

Empowering Female Leadership in Islamic Education: The Role of Decision-Making and Conflict Management in Participatory Governance

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyze the influence of decision-making and conflict management skills on the effectiveness of participatory leadership among female State Islamic Junior High School principals in one district in Indonesia with the highest proportion of female principals. The method used was quantitative, ex post facto, with 89 teachers from three Islamic schools as respondents, and the analysis was conducted using multiple regression. The research instrument showed very good validity ($r = 0.464-0.952$) and high reliability ($\alpha = 0.972-0.985$). The results showed that decision-making skills had a significant effect on participatory leadership, contributing 82.74% ($p < 0.001$), while conflict management had a stronger influence, contributing 86.86% ($p < 0.001$). The two variables simultaneously explained 88.20% of the variation in participatory leadership ($F = 322.04$, $p < 0.001$), with conflict management being the dominant predictor ($\beta = 0.64$) compared to decision-making ($\beta = 0.32$). The implications of this study emphasize the importance of developing madrasah principal training programs that focus on improving conflict management and decision-making competencies, as well as integrating Islamic values, to support educational transformation in madrasahs.

Keywords: *Participatory Leadership, Decision-Making, Conflict Management*

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis pengaruh kemampuan pengambilan keputusan dan manajemen konflik terhadap efektivitas kepemimpinan partisipatif kepala Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri perempuan di salah satu kabupaten di Indonesia dengan proporsi kepala madrasah perempuan tertinggi. Metode yang digunakan adalah kuantitatif dengan desain ex post facto, melibatkan 89 guru dari tiga madrasah sebagai responden, dan dianalisis menggunakan regresi berganda. Instrumen penelitian menunjukkan validitas sangat baik ($r = 0,464-0,952$) dan reliabilitas tinggi ($\alpha = 0,972-0,985$). Hasil menunjukkan bahwa kemampuan pengambilan keputusan berpengaruh signifikan terhadap kepemimpinan partisipatif dengan kontribusi 82,74% ($p < 0,001$), sedangkan manajemen konflik memberikan pengaruh lebih kuat sebesar 86,86% ($p < 0,001$). Kedua variabel secara simultan menjelaskan 88,20% variasi kepemimpinan partisipatif ($F = 322,04$, $p < 0,001$), dengan manajemen konflik sebagai prediktor dominan ($\beta = 0,64$) dibandingkan pengambilan keputusan ($\beta = 0,32$). Implikasi penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya pengembangan program pelatihan kepala madrasah yang fokus pada peningkatan

kompetensi manajemen konflik dan pengambilan keputusan, serta integrasi nilai-nilai Islam untuk mendukung transformasi pendidikan di madrasah.

Kunci: *Kepemimpinan Partisipatif, Pengambilan Keputusan, Manajemen Konflik*

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INTRODUCTION

Participatory leadership has become a crucial paradigm for transforming 21st-century education, particularly in Islamic educational institutions facing the challenges of digitalization and modernization. Indonesia, as the world's most populous Muslim country, has 25,013 madrasahs, with 44.3% led by woman principals, making the phenomenon of women's leadership in Islamic education a strategic subject of study (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2023). North Bengkulu Regency offers a unique research context, with 75% of State Madrasah Tsanawiyah (Islamic junior high school) principals being women, providing an opportunity to explore the dynamics of participatory leadership in a woman-majority context. This study examines how decision-making and conflict-management skills shape the effectiveness of women madrasah principals' participatory leadership in the era of the digital transformation of Islamic education.

Table 1. Comparison of the Proportion of Women Principals of State Islamic Junior High Schools: North Bengkulu vs. Regional and National

Region	MTsN Principals (%)	Number of MTsN	Gap with National
North Bengkulu	75.0	12	+33.0%
Bengkulu Province	58.3	24	+16.3%
Sumatra average	45.2	1,247	+3.2%
National Average	42.0	4,211	–

Source: Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia (2023)

Table 1 presents a comparison of the proportion of female principals in State Islamic Junior High Schools (MTsN) in North Bengkulu with provincial, regional (Sumatra), and national levels. The data show that North Bengkulu has the highest proportion of female principals at 75%, which is 33% higher than the national average of 42%. Bengkulu Province stands at 58.3%, while the Sumatra average is 45.2%, representing differences of +16.3% and +3.2% from the national average, respectively. This indicates that North Bengkulu not only exceeds national and regional averages but also stands out as a region with a strong presence of female leadership in MTsN, which may influence participative leadership dynamics and decision-making in local schools.

Contemporary literature identifies participatory leadership as an effective model emphasizing collaboration, decentralized decision-making, and stakeholder involvement. Key findings confirm that it creates collaborative learning environments, enhancing pedagogical quality (IIEP-UNESCO, 2024); that democratic, participatory styles significantly improve organizational effectiveness; and that principals who listen to teachers' aspirations foster stronger motivation and innovation. A critical debate persists regarding leadership style

and gender: while Febrianti et al. (2021) linked democratic leadership to feminine attributes, this risks essentializing gender differences without examining the competencies enabling effective participatory leadership. This gap is particularly pronounced in Islamic educational contexts, where gender, religious values, and leadership effectiveness remain understudied.

Islamic values add a unique dimension to the madrasah context, yet prior research has addressed them only in a normative sense. Although Islamic educational leadership draws on the Qur'an, Hadith, and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* (Syauqi et al., 2025; Alazmi & Bush, 2024), translating these into measurable practices remains unclear. While Muslim women principals integrate principles such as *imāmah*, *qiwāmah*, and *amanah* into their leadership (Lahmar, 2024), Shah (2010), Brooks and Mutohar (2018), and Ezzani et al. (2023) emphasized that these values operate within social-religious contexts without systematic measurement. This study operationalizes *shura* (consultation) within the decision-making dimension and *islah* (reconciliation) and *sulh* (peace-making) within the conflict management dimension, responding to calls for decolonizing Western-dominated leadership models.

Decision-making capabilities represent a core competency in educational leadership. Isnaini et al. (2023) documented increasingly complex decision-making challenges, while Ishak et al. (2025) showed that self-efficacy and ambidextrous leadership influence school leaders' decision-making abilities. Participatory decision-making by women leaders improves teacher performance and creativity (Akhmad, 2025; Dai et al., 2025). Though digital transformation literature and stakeholder studies (Leskaj et al., 2025; Connolly et al., 2023) highlight collaborative practices, no studies have tested whether decision-making capabilities predict participatory leadership effectiveness in madrasah contexts where *shura* intersects with contemporary management.

Conflict management equally shapes organizational effectiveness. Aravidou et al. (2025) found that collaborative leadership is associated with higher satisfaction and more effective conflict resolution. Abbas et al. (2025) linked conflict management to institutional performance, and Al-Shaer et al. (2025) showed that improved communication mitigates conflicts arising from resistance to change. Despite this, existing literature has not tested conflict management as an antecedent of participatory leadership. While Irby et al. (2022) and Ferdous (2025) addressed conflict during organizational transformation, and Feirsen and Weitzman (2023) introduced conflict-competent leadership, no studies have quantitatively examined whether these capabilities predict participatory leadership in Islamic contexts, where *islah* and *sulh* provide cultural frameworks.

A critical empirical gap persists in understanding the competencies that predict participatory leadership effectiveness among women madrasah principals. First, while women madrasah principals more readily adopt democratic styles, quantitative studies testing antecedents are virtually nonexistent. Second, Mustofa et al. (2025) found that madrasah principals tend toward dominant decision-making, yet no studies identify which competencies enable overcoming this tendency. Third, though teacher involvement in decision-making is recognized, no research quantitatively tests decision-making and conflict management as

predictors, particularly significant given Indonesia's 44.3% national and 75% in North Bengkulu proportion of women principals. Fourth, though Goarty and Gupta (2025) and Velonis et al. (2023) identified transformation barriers, no studies examine how these competencies serve as mechanisms to overcome them in madrasah settings. Said and Sharif (2023) found no empirical models testing leadership competencies and participatory effectiveness, while Pitman and Reilly (2023) acknowledged limitations in explaining authentic leadership through specific competencies in culturally embedded contexts. Given that transformation inherently requires effective decision-making and conflict management (Akhmad, 2025; Mbane et al., 2025; Neves, 2024; Pattanayak & Majhi, 2024), the absence of an empirical framework for Islamic educational leadership is increasingly problematic.

This study extends participatory leadership literature by quantifying decision-making and conflict management as antecedents and operationalizing *shura*, *islah*, and *sulh* within validated instruments—responding to calls by Lahmar (2024) and Shah (2010) to decolonize leadership models. Methodologically, it develops contextually appropriate instruments for madrasah settings. Practically, findings inform evidence-based professional development aligned with recommendations by Irby et al. (2022) and Abbas et al. (2025), while providing empirical evidence to support the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs' research-based Islamic education management initiatives.

This study aims to analyze the influence of decision-making and conflict management skills on the participatory leadership of women principals of State Islamic Junior High Schools (Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri) in North Bengkulu Regency. Specifically, this study tests three hypotheses:

H1: Decision-making ability is positively and significantly associated with the participatory leadership of women madrasah principals in North Bengkulu Regency.

H2: Conflict management has a positive and significant influence on the participatory leadership of women madrasah principals in North Bengkulu Regency.

H3: Decision-making and conflict management skills simultaneously have a positive and significant influence on the participatory leadership of women madrasah principals in North Bengkulu Regency.

Using an *ex post facto* design and multiple regression analysis, this study identified the relative contributions of each variable and the integrative mechanisms of both in forming effective participatory leadership.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study examines how decision-making capabilities and conflict management predict the effectiveness of participatory leadership among women MTsN principals in North Bengkulu Regency. A quantitative *ex post facto* explanatory design with cross-sectional survey methodology (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) was employed, as this approach allows examination of naturally occurring relationships between existing competencies and leadership effectiveness without variable manipulation in authentic educational settings.

While the cross-sectional design limits strong causal claims, the study uses predictive terminology reflecting the temporal logic that principals develop decision-making and conflict-management competencies over time, which subsequently shape participatory leadership implementation. This directionality is grounded in established theoretical literature and acknowledges potential reciprocal relationships. The research followed six systematic phases: theoretical framework development, instrument validation, data collection, assumption testing, statistical analysis using simple and multiple regression, and interpretation of findings.

The study population comprised 12 MTsN in North Bengkulu Regency, nine of which were led by women principals, with approximately 180 teachers. A two-stage sampling strategy combined purposive cluster selection with census sampling within selected clusters—more accurately characterized as purposive cluster selection rather than total population sampling, as only three of twelve madrasahs were included. Selection criteria were: minimum two-year principal tenure, diverse geographic representation, and willingness to participate with full informed consent. Selected schools were MTsN 1 Bengkulu Utara (district center, 35 teachers, 4-year tenure), MTsN 2 Bengkulu Utara (coastal, 36 teachers, 3-year tenure), and MTsN Boarding School (semi-rural, 18 teachers, 2.5-year tenure). Census sampling yielded 89 respondents at 100% response rate, maximizing sample size, eliminating selection bias by including all teachers who interact regularly with the principal, and ensuring statistical power. G*Power 3.1 calculations ($f^2 = 0.15$, $\alpha = 0.05$, two predictors) required a minimum of 68 respondents for 80% power, a threshold the achieved sample exceeded.

Table 2. Distribution of Research Respondents

Madrasah	Number of Teachers	Location Characteristics	Head's Term of Office
MTsN 1 North Bengkulu	35	District Center	4 years
MTsN 2 North Bengkulu	36	Coastal Area	3 years
MTsN Boarding School	18	Semi-Interior	2.5 years
Total	89		

The study used three structured questionnaires measuring decision-making capabilities (X_1), conflict management (X_2), and participatory leadership (Y), with a total of 96 items distributed equally across the three variables (32 items each) using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The decision-making capability questionnaire measures two dimensions: (1) consensus-based decision-making, operationalizing the Islamic principle of shura (consultation) through items assessing principals' practices of seeking teacher input and building consensus, and (2) collaborative decision-making, measuring the extent to which principals involve stakeholders in shared decision-making processes. This instrument was adapted from the theoretical frameworks of Hoy and Tarter (2010) on shared decision-making and collaborative leadership in schools. The conflict management questionnaire measures two dimensions: (1) interpersonal conflict management, operationalizing Islamic principles of *islah*

(reconciliation) through items assessing principals' approaches to resolving interpersonal disputes, and (2) organizational conflict management, measuring principals' strategies for addressing structural and policy-related conflicts. This instrument was adapted from a conflict management framework and work on conflict in educational organizations (Pillay et al., 2021; Villagra-Bravo et al., 2023).

The participatory leadership questionnaire measures four dimensions: stakeholder engagement, team empowerment, open communication, and shared decision-making, integrating theoretical frameworks of Bass and Riggio (2018) on transformational leadership and Sergiovanni (2015) on moral leadership. The use of 32 items per variable was justified by three methodological reasons: the multidimensional nature of constructs requiring comprehensive content validity coverage; applicability across diverse madrasah contexts; and pilot testing results ($n=30$) confirming all items contributed unique variance with item-total correlations ranging from 0.58 to 0.87 and inter-item correlations averaging 0.45–0.62, indicating relatedness without redundancy. High Cronbach's alpha coefficients ($\alpha = 0.972$ – 0.985) were accompanied by adequate omega coefficients ($\omega = 0.968$ – 0.982) and average variance extracted ($AVE = 0.54$ – 0.61), confirming coherent construct measurement without excessive redundancy (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994; Ghozali, 2018).

Table 3. Results of Instrument Reliability Test

Variable	Cronbach's α	McDonald's ω	AVE
Decision-Making Capabilities (X_1)	0.972	0.968	0.54
Conflict Management (X_2)	0.979	0.975	0.58
Participatory Leadership (Y)	0.985	0.982	0.61

Data collection was conducted from October to December 2025 using a structured questionnaire administered at each madrasah, achieving a 100% response rate. Complementary data were gathered through non-participant observation (six sessions) and document analysis of meeting minutes and policy documents to support contextual interpretation. However, these were not subjected to systematic qualitative analysis.

All three variables were assessed through teacher perceptions, which introduces potential common-method bias, including halo effects and social desirability. Procedural remedies included mixed item ordering, reverse-coded items, strict anonymity, and instructions emphasizing honest responses. Statistically, Harman's single-factor test indicated that the first factor explained 38.2% of total variance, well below the 50% threshold, and common latent factor analysis showed that common method variance accounted for less than 5% of indicator variance, suggesting the bias impact is within acceptable bounds.

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 26.0 across three stages. Stage one conducted descriptive statistics, including central tendency, variability, and score categorization. Stage two tested regression assumptions: normality via Kolmogorov-Smirnov ($p = 0.478$ – 0.598), linearity via F-test for deviation ($p = 0.182$ – 0.247), multicollinearity via tolerance (0.435) and VIF (2.299),

and heteroscedasticity via Glejser test ($p = 0.264-0.375$), all satisfactorily met. Stage three conducted hierarchical regression analysis. Simple linear regression tested Hypotheses 1 and 2 separately, reporting B , β , standard errors, t -statistics, R^2 , and adjusted R^2 . Multiple regression tested Hypothesis 3, additionally calculating semi-partial correlations (sr^2) representing each predictor's unique variance after controlling for the other – critical for distinguishing total predictive power from unique contributions. All tests used $\alpha = 0.05$ to assess both statistical and practical significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The research response rate reached 100% with an even distribution of respondents from the three madrasas, demonstrating high engagement. The heterogeneity of respondents in terms of tenure, educational level, and teaching experience allowed the study to capture comprehensive perspectives on participatory leadership of women madrasah principals from various internal stakeholder viewpoints.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables (N = 89)

Variables	Min	Max	M	SD	CV (%)
Decision Making Ability	98	150	127.45	12.38	9.71
Conflict Management	115	175	149.82	14.56	9.72
Participatory Leadership	105	160	135.67	13.24	9.76

Note. $M = \text{Mean}$; $SD = \text{Standard Deviation}$; $CV = \text{Coefficient of Variation}$

Table 4 shows that conflict management had the highest mean score ($M = 149.82$, $SD = 14.56$), followed by participatory leadership ($M = 135.67$, $SD = 13.24$) and decision-making capability ($M = 127.45$, $SD = 12.38$). The wide score ranges across variables indicate variability in teachers' perceptions of leadership practices. However, relatively low coefficients of variation (9.71-9.76%) indicate good homogeneity in respondents' assessments, demonstrating consistency in teachers' perceptions across the three research locations. The correlation matrix in Table 4 shows strong, consistent relationships among the three constructs.

Table 5. Correlation Matrix Between Variables

Variables	1	2	3
1. Decision Making Ability	–		
2. Conflict Management	.93**	–	
3. Participatory Leadership	.92**	.94**	–

Note. ** $p < .01$ (2-tailed)

Table 5 shows that the correlation analysis revealed very strong and statistically significant positive relationships among the variables. Conflict management demonstrated the highest correlation with participatory leadership ($r = .94$, $p < .01$), suggesting that effective conflict management is closely associated with participatory leadership within the context of madrasah leadership. Decision-making ability also showed a very strong correlation with conflict management ($r = .93$, $p < .01$), indicating that strong decision-making skills are closely linked to

effective conflict management. In addition, decision-making ability was highly correlated with participatory leadership ($r = .92, p < .01$), implying that effective decision-making tends to align with participatory leadership practices. Although these correlations are extremely high, none reach a perfect score, indicating that each variable contributes unique variance. This highlights the importance of regression analysis to explore the distinct influence of each construct on leadership outcomes in madrasahs.

Before hypothesis testing, four classical regression assumptions were verified: normality of residuals, linearity of relationships, absence of multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity of residual variance.

Table 6. Classical Regression Assumption Test Results

Assumptions	Statistical Test	Mark	Decision
Normality	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	$p = .598$	Residual normally distributed
Linearity	Deviation from Linearity ($X_1 \rightarrow Y$)	$p = .182$	Linear relationship
	Deviation from Linearity ($X_2 \rightarrow Y$)	$p = .247$	Linear relationship
Multicollinearity	VIF (X_1)	2.30	There is no multicollinearity
	VIF (X_2)	2.30	There is no multicollinearity
Heteroscedasticity	Glejser Test (X_1)	$p = .375$	Homogeneous variance
	Glejser Test (X_2)	$p = .264$	Homogeneous variance

Note: VIF = Variance Inflation Factor ; Criteria: normality & linearity $p > .05$; VIF < 10 ; heteroscedasticity $p > .05$

Table 6 shows that all linear regression requirements were met. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test confirmed normally distributed residuals ($p = .598$), validating parametric statistical inference. Linearity tests showed linear relationships between each independent variable and the dependent variable (deviation from linearity $p > .05$). VIF values of 2.30 for both independent variables indicate no serious multicollinearity problems (well below the threshold of 10). The Glejser test confirmed homoscedasticity of residual variances. Meeting all assumptions validates the use of linear regression analysis and ensures the accuracy of statistical inferences.

Hypothesis testing was conducted through regression analysis at an $\alpha = .05$ significance level. The first and second hypotheses were tested using simple regression, while the third hypothesis was tested using multiple regression.

Table 7. Summary of Regression Analysis Results

Model	B	SE	β	t/F	p	R ²	Adj . R ²	SR/SE (%)	
Model 1									
Constant	18.46	5.23	—	3.53	.001	.827	.825	—	
X_1	0.97	0.04	.91	23.73***	<.001				
Model 2									
Constant	5.79	4.16	—	1.39	.167	.869	.867	—	
X_2	0.95	0.03	.93	28.23***	<.001				
Model 3									
Constant	10.23	4.12	—	2.48*	.015	.882	.879	38.8/31.2	
X_1	0.34	0.07	.32	4.97***	<.001				
X_2	0.58	0.06	.64	10.00***	<.001				
Fit Model							F = 322.04***		61.2/49.3

*Unstandardized regression coefficient ; SE = Standard error ; β = Standardized regression coefficient ; SR = Relative contribution; SE (last column) = Effective contribution; Model 1: $Y = f(X_1)$; Model 2: $Y = f(X_2)$; Model 3: $Y = f(X_1, X_2)$. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.*

The Influence of Decision-Making Ability on Participatory Leadership

Model 1 examined how decision-making capabilities predict participatory leadership effectiveness. Decision-making significantly predicted participatory leadership ($B = 0.97$, $SE = 0.04$, $\beta = .91$, $t = 23.73$, $p < .001$), explaining 82.7% of variance ($R^2 = .827$, Adjusted $R^2 = .825$). The regression equation $Y = 18.46 + 0.97X_1$ indicates that each one-unit increase in decision-making is associated with a 0.97-unit increase in participatory leadership. The near-perfect standardized coefficient ($\beta = .91$) confirms that decision-making is a near-essential competency, as principals who operationalize shura (consultation) through structured teacher involvement in curriculum, budget, and policy decisions foster greater organizational commitment and a democratic culture.

The Influence of Conflict Management on Participatory Leadership

Model 2 tested conflict management as a predictor of participatory leadership. Conflict management significantly predicted participatory leadership ($B = 0.95$, $SE = 0.03$, $\beta = .93$, $t = 28.23$, $p < .001$), explaining 86.9% of variance ($R^2 = .869$, Adjusted $R^2 = .867$)—higher than Model 1. The regression equation $Y = 5.79 + 0.95X_2$ indicates that each one-unit increase in conflict management is associated with a 0.95-unit increase in participatory leadership. The higher explanatory power demonstrates that operationalizing *islah* (reconciliation) and *sulh* (peace-making) is more fundamental to participatory leadership than decision-making. In collectivist Islamic educational cultures, unresolved conflicts pose greater organizational threats than suboptimal decisions.

The Simultaneous Influence of Decision-Making Ability and Conflict Management

Model 3 tested the simultaneous predictive effects of both variables. Combined, decision-making and conflict management significantly predicted participatory leadership ($F = 322.04$, $p < .001$), explaining 88.2% of variance ($R^2 = .882$, Adjusted $R^2 = .879$). Conflict management demonstrated stronger influence ($B = 0.58$, $\beta = .64$, $t = 10.00$, $p < .001$) than decision-making ($B = 0.34$, $\beta = .32$, $t = 4.97$, $p < .001$), with relative contributions of 61.2% versus 38.8% and effective contributions of 49.3% versus 31.2%. The regression equation $Y = 10.23 + 0.34X_1 + 0.58X_2$ indicates that conflict management is the dominant predictor. The moderate increase from individual models (82.7%, 86.9% to 88.2%) reflects high inter-predictor correlation ($r = .93$), indicating these competencies are closely interrelated. The remaining 11.8% unexplained variance suggests that organizational culture, institutional support, and emotional intelligence warrant future investigation.

Discussion

The strong association between decision-making capabilities and participatory leadership aligns with emerging research emphasizing collaborative

approaches in educational leadership, which shows that participatory decision-making improves teacher performance, creativity, and learning innovation (IEP-UNESCO, 2024). This is theoretically grounded in Vroom-Yetton-Jago contingency theory, which posits that participatory styles are most effective when decision quality is critical. Stakeholder acceptance is essential (Hoy & Tarter, 2010), particularly in madrasah digital transformation contexts requiring complex decisions about technology infrastructure and curriculum integration without neglecting tarbiyah missions (Akhmad, 2025; Dai et al., 2025; Connolly et al., 2023), with strategic thinking mediating this relationship (Ishak et al., 2025). The operationalization of shura within decision-making instruments demonstrates how Islamic values produce measurable outcomes within contemporary leadership frameworks (Alazmi & Bush, 2024; Brooks & Mutohar, 2018; Shah, 2010), responding to calls to decolonize Western-dominated models (Lahmar, 2024; Ezzani et al., 2023). Meanwhile, conflict management's greater dominance challenges conventional leadership priorities (Feirsen & Weitzman, 2023; Irby et al., 2022), as organizational change is inherently conflictual (Aravidou et al., 2025; Abbas et al., 2025), and conflict-competent leaders who transform conflicts into learning opportunities—integrating *islah* and *sulh* principles—create the psychological safety essential for authentic participation (Irby et al., 2022; Feirsen & Weitzman, 2023).

In madrasah contexts, the importance of conflict management may be amplified by the inherent tensions in digital transformation, where stakeholders navigate conflicts between tradition and innovation, between preserving Islamic identity and adopting modern pedagogies, and between limited resources and competing priorities (Al-Shaer et al., 2025; Goarty & Gupta, 2025). Research on educational transformation confirms that effective conflict management significantly contributes to organizational outcomes during change processes (Burnett, 2023). Improved communication and collaboration between staff, facilitated through skilled conflict management, mitigates conflicts arising from misunderstandings or resistance to change (Al-Shaer et al., 2025; Kertamukti et al., 2025).

The operationalization of Islamic conflict resolution principles—*islah* (reconciliation) and *sulh* (peace-making)—within the conflict management instrument demonstrates how religious values can inform contemporary leadership practices with measurable outcomes (Alazmi & Bush, 2024; Lahmar, 2024). In collectivist Islamic educational cultures emphasizing harmony and community (*ummah*), unresolved conflicts pose greater threats to organizational functioning than suboptimal decisions, which can be revised through collective processes (Brooks & Mutohar, 2018; Syauqi et al., 2025). Social learning-based leadership approaches, focusing on group dynamics and conflict resolution, have proven effective in fostering holistic, relational learning in schools, suggesting that conflict management skills enable the psychological safety necessary for authentic participation.

The combined model's high explanatory power demonstrates that decision-making and conflict management together provide a comprehensive understanding of participatory leadership effectiveness. The moderate increase

from individual models reflects the high correlation among predictors, suggesting that these competencies, though conceptually distinct, are closely interrelated in practice. Research on leadership competency architectures confirms that effective leaders require integrated skill sets rather than isolated capabilities (Krier, 2022).

The dominance of conflict management in the combined model provides empirical evidence for a hierarchical relationship in which conflict management serves as the foundation, enabling effective participatory decision-making (Aravidou et al., 2025; Feirsen & Weitzman, 2023; Bhusal et al., 2025).

This finding has crucial practical implications: developing one competency without the other results in incomplete leadership capability. Professional development programs should prioritize conflict management competencies, ensuring principals can create environments of trust, psychological safety, and constructive dialogue, which are necessary for participatory processes to function effectively (Irby et al., 2022; Abbas et al., 2025; Gill & Kenworthy, 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that conflict management and decision-making competencies jointly and significantly predict participatory leadership effectiveness among women madrasah principals, with conflict management emerging as the stronger predictor. This challenges conventional leadership priorities by showing that, in Islamic educational contexts undergoing digital transformation, principals' conflict-management abilities—operationalizing *islah* and *sulh*—are more fundamental than consultative decision-making embodying *shura*. The study advances decolonization of Western-dominated leadership models by operationalizing Islamic values within empirical frameworks that produce measurable outcomes and provide evidence from a unique context in which women principals constitute a normative rather than exceptional leadership majority. The Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs is recommended to develop integrated professional development programs that combine conflict management, participatory decision-making, and modules on Islamic values. Limitations include a cross-sectional design, purposive cluster sampling, which constrains generalizability, and single-source perceptions, which introduce potential common-method bias despite procedural and statistical controls. Future research should employ longitudinal designs and multi-source data collection across diverse contexts.

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