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The Role of Transformational Leadership in Enhancing Islamic Educational Quality

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Abstract

Transformational leadership is a leadership style that emphasizes profound organizational change by motivating, inspiring, and empowering individuals to achieve shared goals. In the context of Islamic education, particularly at Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) NU Kudus, transformational leadership is expected to improve the quality of education by enhancing the learning process, strengthening teacher professionalism, and encouraging more participatory school management. This study aims to analyze the implementation of transformational leadership at MTs NU Kudus and its impact on improving the quality of Islamic education. A quantitative approach with a cross-sectional survey design was used to collect data from 100 teachers and staff members across 15 madrasahs. The data were then analyzed using partial least squares–structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). The results show that transformational leadership significantly and positively impacts the quality of Islamic education. School principals who apply transformational leadership by providing inspiration, motivation, individualized support, and value-based direction successfully improve instructional processes, strengthen teacher professionalism, and foster a more inclusive and collaborative school culture. The findings also suggest that leadership based on moderate Islamic values increases stakeholder engagement, including active participation from students and parents. In conclusion, this study recommends strengthening leadership development programs to support

sustainable educational quality enhancement and asserts that transformational leadership is an effective strategy for driving institutional improvement in NU-based madrasahs.

Keywords: Transformational leadership; Islamic Education Quality; Madrasah Tsanawiyah

A. INTRODUCTION

Islamic education in Indonesia plays a critical role in shaping a generation that is not only equipped with strong religious knowledge but also with essential skills and moral character (Hariyadi, 2020). Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs), an Islamic lower secondary educational institution, provides an important foundation for students' academic and character development (Hariyadi et al., 2021). However, MTs face significant challenges in competing with general schools, particularly in producing graduates who excel academically and demonstrate strong character and spirituality (Hartina et al., 2022). Despite their substantial role, the quality of education in many madrasahs is hindered by several persistent issues, including low instructional quality, inadequate human resource management, and insufficient adaptation to contemporary changes, particularly the integration of technology into the learning process (Hariyadi & Darmuki, 2023). Leadership at the madrasah level is one of the key determinants of educational quality. This leadership is responsible for formulating visions, missions, and policies that drive overall institutional improvement (Hariyadi et al., 2024). Transformational leadership, which focuses on constructive change and motivating organizational members to work toward shared goals, is a promising solution for improving educational quality (Liu et al., 2025; Löfflad-Bürkin et al., 2025; Menge & Gerick, 2025; Schmitz et al., 2023). Such leadership can cultivate a more innovative and responsive educational environment and strengthen stakeholder involvement in the educational process (Alzouebi et al., 2025; Nadeem, 2024; Oloba, 2025).

At MTs NU Kudus, which is part of the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) network, the implementation of transformational leadership is expected to address various institutional challenges (Bashori et al., 2022; Rahmatika, 2024; Wakit et al., 2022). A school principal who adopts this leadership style becomes not only an administrative leader but also a source of inspiration and motivation for teachers, students, and the broader community (Ghifary & Anto, 2022; Kareem et al., 2023; Meidelina et al., 2023). This includes improving learning processes, developing teacher competencies, and instilling character values aligned with moderate Islamic teachings (Lubis et al., 2022; Rachma et al., 2023; Said et al., 2023). Thus, transformational leadership is anticipated

to significantly improve academic quality and school management and create a more collaborative learning environment oriented toward achieving better educational outcomes (Jasni et al., 2024; Khanom et al., 2025; Sliwka et al., 2024).

Transformational leadership in education has been widely studied and adopted at all levels, from primary to higher education (Dabie & Asare, 2025; Galila et al., 2025; Kilag et al., 2023). According to Bass (1990), transformational leadership emphasizes big, comprehensive organizational change through motivation and individual empowerment. In educational settings, transformational leaders are considered effective in improving instructional quality, fostering a positive school culture, and motivating teachers and students to achieve higher shared goals (Alainati et al., 2023; Baldwin, 2021; Sasan et al., 2023). In madrasahs, transformational leadership is associated with changes in instructional practices, human resource management, and character development (Adriantoni et al., 2023; Hasanah & Kultsum, 2020; Nailan & Nugraha, 2024). Previous studies have demonstrated that adopting transformational leadership in Islamic schools can enhance educational quality, create more inclusive learning environments, and strengthen community involvement in education (Said et al., 2023; Sulaeman, 2020; Widodo, 2025). Avolio and Bass (2004) found that transformational leadership increases teachers' and students' intrinsic motivation, ultimately leading to improved learning outcomes and academic achievement. However, despite the growing body of scholarship on transformational leadership in education, its implementation in Islamic educational institutions, especially at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah level, is limited (Afriyanto & Khoiri, 2024; Humaisi et al., 2024; Nandalawi & Sentosa, 2024). Consequently, a significant research gap persists regarding the relationship between transformational leadership and quality improvement in faith-based madrasahs, such as the MTs NU Kudus.

Several theoretical frameworks may serve as the conceptual foundation for this study. Transformational Leadership Theory (Avolio & Bass, 2004; Bass, 1990) is frequently referenced in Islamic education literature, particularly the theory's four core dimensions. These dimensions are often used as an analytical framework to examine leadership practices in madrasahs or schools (Arifin & Maunah, 2020; Effendi & Maunah, 2021; Suib et al., 2021). Islamic Value-Based Transformational Leadership Theory integrates transformational leadership with Islamic values, such as ethics, spirituality, and moral exemplarity (*uswatun hasanah*), within the madrasah or pesantren context (Anggraeni et al., 2025; Khanom et al., 2025; Novia & Aimah, 2024). This theory emphasizes that leaders should inspire followers and embody strong religious and moral

character in Islamic educational settings (Bashori et al., 2022; Said et al., 2023; Sutrisno, 2024).

An analysis of the literature reveals several connections to the current study, as well as research gaps. Many studies have examined transformational leadership in Islamic educational institutions, such as madrasahs and pesantren. This provides a strong theoretical foundation for the current study of an NU-based Madrasah Tsanawiyah. However, gaps persist, particularly in the following areas: (1) specific research settings. Studies on transformational leadership in NU-affiliated Madrasah Tsanawiyahs within a particular local context, such as Kudus, remain limited. (2) The integration of NU values with transformational leadership. Existing Islamic-value-based frameworks rarely address NU-specific characteristics. (3) The empirical measurement of educational quality in MTs. Much of the literature is conceptual or qualitative and lacks quantitative evidence linking transformational leadership to measurable outcomes. (4) Local sociocultural factors. The characteristics of teachers and students in MTs NU in Kudus may differ from those in other Islamic educational institutions.

This study contributes to the literature by providing local empirical evidence on the effectiveness of transformational leadership in NU-affiliated madrasahs. It proposes a leadership model that integrates Islamic and NU values with transformational leadership principles and offers practical recommendations for madrasah principals, NU administrators, and local Islamic education policymakers. These recommendations aim to enhance educational quality through leadership. The literature indicates that transformational leadership in Islamic educational contexts is predominantly discussed in national or local journals using qualitative or conceptual approaches. Publications in Scopus- or Web of Science (WoS)-indexed journals are scarce, as are studies integrating both conceptual and empirical dimensions within specific local settings, such as NU-based Madrasah Tsanawiyah in Kudus. This underscores the potential novelty of the present research, which addresses the intersection of transformational leadership, Islamic/NU values, and educational quality within a clearly defined local context. The study aims to analyze and implement transformational leadership to enhance Islamic educational quality at MTs NU Kudus.

B. RESEARCH METHODS

This analytical study explores empirical relationships using a descriptive, observational, cross-sectional, deductive, and quantitative approach (Farashah & Blomquist, 2020; Pitafi, Kanwal, Akhtar, et al., 2018; Pitafi, Kanwal, Ali, et al., 2018). The

study's geographical location is Kudus, Central Java, Indonesia. The population studied consists of respondents from different locations in Indonesia. The investigators collected the desired sample data in 2025 (Pitafi, Kanwal, Akhtar, et al., 2018; Pitafi, Kanwal, Ali, et al., 2018). The population consisted of 15 MTs. The survey used non-probability convenience sampling to collect data for further analysis (Avotra, Chengang, et al., 2021).

The MTs in Kudus, Central Java, Indonesia totaled 15, with 420 teachers and staff. The sample size was calculated using the Slovin formula with a standard error of 10%, resulting in 80.77 respondents, rounded up to 100. The sampling method used in this study was probability sampling, specifically random sampling. In this method, every member of the population has an equal chance of being selected as part of the research sample. The researcher selects sample members from the population without considering the strata present, thereby randomly representing the population.

The investigators recruited willing and available participants to take the survey and obtained their consent for data collection. The study received responses from 100 participants. The study set eligibility criteria, which included being a male resident of Semarang City, Central Java, Indonesia. A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed to participants. The researchers received 100 valid questionnaires for analysis. The respondents' response rate was 100%. The researchers excluded incomplete questionnaires because they contained insufficient and unanswered questions.

The investigators distributed self-administered questionnaires to collect feedback from participants. The study used a self-administered scale to ensure clarity of the questions. Study participants were informed of the purpose of the survey and assured of data confidentiality. The survey forms were distributed to people recruited from various locations in Indonesia. The researchers gave participants four weeks to return the completed forms. The forms were then received and screened, and only the feedback that was helpful for the data analysis was included (Kaur & Anand, 2018). Our model was measured by two latent variables: transformational leadership and the quality of Islamic education. The study developed a five-point Likert scale questionnaire with responses ranging from 1 to 10. Strong agreement was indicated by a score of 10, while a score of 1 indicated strong disagreement.

Furthermore, partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed to examine the formation of the well-being (WB) model and the direct and indirect influences between variables. For this study, data were analyzed using Smart

PLS version 4, a statistical software program for PLS-SEM (K. Latif et al., 2020). PLS-SEM is a statistical tool used by researchers in their studies. It employs robust, superior, flexible, and adequate statistical methods to generate competent analytical models (Aman et al., 2019; Avotra, Chenyun, et al., 2021; K. F. Latif et al., 2020; Lotfi et al., 2018; Pitafi, Kanwal, et al., 2020). The second part of the questionnaire was used for hypothesis testing (NeJhaddadgar et al., 2020; Pitafi, Rasheed, et al., 2020; Yao et al., 2022). The analysis of the data for hypothesis testing is based on two phases. The first phase is measurement model estimation and the second is structural model estimation (Islam, Islam, et al., 2021; Islam, Pitafi, Akhtar, et al., 2021; Islam, Pitafi, Arya, et al., 2021; Zhou et al., 2022). During the measurement model estimation phase, the survey data were screened for valid and reliable scale items. Discriminant and convergent validities were measured (Marchena-Giráldez et al., 2021). Additionally, factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, and average variance extracted (AVE) were used to assess validity. The results were then tested for acceptance or rejection using the obtained values, t-statistics, and p-values.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This subsection outlines the structure of the results and discussion presented in this study. The results consist of research data presented in tables and figures with supporting descriptive explanations and appropriate references. These data are expanded upon to emphasize the key findings derived from the analysis. The discussion then integrates these findings with relevant foundational concepts and theories. This section provides an in-depth examination supported by multidisciplinary scientific perspectives and clear empirical evidence. Third, a critical review compares the present findings with those of previous studies to highlight alignment or divergence. This component underscores the article's novelty and demonstrates its scientific contribution to related research.

1. Measurement Model: Validity and Reliability

Variable	Indicator	Loading Factors	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Transformational Leadership	TL1	0.917	0.893	0.893	0.758
	TL2	0.876			
	TL3	0.880			
	TL4	0.805			

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Islamic Education Quality	EIQ1	0.812	0.905	0.907	0.781
	EIQ2	0.924			
	EIQ3	0.928			
	EIQ4	0.865			

Table 1. Measures of Validity and Reliability

Table 1 displays the convergent validity. It shows indicator reliability, construct reliability, and validity. The reliability test results, which were achieved by calculating Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted, are shown in Table 3. These results are presented in Table 1. The researcher found that the numbers ranged above 0.7, which is the highest reported value. Cronbach's alpha was used to analyze the collected data, yielding the following conclusion according to the recommendations of some researchers (Bjekić et al., 2021; Taber, 2018). The construct composite dependency values are greater than 0.7, which is the highest value recorded for composite dependency. Researchers argue that an adequate critical composite (CR) threshold should be set at no less than 0.7 and considered acceptable. Based on the results shown in Table 1, researchers can conclude that the CR criterion has been met. This allows us to conclude that the CR criterion has been met. Composite reliability can be used as an alternative to Cronbach's alpha because the composite reliability value is somewhat higher than the Cronbach's alpha value. However, the difference between the two values is not significant (Malkewitz et al., 2023). Validity convergence is evaluated by testing the average variance extracted (AVE). AVE values are shown in Table 1. The results are greater than 0.5, the highest number ever recorded. The minimum acceptable AVE value is 0.5 (Rouf & Akhtaruddin, 2018). Thus, it has been determined that the acceptability threshold has been reached and that convergent validity has been met across all four dimensions. These findings are based on the information presented in the above table (Ab Hamid et al., 2017).

2. Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

Variable	Path Coefficients	t-value	Results
Transformational Leadership → Islamic Education Quality	0.791	18.788	Accepted

Table 2. Research Hypothesis Test

Table 2 presents the results of the hypothesis test. The findings validate the two proposed variables for the direct effects of the study at $p < 0.05$. Thus, the findings indicate significant t-statistics and substantial β -values. Hypothesis H claims that transformational leadership positively affects the quality of Islamic education. Figure 1 illustrates the effects of all hypotheses.

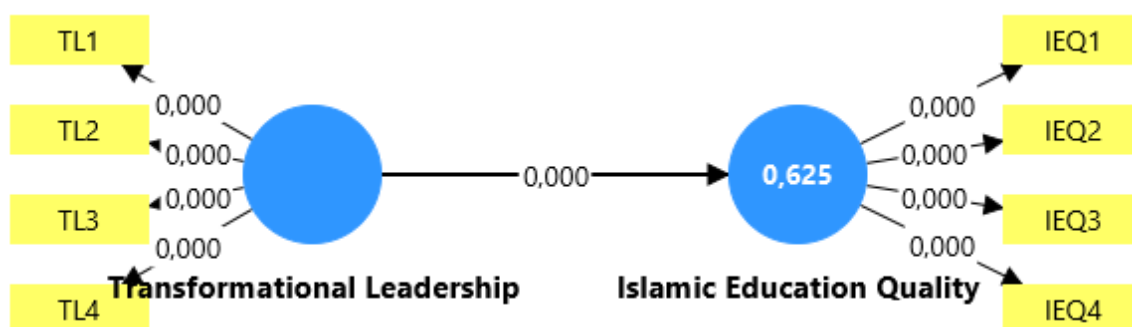


Figure 1. The Results of Path Model Analysis

3. The Effect of Transformational Leadership on the Quality of Islamic Education

The findings of this study reinforce the central role of transformational leadership in driving constructive change and mobilizing all members of an educational organization toward shared institutional goals. Transformational leadership has been identified as an effective approach to enhancing educational quality, fostering innovation, and increasing stakeholder engagement (Liu et al., 2025; Löfflad-Bürkin et al., 2025; Menge & Gerick, 2025; Schmitz et al., 2023). In the context of MTs NU Kudus, which operates under the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) network, transformational leadership is a relevant strategy for addressing institutional challenges. Findings indicate that principals adopting a transformational leadership style function as inspirational figures, motivating teachers, students, and the broader school community (Ghifary & Anto, 2022; Kareem et al., 2023; Meidelina et al., 2023). This leadership approach strengthens instructional processes, improves teacher competencies, and instills character values aligned with moderate Islamic principles (Lubis et al., 2022; Rachma et al., 2023; Said et al., 2023). Consequently, transformational leadership is expected to improve academic quality, refine school management, and foster collaborative learning environments that promote better educational outcomes (Jasni et al., 2024; Khanom et al., 2025; Sliwka et al., 2024).

4. Comparison with Prior Studies and Theoretical Implications

The present findings align with the broader literature showing that transformational leadership is implemented at all levels of education, from primary schools to higher education institutions (Dabie & Asare, 2025; Galila et al., 2025; Kilag et al., 2023). According to Bass (1990), transformational leadership is characterized by comprehensive organizational change driven by motivation, empowerment, and individualized support. In educational settings, this leadership style is linked to better instructional quality, a stronger school culture, and increased motivation among teachers and students (Alainati et al., 2023; Baldwin, 2021; Sasan et al., 2023). Specifically in madrasahs, transformational leadership has been linked to shifts in pedagogical practices, human resource development, and character formation (Adriantoni et al., 2023; Hasanah & Kultsum, 2020; Nailan & Nugraha, 2024). Additionally, prior studies demonstrate that transformational leadership in Islamic schools contributes to higher educational quality, more inclusive learning environments, and enhanced community participation (Said et al., 2023; Sulaeman, 2020; Widodo, 2025). As Avolio and Bass (2004) have noted, such leadership increases intrinsic motivation among teachers and students, ultimately improving learning outcomes and academic performance. Despite this growing body of scholarship, the present study reveals that transformational leadership at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah level, particularly in Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)-affiliated institutions like MTs NU Kudus, remains understudied (Afriyanto & Khoiri, 2024; Humaisi et al., 2024; Nandalawi & Sentosa, 2024).

The theoretical analysis also highlights several relevant conceptual frameworks for interpreting the findings. One such framework is Transformational Leadership Theory (Avolio & Bass, 2004; Bass, 1990), which has four core dimensions and is a widely used analytical lens in studies of leadership within Islamic educational institutions (Arifin & Maunah, 2020; Effendi & Maunah, 2021; Suib et al., 2021). Additionally, the Islamic Value-Based Transformational Leadership framework integrates transformational leadership with Islamic moral values, such as ethics, spirituality, and *uswatun hasanah* (moral exemplarity), providing further insight (Anggraeni et al., 2025; Khanom et al., 2025; Novia & Aimah, 2024). This perspective reinforces the expectation that leaders in Islamic educational environments should inspire and exemplify religious and moral integrity (Bashori et al., 2022; Said et al., 2023; Sutrisno, 2024). Together, these theoretical perspectives demonstrate that transformational leadership, when grounded in Islamic values, can effectively guide institutional improvement and support the holistic development of madrasah communities.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted at MTs NU Kudus using a non-probability convenience sample, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other madrasahs or Islamic educational contexts beyond the NU network. The cross-sectional design captures the relationship between transformational leadership and the quality of Islamic education at a single point in time; therefore, causal inference should be made with caution. Additionally, the study only examined the direct relationship between transformational leadership and Islamic education quality, without accounting for potential mediating or moderating variables, such as teacher motivation or school culture, that could further explain this relationship. Therefore, future research is encouraged to employ probability sampling across a wider range of madrasahs, adopt longitudinal designs, and incorporate additional mediating and moderating variables to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how transformational leadership influences the quality of Islamic education.

D. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that transformational leadership plays a decisive and statistically significant role in improving the quality of Islamic education at MTs NU Kudus. PLS-SEM analysis confirms that transformational leadership has a strong positive effect on the quality of Islamic education. Principals who inspire and motivate their staff while providing individualized, value-based support have been shown to improve instructional processes, strengthen teacher professionalism, and foster a more inclusive, collaborative school culture that actively engages students and parents. These findings answer the research question, affirming that transformational leadership grounded in moderate Islamic values is an effective, contextually relevant strategy for improving educational quality in NU-based madrasahs. Based on these findings, madrasah principals are encouraged to strengthen their transformational leadership competencies through continuous professional development in pedagogical innovation, digital adaptation, and human resource management. NU administrators and local education policymakers should also provide systematic support and policies that sustain collaborative school cultures and long-term educational quality improvement.

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