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Mapping research trends in islamic education management: a bibliometric analysis of global scholarly publications

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ABSTRACT

Islamic education management has grown into a distinct field that integrates managerial theory, educational leadership, and Islamic values within schools, madrasahs, pesantren, and Islamic higher education institutions. Despite this expansion, the intellectual structure of the field remains fragmented and insufficiently mapped, making it difficult to identify how scholars collaborate, which works exert the greatest influence, and which themes are consolidating or emerging. This study aims to map the collaboration structure, scholarly influence, and thematic development of research on Islamic education management. A bibliometric approach combining performance-oriented mapping and science mapping was applied. Records were retrieved from the Scopus database using a title–abstract–keyword query combining Islamic education with management-related terms, yielding 403 initial records. After refinement to English-language journal articles, 293 documents constituted the analytical dataset, which was examined and visualised with VOSviewer through co-authorship, citation, and keyword co-occurrence analyses. The results reveal a highly dispersed collaboration structure composed of many small, weakly connected author clusters with no dominant producers. Citation analysis identifies a small set of disproportionately influential works, led by Sahin (2018) and Lukens-Bull (2001), that anchor the intellectual foundation of this Scopus-indexed, English-language corpus. Keyword analysis shows a core built around Islamic education, management, leadership, and pesantren, with religious moderation, madrasah, and Islamic higher education emerging as the most recent thematic fronts. Because the corpus is confined to Scopus-indexed, English-language articles, the results are best read as a map of the internationally indexed segment of the field rather than of its entirety, since a substantial body of Islamic education management scholarship appears in regional and Arabic-language outlets that Scopus does not cover. Within this scope, the study contributes a transparent, replicable map and highlights the need for stronger cross-institutional collaboration and theory building in Islamic education management.



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Introduction

Effective management is widely regarded as a decisive factor in the quality and sustainability of educational institutions. The way institutions are led, governed, and organised shapes teaching quality, resource allocation,

and the capacity to adapt to changing social demands (Bush, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2020). Within this broad concern, the study of educational management has matured into a substantial body of scholarship that examines leadership behaviour, organisational structures, quality assurance, and the contextual conditions under which schools improve (Hallinger, 2018). These insights provide the conceptual backdrop against which more specialised managerial traditions, including those grounded in particular value systems, can be understood.

Islamic education management occupies a distinctive position within this landscape. It is not simply the application of generic management principles to religious schools; rather, it integrates managerial functions with theological commitments, ethical frameworks, and community expectations specific to Islamic institutions such as madrasahs, pesantren, Islamic schools, and Islamic universities (Sahin, 2018; Lukens-Bull, 2001). Leadership in these settings is frequently mediated by religious authority and moral formation, while governance must reconcile modern accountability demands with the preservation of tradition (Park & Niyozov, 2008; Haidar et al., 2022). Faith-based schooling in other traditions, including Catholic, Jewish, and Buddhist education, negotiates comparable tensions between modern accountability and the preservation of belief; what distinguishes the Islamic case is the particular configuration of religious authority, endowment-based governance, and community expectation through which those tensions are worked out. This dual orientation gives the field its identity and its analytical complexity. Over the past two decades, scholarship on Islamic education management has expanded globally, driven in particular by rapid institutional development in Indonesia and Malaysia and by growing interest in questions of quality, reform, and sustainability (Suyadi et al., 2022; Abubakari et al., 2024). Studies now span transformational leadership, strategic management, quality assurance, human resource development, and digital transformation in Islamic institutions. Yet this growth has been uneven and largely dispersed across national journals and disciplinary traditions, producing a literature that is voluminous but structurally loose.

The consequence is a fragmentation of knowledge. Because contributions accumulate across many venues and research groups with limited cross-referencing, it is difficult to discern the field's shared intellectual foundations, its patterns of collaboration, or the trajectory of its dominant themes. Narrative reviews, while valuable, cannot easily capture these structural properties across hundreds of documents, and they are vulnerable to selective coverage (Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic & Čater, 2015). A systematic, quantitative account of the field's structure is therefore needed. Bibliometric analysis offers precisely this capability. By analysing metadata from large publication corpora, bibliometric methods make it possible to measure productivity, trace intellectual influence through citation relationships, and map thematic structure through the co-occurrence of terms (Broadus, 1987; Ellegaard & Wallin, 2015). When combined with science-mapping visualisation, these methods reveal collaboration networks, influential works, and thematic clusters that remain invisible in conventional reviews (van Eck & Waltman, 2010; Cobo et al., 2011).

Despite the maturity of bibliometric methods in adjacent educational domains, their application to Islamic education management specifically remains limited and often descriptive. Existing mappings tend to treat Islamic education broadly, without isolating the managerial dimension, and they seldom integrate co-authorship, citation, and thematic analyses into a single account. As a result, several substantive questions remain unresolved: whether the field is collaborative or fragmented, which works anchor its intellectual core, and how its thematic emphasis is shifting over time. This is a substantive gap rather than a mere absence of bibliometric studies: the collaboration structure, intellectual influence, and thematic evolution of the field have not been mapped in an integrated way, so its methodological fragmentation and pronounced geographic concentration remain undocumented rather than simply under-studied. This study addresses that gap by providing a transparent and replicable bibliometric map of Islamic education management based on Scopus-indexed publications. Its contribution is threefold: it characterises the collaboration structure of the field, identifies the works and authors that have shaped its intellectual foundation, and traces the evolution of its dominant and emerging themes. In doing so, it offers researchers, institutional leaders, and policymakers an evidence-based overview of where the field stands and where it is moving. To guide this inquiry, the study is organised around three research questions:

- RQ1. How is the collaboration structure among researchers in Islamic education management research formed in terms of co-authorship patterns and research clusters?
- RQ2. Which authors and publications have had the greatest scholarly influence on Islamic education management research based on citation relationships?
- RQ3. What are the dominant and emerging research themes in Islamic education management based on keyword co-occurrence and their temporal evolution?

Literature Review

Islamic Education Management

Islamic education management refers to the organisation, leadership, and governance of Islamic educational institutions in ways that align managerial practice with Islamic values and objectives. Conceptually, it draws on general management functions such as planning, organising, leading, and controlling, but it embeds these functions within a normative framework derived from Islamic teachings on knowledge, ethics, and community (Sahin, 2018). Leadership in Islamic institutions is frequently described as value-laden and relational, combining administrative authority with spiritual and moral responsibility, which distinguishes it from purely technocratic models of school leadership (Suryani et al., 2023; Haidar et al., 2022).

Institutional development is a recurring concern in this literature. Studies examine how pesantren, madrasahs, and Islamic universities pursue quality improvement, reform, and sustainability while negotiating the tension between modernisation and the preservation of tradition (Lukens-Bull, 2001; Suyadi et al., 2022). Governance questions ranging from human resource development to strategic management and quality assurance feature prominently, reflecting institutions' efforts to meet contemporary accountability standards without compromising their religious mission (Masturin et al., 2022; Haidar et al., 2022). Collectively, this body of work frames Islamic education management as an applied and value-oriented field rather than a purely theoretical one.

Bibliometric Research in Education

Bibliometric analysis is an established quantitative approach for studying the structure and dynamics of research fields through publication and citation data (Pritchard, 1969; Broadus, 1987). Two complementary orientations are commonly distinguished: performance analysis, which measures the productivity and impact of research constituents, and science mapping, which reveals the intellectual and social structure of a field (Donthu et al., 2021; Cobo et al., 2011). Science mapping typically relies on co-authorship analysis to expose collaboration networks, citation and co-citation analysis to identify influential works and intellectual bases, and co-word or keyword co-occurrence analysis to uncover thematic structure (Small, 1973; Callon et al., 1983; Kessler, 1963).

These techniques have been widely adopted across educational research to trace research trends, scholarly influence, and collaboration patterns, supported by dedicated software that visualises large bibliometric networks (van Eck & Waltman, 2010; Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). VOSviewer, in particular, is valued for its clustering and overlay visualisation capabilities, which allow researchers to identify thematic clusters and to observe how the temporal focus of a field shifts (Waltman et al., 2010). Applied to Islamic education management, this methodological repertoire enables a structured account of collaboration, influence, and thematic evolution.

Research Gap

Although both Islamic education management and bibliometric methods are individually well developed, their intersection remains thin. Prior mappings often address Islamic education in general terms, rarely isolating the managerial dimension, and frequently rely on a single analytical lens. Few studies integrate co-authorship, citation, and keyword analyses to produce a comprehensive structural account of the field. This gap motivates the present study's three research questions, which jointly examine the collaboration structure (RQ1), scholarly influence (RQ2), and thematic development (RQ3) of Islamic education management research.

Method

Research Design

This study employs a bibliometric research design combining performance-oriented mapping and science mapping (Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic & Čater, 2015). Performance-oriented mapping is used to describe the development and distribution of research output, including annual productivity, leading sources, and citation impact. Science mapping is used to reveal the field's social and intellectual structure through three analyses: co-authorship (collaboration structure), citation (scholarly influence), and keyword co-occurrence with temporal overlay (thematic development). This dual perspective allows the study to answer descriptive and structural questions within a single, coherent framework.

Data Source and Search Strategy

The Scopus database was selected as the single data source because of its broad coverage of peer-reviewed literature and its structured, standardised metadata, which are well suited to bibliometric analysis (Pranckutė, 2021). A title–abstract–keyword (TITLE-ABS-KEY) query was constructed to capture the intersection of Islamic education and management-related concepts. Web of Science provides comparable citation coverage and is often paired with Scopus, but a single-database design was adopted deliberately, so that the export, field tags, and citation counts remain internally consistent and free of the record-merging artefacts that arise when the two indexes are combined; the resulting Scopus-only boundary is acknowledged and revisited as a limitation. The full query is reported in Table 1.

TITLE-ABS-KEY(("Islamic education" OR "Islamic educational") AND (management OR administration OR leadership OR governance OR "strategic management" OR "educational management" OR "school management" OR "education management"))

The initial search returned 403 records. Records were then refined to include only English-language documents, of the document type Article, published in journal sources. After applying these criteria, 293 documents remained and constituted the bibliometric dataset used for all subsequent analyses. The selection criteria are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. <Search strategy and selection criteria.>

Parameter	Specification
Database	Scopus
Field tags	TITLE-ABS-KEY (title, abstract, author/index keywords)
Search concepts	Islamic education (topic) AND management/administration/leadership/governance/strategic, educational, school, and education management (managerial dimension)
Initial records	403 documents
Inclusion — language	English
Inclusion — document type	Article
Inclusion — source type	Journal
Final dataset	293 documents
Export date	12 August 2026
Analysis software	VOSviewer (science mapping and visualisation)

Document Selection

Because bibliometric datasets are defined by database filtering rather than by full-text screening, document selection followed a transparent filtering procedure reported in the spirit of transparent-reporting standards for review-based studies (Moher et al., 2009). 403 records were initially identified, and 293 journal articles remained after applying the predefined filters for language, document type, and source type, so that 110 records were excluded in aggregate. These exclusions were produced entirely by Scopus's own limiter fields, which removed non-English-language records, document types other than Article (such as reviews, conference papers, book chapters, and editorials), and non-journal source types, rather than by subjective manual screening. Because the export did not retain a separate tally for each limiter, the exclusions are reported as an aggregate rather than as fabricated per-stage figures. This sequence corresponds to the identification and screening stages of a PRISMA-style flow (identification: 403 records; excluded by predefined limiters: 110 records; included in the bibliometric dataset: 293 records) and is fully reproducible by re-running the reported query with the same limiters. The resulting 293 records constituted the bibliometric dataset. No additional records were excluded through manual screening, and the final bibliometric dataset comprised 293 documents. The number of duplicates removed by Scopus prior to export could not be independently verified from the exported file and is therefore not reported, in order to avoid presenting unverifiable figures.

Data Extraction

Complete metadata were exported from Scopus in CSV format. The fields used in this study include author names, author identifiers, article title, publication year, source title, volume and issue, page range, citation count ("cited by"), DOI, affiliations, author keywords, and index keywords. Fields not required for the analyses, or not consistently populated across records, were not used. No metadata fields were fabricated or inferred beyond what the export contained.

Data Cleaning

Prior to analysis, the dataset was inspected for consistency. Because the corpus was drawn from a single Scopus export, there were no cross-database duplicates to reconcile. Author keywords were used as the primary unit for thematic analysis, and near-equivalent surface variants (for example, “Islamic educational management” alongside “Islamic education management”, and “madrasa” alongside “madrasah”) were treated with care so that closely related terms were interpreted together where appropriate, while distinct concepts were kept separate to avoid distorting the network. To preserve the integrity of the co-occurrence structure, keywords were not aggressively merged; the analysis reflects the terms as authors assigned them, with normalisation limited to obvious surface variants.

Analysis Settings

Three science-mapping analyses were conducted in VOSviewer: co-authorship analysis (unit: authors) to answer RQ1, citation analysis (unit: documents) to answer RQ2, and keyword co-occurrence analysis (unit: author keywords) with density and temporal overlay visualisation to answer RQ3. VOSviewer's association-strength normalisation and its default clustering algorithm, at the software's default resolution and minimum-cluster-size settings, were used to derive clusters and layout (Waltman et al., 2010; van Eck & Waltman, 2010); relying on these documented defaults keeps the clustering reproducible from the same dataset. The specific threshold values (minimum occurrences and minimum documents), the total number of items, links, and total link strength for each map were not recorded in the exported visualisation files and are therefore not reported here; only information that could be verified from the dataset and the visualisations is presented, in line with the study's commitment to methodological transparency.

Result and Discussions

Dataset Overview

The final dataset comprised **293 journal articles**, all written in English and all classified as the document type Article. The documents span the period **1985 to 2026**, but output is heavily concentrated in recent years: publications rose sharply from 2019 onward, with 45 articles in 2024, 58 in 2025, and 60 in 2026, together accounting for the majority of the corpus. This distribution indicates that, although the field has older intellectual roots, it has intensified markedly over the last several years. Table 2 summarises the principal characteristics of the dataset.

Table 2. <Characteristics of the bibliometric dataset (n = 293).>

Characteristic	Value
Documents analysed	293
Document type	Article (100%)
Language	English (100%)
Publication period	1985–2026
Concentration of output	2019–2026 (majority of documents)
Total citations received	1,614
Average citations per document	5.51
Median citations per document	2
Most-cited document	179 citations (Sahin, 2018)
Documents with no citations	79
Average authors per document	3.57
Single-authored documents	54
Leading source	Munaddhomah (30 documents)
Most productive country	Indonesia, followed by Malaysia

Publication venues are diverse but include several recurring Islamic-education journals. The most frequent sources were Munaddhomah (30 documents), Jurnal Pendidikan Islam (17), Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam (12), and Kharisma (10), alongside international outlets such as the International Journal of Learning,

Teaching and Educational Research and Religions. Geographically, the field is dominated by Indonesia, which appears in the affiliations of the large majority of documents, followed by Malaysia; contributions from the United Kingdom, Australia, Thailand, the United States, Turkey, and Kuwait are present but comparatively small. This concentration frames the interpretation of the collaboration and thematic analyses that follow.

Co-authorship Analysis (RQ1)

The co-authorship network (Figure 1) addresses RQ1 by revealing how researchers in the field collaborate. The most striking feature of the map is its fragmentation. Rather than a single connected collaboration structure with a dense core, the network consists of numerous small clusters and isolated nodes distributed across the map with little interconnection between them. Several tight but self-contained groups are visible—for example, a densely linked cluster around Fadlilah, Chaniago Fransisko, and Farwati Sizka, a second around Arifin Imron, Thoyib Muhammad, and Subandi, and smaller groupings around Jamsari Ezad Azraai, Maskuri, and Mukhtar with Anwar Khairul. Many other authors appear as isolated or weakly connected nodes.

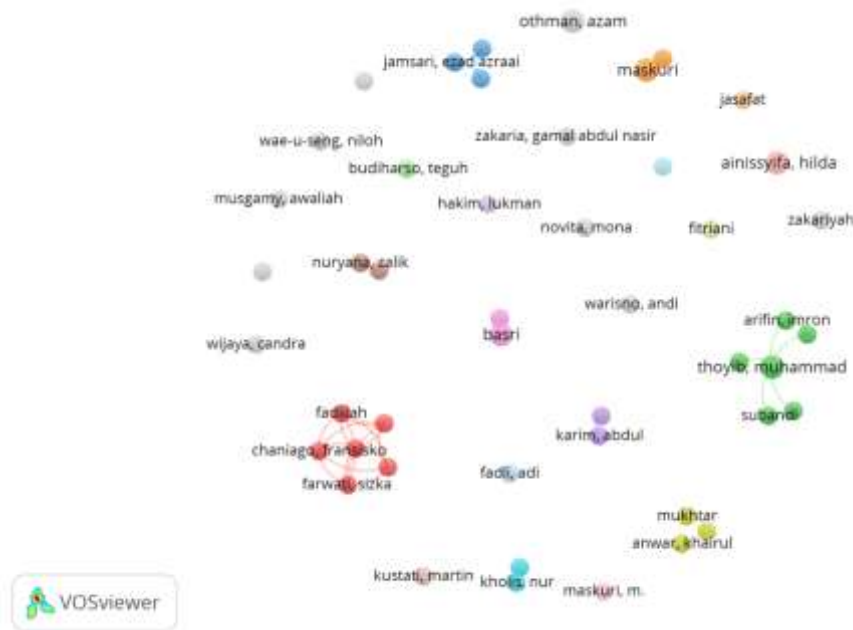


Figure 1. <Co-authorship network of researchers in Islamic education management. Colours denote separate collaboration clusters; the wide spatial separation and sparse links between clusters indicate a fragmented collaboration structure>

This visual impression is consistent with the underlying productivity data. Author output is highly dispersed: the most productive authors contributed only three documents each, and no author functions as a dominant hub linking multiple groups. On average each document had 3.57 authors, and 54 of the 293 documents were single-authored, indicating that collaboration, where it occurs, tends to be local and small-scale rather than networked across institutions. Taken together, these patterns suggest that Islamic education management is currently a collaboratively fragmented field: research is produced by many small teams working in parallel, with limited bridging ties that would allow knowledge and methods to circulate across groups. The practical implication is that the field lacks the integrated collaboration infrastructure that typically accelerates cumulative theory building.

Citation Analysis (RQ2)

The citation network (Figure 2) addresses RQ2 by identifying the documents that have exerted the greatest scholarly influence. Node size in the map corresponds to citation impact, and two documents stand out clearly: Sahin (2018), the largest node, and Lukens-Bull (2001). These are followed by a second tier of influential works, including Park and Niyozov (2008), Suyadi et al. (2022), and Adamson (2007). Because Scopus provides verifiable citation counts, these can be reported directly, and they confirm the visual hierarchy of the network.

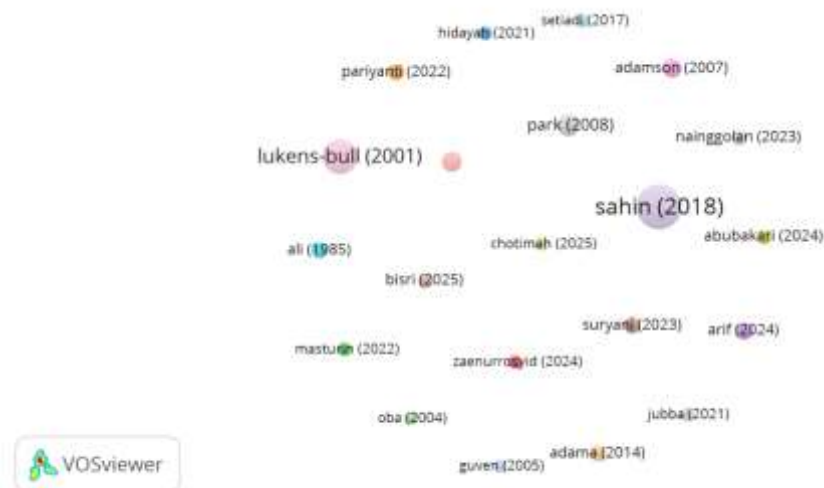


Figure 2. <Citation network of influential documents in Islamic education management. Node size reflects citation impact; labels show first author and publication year>

Table 3. <Most influential documents by citation count (top 15).>

Rank	First author (year)	Year	Cited by	Focus
1	Sahin, A. (2018)	2018	179	Critical issues in Islamic education studies
2	Lukens-Bull, R. A. (2001)	2001	109	Modernity and tradition in Islamic education in Indonesia
3	Park, J. & Niyozov, S. (2008)	2008	45	Madrasa education in South and Southeast Asia
4	Suyadi et al. (2022)	2022	39	Academic reform and sustainability of Islamic higher education
5	Adamson, C. (2007)	2007	31	Islam, women's rights, and moral hierarchy in Java
6	Arif, M. et al. (2024)	2024	29	Strategy to prevent bullying in pesantren
7	Ali, B.-E.-D. (1985)	1985	26	Islamic law and crime (peripheral to management core)
8	Suryani, S. et al. (2023)	2023	25	Islamic work ethics and humble leadership
9	Pariyanti, E. et al. (2022)	2022	24	Workplace behaviour in Islamic-based universities
10	Nainggolan, Y. A. et al. (2023)	2023	23	Governance and performance of Islamic banks
11	Bisri, A. et al. (2025)	2025	23	Educational data mining for performance evaluation
12	Abubakari, M. S. et al. (2024)	2024	22	Adoption of digital technologies in Islamic education
13	Hidayah, S. N. (2021)	2021	19	Pesantren for middle-class Muslims in Indonesia
14	Masturin et al. (2022)	2022	19	Tawhid-based learning in Islamic higher education
15	Setiadi, R. et al. (2017)	2017	18	Peace pedagogy in education settings

The citation structure reveals two important properties of the field's intellectual base. First, influence is highly concentrated: the top two works alone account for a substantial share of all citations, while 79 of the 293 documents have received no citations at all and the median document has only two. Interpreted against typical bibliometric expectations, an average of 5.51 citations per document, a median of two, and 79 uncited records is a modest profile that fits a young, rapidly expanding literature in which most articles have had little time to accumulate citations, rather than a mature field with a broadly distributed citation base (Donthu et al., 2021; Ellegaard & Wallin, 2015). The field therefore rests on a narrow set of foundational references rather than a broadly distributed base of cumulative work. Second, several of the most-cited documents sit at the conceptual periphery of Islamic education management as such. Highly cited works by Ali (1985) on Islamic law, Adama (2014) on the urban informal economy, and Oba (2004) on legal education entered the corpus because the search captured the broader “Islamic education” literature; their prominence signals that the managerial core of the field is anchored by comparatively few works, most notably Sahin (2018), Lukens-Bull (2001), and Suyadi et al. (2022). Alongside these, older thematic contributions such as Guven (2005) on the revitalisation of Islamic education and recent institutionally oriented studies such as Zaenurrosyid et al. (2024) on financing Islamic higher education illustrate the breadth of works that accrue citations within the corpus. The relatively weak link structure among nodes further indicates that citation ties within the field are still forming rather than densely established.

Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis (RQ3)

The keyword co-occurrence map (Figure 3) addresses the first part of RQ3 by identifying the dominant concepts and their interrelations. The density visualisation shows that the field is organised around a strong central term, Islamic education, which is by far the most frequent author keyword (87 occurrences) and the brightest region of the map. Surrounding it are the principal managerial and institutional concepts—management, leadership, pesantren, and education—which form the conceptual backbone of the field. A ring of more specific institutional and contextual keywords, including Islamic higher education, Islamic boarding school, curriculum, Indonesia, Islamic schools, and madrasah, extends outward from this core.

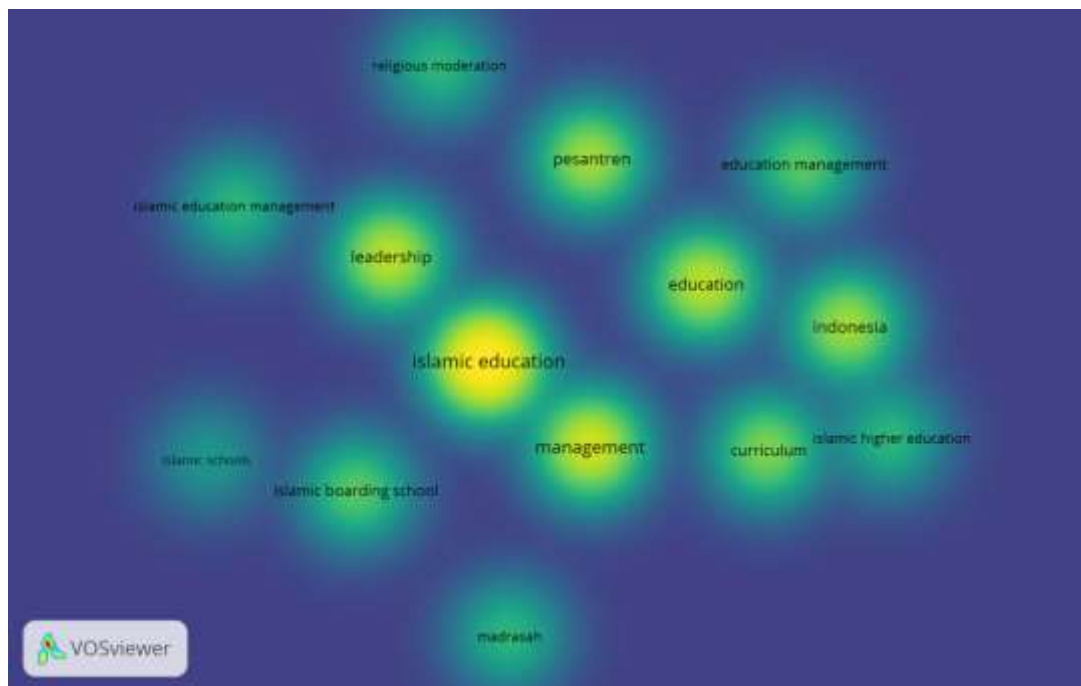


Figure 3. <Keyword co-occurrence density map. Brighter regions indicate keywords with higher occurrence and co-occurrence; Islamic education forms the dominant conceptual core>

Table 4. <Dominant author keywords and thematic interpretation.>

Keyword	Occurrences	Thematic interpretation
Islamic education	87	Central organising concept of the field
Management	13	Core managerial dimension
Leadership	12	Leadership and value-based direction of institutions
Education	12	General educational framing
Pesantren	12	Traditional Islamic boarding institutions
Islamic higher education	9	University-level Islamic institutions (recent front)
Islamic boarding school	8	Institutional focus (recent front)
Indonesia	8	Dominant geographic context
Islamic education management	7	The field's explicit self-designation
Religious moderation	7	Emerging value/policy theme (most recent)
Curriculum	7	Curricular dimension (established theme)
Education management	6	Managerial framing of education
Madrasah	6	Institutional focus (recent front)
Islamic schools	6	Institutional focus

The clusters that emerge from these keywords correspond to recognisable research strands: a managerial–leadership strand (management, leadership, education management, curriculum), an institutional strand centred on specific settings (pesantren, madrasah, Islamic boarding school, Islamic schools, Islamic higher education), and a contextual–value strand (Indonesia, religious moderation). Islamic education and management act as the central concepts that connect these strands, confirming that the managerial dimension is integral to, rather than separate from, the broader Islamic education discourse.

Temporal and Overlay Analysis (RQ3)

The overlay visualisation (Figure 4) addresses the second part of RQ3 by showing how the thematic focus of the field has evolved. In this map, colour encodes the average publication year in which each keyword appears, so that terms shading toward yellow reflect a more recent average year than those shading toward purple. This colouring should be read as a temporal signal rather than as an indicator of importance.

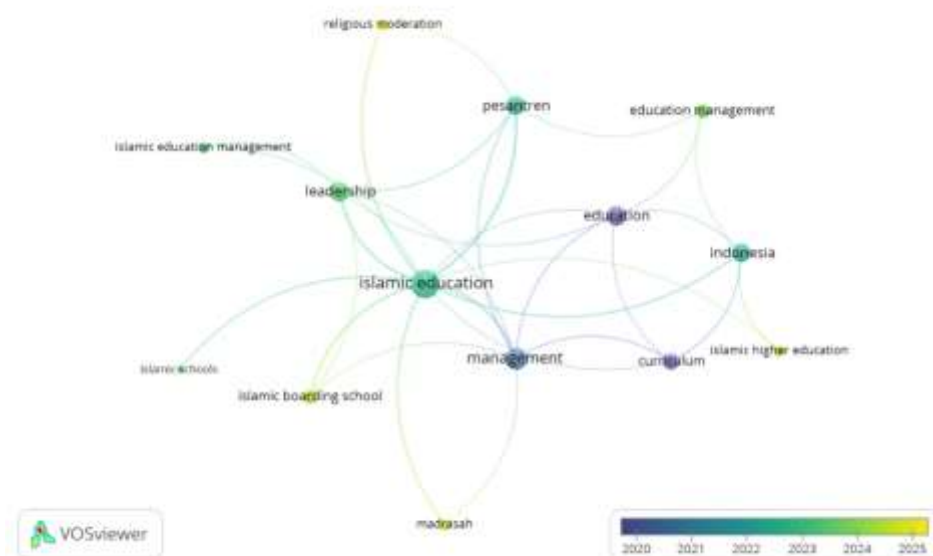


Figure 4. <Keyword co-occurrence network with temporal overlay. Colour indicates the average publication year of each keyword (purple ≈ earlier, yellow ≈ more recent)>

Interpreted alongside the occurrence data, the overlay distinguishes three temporal layers. Earlier themes, with average years around 2019–2020, include curriculum, education, and management foundational concepts that framed the field's initial managerial concerns. Intermediate themes, clustered around 2021–2023, include Islamic education itself, pesantren, Indonesia, leadership, and Islamic education management, representing the consolidation of the field's core identity. The most recent themes, with average years approaching 2024–2025, are religious moderation (the newest, at roughly 2025), madrasah, Islamic higher education, and Islamic boarding school. These emerging fronts indicate that scholarly attention is moving toward value-oriented agendas such as religious moderation and toward specific institutional levels, particularly higher education and boarding schools. Importantly, the emerging status of these terms is inferred from their average year in combination with their occurrence and network position, not from colour alone.

The co-authorship analysis (RQ1) shows that Islamic education management is a collaboratively fragmented field. The network is composed of many small, internally cohesive but mutually isolated clusters, with no dominant authors bridging them and a substantial proportion of single-authored work. This pattern contrasts with more mature bibliometric fields, where a connected core of prolific, well-linked authors typically anchors collaboration (Zupic & Čater, 2015; Donthu et al., 2021). The dispersion observed here is consistent with a field that is expanding rapidly but has not yet developed the cross-institutional networks needed to integrate its output. The consequence is a structural constraint on cumulative progress: findings and methods circulate within small groups but struggle to diffuse across the field, which may partly explain the loose citation structure observed in RQ2.

The citation analysis (RQ2) indicates that the field's intellectual foundation rests on a narrow set of highly influential works, notably Sahin (2018) and Lukens-Bull (2001), supplemented by Park and Niyozov (2008) and Suyadi et al. (2022). These works are influential because they articulate the field's defining tensions between Islamic and secular conceptions of education, between tradition and modernity, and between reform and sustainability which subsequent studies repeatedly engage. At the same time, the presence of highly cited but conceptually peripheral works, and the large share of uncited documents, shows that citation impact in this field is unevenly distributed and still consolidating. It is important not to equate citation counts with scholarly quality: citation accrual is shaped by publication age, venue visibility, and topical breadth, so older or broadly framed works may attract citations for reasons unrelated to their specific managerial contribution (Ellegaard & Wallin, 2015). The citation structure is therefore best read as a map of intellectual anchoring rather than of merit.

The keyword analysis (RQ3) reveals a coherent thematic core Islamic education, management, leadership, and pesantren surrounded by institutional and contextual themes. The temporal overlay adds a dynamic dimension: foundational concerns such as curriculum, education, and management dominated the earlier literature, while the field's more recent attention has shifted toward religious moderation, madrasah, Islamic higher education, and Islamic boarding schools. This evolution suggests that scholarship is moving from generic managerial questions toward context-specific and value-laden agendas, with religious moderation emerging as a distinctively recent policy-relevant theme, particularly in the Indonesian context that dominates the corpus. The reorientation of boarding-school education toward moral formation for younger generations (Jubba et al., 2021) exemplifies this shift toward value-laden, context-specific agendas. The prominence of Indonesia across both the thematic and geographic analyses reinforces the view that the field's current trajectory is strongly shaped by Southeast Asian institutional realities.

By mapping the field's collaboration, influence, and thematic structure, this study contributes an integrated account of Islamic education management as an emerging scholarly domain. It shows that the field possesses a recognisable conceptual core anchored by a small set of foundational works, but that its theoretical development is constrained by fragmentation and uneven citation integration. This suggests a need for consolidating theoretical frameworks that connect value-based leadership and governance with mainstream educational management theory (Bush, 2011; Hallinger, 2018).

For practitioners Islamic school leaders, pesantren and madrasah managers, and Islamic higher education leadersthe thematic map highlights the areas currently receiving the most scholarly attention, including leadership quality, human resource development, quality assurance, and, most recently, religious moderation (Haidar et al., 2022; Chotimah et al., 2025). Institutional leaders can use this evidence base to align internal reform priorities with the field's developing knowledge and to anticipate emerging agendas such as digital transformation in Islamic institutions (Abubakari et al., 2024). For researchers, the analysis identifies underdeveloped but rising themes religious moderation, Islamic higher education governance, and boarding-school management as promising directions, and it signals the value of building cross-institutional collaborations to strengthen the field's currently sparse network structure.

The future research agenda follows directly from the study's findings, expressed as finding–gap–direction chains: Finding: The co-authorship network is highly fragmented, with weak connectivity between clusters. Gap: The field lacks integrative, cross-institutional collaboration. Direction: Future studies should deliberately foster cross-institutional and international co-authorship, for example through joint research programmes linking Indonesian, Malaysian, and other institutions, to strengthen the collaboration infrastructure. Finding: Scholarly influence is concentrated in a few works, and many documents remain uncited. Gap: The field's intellectual base is narrow and unevenly integrated. Direction: Future work should engage more systematically with the field's foundational literature and develop shared theoretical frameworks, so that new contributions accumulate around a common core rather than in isolation. Finding: Emerging themes include religious moderation, Islamic higher education, and boarding-school management. Gap: These recent fronts are still thinly researched relative to their policy relevance. Direction: Future studies should prioritise empirical investigation of these emerging themes, particularly the management of religious moderation and governance reform in Islamic higher education.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the analysis relies on a single database, Scopus, and therefore does not capture relevant work indexed elsewhere. Second, the dataset is restricted to English-language publications, which may under-represent scholarship published in Indonesian, Arabic, and other languages central to the field. Third, only journal articles were included, excluding conference papers, books, and book chapters. Fourth, although the corpus spans 1985 to 2026, output is concentrated in recent years, so the temporal analysis largely reflects developments of the last several years. Fifth, bibliometric findings depend on the quality and completeness of metadata, and citation counts are influenced by publication age, with newer works having had less time to accumulate citations. Sixth, VOSviewer visualisations depend on threshold and clustering settings, so alternative parameters could yield somewhat different maps. Finally, bibliometric mapping describes the structure of a field but does not replace substantive, qualitative interpretation of the underlying scholarship; the maps presented here should be read as complements to, not substitutes for, close reading of the literature.

Conclusions

This study mapped the research landscape of Islamic education management through a bibliometric analysis of 293 Scopus-indexed journal articles drawn from an initial pool of 403 records. In response to RQ1, the co-authorship analysis showed that the field is collaboratively fragmented, composed of many small and weakly connected author clusters with no dominant producers, indicating limited cross-institutional integration. In response to RQ2, the citation analysis identified a narrow but clear intellectual foundation, led by Sahin (2018) and Lukens-Bull (2001) and supported by works such as Park and Niyozov (2008) and Suyadi et al. (2022), while also revealing that influence is highly concentrated and citation integration remains loose. In response to RQ3, the keyword analysis revealed a stable conceptual core Islamic education, management, leadership, and pesantren with a clear temporal shift toward emerging themes of religious moderation, madrasah, and Islamic higher education in the most recent years.

Taken together, these findings show that Islamic education management is a rapidly growing but still-consolidating field with a recognisable thematic identity, a concentrated intellectual base, and evolving priorities. The shared identity and the observed fragmentation are not in tension, because they describe different dimensions of a field: a common conceptual vocabulary on the one hand, and the density of collaborative and citation ties on the other. A concentrated conceptual core sitting alongside a sparse collaboration network is most consistent with disciplinary youth, a field that has agreed on what it studies faster than it has built the cross-institutional infrastructure through which knowledge circulates, rather than with epistemic incoherence. By providing a transparent and replicable map of its collaboration, influence, and themes, this study offers a foundation for more integrated, theory-oriented, and collaborative research, and it identifies concrete directions stronger cross-institutional collaboration and deeper engagement with emerging value-based agendas through which the field can mature.

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