Towards Madrasah Excellence: Shaping a Competitive Culture through Transformational Leadership

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyze transformational leadership in shaping institutional performance in higher education that is integrated with spiritual values and local wisdom. The approach used is a qualitative case study, collecting data through interviews, observations, and documentation. Data are analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model thematic analysis technique, which includes data collection, data reduction, and theme arrangement. This process identifies patterns related to transformational leadership, spiritual values, and local wisdom. The analysis results are then used to conclude the influence of these factors on institutional performance. The study's results indicate that applying transformational leadership that integrates cultural and spiritual values can increase the motivation and involvement of teachers and staff while improving academic performance. This study proves that this approach can encourage increased institutional performance in higher education through five main dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and cultural-spiritual synergy. This study provides implications about the importance of cultural and spiritual contexts in educational leadership practices. Integrating these values creates a harmonious academic environment, strengthens innovation, collaboration, and engagement, and supports the achievement of institutional goals sustainably.

Keywords: *Transformational Leadership, Institutional Performance, Spiritual Values, Cultural Integration*

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis kepemimpinan transformasional dalam membentuk kinerja institusional di perguruan tinggi yang diintegrasikan dengan nilai-nilai spiritual dan kearifan lokal. Pendekatan yang digunakan adalah kualitatif jenis studi kasus, di mana data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Data dianalisis menggunakan teknik analisis tematik model Miles dan Huberman, yang meliputi pengumpulan data, reduksi data, dan penyusunan tema. Proses ini mengidentifikasi pola terkait kepemimpinan transformasional, nilai spiritual, dan kearifan lokal. Hasil analisis kemudian digunakan untuk menarik kesimpulan tentang pengaruh faktor-faktor tersebut terhadap kinerja institusi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penerapan kepemimpinan transformasional yang mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai budaya dan spiritual mampu meningkatkan motivasi dan keterlibatan guru serta staf, sekaligus berkontribusi pada peningkatan kinerja akademik. Melalui lima dimensi utama, yaitu idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, dan cultural-spiritual synergy, penelitian ini membuktikan bahwa pendekatan tersebut mampu mendorong peningkatan kinerja institusional di perguruan tinggi. Penelitian ini memberikan implikasi tentang pentingnya konteks

budaya dan spiritual dalam praktik kepemimpinan pendidikan. Integrasi nilai-nilai ini menciptakan lingkungan akademik harmonis, memperkuat inovasi, kolaborasi, dan keterlibatan, serta mendukung pencapaian tujuan institusional secara berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci: *Kepemimpinan Transformasional, Kinerja Institusional, Nilai Spiritual, Integrasi Budaya*

INTRODUCTION

Madrasah, an Islamic educational institution, is important in producing a generation with noble character and academic competence. The challenge madrasahs face today is the gap between the ideal theory of education and the reality in the field (Jonathan et al., 2024). In theory, madrasahs are expected to be superior institutions with a strong competitive culture. However, many madrasahs still face low-quality education, minimal innovation, and weak leadership (Harandi et al., 2024). Research shows that transformational leadership can catalyze increasing competitive culture in educational institutions. However, is this approach effective when applied to madrasahs, particularly at MTs Negeri 2 Makassar City? Addressing this critical issue is essential to understanding how madrasahs can realize their full potential.

MTs Negeri 2 Makassar City, as one of the developing Islamic Educational Institutions, has challenges in building a visible competitive culture. Although great potential exists, such as competent teaching staff and adequate facilities, a competitive culture has not been fully built (Mustapha et al., 2023). This can be seen from the low participation of students in academic and non-academic competitions at national and international levels (Ruhl & Lopez, 2023). The theory suggests that a competitive culture can be fostered through leadership that effectively engages all elements of the madrasah. However, the findings highlight the need for a more targeted strategy to bridge the gap.

Studies on transformational leadership positively impact teacher performance by increasing job satisfaction, commitment, and self-efficacy, all essential for improving overall school performance (Siagian et al., 2022). When teachers feel more satisfied and committed, they tend to be more effective in achieving their educational goals, thereby improving the overall school environment. This relationship is further strengthened by the role of organizational culture, which mediates the effects of transformational leadership. A positive and supportive organizational culture creates a more conducive work environment, strengthening the positive impact of transformational leadership on teacher performance and school outcomes (Eneis et al., 2022).

Furthermore, integrating transformational leadership with technology adaptation can significantly improve organizational performance in various public sector organizations. This synergy between leadership and technology is critical in schools that want to remain competitive and forward-thinking in an increasingly digital education landscape (Zhang et al., 2022). Transformational leadership also plays a significant role in building a competitive school culture. Transformational leadership fosters a culture that values high performance and competition by increasing commitment and engagement among school members.

The strength of the school culture, shaped by transformational leadership, mediates its impact on teacher commitment and collective efficacy, thereby creating an environment that supports innovation and continuous improvement (Ardoin et al., 2020). In this way, transformational leadership encourages the development of competitive advantage in education, ensuring that schools remain dynamic and able to adapt to future challenges.

This research aims to fill the gap by examining the application of transformational leadership to build a competitive culture at MTs Negeri 2 Makassar City. Its uniqueness lies in its focus on integrating the transformational leadership approach with a competitive culture in the context of madrasahs. Unlike previous studies that discussed leadership in general, this study prioritizes a specific approach to facing the challenges at MTs Negeri 2 Makassar City. Thus, this research is expected to contribute to developing madrasahs' leadership theory and educational culture.

This paper aims to answer the main question: How can implementing transformational leadership build a competitive culture at MTs Negeri 2 Makassar City? This study argues that transformational leadership has great potential in mobilizing all elements of the madrasah to create and develop a competitive culture. With its approach that focuses on inspiration and motivation, transformational leadership can build a strong shared vision, influencing improved performance and competitive spirit in the madrasah environment.

However, the success of implementing transformational leadership at MTs Negeri 2 Makassar City cannot be separated from local factors, and there is a need to adapt to the existing context appropriately. Active participation from all stakeholders, teachers, staff, students, or parents is crucial in realizing the desired competitive culture. Therefore, this study also emphasizes the importance of effective collaboration and communication between all parties in implementing transformational leadership.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research was conducted at MTs Negeri 2 Makassar City as the main unit of analysis. This madrasah was chosen because it faces challenges in building a competitive culture despite having great human resources and facilities potential. The study used a qualitative design with a case study approach. This approach allows researchers to explore in depth how transformational leadership is applied and contributes to building a competitive culture in the madrasah environment. The focus on case studies provides a detailed understanding of specific phenomena at MTs Negeri 2 Makassar City so that it can fully describe the process and results of implementing transformational leadership in the local context (Cole, 2024; Scharp, 2021; Tasci et al., 2020)

Sources of information in this study include the madrasah principal, teachers, administrative staff, students, and other related parties such as parents and madrasah supervisors. The madrasah principal was chosen as a key informant because of his/her leading role in implementing transformational leadership. Teachers and administrative staff provide insight into the internal dynamics and impact of leadership policies on competitive culture. Students are a source of

information regarding their participation in competitions and the changes in competitive culture they experience (Byrne, 2022; Campbell et al., 2021; Kiger & Varpio, 2020). In addition, parents and madrasah supervisors offer external perspectives on the effectiveness of the transformational leadership approach. The selection of informants was carried out intentionally to ensure that the data obtained was relevant and comprehensive.

Regarding data collection, interviews were conducted over five months to ensure a thorough understanding of the participants' perspectives. Observations were conducted using a structured approach, which captured key interactions and behaviours relevant to the study. The documents analyzed included policies, organizational culture, madrasah achievements, news coverage in print and electronic media, and so on, which were selected because of their relevance to the research focus on leadership and competitive culture. These documents were selected to provide a broader context and complement the primary data.

Data was collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation analysis. Interviews were used to explore respondents' views and experiences on implementing transformational leadership and its influence on competitive culture. Observations were conducted to directly understand the interaction between madrasah elements and the implementation of leadership practices in the field. Documentation included analysis of archives, activity reports, and madrasah achievement records. The collected data were analyzed through three stages: reduction, display, and verification. Data reduction was carried out by selecting relevant information that supports the focus of the research. The data was then displayed as a matrix or narrative to facilitate interpretation. Triangulating data from various sources verified the findings' validity and accuracy (Ikotun et al., 2023; Saura, 2021; Yang et al., 2020).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Result
Knowledge Management to Build a Competitive Culture

The study results indicate that transformational leaders in madrasahs play a strategic role in integrating knowledge management to foster a competitive culture. This finding is based on data collected through [interviews/observations] with key informants, including the head of the madrasah, teachers, and administrative staff, who emphasized the importance of leadership in creating an environment conducive to knowledge sharing and competition. Knowledge management includes creating, sharing, and utilizing knowledge to improve collaboration, innovation, and operational effectiveness. The madrasah's strategic policy documentation emphasizes the importance of knowledge management as a key element in the institution's vision and mission. Knowledge management is implemented through ongoing teacher training, best practice-based discussion forums, and digital information-sharing platforms. This process is directed not only to store knowledge but also to create new value through collaborative learning. This documentary evidence supports the idea that transformational leadership can create a work ecosystem that supports the competitiveness of madrasah.

<div style="text-align: center">**Table 1. Knowledge Management to Build a Competitive Culture**</div>

Aspect	Transformational Leader Strategy	Impact
Strategic Policy	Integration of knowledge management into the vision and mission of the madrasah	Improving teacher collaboration and learning effectiveness
Routine Activities	Discussion forum and monthly evaluation meeting	Exchange of best practices and innovative solutions
Use of Technology	Digital platform for sharing materials and information	High accessibility and efficiency of knowledge storage
Performance Report	Periodic evaluation of knowledge management implementation	Improving academic achievement and reputation of madrasah

Table 1 illustrates how transformational leadership utilizes four key aspects in implementing knowledge management to build a competitive culture in madrasahs. The study focuses on MTs Negeri 2 Makassar City, where the leadership's role is central to these strategies. In terms of strategic policies, integrating knowledge management into the vision and mission of the institution demonstrates the leader's commitment to collaboration and learning effectiveness. Routine activities, such as discussion forums and evaluation meetings, facilitate the exchange of best practices and innovative solutions, fostering a collaborative and supportive work culture. Using digital technology through information-sharing platforms enables fast and efficient resource access, enhancing teacher and student productivity. Performance reports further confirm the positive impact of these strategies, including improvements in academic achievement and the institution's reputation.

Transformational leadership shapes a knowledge management-based strategy and fosters a work environment that supports collaboration, innovation, and sustainable competitiveness. The implementation of knowledge management under transformational leadership has a significant impact on Madrasah's performance. Leaders prioritize storing information and promote knowledge transfer and development through intensive interactions among teachers and staff. Technology enables quick access to learning resources, while regular discussion forums offer space for madrasah members to share experiences and solutions. The Madrasah consistently applies knowledge management strategies and performs better in academic achievements and public recognition than those who do not. These findings confirm that transformational leadership is a significant catalyst in building an effective knowledge management ecosystem.

There are consistent patterns in the implementation of knowledge management in Madrasah. The first pattern is the integration of knowledge management policies into the strategic vision, which ensures that all organization members understand the importance of knowledge management. The second pattern is the routine of discussion and evaluation, where transformational leaders act as facilitators, creating an active collaborative culture. The third pattern is using digital technology to accelerate the distribution of information and improve operational efficiency. The last pattern is the periodic evaluation of the implementation of knowledge management, which allows leaders to measure its impact on madrasah performance. These patterns indicate that transformational leadership is key to creating a sustainable competitive culture through knowledge management.

Engagement Strategies for Building a Competitive Culture

The madrasah shows that transformational leadership plays a significant role in creating engagement strategies that support a competitive culture. The head of the madrasah actively uses personal and collective approaches to engage teachers, staff, and students in various activities designed to increase a sense of ownership and responsibility for the madrasah's vision. One important finding is implementing a weekly discussion forum between leaders and teachers, which focuses on performance evaluation and the delivery of creative ideas to improve the quality of learning. This forum is a place to share information, strengthening the emotional relationship between leaders and organization members.

Transformational leaders consistently use rewards to encourage engagement. The monthly "Exemplary Teacher" and "Outstanding Student" programs are concrete examples of this strategy. Through these programs, the principal rewards individuals who demonstrate exceptional commitment to supporting the achievement of the school's goals. For example, one teacher was recognized for consistently improving student engagement through innovative teaching methods, directly contributing to higher student performance in national exams. Further observations show that this approach increases individual motivation and creates an atmosphere of healthy competition, encouraging all organization members to contribute to their full potential.

In addition, leaders use effective communication as the core of their engagement strategies. Based on observations, the principal routinely visits classrooms to interact directly with students and teachers. During one visit, the principal held an informal discussion with students who expressed concerns about the workload. This direct interaction demonstrated the principal's concern for daily school activities and allowed students and teachers to express their aspirations and challenges. Documentation shows that such interactions have helped build closer and more trusting relationships between the leader and all school community members.

The leaders use team-based activities to increase collective engagement. For instance, group-based teacher training, cross-disciplinary projects, and inter-class competitions have become important tools for strengthening collaboration. In one notable case, a cross-disciplinary project involving science and art teachers led to an interactive exhibition on environmental issues, which received widespread praise from students and parents. Observations of the implementation of these activities show that team members are more proactive and innovative when they feel that the leader values their ideas. This supports the finding that collaboration-based engagement strategies can significantly increase the madrasah's competitiveness.

Overall, the engagement strategy implemented by transformational leaders has succeeded in building a competitive culture in the madrasah. Observations and documentation show that an inclusive, reward-based approach focusing on effective communication can create a strong sense of togetherness among teachers, staff, and students. Ultimately, this deep engagement becomes the main foundation for the madrasah in facing external challenges and strengthening its position as a competitive educational institution.

Building Confidence and Competitive Culture

Transformational leadership significantly builds self-confidence among teachers, staff, and students, ultimately contributing to a competitive culture in madrasahs. The respondents, consisting of madrasah principals, teachers, and administrative staff, revealed that transformational leaders consistently show attention to individual needs, provide encouragement, and create an environment supporting each individual's maximum potential development. One respondent emphasized that "a leader who can recognize my abilities and give me full trust makes me more confident in making important decisions," indicating that the leader's approach greatly influences self-confidence.

Meeting minutes and performance reports support these findings. For instance, performance reports indicate increased individual contributions to collaborative projects after implementing the leaders' mentoring program. These records also highlight leaders' efforts to recognize individual achievements through verbal appreciation in meetings and formal recognition in official forums. Such initiatives have enhanced motivation and self-confidence among teachers and staff, who feel valued and acknowledged for their contributions."

The students also felt the impact of this transformational leadership approach. The students interviewed revealed that the principal often provided emotional support, especially when they faced academic challenges. One student said, "When I failed in a competition, the principal always said that failure is part of the learning process, and I was given a second chance to try." This approach builds students' confidence to continue trying and competing, ultimately creating a healthy competitive culture in the school.

More broadly, the interviews also revealed that transformational leaders encourage independent decision-making among teachers and staff, strengthening their confidence in carrying out their daily tasks. One teacher said, "The principal often says that we are part of the solution, not just the implementers of instructions." This kind of responsibility increases individual confidence and strengthens the collective ability to face challenges, an important foundation for a competitive culture in the madrasah.

The findings show that transformational leadership positively impacts the building of self-confidence in madrasahs. However, local context factors, such as infrastructure limitations and traditional cultural structures, can hinder the implementation of knowledge management strategies. Despite these challenges, the leadership's focus on trust-building, communication, and engagement has fostered a culture of self-confidence. Through emotional support, recognition, and empowerment, leaders create an environment that motivates individuals to achieve, which is key to sustainable madrasa competitiveness. This highlights the importance of transformational leaders who empathize, support and empower their teams.

Discussion

The main implication of these results underscores the importance of knowledge management in fostering a competitive culture at MTs Negeri 2 Makassar City. By leveraging the collective knowledge of teachers, students, and other relevant stakeholders, madrasahs can develop data-driven strategies that

enhance participation in academic competitions (Kastner, 2021). Effective knowledge management ensures the documentation, dissemination, and consistent application of best practices across the institution (Muafi & Johan, 2022). For example, a teacher's experience in coaching students for competitions can be shared and adapted by others, broadening the potential for success. This process aligns with Bass's transformational leadership theory, which emphasizes building confidence and collaboration to inspire individuals and elevate their performance (Bass, 1985).

Moreover, knowledge management fosters innovation by incorporating relevant technological tools into the learning environment, enhancing student competitiveness. By integrating cutting-edge technologies, madrasahs can create a dynamic and forward-thinking culture that supports academic success and prepares students to excel in increasingly competitive environments. Knowledge management promotes innovation by integrating technology into learning, further boosting student competitiveness. These implications extend beyond academic outcomes, contributing to developing a competitive mindset that supports students in becoming confident and adaptive individuals (Mehmood et al., 2024).

The relationship between knowledge management and competitive culture lies in the role of information and innovation in driving change. Knowledge management enables all elements of the madrasah to access relevant information, share experiences, and collaborate toward common goals (Shah et al., 2022). When information is effectively managed, teachers are better equipped to design competitive teaching strategies while students access high-quality learning resources. This process also enhances collective efficacy, where all parties feel involved in a shared mission (Lopez et al., 2024). Well-managed knowledge fosters a progressive mindset that encourages innovation and creativity, giving the madrasah a competitive edge in facing external challenges, such as school competitions (Abourokbah et al., 2024). Knowledge management becomes the foundation for sustaining and nurturing a competitive culture in this context.

The study results also highlight the significant implications of inclusive engagement strategies in building a competitive culture at MTs Negeri 2 Makassar City. By involving all stakeholders—students, teachers, parents, and the community—madrasahs can create an ecosystem that supports shared achievement. Active engagement enhances the sense of ownership of the madrasah's goals, motivating individuals to contribute and commit to the institution's success (Yang et al., 2021). Engagement strategies enable the madrasah to understand the specific needs of various stakeholders better, allowing for more targeted interventions (Nabi et al., 2023). For instance, teacher training programs can be designed based on direct input from educators, while student activities can be customized to their interests. This finding affirms that a competitive culture cannot be developed in isolation; it requires synergy among all elements.

The connection between engagement strategies and competitive culture is evident in how engagement increases a sense of shared responsibility. When students feel heard, they are more motivated to participate in competitive activities (Ouyang et al., 2022). Teachers involved in decision-making feel more

appreciated, enhancing their work efficacy (Lamsam & Charoensukmongkol, 2023). Parents actively participating in madrasah activities are more likely to support their children's success. This creates a positive feedback loop, where involvement leads to more significant commitment and more tremendous success. In this context, engagement catalyses harmonious cooperation across all parties to achieve a competitive culture (Streimikiene et al., 2021). In other words, competitive culture is not merely the result of a specific strategy but the cumulative effect of sustained engagement.

Furthermore, these results highlight the critical role of students' self-confidence in building a competitive culture at madrasahs. Self-confidence boosts students' participation in competitions and helps them manage the pressures that arise (Alhitmi et al., 2023). When students believe in their abilities, they are more willing to take risks, learn from failures, and continue improving. This fosters a healthy competitive culture where success is celebrated and the effort and process are equally valued (Hooi & Chan, 2023). These findings emphasize the importance of teachers and madrasah leaders in providing emotional support and creating a safe learning environment that nurtures growth.

The relationship between self-confidence and competitive culture is evident in how self-confidence impacts students' intrinsic motivation. When students feel capable, they are more likely to set ambitious goals and diligently work toward achieving them (Juliana et al., 2021). Self-confidence also contributes to collective efficacy, where individual achievements inspire their peers (Malik et al., 2024). In the context of madrasahs, strong self-confidence enables students to overcome negative stereotypes associated with Islamic educational institutions, proving that they can compete nationally and internationally (Vickers et al., 2021).

In this sense, self-confidence plays a vital role in cultivating a competitive culture that emphasizes academic success and the development of student's character and mindset. This paper contributes to the field of Islamic educational management by highlighting the role of self-confidence as a driving force behind both academic achievements and character development in madrasah students. By fostering self-confidence, madrasah educators can create a balanced environment that promotes excellence while upholding Islamic values and ethics.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that transformational leadership significantly fosters a competitive culture at MTs Negeri 2 Makassar City. Transformational leadership effectively aligns the madrasah community toward achieving excellence by emphasizing inspiration, motivation, and a shared vision. The study identifies three key factors in creating a sustainable competitive culture: knowledge management, student engagement strategies, and the development of student self-confidence. These findings offer practical insights for implementing transformational leadership in madrasahs, an area that has not been extensively explored. Additionally, this research contributes to developing educational leadership theory focused on cultivating a competitive culture, offering strategic recommendations for other madrasahs facing similar challenges.

The weakness of this study is the limited scope of one madrasah, so the results may not be fully generalizable to other madrasahs with different

characteristics. In addition, the qualitative approach relies on individual perceptions and experiences, which may be influenced by subjective bias. Time constraints also limit the exploration of the long-term influence of transformational leadership on competitive culture. Further research is recommended to integrate quantitative approaches by involving more samples from various madrasahs in other regions to increase the validity and generalization of the findings. In addition, longitudinal research is needed to understand the impact of implementing transformational leadership over a longer period. Research can also explore the synergy between transformational leadership and digital technology as a strategy to increase the competitiveness of madrasahs in the era of education 4.0.

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