

An Exploration of Growth Mindset in Muslim Student Leadership: A Case Study of the IOU Indonesia Student Committee

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Abstract

This study explores the development of growth mindset among Muslim student leaders in the IOU Indonesia Student Committee (SC). Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through written interviews and open-ended questionnaires with 20 board members. Thematic analysis revealed three core themes: Faith-Based Mindset (100%), where all participants grounded resilience and leadership identity in Islamic values such as *amanah*, *tawakkul*, and *sabr*; Leadership as Learning (85%), in which most participants described leadership as an iterative process of mistakes, feedback, and improvement; and Community Support (65%), emphasizing mentorship, peer encouragement, and collective growth as significant sources of resilience. Findings suggest that leadership is deeply constructed through spirituality, strengthened by experiential learning, and sustained by community ties. This integration underscores the importance of culturally and spiritually grounded approaches to fostering resilient and adaptive student leadership.

1. Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving educational and social landscape, the ability to adapt, learn continuously, and lead effectively through change has become increasingly important. One psychological construct that strongly supports such adaptability is the growth mindset, defined as the belief that intelligence, abilities, and leadership capacities can be developed through sustained effort, learning, and perseverance. Although growth mindset has been widely discussed in educational psychology, its application in leadership behaviour among student leaders, particularly within faith-based academic communities, remains less clearly articulated.

Understanding this issue is particularly important because student leadership in Muslim educational contexts often involves the intersection of academic responsibility, spiritual commitment, and organizational engagement. Examining how growth mindset is cultivated within such settings may provide valuable insights for designing leadership development initiatives that are contextually relevant and spiritually grounded, especially in digital and distance learning environments.

The existing literature may be organized into several interrelated themes. First, studies on the spiritual and affective foundations of growth mindset suggest that personal beliefs and religiosity may significantly influence students' motivation and developmental orientation. Fontaine (2019) found that learning activities based on Sūrah Yasin enhanced Islamic leadership potential among university students by reinforcing values such as faith, responsibility, perseverance, and motivation to grow, all of which conceptually align with growth mindset principles. Likewise, Luebke (2019) reported that students with higher religiosity combined with a growth mindset demonstrated stronger mathematics achievement, indicating the important role of belief systems in academic and personal development.

Second, research on growth mindset interventions in higher education has consistently shown positive academic outcomes. North Wolfe (2017) observed that first-year college students who participated in growth mindset interventions demonstrated higher academic performance and retention rates than their peers. Similarly, De Welde (2022) argues that addressing structural and relational gaps within academic environments through justice-oriented and supportive practices can help reduce educational disparities by strengthening students' sense of belonging, motivation, and capacity to engage meaningfully in learning, particularly among those who experience marginalization or exclusion.

Third, literature on Muslim student leadership and committee-based organizational development highlights the role of student organizations as leadership incubators. Ansari (2019) explains that Muslim Student Associations (MSAs) function as important spaces for fostering religious identity, collective belonging, social networking, and community engagement, contributing to the formation of a broader sense of the Muslim *ummah* among students. These organizations also provide opportunities for leadership practice, advocacy, and the development of organizational responsibility. In school settings, committees have also been shown to strengthen religiosity and character formation through structured activities and interaction between students and educators (Marfinda et al., 2023). Nur'aini et al. (2020) further emphasize that active and well-organized committees support curriculum implementation, teacher development, and student engagement, thereby improving both academic and spiritual outcomes. In a similar vein, Aalamsyah et al. (2024) note that organizations such as the Muhammadiyah Student Association intentionally foster responsible character through leadership training, ethical guidance, and community service.

Fourth, studies focusing on leadership behaviour and Muslim student experiences further enrich this discussion. Guimba et al. (2011) found that undergraduate Muslim leaders develop communication, management, and collaboration skills while maintaining their religious identity, often supported by mentorship and community networks. Khawaja (2025) underscores the need for inclusive leadership models that incorporate religious perspectives and facilitate dialogue between Muslim students and institutional administration. Additionally, El Syam (2017) conceptualizes leadership through the lens of *prophetic leadership*, emphasizing moral integrity, responsibility, social guidance, and service to the *ummah* as core dimensions of effective leadership. More broadly, Dung and Hai (2020) argue that transformational leadership significantly strengthens commitment to organizational change through effective communication, strategic direction, adaptability, and the ability to inspire followers toward shared goals. In educational settings, Shah (2017) similarly highlights that proactive teacher leadership plays a crucial role in enhancing student motivation, creativity, engagement, and collaborative learning environments.

Within the context of digital Islamic higher education, the IOU (International Online University) Indonesia Student Committee (SC) offers a particularly relevant setting for examining these dynamics. Hartono (2022) explains that IOU employs a modern distance education model supported by digital technologies, allowing flexible access to learning resources, interaction, and assessment across geographically diverse learners. Hartono (2024) further emphasizes that the integration of Islamic content with interactive digital platforms improves student participation, learning outcomes, and overall satisfaction.

Despite the growing body of literature on growth mindset, leadership behaviour, student committees, and Muslim student leadership, few studies have specifically explored how growth mindset is developed and manifested among Muslim student leaders within virtual or hybrid Islamic higher education environments. In particular, limited empirical evidence exists regarding how spiritual, cultural, and organizational dynamics shape leadership mindsets in online student committees.

Therefore, this study aims to qualitatively explore the growth mindset among student leaders of the IOU Indonesia Student Committee through written interviews and open-ended questionnaires in order to understand how growth-oriented beliefs are internalized and expressed in their leadership practices.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore how growth mindset is understood and manifested among student leaders of the IOU Indonesia Student Committee (SC). According to Harrison et al. (2017), a case study design is particularly appropriate for investigating contemporary phenomena within their real-life contexts, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly distinguishable. This design is especially suitable for addressing how and why questions and allows an in-depth exploration of leadership experiences within a specific faith-based academic community. The case selected for this study was the SC IOU Indonesia, an online student leadership organization operating within the International Open University Indonesia learning community. This setting was chosen because it represents a unique intersection of student leadership, Islamic values, and digital learning environments, making it highly relevant to the study objective.

Participants were selected using voluntary response sampling, in which individuals willingly chose to participate after receiving an invitation to contribute to the study. This sampling strategy was considered appropriate because the research focused on personal reflections, mindset development, and leadership experiences, which require participants' openness and willingness to share in-depth responses. Voluntary participation was also ethically suitable, as it ensured that respondents contributed without coercion and were genuinely motivated to reflect on their experiences.

A total of 21 board members participated in the study. Based on the collected demographic data, the participants consisted of 18 female and 3 male members, representing various leadership and administrative

roles, including secretarial, media, entrepreneurship, creative division, translation, and public relations positions. Participants had varying lengths of service, ranging from approximately one year to four years, with most having served for at least one year in the organization. The study focused on active members who had sufficient leadership experience to provide meaningful reflections on growth mindset development.

Data were collected through an online open-ended questionnaire in written interview format. This method was chosen to enable participants to respond flexibly and reflectively while accommodating the online nature of the SC IOU Indonesia community. Jacob and Furgerson (2012) emphasize that structured qualitative interview protocols are essential for capturing participants' experiences, perceptions, and viewpoints in a systematic manner.

The questionnaire included both demographic and reflective questions. Demographic questions covered gender, organizational role, and duration of service. The substantive questions were designed to explore leadership challenges, responses to failure, beliefs about personal development, and the role of Islamic values in shaping mindset. Sample questions included:

- a. "Please describe the most challenging experience you faced while serving as a board member of SC IOU Indonesia. How did you feel at that time, and what did you do to deal with it?"
- b. "When facing difficulties, do you believe that your abilities can develop through effort and learning? Please explain."
- c. "What role do faith or Islamic values play in the way you perceive failure and challenges?"
- d. "In your opinion, what is the relationship between leadership and the process of learning from mistakes?"

These questions were intentionally open-ended to encourage rich narrative responses and allow participants to articulate their lived experiences in their own words (Weller et al., 2018).

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis following a step-by-step procedure adapted from Braun and Clarke's qualitative framework. First, all responses were read repeatedly to achieve data familiarization and identify initial impressions. Second, the responses were systematically coded line by line, with key phrases and recurring ideas labeled according to concepts relevant to growth mindset, leadership, resilience, and spiritual values. Third, similar codes were grouped into initial categories, such as learning from failure, faith-based perseverance, leadership confidence, and community support. Fourth, these categories were further synthesized into broader themes that represented recurring patterns across participants' experiences. Fifth, the themes were reviewed and refined by checking their consistency with the original data and ensuring conceptual coherence. Finally, the themes were defined, named, and interpreted in relation to the study objective and existing literature.

This step-by-step thematic procedure enabled the researcher to move from raw textual responses to meaningful conceptual insights regarding the growth mindset of Muslim student leaders in a digital academic setting.

Ethical approval for this research was obtained from the relevant university ethics board. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Participation was entirely voluntary, and no financial or academic incentives were provided. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research and publication process.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Perception of Leadership as a Learning Process

Most participants (17 out of 20; 85%) described leadership as an evolving process. They acknowledged mistakes and used feedback constructively, interpreting challenges as opportunities for self-improvement. Leadership was perceived not as a fixed trait but as a skill refined over time through reflection and practical experiences.

This aligns with Khan et al. (2016), who emphasize that leadership should be understood as a dynamic and developmental process in which leaders continuously refine their abilities through experience, reflective practice, and adaptation to situational demands. Similarly, Al Khajeh (2018) highlights that effective leadership styles significantly influence organizational performance through leaders' ability to adapt their approaches to situational demands, foster productive relationships, and guide followers toward shared goals, underscoring that leadership evolves dynamically through experience and contextual responsiveness.

Illustrative quote: "...I try to shift my perspective by seeing mistakes as lessons, which allows me to learn and improve the procedures..."

3.2. Integration of Faith and Personal Growth

All participants (20 out of 20; 100%) explicitly linked their mindset to Islamic teachings. Concepts such as *amanah* (trust), *tawakkul* (reliance on God), and *sabr* (patience) shaped their responses to challenges. They viewed difficulties not merely as obstacles but as divinely ordained tests that could nurture personal growth and strengthen resilience.

This reflects the idea that faith development is a dynamic process intertwined with personal growth, where spiritual values shape one's ability to cope with challenges. Younis and AL-yabroudi (2024) further suggest that faith growth in Islamic education develops through stages of recognition, reflection, and internalization, in which belief gradually becomes a guiding framework for self-awareness, moral decision-making, and resilience in facing life challenges.

Illustrative quote: "...trust (*amanah*) must be fulfilled to the best extent possible..."

3.3. Resilience Through Community and Mentorship

A significant proportion of participants (13 out of 20; 65%) emphasized the importance of community and mentorship. Peer encouragement, senior guidance, and shared experiences sustained their motivation, especially during high-pressure tasks or organizational conflicts. Mentorship was perceived not only as practical support but also as a process that nurtured confidence, problem-solving, and adaptability.

Mucci (2009) suggests that effective mentorship enhances critical thinking and resilience, while the West Indian Medical Journal (2021) highlights mentorship as a driver of academic resilience and collective growth.

Illustrative quote: "Actually, I enjoy leading, but when I am in the position of a member, I often wait for the leader to make the first move..."

Table 1. Summary of Emergent Themes and Descriptions

Theme	Description	% of Participants
Leadership as a Learning Process	Leadership seen as iterative; mistakes welcomed as growth opportunities	85% (17/20)
Faith-Based Mindset	Spiritual values (<i>amanah</i> , <i>tawakkul</i> , <i>sabr</i>) encourage perseverance and reframe failure	100% (20/20)
Community Support & Mentorship	Peer feedback and mentorship foster resilience and growth	65% (13/20)

The findings underscore the adaptability of the growth mindset framework when contextualized within a faith-based student leadership setting. The first and most dominant theme, Faith-Based Mindset (100%), reflects that every participant integrated Islamic values into their leadership understanding. This universality demonstrates that faith serves as the foundation upon which resilience and mindset development are built. Participants consistently interpreted resilience and growth through religious principles such as *amanah* (trust), *tawakkul* (reliance on God), and *sabr* (patience). This highlights that leadership identity in IOU SC is inseparable from spiritual reflection, confirming that faith-based leadership approaches emphasize integrating spiritual values into leadership practices, prioritizing service, moral integrity, and community empowerment as foundational elements of leadership development (Shula et al., 2022).

The second theme, Leadership as Learning (85%), indicates that the majority of participants consistently described leadership as a continuous learning process. They framed mistakes and setbacks as opportunities for growth, aligning with growth mindset principles. The high proportion suggests that "learning by doing" and reflective adaptation form the foundation of their leadership practice, consistent with Khan et al. (2016) practices, contextual responsiveness, and the leader's ability to continuously refine strategies in response to challenges and organizational demands.

The third theme, Community Support (65%), was highlighted by nearly two-thirds of participants, making it more prominent than in the earlier findings. This shows that the role of peer encouragement, mentorship, and collective growth has stronger importance in shaping leadership than previously assumed. The mentorship model that organically emerged among IOU SC members illustrates how institutional support mechanisms enhance resilience and competence. This finding is consistent with research highlighting that effective mentoring fosters academic success, personal growth, and professional skills through supportive and trust-based relationships (Law, Hales, & Busenbark, 2020).

Taken together, the findings show that leadership development among Muslim student leaders is deeply faith-driven (100%), strongly supported by learning from experience (85%), and significantly strengthened by community and mentorship (65%). These insights suggest that leadership training programs in Muslim contexts may benefit from combining spiritual integration, practical learning opportunities, and peer-based support to foster holistic and sustainable growth among young leaders.

4. Conclusion

This study provides exploratory insight into the development of growth mindset among Muslim student leaders in the IOU Indonesia Student Committee, with the main finding showing that a faith-based mindset is the strongest factor shaping leadership identity and resilience. All participants consistently grounded their leadership experiences in Islamic values such as patience, perseverance, and trust in God, making faith the most dominant and universal theme. This was followed by leadership as learning, where participants viewed leadership as a continuous process of reflection, mistakes, feedback, and improvement, and community support, which emphasized the role of mentorship and peer encouragement in sustaining motivation. Overall, the findings indicate that growth mindset in this context is not merely an individual cognitive orientation but is deeply rooted in spiritual and social dimensions, showing that leadership development is shaped through the integration of faith, lived experience, and supportive relationships.

Author Contributions

All authors contributed equally to this article and have read and approved the final version of the manuscript. Febi Robianti was responsible for conceptualization, methodology, data curation, and drafting as well as reviewing and editing the manuscript. Mufutau Oyedapo Raufu contributed to conceptualization, methodology, data curation, and participated in writing and reviewing the article. Rifatun Nur Khairani handled conceptualization, investigation, validation, and contributed to writing and reviewing the manuscript. Humairoh Hasan contributed to conceptualization, investigation, validation, and participated in drafting and reviewing the manuscript.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/ or publication of this article.

Data Availability

The datasets generated during and/ or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declaration on AI Use

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

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