**Proceedings of International Conference on Islamic Education (ICIED)**
**Building an Inclusive and Sustainable Educational System**
**Volume 11, 2026 (p-ISSN 2477-3638 / e-ISSN 2613-9804)**

# Humanistic AI Transformation in Schools: Digital Leadership, Emotional Intelligence, and Data Ethics

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**Abstract**
Humanistic AI transformation calls on schools to adopt artificial intelligence in ways that strengthen teaching quality while safeguarding the human, ethical, and privacy dimensions of school life, a balance that rests on three interlocking pillars: digital leadership, emotional intelligence, and data ethics. How these three pillars interact at the junior secondary level remains largely unexamined, particularly in settings where school level data governance capacity is still maturing and where the link between a principal's digital leadership style and teacher psychological well being has rarely been investigated. Addressing this gap, the study first develops the Integrative Digital Emotional Adaptive Leadership (IDEAL) model as an a priori conceptual framework, synthesized from digital leadership, emotional intelligence, and data governance theory before fieldwork began, and then examines how that framework plays out in practice through an in depth account of how the principal of an Islamic junior secondary school (SMP Islam Athirah Bone, Indonesia) integrates the three pillars while balancing rapid AI adoption with emotional attentiveness and compliance with personal data protection regulation. The site was purposively selected as a theoretically generative case: a value based Islamic school whose digital transformation has outpaced most of its peers, offering a rare test of whether leadership and data ethics frameworks built mainly in secular, Western, and higher education settings travel to a faith based, non Western, junior secondary context. A qualitative single instrumental case study design is employed, drawing on semi structured in depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis, with data analyzed through the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña interactive model and validated through source and technique triangulation. Findings indicate a value based transformational digital leadership profile characterized by deliberate emotional mentoring during technology adoption, an emerging but not yet systematized data ethics regime, and support for the IDEAL model, in which Islamic institutional values shape and bridge the relationship between leader emotional intelligence and data governance effectiveness rather than operating as a statistically mediating variable. The study contributes theoretically by extending digital leadership constructs to value based Islamic schooling, and practically by informing capacity building policy for junior secondary principals navigating humanistic AI transformation.

**Keywords:**
Digital leadership, emotional intelligence, data protection ethics, humanistic artificial intelligence, teacher well being

## A. INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI) now touches nearly every corner of education, and this expansion places schools squarely at the center of what has come to be called humanistic AI transformation: technology adoption that raises the quality of teaching without compromising human values, privacy, or well being (Arbab et al., 2025; Gökçe, 2025). Realizing that balance rests on three interlocking pillars digital leadership that sets a coherent technological vision, emotional intelligence that keeps the vision anchored in care for people, and data ethics that protects students and staff as adoption accelerates. Indonesian schools feel this pressure acutely, and within it, the school principal's role as a digital leader becomes decisive.

Digital leadership and emotional intelligence are best read together rather than apart. Digital leadership is more than technical fluency with devices, it calls for a visionary capacity to chart transformation alongside emotional sensitivity that preserves organizational cohesion (Mossberger et al., 2008; Yukl, 2012). Bush (2020) identifies four characteristics of effective digital education leaders, the most neglected yet arguably most decisive being sensitivity to the socio emotional impact of technological change. Berkovich and Hassan (2025) show that principals' digital transformational leadership predicts teacher commitment and school effectiveness, while Schmitz et al. (2023) find, in Swiss secondary schools, that transformational leadership empowers teachers to use technology in demanding, exploratory ways rather than merely compliant ones. Emotional intelligence (EI) the capacity to recognize, understand, and productively use emotion in oneself and others (Goleman, 1995) functions as a counterweight to the efficiency demands of new technology, balancing them against the emotional needs of teachers, students, and parents principals with high EI manage resistance to change and build staff trust more successfully (Day & Gu, 2010). Recent scoping evidence reinforces this pairing: Renta-Davids et al. (2025) find that AI era school leaders need emotional and social intelligence as a non substitutable core competency alongside data literacy and Karakose and Tülübaş (2024) argue that school leadership itself must be redefined for the AI era shifting from administrative oversight toward a role that keeps technology adoption anchored in care for students and staff. Nationally, Arjuna et al. (2024) report that emotional intelligence catalyzes social competence in the digital era, directly informing empathy based leadership development.

**Table 1.** Research Gap Mapping and Study Contributions

| No. | Research Gap | Relevant Literature | Contribution of This Study |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Digital leadership EI AI integration in schools rarely explored in depth | (Karakose & Tulubas, 2024), (Renta-Davids et al., 2025) | Tripartite integrative model in an Islamic school context |
| 2 | School level data protection and cybersecurity management still immature | (Sunyaev, 2020), Law No. 19/2016, Gov. Reg. No. 71/2019 | Maps data ethics practice in a value based Islamic school |
| 3 | Shift needed from administrative to visionary humanistic leadership | (Leithwood & Louis, 2012) (Bush, 2020) | Documents this paradigm shift empirically |
| 4 | Junior secondary digital leadership studies far scarcer than higher education | (Fullan, 2014), (Hallinger & Huber, 2012) | Fills an empirical gap at junior secondary level |
| 5 | Research void linking digital leadership style to teacher well being | (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018), (Day & Gu, 2010) | Explores effect of humanistic leadership on well being |

*Source: Author's elaboration (2026)*

AI ethics and data protection form a second, closely related strand of this literature. Mass AI adoption in education intensifies ethical risk around student data privacy and security (Huang, 2023). Ahmad et al. (2024) classify these risks as technological (privacy invasion, data leakage, algorithmic bias), educational (depersonalized learning, erosion of teacher autonomy), and social (unequal access, marginalization). Baker and Hawn (2022) substantiate the technological dimension empirically, documenting systematic algorithmic bias by race, gender, and socioeconomic status across widely deployed educational algorithms evidence that reinforces transparent, accountable data governance as an ethical prerequisite for responsible digital leadership, not merely a matter of regulatory compliance. Indonesia already has the legal scaffolding for this: Law No. 19/2016, Government Regulation No. 71/2019, and Law No. 27/2022 on Personal Data Protection, yet school level implementation still lags well behind the letter of the law (2020). What the regulations cannot finish on their own is a privacy culture rooted in the school's own values transparent data collection, need based access, and digital rights education treated as an ongoing conversation rather than a one off training.

Humanistic AI adaptation, in turn, is a fairly simple idea at its core: technology adoption should keep pointing back toward human dignity, autonomy, and well being, not away from them (Fullan, 2014). In a school like SMP Islam Athirah Bone, that idea gains an extra layer, since Islamic values of justice, care, and collective responsibility give the school its own vocabulary for what being human centered actually means in daily practice. Leaders who manage this transformation successfully distinguish tasks appropriately delegated to AI from dimensions of learning that must remain human creativity, empathy, character formation, and the teacher student relationship. A systematic review by Sposato (2025) maps ten domains of AI application in educational leadership and stresses the need for evaluation frameworks prior to implementation. Ghamrawi et al. (2024) show that AI's effect on educational leadership capacity is contested: it can expand leaders' strategic and relational reach, but only if adopted deliberately rather than left to erode the professional judgment it is meant to support. Complementing this, Polat et al. (2025) show that fairness, transparency, accountability, and privacy remain under theorized as an integrated leadership competency rather than a purely technical matter, while Al Nuaimi et al. (2024), surveying 200 principals, find that a principal's own perceived usefulness of digital resources is the strongest predictor of effective school level digital transformation.

Teacher psychological well being under digitalization closes the loop. Digitalization demands unmatched by adequate organizational support can trigger professional burnout conversely, empathetic leadership during digital adaptation is associated with stronger teacher intrinsic motivation, commitment, and instructional performance (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). Using Job Demands Resources theory, Bakker and Demerouti (2024) show that supportive leadership buffers digitalization's negative effects on exhaustion, cross cultural PISA 2022 evidence (Üztemur et al., 2026) confirms that transformational leadership predicts teacher job satisfaction and well being, a pattern also confirmed nationally by Meidelina et al. (2023). None of this is purely personal it is organizational, and it shows up directly in classroom quality. Digital leadership that takes teacher well being seriously should treat it as a measure of success in its own right, not an afterthought.

A bibliometric analysis of 338 Scopus indexed documents (1993–2024) reveals a sharp rise in publications on digital leadership after 2020, peaking in 2023 alongside accelerating AI adoption in school ecosystems worldwide (OKunlola & Naicker, 2025), yet most studies remain concentrated at the higher education level, with junior secondary schools receiving markedly less attention (Hallinger & Huber, 2012; Leithwood & Louis, 2012). In Indonesian Islamic education specifically, Achruh et al. (2024)find that AI adoption is outpacing the ethical and leadership frameworks needed

to govern it responsibly a gap even more pronounced at the junior secondary level, where this study is situated.

SMP Islam Athirah Bone was chosen not simply because it was accessible but because it offers a theoretically generative case in the sense (Putra et al., 2025; Wedi et al., 2025) describe: a school whose digital transformation has outpaced most of its peers while remaining explicitly and visibly anchored in Islamic institutional values. That combination matters to readers well beyond Indonesia. This case exemplifies how digital innovation can coexist with strong religious foundations, providing valuable insights for similar institutions navigating the intersection of technology and faith.

Most of the digital leadership, AI ethics, and job demands resources literature this paper draws on was built in secular or Western settings, or at the university level, where personal data governance is comparatively mature (Sunyaev, 2020) a value based Islamic junior secondary school actively navigating Indonesia's newly enacted Personal Data Protection Law (Law No. 27/2022) is, by contrast, a live test of whether those constructs travel to a faith based, non Western, resource constrained setting. The school also sits at an unusual intersection of tensions Islamic values meeting rapid technological modernization, leadership that must hold efficiency and empathy together, and data protection obligations unfolding inside a digital ecosystem that keeps shifting which makes it well suited to surfacing mechanisms that a more typical, or less digitally advanced, school would likely leave invisible.

**Conceptual origins of the IDEAL model**

The Integrative Digital Emotional Adaptive Leadership (IDEAL) model presented in this paper is not a claim distilled from the data it is an a priori, theory derived conceptual framework, assembled before fieldwork began by synthesizing the three literature strands reviewed above digital leadership theory (Bush, 2020; Mossberger et al., 2008; Yukl, 2012), emotional intelligence theory (Day & Gu, 2010; Goleman, 1995), and data ethics and governance scholarship (Ahmad et al., 2024; Huang, 2023) together with job demands resources theory linking leadership to teacher well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2024). Its purpose at the outset was heuristic: to give the interview guide, observation focus, and initial coding structure a defensible starting point, in line with Miles et al.'s (2014) recommendation that qualitative case studies benefit from an explicit a priori framework rather than approaching the field as a blank slate. The model was then held open to revision. As fieldwork progressed, the Islamic values dimension present in the initial framework only as contextual background was elevated to an explicit, named construct because the data kept pointing to it as doing real interpretive work, an abductive move consistent with the iterative logic of the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) analytic model described in the Methods section. The IDEAL model should therefore be read as a conceptual, not statistical, framework: it organizes how the five constructs relate to one another qualitatively, and the claims that follow describe how Islamic institutional values appear to shape and bridge leader emotional intelligence and data governance practice not a mediation effect estimated through path coefficients, which would require a design this study does not use.

Pulled together, this body of work leaves a fairly clear set of gaps on the table. Digital leadership, emotional intelligence, and AI are rarely explored as one integrated picture school level data protection is still catching up to the regulations meant to guide it, the field keeps calling for a shift from administrative to visionary, humanistic leadership without much empirical grounding for what that shift looks like in practice junior secondary schools remain an afterthought next to higher education in this literature and almost no one has asked how digital leadership style actually relates to teacher well being. Studies integrating these dimensions within a value based Islamic secondary school remain limited. This research therefore sets out to generate an in depth, context grounded account of how a school principal manages this integration.

The objectives are: (1) to describe the digital leadership profile enacted at SMP Islam Athirah Bone (2) to identify strategies for integrating emotional intelligence into digital leadership (3) to characterize the school's data protection ethics practices; and (4) to examine how the Integrative Digital Emotional Adaptive Leadership (IDEAL) model, developed a priori from the literature, is reflected in empirical evidence from the site.

## B. METHODS

### Research Design and Site

This study takes a qualitative approach, built around a single instrumental case study, because what it is really after the process, the meaning, the context behind digital leadership is the kind of thing numbers tend to flatten rather than reveal (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study design was chosen because the study examines a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, where the boundary between phenomenon and context cannot be drawn sharply. SMP Islam Athirah Bone was selected as the research site through purposive sampling valued for selecting information rich cases (Campbell et al., 2020) based on the following criteria: (1) the school has actively implemented multiple digitalization programs (2) the principal has a track record of innovative leadership (3) the school has an Islamic background that offers a rich value dimension and (4) research access to the site could be reasonably negotiated.

### Participants, Data Sources, and Collection Techniques

Data were collected through three complementary techniques, summarized in Table 2. Semi structured in depth interviews served as the primary data collection technique, the interview guide was developed from the literature review and refined through initial piloting. Each session was recorded with informant consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Participatory observation was conducted with the researcher present during school activities to observe how digital leadership manifests in day to day interaction. Document analysis covered both formal and informal documents relevant to the research focus.

**Table 2.** Data Collection Techniques, Subjects, Focus, and Duration

| Technique | Subjects / Sources | Data Focus | Duration / Frequency |
|---|---|---|---|
| Semi structured in depth interviews | Principal, 4 vice principals, 8 senior teachers, 2 IT staff, 3 parents | Leadership strategy, AI perceptions, emotional intelligence, data policy | 60–90 min/session, 3–4 rounds |
| Participatory observation | Teacher council meetings, digital classrooms, parent meetings, technology based extracurricular activities | Interaction patterns, technology implementation, teacher student emotional response | 4 months (Feb–May 2025), 3×/week |
| Document analysis | School policies, digital SOPs, evaluation reports, meeting minutes, curriculum | Internal regulation, implementation evidence, policy practice consistency | As documents became available |

*Source: Author's elaboration (2026)*

### Data Analysis

Data were analyzed following the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), comprising four components that proceed simultaneously and iteratively: (1) data condensation selecting, focusing, and simplifying raw data (2) data display organizing data into formats that support conclusion drawing (3) drawing and

verifying conclusions and (4) theoretical reflection linking empirical findings to the existing literature. Analysis began concurrently with data collection, allowing the researcher to identify inductively emerging themes and adjust subsequent data collection guides accordingly. NVivo 14 software was used to support qualitative data management and coding.

### Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was ensured through four strategies: (1) source triangulation, confirming data from the principal against data from teachers, parents, and staff (2) technique triangulation, comparing interview data with observation and document data (3) member checking, returning preliminary findings to key informants for confirmation central to establishing credibility when implemented as a structured, iterative process (McKim, 2023) and (4) an audit trail, transparently documenting all methodological decisions to allow external verification.

## C. RESULT & DISCUSSION

This section presents the study's findings, organized around the IDEAL model set out in the Conceptual Framework above, and discusses the extent to which they support it. Figure 1 traces the model as a four stage flow: leader emotional intelligence builds the relational foundation (Karakose & Tulubas, 2024) that enables visionary digital leadership as the core driver, which is then safeguarded by data protection ethics (Huang, 2023) and enacted through humanistic AI adaptation (Renta-Davids et al., 2025) together shaping teacher psychological well being as the outcome, which in turn feeds back into leadership practice (Bakker & Demerouti, 2024). Islamic institutional values and culture run through every stage of this flow, shaping how each construct is enacted rather than sitting apart from it. The subsections below present the findings construct by construct before returning, in the final subsection, to how they speak to the model as a whole.

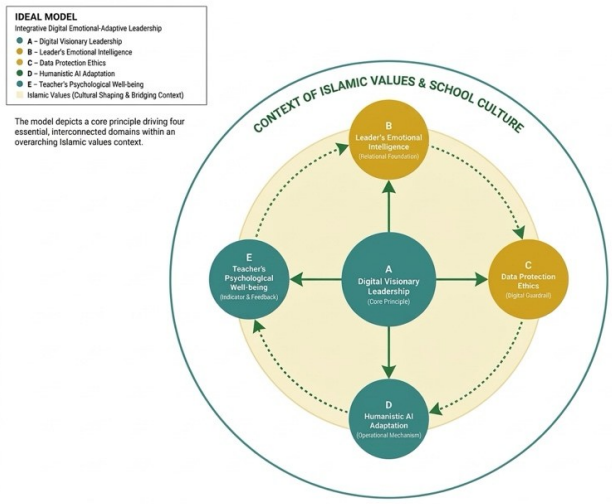



**Figure 1.** Integrative Humanistic Digital Leadership (IDEAL) Model Process Flow

### *Digital Leadership Profile at SMP Islam Athirah Bone*

What stands out in the early observations is a leadership profile best described as value based transformational digital leadership, visible in three recurring habits: technology folded into routine meetings without pushing personal dialogue out of the room, new digital platforms introduced only after thorough socialization and training rather than simply switched on and teachers consistently asked for input before, not

after, technology related decisions are made. Teacher informants (n = 8, first round interviews) consistently described the principal as someone who understands their adaptation difficulties and does not impose technology without accompanying the process descriptions indicating a high manifestation of emotional intelligence in day to day leadership practice.

***Strategies for Integrating Emotional Intelligence into Digital Leadership***

Four concrete strategies carry most of the weight in practice: personal mentoring for teachers who struggle to adapt, deliberately protected technology free stretches within meetings, so interpersonal connection is not crowded out, digital communication platforms matched to what each teacher can actually work with, rather than a single mandate for everyone and Islamic values applied as an explicit filter, not an afterthought, in every technology adoption decision.

***Data Protection Ethics Practices***

Document analysis reveals that the school already has several data management policies in place, though these are not yet fully systematized into a single, comprehensive data governance framework. The principal shows a high level of awareness regarding student data privacy, reflected in access-restriction policies and data security incident protocols. However, privacy literacy among teachers and parents still requires systematic strengthening a finding consistent with Sunyaev's (2020) observation that school-level data protection implementation in Indonesia generally lags behind the regulatory framework it is meant to satisfy.

***Findings in Relation to the IDEAL Model***

Read against the IDEAL model, the findings are consistent with the framework, with one contextual refinement. Rather than functioning as background, Islamic institutional values operate as a cultural lens that shapes and bridges the relationship between leader emotional intelligence and data governance effectiveness: they give the principal's emotional attentiveness a specific normative content amanah (trust), keadilan (justice), and collective responsibility and they translate that content into concrete governance choices, such as which data practices count as legitimate and which forms of teacher support are treated as an institutional obligation rather than a managerial favor. This is a qualitative, interpretive claim about how meaning and practice connect, not a statistically estimated mediation effect. Table 3 summarizes how each construct of the model is reflected empirically at the site, together with what each implies for practice elsewhere.

**Table 3.** Projected IDEAL Model Findings and Practical Implications

| Model Dimension | Empirical Indicators | Practical Implication |
|---|---|---|
| Visionary Digital Leadership | Technology vision integrated with Islamic values, medium term AI roadmap, transparent digital communication | Guidance for developing value based, locally grounded school digital visions |
| Leader Emotional Intelligence | Empathy in teacher mentoring; emotional self regulation during change, sustaining staff intrinsic motivation | EI training modules for principals in digitalization contexts |
| Data Protection Ethics | Student data security SOPs, regulatory compliance, privacy literacy across the school community | A data governance framework adoptable at national scale |

| Model Dimension | Empirical Indicators | Practical Implication |
|---|---|---|
| Humanistic AI Adaptation | Ethical selection of AI tools, adaptive teacher mentoring, resistance to depersonalized learning | AI adoption evaluation criteria for junior secondary schools |
| Teacher Psychological Well Being | Systemic emotional support, measured digital workload, preserved professional autonomy | A teacher well being monitoring instrument for the digital transformation era |

*Source: Author's elaboration (2026)*

### *Discussion: Addressing the Identified Research Gaps*

These findings speak directly to the five gaps set out in the Introduction. The study begins to map how digital leadership, emotional intelligence, and AI interact within one school context, closing in on the integration gap noted by Karakose and Tülübaş (2024) and Renta-Davids et al. (2025) the emerging data governance profile extends Sunyaev's (2020) and Ahmad et al.'s (2024) largely technical framing toward a leadership practice view the leadership narratives reinforce the shift from administrative to humanistic leadership argued by Leithwood and Louis (2012) and Bush (2020), showing what that shift looks like on the ground the study adds to the still thin literature on junior secondary digital leadership, consistent with the scarcity Hallinger and Huber (2012) and Sposato (2025) document and the evidence links empathetic leadership to teacher wellbeing, aligning with Bakker and Demerouti (2024) and Arbab et al. (2025) while adding a value based Islamic school setting this literature has not yet examined. Where the findings diverge most from prior work is in the shaping and bridging role that institutional Islamic values play a role that existing digital leadership and job demands resources frameworks, built largely in secular, Western settings, do not theorize. That divergence, more than any confirmation of what is already known, is the contribution this study is positioned to offer, and it is the reason a case like SMP Islam Athirah Bone deserves an international readership's attention: it points to a mechanism these frameworks currently have no vocabulary for.

## D. CONCLUSION

Returning to the four objectives: on the leadership profile, the evidence points to a value based transformational pattern in which technology adoption never travels alone emotional accompaniment goes with it. On the integration strategies, four concrete emotional intelligence practices have surfaced within the school's routines. On data protection ethics, the picture is one of meaningful but not yet systematized governance. And on the IDEAL model, the early evidence runs in the direction it predicts, with Islamic institutional values looking less like background and more like an active cultural mediator.

Beyond these findings, the study advances the understanding of humanistic AI transformation in schools around the same three pillars named in its title. Theoretically, it proposes the IDEAL model as a new conceptual framework integrating digital leadership, emotional intelligence, and data ethics into one cohesive construct, extending educational leadership theory by incorporating Islamic values as a substantive cultural mediator. Practically, the findings begin to yield operational guidance for principals balancing technological demands with the human needs of the school community, and the data ethics profile documented offers a reference point for national policy on personal data protection in schools. The contribution's value lies less in specific numbers than in showing a mechanism emotionally attentive, value anchored digital leadership through which schools can adopt AI without eroding the human relationships learning depends on, if confirmed, this mechanism would be transferable

to other value based schools facing similar pressures.

For future work, the study recommends that the Ministry of Education develop digital leadership competency standards that explicitly include emotional intelligence and data protection ethics as mandatory principal competencies, that teacher training institutions revise principal training curricula to include modules on humanistic AI transformation, including case studies on student data management, that regional education offices facilitate trust based, collegial principal learning communities focused on good digital leadership practice, that value based schools (Islamic, Christian, and others) actively explore how their value foundations can strengthen rather than weaken digital transformation, and that comparative research be pursued to test the transferability of the IDEAL model across a broader range of Indonesian secondary school contexts. This case study is part of an ongoing research project, the full validation of the IDEAL model, drawing on the complete interview and observation corpus, will be reported in subsequent work.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The researchers gratefully acknowledge the principal, teachers, staff, and school community of SMP Islam Athirah Bone for their openness and invaluable cooperation throughout the research process, and thank colleagues who provided intellectual support and encouragement during the preparation of this manuscript.

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