

YOUTH INNOVATION FOR SUSTAINABLE ISLAMIC EDUCATION: LESSONS FROM THE INTERNATIONAL YOUTH POTENTIAL SUMMIT IN THAILAND

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ABSTRAK

Artikel ini mengeksplorasi peran inovasi pemuda dalam memajukan pendidikan Islam berkelanjutan melalui pengalaman pembelajaran lintas budaya. Berdasarkan wawasan dari *International Youth Potential Summit* yang diselenggarakan di Thailand pada tahun 2025, penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana generasi muda berperan sebagai calon pemimpin pendidikan dalam mempromosikan nilai-nilai *Sustainable Development Goal* (SDG) 4, yaitu Pendidikan Berkualitas, dalam kerangka pendidikan Islam. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan reflektif kualitatif, artikel ini menganalisis pengalaman peserta, diskusi, serta inisiatif kolaboratif yang diamati selama pelaksanaan summit.

Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa inisiatif pendidikan yang dipimpin oleh pemuda berkontribusi terhadap pendidikan Islam berkelanjutan melalui penguatan kesadaran kepemimpinan, pemahaman budaya, dan rasa tanggung jawab yang berlandaskan nilai-nilai Islam seperti *amanah*, kolaborasi, dan pembelajaran sepanjang hayat. Selain itu, forum pemuda internasional menyediakan ruang yang bermakna untuk dialog lintas budaya sehingga memungkinkan peserta menafsirkan kembali prinsip-prinsip pendidikan Islam dalam konteks global dan pluralistik. Artikel ini berpendapat bahwa pemberdayaan generasi muda melalui platform pendidikan yang berorientasi pada inovasi dan berbasis nilai merupakan langkah penting dalam membentuk masa depan pendidikan Islam yang berkelanjutan. Penelitian ini memberikan wawasan bagi pendidik, pembuat kebijakan, dan organisasi kepemudaan dalam memperkuat kepemimpinan pendidikan Islam di dunia yang semakin saling terhubung.

Kata kunci: inovasi pemuda, pendidikan Islam, kepemimpinan pendidikan, SDG 4, keberlanjutan

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the role of youth innovation in advancing sustainable Islamic education through cross-cultural learning experiences. Drawing on insights from the International Youth Potential Summit held in Thailand in 2025, the study examines how

young people engage as emerging educational leaders in promoting the values of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) within an Islamic educational framework. Using a qualitative reflective approach, the paper analyzes participants' experiences, discussions, and collaborative initiatives observed during the summit. The findings indicate that youth-led educational initiatives contribute to sustainable Islamic education by fostering leadership awareness, cultural understanding, and a sense of responsibility grounded in Islamic values such as amanah, collaboration, and lifelong learning. Furthermore, international youth forums provide a meaningful space for dialogue across cultures, enabling participants to reinterpret Islamic educational principles in a global and pluralistic context. This paper argues that empowering youth through innovation-oriented and values-based educational platforms is essential for shaping a sustainable future of Islamic education. The study offers insights for educators, policymakers, and youth organizations seeking to strengthen Islamic educational leadership in an increasingly interconnected world.

Keywords : youth innovation, Islamic education, educational leadership, SDG 4, sustainability

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a strategic role in shaping future generations who are capable of responding to global challenges while maintaining moral and spiritual values (Putri et al., 2025; Hidayat et al., 2025). In the contemporary era, the demand for sustainable education has become increasingly significant, particularly in relation to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which emphasizes inclusive and quality education for all (United Nations, 2022; SDGs UB, n.d.). Within this context, Islamic education is expected not only to preserve religious teachings but also to develop adaptive, innovative, and socially responsible individuals who are prepared to contribute to society. Therefore, the integration of sustainability principles with Islamic educational values has become an important discourse in current educational studies (Putri et al., 2025).

Previous studies have highlighted that youth participation is a key factor in accelerating educational transformation and social development. Youth are often recognized as agents of change who possess creativity, energy, and the capacity to initiate innovative programs in various sectors, including education (UNESCO,

2025; UNESCO IESALC, 2024). In addition, international forums have been acknowledged as effective platforms for developing leadership capacity, intercultural competence, and collaborative problem-solving skills among young people (UNESCO, 2023; United Nations, 2022). However, many discussions on youth leadership remain general and have not sufficiently examined its relevance within the framework of Islamic education.

Studies on Islamic educational leadership mostly focus on school principals, teachers, or institutional management, emphasizing values such as "*amanah*" (trustworthiness), justice, consultation ("*shura*"), and service-oriented leadership (Hidayat et al., 2025; Hidayat, 2023). While these values are highly relevant, limited attention has been given to the role of youth as emerging leaders who can embody such principles in global educational settings. This indicates a research gap concerning how international youth engagement can contribute to sustainable Islamic educational leadership.

The novelty of this paper lies in its attempt to connect youth innovation, global learning experiences, and Islamic educational leadership through a reflective analysis of participation in the International Youth Potential Summit held in Thailand in 2025. Unlike previous studies that discuss leadership in formal educational institutions, this paper focuses on non-formal international youth forums as spaces for nurturing leadership values and educational innovation (UNESCO, 2025; UNESCO IESALC, 2024).

This study seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) How can international youth forums contribute to the development of sustainable Islamic education? (2) What leadership values are developed through youth participation in global educational forums? (3) How can these experiences inspire future educational initiatives within Muslim communities?

Methodologically, this study uses a qualitative reflective approach. Data were collected through direct participation, observation, presentation experiences, intercultural discussions, and post-event reflections. The data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns related to leadership development, innovation, and Islamic educational values.

The findings of this paper are expected to contribute theoretically to the discourse of Islamic educational leadership and practically to educators, policymakers, and youth organizations seeking innovative strategies for empowering future Muslim leaders in a globally connected world (Putri et al., 2025; Hidayat et al., 2025).

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative reflective research design to explore the contribution of international youth forums to sustainable Islamic education and leadership development (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Mishna et al., 2022). A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to understand experiences, meanings, and values emerging from direct participation in a real-life educational setting. Reflective inquiry was used to examine how participation in an international youth summit shaped perspectives on leadership, collaboration, and innovation within the framework of Islamic education (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Alavi & Rahman, 2025).

The setting of this study was the International Youth Potential Summit held at Thammasat University, Thailand, in 2025. The summit brought together youth participants from several countries, including Indonesia, Thailand, and Nigeria, through both offline and online participation. The program consisted of educational presentations, cross-cultural discussions, collaborative sessions, project development activities, and university visits. These activities provided a dynamic environment for observing intercultural learning and leadership practices among young participants (UNESCO, 2025; UNESCO IESALC, 2024).

The primary data source of this study was the author's direct participation as an Indonesian delegate, presenter of an SDG-related educational project, and recipient of the Best Innovation Award. Additional contextual data was derived from summit agendas, presentation sessions, participant interactions, and reflective notes documented during and after the event. This insider perspective enabled the researcher to capture authentic experiences and meaningful insights regarding youth engagement in global educational initiatives (Mishna et al., 2022; Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Data collection techniques included participatory observation, reflective journaling, and document review. Participatory observation was conducted during summit activities by examining communication patterns, teamwork processes, leadership behaviors, and educational exchanges among participants. Reflective journaling was used to record significant moments, learning experiences, and critical reflections related to innovation and Islamic values. Relevant summit documents, schedules, and program materials were also reviewed to support contextual understanding (Braun & Clarke, 2022; UNESCO IESALC, 2024).

The data was analyzed using thematic analysis. First, the researcher organized all field notes and reflections into meaningful categories. Second, recurring themes related to leadership, innovation, collaboration, and values-based education were identified. Third, these themes were interpreted through the lens of Islamic educational leadership, particularly the principles of amanah (trustworthiness), cooperation, responsibility, and lifelong learning (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Hidayat, 2023; Hidayat et al., 2025).

To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied credibility through prolonged engagement during the summit activities and triangulation of observation notes, reflective records, and supporting documents (Morse, 2022; Nowell et al., 2017). In addition, peer-reviewed literature on youth leadership and Islamic education was used to strengthen the interpretation of findings (Alavi & Rahman, 2025; UNESCO, 2025). This method is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of how international youth forums can function as alternative spaces for nurturing sustainable Islamic educational leadership (UNESCO IESALC, 2024; Hidayat et al., 2025)..

DISCUSSION

1. Youth Leadership Development

The findings of this study reveal that participation in the International Youth Potential Summit significantly contributed to the development of youth leadership awareness. Participants were encouraged to share ideas, lead group discussions, present projects, and engage in collaborative problem-solving activities. These experiences allowed young people to practice initiative, confidence, and decision-

making skills in real situations. Similar findings were reported by Putri et al. (2025), who emphasized that Islamic education supports the development of responsible, adaptive, and socially engaged learners in the context of sustainable development.

From the perspective of Islamic education, leadership is closely related to the concept of amanah (trustworthiness), responsibility, and service to others. Leadership is not merely about holding authority, but about making positive contributions and guiding communities toward beneficial goals. This understanding is consistent with Putri et al. (2025), who highlighted the role of Islamic education in strengthening ethical responsibility and sustainability-oriented learning. Through active involvement in the summit, participants learned that young people can become agents of change when they are given trust and opportunities to act. This is in line with recent youth forum discussions showing that young people are increasingly positioned as active actors and co-creators of social change rather than passive beneficiaries (Global Peace Foundation Indonesia, 2026; UNESCO, 2026).

The author's experience as an Indonesian delegate, presenter, and recipient of the Best Innovation Award further demonstrates that youth possess the capacity to lead through ideas, creativity, and commitment. This finding supports the argument that leadership potential should be nurtured from an early stage through meaningful educational experiences. It also aligns with the view that youth-led forums can function as spaces for courage, creativity, and leadership development in real community settings (Global Peace Foundation Indonesia, 2026; UNESCO, 2026).

2. Cross-Cultural Learning and Collaboration

Another important finding concerns the role of intercultural interaction in broadening educational perspectives. The summit brought together participants from different national backgrounds, including Indonesia, Thailand, and Nigeria. Such diversity created opportunities for dialogue, teamwork, and the exchange of experiences regarding educational challenges in different countries. This is consistent with recent studies showing that youth engagement in multicultural and intercultural settings can strengthen tolerance, mutual understanding, and collaborative awareness (Irwan et al., 2022; Arifin et al., 2024).

Cross-cultural learning helps youth develop tolerance, empathy, and communication skills. Participants learned that although educational systems may differ, many challenges, such as inequality, access, and quality, are shared globally. This awareness is important for building collaborative responses to global issues. Research also shows that multicultural education helps young people become more open to difference and better prepared to live in plural societies (Habibah et al., 2022; Fitri & Wahyuningsih, 2023).

In Islamic teachings, diversity is recognized as part of human creation and should become a source of mutual understanding rather than conflict. Therefore, intercultural engagement in youth forums aligns with Islamic values of brotherhood, respect, and peaceful coexistence. International forums can thus become practical spaces for strengthening moderation and harmonious living through education (Fikriyah et al., 2025; Gozali et al., 2024; Junaidi & Suryanto, 2022).

3. Innovation for Sustainable Islamic Education

The summit also served as an important platform for youth innovation, particularly through project presentation sessions aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals. In these sessions, participants articulated ideas and initiatives designed to address educational and social challenges in their local communities, reflecting the broader shift from youth as passive beneficiaries to active agents of change in sustainable development processes (IISD, 2024; UNDP, 2024; UN Global Compact, n.d.).

The author's receipt of the Best Innovation Award further illustrates that youth-generated ideas can produce meaningful social impact and gain international recognition when supported by collaborative and solution-oriented learning environments (HundrED, 2024; UNDP, 2024). In the context of Islamic education, innovation should be understood as a constructive effort to improve society through beneficial knowledge and purposeful action, a perspective consistent with recent scholarship that frames Islamic educational renewal as a balance between preserving tradition and embracing contemporary innovation (Assa Journal, 2025; Jiis UINSA, 2025). Historically, Islamic civilization has sustained scientific

inquiry, creativity, and public contribution through an integrative knowledge tradition, which provides a strong epistemological foundation for viewing innovation as both an educational and civilizational imperative (Salmad, 2025; Official Journal of the State University of Surabaya, 2025).

Table 1. Key Competencies Developed Through International Youth Summit Participation

No.	Competency	Description
1	Leadership	Decision-making, initiative, and responsibility
2	Collaboration	Teamwork across cultures and backgrounds
3	Communication	Presentation, dialogue, and negotiation skills
4	Innovation	Creative solutions for educational challenges
	Social Awareness	Commitment to community service and SDG values

Source: Developed by the author based on research findings (2026).

Table 1 shows that participation in international youth forums develops competencies that are highly relevant to the goals of sustainable Islamic education. These competencies combine intellectual growth with ethical responsibility and practical engagement.

4. Implications for Islamic Educational Institutions

This study suggests that sustainable Islamic education should extend beyond classroom instruction to include broader experiential learning opportunities. Islamic educational institutions should therefore create structured spaces for students to engage in leadership programs, innovation forums, volunteer activities, and international exchanges. Such engagements can strengthen self-confidence, expand worldview, and cultivate a stronger sense of social responsibility among learners (Hidayat et al., 2025; ICYF, 2024). More importantly, these experiences may help students connect Islamic values with contemporary global challenges in meaningful and practical ways, as faith-based education increasingly emphasizes

global competence, moral responsibility, and social contribution (Chodjimah et al., 2025; Islam et al., 2023).



Source: Author's illustration based on study findings (2026).

Figure 1. Youth Forum Contribution to Sustainable Islamic Education

The figure above illustrates that youth participation in global forums can become a pathway toward sustainable Islamic education. Through leadership development, value internalization, and collaborative innovation, young people are prepared to face future challenges while remaining grounded in Islamic ethics.

Overall, international youth forums can function as a bridge between local Islamic values and global aspirations. They demonstrate that faith-based identity and global engagement are not mutually exclusive, but mutually reinforcing in the formation of future Muslim leaders (Chodjimah et al., 2025; Global Islamic School Yogyakarta, 2025). In this sense, participation in international forums may serve as an important pedagogical strategy for preparing students who are both ethically grounded and globally responsive (ICYF, 2024; Global Islamic School Yogyakarta, 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that international youth forums have significant potential to contribute to the development of sustainable Islamic education. Participation in the International Youth Potential Summit in Thailand provided

meaningful opportunities for youth to strengthen leadership capacity, intercultural competence, innovation skills, and social responsibility. These competencies are highly relevant to the goals of Islamic education, which emphasize the balanced development of intellectual, moral, social, and spiritual dimensions.

The findings show that youth engagement in global forums can become an alternative pathway for nurturing future Muslim leaders who are adaptive to contemporary challenges while remaining grounded in Islamic values such as amanah, cooperation, justice, and lifelong learning. Through direct involvement in presentations, discussions, and collaborative projects, participants gained practical experiences that cannot always be obtained through classroom learning alone.

This study also highlights that educational institutions should provide broader access for students to participate in leadership programs, volunteer movements, innovation competitions, and international exchanges. Such initiatives may strengthen students' confidence, broaden global perspectives, and Encourage meaningful contributions to society, particularly in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4.

However, this study is limited by its reflective design based on a single event and the author's personal participation experience. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all youth forums or educational contexts. Future research is recommended to involve multiple participants, comparative international programs, or mixed-method approaches to obtain more comprehensive insights regarding youth leadership and Islamic education.

In contribution, this paper offers a practical perspective that sustainable Islamic education can be strengthened not only through formal institutions but also through transformative global experiences that empower youth as future change-makers.

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