

RESEARCH

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Transformational Leadership in Driving Change in Madrasahs: A Comparative Study of Public and Private Madrasah Principals

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Abstract

This study examines how principals of public and private madrasahs implement transformational leadership in driving institutional change at MTsN 17 Tanah Datar and MTsS Balimbing Tanah Datar. Using a qualitative multiple-case study design, data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, then analyzed with the Miles and Huberman model through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings show that both principals enact the four core dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. The principal of MTsN 17 Tanah Datar demonstrates a structured, professional, and innovation-oriented leadership pattern supported by instructional and distributed leadership practices to strengthen academic quality and managerial efficiency. In contrast, the principal of MTsS Balimbing Tanah Datar emphasizes emotional closeness, spirituality, participation, and Minangkabau local wisdom in mobilizing limited resources. The study concludes that effective transformational leadership in Islamic education depends on the ability to integrate universal leadership principles with institutional context, Islamic values, and local culture, thereby producing a contextual and sustainable model of madrasah change.

Keywords: Islamic principles, Minangkabau local knowledge, public and private madrasahs, transformational leadership, and change management

Introduction

According to Ghasabeh et al. (2015), transformative leadership is the best kind of leadership that helps companies become sustainably competitive through innovation so that employees can find novel solutions to organizational issues. Transformative leaders, according to Bradshaw et al. (2015), operate as change agents, promote greater levels of motivation and loyalty, look to the future, and commit to achieving a better trajectory.

In the context of education in the digital era, educational institutions are under increasing social pressure to adapt to change (Álvarez Toro-Moreno, 2024; Ele et al., 2021), and school administrators are the most influential players in this transformation. The competence of school principals greatly influences the educational management process and is one of the most important



variables ensuring the efficiency of school activities (Bairauskienė, 2018). A broad body of school leadership scholarship confirms that principals influence school improvement, teacher learning, and student outcomes not only through direct supervision but also through vision setting, capacity building, instructional focus, and organizational culture formation (Hallinger, 2003; Robinson et al., 2008; Day et al., 2016). Educational institutions must develop graduates who can compete on a global scale in light of the changing times. Each of Indonesia's three primary educational establishments schools, madrasahs, and Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) faces unique difficulties in instructing the country's youth (Daman Huri & Yacub, 2024).

In order to become better madrasahs and be able to compete with public schools (Nazula et al., 2024), madrasahs must increase their quality (Arif et al., 2024). Leadership becomes especially strategic because transformational leadership has been shown to affect school conditions, teacher commitment, organizational learning, and student engagement through mostly indirect but meaningful pathways (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Leithwood & Sun, 2012). It is clear from the foregoing description that one of a transformative leader's key responsibilities is to guide the madrasah toward advancement by acting as a change agent. The principals of MTsN 17 Tanah Datar and MTsS Balimbing Tanah Datar, who serve as change agents in the madrasahs they oversee, provide proof of this.

These two madrasahs provide compelling evidence of how the madrasah principals have used transformational leadership to promote improvements in a number of institutional areas, including work culture, teacher effectiveness, institutional vision, and community involvement. As a result, since the two madrasah principals took over, both institutions have undergone substantial changes that are visible and thoroughly examined. MTsS Balimbing Tanah Datar is a private madrasah run by a foundation, whereas MTsN 17 Tanah Datar is a state madrasah overseen by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The choice of these two madrasahs enables a contextual comparative analysis to comprehend how the transformational leadership method is applied in two distinct kinds of institutions due to these variations in management systems. Such a comparison is relevant because leadership effectiveness is shaped by institutional context, school capacity, collaborative culture, and the resources available for professional learning (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Liu et al., 2016; Hallinger et al., 2019). This is relevant to characterize the dynamics of transformative leadership more generally and thoroughly.

Various past studies have explored transformational and transformative leadership in educational contexts, both in madrasahs and other Islamic educational institutions. Sincerity is the essence of transformational leadership in Islamic boarding schools, which promotes the development of a supportive and creative atmosphere, according to research that employs a phenomenological approach (Rahmatika, 2024). A quantitative study discovered a strong correlation between improved teacher performance effectiveness at MIN Bandung and the transformative leadership of madrasah principals (Zainal, 2024). A literature review demonstrates that Ki Hajar Dewantara's leadership values reflect progressive and inclusive transformative leadership (Nazula et al., 2024). At the international level, research also shows that transformational leadership is closely related to school restructuring, teacher commitment, organizational conditions, and broader educational improvement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Shatzer et al., 2014).

Additionally, through a case study at MTs Persis 37 Sumedang, research by Sariah & Nugraha found a number of innovations made by madrasah principals in literacy and etiquette-based programs as examples of transformational leadership (Sariah & Safwandy Nugraha, 2024). A study conducted at MA Al-Amiriyyah Blokagung by Abidin et al. illustrated the function of madrasah

principals as change agents that effectively inspire, act as role models, and find collaborative solutions to issues (Abidin et al., 2022). Meanwhile, Phangesti highlighted transformative leadership in responding to inclusive education concerns through policy and teacher training (Suluh Phangesti & Risalah, 2023).

It seems that a lot of research has been done on transformative leadership in madrasas based on the pertinent prior studies cited above. However, much qualitative research focuses on only one form of madrasa. Therefore, the urgency of this research resides in its contribution, which can provide richer and more specific insights, with an empirical picture of how public and private madrasa principals can become agents of change through transformative leadership, given the unique constraints of each context. This comparative emphasis is also consistent with leadership scholarship arguing that effective school leadership cannot be detached from the school's external environment, organizational capacity, instructional needs, and local culture (Hallinger, 2003; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Day et al., 2016).

Method

In order to compare transformational leadership in promoting change in public and private madrasas, this study used a qualitative methodology with a multiple case study design. The principals of MTsN 17 Tanah Datar and MTsS Balimbing Tanah Datar served as key informants for the study. The researcher employed a snowball sampling strategy to find additional informants, adding more in accordance with field demands.

Three methods of gathering data were used in this study: documentation, in-depth interviews, and passive participant observation. The researchers were able to witness the madrasah principals' leadership methods firsthand. Several informants provided thorough and comprehensive information through in-depth interviews. Important madrasah records, including activity reports, academic data, policies, and documentation of changes that had taken place at each madrasah, were gathered using documentation techniques.

This study's data validity verification methods included member checking and data triangulation. Source triangulation and technical triangulation were the methods of triangulation employed. By comparing information from key informants with information from additional supporting informants, source triangulation was carried out. By contrasting information gathered through observation methods with information gathered through other methods, such as interviews and documentation, the researcher carried out technical triangulation. Member checking, which involves asking informants to confirm the condensed interview data, was the next method used to assess the validity of the data. To make sure that member checking could function properly in this instance, the researcher performed focus group discussions (FGDs).

The three stages of the Miles and Huberman (1984) model data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification are used in this study's data analysis methodology. When reducing the data, the researcher chooses and condenses the information gathered in the field and concentrates on the key ideas that are the subject of the study. This data will be continued by providing the data (data display) in the form of descriptive narratives and comparative tables. Drawing conclusions from the examination of the two madrasah principals' transformational leadership styles and their influence on change within each madrasah is the next stage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Transformational Leadership of Madrasah Principals

According to research conducted at MTsN 17 Tanah Datar, the principal has put excellent

transformational leadership into practice. This is demonstrated by the principal's outstanding behavior, discipline, and active participation in school activities. In addition to focusing on administrative and structural elements, this style of leadership encourages motivation, teamwork, and strong emotional bonds with the school community. These findings are consistent with research showing that transformational leadership style enhances subordinates' psychological health, creativity, job happiness, and commitment (Deng et al., 2023). They are also consistent with evidence that transformational school leadership strengthens school conditions and teacher commitment, which then indirectly contributes to student learning and engagement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Leithwood & Sun, 2012). Teachers' moral and professional identities are strengthened in the school setting by the principal's presence as a role model who walks the walk, resulting in a peaceful and effective work environment.

This result theoretically supports the idea of transformational leadership put out by Bass and Avolio (Bass & Avolio, 1994), according to which transformational leaders encourage and inspire their followers to put aside personal interests in order to accomplish a common vision and objectives. The principal of MTsN 17 Tanah Datar exemplified the idealized influence dimension by setting a moral example and upholding integrity, as well as by inspiring all madrasah members with a vision. This supports the claim that a high degree of transformational leadership will boost loyalty to the company and confidence in the leader, which in turn motivates followers to perform better (Barling, 2000). In school contexts, such influence becomes more powerful when it is combined with instructional attention to teaching quality and professional learning (Robinson et al., 2008; Shatzer et al., 2014).

Additionally, MTsN 17's application of professionalism and discipline principles is consistent with the notion that transformational leaders serve as both change agents and motivators, creating an innovative, trusting, and collaborative work environment (Yukl, 2013). The madrasah principal can incorporate the spiritual dimension of leadership—that is, leadership that cultivates meaning and moral calling in work—by putting into practice a methodical managerial style grounded in Islamic beliefs (Fry, 2003). Because it can link performance orientation with spiritual and humanitarian principles, this leadership paradigm works well in Islamic educational institutions. Successful principals often combine transformational and instructional strategies across different phases of school improvement, rather than relying on a single leadership style (Hallinger, 2003; Day et al., 2016).

Additionally, the study's findings support the theory that transformational leaders are essential in creating a dynamic corporate culture through model conduct, an innovative mindset, and the guts to embrace change. According to N. M. Tichy and M. A. DeVanna in (Claudet, 2016). The principal of MTsN 17 Tanah Datar effectively exhibited leadership that not only controls but also inspires and empowers, which has an effect on raising teacher motivation, teamwork, and madrasah loyalty. Transformational leadership at MTsN 17 Tanah Datar is therefore pertinent to the demands of contemporary Islamic education management since it embodies a synthesis between managerial expertise and spiritual sensitivity.

Based on the results of the investigation, it can be concluded that the transformational leadership of the principal of MTsN 17 Tanah Datar is an effective and appropriate leadership model for the management of modern Islamic educational institutions. The leadership implemented is not only focused towards managerial and administrative aspects, but also emphasizes moral, spiritual, and humanistic dimensions through model behavior, discipline, and direct involvement in madrasah activities. The madrasah principal is a change agent who may cultivate a culture of creativity, cooperation, and shared dedication via the merging of transformative vision, professionalism, and religious values. Therefore, the leadership style used at MTsN 17 Tanah Datar effectively achieves a

synergy between work spirituality and value-based leadership, which influences the development of a productive, peaceful, and forward-thinking madrasah organizational culture and fortifies the Islamic character of all of its members.

The MTsS Balimbing Tanah Datar Principal's Transformational Leadership

By encouraging a sense of unity and sincerity among the madrasah community through the values of mutual cooperation and emotional closeness, the principal of MTsS Balimbing Tanah Datar's transformational leadership is unique. This state illustrates the dimension of idealized influence as explained by Bass and Avolio, where the leader becomes a role model and source of moral inspiration that pushes organizational members to work beyond personal interests (Bass & Avolio, 1994). The prominent aspect of charisma in the madrasa principal is an important factor in building trust and collective motivation, in line with the view that charisma and service orientation in transformational leadership play a significant role in increasing organizational innovation and performance (Samad, 2012). The madrasa principal's charisma serves as a symbolic power that encourages self-assurance, optimism, and a sense of community, particularly when educational institutions are confronted with constraints. This emotional dimension is significant because educational leaders' emotions and relational practices shape trust, motivation, and organizational commitment in schools (Berkovich & Eyal, 2015).

According to Korejan & Shahbazi, transformational leadership encourages organizational members' dedication, zeal, and devotion to continuously make changes so that the organization can move in a new direction and attain optimal performance (M. Moradi Korejan, 2018). The phenomenon observed at MTsS Balimbing demonstrates that a leader's capacity to motivate others through moral and spiritual principles ingrained in the madrasah culture is just as powerful as systems and policies. This is also in accordance with the concept of emotional and value-based leadership Burns (Burns, 1979); and Goleman (Goleman, 2017), which emphasizes the importance of emotional and moral interactions between leaders and followers in building a meaningful and dedicated work environment. Therefore, it can be claimed that the principal of MTsS Balimbing Tanah Datar has effectively applied transformational leadership grounded in local wisdom, which integrates spiritual, social, and emotional aspects to preserve madrasah performance and unity in the face of constraints.

In addition to being based on contemporary management concepts, the premise of MTsS Balimbing Tanah Datar's transformational leadership is deeply ingrained in Islamic ideals and Minangkabau culture, which are vital to the community's social life. The notion of *al-qiyādah al-ṣāliḥah*, or leadership based on moral example and a sincere purpose to serve the community, is reflected in the key leadership traits of the madrasah principal in the Islamic setting, such as sincerity, trustworthiness, and responsibility (Al Mawardi, 2020). This idea is consistent with spiritual principles that stress the significance of honesty in the workplace and fraternity among organizations, such that leadership is viewed as a mandate to effect change and benefit both parties rather than as a position of authority.

Culturally, the leadership approach of the principal of MTsS Balimbing Tanah Datar also reflects the Minangkabau idea of "*adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi Kitabullah*" which positions religion as a source of moral values in action. The tendency of the principal to prioritize deliberation, mutual cooperation, and emotional closeness in mobilizing the madrasa community shows the application of the principle of *duduak samo randah, tagak samo tinggi*, namely egalitarianism and social solidarity which are the core of leadership in Minangkabau culture (Robbie et al., 2021). At MTsS Balimbing, transformational leadership is not merely a management technique but rather an expression of local wisdom-based leadership, in which the leader serves as a social and moral role model who can strike

a balance between the demands of contemporary change and the dignity of tradition.

Therefore, MTsS Balimbing Tanah Datar's principal's leadership style exemplifies a contextual, integrative, and locally described transformational leadership paradigm. Integrating Islamic principles with Minangkabau cultural knowledge enhances the ability of leaders to foster unity, dedication, and a sense of community within the madrasah community. This approach shows that a leader's ability to impart the spiritual and cultural values that characterize their community is just as important to their success as their administrative and creative skills.

Table 1. Comparison of Transformational Leadership at MTsN 17 Tanah Datar and MTsS Balimbing Tanah Datar

Dimension	Similarities	Differences
Idealized Influence	- Both leaders serve as role models in time discipline. - Both are directly involved in religious activities. - They communicate politely, fairly, and maintain close relationships with madrasah members.	MTsN 17: Emphasizes compliance with regulations and strengthening religious culture through structured and scheduled programs. MTsS Balimbing: Highlights personal role modeling, a charismatic father-like figure, emotional closeness, and active involvement in community activities.
Inspirational Motivation	- Both use the vision and mission as the main direction of the madrasah. - The vision and mission are disseminated through meetings, activities, and displayed on madrasah walls. - Both provide moral encouragement to teachers despite limitations.	MTsN 17: Focuses on producing students with strong character, technological competence, and environmental awareness. Programs include <i>Adiwiyata</i>, digital library initiatives, motivational slogans ("If others can do it, why can't we?"), and achievements in the Integrity Zone program. MTsS Balimbing: Focuses on building an Islamic and culturally rooted community by maintaining <i>kitab kuning</i>, <i>tahfiz</i>, and Islamic arts. Teacher motivation is more spiritual, emphasizing teaching as worship and a source of reward, especially for honorary teachers.
Intellectual Stimulation	- Both encourage teachers to participate in training, workshops, and knowledge sharing. - Emphasize lesson planning and creativity in teaching. - Provide space for formal and informal discussions and appreciate teachers' ideas.	MTsN 17: Applies a systematic and structured approach, requiring soft copies of teaching documents, routine supervision with feedback, needs-based training, use of technology in learning, and adequate facilities. MTsS Balimbing: Relies on networking and collaboration, including sharing with senior teachers from MTsN 17. Despite limited funding, it provides projectors, internet access, and rotating laptop loans.
Individualized Consideration	- Both consider teachers' personal conditions when assigning tasks. - Provide rewards (certificates, gifts, praise) for disciplined or high-performing teachers. - Show social concern by offering moral and material support when teachers face illness or misfortune.	MTsN 17: Uses a professional, system-based approach, including peer tutoring programs and diverse reward categories (disciplined teachers, change agents, competition mentors). The principal acts as a coach with national-level experience. MTsS Balimbing: Applies a family-oriented and mutual cooperation approach. Tasks are adjusted to personal conditions (young teachers as coordinators, teachers with family

Dimension	Similarities	Differences
		responsibilities given lighter tasks). Rewards are simple (gifts and praise). Civil servant teachers contribute uniforms and holiday allowances for honorary teachers.

The research findings indicate that the transformational leadership of the principals of MTsN 17 Tanah Datar and MTsS Balimbing Tanah Datar both represent the four main dimensions proposed by Bass and Avolio (Bass & Avolio, 1994), namely idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Both principals succeeded in developing a positive madrasah culture through role models, motivation, intellectual development, and attention to individuals. This is in accordance with the concept that transformational leadership is directed towards enhancing the morale and motivation of followers to accomplish greater shared goals (Burns, 1979). Empirical reviews also affirm that transformational leadership can strengthen school organizational conditions and teacher commitment, although its effects on student outcomes are generally mediated through teaching, learning culture, and school capacity (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Robinson et al., 2008). The differences in leadership styles that emerged, where the principal of MTsN 17 emphasized a structured managerial system, while the principal of MTsS Balimbing emphasized a personal and familial approach, can be explained through contingency theory which emphasizes that leadership effectiveness is highly dependent on the match between the leader's style and the organizational context (Shala et al., 2021).

According to Hallinger and Murphy (1985), instructional leadership is characterized by developing academic vision, supervising learning, and professionalizing educators. The structured approach used at MTsN 17 Tanah Datar exemplifies these traits. The use of technology, needs-based training, and a routine oversight system increase the effectiveness of innovation- and accountability-based leadership. This supports the argument that instructional and transformational leadership should be viewed as complementary practices in school improvement, particularly when principals aim to raise teaching quality and strengthen academic culture (Hallinger, 2003; Shatzer et al., 2014; Day et al., 2016). On the other hand, the principal of MTsS Balimbing Tanah Datar's leadership style, which places a strong emphasis on emotional intimacy, charismatic role models, and a sense of family, reflects the idea of emotional intelligence leadership as described by Goleman (2017), which states that leaders with high emotional intelligence are able to create a peaceful and spiritually significant work environment.

In addition, the practice of the principal of MTsS Balimbing who relies on collaboration and networking to optimize limited resources also shows the manifestation of distributed leadership as explained by Spillane (2005), where leadership does not only reside in one figure, but is spread through cooperation between members of the organization. This interpretation is strengthened by distributed leadership studies showing that leadership practice emerges from the interaction among leaders, followers, and their situation, and that distributed leadership can be used as a unit of analysis to understand collective organizational action (Spillane et al., 2001; Gronn, 2002). This strategy is consistent with the norms of the indigenous Minangkabau culture, which emphasizes mutual cooperation and deliberation as components of local wisdom (Robbie et al., 2021). In the meantime, both madrasah principals' individualized consideration dimension demonstrates sensitivity to the personal needs of teachers, which is crucial for creating an adaptable and long-lasting organizational culture, despite differences in formality and approach (Schein, 2006).

Therefore, the two madrasah principals' different leadership philosophies are an adaptation to the social and cultural setting of each organization rather than a contradiction. While the principal of MTsS Balimbing uses a strategy based on strong family values and religiosity despite having low resources, the principal of MTsN 17 is better suited to the nature of state madrasahs with their bureaucratic processes and higher resources. This supports the claim that effective transformational leadership must be contextual, meaning it must be able to blend local values (spirituality, cooperation, and emotional intimacy) with global values (vision, creativity, and professionalism). Studies on collaborative leadership and teacher professional learning further indicate that principals contribute to school improvement by building capacity, trust, teacher agency, and professional learning cultures suited to each institutional context (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Liu et al., 2016; Hallinger et al., 2019).

The aforementioned analysis concludes that the application of four primary dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration by transformational leadership at MTsN 17 Tanah Datar and MTsS Balimbing Tanah Datar is equally effective in creating a positive madrasah culture. Both exhibit adaptability to the social and cultural environments of their respective institutions, yet having distinct approaches. While the principal of MTsS Balimbing places a higher priority on emotional, spiritual, and familial values rooted in local Minangkabau wisdom, the principal of MTsN 17 stands out for taking a methodical and creative approach to teaching that is consistent with the character of a bureaucratic state madrasah. Thus, the success of transformational leadership in these two madrasahs demonstrates that a leader's ability to successfully integrate universal transformational values with local spirituality and culture is just as important as modern managerial systems. This leads to the development of a contextual, adaptable, and sustainable model of Islamic educational leadership.

Conclusion

Transformational leadership at MTsN 17 Tanah Datar and MTsS Balimbing Tanah Datar is equally effective in creating organizational and cultural change in the madrasah through role models, motivation, and strengthening spiritual principles. The four primary components of transformational leadership—idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, inspiring motivation, and individualized consideration—have been effectively applied by both, boosting the madrasah community's commitment, motivation, and trust. The difference lies in the context and approach: the principal of MTsN 17 emphasizes a structured, professional, and innovative leadership style with a combination of transformational, instructional, and distributed leadership oriented towards academic quality and managerial efficiency, while the principal of MTsS Balimbing displays a more emotional, spiritual, and participatory leadership based on Islamic values and local Minangkabau wisdom, which fosters social solidarity, a spirit of togetherness, and a sense of belonging amidst limited resources.

According to the analysis, in order to build adaptable, creative, and character-based madrasahs, transformational leadership in Islamic educational institutions must be continuously developed via the combination of Islamic ideals and local expertise. In addition to being administrative supervisors, madrasah principals ought to be moral and spiritual leaders who uplift and strengthen the madrasah community. While politicians are expected to give latitude and support for innovation depending on local conditions, educators and administrative personnel must enhance collaboration and professionalism through supervision, training, and a collaborative learning culture. Additionally, more study is necessary to expand knowledge of Islamic and culturally specific transformational leadership paradigms that are pertinent to the social and spiritual dynamics of

society.

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