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The Advantages of Shadow Education from the Perspective of Islamic Education Management

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Abstract

Although shadow education has emerged as a significant global educational phenomenon, research examining its organization through the framework of Islamic educational management remains limited. This study aims to explore the strengths of shadow education, examine the integration of Islamic educational management functions in its administration, and identify its implications for the broader educational ecosystem. A qualitative case study was conducted at the Aqila Course and Training Institution in Tambak District, Banyumas Regency, Central Java, Indonesia, with informants comprising institutional leaders, senior tutors, and parents selected through purposive sampling. The institution was selected because of its established experience in providing educational course and training services. Data were collected through in-depth, open-ended interviews and analyzed through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The findings reveal that the principal strengths of shadow education include personalized and adaptive teaching, an interactive and family-oriented learning environment, and effectiveness in supporting students' academic goals. Islamic educational management is implemented through collaborative curriculum planning, institutional practices that prioritize Sharia values and religious discipline, and a structured quality-control system involving periodic evaluation and alignment with parental aspirations. These practices position shadow education as a complementary academic mechanism that supports students' problem-solving independence, religious character development, and social skills through proactive communication between the institution and parents. The study concludes that integrating Islamic educational management principles into shadow education can strengthen both instructional responsiveness and institutional quality. These findings contribute to the

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literature on Islamic educational management and nonformal education by demonstrating how managerial functions and Islamic values can be integrated within supplementary education while offering practical implications for nonformal education providers seeking to balance academic achievement, character formation, and stakeholder collaboration.

Keywords: Shadow Education; Islamic Educational Management; Nonformal Education; Personalized Learning; Educational Ecosystem

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of shadow education as an alternative educational system has experienced rapid and significant development. Shadow education has the primary advantage of improving academic achievement and providing more personalized learning services. From an academic perspective, the advantages of shadow education are beneficial in helping struggling students catch up and encouraging high achievement on exams (Hajar & Karakus, 2024; van den Hoven, 2023). From a socio-economic perspective, shadow education can serve as an educational business opportunity (Bray & Hajar, 2022; Bray & Ventura, 2022). From the perspective of Islamic educational management, shadow education offers several advantages, including personalized learning, flexibility, and the reinforcement of religious and academic values, particularly for students with special needs (Hakiman et al., 2021; Hanur et al., 2025; Nurwidayanti, 2025; Pasaribu et al., 2023). Data on community participation rates as users of shadow education services exceed 50–80% in several countries, including those in the Middle East and Asia (Bray, 2024; Bray & Hajar, 2022; van den Hoven, 2023). Evidence from various quantitative and qualitative studies demonstrates tangible effects on exam outcomes, patterns of inequality, and teacher–student behavior (Hajar & Karakus, 2022, 2024; Luo & Chan, 2022; Mahmud, 2021; Zhang & Bray, 2018, 2020). Experts argue that shadow education, as a global phenomenon, must be brought out of the "shadows" and explicitly incorporated into educational planning and regulation (Bray, 2023; Bray & Hajar, 2022; Hajar & Karakus, 2024; Luo & Chan, 2022). Thus, the tangible benefits of shadow education can synergize with formal education in efforts to improve the quality of the education system.

Numerous global studies have been conducted on the advantages of shadow education (private tutoring, study groups, and other non-formal educational institutions), but almost all of them focus on the general context of public schools rather than on the

perspective of Islamic educational management. Academic learning activities outside formal schools (tutoring, online courses, cram schools, learning centers) are growing rapidly worldwide and increasingly filling the "educational ecosystem" beyond formal schools (Park et al., 2016). The influence of shadow education has permeated various levels, ranging from students, families, and schools to the macro socio-economic structure (Luo & Chan, 2022). In inclusive Islamic schools, shadow teachers play a crucial role as facilitators, mentors, and emotional supporters, aligning their work with core Islamic values such as ihsan (excellence), rahmah (compassion), and ta'awun (mutual aid) (Nurwidayanti, 2025). Other studies also highlight the importance of collaboration between teachers, parents, and the community to optimize learning outcomes and character development (Hakiman et al., 2021; Pasaribu et al., 2023). However, the findings from these various studies remain fragmented regarding individual roles and general contexts, so exploration of a shadow education management system that is holistically integrated with Islamic educational principles remains very limited and has not been well mapped out.

The concept of excellence in educational institutions is now understood not only as academic quality but also as the institution's ability to differentiate itself and survive in competition, including in the digital age and amid disruption. In an Islamic context, excellence is also strongly linked to Islamic values and character development (Na'imah, 2018). Several studies emphasize that excellence stems from a combination of appropriate strategies, strong leadership, and service differentiation (Arwani et al., 2025; Azis et al., 2024; Ma'mun et al., 2025). The excellence of Islamic educational institutions stems from the internalization of the values of amanah, justice, ihsan, shiddiq, and ta'awun in strategic management, reinforced by spiritual leadership, thereby producing high-quality services, public trust, and a harmonious work environment (Jabbar et al., 2025).

Excellence in education can be broken down into several interrelated aspects. First, academic excellence refers to an institution's ability to produce students with high cognitive competencies, deep mastery of subject matter, and critical thinking skills (Scheerens, 2000). Second, character excellence, which is the institution's capacity to shape students' character, fostering integrity, responsibility, and strong moral values as the foundation of life (Munawarsyah et al., 2024). Third, managerial excellence, which is reflected in the effectiveness of institutional management, ranging from strategic planning and resource allocation to an accountable evaluation system (Babafemi, 2015). Fourth, innovative excellence, namely the institution's ability to adapt to change and provide creative solutions

in the learning process (Fahri, 2025). The integration of effective management principles rooted in Islamic values is essential to maximize the benefits of shadow education while addressing issues and challenges from both practical and managerial perspectives (Nurwidayanti, 2025). Thus, an Islamic educational management perspective can serve as a benchmark for the excellence of shadow education, based on its ability to provide additional learning support for students in need, strengthen character and spiritual values, and foster collaboration among schools, families, and the community.

Islamic educational management can be described through a number of functional aspects derived from the integration of management theory and Islamic values. Islamic educational management encompasses the functions of planning, organizing, implementing, and supervising, all of which are integrated with Islamic values (Badrun, 2024). First, the planning aspect is grounded in the principle of sincere intention and is oriented toward the welfare of the community (Nasution, 2022). Second, the organizing aspect emphasizes fair task distribution, the placement of human resources according to competence (the right person in the right place), and a spirit of collaboration based on the value of brotherhood (Antika & Husni, 2025). Third, the mobilization aspect is realized through leadership exemplifying the Prophet's traits—shiddiq, amanah, tabligh, and fathanah—as the foundation for motivation and human resource empowerment (Hananto et al., 2025). Fourth, the oversight aspect is grounded in the awareness of every individual that all deeds are observed by Allah, thereby fostering authentic and consistent accountability (Ansori et al., 2026). These four aspects of management functions serve as analytical tools in examining how shadow education can be managed effectively within the framework of Islamic educational management.

Based on the literature gap discussed earlier, the objective of this study on the advantages of shadow education from the perspective of Islamic educational management is to identify the various advantages of shadow education, examine the integration of Islamic educational management principles—including planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling—in the management of shadow education, and identify the implications of shadow education within the educational ecosystem. The contribution of this study's findings lies in providing new understanding and knowledge to strengthen the position and tangible role of shadow education-based institutions by integrating them within the framework of Islamic educational management.

METHODS

This study was conducted in March 2026 at Lembaga Kursus dan Pelatihan (LKP) Aqila, or Aqila Course and Training Institution, located in Tambak District, Banyumas Regency, Central Java Province, which was selected through purposive sampling (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025). Aqila Course and Training Institution is a non-formal educational institution that has been operating for over a decade, with a track record of managing structured and consistent shadow education programs. This institution was chosen as a relevant research site because its management integrates the principles of Islamic educational management into every aspect of its operations, ranging from curriculum planning and teacher recruitment to the evaluation of learning programs (Astuti & Firmansyah, 2025; Rika Evania, 2022). The unit of analysis in this study is the institution's managerial practices, encompassing leadership, program administrators, and educators directly involved in the implementation of tutoring activities (Bouncken et al., 2026).

The research method employed is qualitative, utilizing a case study approach to conduct an in-depth exploration of the strengths of shadow education managed from the perspective of Islamic educational management at LKP Aqila Tambak (Creswell, 2013; Lewis, 2015). The data used in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained directly through intensive interaction between the researcher and the research subjects in the field (Creswell, 2013). The results of the primary data are used to explain the phenomenon of the excellence of shadow education, the integration of the Islamic educational management framework in the management of shadow education, and the implications of shadow education within an educational ecosystem that is contextual and situational and requires direct information gathering from the practitioners who experience it firsthand (Bouncken et al., 2026). Secondary data is used to support and strengthen the findings from the primary data (Gokak et al., 2023).

The data sources for this study were several informants selected using purposive sampling based on the criterion of direct involvement in the management and implementation of the shadow education program at the institution for at least two years (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025). The informants consisted of the institution's leaders/managers, senior instructors/tutors, and parents of active students who had participated in the course program for at least one year. The selection of informants was guided by the principles of representativeness of perspectives and data saturation, whereby data collection was halted

once the data reached a point of saturation and no longer yielded new meaningful themes or categories (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured in-depth interviews (Creswell, 2013). The interviews were conducted face-to-face using a set of questions based on the dimensions of Islamic education management, which encompass the aspects of planning, organizing, implementing, and supervising. Data exploration regarding strengths and implications was also developed from the perspective of the four dimensions of Islamic education management (Creswell, 2013).

Data analysis was conducted using the analytical model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, namely data condensation, data presentation, and the drawing and verification of conclusions (Miles et al., 2014). The coding process was conducted in two cycles: in the first cycle, descriptive codes reflecting the phenomena of shadow education's strengths were identified, while in the second cycle, analytical codes conceptually linked to the theoretical framework of Islamic educational management were derived (Creswell, 2013). The validity and credibility of the data were ensured through source triangulation from key informants to guarantee the certainty, accuracy, and depth of the interpretation of the research findings (Miles et al., 2014). Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from various categories of informants, namely leaders/administrators, teachers/tutors, and parents of students (Creswell, 2013).

RESULTS

Table 1. Description of Research Informants

Informant Code	Role
T1	Institutional Manager
T2	Institutional Tutor
T3	Institutional Tutor
T4	Institutional Tutor
T5	Institutional Tutor
T6	Institutional Tutor
O1	Parent
O2	Parent
O3	Parent

Table 1 shows that 9 informants were involved: institutional administrators and tutors with at least two years of teaching experience, as well as parents of students at Aqila Course and Training Institution (LKP) who have been service users for at least one year.

Table 2. Findings on the Advantages of Shadow Education at LKP Aqila

Findings	Indicator/Description
Personalized and Flexible Teaching Methods	Uses a private approach that is not rigid, is structured, easy to understand, and prioritizes emotional bonds (tutors teach with heart).
Achievement of Academic Goals	The goal of completing the reading, writing, and arithmetic (calistung) program is very clear and has a direct impact on improving students' grades and achievements in formal schools.
A Comfortable Learning Environment	The learning atmosphere is built on a sense of family, prioritizing empathy, and employing interactive methods (such as quizzes and "learning through play") to keep students engaged.

Source: processed primary data, 2026

Table 2 shows that the main advantages perceived by students are the flexible, structured, and easy-to-understand teaching methods. The approach used by this institution is more personalized, where tutors check students' understanding of the material one-on-one. The personalized approach implemented by the institution aligns with the views of students' parents, who highly appreciate the tutors' emotional approach because they feel that the educators at this institution truly "educate children with heart." The use of inquiry-based and contextual approaches linked to real-world materials and experiences has made students feel more comfortable in absorbing lessons. As some informants stated:

"The main strength of this institution lies in its learning methods, which are flexible, structured, and easy to understand." (T5)

"The teaching style is enjoyable and more personalized, as we ask about the material one-on-one." (T4)

"Through a personalized approach to students, and by connecting the material to real life, the tutors teach us how to think in a way that focuses on results—— so that the LKP becomes a relaxed tutoring center that still prioritizes understanding." (T2)

"Educating children with heart." (O1)

Students and parents also perceive significant advantages in achieving academic goals, particularly in the reading, writing, and arithmetic (calistung) program and subject-

specific tutoring. The institution sets very clear passing targets for calistung using varied methods. The positive impact of these passing targets is affirmed by parents who directly observe their children's rapid academic progress. Parents note that their children's grades in formal school subjects have improved and are rising sharply, thanks to the focused tutoring methods. As some informants stated:

"For the literacy tutoring, the learning goal is for children to be able to read by the end of the program. For general elementary school subjects, some children excel at school and participate in academic competitions." (T1)

"Grades in academic subjects are getting better, thanks to the learning methods provided by this LKP." (O3)

"The effective and varied literacy, numeracy, and writing methods enable students to read, write, and do arithmetic more quickly." (T3)

"There is a reading proficiency goal for the literacy program; the goal is to ensure students can read until it is fully achieved, even if it takes longer than the initial target." (T1)

Finally, students experience a pleasant learning environment fostered by a strong sense of community. The learning process is frequently interspersed with "play-based learning" methods and interactive quizzes that successfully keep children from getting bored. The tutors' empathetic attitude as active listeners helps create a learning space where each student's abilities are valued. The combination of the tutors' patience and a relaxed yet focused environment makes the institution a comfortable learning space for students and one that parents can rely on. As some informants stated:

"Enjoyable learning." (T5)

"A strong sense of family." (T3)

"By being active listeners, the tutors show empathy toward the students and value each student's individual abilities, thereby creating a comfortable and enjoyable learning environment." (T2)

"By learning through play... quizzes, the result is that the children are happy." (T6)

Table 3. Integration of Islamic Education Management Principles at LKP Aqila

Findings	Indicator/Description
Planning	The management system and modules are well-organized; tutors are recruited based on qualifications and competencies (such as graduates in psychology or counseling); and the curriculum is collaborative and responsive to parents' suggestions.
Organizing	The distribution and description of teaching duties for each tutor are assigned fairly and evenly
Actuating	Based on Islamic Sharia values, as demonstrated by the requirement for tutors to cover their bodies, the practice of prayer, and religious discipline (requiring children to pray on time during study breaks).
Supervision (Controlling)	Periodic evaluations of tutors (at most every three months), comprehensive tests for reading, writing, and arithmetic proficiency, self-reflection on teaching methods by tutors, and evaluations of time discipline based on parent feedback.

Source: processed primary data, 2026

Table 3 shows that, in terms of planning and organizing, the institution has a well-structured management system. This is evidenced by the systematic teaching approach, the provision of modules, and the recruitment of qualified and competent tutors in their respective fields, such as hiring psychology graduates and guidance and counseling specialists to teach preschool-aged students. The curriculum is organized collaboratively by integrating the institution's objectives with the curriculum of the students' original schools. As part of improving future planning, the institution also incorporates parents' suggestions to further refine and enhance the variety of lesson materials, not limited to basic general subjects. As stated by some informants:

"It has a well-organized management system and everything is transparent. The teaching method focuses directly on the child, not in a traditional classroom setting, but rather in a more private setting." (T4)

"In this institution, all aspects are well-organized, from management and teaching systems to the instructional materials we provide; as a tutor, I never feel confused about what content to deliver." (T3)

"Tutor recruitment is based on competence and academic qualifications, with a background in literacy, numeracy, guidance and counseling, and psychology." (T1)

"If possible, the curriculum should be comprehensive and not limited to general subjects alone." (O3)

In the actuating function, the institution's management prioritizes a collaborative leadership style deeply rooted in Islamic principles. As the primary manager of the institution, the director requires all tutors to dress modestly and cover their bodies appropriately. The promotion of these Islamic values is highly appreciated by parents, particularly regarding the instillation of good moral character as a foundation for young children. In addition to daily prayer routines, parents highly appreciate the discipline in religious practice enforced by the institution, where children are consistently guided and required to perform prayers on time as soon as prayer times begin during study hours. As stated by some informants:

"All tutors dress modestly and cover their bodies. They allow ample time for prayer without restricting students or tutors." (T1)

"When it is time for prayer, the children are told to pray on time." (O3)

"Instilling good moral habits as a foundation for young children." (O2)

"We always pray at the beginning and end of each lesson. When prayer time arrives, tutors are allowed to perform their prayers on time." (T6)

"Implementing prayers before and after lessons. Behaving politely toward parents, fellow tutors, children, and the institution's leadership. Tutors and children perform the Asr prayer during breaks in the lesson." (T3)

The supervisory (controlling) function is carried out periodically to maintain the institution's quality. The institution's management conducts evaluations with tutors every three months to discuss tutor performance and various challenges in the learning process. At the classroom level, tutors routinely assess students' understanding independently through practice exercises and require comprehensive tests before passing students, particularly in reading, writing, and arithmetic (calistung) classes. Feedback from parents also serves as an important external monitoring tool for management, such as valuable input regarding the need to improve discipline regarding punctuality when starting students' study sessions. As stated by some informants below:

"We have a structured management system. Every few months, there is an evaluation of tutors and the learning process." (T3)

"At most every 3 months, we hold evaluations with the tutors; for example, if there is a problematic tutor, it is noted and discussed during the evaluation." (T1)

"They must be comprehensively tested before being officially passed." (T1)

"Punctuality in starting lessons." (O1)

Table 4. Implications of Shadow Education at LKP Aqila within the Educational Ecosystem

Findings	Indicator/Description
Academic Support	To serve as an effective bridge to address students' learning gaps in formal schools (for example, in basic mathematics), thereby fostering high-achieving students.
Enhancing Independence and Problem-Solving Skills	Transforming students' learning patterns to be more active and independent through initial module-based learning, followed by two-way problem-solving discussions with tutors.
Fostering Religious and Social Character	Strongly focused on instilling noble character, manners, politeness, and discipline in young children, reinforced by synergy and proactive communication between the institution and parents.

Source: processed primary data, 2026

Table 4 shows that the presence of shadow education, reflected in the institution's management, has significant implications in the form of intensive academic support for the formal education ecosystem. The institution acts as a vital link in addressing academic challenges frequently encountered in formal schools, such as difficulties in understanding basic mathematics. Through in-depth personalized guidance, the institution strengthens students' cognitive foundations. As a result, the existence of this additional support helps foster high-achieving students. Tangible evidence in the form of academic achievement is directly recognized by parents through the surge in their children's academic grades at school. As stated by an informant:

"Subject grades have improved significantly thanks to the learning methods provided by this LKP" (O2)

Further implications are evident in the increased independence of students in the problem-solving process. Through innovative learning methods and resources, students are guided to first study the material independently using worksheets or modules. Face-to-face sessions at the tutoring center are then repurposed as intensive discussion sessions to solve difficult problems together with the tutor. This shift to a two-way learning model has very positive implications, as students transition from being merely passive listeners to active, independent learners who are confident in communicating their difficulties.

"Students first study the material through worksheets or learning modules, and then the sessions at the learning center are used as a platform for intensive discussion between

the tutor and the student to solve problems. The result: students become more active and independent in problem-solving, rather than just listening." (T2)

Beyond the cognitive realm, this shadow education has a strong impact on strengthening religious and social character within the community's educational ecosystem. The institution is not merely a vehicle for transferring knowledge but serves as a tool for shaping the character of young children with noble moral values. Daily interactions at the institution successfully instill practices of etiquette, discipline, responsibility, and politeness. This ecosystem becomes increasingly solid thanks to the synergy and proactive communication patterns between the institution and parents, both in person and through personalized online platforms, ensuring that character education at the tutoring center aligns with parenting at home.

"Tutors not only assist as facilitators of teaching and learning but also as agents in fostering noble character in students in accordance with the commands of Allah SWT." (T2)

"This institution has implemented Islamic values such as praying before and after studying, as well as fostering noble character among students toward teachers and parents—values that must be developed both within the learning center and in the surrounding community." (T5)

"Through online groups, communication is conducted directly and personally to maintain the privacy of the relationship with each parent." (T1)

DISCUSSION

The benefits of shadow education experienced by students and parents at this institution reaffirm previous literature findings regarding the importance of personalized educational services. These findings demonstrate the tangible existence of academic excellence—that is, the institution's ability to produce students with high cognitive competencies through effective and structured learning processes (Scheerens, 2000). Flexible learning methods and the personalized approach of tutors who educate "with heart" create a comfortable and non-rigid learning environment. This aligns with research stating that the primary strength of shadow education lies in more personalized learning services, compared to formal schools (Hajar & Karakus, 2023; van den Hoven, 2023). Furthermore, warm interactions and the fostering of a sense of family have proven effective in minimizing

student burnout, making them more enthusiastic about participating in learning processes outside of school hours. The use of an inquiry-based approach that connects the material to students' real-life experiences is a manifestation of innovative excellence—that is, the institution's ability to provide adaptive, creative solutions in the learning process (Fahri, 2025). From the perspective of Islamic educational management, this quality of empathetic pedagogical relationships is a manifestation of the values of rahmah (compassion) and ihsan (kindness), which form the essence of service in Islamic educational institutions (Jabbar et al., 2025; Nurwidayanti, 2025).

Beyond the aspect of comfort, the achievement of academic targets serves as the primary benchmark of this institution's excellence in the eyes of students and parents. Clear achievements, such as the requirement to master reading, writing, and arithmetic (calistung) skills before graduation, have proven to have a significant impact on improving students' grades and performance in formal schools. The achievement of academic targets, particularly in the reading, writing, and arithmetic (calistung) program, serves as concrete evidence of managerial excellence—that is, the effectiveness of institutional management that is measurable, accountable, and results-oriented (Babafemi, 2015). The establishment of clear graduation standards verified through comprehensive tests demonstrates that the institution does not merely provide supplementary learning services but operates with a firm commitment to quality. This positive impact is directly acknowledged by parents who witness a surge in their children's academic grades in formal schools as a tangible result of focused tutoring. This success confirms the argument that supplementary tutoring plays a vital role in helping students catch up on missed material while simultaneously driving higher academic achievement on academic exams. This success demonstrates that well-managed shadow education is capable of bridging the gap between academic expectations and the reality of students' achievements in formal schools (van den Hoven, 2023). Thus, shadow education is not merely a supplement but has become a crucial catalyst in achieving students' academic competitive advantage.

The integration of Islamic educational management principles into the planning and organizing aspects reflects the comprehensive application of Islamic managerial functions (Badrun, 2024). Recruiting tutors based on competency qualifications—particularly graduates in counseling and psychology to support preschool-aged students—is a concrete realization of the "right man in the right place" principle in organizing teaching duties (Antika & Husni, 2025). This principle ensures that every tutor is not only academically excellent but

also possesses the psychological competence to support children's developmental stages holistically. The collaborative development of the curriculum, which incorporates parental input, reflects planning grounded in sincere intent for the students' well-being, in alignment with Islamic planning principles (Nasution, 2022). An open attitude toward parents' aspirations also indicates that the institution positions itself as an active partner in the educational ecosystem, not merely a transactional service provider. This participatory approach is relevant to the modern Islamic educational management model, which emphasizes synergy between the institution's capacity, students' needs, and community expectations (Hanur et al., 2025).

The distinctive nature of the institution's governance is increasingly evident in the execution of its actuating and controlling functions, which are thoroughly imbued with the values of Islamic Sharia. Leadership that requires tutors to cover their aurat, establishes the routine of reciting the opening prayer before studying, and enforces the discipline of performing prayers on time during study breaks is an implementation of leadership based on emulating the Prophet's traits—shiddiq (truthful), amanah (trustworthy), tabligh (conveying), and fathanah (wise)—as the foundation for motivation and human resource empowerment (Hananto et al., 2025). The benefits of cultivating these moral values are directly felt by parents as the foundation for building strong character (character excellence) in young children (Munawarsyah et al., 2024; Na'imah, 2018). Meanwhile, the monitoring functions carried out periodically—quarterly evaluations of tutors' performance, comprehensive literacy and numeracy proficiency tests, and the collection of parental feedback—constitute the actualization of the Islamic concept of accountability, namely the awareness that every deed is accountable to Allah, thereby fostering authentic and consistent accountability (Ansori et al., 2026). This combination of Islamic-value-based mobilization and supervision demonstrates that Islamic shadow education can offer dual advantages: flexibility and improved academic achievement alongside the reinforcement of strong religious values (Hakiman et al., 2021; Pasaribu et al., 2023).

Findings regarding the implications of shadow education within the educational ecosystem highlight the strategic role of these non-formal institutions as a bridge to bridge academic gaps. This tutoring serves as an intensive support system to address difficulties that are often not fully resolved in formal schools, such as mastery of basic mathematics. By encouraging students to study modules independently from the outset, these institutions have successfully shifted students' learning paradigm from passive to more proactive in

independent problem-solving. This transformation in learning style is crucial because learning activities outside formal schools are increasingly recognized and are shaping the landscape of the "educational ecosystem" in fostering resilient learners(Luo & Chan, 2022; Park et al., 2016).

Equally important is the tangible contribution of shadow education to the development of religious and social character. The role of these institutions has evolved from merely providing academic tutoring to serving as strategic spaces for instilling manners, courtesy, and social responsibility in children. Strong synergy between the institutions and parents through proactive communication ensures that this character education remains aligned with parenting practices at home. Such a holistic learning ecosystem serves as a strong foundation for the argument that shadow education should indeed be brought out of the "shadows" and explicitly positioned alongside formal schools in national education planning and regulation (Bray, 2023; Bray & Hajar, 2022).

The primary limitation of this study lies in its single case study design within one local institution; thus, the findings cannot yet be broadly generalized to more diverse shadow education contexts. Furthermore, the observation, which was conducted for only one week, may potentially fail to capture the full dynamics and variations of long-term managerial practices. For future research, it is recommended to conduct comparative studies across various Islamic shadow education institutions in different regions with diverse socio-economic contexts. Additionally, combining qualitative approaches with quantitative surveys is suggested to measure the impact of Islamic-based shadow education on academic achievement and character formation in a more measurable and generalizable manner.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that shadow education at Aqila Course and Training Institution, Tambak, Banyumas, excels in three mutually reinforcing key dimensions: personalized learning grounded in empathy and the value of rahmah, the achievement of measurable academic goals through literacy and numeracy programs (calistung), and the development of a strong religious and social character. The comprehensive integration of Islamic educational management principles—including collaborative planning, competency-based organization, sharia-aligned implementation, and periodic monitoring—has proven to be an effective and distinctive management framework.

The role of this institution is not merely that of an academic partner; rather, it has transformed into a holistic educational ecosystem that brings together academic, character, managerial, and innovative excellence within a single integrated system.

A qualitative case study approach combined with an analytical framework for Islamic education management has proven capable of addressing the three research questions in depth and in a contextual manner. The four-dimensional conceptual framework of excellence—comprising academic, character, managerial, and innovative dimensions—successfully mapped the achievements perceived by students and parents in a comprehensive manner. Meanwhile, the functions of Islamic management are planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling. When used as an analytical lens, these functions successfully revealed how Islamic values are operationally integrated into the governance of shadow education—a conceptual contribution that has not been extensively explored in previous shadow education literature.

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