



***Kaizen* as a strategy for continuous improvement of education quality in IT schools (Integrated Islam)**

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ABSTRACT

Improving the quality of education in schools requires a sustainable and participatory strategy. *Kaizen*, known as a philosophy of continuous improvement in the industrial world, has the potential to be applied in the educational context. This study aims to explore how *Kaizen* principles can be adapted as a strategy to improve the quality of education in schools. Through a qualitative case study of an Integrated Islamic School that combines science and Islamic values, this study reveals that the implementation of *Kaizen* principles supported by the 5S concept, collective participation (teachers, students, and parents), effective leadership, regular evaluation, continuous improvement, and collaboration positively influences work culture and enhances the quality of educational services. These outcomes are facilitated through the use of PDCA, Gemba Walk, *Kaizen* Event, and the Suggestion System. The conclusion of this study suggests that *Kaizen* can be an effective strategy in creating an adaptive, participatory, and continuous improvement-oriented education system.



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INTRODUCTION

Education is the main foundation in the development of a nation. It can even be said that education is the source of everything. When you want to solve a problem, it is like you must first fix the education (Hibana et al., 2015). Therefore, the quality of education must always be improved to produce good quality education. Good education quality is not only determined by the curriculum and infrastructure, but also by the management system implemented in school administration (Purnomo & Haryati, 2023).

In the context of global competition and increasingly complex developments, the demand for quality education is increasing. Schools as educational institutions are required to continue to innovate and make continuous improvements in order to produce graduates who are competent and adaptive to change (Safardan, 2024). However, the reality in the field shows that efforts to improve the quality of education are often carried out partially and unsystematically. Many schools experience stagnation in quality management due to the absence of structured and sustainable strategies (Sopandi et al., 2025). In fact, quality improvement should be part of the school's organizational culture, not just a short-term incidental program. This means that organizational culture should be implemented continuously. In this context, Integrated Islamic (IT) schools, which have recently gained popularity, provide an interesting setting to examine how such a culture can be sustained.

This is based on the observation that this type of school seeks to integrate science and religion, in this case Islam. In addition, IT schools are considered superior in terms of programs and achievements, even though they are more expensive than public schools. In order to maintain the quality of education, every school must strive to maintain and improve the quality of education, including IT (Integrated Islamic) schools (Samdani, 2014).

One approach that can be adapted in the context of education is *Kaizen*. The concept of *Kaizen* originated in Japan (*kai* = change, *zen* = better), which embodies the philosophy of "continuous improvement" through small, consistent steps involving all elements of the organization, from leaders

to the lowest-level implementers (Imai, 1986). In the industrial world, *Kaizen* has been proven to be able to consistently improve efficiency, productivity, and quality (Ishikawa, 1987; Liker, 2004). The application of *Kaizen* principles in education is believed to encourage the creation of a collaborative, efficient, and quality-oriented work culture (Duran & Mertol, 2020).

Kaizen is synonymous with 5S (*Seiri, Seiton, Seise, Seiketsu, Shitsuke*) with *Kaizen* techniques and tools in the form of PDCA, Gemba Walk, *Kaizen* Event, and Suggestion System or *Kaizen* Proposal. Although *Kaizen* was originally a manufacturing concept, his ideas are relevant to education, which is a service organization whose processes are highly dependent on people (teachers, students, educational staff) and daily interactions. The application of *Kaizen* in schools or universities means fostering a culture where every teacher, staff member, and student actively seeks opportunities for improvement, reports ideas, and conducts small, measurable experiments.

A number of studies, such as those conducted by Imai (1986) and David & David (2017) show that the application of *Kaizen* principles in educational institutions, both in management practices and learning processes, has a positive impact on school performance. In addition, Roofi'i et al. (2022) also show that improving the overall quality of education can be achieved by paying attention to a supportive social culture, the involvement of all parties, and the use of *Kaizen*. Furthermore, research conducted by Supriyanto et al. (2019) found that in higher education, *Kaizen* can be used to create a culture of quality, minimize initial errors, and improve productivity and the quality of education.

However, most of these studies were conducted in non-Islamic or industrial-oriented educational contexts, providing limited insight into how *Kaizen* can be adapted within schools that integrate religious and scientific values. Furthermore, previous research has primarily focused on managerial efficiency rather than on the collaborative participation of all stakeholders, including teachers, students, and parents, in cultivating a sustainable work culture. Methodologically, most prior studies employed quantitative or survey-based approaches, while in-depth qualitative explorations of *Kaizen* implementation within Integrated Islamic Schools remain scarce (Rizal, 2025). Therefore, this study seeks to fill these gaps by employing a qualitative case study approach to explore how *Kaizen* principles can be contextualized within an Integrated Islamic School setting.

The lack of *Kaizen* implementation in Indonesian schools and the fact that much research remains to be done, especially as a formal strategy for improving the quality of education. Based on this background, this study aims to examine how *Kaizen* principles can be applied in educational quality management in schools, especially in IT (Integrated Islamic) schools, and how this impacts work culture and educational services. Thus, this study is expected to contribute to the development of a better educational quality management model that can be applied, given that there are currently quite a number of IT schools in Indonesia, especially in Jakarta.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach was chosen because the researcher wanted to gain an in-depth understanding of the application of *Kaizen* principles in improving the quality of education in Integrated Islamic Schools. The research subjects were school principals, teachers, administrative staff, and school committees.

The object of this research is the *Kaizen*-based quality improvement strategy implemented in Integrated Islamic (IT) schools. The study was conducted in several Integrated Islamic Schools in Jakarta that actively apply internal quality improvement principles. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation methods. The data analysis technique employed the Miles and Huberman model, which includes the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Sugiyono, 2019).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the findings obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation, it was revealed that Integrated Islamic (IT) schools do not fully implement *Kaizen*-style Total Quality Management (TQM). However, several elements of *Kaizen* philosophy have been partially adopted and

integrated into their educational quality improvement strategies. These aspects are reflected in curriculum development, teacher competence enhancement, facility management, and administrative processes. Although IT schools follow the quality standards established by the government and the Integrated Islamic School Network (JSIT), they contextualize these standards with Islamic values, particularly through the integration of faith-based practices in everyday school routines (Sholehah et al., 2025).

Interviews further indicated that there are no significant differences between the government's and JSIT's quality standards. Instead, JSIT serves as an adaptive model that allows each Integrated Islamic School to develop its unique identity. This finding aligns with Supriyanto et al. (2019), who emphasized that contextual adaptation of quality management principles is essential for achieving organizational relevance and sustainability in faith-based schools. The implementation of quality management in IT schools is translated into more specific operational practices, one of which is through the application of the PDCA cycle as a systematic approach to quality improvement.

Implementation of PDCA

PDCA (Plan – Do – Check – Act), specifically for the unique purpose of IT schools, namely to improve the quality of the Al-Qur'an learning process and memorization to make it more effective and interesting, with the following details:

1. Plan

The Qur'an teaching team and the principal identify the problem of why some children are not yet fluent in makhraj. Then they work together to analyze and develop a small improvement plan, which involves tutoring between students who are already fluent and those who are not yet fluent in small groups. In this case, the teacher continues to provide assistance.

2. Do

Every day, students memorize and practice reading the Qur'an and praying. Students who serve as tutors are entrusted by teachers to teach their peers who are not yet proficient, while still being supervised by teachers.

3. Check

The school also assesses each student who serves as a mentor or tutor in their field of expertise, as well as how small group learning is conducted.

4. Act

In practice, based on the interview results, there was an improvement in memorization and pronunciation, which was considered to be motivated by their friends who became tutors. However, there were also students who had difficulty memorizing, so they still needed guidance from teachers and parents at home by providing them with a "Qur'an learning monitoring book" that had to be signed by their parents every day. It turns out that, upon further investigation, this book is not only for monitoring Qur'an memorization, but also contains other religious points such as prayer, daily activities, and so on. These results demonstrate that the PDCA cycle not only enhances the effectiveness of learning but also strengthens students' spiritual and social responsibility similar to the findings of Duran & Mertol (2020) and Supriyanto et al. (2019), who noted that *Kaizen*-based learning encourages moral and behavioral development in educational contexts.

Implementation of 5S (*Seiri, Seiton, Seise, Seiketsu, Shitsuke*)

1. *Seiri* (Sort)

Remove unnecessary items from classrooms or teachers' offices. Students are accustomed to removing distractions, such as trash, shoes that are out of place, including the habit of queuing to get drinking water and perform wudu so that it is concise, fast, and effective.

2. *Seiton* (Order)

Arrange items in an orderly manner so that they are easy to find and use. This includes placing bags and personal items on their designated shelves, shoes in their designated places, and lining up neatly when arriving at and leaving school.

3. *Seise* (Clean)

Cleanliness is part of faith. At IT School, cleanliness is cultivated in all aspects, guided by teachers who always set an example, advise students, and so on.

4. *Seiketsu* (Cleanliness)

Teachers and students work together to establish standards of cleanliness and tidiness that apply to everyone. At certain times, there are even classroom cleanliness and tidiness competitions to motivate everyone to always maintain cleanliness and tidiness.

5. *Shitsuke* (Diligence)

Teachers and principals at IT schools are required to arrive by 6:30 a.m. at the latest, and students by 6:45 a.m. at the latest, in order to participate in activities such as the *dhuha* prayer, memorization, and reading the Qur'an. Thus, diligence and discipline are considered as one. Teachers and the principal serve as role models in implementing this discipline. This means that the application of the 5S system not only improves the physical environment but also builds a mental and spiritual culture that supports the overall quality of education (Hibana et al., 2015; Purnomo & Haryati, 2023).

Thus, the 5S principle is systematically applied to establish order, cleanliness, and discipline in the school environment. For example, students are trained to maintain cleanliness (*Seiso*), organize learning spaces (*Seiton*), and uphold diligence (*Shitsuke*) through early attendance and participation in religious activities such as *dhuha* prayer and Qur'an recitation. This supports the view of Hibana et al. (2015) and Purnomo & Haryati (2023), who found that the 5S system strengthens not only the physical environment but also moral discipline and organizational harmony.

Tools in the Kaizen philosophy of School Management

Tools such as Gemba Walk, *Kaizen* Event, and the Suggestion System are actively used to foster participatory leadership and continuous improvement. Principals conduct Gemba Walks to observe real-time learning and operational processes. This aligns with Siregar & Tarigan (2023), who found that visible leadership presence enhances teacher motivation and accountability. The *Kaizen* Event enables collaboration between schools and parents in solving short-term issues, while the Suggestion System empowers teachers and parents to provide feedback. These findings correspond to Latif & Sesmiarni (2024) who highlighted that suggestion systems promote innovation and shared responsibility in organizational development.

1. Gemba Walk (Real Place)

In the context of schools, Gemba Walk means that the principal or quality team goes directly to the field (classrooms, laboratories, prayer rooms, school kitchens, courtyards) to monitor the effectiveness of school programs in order to maintain and improve school quality by observing them in real time/directly. At the IT school we observed, for activities or programs such as flag ceremonies, *tahsin* activities, or others, the principal always tries to participate and be present, and if unable to do so, the vice principal acts as a representative. However, for monitoring purposes, based on the results of interviews, CCTV cameras are now used in every corner of the school, which are centered in the principal's office. The direct involvement of leaders in Gemba Walk strengthens the culture of participatory leadership, which, according to research by Zamzami & Novita (2021) greatly influences teacher motivation and school quality.

2. *Kaizen* Event

A focused and structured improvement activity conducted within a short period of time (1–5 days) to resolve specific issues. In this regard, based on research findings, for focused improvements to achieve maximum results, it is essential to collaborate and communicate openly between the school and the students' parents. Moreover, the issues typically faced in IT schools are often related to discipline.

For example, children who are absent for more than three consecutive days will be examined in depth, such as the distance from home to school, the vehicle used, and the like. From the follow-up results, a “school pick-up and drop-off” event will be provided if the parents also agree to pay additional transportation costs. Similarly, the issue of catering or lunch menus is addressed, considering that IT schools are accustomed to returning home after congregational midday prayers, which is definitely after 12 noon. These activities and patterns will foster a sense of shared responsibility for the school’s success by promoting a sense of care between the school and students.

3. Suggestion System or *Kaizen* Proposal

A system that encourages every teacher, staff member, or student to routinely and systematically propose small improvements (*Kaizen*). Ideas do not have to be big; they just need to be practical, easy to implement, and useful. At the IT school where we obtained this information, at the end of each month, every teacher is required to fill out a Google form with their impressions and messages about teaching and other activities (Akhitova, 2023; Rizal, 2025). Meanwhile, parents are required to fill out a daily monitoring book for their children, which serves as a reference for teachers. This is expected to serve as a bridge for improvement, identifying shortcomings so that improvements, even small ones, can be made. The school implements a suggestion system in which every teacher is required to fill out a digital form (Google Form) containing monthly reflections and ideas for improvement. Parents also contribute through notes in the student monitoring book, which is used as evaluation material by teachers (Muslimin, 2023). This system serves as a two-way communication tool that reinforces the principle of bottom-up improvement. Research findings indicate that the suggestion system effectively encourages innovation and individual responsibility for organizational quality (Firdaus, 2023).

The Impact of *Kaizen* Culture on School Culture and Quality

The implementation of *Kaizen* in this IT school has resulted in a real transformation in three main aspects, namely the learning process, internal management, and student character. First, learning has become more participatory and reflective, with students playing an active role in learning activities. Second, a culture of discipline and cleanliness has been established through positive habits such as punctuality and tidiness, while participatory leadership from the principal encourages collaboration and innovation among teachers. Third, the relationship between the school and parents has become closer through a daily monitoring system and regular evaluations.

These findings are in line with the research of Roofi’i et al. (2022), Apriyani (2024), and Supriyanto et al. (2019), which shows that the integration of *Kaizen* with Islamic values can shape an adaptive, collaborative, and sustainable educational organizational culture. The implementation of *Kaizen* culture in IT schools has transformed three major areas. First, learning processes, which have become more participatory and reflective. Second, internal management, which emphasizes collaboration, discipline, and cleanliness, and third school–parent relations, which have strengthened through continuous communication and evaluation. In essence, improving the quality of education at this IT school requires the involvement of all parties (teachers, students, including parents), good leadership, regular evaluations, and gradual improvements, as well as cooperation between various parties to have a positive impact on work culture and the quality of educational services. The integration of *Kaizen* principles within an Islamic framework offers a promising pathway for sustainable educational quality enhancement.

The findings suggest that *Kaizen* principles, when contextualized with Islamic values, can serve as a strategic framework for holistic quality improvement in faith-based schools. Practically, this model encourages collective responsibility, participatory leadership, and spiritual-based motivation among school communities. Theoretically, it contributes to expanding *Kaizen* and TQM discourse beyond industrial and secular settings into the domain of Islamic education management.

CONCLUSION

Total Quality Management (TQM) has become essential for continuous improvement in organizations, including educational institutions. *Kaizen*, originally developed in the manufacturing

sector, can be effectively contextualized in education through its principles and tools. In this study, the 5S concept (*Seiri, Seiton, Seiso, Seiketsu, Shitsuke*) along with *Kaizen* techniques such as PDCA, Gemba Walk, *Kaizen* Event, and the Suggestion System (*Kaizen* Proposal) were examined within IT (Integrated Islamic) schools. The findings indicate that IT schools have adopted several aspects of *Kaizen* thinking to enhance educational quality, including curriculum development, teacher competence, facilities management, and administrative processes. These schools follow the quality standards set by the government and the Integrated Islamic School Network (JSIT), which integrate Islamic values into all aspects of education. Several activities were implemented as part of *Kaizen*, namely through the application of the PDCA cycle in various activities, such as improving Al-Qur'an learning and memorization. Then, the application of the 5S principle is implemented to maintain order, cleanliness, and discipline in the school environment. Meanwhile, there is also the implementation of *Kaizen* events and the *Kaizen* suggestion/proposal system, which is carried out through Google Forms and student monitoring books to encourage feedback and continuous improvement. In essence, improving the quality of education at IT schools requires active involvement from all stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents, and school leaders.

Based on the findings of the study described above, there are several recommendations that can be implemented by schools, including strengthening *Kaizen* integration, increasing the capacity of teachers and staff through regular training on *Kaizen* tools and techniques, increasing stakeholder engagement (parents, students, and the wider school community), and monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of *Kaizen* initiatives on learning outcomes, student behavior, and school performance. This study is limited to several Integrated Islamic Schools in Jakarta, which may not represent the diversity of IT schools throughout Indonesia. Future research could use a comparative or mixed approach to explore variations in *Kaizen* implementation across different regions or levels of education and conduct longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of *Kaizen* implementation on the quality of education and character development in IT schools. Overall, this study suggests that *Kaizen* can be an effective strategy for creating an adaptive, participatory, and continuously evolving educational environment that aligns modern management principles with Islamic values.

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