

TOWARD A GOLDEN STANDARD OF EDUCATION: CONSTRUCTING THE OUTSTANDING SCHOOL MODEL IN MUHAMMADIYAH INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

The uneven quality of Muhammadiyah schools reflects the absence of a coherent and standardized framework for defining school excellence. Despite Muhammadiyah's substantial contribution to Indonesian education, existing approaches to school quality remain fragmented and insufficiently integrate academic performance, Islamic values, future competencies, and institutional development. This study aims to develop an integrative Outstanding School Model of Muhammadiyah as a conceptual and practical framework for future-oriented educational excellence. Its novelty lies in synthesizing Islamic educational values and future competencies into a unified model anchored in an existing school evaluation system. This study employed a qualitative design-based approach, combining a systematic literature review with document analysis. The Muhammadiyah Future School (MFS) evaluation instrument was used as the empirical foundation for model construction and conceptual refinement. The findings show that the MFS instrument can be reorganized into four core dimensions: academic excellence, Islamic character (Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyah), future skills, and institutional quality. However, the instrument remains conceptually fragmented and is strongly dominated by institutional quality, which accounts for 46% of the indicators and 68% of the total scoring points, while future skills remain underrepresented. This suggests that the current framework is more heavily oriented toward governance and administrative performance than toward balanced future-oriented competencies. This study concludes that transforming the MFS instrument into an integrated four-dimensional framework can strengthen the conceptual basis of Muhammadiyah school excellence. The proposed model provides a standardized reference for school quality improvement, bridges Islamic educational values with global competencies, and supports the advancement of Muhammadiyah education in line with SDG 4 and related global educational agendas.

Keywords: Future Competencies, Islamic Education, Muhammadiyah, Outstanding School, School Quality



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INTRODUCTION

Education systems worldwide are undergoing profound transformation as a result of technological advancement, globalization, and the increasing demand for future-oriented competencies. In this changing landscape, schools are no longer expected merely to transmit academic knowledge; they are also required to cultivate critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, adaptability, and moral character. Consequently, the concept of the outstanding school has gained growing attention as a reference point for educational quality, holistic student development, and institutional sustainability (Aisyah & Matas, 2024; Arnot et al., 2025; Assembly, 2019; Manchanda et al., 2025; Mumthaza et al., 2021; Mumthaza, Cholily, et al., 2026; Mumthaza, Utomo, et al., 2026; Siswanto et al., 2024).

An outstanding school is generally understood as an institution that demonstrates not only strong academic performance but also a healthy school climate, effective leadership, character formation, and the capacity to respond to contemporary educational challenges. In this sense, outstanding schools function as benchmarks for quality assurance and as models for future educational development. The concept is particularly relevant in contexts where educational institutions are expected to balance academic excellence with value-based education and organizational improvement (Dinham, 2005; Hidayatulloh et al., 2022; MacNeil et al., 2009; Mahmood et al., 2024; Martínez-Bravo et al., 2022; Sawalhi & Tamimi, 2023; Sosial & Dergisi, 2020)

Within the Indonesian context, Muhammadiyah represents one of the largest and most influential Islamic educational networks. Through its extensive range of educational institutions, from primary schools to universities, Muhammadiyah has made a substantial contribution to national education. Its long-standing role in providing access to education, promoting Islamic values, and fostering social development makes Muhammadiyah an important case for examining how school excellence can be conceptualized and institutionalized within faith-based educational systems. The data shows that Muhammadiyah accounts for more than 1% of all schools in Indonesia (Muhammadiyah, 2024; Pusdatin Kemendikdasmen, 2026). Additionally, the total number of educational institutions reaches thousands, ranging from elementary schools to universities (Hamami & Nuryana, 2022; Maraulang, 2025; Muhammadiyah, 2024; Pahlevi et al., 2024; Siddik et al., 2023).

Table 1. Distribution of Formal Educational Institutions in Indonesia and Muhammadiyah-Affiliated Schools

Level Of Education	Total Formal Educational Institutions in Indonesia	Muhammadiyah-Affiliated Institutions	Percent age
Elementary School (SD)	176.975	2.453	1,4%
Junior Secondary School (SMP)	64.299	1.599	2,5%
Senior Secondary School (SMA)	40.586	1.294	3,2%
Total Formal Education	281.860	5.346	1,9%

Source : (Pusdatin Kemendikdasmen, 2026)(Muhammadiyah, 2024)

Despite this important contribution, the quality of Muhammadiyah schools remains uneven. While some schools have demonstrated strong achievement in academic performance, character education, and institutional management, others continue to face difficulties in meeting expected standards. This disparity suggests that excellence within Muhammadiyah education has not yet been supported by a shared and integrative framework that can guide school development systematically. As a result, efforts to improve school quality often remain fragmented, context-dependent, and difficult to replicate across institutions. Muhammadiyah categorizes its schools into three major clusters. Cluster A consists of schools with fewer than 100 students, totaling 2,032 schools, or 38%. Cluster B consists of schools with 100–300 students, totaling 2,245 schools or 42%. Cluster C consists of schools with more than 400 students, totaling 1,069 schools or 20%. The data is illustrated in Figure 1 (Fauzi et al., 2021; Muhammadiyah, 2024; Siddik et al., 2023).

MUHAMMADIYAH EDUCATION CLUSTER

■ Cluster A (<100 students) ■ Cluster B (100-399 students) ■ Cluster C (> 400 students)

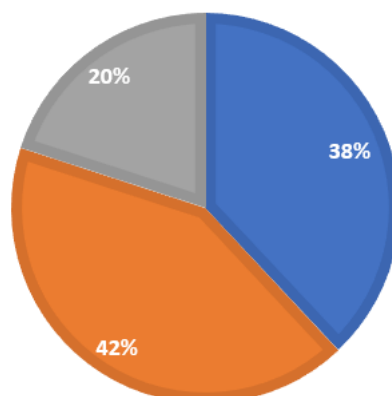


Figure 1. Variations in the Quality of Education in Muhammadiyah

This condition points to a more specific gap in the literature and practice. Previous studies have tended to discuss key dimensions of school excellence—such as academic quality, Islamic character, future skills, and institutional quality—in a partial or separate manner. However, there is still limited research that integrates these dimensions into a single conceptual and operational model specifically designed for Muhammadiyah schools. In addition, although Muhammadiyah Jawa Timur has initiated a school evaluation system to strengthen educational quality, this initiative still requires a stronger conceptual and empirical basis in order to function as a standardized and transferable framework for defining and assessing outstanding schools (Biyanto, 2020; Hamami & Nuryana, 2022; Hidayatulloh, 2017; Suyatno et al., 2023).

Accordingly, this study aims to develop and validate an integrative Outstanding School Model of Muhammadiyah by synthesizing four core dimensions: academic excellence, Islamic character (Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyah), future skills, and institutional quality. The novelty of this study lies in its effort to move beyond fragmented perspectives by constructing a unified framework that connects these dimensions within a single model of school excellence. In doing so, the study contributes not only to the theoretical discussion on outstanding schools in Islamic educational settings but also to the practical refinement of Muhammadiyah’s existing evaluation system. The proposed model is expected to serve as a standardized reference for future school development and as a more coherent benchmark for educational excellence within Muhammadiyah institutions.

This study offers a novel contribution by developing an integrative Outstanding School Model of Muhammadiyah that systematically combines academic excellence, Islamic character (Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyah), future skills, and institutional quality into a unified framework. Unlike previous studies that tend to examine these dimensions separately, this research bridges the gap by linking a conceptual model with an existing evaluation system initiated by Muhammadiyah Jawa Timur, thereby transforming it into a standardized and future-oriented benchmark for school excellence.

Based on the background and research gaps identified above, the research addresses the following questions: 1) What dimensions define an outstanding Muhammadiyah school?, 2) How can an integrative Outstanding School Model be developed and validated?, 3) How can the model function as a standardized framework for future Muhammadiyah education?

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative design-based research approach to develop an integrative Outstanding School Model of Muhammadiyah. The study combined a systematic literature review and document analysis to construct a conceptual framework grounded in both scholarly perspectives and institutional practice. The literature review was used to identify key dimensions of school excellence, Islamic education, and future-oriented competencies, while the document analysis examined the school evaluation system developed by Muhammadiyah Jawa Timur.

Research Data Sources And Selection

The study used two types of data sources: scholarly literature and institutional documents. The literature sources included international journal articles, books, and policy documents related to school excellence, Islamic education, school quality, and 21st-century competencies. The document sources included official evaluation instruments, institutional guidelines, and assessment criteria issued by Muhammadiyah Jawa Timur.

Sources were selected using purposive, criterion-based sampling. Literature was included if it was relevant to the conceptualization of school excellence and provided theoretical, empirical, or policy-based insights. Institutional documents were included if they were officially used in the evaluation of Muhammadiyah schools and contained indicators relevant to school quality and excellence.

Data Collection

Data were collected using two researcher-developed instruments: a literature extraction matrix and a document review matrix. The literature extraction matrix was used to record bibliographic information, conceptual definitions, dimensions, and indicators. The document review matrix was used to identify domains, indicators, scoring structures, and conceptual emphases within the existing evaluation system. Data collection involved systematic identification, screening, selection, and extraction of relevant sources.

Data analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis and framework synthesis. The analysis proceeded through four stages: (1) data reduction to identify key concepts and indicators, (2) coding and categorization to group findings into broader themes, (3) framework synthesis to integrate these themes into a conceptual model, and (4) conceptual alignment to compare the proposed model with the existing Muhammadiyah Jawa Timur evaluation system. The analysis resulted in four core dimensions: academic excellence, Islamic character (Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyah), future skills, and institutional quality.

In this study, these dimensions were treated as analytical constructs rather than statistically tested variables. To complement the thematic interpretation, descriptive quantification was used to examine the distribution of indicators across dimensions in the existing evaluation instrument.

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied source triangulation by comparing findings from the literature with institutional documents. The emerging framework was also assessed for theoretical consistency with established educational quality and future competency frameworks. Transparency and dependability were supported through the use of analytic matrices, coding records, and explicit category definitions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on an analysis of the assessment indicators for The Outstanding School, these have been grouped into four major themes. Table 2 presents a comparison with the components of the Muhammadiyah Future School. Analysis of the Muhammadiyah School Evaluation Instrument (MFS) reveals that its indicators can be systematically categorized into four major dimensions: academic excellence, Islamic character, future skills, and institutional quality. Through thematic coding, components such as vision, leadership, governance, financial management, and partnerships were grouped under institutional quality, reflecting the organizational foundation of school effectiveness. Indicators related to Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyah values, religious practices, and Islamic culture were categorized as Islamic character, emphasizing the distinctive identity of Muhammadiyah education.

Table 2. Mapping of indicators byt themes

MFS Component	Item No	Theme (Model)	Reasons for Categorization
A. Clear Vision	1–6	Institutional Quality	Regarding vision, planning, and governance
B. Core Value	7–9	Islamic Character	The Values of Islam and Muhammadiyah
C. Clean, Green, Hygienic, Beautiful, And Safe Environment	10–14	Institutional Quality	Facilities & Learning Environment
D. Inspiring Learning Community	15–21 (Principal)	Institutional Quality	Leadership & Management
	22–25 (Teacher Competence)	Academic Excellence + Future Skills	Teacher training & competencies
	26–29 (Teacher Competence in ISMUBA)	Islamic Character	The Values of Islam
	30–35 (Educational Support)	Institutional Quality	System Support
	36–40 (Student)	Academic Excellence + Future Skills	Student achievements and activities
E. Community Trust	41–45	Institutional Quality	Trust and Partnership
F. Student Friendly School	46–49	Institutional Quality + Islamic Character	Well-being & values
G. International Orientation	50–58	Future Skills + Academic Excellence	Global competence & digital
H. Financial Management	59–70	Institutional Quality	Financial accountability
		Academic Excellence + Future Skills + Islamic Character	Integrated learning
J. Islamic Culture & Quality	78–83	Islamic Character	Islamic Culture
	84–90	Institutional Quality	Quality assurance
	91–97	Institutional Quality + Academic Excellence	Facilities and curriculum

Furthermore, indicators associated with student achievement, curriculum implementation, and learning processes were classified under academic excellence, while elements such as digital literacy, international orientation, and innovative learning approaches were grouped into future skills. This categorization demonstrates that the MFS instrument, although initially structured in multiple components, inherently contains an integrative structure that aligns with the proposed four-dimensional model of outstanding Muhammadiyah schools. These findings further show that excellence in Muhammadiyah schools is multidimensional rather than being defined by academic performance alone.

This finding is important because previous discussions of school quality and Islamic education often treat academic achievement, moral formation, and institutional effectiveness as separate domains. In contrast, the present analysis shows that these dimensions are interdependent and should be understood as a unified structure of school excellence. Therefore, the first key finding of this study is that an outstanding Muhammadiyah school is defined by the integration of four dimensions rather than by a single dominant indicator.

MFS actually already encompasses four dimensions, but they are still fragmented. The next step in this research is to unify, structure, and develop into the framework. To answer the second research question, the coded indicators were synthesized into an integrative conceptual model. The analysis identified 97 indicators in total, distributed across the four dimensions as follows: academic excellence

(20 indicators; 21%), Islamic character (18 indicators; 19%), future skills (14 indicators; 14%), and institutional quality (45 indicators; 46%). As shown in Table 3, institutional quality accounts for nearly half of the coded indicators, indicating that the current MFS instrument gives substantial emphasis to governance, management, environment, and organizational capacity. Based on the distribution of indicators by thematic dimension, the distribution of these indicators is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Institutional Quality Of Instrument

Dimension	Indicator Amount	Percentages based on Coding
Academic Excellence	20	21%
Islamic Character	18	19%
Future Skills	14	14%
Institutional Quality	45	46%
TOTAL	97	100%

A similar pattern appears when the instrument is examined based on score weighting. Table 4 shows that institutional quality accounts for 68% of the total scoring points, while future skills account for 17%, Islamic character for 11%, and academic excellence for only 4%. This means that the current evaluation structure not only includes more institutional indicators, but also assigns them substantially greater weight. From an evaluative perspective, this result suggests that the existing system privileges institutional and administrative performance more strongly than academic or future-oriented learning outcomes. If the indicators are graded per-point basis, the scoring weight will be as table 4 follows.

Table 4. Indicator by Score Weighting

Dimension	Grade	Percentages based on Coding
Academic Excellence	21	4%
Islamic Character	52	11%
Future Skills	82	17%
Institutional Quality	327	68%
TOTAL POINT	482	100%

The mapping diagram illustrates how the multiple components of the Muhammadiyah School Evaluation System (MFS) are systematically synthesized into four core dimensions: Academic Excellence, Islamic Character, Future Skills, and Institutional Quality. The transformation highlights a shift from a fragmented multi-component system into an integrated and coherent model of school excellence.

Comparison on theme distribution

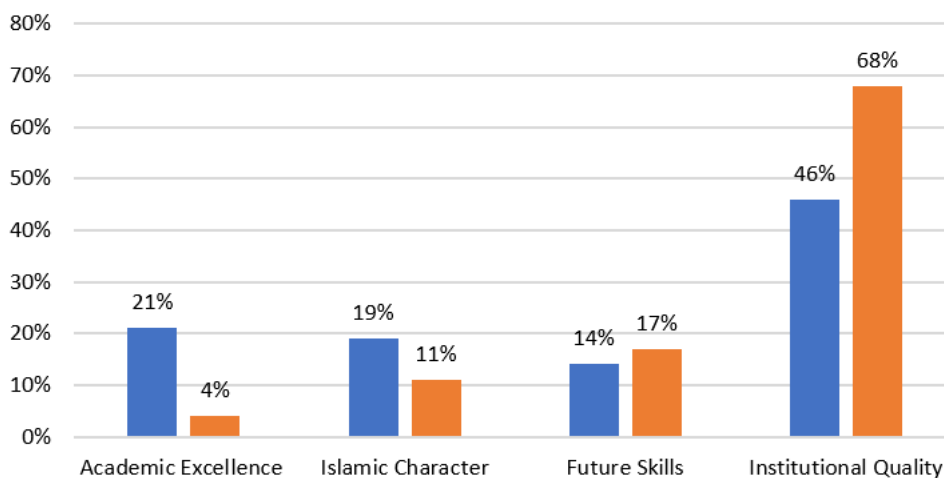


Figure 2. Comparison on theme distribution

The quantitative distribution of indicators reveals a strong emphasis on institutional quality, which accounts for nearly half of the total components in the MFS instrument as the figure 2. This finding indicates that the current evaluation system is predominantly oriented toward governance, management, and administrative performance. While these aspects are essential, such dominance may limit the system's ability to fully capture the multidimensional nature of educational excellence.

In contrast, the proportion of indicators related to future skills remains relatively limited. This contrasts with global education frameworks, such as 21st-century learning models and OECD learning paradigms. It is bringing to place strong emphasis on competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and digital literacy. The imbalance suggests that the existing MFS framework has not yet fully aligned with global trends in future-oriented education.

Moreover, while Islamic character is well represented, its integration with future competencies is not yet explicitly articulated. Previous studies in Islamic education tend to position moral and spiritual development as central, but often lack connection with innovation and global competencies. Therefore, this study contributes by bridging this gap through an integrative model that combines Islamic values with future skills, positioning Muhammadiyah education within both local and global educational discourses.

This imbalance is analytically significant. On the one hand, strong institutional foundations are essential because leadership, governance, quality assurance, and school climate enable the implementation of educational excellence. On the other hand, the dominance of institutional indicators may reduce the visibility of competencies increasingly emphasized in global educational discourse, particularly critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, and digital literacy. Thus, the proposed model does not reject the current MFS structure; instead, it refines it by reorganizing fragmented components into a more coherent framework and by highlighting areas that require stronger conceptual balance, especially future skills.

The validation of the model in this study is conceptual rather than statistical. The four dimensions were validated through alignment between the literature-based framework and the existing evaluation instrument of Muhammadiyah Jawa Timur. Figure 2 demonstrates this transformation from a fragmented multi-component instrument into an integrated four-dimensional model. Therefore, the second major finding is that the MFS instrument already provides an empirical basis for model development, but it requires conceptual restructuring in order to function as a coherent model of outstanding Muhammadiyah schools

Discussion

Dimensions Defining an outstanding Muhammadiyah School

This research confirm that previous school evaluation approaches tend to assess educational quality in a fragmented manner. This aligns with previous studies that highlight the tendency of educational research to focus on isolated aspects of school effectiveness. The proposed model addresses this limitation by integrating academic, spiritual, future-oriented, and institutional dimensions into a unified framework.

The function of this model as a standardized framework lies in its ability to translate a localized evaluation instrument into a more conceptually robust and transferable structure. In other words, the model provides a common reference for defining what an outstanding Muhammadiyah school should look like, what dimensions should be evaluated, and how school quality can be improved in a more balanced manner. This is particularly important because the current uneven quality among Muhammadiyah schools reflects the absence of a shared benchmark for excellence. By integrating conceptual dimensions with institutional practice, the model offers a stronger basis for standardization, replication, and long-term quality improvement.

This integrative approach is crucial, as future education requires more than just academic competencies. It demands the ability to adapt, collaborate, and uphold ethical values. Therefore, the Muhammadiyah Model School represents a shift from partial evaluation toward holistic standardization.

Recontextualizing Islamic Education in Future-Oriented Learning

One of the key contributions of this study is the integration of Islamic character (Al-Islam and Kemuhmadiyah) with future skills. This finding extends previous discussions on Islamic education, which often emphasize moral and spiritual development but less frequently connect these aspects with global competencies (Biyanto, 2020; Molloy et al., 2024; Mumthaza, Cholily, et al., 2026; Pashiardis & Johansson, 2020).

By positioning Islamic values alongside critical thinking, creativity, and digital literacy, the model demonstrates that religious education and modern competencies are not contradictory but complementary. This integration reinforces the relevance of Muhammadiyah education in addressing contemporary educational challenges (Manchanda et al., 2025; Mukarom & Assaraj, 2024; Mulyadi et al., 2021; Mumthaza, Utomo, et al., 2026; Zurqoni et al., 2018).

From Local Evaluation Practice to Standardized Framework

The alignment between the proposed model and the Muhammadiyah Jawa Timur evaluation system highlights an important practical implication. While the existing system provides a contextual and operational basis, the model developed in this study offers a conceptual structure that can enhance its coherence and scalability.

To answer the third research question, the four dimensions were further synthesized into a conceptual framework showing how they interact to produce an outstanding Muhammadiyah school. Figure 3 indicates that academic excellence, Islamic character, future skills, and institutional quality are not independent elements; rather, they work dynamically and collectively to shape a holistic educational system. In this model, academic excellence ensures learning quality, Islamic character provides moral and ideological grounding, future skills prepare learners for contemporary challenges, and institutional quality sustains implementation and continuous improvement.

This transformation is significant, as it enables the evaluation system to evolve from a localized practice into a standardized framework that can be adopted across Muhammadiyah schools. In this sense, the study bridges the gap between theory and practice by linking conceptual development with institutional implementation as figure 3.

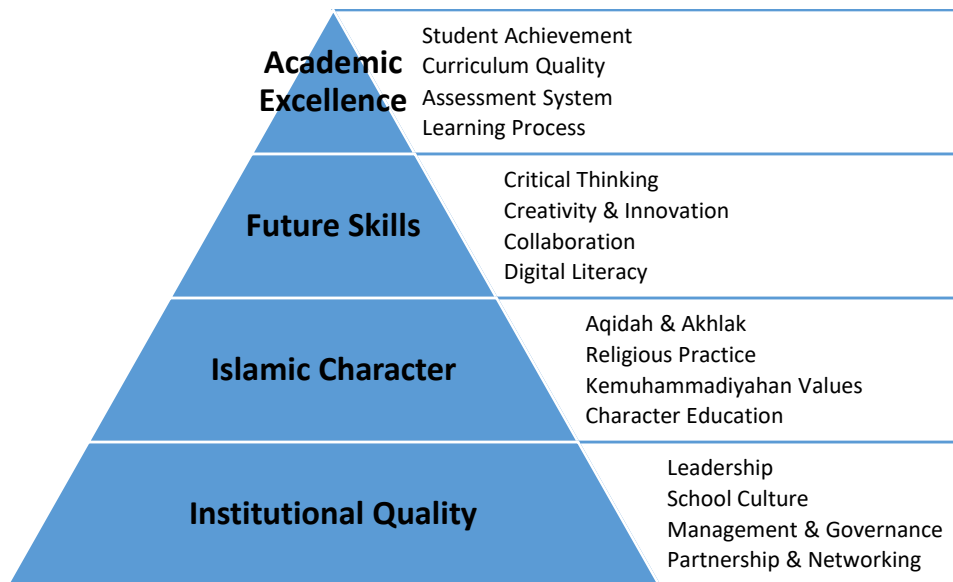


Figure 3. The conceptual framework

The conceptual framework illustrates that the Outstanding School Model of Muhammadiyah is constructed through the integration of four core dimensions: academic excellence, Islamic character, future skills, and institutional quality. These dimensions interact dynamically and collectively contribute to the development of a holistic educational system. The convergence of these four pillars leads to the formation of an outstanding school that meets the demands of future education, ultimately achieving a “golden standard” within Muhammadiyah institutions.

Academic excellence consists of: Improving student learning outcomes, Academic achievements (competitions, Olympiads), Learning mastery, Adaptive and contextual curriculum, Integration of literacy and numeracy, Higher-order thinking skills (HOTS)-based learning, Authentic assessment, competency-based evaluation, continuous feedback, active and student-centered learning, use of technology in learning, differentiated instruction. In the second step are future skills include analytical and problem-solving skills, data-driven decision-making, creating innovative work, project-based learning, teamwork, effective communication, the use of digital technology, digital ethics, and ICT-based learning (Fadhli, M. et al., 2024; Fardian et al., 2025; Rahardjanto & Susilowati, 2018; Salas-Pilco et al., 2023; Selvaratnam & Sankey, 2021; Triani et al., 2018; Varadarajan et al., 2023).

Islamic character consists of the internalization of the value of tawhid, virtuous behavior, exemplary conduct, regular acts of worship, spiritual practices (prayer, remembrance of God), a religious school culture, an understanding of the Muhammadiyah ideology, the implementation of the values of Al-‘Ashr (faith, knowledge, deeds), community-oriented social movements, and foundational values such as discipline and responsibility, social awareness, and integrity. In institutional quality consist of visionary leadership, strategic decision-making, a culture of quality and excellence, a conducive learning environment, school-based management, program planning and evaluation, community partnerships, and collaboration with external institutions (Biyanto, 2020; Hariandi et al., 2023; Hidayat et al., 2024; Hurriyati et al., 2022; Konstantinos & Oyrania, 2025; Salite et al., 2021; Tabibian et al., 2019; Utomo, 2021; Villarama et al., 2025).

Based on this mapping, this indicator is fully aligned with the SDGs established by the international community as table 5. This study extends existing educational models by aligning an Islamic-based school framework with global agendas such as the SDGs and future education competencies, thereby positioning Muhammadiyah education within an internationally relevant discourse (Ortega-Sánchez et al., 2020; Savelyeva & Park, 2024).

The broader relevance of the model is further demonstrated by its alignment with global educational agendas. As shown in Table 5, academic excellence aligns with SDG 4, Islamic character aligns with SDG 4.7, future skills align with SDG 4 and SDG 9, and institutional quality aligns with SDG 17. This mapping shows that the proposed framework is not only contextually grounded in Muhammadiyah and Islamic education, but also compatible with international discussions on quality education, innovation, values-based learning, and institutional partnership. Accordingly, the third major finding is that the model can function as both a context-specific and globally relevant reference framework for future Muhammadiyah education.

Table 5. Indicator throughout SDGs

Dimension	Key Indicators	SDGs Alignment	Future Education Framework
Academic Excellence	- Student achievement- Curriculum quality- Assessment system	SDG 4: Quality Education	- Foundational literacy & numeracy- Lifelong learning
Islamic Character	- Aqidah & akhlak- Religious practices- Kemuhammadiyah values	SDG 4.7 (Education for sustainable development, values, ethics)	- Global citizenship- Ethical & moral competence
Future Skills	- Critical thinking- Creativity- Collaboration- Digital literacy	SDG 4 & SDG 9 (Innovation)	- 21st-century skills (4Cs)- Digital transformation
Institutional Quality	- Leadership- Governance- School culture- Partnership	SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals	- School transformation- Adaptive leadership

Linking the proposed model to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is essential to position the study within a global educational discourse. In particular, the alignment with SDG 4 (Quality Education) highlights the relevance of the model in promoting inclusive, equitable, and future-oriented learning. This connection not only strengthens the theoretical foundation of the study but also enhances its policy relevance and international applicability. By integrating Islamic educational values with global

educational goals, the model bridges local identity and global standards, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive and sustainable vision of educational excellence (Miseliunaite et al., 2022; Ortega-Sánchez et al., 2020; Saputra et al., 2025).

The alignment between the proposed Outstanding School Model of Muhammadiyah and global frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and future education paradigms highlights the broader relevance of this study. In particular, the model strongly supports SDG 4 (Quality Education) by promoting inclusive, equitable, and high-quality learning environments. The integration of Islamic character further aligns with SDG 4.7, which emphasizes values-based education, global citizenship, and sustainable development (Cuong et al., 2024; Michael et al., 2024; Miseliunaite et al., 2022).

Moreover, the inclusion of future skills—such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and digital literacy—reflects the global shift toward 21st-century competencies and innovation, which are also connected to SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure). Meanwhile, the institutional dimension of the model corresponds with SDG 17, highlighting the importance of partnerships, governance, and systemic transformation in achieving sustainable educational outcomes (Holtman et al., 2018; Manchanda et al., 2025; Miseliunaite et al., 2022; Ortega-Sánchez et al., 2020).

This mapping demonstrates that the Outstanding School Model of Muhammadiyah is not only contextually grounded in Islamic education but also globally relevant. It positions Muhammadiyah schools within an international discourse on future education, bridging local values with global standards and reinforcing their role in achieving sustainable and future-oriented educational development (Chang Hiang-Chu, 2024; Ishatono & Raharjo, 2016; Li et al., 2025; Preckler Galguera, 2018; Savelyeva & Park, 2024; UNESCO, 2020).

The findings of this study reinforce the view that school excellence should not be reduced to test scores or organizational compliance alone. Previous studies on school effectiveness and outstanding schools have emphasized the importance of leadership, school climate, academic outcomes, and institutional culture. Meanwhile, studies on Islamic education have tended to place stronger emphasis on moral, spiritual, and identity formation. The present study extends these strands of literature by showing that, in Muhammadiyah schools, excellence emerges from the interaction of academic, Islamic, future-oriented, and institutional dimensions rather than from isolated domains.

A particularly important contribution of this study is the integration of Islamic character and future skills. In many discussions, religious education is positioned as value-centered, while future competencies are framed as technical or global skills. This study argues that the two should not be treated as contradictory. Instead, Islamic values can provide an ethical foundation for the development of critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, and digital responsibility. In this sense, the model contributes a more holistic and contextually grounded interpretation of future-oriented Islamic education.

The study also sharpens the meaning of institutional quality. Rather than viewing it merely as administrative compliance, the findings suggest that institutional quality acts as an enabling structure that makes the other three dimensions sustainable. However, because the current MFS instrument gives much greater proportion and scoring weight to this dimension, there is a risk that excellence may be interpreted too narrowly in managerial terms. Therefore, one implication of this study is the need to rebalance the framework so that future skills and academic processes receive stronger visibility without weakening institutional accountability.

This study lies in two main aspects of novelty. First, it develops an integrative Outstanding School Model of Muhammadiyah that unifies four dimensions—academic excellence, Islamic character, future skills, and institutional quality—into a single framework. Second, it links that conceptual model directly to an existing evaluation system used in Muhammadiyah Jawa Timur, thereby bridging the gap between theory and institutional practice. This makes the study not only conceptually innovative but also practically applicable.

The theoretical implication of this study is the advancement of a holistic model of school excellence within Islamic education. The practical implication is that school leaders, evaluators, and Muhammadiyah policymakers may use the model as a structured reference for revising indicators, rebalancing scoring systems, and strengthening school quality improvement programs. At the policy level, the model provides a basis for a more standardized and scalable approach to evaluating Muhammadiyah schools across different contexts.

This study has several limitations. First, the model was developed through literature review and document analysis; therefore, its validation remains conceptual and has not yet been tested empirically

across Muhammadiyah schools. Second, the analysis relied on one institutional evaluation system, namely the MFS instrument from Muhammadiyah Jawa Timur, which may not fully represent the diversity of practices across all Muhammadiyah educational institutions. Third, the study focused on model construction rather than on measuring the direct effects of the proposed dimensions on school outcomes.

Future studies should therefore conduct empirical validation of the proposed framework using broader institutional samples and mixed-method or quantitative designs. Further research may also refine the weighting of indicators, examine stakeholder perspectives, and test whether the model can predict differences in school performance, student development, and organizational improvement. In addition, Muhammadiyah educational authorities may consider revising the current instrument so that future-oriented competencies are more explicitly represented and more proportionately weighted within school evaluation.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that an outstanding Muhammadiyah school is defined by the integration of four core dimensions: academic excellence, Islamic character, future skills, and institutional quality. The findings show that the existing Muhammadiyah Future School (MFS) instrument already contains these dimensions, but in a fragmented form and with a strong dominance of institutional indicators. By reorganizing the instrument through thematic analysis and framework synthesis, this study develops an integrative model that offers a more coherent conceptual basis for defining and evaluating school excellence. The study contributes a new concept of school excellence in Muhammadiyah education by linking Islamic values, future competencies, academic quality, and institutional capacity within a single framework. This model not only answers the need for a clearer benchmark of outstanding Muhammadiyah schools, but also provides practical guidance for improving evaluation systems and strengthening school quality more systematically. Its alignment with SDG 4, SDG 4.7, SDG 9, and SDG 17 further indicates that the model is both locally grounded and globally relevant. However, because the model has been validated conceptually rather than empirically, further studies are needed to test its applicability across broader Muhammadiyah school contexts. Even so, the proposed framework offers an important foundation for advancing a sustainable and future-oriented golden standard of Muhammadiyah education.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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