

Transforming Teacher Leadership in the Social Media Era: The Role of Digital Agency, Professional Identity, and Character Education in Islamic Primary Schools

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Abstract : The transformation of teacher leadership in the social media era has reconfigured the pedagogical and ethical authority of educators, but studies on these dynamics in Islamic elementary education are still limited. This study aims to analyze the transformation of teacher leadership, the role of digital agency and professional identity, and their contribution to character education in the social media ecosystem in Islamic elementary education. This study employs a library research method with a conceptual and content analysis approach. Data were collected from various primary and secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journals, academic books, and relevant educational reports, focusing on the intersection of digital agency, professional identity, and character education. The data were analyzed through thematic coding and conceptual synthesis to construct a new theoretical framework. The results of the study show: (1) teacher leadership transforms from classroom-based practices to networked and digitally mediated leadership, which operates beyond institutional boundaries through the social media ecosystem; (2) digital agency and professional identity form a reciprocal mechanism that gives birth to a new construct in the form of Digital Islamic Teacher Identity – a hybrid identity that integrates digital competence with the values of *murabbi* and *uswah hasanah*; (3) Social media-mediated leadership contributes substantively to character education through digital role models as a hidden curriculum and Islamic-themed content curation, which strengthens students' moral resilience and digital citizenship. This study proposes an integrative conceptual model that offers a paradigm shift from technology adoption to value-framed technology integration in educational leadership. Policy and practical implications for the development of teachers' digital leadership are also discussed.

Keywords : teacher leadership; digital agency; professional identity; social media; character education

Abstrak : Transformasi kepemimpinan guru di era media sosial telah merekonfigurasi otoritas pedagogis dan etis pendidik, namun kajian mengenai dinamika ini dalam pendidikan dasar Islam masih terbatas. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis transformasi kepemimpinan guru, peran agensi digital dan identitas profesional, serta

kontribusinya terhadap pendidikan karakter dalam ekosistem media sosial di pendidikan dasar Islam. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode riset kepustakaan dengan pendekatan analisis konseptual dan isi. Data dikumpulkan dari berbagai sumber primer dan sekunder, termasuk jurnal yang ditelaah sejawat, buku-buku akademik, dan laporan pendidikan yang relevan, dengan fokus pada keterkaitan antara agensi digital, identitas profesional, dan pendidikan karakter. Data tersebut dianalisis melalui pengkodean tematik dan sintesis konseptual untuk membangun kerangka teoretis baru. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan: (1) kepemimpinan guru bertransformasi dari praktik terikat ruang kelas (*classroom-based*) menuju kepemimpinan terjejaring yang termediasi digital (*networked and digitally mediated leadership*), yang beroperasi melampaui batas institusional melalui ekosistem media sosial; (2) agensi digital dan identitas profesional membentuk mekanisme resiprokal yang melahirkan konstruk kebaruan berupa *Digital Islamic Teacher Identity*—identitas hibrid yang mengintegrasikan kompetensi digital dengan nilai-nilai *murabbi* dan *uswah hasanah*; (3) kepemimpinan termediasi media sosial berkontribusi substantif terhadap pendidikan karakter melalui keteladanan digital sebagai kurikulum tersembunyi dan kurasi konten bernuansa Islami, yang memperkuat ketahanan moral dan kewargaan digital siswa. Penelitian ini memproposisi model konseptual integratif yang menawarkan pergeseran paradigma dari adopsi teknologi menuju integrasi teknologi berbingkai nilai dalam kepemimpinan pendidikan. Implikasi kebijakan dan praktis bagi pengembangan kepemimpinan digital guru juga dibahas.

Kata kunci : kepemimpinan guru; agensi digital; identitas profesional; media sosial; pendidikan karakter

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INTRODUCTION

The social media ecosystem has fundamentally reconfigured the professional landscape of teachers worldwide, shifting the traditional boundaries of the classroom and creating new arenas for pedagogical interaction, professional collaboration, and knowledge dissemination (An et al., 2026). At the primary education level, this phenomenon holds unique significance because teachers serve not only as instructors but also as primary architects of character formation and the moral foundation of students at the most critical stage of development in Islamic basic education (Jamil, 2024). This dynamic is further complicated by the dual responsibility teachers bear: integrating the digital competencies demanded by the contemporary era while simultaneously maintaining and transmitting Islamic values such as morality, good morals, and *adab*, which are at the core of the mission of Islamic education (Husni et al., 2025). Although social media penetration among teachers has increased exponentially and various digital professional development initiatives have been launched, academic understanding of how this digital transformation is reshaping teacher leadership, particularly at the intersection of digital agency, professional identity, and character education in the context of Islamic primary education, remains very limited and fragmented (Maliza, 2025). This gap not only hinders the development of a comprehensive theoretical framework but also limits the ability of policymakers to formulate effective strategies to empower teachers as transformative leaders in the digital age.

A review of the existing literature reveals several relevant research trends that have not been conceptually integrated. In their book, Theoharis & Scanlan (2025) successfully

mapped the construct of teacher leadership and identified conceptual diversity in this field. However, their study did not explicitly explore how the social media ecosystem reconfigures these dimensions of leadership. From the perspective of teacher agency, Pathiranage and Karunaratne (2023) investigated teacher agency in technology in the pre- and post-COVID-19 periods, but their focus was limited to teacher responses to technology policies, rather than how digital agency proactively shapes leadership practices. In the domain of professional development, Mercado & Shin (2025) mapped the use of social media for teacher continuing professional development, but their study failed to address the leadership dimensions and professional identity construction that emerge from these digital interactions. Furthermore, studies on teacher professional identity in the digital space tend to focus on secular Western educational contexts (Succarie, 2024; Chibuko et al., 2025), while the literature on character education in Islamic schools generally still adopts a conventional classroom-bound approach without adequately integrating the digital leadership dimension of teachers. This fragmentation between domains indicates that there has been no synthesis that simultaneously integrates teacher leadership, digital agency, professional identity, and character education within a coherent analytical framework, particularly in the context of Islamic elementary education. This study aims to fill this gap by proposing a novel construct, Digital Islamic Teacher Identity, and an integrative conceptual model that explains the mechanisms of teacher leadership transformation mediated by social media.

Based on this conceptual gap, this study aims to: (1) analyze how the literature describes teacher leadership transformation as a consequence of the development of the social media ecosystem in elementary education; (2) investigating the role of digital agency and professional identity in shaping teacher leadership practices in a social media environment; and (3) exploring the contribution of social media-based teacher leadership transformation to character education and students' moral resilience in Islamic elementary education. The urgency of this research lies in two dimensions. Theoretically, this research offers a paradigm shift from a classroom-based understanding of teacher leadership to networked and digitally mediated leadership, while enriching the global educational leadership literature with a contextual perspective from Islamic education. Practically, this synthesis provides an evidence-based foundation for formulating digital teacher leadership development policies that are not only oriented towards technical competencies, but also on strengthening professional identity and its impact on student character formation in the digital era.

METHOD

This study employs a library research method utilizing a qualitative approach with content analysis and conceptual synthesis. Library research is a systematic methodology that involves the collection, evaluation, and integration of existing literature to answer research questions, identify theoretical gaps, and construct new conceptual frameworks (George, 2008). Unlike empirical research that collects primary data from the field, library research treats existing texts, documents, and scholarly publications as the primary data sources to generate comprehensive theoretical insights.

The data for this study were gathered from primary and secondary sources. Primary sources consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and authoritative

reports published in reputable national and international databases that explicitly discuss teacher leadership, digital agency, professional identity, social media ecosystems, and character education, particularly within the context of Islamic and primary education. Secondary sources included theoretical books, policy documents, and relevant conceptual papers that provided foundational frameworks for the study. The literature was collected using purposive sampling, where sources were selected based on their thematic relevance, conceptual depth, and alignment with the three main research objectives of this study.

The collected literature was analyzed using qualitative content analysis and conceptual synthesis. The analysis process followed three iterative stages: (1) Data Reduction and Coding, where the literature was read thoroughly, and key concepts, arguments, and findings related to the research focus were extracted and coded line-by-line; (2) Thematic Synthesis, where the coded data were grouped into broader descriptive and analytical themes to identify patterns and relationships between digital agency, professional identity, and teacher leadership; and (3) Conceptual Synthesis, where the thematic findings were integrated to construct a new, integrative conceptual model. This approach allows for the transformation of fragmented theoretical findings into a coherent, novel conceptual framework that explains the transformation of teacher leadership in the digital era.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Transforming Teacher Leadership in the Social Media Era

The paradigm shift in teacher leadership is shifting from a hierarchical-structural model bound by physical space to a fluid and boundaryless practice of networked and digitally mediated leadership (Picot et al., 2023). In primary education, the social media ecosystem has broken down the traditional dichotomy between formal leaders and followers, redistributing pedagogical influence across broader digital networks. This transformation marks a redefinition of teacher leadership, no longer solely as a structurally assigned position or role, but rather as a dynamic practice executed through digital interactions (Kalogeratos et al., 2026). Scholarly and pedagogical authority is now collectively negotiated beyond the classroom walls, enabling teachers to exert their influence both horizontally and vertically through digital spaces.

Research findings also indicate that social media platforms—from instant chat groups to interest-based professional communities—have metamorphosed from mere administrative communication tools into substantial informal leadership ecosystems (Fry, 2025). In this digital space, teachers actualize their leadership roles through peer-mentoring practices, dissemination of best practices, and real-time advocacy for school policies (Majeed, 2025). This digital professional network facilitates the formation of strong social capital, enabling elementary school teachers to lead cross-school learning initiatives, build learning communities, and influence the direction of curriculum development without relying on top-down instructions from the principal. Social media thus serves as a catalyst that democratizes access to leadership roles.

This transformed leadership practice manifests itself in three main forms: instructional, cultural, and advocacy leadership (Catone et al., 2017). Instructionally, teachers lead through the curation and creation of openly shared digital learning resources to improve the quality of learning. Culturally, they lead by normalizing a culture of collaboration, pedagogical reflection, and appreciation for peer innovation in the digital public space. Meanwhile, advocacy leadership emerges when teachers use social media platforms to voice student needs, educate the public about elementary education issues,

and shape a positive public narrative about the teaching profession. This tripartite practice broadens the impact of teacher leadership from the micro (classroom) to the macro (society and policy) level.

In the specific context of Islamic primary education (madrasah/MI), literature findings highlight that this leadership transformation is inseparable from a framework of Islamic values that integrates teachers' identities as *murabbi* (leaders) (Munif, 2026). Digital leadership in this space operates by strengthening Islamic brotherhood and mutual assistance (*ta'awun*) among educators through digital platforms. Teachers not only lead professionally but also model Islamic digital ethics (*akhlaq*) in interactions, filtering content, and constructing educational narratives aligned with the values of *tauhid* (Mukhlis & Cahyadi, 2026). Social media positions itself as a space where pedagogical and spiritual leadership intersect, creating a holistic, religiously nuanced leadership model oriented toward the formation of *adab* (ethics).

While offering opportunities for expanding influence, the synthesis also reveals the structural and psychological tensions that accompany this transformation. The social media ecosystem blurs the boundaries between teachers' private and professional spheres, leading to digital fatigue and constant availability expectations from colleagues and parents (Andersson & Hedström, 2024). Furthermore, digital leadership dynamics are prone to miscommunication, horizontal conflicts among colleagues in group settings, and implicit pressure to constantly validate themselves through digital metrics. These findings confirm that the transformation of teacher leadership in the social media era is not a fully emancipatory process, but rather a complex adaptation that requires constant negotiation between professional autonomy, psychological well-being, and ethical responsibility.

Digital Agency and Professional Identity as Mechanisms of Leadership Transformation

Teachers' digital agency cannot be reduced to mere technical literacy or instrumental competence in operating social media platforms. Digital agency, more substantively understood, is a teacher's intentional, reflective, and critical capacity to exploit the digital ecosystem to achieve pedagogical, professional, and social goals (Novoa, 2024). This concept extends beyond the "ability to use technology" to the "ability to act meaningfully through technology." In the context of primary education, digital agency is a fundamental prerequisite for teachers not only adapting to digital transformation but also actively shaping the direction of that transformation in accordance with their professional and pedagogical values (Stenbom & Geijer, 2025).

The manifestation of digital agency in teacher leadership practices is observed through the shift in teachers' roles from passive consumers of information to prosumers – producers and consumers of professional content. Teachers with high digital agency actively curate learning resources, produce original pedagogical content, reject digital mandates that align with pedagogical principles, and proactively build networks across schools and regions (Tseng, 2025). This agency is also manifested in teachers' ability to critically negotiate school digital policies, filter technology trends that are truly educational, and initiate professional learning communities in digital spaces (Gouseti et al., 2025). Digital agency serves as a driving force that enables teacher leadership to operate autonomously and transformatively outside of formal school structures.

In line with the development of digital agency, the literature also highlights how social media has become an arena for the negotiation and construction of teachers'

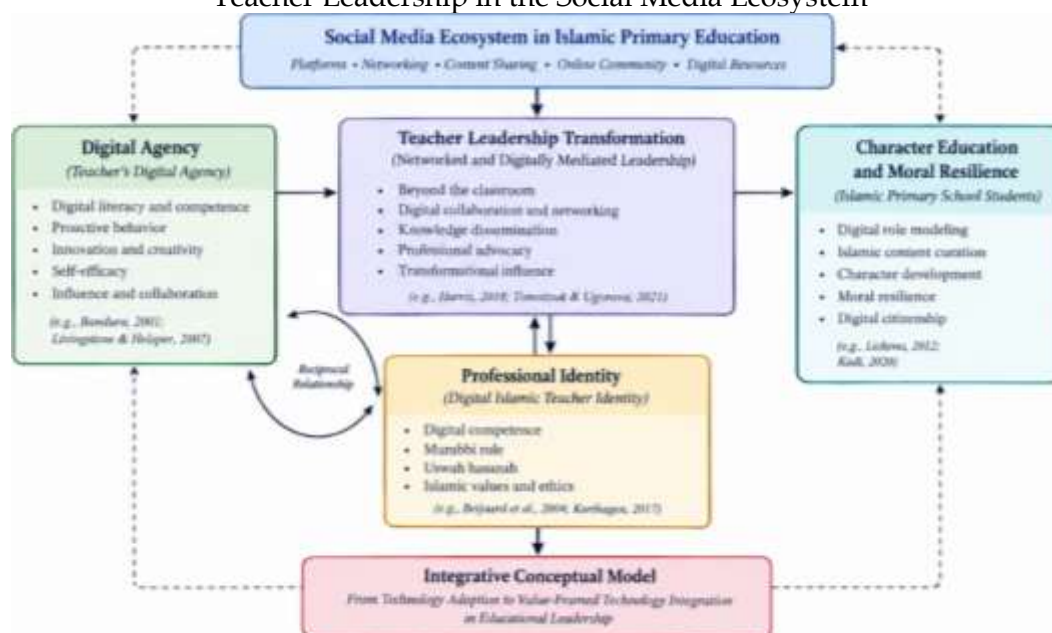
professional identities. Professional identities are no longer formed solely through institutional recognition within the school environment, but rather through ongoing digital interactions within professional networks. Teachers construct a digital teacher-self—a professional self-representation in digital spaces—through the ways they present their competencies, respond to educational discourse, collaborate with colleagues, and gain symbolic recognition from digital communities (Burgett, 2026). This process is dynamic and reflexive: teachers' professional identities are continuously reconstructed through digital feedback, participation in professional discussions, and the visibility they build on social media platforms.

The construction of professional identity in Islamic elementary education acquires a unique additional dimension: the intersection of digital professional identity and Islamic identity as a *murabbi* (leader). Findings indicate that teachers in Islamic madrasas and elementary schools not only construct themselves as digitally competent professionals but also as educators who integrate moral values and good practices into their digital practices (Nasution et al., 2025). This Islamic identity manifests itself in the curation of content nuanced by monotheism, moderation in digital interactions, and a commitment to presenting educational narratives aligned with Islamic values.

(Yampap, 2025).

The interaction between digital agency, professional identity, and leadership practice forms a reciprocal and mutually reinforcing feedback loop. High digital agency enables teachers to express their professional identities more authentically in the digital space. A strong professional identity, in turn, fosters confidence in taking leadership initiatives; and the experience of exercising digital leadership further strengthens agency and sharpens professional identity (Engeness & Gamlem, 2025). This cycle demonstrates that the transformation of teacher leadership in the social media era is not a linear phenomenon, but rather a dynamic process of equilibration between the capacity to act (agency), self-meaning (identity), and the practice of influence (leadership). The conceptual framework of the interaction of these three dimensions is presented visually in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model of the Interaction of Digital Agency, Professional Identity, and Teacher Leadership in the Social Media Ecosystem



While this conceptual cycle offers an optimistic explanation, the literature synthesis also uncovers a series of structural and cultural barriers that can undermine digital agency and distort the construction of teachers' professional identities. Authoritarian school cultures, lack of principal support for teachers' digital initiatives, fear of cyberbullying or cancel culture, and generational gaps in digital literacy among colleagues have proven to be significant inhibiting factors. These barriers not only limit the space for expressing digital agency but also force teachers to engage in self-censorship, ultimately reducing the authenticity of their professional identities in the digital space (Diamantis, 2022). These findings emphasize that teacher leadership transformation cannot be understood separately from the surrounding structural and cultural ecosystems.

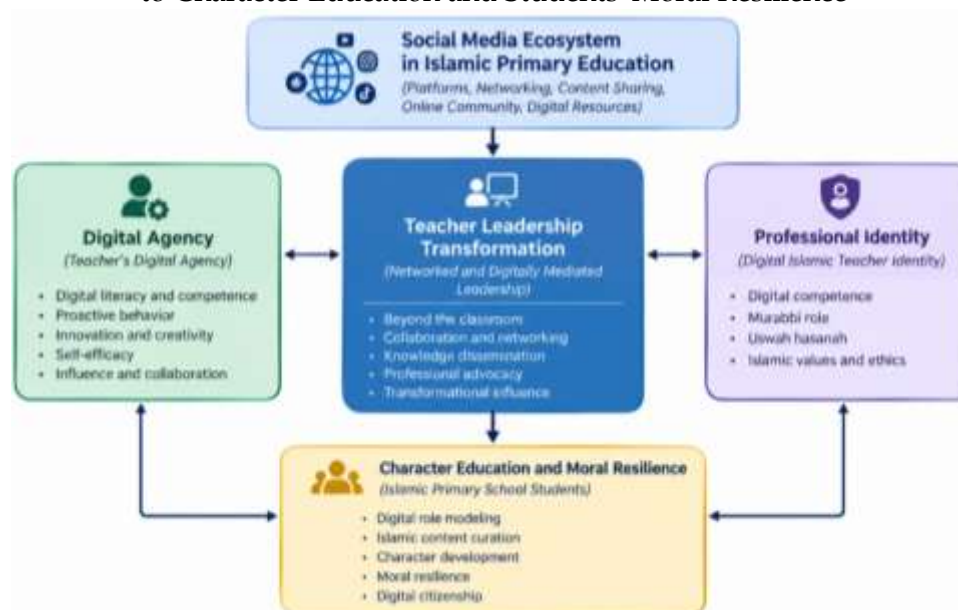
Social-Media-Mediated Teacher Leadership and Character Education

A synthesis of literature findings also shows that the transformation of teacher leadership mediated by social media ultimately flows into the pedagogical ecosystem in the classroom, creating a significant trickle-down effect on students' character education (Nichols, 2022). The digital leadership exercised by teachers—through collaborative networks, sharing good practices, and educational advocacy—indirectly enriches their pedagogical repertoire. Teachers who are active in digital professional communities tend to design character education interventions that are more innovative, contextual, and responsive to the challenges of the times (González-Pérez & Ramírez-Montoya, 2022). The position of social media not only serves as a space for teacher self-development but also fundamentally transforms the quality, depth, and relevance of character education in primary education.

In the context of Islamic primary education, the most substantial dimension of this digital leadership is manifested through the role of teachers as digital moral role models who actualize the concept of *uswah hasanah* (exemplary behavior). Findings reveal that teachers' digital footprints—from how they communicate, share information, to how they respond to public issues—operate as a hidden curriculum implicitly observed by students (Demir & Sad, 2020). For elementary school students beginning to be exposed to the internet, teachers' role models in the digital space serve as their first cognitive and affective foundation for understanding social media ethics. Teacher leadership thus goes beyond verbal classroom instruction; it operates persistently through authentic modeling of how a competent and civilized Muslim educator interacts online.

Furthermore, the literature highlights the role of teacher leadership in curating and mediating character education content nuanced by Islamic values, closely aligned with the developmental psychology of elementary school children. Teachers lead digital literacy initiatives by actively filtering, adapting, and disseminating materials such as digital storytelling nuanced with morals, animated exemplary stories, and engagingly packaged anti-hoax campaigns (Kerimbayeva et al., 2024). These leadership practices ensure that students' digital exposure is not only technically safe but also morally and spiritually enriching. Through this purposeful curation, teachers bridge the gap between traditional *madrasah* values and the realities of the digital ecosystem students face daily.

Figure 2: Conceptual Model of the Contribution of Social Media-Based Teacher Leadership to Character Education and Students' Moral Resilience



The culmination of this mediation of content and role models is the development of strong moral resilience and digital citizenship in students. The synthesis confirms that teacher leadership on social media proactively equips students with "Islamic moral filters" to navigate risky digital spaces (Yaqin, 2025). Teachers lead preventative efforts by teaching ethical commenting (digital akhlaq), introducing the concept of tabayyun (verification) in disseminating information, and intervening early in potential cyberbullying. As a result, students are not only protected from negative exposure but are actively empowered to become critical, reflective, and responsible moral agents in their digital environment.

This leadership transformation extends the character education ecosystem beyond school walls through strategic collaborations with parents and the community. The literature confirms that teachers use social media platforms to lead digital parenting initiatives, such as facilitating Islamic discussion groups for parents, sharing guides on mentoring children on social media, and aligning educational visions between the madrasah and the home (Alshehri, 2026). This collaborative leadership creates a golden triangle—teachers, parents, and the community—that ensures consistent character education across children's diverse environments. This social media-mediated synergy emphasizes that character education in the digital age is not the sole responsibility of teachers, but rather an integrated and mutually reinforcing collective leadership ecosystem.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal three fundamental, interrelated contributions. First, teacher leadership has undergone a structural transformation from classroom-based practices to networked and digitally mediated leadership (Acquaro & Gurr, 2022). This transformation is not simply a shift in medium, but rather an ontological redefinition of where and how pedagogical influence is exercised. Second, digital agency and professional identity operate as reciprocal, mutually reinforcing mechanisms; teachers require not only technical competence but also the intentional capacity to act critically and

reflectively in the digital space (Eteläpelto et al., 2014). Most significantly, the findings identify the emergence of Digital Islamic Teacher Identity as a hybrid identity that integrates digital professionalism with the values of murabbi and uswah hasanah. Third, social media-mediated leadership contributes substantively to character education through two channels: as a hidden curriculum through teachers' digital role models, and through the curation of Islamic-themed content that builds students' moral resilience (Ma'mur et al., 2025). These findings confirm that the impact of teacher leadership in the digital era is not limited to the professional development of teachers themselves, but systematically permeates the ecosystem of student character formation.

Figure 3: Integrative Conceptual Model of Digitally Mediated Teacher Leadership in Islamic Primary Education



The conceptual model proposed in this study provides an integrative framework explaining how teacher leadership transforms within the digital ecosystem of Islamic primary education. This model positions Digital Islamic Teacher Identity not as a peripheral variable, but as a core construct mediating the relationship between digital agency and leadership practices. Unlike conventional models of teacher leadership, which tend to be linear and hierarchical, this model adopts an ecological-dynamic perspective in which the three main dimensions—agency, identity, and leadership—interact reciprocally in a mutually reinforcing cycle. Social media is not positioned simply as a tool, but as a social space with its own logic, norms, and power dynamics that reshape teachers' professional practices. Furthermore, this model integrates Islamic educational values as framing values that permeate all dimensions, not as an additional layer. The theoretical implication of this model is the need for a shift from the technology adoption paradigm to technology integration with value framing in educational leadership studies. This model also offers a mechanistic explanation of how teacher leadership influence can "trickle-down" from digital spaces to classroom practices, and ultimately to student character formation, through digital role models and targeted content curation.

The findings of this study critically dialogue with five previous studies that serve as primary references. First, unlike Theoharis & Scanlan (2025), who mapped teacher leadership within a formal-structural framework within conventional school environments, this study uncovers informal and distributed dimensions that operate beyond institutional boundaries through digital networks. Second, these findings extend the work of Pathiranage & Karunaratne (2023) on teacher agency in technology. While their study focused on agency in response to technology policies (pre- and post-COVID), this study conceptualizes digital agency as a proactive capacity that shapes the leadership

ecosystem itself. Third, this study complements Mercado & Shin's (2025) findings on social media for professional development by demonstrating that social media's function extends beyond professional learning to professional leading—teachers not only learn from networks, but also lead through them. Fourth, unlike studies on digital citizenship that tend to focus on students (e.g., studies on student digital literacy), this study positions teachers as architects of digital citizenship who build students' moral resilience through digital leadership practices. Fifth, the findings on Digital Islamic Teacher Identity provide a unique contribution not accommodated in secular Western teacher leadership literature; this identity integrates spiritual (murabbi), ethical (akhlaq), and pedagogical dimensions into a coherent construct (Succarie, 2024; Chibuko et al., 2025). Thus, this study not only confirms previous findings but also expands, contextualizes, and critiques existing conceptual limitations.

The results obtained in this study have substantive policy implications at the macro (government) and meso (school) levels. At the government level, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Education need to formulate a Digital Teacher Leadership Framework policy that explicitly recognizes and facilitates the informal leadership role of teachers in the digital space. This policy should include: (1) Integration of digital leadership competencies into teacher competency standards, particularly for Islamic elementary school (MI/SD) teachers, with an emphasis on digital agency and Islamic digital ethics; (2) Development of an official platform or curation of a safe platform for teacher professional learning communities integrated with a career development system; (3) Preparation of a digital teacher ethics guideline (Teacher Digital Code of Ethics) that integrates Islamic values and protects teachers from the risk of cyberbullying or horizontal conflict in the digital space; (4) Budget allocation for the Digital Leadership Incubator program that equips teachers with the capacity for content curation, digital storytelling, and online learning community management. At the school level, madrasah principals and supervisors need to adopt policies that support: (1) Formal recognition of teachers' digital leadership contributions in performance assessments and promotions; (2) Creating a school culture that supports digital experimentation and online collaboration between teachers, rather than one that represses digital criticism or innovation; (3) Facilitating a Digital Parenting Partnership program that utilizes social media to build a golden triangle of collaboration (teachers-parents-communities) in character education; (4) Providing digital mentors for senior teachers to reduce the generation gap in digital literacy. Without this structural and cultural policy support, the transformative potential of social media-based teacher leadership will be hampered by counterproductive institutional barriers.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that teacher leadership has fundamentally transformed from classroom-bound practices to networked leadership mediated by the social media ecosystem. This structural transformation is driven by a reciprocal mechanism between digital agency and professional identity, specifically giving rise to a new construct called Digital Islamic Teacher Identity. This hybrid identity uniquely integrates digital competency with the spiritual values of murabbi (leader) and *uswah hasanah* (good example). Furthermore, social media-based leadership contributes substantively to character education through two main channels: modeling digital role models as a hidden curriculum, and curating Islamic-influenced pedagogical content. This synergy not only strengthens the moral resilience and digital citizenship of elementary school students but

also expands the character education ecosystem holistically through strategic collaboration within the golden triangle between teachers, parents, and the community. These findings confirm that social media is not simply a communication tool, but rather a transformative social space that reconfigures teachers' pedagogical and ethical authority in the digital era.

The primary contribution of this study is the proposition of an integrative conceptual model of digitally mediated teacher leadership centered on Digital Islamic Teacher Identity. However, as a library research and conceptual study, this paper has limitations in that it relies on theoretical synthesis and existing literature. The empirical validity and causal effects of the proposed conceptual model in the field require further testing. Further research is recommended using quantitative, mixed-methods, or longitudinal designs to validate the reciprocal mechanisms between digital agency and professional identity. Furthermore, cross-cultural and cross-platform comparative studies would enrich the generalizability of these findings in a broader global educational context, while also examining their long-term impact on student character outcomes.

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