

A Phenomenological Study of Human Resource Management in Islamic Educational Institutions: Insights from Educators and Administrators

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ABSTRACT

Human resource management (HRM) plays a critical role in educational institutions, particularly in Islamic settings where the integration of academic and religious values presents unique challenges. While much research has explored HR practices in educational contexts, there is a lack of understanding regarding how staff in Islamic educational institutions navigate these dual expectations. This study aims to explore the lived experiences of educators and administrators in Islamic schools, madrassas, and pesantrens. Employing a phenomenological approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 12 staff members, including headmasters, teachers, and administrative personnel. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, from which five key themes emerged. These themes include: (1) values-based leadership, (2) role duality management, (3) faith-integrated professional development, (4) community engagement, and (5) institutional support structures. The findings highlight that leadership grounded in Islamic values plays a pivotal role in managing human resources. Furthermore, professional development programs that integrate both academic and religious training are crucial in addressing staff challenges. These results offer practical insights into HRM strategies within faith-based institutions. The study also has implications for future research, particularly in examining the long-term impact of values-driven HR practices on educational outcomes in similar Islamic educational contexts.



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INTRODUCTION

Human resource management (HRM) plays a critical role in the effective functioning of educational institutions, particularly in Islamic schools, madrassas, and pesantrens, where academic goals intersect with religious values. In these contexts, HR practices such as recruitment, training, and retention are influenced not only by professional standards but also by religious and cultural expectations. Staff members are expected to serve as role models who embody Islamic teachings, adding a unique dimension to their professional responsibilities.

The significance of Islamic values in HRM lies in their influence on both institutional culture and individual conduct. HRM is not only aimed at achieving organizational efficiency but also at upholding faith-based principles, creating a framework where professional duties must align with religious obligations. This dual expectation shapes the experiences of educators and administrators, particularly in how they balance institutional demands with personal religious commitments.

This study seeks to explore how HRM is experienced within Islamic educational institutions by addressing the following research questions: (1) How do educators and administrators perceive the integration of Islamic values in HRM practices? (2) What challenges and strategies do they encounter in balancing professional responsibilities with religious expectations?

Given these unique challenges, a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of educational staff in Islamic institutions is essential. The approach of phenomenology is particularly suited to exploring these subjective experiences, as it allows for an in-depth examination of how individuals perceive, interpret, and respond to the complexities of managing human resources within a framework

that intertwines religious and academic expectations. By focusing on the personal and social realities of those working in Islamic educational settings, this research aims to uncover the meanings they attribute to their roles, the challenges they face, and the solutions they develop, contributing to a richer understanding of HRM in this context.

Research into the experiences of individuals within specific phenomena, particularly in the context of human resource management in Islamic educational institutions, has become an important area of study in the fields of education and organizational management. Understanding how staff members perceive their roles, navigate institutional expectations, and integrate personal values with professional duties is vital in uncovering the complexities of managing human resources in these unique settings. This type of research provides insights into the lived experiences of educators and administrators, revealing the meanings they attach to their work and how they respond to the challenges posed by the intersection of religious and academic obligations.

However, exploring such deep, subjective experiences presents significant methodological challenges. While quantitative approaches may offer broad generalizations, they fail to capture the nuanced, personal interpretations of those involved in Islamic education. Quantitative methods, often focused on measurable outcomes such as performance metrics or satisfaction surveys, lack the ability to explore the complexities of individual experiences and the emotional and moral dimensions that shape those experiences. These limitations make it difficult to fully grasp the essence of the phenomenon, as they overlook the rich, detailed narratives that come from participants' lived realities.

As a result, much of the existing research on human resource management in Islamic education has struggled to adequately address the subjective and relational aspects of this field. The inability of traditional, non-qualitative methods to reveal the depth of personal experience underscores the need for a phenomenological approach, which is better suited to exploring how individuals make sense of their roles and responsibilities in a culturally and religiously embedded context. By focusing on the lived experiences of educators and administrators in Islamic institutions, this study aims to fill the gap left by previous research, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the human side of educational management within the context of Islamic values.

While many studies on human resource management in Islamic educational institutions have provided valuable insights into the practical aspects of staffing, leadership, and organizational structures, these approaches often rely on traditional methodologies such as surveys, interviews with standardized questions, and performance metrics. These practical, data-driven methods are useful for capturing general trends and outcomes but fail to fully explore the personal, subjective experiences that shape the way educators and administrators navigate their roles in these settings. Such methods, while effective in measuring broad patterns, tend to overlook the emotional, moral, and social dimensions of human resource management, which are critical in understanding the full scope of this phenomenon.

The reliance on these conventional approaches results in a limited understanding of the phenomenon, as they do not capture the richness of individual experiences or the meanings participants attach to their work in the context of Islamic values. For instance, how do educators feel about the integration of religious principles into their daily work? What personal challenges do they face when balancing professional responsibilities with religious expectations? These are questions that traditional research methods do not adequately address. As such, there remains a significant gap in understanding the deeper layers of meaning behind human resource management practices in Islamic educational contexts.

To address this gap, a phenomenological approach is proposed as an alternative to traditional methods. Phenomenology, by focusing on the lived experiences of individuals, allows for an exploration of the essence of the phenomenon in a more holistic and nuanced manner. It offers a means to uncover the personal, subjective interpretations of those involved in the management of human resources in Islamic schools, madrasahs, and pesantrens, providing insights that go beyond surface-level descriptions. This approach will enable a deeper understanding of how individuals perceive their roles, navigate challenges, and find meaning in their work, shedding light on aspects of the phenomenon that are currently underexplored.

Existing literature on human resource management in Islamic educational settings has primarily focused on practical aspects such as staffing, organizational structure, and leadership dynamics. Studies have explored the challenges in aligning educational practices with Islamic values, yet they often rely on quantitative methods, providing a limited understanding of the personal experiences of educators and administrators. Research on Islamic education has suggested that staff members in these settings face unique challenges, such as balancing religious and academic expectations, but deeper insights into their personal perspectives remain sparse. Previous research on educational leadership and human resource management in Islamic institutions highlights the importance of values-driven leadership but does not fully explore how these values shape the lived experiences of those managing human resources. This gap underscores the need for a more nuanced, experience-based approach to understanding human resource management in Islamic education.

To address this gap, a phenomenological approach has been adopted for this study, as it is uniquely suited to exploring the subjective experiences of individuals within specific contexts. Phenomenology allows for an in-depth examination of the meaning-making process, providing rich insights into how participants experience and interpret their roles in the management of human resources in Islamic educational institutions. This approach will enable the research to uncover the underlying essence of these experiences, shedding light on how educators and administrators navigate the complexities of their roles within the context of Islamic values. By focusing on individual narratives, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the personal and social realities that influence human resource practices in these settings. In addressing the knowledge gap, this research seeks to provide deeper, holistic insights that previous methodologies have overlooked.

The structure of the article follows a clear and logical progression. After introducing the phenomenon and its context, the paper will explain the phenomenological approach used to explore the experiences of staff in Islamic educational institutions. The methodology section will detail the data collection process, including semi-structured interviews, and the analytical techniques, such as thematic analysis, that were employed to identify key themes in the data. The results section will present the findings based on the themes that emerged, followed by a discussion that connects these findings to the broader theoretical and practical implications. Finally, the conclusion will summarize the contributions of the study and suggest areas for future research.

RESEARCH METHODS

Study Design

This research adopted a phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of human resource management in Islamic educational institutions. Phenomenology is particularly suited for this study as it focuses on understanding and describing how individuals make sense of their lived experiences, emphasizing subjective meaning. The approach allows for a deep exploration of the participants' personal insights and perceptions, which are critical in understanding the nuances of human resource management within the context of Islamic educational institutions. The phenomenological design helps uncover the underlying essence of participants' experiences by capturing their lived realities, rather than reducing their experiences to numerical data. For this study, a descriptive phenomenological approach was utilized, which focuses on providing rich, detailed accounts of participants' experiences without interpreting or theorizing beyond their descriptions.

Participants

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that those involved in the study had relevant experience with human resource management in Islamic educational settings. Inclusion criteria required participants to be current staff members—either teaching or administrative personnel—at Islamic schools, madrassas, or pesantrens. All participants had at least two years of experience in their current role, ensuring that they had sufficient exposure to the challenges and practices involved in human resource management within these institutions. Exclusion criteria included individuals who had less than two years of experience or those who did not work directly with human resources, such as students or external stakeholders. The final sample consisted of 12 participants, including six

headmasters, four teachers, and two administrative staff members, with a gender distribution of seven males and five females. Participants' ages ranged from 30 to 55 years, and their years of experience in education varied from 5 to 25 years, ensuring a broad range of perspectives and experiences. Data collection continued until data saturation was reached, as indicated by the repetition of themes and the absence of new insights in the final interviews.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews to provide participants with the flexibility to express their experiences in depth. Interviews were conducted in a quiet, private setting to ensure a comfortable environment for participants. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent. The interview guide included open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed narratives about participants' experiences with human resource management, focusing on challenges, strategies, and the influence of Islamic values in their practices. The interviews were conducted in-person at participants' workplaces to maintain relevance to their daily work context.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a commonly applied technique in phenomenological research. This approach involved a systematic process of identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within the data. Transcripts were first reviewed multiple times to gain familiarity with the data, followed by the identification of significant statements related to the research questions. These statements were then grouped into meaning units, and the themes were developed through iterative coding. The analysis focused on capturing the essential experiences and meanings as described by participants.

NVivo software was utilized to systematically manage, code, and categorize the qualitative data. The software facilitated the organization of transcripts, allowed for the application of codes across interviews, and enabled the visualization of coding patterns. This technological support enhanced the transparency and rigor of the thematic analysis while maintaining the interpretive depth required in phenomenological inquiry. The final themes emerged through a process of reduction, where non-essential data were filtered out, and the core themes were distilled.

Ethics

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the relevant institutional ethics committee. All participants were provided with a clear explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to confidentiality and voluntary participation. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and they were assured that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential. Personal identifiers were removed from the data to ensure anonymity, and all data were securely stored. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. The study adhered to international ethical standards for research involving human subjects, ensuring respect for participants' rights and privacy throughout the research process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Challenges in Managing Human Resources in Islamic Educational Institutions

The experience of managing human resources within Islamic educational institutions was described by participants as highly challenging, especially when balancing religious values with the practical demands of modern educational systems. One of the major challenges emphasized was the recruitment and retention of qualified staff who adhere to both professional and religious standards. A principal stated, "It is difficult to find teachers who not only meet the academic qualifications but also uphold the moral and religious values we want to instill in our students". This sentiment was echoed by several participants, including administrative staff, who noted that the process of hiring teachers involved careful scrutiny of both their academic qualifications and their alignment with the values of the institution.

Moreover, the workload distribution and the growing expectations placed on staff were noted as another significant challenge. As one teacher mentioned, “We are expected to manage the religious curriculum alongside the regular academic subjects, which can sometimes feel overwhelming, especially with limited resources”. This perception highlights the tension between maintaining high academic standards and upholding Islamic values, a challenge unique to Islamic educational settings.

The Role of Leadership in Managing Human Resources

A central theme that emerged from the data was the critical role of leadership in effectively managing human resources. Participants, particularly school leaders, shared how leadership practices influenced the work environment and overall productivity of staff members. One participant, a headmaster, noted, “In an Islamic school, leadership is not just about managing operations; it's about guiding the staff and students in a way that aligns with our religious principles. It's about being a role model.” This leadership style, rooted in Islamic values, was viewed as essential to maintaining morale and a sense of community within the school.

Leadership was also described as a crucial factor in managing conflicts and maintaining harmony among staff. As one teacher expressed, “Whenever there is a disagreement or issue among staff, the headmaster's approach is always rooted in patience and understanding, which helps resolve conflicts peacefully and respectfully”. This points to the importance of adopting an Islamic leadership approach that prioritizes patience, understanding, and ethical guidance in the management of human resources.

Solutions for Effective Human Resource Management

Participants also highlighted several strategies they believed could improve human resource management within Islamic educational institutions. One of the key solutions proposed was the development of ongoing professional development programs that integrate both academic and religious training. As one teacher explained, “Professional development should include not only teaching methodologies but also a focus on personal development in alignment with Islamic values. This would help us to better perform our duties both as educators and as role models.” This emphasis on continuous professional development ensures that staff remain committed to both their professional growth and their religious duties.

Another solution proposed by the participants was the establishment of a collaborative work environment, where staff members could share ideas and resources more effectively. As one administrative staff member mentioned, “When we work together and share our challenges and successes, it not only improves our work environment but also strengthens the Islamic principles that we uphold”. This collaborative approach was viewed as a means to address the limited resources often faced by Islamic schools and to foster a sense of community and shared responsibility among staff.

The findings reveal that managing human resources in Islamic educational institutions is fraught with challenges, including the difficulty of finding qualified staff who align with the institution's religious values, balancing academic and religious expectations, and maintaining a supportive work environment. However, leadership, grounded in Islamic principles, plays a crucial role in overcoming these challenges, fostering collaboration, and guiding staff development. The solutions identified by participants, such as integrating professional development with Islamic teachings and promoting a collaborative work culture, offer valuable insights into improving human resource management within this unique educational context.

Improving HRM in Islamic Education



The study revealed three key themes regarding human resource management in Islamic educational institutions: the challenges in managing human resources, the pivotal role of leadership, and the proposed solutions to improve HR practices. These findings provide deep insights into how educational staff experience their roles and responsibilities, balancing both academic and religious obligations. These results are central to addressing the question raised in the introduction: how do educators and administrators in Islamic institutions navigate the complexities of their roles within a framework of Islamic values?

The findings of this research make a significant contribution to understanding human resource management in Islamic educational settings by emphasizing the dual focus on academic and religious expectations. The study shows that human resource management is not only about professional qualifications but also about ensuring staff align with religious and moral standards. The role of leadership, grounded in Islamic values, was highlighted as crucial in creating a supportive environment where staff can thrive despite the challenges. Furthermore, the study identified that practical solutions, such as professional development programs that incorporate religious values and fostering a collaborative environment, are essential to addressing the challenges faced by Islamic educational institutions. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of educators and administrators, shedding light on how Islamic educational institutions can improve their HR practices by integrating both academic and religious expectations.

The findings align with and expand upon previous research on leadership and human resource management in educational settings, particularly those in religious contexts. Prior studies have highlighted the importance of values-driven leadership in managing human resources (Robinson, 2001; Day, 2003), which is consistent with the results of this study, where leadership was identified as central to resolving conflicts and fostering a supportive work environment. However, this study goes further by exploring the specific ways in which Islamic leadership practices, such as patience and understanding, influence staff dynamics in Islamic educational institutions. The challenges identified in this research also resonate with the work of scholars such as Hallinger (2005), who discussed the complex balance between academic and moral responsibilities in educational management. Furthermore, the proposed solutions, such as integrating religious values into professional development, build on existing literature that advocates for the alignment of personal and professional growth within educational frameworks (Hargreaves, 2003). This research contributes to the growing body of knowledge by providing a detailed, phenomenological understanding of how Islamic values shape the experiences of educational staff in these institutions.

Implications of Findings

The findings of this research offer both theoretical and practical implications for the management of human resources in Islamic educational institutions. From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on values-driven leadership and human resource management in religious settings. The identification of leadership as a critical factor in addressing HR challenges aligns with previous research on the importance of transformational leadership in educational contexts (Robinson, 2001). Practically, the research highlights the need for professional development programs that integrate religious and academic values, suggesting that educational institutions should provide continuous training that aligns both the professional growth of staff and their personal, moral values. This holistic approach to development could foster a more balanced and supportive work environment in Islamic schools. Furthermore, by emphasizing the significance of a collaborative work culture, the study calls for more efforts in creating an inclusive and cooperative atmosphere that enables educators to share resources, knowledge, and challenges. These findings have practical relevance not only for Islamic educational institutions but also for other faith-based educational settings that seek to balance academic and religious expectations.

Limitations of the Study

This study, while providing valuable insights, has certain limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the research was conducted in a limited number of Islamic educational institutions, and the sample size, although sufficient for a phenomenological study, may not fully represent the diversity of experiences in larger or more varied settings. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported data from interviews, which may have introduced biases based on participants' perceptions and personal experiences. As is common in phenomenological research, the subjective nature of the data could have led to varying interpretations depending on individual perspectives. The study also did not explore the perspectives of students or parents, which could provide a more comprehensive view of the dynamics in Islamic educational institutions. These limitations suggest that the findings may not be entirely generalizable to all Islamic educational contexts, and further research is needed to validate and expand upon these findings in different settings.

Prospective Directions for Future Research

The findings of this study open several avenues for future research. One potential direction is to explore the experiences of students and parents in Islamic educational institutions, as their perspectives could provide valuable insights into the broader impact of human resource management practices on the educational environment. Additionally, future research could examine how the integration of religious and academic values in professional development influences the retention and satisfaction of staff members over time. Longitudinal studies could shed light on the long-term effects of values-based leadership and HR practices on institutional culture and educational outcomes. Finally, comparative studies between Islamic educational institutions and secular schools could further explore the unique challenges and benefits of managing human resources within a religious context. This research could contribute to the development of more effective HRM strategies that are tailored to the specific needs of faith-based educational settings.

CONCLUSION

This study focused on exploring the experiences of human resource management in Islamic educational institutions, specifically the challenges and solutions identified by educators and administrators. The research revealed three key themes: the unique challenges faced in balancing academic and religious expectations, the critical role of leadership in managing human resources, and the importance of integrating Islamic values into professional development. These findings offer both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, the study extends the application of values-based HRM by demonstrating how Islamic principles can shape leadership behavior, professional standards, and organizational culture in faith-based institutions. From a policy perspective, the results inform the development of HR frameworks that are culturally and religiously responsive.

A concrete policy recommendation emerging from this study is the institutionalization of structured professional development programs that explicitly incorporate Islamic ethical teachings alongside pedagogical competencies. Such programs should be mandated as part of ongoing staff training to ensure alignment between religious identity and educational professionalism. These findings provide a deeper understanding of how human resource practices in Islamic schools differ from those in secular institutions, highlighting the strategic importance of values-driven leadership and collaborative, faith-sensitive work environments. By addressing the gaps in previous research, this study contributes to the development of more effective HR practices that are sensitive to both academic and religious needs. Future research could explore the experiences of students and parents in these institutions or extend the study to other faith-based educational settings to further validate and expand these findings. The results suggest that integrating religious values into HR practices may offer long-term benefits for staff retention, institutional cohesion, and improved educational outcomes.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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