

Beyond Rational Decision-Making: Istikharah in Islamic Educational Leadership

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ABSTRACT. Leadership in Islamic education is not only concerned with administrative and organisational considerations, but also with spiritual values that influence the way leaders understand and make decisions. One spiritual practice present in the Islamic tradition is istikharah; however, the role of this practice in the decision-making process of educational leadership has not yet been extensively explored empirically. This study aims to analyse how istikharah is integrated into the leadership decision-making process within Islamic educational institutions. The research employs a qualitative approach using a case study design at PP Miftahul Ulum Bringin Anom, Pamekasan. Data were collected through interviews, observation and documentation, and were subsequently analysed interactively through data condensation, data presentation and the drawing of conclusions. The research findings indicate that istikharah does not replace problem identification, information gathering or consultation, but is situated after organisational considerations and before the decision is finalised by the head of the institution. Istikharah functions as a space for spiritual reflection that helps leaders consolidate their stance before exercising their leadership authority. These findings contribute a perspective of spiritual discernment to the study of Islamic educational leadership by demonstrating that organisational considerations, deliberation, authority and spirituality can operate sequentially within a single decision-making process.

Keywords: Islamic educational leadership; spiritual discernment; istikharah; decision-making; pesantren

ABSTRACT. Kepemimpinan pendidikan Islam tidak hanya berhadapan dengan pertimbangan administratif dan organisatoris, tetapi juga dengan nilai spiritual yang memengaruhi cara pemimpin memahami dan menetapkan keputusan. Salah satu praktik spiritual yang hadir dalam tradisi Islam adalah istikharah, tetapi posisi praktik tersebut dalam proses pengambilan keputusan kepemimpinan pendidikan masih belum banyak dijelaskan secara empiris. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis bagaimana istikharah ditempatkan dalam proses pengambilan keputusan kepemimpinan pada lembaga pendidikan Islam. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus di PP Miftahul Ulum Bringin Anom, Pamekasan. Data diperoleh melalui wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis secara interaktif melalui kondensasi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa istikharah tidak menggantikan identifikasi persoalan, pengumpulan informasi, atau musyawarah, tetapi ditempatkan setelah pertimbangan organisatoris dan sebelum keputusan difinalisasi oleh pengasuh. Istikharah berfungsi sebagai ruang refleksi spiritual yang membantu pemimpin meneguhkan sikap sebelum menggunakan otoritas kepemimpinannya. Temuan ini menyumbangkan perspektif spiritual discernment dalam kajian kepemimpinan pendidikan Islam dengan memperlihatkan bahwa pertimbangan organisatoris, deliberasi, otoritas, dan spiritualitas dapat beroperasi secara berurutan dalam satu proses pengambilan keputusan.

Kata Kunci : Kepemimpinan pendidikan Islam; kebijaksanaan spiritual; istikharah; pengambilan keputusan; pesantren

Pendahuluan

Leadership is a fundamental element of educational management because it involves the capacity of leaders to direct individuals, coordinate resources, formulate policies, and mobilize organizations toward institutional goals. In Islamic educational institutions, leadership assumes a more complex character because organizational management is closely associated with religious values, moral orientations, and social responsibilities (Muntaha & Asyhari, 2025; Solechan & Wahidah, 2024). Leaders are expected not only to possess administrative and organizational competencies but also to incorporate Islamic values into their leadership orientations and practices. A systematic review by Arar of research on Islamic-based educational leadership reveals that scholarship in this field has developed around several themes, including educational leadership models and styles, policy, reform, stakeholders, and spirituality in leadership (Arar dkk., 2022). This development positions Islamic educational leadership as a field concerned not only with organizational effectiveness but also with the relationship between Islamic values and leadership practices. In the context of Islamic boarding schools, this relationship becomes particularly complex because kiai or religious leaders exercise leadership functions associated with institutional management while simultaneously holding religious authority.

Decision-making is an integral part of leadership because every policy formulated by a leader has consequences for the direction of an organization and the lives of its members. In pesantren contexts, decision-making is not confined to administrative considerations but is also connected to religious authority, institutional values, and the relationships among *kiai*, administrators, and educators. Syuhud found that *kiai* possess substantial authority in strategic pesantren decisions, while information and input from administrators remain part of the process of determining decisions (Syuhud, 2019). Karim further found that spiritual leadership in pesantren involves reflection, one dimension of which is associated with decision-making and leaders' self-correction. These findings suggest that spirituality is not necessarily separate from managerial activity but can become part of how leaders interpret organizational problems and determine courses of action (Karim dkk., 2025). From an Islamic leadership perspective, decision-making may also involve *istikharah* and *istisharah*, referring to seeking divine guidance and consulting others as part of the considerations preceding a decision (Ahmed & Sarwer, 2022). This perspective provides a basis for examining decision-making in Islamic education as a process in which organizational considerations interact with spiritual orientations.

Istikharah is a spiritual practice in the Islamic tradition associated with the process of making choices when individuals face matters requiring a decision. Within Islamic leadership

scholarship, *istikharah* is discussed alongside *istisharah*, or consultation, as part of the considerations that may precede a leader's decision (Ahmed & Sarwer, 2022). Research on Islamic organizational management has also increasingly addressed the integration of Islamic values into decision-making, including *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, deliberation, ethical considerations, and the pursuit of institutional welfare (T.m & Ismail, 2021). Recent scholarship in Islamic education has expanded this discussion by examining the relationship between spirituality, professionalism, governance, and decision-making in Islamic educational institution (Salim dkk., 2024). Studies of pesantren leadership likewise suggest that leadership decisions can emerge from the interaction of organizational considerations, religious values, consultation, and the authority of the kiai. However, previous studies have largely examined spirituality as a leadership value, religious authority as a source of decision-making legitimacy, or consultation as a mechanism of organizational deliberation. They provide limited empirical explanation of how *istikharah* itself is positioned within the sequence of organizational decision-making, particularly in relation to problem identification, information gathering, deliberation, and the final exercise of leadership authority. Consequently, it remains unclear whether *istikharah* functions as a substitute for organizational reasoning, an additional source of guidance, a form of spiritual reflection, or a mechanism that influences how leaders finalize and legitimize decisions. This unresolved issue constitutes an important gap in understanding spiritual practices within Islamic educational leadership.

This phenomenon is evident in the leadership practices of PP Miftahul Ulum Bringin Anom, Pamekasan, where *istikharah* is positioned as part of the leadership decision-making process. Preliminary research data indicate that certain institutional decisions are not considered solely in terms of administrative aspects, organizational needs, or deliberative outcomes, but are also associated with the leader's performance of *istikharah*. Such preliminary evidence is relevant to recent scholarship that conceptualizes pesantren leadership as a practice negotiating religious authority with the demands of contemporary organizational governance. This context provides an opportunity to examine not simply whether *istikharah* is practiced, but what organizational position it occupies and how it interacts with other stages of decision-making. The study therefore treats *istikharah* as an organizationally situated leadership practice rather than solely as an individual act of religious devotion. In doing so, it examines the relationship between organizational reasoning, consultation, spiritual reflection, and leadership authority within a concrete institutional setting. The novelty of this study lies in identifying the organizational position and function of *istikharah* within the decision-making sequence, rather than merely documenting its existence as a religious practice.

Based on this focus, this study aims to analyze *istikharah* as a practice embedded in decision-making within Islamic educational leadership. Specifically, the study addresses question:

how is istikharah positioned within the leadership decision-making process in an Islamic educational institution? The study does not seek to determine the metaphysical validity of istikharah outcomes, but rather to understand how the practice is enacted, interpreted, and positioned within organizational leadership processes. Its novelty lies in examining istikharah as a leadership practice operating within institutional decision-making rather than merely as an individual spiritual practice or a normative concept in Islamic literature. This perspective extends Islamic educational management scholarship by illustrating how spiritual considerations interact with leadership authority, decision-making processes, legitimacy, and the acceptance of organizational decisions in pesantren contexts. Practically, the study provides a contextual understanding of the position of spiritual values in leadership and management practices within Islamic educational institutions.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design to examine the practice of istikharah in leadership decision-making within Islamic educational institutions. This design was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the process, experiences and significance of this practice within a specific institutional context (Tong dkk., 2007). The study is limited to leadership practices at PP Miftahul Ulum Bringin Anom, Pamekasan, specifically the use of istikharah in leadership decision-making. The study addresses one main question: how are the role and function of istikharah integrated into the leadership decision-making process? The analysis covers two dimensions: the role of istikharah within the stages of decision-making and its function in establishing the legitimacy of and acceptance for leadership decisions (Yin, 2018). The locations and participants were selected on a purposive basis, based on their involvement, experience and knowledge relating to leadership and decision-making processes. The participants comprised leaders or religious authorities at the pesantren, members of the management committee, and ustadz or educators, who were assigned codes to ensure confidentiality and facilitate data tracing. The characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics and Coding of Research Participants

No.	Code	Participant Position/Role	Selection Criteria	Information Focus
1	P1	Pesantren Leader/Religious Authority	Directly holds authority and is involved in institutional decision-making	The position of istikharah, decision- making processes, and decision legitimacy
2	PG1	Administrator	Involved in the management, communication, or	Decision-making processes and acceptance of decisions

			implementation of leadership decisions	
3	PG2	Administrator	Has experience in implementing institutional policies or leadership decisions	Decision implementation and acceptance
4	U1	Ustadz/Educator	Familiar with or has experienced the implementation of leadership decisions in institutional activities	Interpretation and acceptance of decisions
5	U2	Ustadz/Educator	Has experience interacting with institutional leadership and institutional policies	Implications of decisions for organizational life
6	U3	Ustadz/Educator	Has knowledge of leadership practices and decision implementation	Decision acceptance and implementation

The adequacy of the sample is determined on the basis of the relevance and depth of the information in relation to the research focus, taking into account the participants' specific characteristics, the research objectives, the quality of the interview interactions, and the analysis strategy. This follows the principle of information power, namely that the more relevant and rich the information possessed by the participants, the smaller the number of participants required (Malterud dkk., 2016). Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, observation and documentation. Interviews were conducted with leaders, administrators and ustadz or educators, guided by the research focus and follow-up questions based on the information obtained. The interviews covered the role of istikharah, the stages of decision-making, the relationship between istikharah and consultation, leadership considerations, and members' responses to decisions. Observations were made of leadership activities and organisational interactions relating to decision-making, whilst documentation included institutional documents, activity records, policies and other relevant documents (Kallio dkk., 2016).

The data were analysed interactively using the Miles, Huberman and Saldaña model, which involves data condensation, data presentation, and the drawing and verification of conclusions (Miles dkk., 2014). Interview transcripts, observation notes and documents were condensed through a coding process based on two dimensions of analysis: the role of istikharah in the

decision-making process and its function in establishing the legitimacy and acceptance of decisions. The codes were then compared and grouped into thematic categories. The data were presented in a matrix to compare information from leaders, administrators and religious teachers, and to link this with the results of observations and documentation. Conclusions were drawn by identifying patterns, relationships between categories and emerging meanings, which were then cross-checked against the data sources. The analysis process was carried out iteratively from data collection through to interpretation.

The validity of the data is reinforced through source triangulation, methodological triangulation and member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Source triangulation was carried out by comparing information from leaders, administrators and ustadz or educators, whilst methodological triangulation was carried out by comparing the results of interviews, observations and documentation. Differences in information between sources were analysed as variations in the participants' experiences and perspectives. *Member checking* was carried out by confirming specific information or interpretations with the relevant participants, particularly data concerning the role and function of *istikharah* in decision-making. These procedures were used to strengthen the credibility of the findings and ensure traceability between the empirical data and the researcher's interpretations.

Research Findings and Discussion

Finding

The Position of Istikharah in the Leadership Decision Making

The findings indicate that *istikharah* occupies a specific position within the leadership decision-making process at the pesantren. It is situated as a spiritual consideration at the later stage of decision-making, after the issue has been identified, relevant information has been gathered, and deliberation with organizational actors has taken place. Rather than replacing consultation (*musyawarah*) or organizational considerations, *istikharah* constitutes an additional spiritual consideration undertaken before the leader finalizes an important decision. The practice primarily takes place at the leadership level, while administrators and teachers contribute information, participate in deliberative processes, and subsequently implement decisions made by the leader.

Interview data from the pesantren leader, administrators, and teachers reveal a consistent pattern concerning the position of *istikharah* within the decision-making process. The pesantren leader explained that important decisions are not immediately finalized but are preceded by an examination of the issue and discussion with individuals who understand the situation:

“If a decision concerns the greater interests of the Islamic boarding school, I do not make it straight away. Usually, we examine the issue first, then discuss it with the management or those who truly understand the matter. After that, I perform *istikharah*. So *istikharah* does not

replace consultation, but serves as a spiritual consideration before I actually finalise the decision.” (P1)

This account places *istikharah* after the initial examination of the issue and organizational deliberation. The administrator’s account further indicates that *istikharah* is undertaken after the issue has been discussed and several options have been considered:

“As I understand it, *istikharah* is usually performed after an issue has been discussed and several options have been considered. The management explains the situation on the ground, and the final decision rests with the head of the organisation. If he says that *istikharah* is still needed, we wait until he feels confident about the decision to be taken.” (PG1)

A similar pattern appears in the account of PG2, who specifically identified the organizational information considered before the practice of *istikharah*:

“*Istikharah* tends to take place at the final stage of deliberation. Prior to that, we continue to present data, details of the students’ circumstances, the management’s capabilities, and the boarding school’s needs. Once all of this has been discussed, the head of the boarding school reconsiders the matter through *istikharah* before the decision is communicated to us.” (PG2)

These accounts indicate that information concerning students’ conditions, administrative capacity, institutional needs, and the outcomes of deliberation constitutes part of the decision-making process preceding *istikharah*. The practice therefore appears to be embedded within, rather than detached from, the organizational process of decision formulation.

The teachers’ accounts provide a complementary perspective because they are not directly involved in the performance of *istikharah*. U1 observed that certain decisions were not immediately announced following deliberation because the leader continued to consider the matter before communicating the final decision:

“As religious teachers, we are not usually directly involved in the *istikhara* process. From what we have observed, certain decisions are not announced immediately following the consultation. Sometimes the leaders are still weighing up various factors. Only then is the decision communicated. We understand that religious considerations are taken into account before the decision is finalised.” (U1)

Similarly emphasized that deliberation remained necessary, while the final decision involved considerations beyond technical aspects:

“In my view, *istikharah* forms part of the process when a decision is deemed important. Consultation still takes place because information from the management is required. However, the final decision is not based solely on technical considerations. There are spiritual considerations that form part of the carer’s beliefs before a choice is made.” (U2)

Further explained that organizational members do not necessarily have direct knowledge of how *istikharah* is performed, but recognize its presence in the process preceding certain important decisions:

“Once a decision has been communicated following that process, we usually accept it as a decision made by the leadership. We do not always know how the *istikharah* is carried out, but we do know that some important decisions are preceded by such deliberations.” (U3)

Taken together, the interview accounts distinguish the position of *istikharah* from that of *musyawarah*. Whereas deliberation provides organizational information and practical considerations, *istikharah* operates primarily within the leader’s spiritual deliberation before the final decision is established. The two processes are therefore not presented by the participants as mutually exclusive alternatives but as components of a sequential decision-making process.

The observational data indicate that leadership decision-making at PP Miftahul Ulum Bringin Anom involves interaction between the pesantren leader and organizational actors before a final decision is communicated. In the decision-making activities observed, administrators and other organizational members presented information concerning institutional conditions and the issues under consideration, while the pesantren leader listened to the information, considered the explanations provided, and maintained the authority to establish the final decision. The observed process showed that organizational discussion and the exchange of information preceded the communication of important decisions, while some decisions were not immediately finalized after the discussion, indicating further consideration by the leader. Although the performance of *istikharah* itself was not directly observable as a private spiritual practice, its position could be understood from the sequence of activities surrounding the decision-making process. The observation therefore complements the interview findings by showing that organizational information and deliberation precede the leader’s final consideration, while *istikharah* is positioned as a spiritual consideration associated with the finalization of important decisions.

The documentary data provide additional evidence concerning the organizational context and implementation of leadership decisions at PP Miftahul Ulum Bringin Anom. The institutional records examined indicate that leadership decisions are connected to concrete organizational activities, responsibilities, and institutional needs, and that administrators and educators are involved in implementing decisions established by the pesantren leader. The documents, however, do not explicitly record the performance of *istikharah* as part of the formal decision-making procedure. This absence is understood as a distinction between the formal documentation of organizational decisions and the spiritual considerations undertaken by the leader before finalizing certain decisions. Thus, the documentary evidence complements the interview data by demonstrating the organizational context and consequences of leadership decisions, while the

interview data provide information concerning the spiritual consideration of *istikharah* that may not be formally documented.

Discussion

The research findings indicate that *istikharah* occupies a specific position in the leadership decision-making process at PP Miftahul Ulum Bringin Anom, namely after the issue has been examined, relevant information and organisational conditions have been considered, and consultation has taken place, but before a decision is formally adopted. This position suggests that *istikharah* does not replace organisational consultation, but rather serves as a spiritual consideration at the final stage of decision-making. These findings are consistent with the research by Ahmed and Sarwer, which positions *istikharah* and *istisharah*, or consultation, as part of the decision-making process within an Islamic framework (Amaliya & Anwar, 2026). Meanwhile, the Qur'an (2025) emphasises *shura* as a key approach to strategic decision-making grounded in knowledge, Islamic ethics and consultation. Whilst previous research has primarily provided conceptual explanations of the relationship between consultation and Islamic principles, the findings of this study offer empirical evidence of how this relationship plays out in the leadership practices of Islamic boarding schools.

The decision-making process identified in this study proceeds through the stages of problem identification, information gathering, discussion of various alternatives through *musyawarah*, and then the performance of *istikharah* before the leader makes a final decision. This pattern indicates that spiritual and organisational considerations function as two complementary dimensions, rather than as conflicting mechanisms. Thus, *istikharah* can be understood as a form of *spiritual discernment* that complements deliberative decision-making, whilst still holding the leader accountable for gathering information, considering various perspectives, and assessing the organisation's circumstances before making a decision (Al Qur'an, 2025).

Building on this sequence, the positioning of deliberation before *istikharah* indicates that spiritual consideration is preceded by the exchange of information and perspectives among organizational actors. Staff communicate field conditions, students' needs, managerial capacity, and possible consequences of alternative options, which the pesantren leader uses to determine the final course of action. Thus, deliberation functions not merely as a formal procedure but as an epistemic mechanism that broadens the leader's understanding of organizational realities. This finding is consistent with (Rahmatullah dkk., 2025), whose study of Nizam Al-Mulk Islamic Boarding School found that *shura* connects Islamic values with participatory leadership by involving teachers and managerial staff in strategic decision-making. Although such participation may require longer coordination, it can strengthen organizational commitment to decisions.

This role of deliberation is particularly important because istikharah is not used to obtain factual information about organizational problems. Such information is derived from actors directly involved in the relevant issues, after which the leader performs istikharah once organizational considerations have been articulated. This distinction highlights a functional difference between the two practices: deliberation broadens the leader's understanding of organizational conditions, whereas istikharah provides spiritual consideration before the decision is finalized. Accordingly, the findings show that pesantren leadership can maintain deliberative decision-making while integrating spiritual orientation into strategic decisions.

Following this deliberative process, the positioning of istikharah can be understood as a form of *spiritual discernment*, namely a reflective process that helps leaders determine their course of action after alternative decisions have been considered. In this study, istikharah is not positioned as a source of empirical information about organizational problems but as a spiritual practice that provides the leader with space for reflection before assuming responsibility for the decision. This understanding is consistent with (Fernando & Jackson, 2006), who show that religious beliefs and practices can provide an interpretive framework for leadership decision-making, and with (Phipps & Shelton, 2020), who describe *executive discernment* as a process through which leaders connect decision considerations with transcendent beliefs before determining a course of action.

The findings from PP Miftahul Ulum Bringin Anom provide a specifically Islamic context for understanding this process. Here, *spiritual discernment* is not detached from management but integrated into a decision-making sequence that begins with problem identification, information exchange, and deliberation. After obtaining information and perspectives from organizational actors, the pesantren leader performs istikharah as a space for spiritual reflection before finalizing the decision. This positioning indicates that the spiritual dimension of pesantren leadership extends beyond the leader's personal religiosity and becomes part of a decision-making practice with direct implications for institutional life.

The findings further indicate that istikharah does not diminish the leader's responsibility for organizational decision-making. After deliberation and istikharah, the decision remains under the authority of the pesantren leader and must be communicated and implemented within the organizational structure. Thus, spiritual consideration does not transfer responsibility away from the leader but becomes part of the reflective orientation preceding the exercise of formal authority. This finding is consistent with (Piwowar-Sulej & Iqbal, 2024), who associate spiritual leadership with the integration of spiritual values, ethics, meaning, and concern for the common good, as well as with (Azzuhri dkk., 2024), who show that spiritual leadership in the Indonesian context is rooted in Islamic values and integrates moral and spiritual dimensions into leadership practice.

In the current context, these dimensions take on a more specific form through istikharah, which provides a spiritual framework for pesantren leaders to reflect before making decisions that remain subject to organisational accountability. Thus, istikharah is more accurately understood as a practice that strengthens leaders' reflective orientation, rather than as a mechanism that absolves them of organisational responsibility. Leaders remain responsible for making decisions, communicating their direction and guiding their implementation, whilst istikharah provides spiritual guidance before that authority is exercised.

Therefore, these findings must be interpreted without creating a dichotomy between rational and spiritual decision-making. At PP Miftahul Ulum Bringin Anom, organisational and spiritual considerations proceed in an integrated sequence: information regarding the issue at hand, the pupils' circumstances, administrative capacity, and potential consequences is gathered and discussed before istikharah is performed. Istikharah then provides space for spiritual reflection once the organisational considerations have been established. This pattern is consistent with (Azevedo dkk., 2024), who found that a leader's spirituality can be integrated into organisational life through reflection, value orientation, and leadership practices. In this study, this integration takes a more specific form, as istikharah is situated within, rather than outside, the managerial decision-making process.

Therefore, istikharah must not be understood as a substitute for organisational analysis, nor should administrative considerations be viewed as eliminating the need for spiritual reflection. Both serve distinct yet complementary functions: organisational considerations help leaders understand the available options and their consequences, whilst istikharah provides spiritual reflection prior to the exercise of formal authority. Consequently, these findings indicate the existence of an integrative decision-making logic within Islamic educational leadership, in which practical considerations, consultation, authority and spirituality are sequentially interconnected without negating one another.

The relationship between istikharah and leadership authority can also be understood through the development of leaders' confidence and organizational trust in decisions that are to be implemented. After deliberation and istikharah, the pesantren leader remains the formal decision-maker, while organizational members accept the decision within an existing relationship of trust. Istikharah therefore does not constitute a source of formal authority, which remains embedded in the leadership structure, but may contribute to the leader's confidence before exercising that authority. This finding is consistent with (Daud dkk., 2025), who found an association between spiritual leadership and organizational trust, particularly through leaders' value orientation, concern for others, behavioral consistency, and trustworthy relationships.

However, at the Miftahul Ulum Bringin Anom Islamic Boarding School, trust cannot be attributed solely to istikharah. The acceptance of decisions by members of the organisation is also influenced by the leader's position within the structure, their leadership experience, communication, the consultation process, and the clarity of implementation. Thus, istikharah is more accurately understood as one element within the broader construction of trust-based leadership authority, rather than as the sole source of decision-making legitimacy. This distinction demonstrates that spirituality in pesantren leadership operates alongside existing organisational mechanisms, so that spiritual and organisational authority can function as complementary dimensions, rather than competing with one another.

Compared with previous research on spiritual leadership in Islamic boarding schools, these findings suggest that spirituality is not only expressed as a leadership characteristic or a form of personal reflection, but also occupies a special place in organisational decision-making. Karim dkk (2025) identified meditation, mediation and reflection as behavioural dimensions of spiritual leadership in Islamic boarding schools, where reflection relates to decision-making and self-correction by leaders. This study expands upon that understanding by demonstrating that istikharah is performed after problem identification, information exchange and consultation, but before a decision is ratified. These findings are also consistent with (Azzuhri dkk., 2024), who emphasise the importance of understanding spiritual leadership through Islamic values and practices, as well as with (Piwowar-Sulej & Iqbal, 2024), who demonstrate that research on spiritual leadership links spiritual values and practices to organisational processes. Consequently, the contribution of this study lies in affirming the temporal and functional position of istikharah: istikharah is not merely an indicator of a leader's religiosity, but rather a spiritual practice integrated into the transition from deliberation to final decision-making. This perspective enriches research on Islamic educational leadership by demonstrating that spiritual practices in pesantren can be examined as part of organisational mechanisms without diminishing their religious significance.

Theoretically, these findings expand our understanding of Islamic educational leadership by positioning istikharah as a practice that links the leader's spiritual dimension with organisational decision-making. At PP Miftahul Ulum Bringin Anom, istikharah is carried out after an issue has been examined, organisational information has been gathered, and consultation has taken place, but before a decision is finalised. Thus, istikharah functions not merely as an internal or personal spiritual orientation, but as part of the organisational decision-making process. At the internal level, istikharah provides space for reflection and inner conviction before the leader exercises their formal authority; at the organisational level, istikharah forms part of a process involving problem identification, information exchange, consultation, decision-making, communication and implementation. Consequently, the main contribution of this research is not the claim that

istikharah yields more accurate decisions, but rather the identification of its functional role as a form of *spiritual assessment* that links organisational considerations with spiritual orientation before leadership authority is exercised. Consequently, istikharah complements, rather than replaces, deliberation, organisational information and leadership accountability, illustrating how deliberation, authority and spirituality can operate within a single decision-making sequence and providing a basis for examining their relationship with the legitimacy and acceptance of leadership decisions.

Conclusion

This study shows that istikharah occupies a special place in the leadership decision-making process at PP Miftahul Ulum Bringin Anom, Pamekasan. Istikharah is carried out after problem identification, information gathering, and consultation with relevant organisational stakeholders, but before the pesantren leadership formally finalises its decision. Thus, istikharah does not replace organisational deliberation or *musyawarah*, but rather serves as a spiritual consideration at the final stage of decision-making, whilst leaders continue to take into account institutional conditions, the needs of the students, the organisation's capacity, and the potential consequences of alternative decisions. These findings indicate that leadership decision-making within the pesantren context is an integrated process in which organisational reasoning, consultation, leadership authority and spiritual reflection occur sequentially. The scientific contribution of this research lies in the conceptualisation of istikharah as a leadership practice embedded within an organisational context, rather than merely an individual religious practice or a personal characteristic. Through the perspective of *spiritual assessment*, istikharah can be understood as a practice situated between the process of organisational deliberation and the final decision-making, without implying that this practice yields decisions that are objectively more correct.

These findings also have practical implications for leaders and managers of Islamic educational institutions. Istikharah can be practised as a complementary spiritual process alongside organisational analysis and consultation: issues are identified, relevant information is gathered, and organisational perspectives are considered through *musyawarah* before spiritual reflection precedes the final decision. This integration does not negate leadership accountability; leaders remain responsible for communicating decisions, explaining their organisation's direction, and ensuring implementation within the institutional structure. For pesantren leadership, this configuration provides a context-rooted approach to integrating spiritual orientation with deliberative and organisational decision-making, whilst maintaining the distinctions between deliberation, spiritual reflection, and formal leadership authority.

This study has several limitations. It utilised a qualitative case study at a single Islamic educational institution, PP Miftahul Ulum Bringin Anom, Pamekasan; consequently, its findings

must be understood within the specific institutional, cultural and leadership context, and should not be generalised to all pesantren. Furthermore, this study does not compare istikharah practices across different pesantren nor does it quantitatively analyse their relationship with specific organisational outcomes. Therefore, future research could examine several Islamic boarding schools with different leadership traditions and institutional characteristics, compare educational levels, and combine qualitative and quantitative approaches to clarify how istikharah and other spiritual practices interact with organisational governance, leadership authority and decision-making.

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