the referent is a colleague, a superior, or the institution (Klein et al., 1994; Carter, 2022).

An Islamic frame for consultative leadership

In the Islamic tradition that animates the madrasah, trust (*amanah*) is a charge to be discharged faithfully, and leadership is enjoined to be gentle and consultative. Scriptural emphasis on consultation (*syura*) and on the strong-and-faithful trustee supplies a normative scaffold that resonates with the empirical faces of trust: capability maps onto competence, faithfulness onto integrity, and gentle consultation onto openness and benevolence. The study reads its findings against this frame to recover the locally meaningful vocabulary through which madrasah actors interpret trustworthy leadership (Coulson-Thomas, 2022).

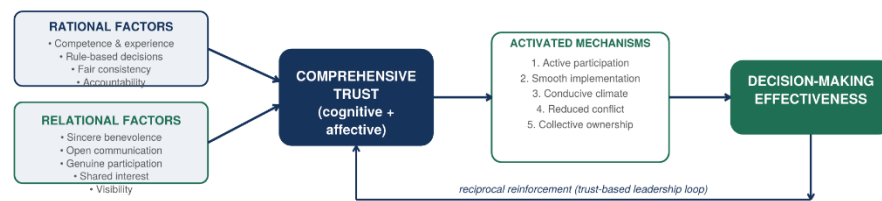


Figure 1. Conceptual framework: comprehensive trust as the mediator between rational/relational antecedents and decision-making effectiveness.
Source: authors' synthesis of the five-faces (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999), ability-benevolence-integrity (Mayer et al., 1995), and team-effectiveness (Robbins & Judge, 2019) traditions.

METHODOLOGY

Design and approach

The study employs a qualitative, multi-site phenomenological design to capture the lived experience of teachers as they perceive principal leadership (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenology seeks the essence of a phenomenon as it is lived rather than an external, objective description; trust here is treated not as a normative concept but as a real, everyday experience enacted in school interactions and recoverable from experiences such as being included in meetings and observing the principal's consistency over time.

Sites, participants, and data sources

Three state madrasah were selected to represent the western, central, and eastern regions of Jambi Province: MTsN 1 Bungo, MTsN 1 Batang Hari, and MTsN 1 Kota Jambi. Following the social-situation logic of place, actors, and activities (Spradley, 2016), participants comprised three groups—principals, teachers, and administrative staff—chosen for their distinct vantage points. Primary data were generated through observation and interview; secondary data comprised official documents (institutional histories, organisational structures, staffing records, meeting minutes, and policy texts).

Data collection and analysis

Three complementary techniques were used: participant observation of meetings and informal exchanges; in-depth, semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews; and documentation furnishing corroborating evidence (Spradley, 2016). Participant observation recorded the atmosphere of meetings, informal principal-teacher exchanges, communication patterns, and responses to instructions. Interviews probed leadership strategies, teachers' perceptions and involvement, and the operational support of administrative staff. Documentation furnished formal, historical evidence corroborating the other sources.

Analysis followed the interactive model—data collection, condensation, display, and conclusion drawing/verification—iterated until conclusions were supported by consistent evidence (Miles et al., 2014). Condensation entailed summarising field notes, transcripts, and documents into themes, categories, and patterns; display organised the condensed material as narrative text and relational matrices; and verification tested provisional conclusions against the corpus, treating early conclusions as revisable until corroborated. The researcher served as the principal instrument, analysing data in situ and feeding emerging questions back into subsequent observation and interview (Moleong, 2021); this

iterative movement allowed the study to register the shift from low to higher trust as it unfolded rather than to infer it retrospectively.

Trustworthiness

Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were pursued through prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation (Moleong, 2021). Prolonged engagement let the researcher detect and discount distortions, so the planned three-month period was informally extended. Triangulation spanned sources, methods, investigators, theory, and time, enriching the account by drawing on different knowledge systems (Caillaud et al., 2019). Source triangulation cross-checked teacher and principal accounts against documentary records. Informed consent was secured from all participants, and identifying details were handled confidentially, with findings made available to participating institutions.

Researcher position and ethics

As the primary instrument in a phenomenological study, the researcher's situated presence both enabled access and required vigilance (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Prolonged engagement and triangulation were used specifically to offset the risk that prior assumptions or respondents' self-presentation would distort the account. Participation in routine school life was balanced with a deliberately unobtrusive stance in sensitive settings, beginning each observation with limited aims before widening focus. The ethical commitments – voluntary *participation*, transparency of purpose, and confidentiality – were treated not as procedural box-ticking but as continuous with the study's substantive concern for trust.

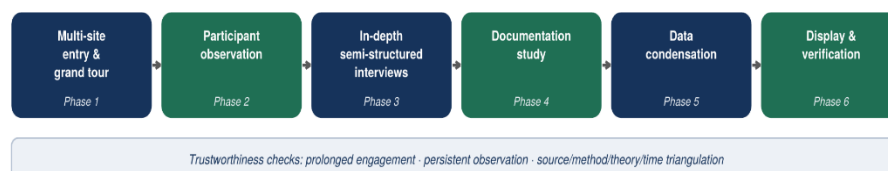


Figure 2. Research workflow: a six-phase qualitative pipeline anchored by triangulation-based trustworthiness checks.

Table 1 summarises the design across the three sites.

Table 1. Multi-site design and trust profiles

Site (region)	Accreditation / status	Participant groups	Dominant trust profile
MTsN 1 Bungo (west)	State madrasah; est. 1961 (formerly MTs Tanjung Agung)	Principal, teachers, admin. staff	Strong on integrity & consistency
MTsN 1 Batang Hari (central)	Accreditation A (valid to 2026)	Principal, teachers, admin. staff	Strong on competence & loyalty
MTsN 1 Kota Jambi (east)	State madrasah, provincial capital	Principal, teachers, admin. staff	Strong on openness & visibility

Note: trust profiles reflect the end-of-fieldwork phase; variation reflects institutional context, not differential leadership quality.

FINDINGS

The texture of teacher trust

At MTsN 1 Bungo and MTsN 1 Batang Hari the grand tour exposed low trust – passive teachers, a culture of silence, oppositional cliques, resistance to innovation, and a tendency toward authoritarian leadership – while at MTsN 1 Kota Jambi these symptoms were present but not pervasive. Table 2 catalogues the six symptoms that organised the initial diagnosis.

Table 2. Grand-tour symptoms of low teacher trust

Symptom of low trust	Observable indication	Most evident at
Teacher passivity	Tasks done as formality; silence when input is sought	Bungo, Batang Hari
Small cliques	Informal groups critiquing policy privately	Bungo, Batang Hari
Resistance to change	Scepticism and technical objections to innovation	Bungo
Authoritarian style	Teachers excluded from key decisions	Bungo, Batang Hari
Weak teamwork	Favouritism toward senior teachers	All sites (varied)
Low vision commitment	Vision as wall decoration; “get by” mindset	Batang Hari

The higher trust subsequently observed was not a long-settled condition but the product of leadership adjustment during fieldwork, accumulated through concrete experience along five dimensions: integrity, competence, consistency, loyalty, and openness (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Principals demonstrated word–deed alignment, honest disclosure, measurable managerial capacity, teacher involvement in significant decisions, and information-sharing via routine deliberation and official digital channels. Inter-site variation – Bungo strongest on integrity, Batang Hari on competence and loyalty, Kota Jambi on openness and *visibility* – reflected differences in institutional context rather than in the quality of leadership.

The decision-making pattern

Decision-making followed a *participative–transformational* pattern with four consistent features. First, decisions were tiered and proportional: broad-impact issues went to full faculty meetings, technical issues were resolved with deputy heads, and routine matters were delegated. Second, deliberation was genuine rather than ceremonial. Third, decisions rested on careful analysis of verifiable rules rather than personal interest. Fourth, accountability was full: when a decision proved mistaken, the principal admitted the error and crafted a collective solution—an act that strengthened rather than weakened trust (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

This pattern aligns with the Qur'anic emphasis on consultative leadership (*syura*) and with the trustworthiness of the strong and faithful (*al-qawwiyy al-amin*): the principals who earned trust combined demonstrable capability with consultative restraint, softening authority with deliberation. The tiered logic also protected efficiency: by routing only broad-impact matters to full deliberation, principals preserved both *participation* and timeliness, avoiding the twin failure modes of paralysing over-consultation and exclusionary unilateralism (Robbins

& Coulter, 2018). Table 3 makes the tiered logic explicit, distinguishing the kind of issue, the decision arena, and the *participation* mode at each level.

Table 3. The tiered, proportional decision-making model

Issue type	Decision arena	Participation mode
Broad-impact / strategic	Full faculty deliberation (rapat dewan guru)	Genuine voice for every unit; decision confirmed to all
Technical-managerial	Principal with deputy heads	Consultative within the leadership team
Routine operational	Delegated to duty/homeroom teachers	Delegated authority within set boundaries

How trust conditions decision-making effectiveness

Teacher trust related positively and directly to decision-making effectiveness through five interlocking mechanisms, summarised in Table 4. The relationship is reciprocal: trusted leadership yields better decisions, and better decisions further reinforce trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

Table 4. Five mechanisms linking teacher trust to decision-making effectiveness

Mechanism	Trust input	Effect on decision-making
1. Participation	Teachers feel safe to voice ideas	Richer information and higher-quality deliberation
2. Implementation	Policy seen as jointly owned, not imposed	Smoother, faster execution of decisions
3. Climate	Psychological safety for professional risk	Openness to feedback; effort beyond formal duty
4. Conflict reduction	Dissatisfaction reframed constructively	Fewer blockages; disputes become trust-building
5. Collective ownership	Decisions felt as shared responsibility	Earnest, sustained policy enactment

These findings confirm the team-effectiveness model (Robbins & Judge, 2019): where a *climate* of trust is present, the process components – meaningful deliberation, cohesion, and collective efficacy – activate together, and social loafing was largely absent by the close of fieldwork. The *participation* mechanism is foundational: trust lowers the perceived cost of speaking, so teachers who once met requests for input with silence began to surface tacit knowledge the principal could not otherwise access (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). Because the quality of a decision is bounded by the quality of the information that enters it, trust is what unlocks that information. The *implementation* mechanism follows from ownership: when teachers experience a decision as jointly authored, they enact it without the friction of passive resistance. The *climate* mechanism rests on psychological safety – the willingness to be vulnerable that the trust literature places at the heart of the construct (Mayer et al., 1995). The *conflict-reduction* mechanism is the most counter-intuitive: trust does not eliminate disagreement but changes its character, so that discontent surfaces openly and is metabolised constructively. The *collective-ownership* mechanism integrates the other four into a single connected process by which trust is translated into effectiveness.

Each mechanism merits closer examination because the five do not operate in isolation but in sequence and in mutual reinforcement. Where the grand tour had recorded rooms that fell silent when the principal asked for views, the later

phase recorded substantive contestation and proposal—evidence that the information base of decisions had widened (Datnow & Hubbard, 2016). Trust thus shortens the distance between a decision and its faithful execution, converting policy from an external demand into an internalised commitment. In low-trust phases, dissatisfaction had hardened into cliques that discussed policy negatively in private; in higher-trust phases, the same dissatisfaction surfaced openly and became an occasion for strengthening rather than fracturing the collective. As *participation*, smooth *implementation*, a safe *climate*, and constructive conflict accumulated, teachers came to regard institutional decisions as their shared responsibility, and enacted them with earnestness rather than resignation (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

Cross-site comparison and the reversibility of low trust

The three sites illuminate the construct from complementary angles. At MTsN 1 Bungo, the oldest of the three, trust hinged on integrity and consistency: teachers watched closely for word-deed alignment. At MTsN 1 Batang Hari, an accredited institution with strong formal standing, the salient faces were competence and loyalty, yet this was also the site of the deepest initial disengagement, illustrating that formal quality does not guarantee a trusting *climate* (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). At MTsN 1 Kota Jambi, in the provincial capital, openness and *visibility* predominated, and the milder baseline symptoms suggest that an established culture of accessible leadership buffers against the erosion of trust. The same underlying construct thus expresses itself through different dominant faces according to institutional history, while the mediating pathway from trust to effective decisions holds across all three.

Because trust proved dynamic, the low-trust symptoms catalogued in Table 2 were reversible within the study window. The residual social loafing and weak vision-commitment at Batang Hari did not persist as fixed traits; targeted, consistent leadership action—reliable meetings, undistorted information, visible presence, and owned accountability—shifted the *climate* measurably over the fieldwork period (Handford & Leithwood, 2013). The practical corollary is consequential: principals inheriting a demoralised faculty are not condemned to it. Trust can be rebuilt deliberately, but only through repeated, observable action rather than declaration, and only where rational credibility and relational warmth are cultivated together.

Determinants of teacher trust

Trust was determined by two synergistic categories. Rational determinants comprised observable competence and experience, rule-based and verifiable decisions, fair consistency, and accountability in admitting and revising errors. Relational determinants comprised sincere benevolence, open communication, genuine partnership in decision-making, demonstrable prioritising of shared over personal interest, and *visibility*—the principal's observable presence across institutional activities, including emergencies. Their interaction produced what we term *comprehensive trust*: cognitively strong and affectively warm (Mayer et al., 1995; Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Notably, the two categories were not independent: a principal seen as present, communicative, and fair was more *readily* credited with competence, while an absent or favour-based principal had competence discounted regardless

of formal qualification. This interdependence cautions against leadership-development designs that treat managerial skill and relational presence as separable training targets. Their relative weight also shifted over time. Early in the fieldwork, when teachers had little basis for confidence, rational signals carried the initial burden; as relationships matured, relational signals – benevolence, open communication, and especially visible presence – became the decisive factors that converted provisional trust into durable, affectively warm commitment (Handford & Leithwood, 2013). Trust-building is therefore a staged process in which rational credibility opens the door and relational warmth sustains what enters.

Table 5. Rational and relational determinants of comprehensive trust

Rational determinants	Relational determinants
Observable competence and professional experience	Sincere benevolence toward teacher welfare
Decisions grounded in verifiable rules	Clear, fast, and open communication
Fair, non-discriminatory consistency	Genuine teacher partnership in decisions
Accountability in admitting and revising error	Demonstrable priority of shared interest
—	Visibility: observable presence, incl. emergencies

DISCUSSION

The Trust-Based Leadership Model

Synthesising the findings yields three original contributions. Conceptually, the study fuses the *five-faces* framework (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999), the team-effectiveness context category (Robbins & Judge, 2019), and transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006) into a single *comprehensive-trust* construct, and adds *visibility* as a sixth, culturally salient face attuned to the deliberative (*musyawarah*) traditions of Islamic and Malay-Jambi leadership. Empirically, it shows how trust lubricates madrasah bureaucracy in a distinctive setting. Practically, it formalises a self-reinforcing *trust-based leadership loop*, depicted in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Novelty model – the trust-based leadership loop: trust → active participation → quality information → better decisions → reinforced trust.

Two further contributions stand out. First, relational factors – especially *visibility* and a demonstrable commitment to shared interest – prove as important as rational, structural factors in forming teacher trust, extending frameworks that

have emphasised procedure over presence (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Second, leadership accountability strengthens rather than weakens authority: a principal's willingness to admit error and revise decisions collectively deepens trust, contradicting the common assumption that admitting mistakes erodes a leader's standing. Together these findings reposition trust from a static attribute to a dynamic, manageable, and intervenable construct.

The loop is best understood as a self-reinforcing cycle rather than a linear chain. Trust enables active *participation*; *participation* improves the quality of information available to the principal; better information yields better decisions; and better decisions, visibly enacted, return to deepen the trust that set the cycle in motion. The same structure runs in reverse where trust is absent, which is why the low-trust sites exhibited mutually reinforcing passivity, poor information flow, and contested decisions. Recognising the loop's directionality is what gives the model its practical bite: intervening at any node—most *readily* at the leadership behaviours that seed trust—can tip a vicious cycle toward a virtuous one (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

Trust as the mediator, not a by-product

A central interpretive claim follows from the evidence: in the madrasah setting trust is best modelled as a mediator rather than a downstream by-product of good leadership. Transformational practices—articulating vision, intellectual stimulation, individualised support—did not act directly on decision outcomes; they acted by building trust, which in turn activated *participation*, commitment, and collective ownership (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). Where trust was thin, the same transformational gestures were read as performance or manipulation and produced compliance without conviction. The mediating role also clarifies why accountability strengthened rather than weakened authority: where authority rests on trust, transparent error-correction supplies fresh evidence of integrity and benevolence—the very faces of trust that sustain authority—so the act conventional wisdom treats as a liability becomes an asset (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Positioning against prior work

The contribution is best located against three reference points. Relative to the *five-faces* framework, validated in Western public-school settings (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999), this study confirms the transferability of the five faces to the Indonesian madrasah while arguing that a sixth face—*visibility*—earns its place where the leader's observable presence carries particular weight. Relative to the ability-benevolence-integrity model (Mayer et al., 1995), the study shows the entanglement of these antecedents with relational experience. Relative to the team-effectiveness model (Robbins & Judge, 2019), it operationalises the abstract claim that a *climate* of trust is the most fundamental enabler.

What is new is the integration of these elements into a working loop with an identified mediating mechanism: where earlier scholarship treated trust as an outcome to be explained or a *climate* to be measured (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2015; Bryk & Schneider, 2002), here trust is modelled as the operative hinge that converts leadership practice into decision quality and is then reinforced by it. The reciprocal structure explains both virtuous and vicious cycles: thin trust degrades *participation* and information, yielding poorer decisions that further corrode trust,

while the deliberate practices identified in this study can reverse the spiral. This dynamic reading aligns the trust construct with transformational-leadership theory, which holds that leaders shape outcomes by transforming followers' motivation and commitment rather than by transactional exchange alone (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

Integration with Islamic leadership ethics

Because the madrasah is an explicitly faith-based institution, the model gains coherence when read alongside Islamic leadership ethics. Consultation (*syura*) is not a borrowed managerial technique but a scripturally enjoined mode of authority that the most trusted principals already practised, and the conception of leadership as *amanah* frames accountability as a religious obligation, helping explain why open admission of error strengthened a principal's standing. The correspondence runs face by face: competence aligns with the strong-and-faithful trustee (*al-qawwiyy al-amin*); integrity with faithful discharge of trust; benevolence with *ihsan*; and openness and *visibility* with the accessible, consultative leader. Leadership-development programmes for madrasah principals are more likely to be adopted when framed in the moral vocabulary of *syura*, *amanah*, and *adil* rather than in purely secular-managerial terms (Coulson-Thomas, 2022).

At the same time, the religious frame does not exempt leadership from empirical scrutiny. The study's value lies in showing that these ethical ideals have observable, behavioural correlates—presence, disclosure, consultation, accountability—that can be cultivated, evaluated, and, where absent, repaired. The normative and the empirical thus reinforce one another: the tradition supplies the why, and the evidence supplies the how. This dual grounding also guards against two opposite errors—reducing Islamic leadership to pious sentiment without managerial substance, and importing secular management wholesale without regard for the moral world in which madrasah actors operate.

A propositional summary

The model distils into five testable propositions. P1: Teacher trust mediates the relationship between transformational leadership practice and decision-making effectiveness. P2: Comprehensive trust—the joint presence of rational and relational trust—predicts effectiveness more strongly than either component alone. P3: *Visibility* constitutes a distinct dimension of trust not subsumed by the established five faces. P4: Leadership accountability is positively, not negatively, associated with subsequent teacher trust. P5: The trust–participation–information–decision–trust sequence is reciprocal, such that improvements in decision quality feed back into higher trust over time.

Stated this way, the qualitative findings become a bridge to confirmatory work: each proposition specifies a relationship that a survey or quasi-experiment could operationalise and test at scale (Klein et al., 1994). The propositions also clarify the model's falsifiability—if, for instance, *visibility* added no incremental predictive value once the five faces were controlled, P3 would be disconfirmed and the claim of a sixth face would require revision. Framing the contribution as a set of refutable propositions, rather than as a closed model, is intended to invite precisely this kind of cumulative scrutiny and to position the *trust-based leadership*

loop as a hypothesis-generating device for the next phase of madrasah-leadership research.

IMPLICATIONS

Theoretical. The study confirms the *five-faces* framework in the madrasah context while adding *visibility* as a sixth face, positions trust as the principal mediator between transformational practice and decision effectiveness, and operationalises the three-category team-effectiveness model for school leadership research (Robbins & Judge, 2019).

Each of these has a concrete methodological consequence for future research. Treating *visibility* as a distinct face implies that trust instruments adapted for Indonesian madrasah should add items capturing the leader's observable presence, not only their disclosed information or demonstrated competence (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Positioning trust as a mediator implies that studies of madrasah leadership should model it explicitly on the causal path—as a variable that carries the effect of leadership onto outcomes—rather than relegating it to a control or descriptive role. And adopting the three-category team-effectiveness lens implies that analyses should attend jointly to context, composition, and process, rather than reducing effectiveness to the individual attributes of the principal. In combination, these moves push the field toward a more systemic and culturally grounded account of why some madrasah decide well and others do not.

Practical. Principals should treat trust-building as a strategic priority on par with curriculum and administration—arriving early, keeping promises, disclosing information without filtering, and normalising accountability. For the Ministry of Religious Affairs, selection and development of principals should incorporate an explicit *trust-competence* dimension, training modules on participative deliberation and value-based (*syura, amanah, adil*) leadership, and *trust-climate* indicators within performance evaluation (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Trust is built or eroded through specific, observable behaviours, and what is behavioural can be named, taught, practised, and assessed—reframing trust-building from a matter of character alone into a manageable leadership competency.

Five operational practices follow for principals: (1) meaningful deliberation through documented monthly faculty meetings; (2) *transparency-first* communication that relays information in full; (3) accountability that openly admits and collectively revises errors; (4) *visibility* through observable presence, including in emergencies; and (5) decision differentiation matching the mode of decision to the issue while holding firm boundaries of authority. Each practice maps onto a face of trust and a mechanism identified above, so the recommendations are not generic exhortations but levers tied to the study's causal account (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Trust is also co-produced: teachers who communicate constructively and participate substantively help generate the very *climate* from which they benefit (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). This reframes the culture of silence not merely as a leadership failure but as a collective equilibrium that requires action on both

sides to break. Where trust is unevenly distributed – concentrated among senior teachers and withheld from others, as the favouritism symptom in the grand tour suggested – its benefits accrue unequally, and the excluded develop precisely the passive, sceptical postures the model seeks to dissolve. Distributing voice fairly across the faculty is therefore both an ethical imperative consistent with the Islamic principle of justice (*adil*) and a practical condition for the loop to operate institution-wide rather than within a privileged inner circle.

CONCLUSION

Across three State Islamic Junior Secondary Schools in Jambi, teacher trust in principal leadership functioned as a determinant of decision-making effectiveness. Trust proved to be a dynamic construct, manageable through consistent, transparent, participative, and accountable leadership rather than a fixed trait. The study contributes a *comprehensive-trust* construct integrating rational and relational dimensions, identifies *visibility* as a sixth face of trust, and formalises a reciprocal *trust-based leadership loop*, while showing that accountable leadership reinforces authority.

Several limitations qualify these findings. First, the study is geographically bounded to three state madrasah in a single province, so its conclusions are analytically rather than statistically generalisable; transfer to other settings should be assessed against contextual similarity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Second, the phenomenological, researcher-as-instrument design carries an irreducible interpretive element that triangulation and prolonged engagement mitigate but cannot wholly eliminate. Third, the observed shift from lower to higher trust unfolded within a finite fieldwork window, so its durability beyond the study period remains an open empirical question. Fourth, the focus on teacher trust in the principal brackets other consequential trust relationships—among colleagues, with students and parents, and in the institution—that a fuller account would integrate. These limitations are not weaknesses to be concealed but boundaries that define the claims and point toward future work: province-wide quantitative measurement, quasi-experimental intervention testing, extension to other madrasah levels and to private madrasah, and longitudinal tracing of trust dynamics across a principal's tenure.

In the end, the study's most portable lesson is deceptively simple. Trust in the madrasah is not won by declaration or charisma, but accrued through small, repeated, observable acts—being present, telling the whole truth, keeping promises, sharing decisions, and owning mistakes. Where these acts are sustained, a *climate* of trust forms; where the *climate* forms, teachers participate, information improves, decisions sharpen, and the improved decisions return to deepen the trust that produced them. Understanding leadership as the patient construction of this loop, rather than as the exercise of authority over it, is the contribution this study offers to the practice and study of Islamic educational management.

Beyond these boundaries, the study invites a broader agenda. Quantitative work could test whether the *comprehensive-trust* construct and the *visibility* face replicate at scale and whether the *trust-based leadership loop* holds across regions.

Intervention studies could establish causality by training principals in the five practices above and measuring effects on decision *implementation* and school performance. Comparative work across senior madrasah (MAN) and primary madrasah (MIN), and between state and private institutions, would probe how far the model is universal versus context-specific. Positive-leadership research further suggests that the same trust dynamics may shape inclusion and staff well-being, widening the outcomes worth measuring (Adams et al., 2020). In all of these, measuring trust explicitly as a mediator—rather than as a control or descriptive variable—would do most to consolidate a cumulative, evidence-based theory of madrasah leadership in Indonesia.

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