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WHY GEN Z EMPLOYEES INTEND TO LEAVE: TOXIC LEADERSHIP, ENVIRONMENT, AND SELF-AFFIRMATION IN ISLAMIC EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACTS

Background: Turnover intentions among Generation Z employees are a problem in human resource management, particularly in Islamic educational institutions. Despite upholding spiritual and ethical values, these institutions often face challenges in their implementation, such as destructive leadership and a hostile work environment. This complexity is compounded by Gen Z's sensitivity to psychological stress. **Objective:** This study analyzes the influence of destructive leadership and a conducive work environment on turnover intention among Gen Z employees in Islamic educational institutions, with self-affirmation as a mediator. **Methods:** A quantitative survey was conducted with 125 Generation Z employees working in Islamic educational institutions in Makassar. Data were analyzed using structural equation modeling. **Results:** Destructive leadership decreased self-affirmation, thus increasing turnover intention. However, a conducive environment increased self-affirmation but had no direct effect on turnover intention. Self-affirmation significantly mediated both relationships. **Conclusion:** Gen Z employees in Islamic educational institutions tend to have intentions to leave if they experience toxic leadership and an unsupportive work environment. However, strong self affirmation can mitigate these negative influences. These findings have implications for human resource management in Islamic educational institutions to provide a supportive work environment, especially for the younger generation who are more sensitive to psychological issues.

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A. INTRODUCTION

Empirical facts show in the results of a national survey released by Jakpat in 2022, as many as 52.4% of Generation Z (Gen Z) respondents chose to leave their jobs because they felt the work environment was toxic (Jakpat 2023). This figure shows that an unhealthy work environment is one of the main triggers for turnover among Gen Z. The intention to leave a job is a problem in human resource management, especially in educational institutions that are based on values and knowledge (Schmiedehaus et al. 2023; Akpom and Ibegbulam. 2023).

The Gen Z group is individuals born between 1997 to 2012 who are starting to dominate the workforce (Pham et al. 2024). Gen Z dislikes unhealthy organizational conditions, such as authoritarian managerial practices, lack of leadership empathy, and an uncompetitive work environment. This is because Gen Z has characteristics that are more open to change, prioritize life balance and have a sensitive soul to psychological conditions in the workplace (Abbasi et al. 2024).

Islamic educational institutions uphold moral, spiritual, and humanitarian values, but this becomes contradictory if toxic leadership occurs because it can cause cognitive dissonance and emotional stress in young employees who are still adapting and forming a professional identity (Alanezi 2024; Dahlan, et al. 2024). Toxic leadership is destructive behavior carried out by leaders and has a negative impact on employees and the work environment as a whole (Herbst and Roux. 2023; Labrague 2024). Muslims use the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet as a guide to life and use them as a guide for science (Al-Anesi 2023), but in reality, people who work in institutions that should be role models in the application of ethical values are not free from destructive leadership practices. Destructive leadership, or toxic leadership, refers to leaders' behavior that is destructive, authoritarian, and manipulative toward the well-being of their subordinates. This type of leadership not only decreases performance but also causes emotional stress that affects employee psychology, especially among Generation Z, who are still developing their identity.

According to Octavian (2023) manipulative (toxic) leaders can reduce work loyalty. This situation will worsen if it is not supported by a conducive work environment, namely an environment that is psychologically supportive, open to communication, and provides space for personal and professional growth. The existence of destructive leadership in an organization based on Islamic values will create a contradiction between institutionally adopted values and applied managerial practices. This contradiction can trigger psychological stress, considering that spiritual values are expected to be the foundation for forming a healthy and supportive organizational culture.

Previous research has shown that destructive leadership can trigger psychological stress, anxiety, and cognitive dissonance in employees, which can disrupt the process of self internalization (Son and Pak 2024; Zia et al. 2024; Korkmazyurek and Ocak, 2024). Furthermore, Li, Peikai et al. (2024) explain that destructive leadership styles such as authoritarian, manipulative, and abusive can create psychological stress that affects employee behavior within the organization. Employees who adopt these leadership styles tend to feel uncomfortable within the organization, leading to a desire to withdraw from it. Furthermore, research shows that a conducive work environment has a positive impact on employee psychological well-being and engagement (Lu et al. 2023; Santoso and Oktafien 2024; Tripney et al. 2024). A psychologically supportive

environment, providing space for personal and professional growth, and fostering open communication can be factors in a person's intention to leave their job (Sok, Danaher, and Sok 2023; Huang and Yin. 2024).

Furthermore, research has found that the positive impact of the work environment is largely mediated by psychological variables, such as work engagement, subjective well-being, and self-affirmation (Spoelma and Marchiondo 2024; Wang et al. 2024). This means that the internal work environment is a determining factor in whether employees stay or leave their organization (Lambert. 2023). However, literature Poku et al, (2022) and Andriani et al,(2023) explains that although a conducive work environment exists within an organization, such as support, good working relationships, and adequate work facilities, this does not always have a direct impact on individuals' desire to leave their organization. In other words, a conducive environment does not always directly reduce the desire to leave their job.

In previous research related to the same object in Islamic institutions, in research Udin (2024) and Nauman, et al (2025) found that superiors who are able to implement Islamic work ethics or have ethical behavior will have an impact on employee behavior so that they do not deviate from the organization. In addition, research, Islam et al, (2020) explains that harsh leaders will affect employee performance, but the existence of an Islamic work environment can reduce this impact. Previous research also explains that Generation Z who deviate from the workplace is influenced by an unhealthy work environment (Aggarwal et al. 2022; Abbasi, et al 2024; Das and Malik 2025). However, in contrast to previous research conducted in Islamic educational institutions, destructive leadership does not have a significant impact on a person's perception of their work (Al-Ansi 2022).

Referring to previous research that has addressed destructive leadership and the work environment in the context of general organizations, however, studies in the context of Islamic educational institutions are still very limited and inconsistent. Generation Z employees in Islamic educational institutions and the use of self-affirmation as a mediating variable, which has not been discussed in previous research, is the novel value of this research.

Self Affirmation Theory is an appropriate concept to discuss in this research. The concept of self-affirmation explains that individuals have a need to maintain self-integrity, especially when facing threats to self-esteem or identity (Steele 1988). When faced with stressful work situations or situations that are not in line with personal values such as toxic leadership (destructive leaders), individuals will use self-affirmation as a means of psychological defence. Self-affirmation refers to a cognitive process in which individuals affirm personal values that are important to them as a way to maintain self-esteem and identity stability. Self-affirmation can function as a mediator between psychological stress at work and the intention to leave the job. This means that even though employees are in an unfavourable situation, the ability to do self-affirmation can provide psychological resilience and influence the decision to stay or leave the organization. When Gen Z employees face psychological stress, for example from destructive leaders or the work environment, they try to maintain self-esteem through the process of self-affirmation. This affirmation can reflect personal values that impact the decision to leave the organization or not. This is what makes this theory the main reference in interpreting the relationship between variables. Self-affirmation is the main

node in this research model on the influence of destructive leadership and conducive environments on turnover intention through self-affirmation.

Empirical literature examining the mediating role of self-affirmation in the workplace is still very limited, especially in the scope of Islamic educational institutions and the Gen Z population. So this is a gap to fill the research gap that needs to be studied. The proposed hypothesis reflects theoretical assumptions built on the results of previous studies and strong contextual relevance. Departing from the description that has been presented, this study aims to predict turnover intention in Gen Z employees in Islamic educational institutions, by testing the direct influence of destructive leadership and a conducive work environment, as well as testing the role of self-affirmation as a mediating variable. Moreover, the importance of this study also lies in the specific context of Islamic educational institutions that have great potential in creating a workspace that is not only conducive but also spiritual and ethical.

B. METHOD

Research Approach

This study was designed to explain the relationship between independent, mediating, and dependent variables in Islamic educational institutions by using Generation Z employees as the object. The quantitative approach (explanatory research design) was chosen because it is able to test the direct and indirect effects between variables systematically and measurably based on numerical data (Lim 2024). The structural model used contains the influence pathways that connect the mediating effects of self-affirmation.

Population and Sample

This study focuses on Generation Z employees working in Islamic educational institutions in Makassar City, South Sulawesi. Makassar is one of the big cities in Eastern Indonesia that has a high concentration on the development of Islamic educational institutions, from elementary to tertiary levels. This city is a regional centre of Islamic education with the existence of various institutions such as madrasahs (MI, MTs, MA), integrated Islamic schools, modern Islamic boarding schools, and Islamic universities, both state and private.

Purposive sampling is a sampling technique that includes criteria that are appropriate to the research objectives (Robinson. 2023). The criteria for determining the sample in this study are as follows:

1. Respondents are employees or workers who are included in Generation Z (born between 1997–2012);
2. Work in Islamic educational institutions Can include: madrasahs (MI, MTs, MA), integrated Islamic schools, Islamic boarding schools, and Islamic universities (both state and private).
3. Have non-PNS employee status, namely contract or permanent employees who are under the auspices of foundations or non-governmental institutions;
4. Have worked for at least 6 months to 1 year

The number of samples was determined based on the approach (Hair and Alamer 2022), where the minimum number of respondents is 10 times the number of the largest indicators, however, to increase the accuracy of the model and the power of the analysis, this study involved 125 respondents who met the criteria. This number has exceeded the

minimum threshold and is in accordance with best practices in quantitative research using the SEM approach based on variance.

Data Sources and Research Instruments

This study uses primary data collected through a five-point Likert scale-based questionnaire, from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). The instrument is arranged in the form of statements related to the variables Destructive Leadership (X₁), Conducive Environment (X₂), Self-Affirmation (Z), and Turnover Intention (Y). The collected data is processed by calculating the average score per respondent for further analysis according to the research objectives.

Table 1. Research Instruments

Variable	Indicator	Source
Destructive Leaders (X ₁) Leader behaviour that systematically and repeatedly displays negative actions, hurt psychological conditions, motivation, and work loyalty.	1. Authoritarian or manipulative behaviour, 2. Lack of empathy, 3. Abuse of power 4. Unfairness in decision-making 5. Verbal or emotional abuse	(Schmid, Pircher Verdorfer, and Peus 2018; C. N. Thoroughgood et al. 2012; C. Thoroughgood, Hong, and Sawyer 2024).
Conducive Environments (X ₂) Working conditions support productivity, and comfort, and provide psychological comfort for individuals in the workplace, both from the physical, social, and cultural aspects of the organization.	1. Supportive work environment, 2. Harmonious relationships between co-workers, 3. Adequate work facilities, 4. Fair and transparent work system.	(Zhenjing et al. 2022; Mattarelli et al. 2024).
Self-Affirmation (Z) an individual's belief in their own values, identity, and competence	1. Self-confidence in one's own worth, 2. Resilience to social pressure, 3. Ability to reflect on one's own strengths, 4. Appreciation of personal achievements, 5. Belief in morals or principles that are believed in	(Pilot and Stutts 2023; Khoo, Yang, and Toh 2024).
Turnover Intention (Y) the desire or intention of an individual to leave a job or organization due to a mismatch between personal values and the work environment.	1. Desire to find another job, 2. Dissatisfaction with the current job, 3. Intention to resign in the near future 4. Incompatibility with the work environment,	(Pu et al. 2024; Tran, Nguyen, and Nguyen 2025)

5. Tendency to compare
the current job with
other workplaces.

Source: Table processed 2025

Questionnaire Development and Ethical Considerations

Several steps were taken to develop the questionnaire: First, the questionnaire was developed from previous research, as outlined in Table 1. Second, the instrument was translated and adapted to the context of Islamic educational institutions. Third, the instrument was validated by experts in human resource management to assess its suitability for the research constructs. Fourth, a pilot test was conducted on 30 respondents with similar characteristics to the research sample to gain an understanding of the response items. The pilot test results were used to refine the instrument's wording to improve its understanding.

The principles of confidentiality and respondents' willingness to provide answers are ethical principles in this research. Respondents were assured that the research was pursuing academic goals, and they had the right to refuse or complete the questionnaire as a form of research ethics to ensure neutrality in the results.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data in the study were analysed using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) approach, with the assistance of SmartPLS software version 4. The selection of PLS-SEM was based on considerations of the characteristics of quantitative data, and the complexity of the research model involving mediating variables. This method is considered appropriate because it has advantages in estimating complex structural models, even with non-normally distributed data and limited sample sizes (Hair and Alamer 2022).

Data Processing

After the questionnaire data is collected, a recapitulation is carried out based on the characteristics of the respondents such as gender, age, occupation, and domicile. Data processing is carried out in two stages:

1. Instrument Test

- Validity Test: ensuring that the statement items measure the intended variables.
- Reliability Test: assessing consistency between items using Alpha Cronbach.

2. SEM-PLS (Structural Equation Modeling - Partial Least Square) Analysis

SEM-PLS is used to test the direct and indirect effects between latent constructs in the model. Evaluation is carried out through:

- Measurement Model (Outer Model): testing convergent validity (loading factor > 0.7), discriminant validity (cross-loading > 0.7), and reliability (composite reliability > 0.7).
- Structural Model (Inner Model): testing the relationship between variables through the path coefficient, t-statistic, R-square value, Q-square, and f-square. This analysis also includes testing the mediation effect (indirect influence) through the intermediary variable.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The results of data processing are presented in this discussion, starting with a construct reliability test to ensure the reliability of the respondent's answer instrument.

Reliability Results

Table 1. Construct Reliability and Validity

Variable	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Information
Destructive Leaders_(X ₁)	0.942	0.956	Reliable
Self-Affirmation_(Z)	0.964	0.973	Reliable
Conducive Environments_(X ₂)	0.804	0.829	Reliable
Turnover Intention_(Y)	0.925	0.943	Reliable

Source: Table processed 2025

Table 1 shows the results of the minimum value, namely 0.70 for composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha. These results explain that the research instrument has strong internal consistency so that each construct can be said to be valid as a measuring instrument. All question items are proven to be reliable in reflecting the constructs they represent.

Validity Test Results

Table 2 Outer Loadings Value

Indicator	Destructive Leaders (X ₁)	Conducive Environments (X ₂)	Self-Affirmation (Z)	Turnover Intention (Y)
X _{1.1}	0.949			
X _{1.2}	0.911			
X _{1.3}	0.777			
X _{1.4}	0.91			
X _{1.5}	0.954			
X _{2.1}		0.723		
X _{2.2}		0.732		
X _{2.3}		0.737		
X _{2.4}		0.77		
Z ₁			0.962	
Z ₂			0.979	
Z ₃			0.975	
Z ₄			0.776	
Z ₅			0.98	
Y ₁				0.837
Y ₂				0.862
Y ₃				0.927
Y ₄				0.824
Y ₅				0.926

Source: Table processed 2025

Convergent validity has been fulfilled as indicated by the loading factor value of each indicator against the construct exceeding the threshold of 0.50.

Table 3. Nilai Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Variables	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Destructive Leaders_(X1)	0.814
Self-Affirmation_(Z)	0.879
Conducive Environments _ (X2)	0.548
Turnover Intention_(Y)	0.768

Source: Table processed 2025

The AVE values of all four variables > 0.5 meet the requirements for a good model. The validity of the research results is acceptable because the cross-loading value $>$ the latent variable loading value.

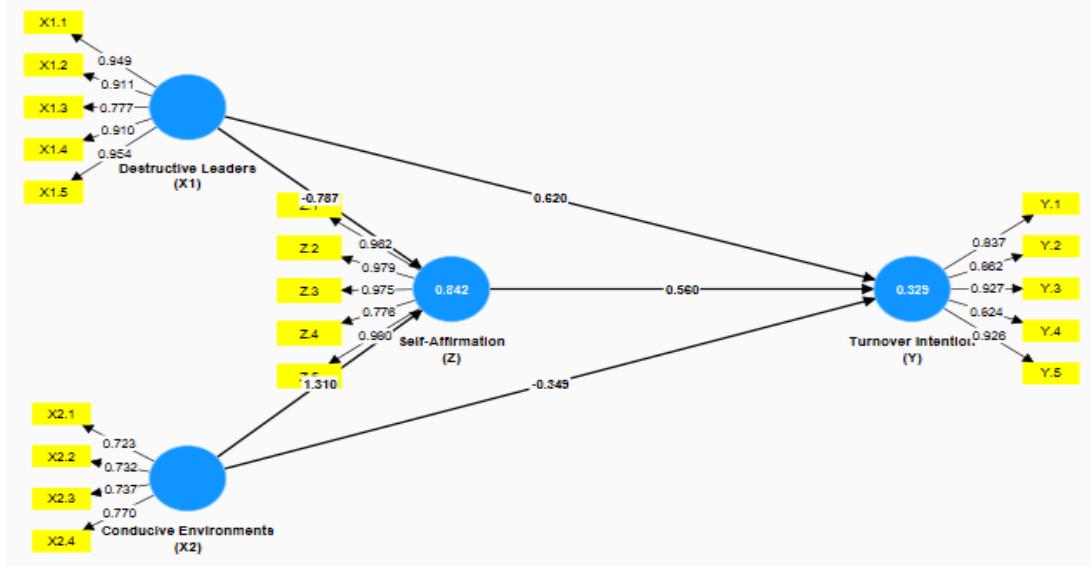


Figure 1. Structural Model Test Results (Inner Model)

R-squares are presented in a table to explain how much the variables studied are able to explain the phenomenon.

Table 4. R-Square

Variables	R-square	R-square adjusted
Self-Affirmation_(Z)	0.842	0.84
Turnover Intention_(Y)	0.329	0.313

Source: Table processed 2025

The results of Table 4 show that the Self-Affirmation variable (Z) has an R-squared value of 0.842, which means 84.2%, while Turnover Intention (Y) has an R-squared value of 0.329 or 32.9% has been constructed in the model.

Direct Influence Test Results

Before discussing the mediation effect, the direct effect test between the main constructs of the study will first be explained.

Table 5. Direct Influence Test Results

	Original Sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Destructive Leaders_(X1) -> Self-Affirmation_(Z)	-0.787	-0.746	0.219	3.597	0.000
Destructive Leaders_(X1) -> Turnover Intention_(Y)	0.62	0.603	0.167	3.703	0.000
Self-Affirmation_(Z) -> Turnover Intention_(Y)	0.56	0.559	0.173	3.238	0.001
Conducive Environments_(X2) -> Self-Affirmation_(Z)	1.31	1.304	0.166	7.884	0.000
Conducive Environments_(X2) -> Turnover Intention_(Y)	-0.349	-0.34	0.245	1.423	0.155

Source: Table processed 2025

1. Destructive Leaders (X1) → Self-Affirmation (Z)

Coefficient = -0.787, T = 3.597, P = 0.000

There is a negative and significant influence of destructive leadership on self-affirmation. The higher the leader's destructive behaviour, the employee's self-affirmation tends to decrease.

2. Destructive Leaders (X1) → Turnover Intention (Y)

Coefficient = 0.620, T = 3.703, P = 0.000

Destructive leadership has a positive and significant effect on turnover intention. This means that if a leader behaves destructively, the greater the desire of employees to leave the organization.

3. Self-Affirmation (Z) → Turnover Intention (Y)

Coefficient = 0.560, T = 3.238, P = 0.001

Self-affirmation has a positive and significant effect on turnover intention. The higher the self-affirmation, the higher the tendency of employees to consider leaving, possibly because their self-values are not aligned with the work environment.

4. Conducive Environments (X2) → Self-Affirmation (Z)

Coefficient = 1.310, T = 7.884, P = 0.000

A conducive work environment has a positive and significant effect on self-affirmation. A supportive environment increases employees' positive perceptions of themselves.

5. Conducive Environments (X2) → Turnover Intention (Y)

Coefficient = -0.349, T = 1.423, P = 0.155

The effect of a conducive environment on turnover intention is not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). Although the direction of the relationship is negative (the more conducive, the lower the turnover intention), this effect is not strong enough to be concluded as significant.

Indirect Effect Test Results

The results of testing the indirect influence hypothesis (intervening variable) can be presented in the following Table:

Table 7 Results of Indirect Effect Testing

Construct	Path a	Path b	Indirect Effect (ab)	Sobel z	p-value	Explanation
X ₁ → Z → Y (Destructive Leaders → Self-Affirmation → Turnover Intention)	-0.787	0.560	-0.441	-2.405	0.016	Mediated
X ₂ → Z → Y (Conducive Environments → Self-Affirmation → Turnover Intention)	1.310	0.560	0.734	2.995	0.003	Mediated

Source: Table processed 2025

6. Destructive Leaders (X₁) on Turnover Intention (Y) through Self-Affirmation (Z)

Obtained an indirect coefficient value of -0.441, with a Sobel statistical value of -2.405 and a p-value of 0.016 ($p < 0.05$). These results indicate that the Self-Affirmation variable significantly mediates the relationship between Destructive Leaders and Turnover Intention. This means that destructive leadership can reduce employee self-affirmation, which ultimately increases employee turnover intention from the organization.

7. Conducive Environments (X₂) on Turnover Intention (Y) through Self-Affirmation (Z)

The indirect coefficient value is 0.734, with a Sobel statistic value of 2.995 and a p-value of 0.003 ($p < 0.05$). This shows that the Self-Affirmation variable also significantly mediates the relationship between a conducive work environment and Turnover Intention. Thus, a supportive work environment can increase self-affirmation, which in turn reduces employees' desire to leave the organization.

Discussion

1. Leadership on Self-Affirmation (H₁: Negative, significant)

This research suggests that when leaders exhibit negative behavior, such as authoritarianism, manipulation, or unfairness, it significantly erodes an individual's self-confidence and self-esteem. Generation Z members who experience destructive leadership feel powerless or unappreciated, resulting in low self-affirmation. Statistically, it shows that the destructive leadership relationship shows a significant negative impact on Self-Affirmation in the Generation Z employee group. This significant negative coefficient indicates that the higher the perception of authoritarian, manipulative, or unfair leadership behaviour, the lower the level of self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-acceptance of employees.

This finding reinforces the statement in previous findings which state that a toxic leadership style (destructive leadership) can create a work environment full of stress, uncertainty, and psychological insecurity (Alexander et al. 2024; Lee et al. 2024). When workers experience psychological pressure, they tend to have no control over their work (Zhang et al. 2023). According to Nieżurawska et al. (2023) and Chaudhry (2024). Generation Z employees highly value recognition, transparency, and fairness. Generation Z grew up in a culture that prioritizes self-expression, demeaning or manipulative treatment from superiors can directly damage their perception of their values and identity in the workplace. This finding is a warning to organizations that a

toxic leadership style not only damages interpersonal relationships in the workplace but also damages the psychological condition of individuals in the form of low self-affirmation.

Based on research conducted on a group of employees working in Australia, the results indicate that leadership patterns can foster self-affirmation (Ma and Shi 2025). However, this difference lies in the direction of the relationship and context. Positive leadership will encourage increased self-affirmation, while negative or destructive leadership will result in decreased self-affirmation.

When Generation Z experiences demeaning or manipulative treatment from superiors in institutions that promote Islamic identity, they not only feel unappreciated but also experience a crisis of spiritual and professional identity. This results in low self-affirmation. This finding serves as a warning to leaders of Islamic educational institutions that leadership that does not reflect Islamic morals actually creates a crisis of values, which results in psychological damage to employees. To support this within the organization, it is necessary to strengthen religious values, such as the statement by Al-anesi, (2022) that religious values have an important role in shaping individual behavior and attitudes. To maintain psychological health and the sustainability of value-based organizations, positive leadership that is fair, empathetic, and reflects the aspirations of the younger generation, especially Generation Z.

2. Destructive Leadership Increases Resignation Intention (H2: Positive, Significant)

Destructive leadership has a significant positive influence on the intention to leave Generation Z employees, especially in the context of Islamic educational institutions. The positive significance of the regression coefficient indicates that the higher the employee's perception of authoritarian, unfair, and manipulative leadership behavior, the greater the tendency to consider leaving the organization (turnover intention).

This finding reinforces previous research showing that destructive leadership is a strong factor in turnover intentions in various institutional contexts (Berkovich. 2023; Badar et al. 2023). Surveys in India, Pakistan, and China also found that abusive leaders can influence employees' intentions to quit their jobs (Pradhan et al., 2019; Yasmeen et al., 2024; Li & Song, 2024).

Based on psychological and organizational perspectives, leaders who display destructive behaviour have been shown to create an unhealthy work environment (Zaman et al. 2023). Generation Z who work in Islamic educational institutions consider this type of leadership to be increasingly problematic because it conflicts with this generation's expectations of a supportive, fair, and spiritually meaningful work environment. Generation Z cannot tolerate unethical leadership styles or those that do not value individual contributions (Pan et al. 2025). Gen Z also tends to make quick decisions to leave the organization if they feel disempowered or unappreciated (Xueyun et al. 2023). In Islamic educational institutions, this condition is a serious challenge because young workers can disrupt the continuity of educational programs and weaken the institution's capability to adapt to changing times.

In Islamic educational institutions, where the values of togetherness (ukhuwah), collective responsibility (mas'uliyyah), and trustworthiness are highly valued, leadership behavior that does not reflect these values can deeply disappoint young employees. As a result, they lose their motivation to contribute in the long term. Furthermore, a destructive leadership style in values-based institutions actually creates

a moral and spiritual crisis for employees who are oriented towards work values. Employees who experience emotional pressure from the work environment will experience decreased performance (Mukhtar Afiah 2021). When leadership fails to provide space for dialogue, appreciation, and growth, Generation Z employees see no promising future in the organization, so they prefer to resign rather than persist in an unhealthy environment.

3. Self Affirmation Increases Turnover Intention (H₃: Positive, Significant)

A statistically significant positive relationship exists between destructive leadership and the turnover intention of Generation Z employees in Islamic educational institutions. The results of this study indicate that self-affirmation has a positive and significant effect on turnover intention among Generation Z employees in Islamic educational institutions. This finding indicates that individuals with high levels of self-affirmation will have strong self-awareness, positive self-esteem, and confidence in their personal values, but are more likely to make decisions to leave the organization when they feel that their personal values are not in line with organizational conditions.

Psychologically, self-affirmation not only reflects self-confidence and self-esteem but also strengthens an individual's orientation towards personal values and moral integrity. According to Harari et al. (2023) and Wahyudi et al. (2024) Generation Z is known as a generation that has a strong value orientation, dares to speak up, and does not hesitate to make decisions independently when there is a discrepancy between personal values and organizational values. Self-affirmation, which is usually associated with psychological resilience, can encourage individuals to leave a system that is not in line with their internal values. In an unfair, non-transparent, or personally or spiritually meaningless work environment, Gen Z employees with high self-affirmation will not show loyalty and will take steps to leave the organization.

Basic values such as justice (adl), honesty (sidq), and responsibility (amanah) are not merely institutional symbols but must be implemented in daily managerial practices. When these values are not felt authentically by employees, especially Generation Z who have high self-awareness, they will consciously and confidently choose to leave. The decision to resign in this context is not a form of disloyalty, but an expression of the suitability of self-values and spiritual integrity. These results are an important note for managers of Islamic educational institutions that building the loyalty of Generation Z employees is not enough just by providing formal incentives but must be accompanied by a commitment to values that are in line with identity and idealism.

4. Conducive Environment Increases Self-Affirmation (H₄: Positive, Significant)

The results of the study indicate that a conducive work environment has a positive and significant effect on the self-affirmation of Gen Z employees in Islamic educational institutions. This finding confirms that a work environment that provides psychological comfort is a factor in forming self-affirmation. A good work environment is an organizational justice that supports relational physical aspects such as openness of communication, recognition of contributions, and a climate of mutual respect (Singh et al. 2024).

For the Generation Z group, factors that support the work environment are very important because they have high expectations of a workplace that provides a sense of psychological safety (Grénman et al. 2024). The environment of Islamic educational institutions must reflect Islamic ethical values such as rahmah (compassion),

deliberation, and 'adalah (justice) will further strengthen employee self-affirmation. This happens because there is a match between personal values and institutional values that are internalized through organizational culture. When employees feel valued as whole human beings, not just work resources, a positive and stable professional identity is formed, which is reflected in high self-affirmation. Furthermore, these findings reinforce the view that a healthy work environment creates a space for self-actualization for the younger generation (Kolomiets et al. 2023; Salvadorinho et al. 2024). Creating a work environment that is in line with spiritual values not only increases job satisfaction but also strengthens the moral and psychological dimensions of employees. Generation Z working in this sector will be better able to perform at their best if they feel that their workplace reflects justice, empathy, and integrity (Salvadorinho et al. 2024). Based on the context of Islamic educational organizations, this is a strategic opportunity to understand that the transformation of work culture in Islamic educational institutions towards a humanistic model that not only supports the achievement of organizational performance but also strengthens the psychological and spiritual conditions of employees, especially the younger generation who will become agents of change in the future.

5. Conducive Environment Does Not Have a Direct Influence on Turnover Intention (H₅: Negative, not Significant)

The results of the study indicate that the conducive work environment variable has a negative relationship with turnover intention, but the relationship is not statistically significant. This finding indicates that although theoretically, a comfortable and supportive work environment can reduce employee intentions to leave their jobs, this does not necessarily happen directly, especially in the context of Gen Z working in Islamic educational institutions.

This phenomenon can be explained through the unique characteristics of Generation Z, which tends to focus more on aspects of self-actualization, the balance of personal values with institutional values, and the need for meaning in work (Berfin et al. 2023). Based on the review of the research results, it can be interpreted that young workers who work in Islamic educational institutions are more influenced by the compatibility between personal values rather than the physical or social conditions of the work environment alone. Gen Z has high expectations for self-development and individual recognition (Bejan. 2023; Zhou et al. 2025). Islamic educational institutions institutionally uphold religious and collective values, although a work environment that looks conducive is not necessarily enough if it is not accompanied by meaningful work experiences, learning opportunities, and space for self-actualization.

Theoretically, these results support the framework that turnover intention is a multidimensional construct influenced by complex interactions between organizational and individual factors. These findings also imply that young workforce retention strategies in Islamic educational institutions need to go beyond the environmental-based approach and emphasize employee identity-based approaches, work spirituality, and transformative leadership that can inspire and facilitate personal growth.

The results of this study emphasize that even a favorable work environment is not strong enough for Gen Z employees to stay in their organization. Other factors that can influence this are compensation, living costs, workplace motivation, and career opportunities, which influence turnover intention (Ayodele et al., 2020; Zahari & Puteh, 2023; Plessis & Altintas, 2024; Abdi et al., 2025). Therefore, the findings of this study can

be recommended for future research by linking additional factors to turnover intention in Islamic educational institutions.

6. Self-Affirmation Significantly Mediates the Relationship Between Destructive Leaders and Turnover Intention. H6

The results of this study indicate that destructive leadership does not directly encourage individuals to leave the organization, but rather has an indirect impact through decreased self-affirmation. This means that when employees are under destructive leadership, they tend to experience a crisis of self confidence and appreciation for their personal values within the organization.

Referring to previous research findings, it clarifies the importance of individual psychological factors in explaining the relationship with turnover intention. A study in Korea found that self-enhancement motivation influences turnover intention, with factors influenced by group efficacy and leadership (Choi and Park 2024). Therefore, this study suggests that destructive leadership impacts turnover intention due to decreased self-affirmation. These two concepts emphasize that both contextual and psychological factors play a role in increasing turnover intention, although the pathways of influence found differ. Research (Wong and Cheng 2020), which examined respondents from 18 countries across nine different geographic regions, found that the relationship between turnover intention and turnover behavior varies widely, depending on an individual's national culture.

Decreased self-affirmation significantly impacts the increased desire to leave. Employees who feel unappreciated, unheard, or even belittled will experience a decline in the positive self-image they have built in the workplace (Liang 2023). As space for maintaining personal dignity and integrity becomes increasingly limited, leaving an organization is seen as a form of self-protection and self-recovery (Liu et al. 2024). This situation is highly relevant to the characteristics of Generation Z, particularly those working in Islamic educational institutions. Employees working in institutions based on Islamic educational values seek not only employment but also a space for self-actualization with spiritual and social value. Therefore, when leaders exhibit destructive behavior, it is not only seen as a professional disruption but also as a threat that can undermine individual morale.

These findings emphasize the importance of creating leadership patterns that foster self-affirmation in employees, especially the younger generation who are highly concerned with justice. Organizations need to ensure that leaders are equipped with transformative and empathetic leadership competencies aligned with Islamic values to prevent the formation of a toxic work environment and maintain employee loyalty.

7. Self-affirmation Significantly Mediates the Relationship Between a Conducive Work Environment and Turnover Intention. H7

The results of the study indicate that a conducive work environment has an indirect effect on reducing turnover intentions, with self-affirmation acting as a significant mediator. This finding suggests that a supportive work environment characterized by healthy social relationships, open communication, a sense of psychological safety, and aligned work values can strengthen employees' positive self-affirmation.

The results of research conducted in Malaysia by Yusliza et al (2021) show that a conducive work environment also determines employees' decisions to remain in the organization. Although the mediator variables in previous studies differed, this study confirms that the work environment does not directly determine employees' decisions

to stay or leave, but is influenced by internal psychological factors. These results reinforce the novelty of self-affirmation as a mediator in the relationship between the work environment and turnover/retention. Similarly, Chen et al (2023) a study conducted among young workers in China confirmed that psychological factors mediate the relationship between working conditions and employees' intention to stay or leave their organization.

Employees who perceive their work environment as supportive of growth, providing space for expression, and valuing individual contributions will have positive self perceptions (Wang. 2023; Jaqua 2024). Self affirmation in this context reflects the belief that employee Z's presence and role within the organization are meaningful, valued, and recognized. This belief ultimately strengthens the psychological bond between employees and the organization, thereby reducing the tendency to seek employment opportunities elsewhere. Generation Z employees working in Islamic educational institutions tend to assess work success not only in terms of formal or material achievements, but also in terms of the degree of alignment between personal identity, spiritual values, and organizational culture. A conducive work environment serves not only as a place to work but also as a space for self-expression and identity formation (Wang Q et al. 2024; Chen and Lin 2024). Therefore, when the environment is able to facilitate self-affirmation, loyalty and emotional attachment to the organization will also increase.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that destructive leadership increases employee turnover intentions directly and indirectly through decreased self-affirmation. Conversely, a conducive work environment does not directly influence turnover intentions but can indirectly reduce them through increased self-affirmation. Self-affirmation has been shown to be an important psychological mechanism mediating the relationship between the work context and employees' tendency to leave the organization. These findings provide insight into the need to create a supportive work environment and a constructive leadership style, especially among Generation Z in Islamic educational institutions.

Based on these findings, leaders and HR managers in Islamic educational institutions need to take steps to prevent toxic leadership and create a positive work environment. This can be done by developing training based on Islamic values and ethics, strengthening a supportive work environment through open communication and appreciation for employee contributions, and encouraging self-affirmation programs through reflective training that boosts employee self-confidence. Thus, Islamic educational institutions can minimize the negative impact of toxic leadership, create a healthy work environment, and reduce turnover intentions. Further research is recommended to explore the factors influencing employee turnover intentions, as well as explore cross-institutional research.

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