

Breaking Barriers: How Women's Transformational Leadership Enhances Educational Quality

Rubini

Islamic Educational Management Department, Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Terpadu,
Yogyakarta, Indonesia
Email: rubinihr80@gmail.com

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Abstract:

This research aims to examine the role of women's transformational leadership in enhancing educational quality at the International Islamic School. The study examines how female leadership, grounded in transformational principles, fosters both academic excellence and the integration of Islamic values in education. Despite the increasing presence of women in leadership roles, there is limited research on how their leadership styles impact educational outcomes in Islamic institutions. Utilizing a qualitative approach, this case study analyzes interviews, document reviews, and literature-based case studies with Thematic analysis. The findings reveal that women's transformational leadership has a positive impact on educational quality by fostering a vision of academic and moral development, engaging stakeholders, and overcoming gender barriers. The leadership promotes an inclusive environment, encourages professional growth, and ensures the integration of Islamic values into modern curricula. The study contributes valuable insights into the intersection of leadership, gender, and education in Islamic contexts, offering recommendations for promoting transformational leadership among women in educational institutions. This research highlights the importance of adopting leadership practices that strike a balance between academic rigor and religious principles in faith-based schools.

Keywords: *Women Leadership, Educational Quality, Gender Barriers*

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji peran kepemimpinan transformasional perempuan dalam meningkatkan mutu pendidikan di Sekolah Islam Internasional. Studi ini mengkaji bagaimana kepemimpinan perempuan, yang berlandaskan prinsip-prinsip transformasional, mendorong keunggulan akademik dan integrasi nilai-nilai Islam dalam pendidikan. Meskipun kehadiran perempuan dalam peran kepemimpinan semakin meningkat, penelitian tentang bagaimana gaya kepemimpinan mereka memengaruhi hasil pendidikan di lembaga-lembaga Islam masih terbatas. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, studi kasus ini menganalisis wawancara, tinjauan dokumen, dan studi kasus berbasis literatur dengan analisis tematik. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa kepemimpinan transformasional perempuan berdampak positif terhadap mutu pendidikan dengan menumbuhkan visi pengembangan akademik dan moral, melibatkan pemangku kepentingan, dan mengatasi hambatan gender. Kepemimpinan tersebut mendorong lingkungan yang inklusif, mendorong pertumbuhan profesional, dan memastikan integrasi nilai-nilai Islam ke dalam kurikulum modern. Studi ini memberikan wawasan berharga tentang hubungan antara kepemimpinan, gender, dan pendidikan dalam konteks Islam, serta menawarkan rekomendasi untuk mendorong kepemimpinan transformasional di kalangan

perempuan di lembaga pendidikan. Penelitian ini menyoroti pentingnya mengadopsi praktik kepemimpinan yang menyeimbangkan antara ketelitian akademik dan prinsip-prinsip agama di sekolah-sekolah berbasis agama.

Kata Kunci: *Kepemimpinan Perempuan, Kualitas Pendidikan, Hambatan Gender*

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INTRODUCTION

The study of leadership, particularly transformational leadership, within educational settings has gained significant attention in recent years, especially in the context of Islamic institutions (Effendi et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., 2022; Susilawati et al., 2021). One area that remains relatively underexplored is the role of women in transformational leadership within international Islamic schools. Women's transformational leadership in education has emerged as a vital and transformative force in the pursuit of quality education worldwide (Aini et al., 2021; Maheshwari & Nayak, 2022; Samier & Elkaleh, 2021). Across diverse educational settings, women in leadership roles often embody relational, visionary, and inclusive approaches that align closely with transformational leadership principles (Fansori et al., 2024; Siregar, 2023; Zainuddin et al., 2022). This type of leadership emphasizes the development of individuals, institutional change, and shared purpose, creating educational environments conducive to innovation, engagement, and continuous improvement. In many societies, the presence of women leaders in education has been linked not only to better organizational performance but also to a broader sense of equity and inclusion.

The core of this study is a comprehensive analysis of existing literature surrounding transformational leadership, women's leadership roles in Islamic education, and their impact on educational quality. The literature reviewed encompasses several key themes: transformational leadership theory, as defined by Bass (1985); the role of women in leadership within Islamic educational contexts (Koburtay et al., 2023); and the specific challenges and benefits of applying transformational leadership in international Islamic schools (Arar et al., 2022; Irawan et al., 2024; et al., 2023). These sources provide the theoretical backbone for the study, offering insights into both the characteristics and practical applications of transformational leadership in diverse educational settings. Leadership that is both visionary and grounded in strong personal values can lead to enhanced educational outcomes in schools with religious foundations.

The social context of this study revolves around the ongoing evolution of women's roles in leadership positions within educational institutions, particularly in the Islamic education sector. Over the years, traditionally male-dominated leadership positions in educational settings have seen a shift, with an increasing number of women assuming leadership roles (Putra et al., 2021). This transformation is particularly significant in Muslim-majority societies, where cultural and religious norms have often restricted women's participation in leadership positions. The social realities surrounding women's leadership in

education reflect persistent gender imbalances and structural barriers that undermine equity and diversity in leadership (Cardozo & Srimulyani, 2021; Islam et al., 2023; Junaidi et al., 2022). Despite global commitments to gender equality, women continue to be underrepresented in high-level educational leadership positions, particularly in secondary and tertiary institutions (Ahmed, 2023). In many societies, cultural norms and patriarchal values continue to limit women's access to leadership roles, relegating them to subordinate positions or informal leadership without recognition.

Particularly in institutions with a strong religious or cultural identity, the influence of transformational leadership on educational outcomes is significant, as it enhances the effectiveness of transformational leadership in cultivating high standards of teaching and learning. Lahmar (2024) explored the role of women in Islamic leadership, noting that female leaders often bring unique perspectives and approaches that positively impact the learning environment. Transformational leadership is a crucial factor in striking a balance between religious education and academic rigor in international Islamic schools (Ezzani et al., 2023; Lopes Cardozo et al., 2022). Other studies have focused on the broader impacts of leadership in educational settings, such as improving teacher morale (Mulya & Sakhiyya, 2021), enhancing student engagement (Brooks & Ezzani, 2022), and promoting community involvement (Alqahtani, 2021). This highlights the potential of transformational leadership to drive educational excellence in various contexts, including Islamic educational institutions.

Despite the growing body of literature on leadership in education, a gap remains in research specifically addressing the role of women in transformational leadership within international Islamic schools. Additionally, there is a lack of research focusing on the integration of Islamic values with modern educational practices under the guidance of female leaders. This gap represents a significant research opportunity, as understanding the dynamics of women's leadership in such contexts can provide valuable insights into how educational institutions can thrive by incorporating both religious and academic excellence. Furthermore, the specific case of BIAS, with its focus on Islamic education within an international context, presents an underexplored area in the literature that requires attention.

The primary objective of this research is to explore how women's transformational leadership influences the quality of education at Bina Anak Sholeh International Islamic School. The study aims to examine the key characteristics of transformational leadership, including visionary thinking, personalized consideration, and intellectual stimulation, and how these aspects contribute to the development of the institution. Additionally, the research will investigate the integration of Islamic values with modern education under women's leadership. The focus will be on understanding the specific mechanisms through which transformational leadership can enhance educational outcomes, including curriculum development, teacher engagement, and community involvement. The study will also analyze the role of women in leadership positions and how gender impacts the implementation of transformational leadership in Islamic educational contexts.

This research is original in its approach, as it addresses the intersection of transformational leadership, women's leadership roles, and Islamic education. While much of the existing literature discusses transformational leadership in general terms or focuses on male leaders, this study specifically highlights the contributions of women in leadership within an Islamic school context. By focusing on women's leadership, the study offers new insights into how women can influence educational practices and outcomes within a faith-based institution. The research will argue that women's transformational leadership, when grounded in Islamic values, has the potential to drive both academic and moral excellence in educational settings, contributing to the development of students who are not only knowledgeable but also ethically grounded.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative approach, specifically through a case study method (Leko et al., 2021), to explore women's transformational leadership as a central factor in enhancing educational quality at Bina Anak Sholeh International Islamic School (BIAS). The primary focus is on understanding and interpreting leadership practices in this institution, with an emphasis on the role of women in leadership positions. This approach enables an in-depth examination of how transformational leadership, characterized by visionary thinking, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation, affects educational quality. The research examines BIAS as a case study, providing insights into how transformational leadership can contribute to the academic and moral development of students in an Islamic educational context.

To collect data for this study, a combination of primary and secondary sources was utilized. Interviews were conducted with key stakeholders at BIAS, including the school's leadership, teachers, and staff, to gain insights into their experiences with transformational leadership. Additionally, document analysis was employed to review relevant Islamic education policies and leadership guidelines from international schools, including those established by global educational bodies and local authorities (Taherdoost, 2022). These documents provided a contextual understanding of how leadership is framed in Islamic educational settings and its alignment with international standards. The study also incorporated literature-based case studies from other Islamic schools, drawing comparisons on how transformational leadership has been applied in similar educational contexts (Proudfoot, 2023).

The data collected through these techniques were analyzed using thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2018), a method that allows for the organization and interpretation of data according to core themes and patterns. Thematic analysis involves identifying recurring themes and concepts that emerge from the data, and then categorizing them into meaningful groups. This study focused on themes related to transformational leadership, women's roles in Islamic education, the impact of leadership on educational quality, and the integration of Islamic values into modern educational practices. Thematic analysis enables a deeper understanding of how these themes interact and influence the educational

outcomes at BIAS. By organizing the data in this way, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how transformational leadership, especially when practiced by women, can enhance the overall educational experience in Islamic schools. This approach also helps in highlighting the practical implications of the research, offering strategic insights for improving leadership practices in similar educational contexts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Transformational Leadership in Enhancing Educational Quality

Bina Anak Sholeh (BIAS) operated with minimal assets, starting from a rented building in Giwangan. However, through strategic reinvestment of operational profits, the institution gradually acquired multiple properties and resources. Currently, BIAS owns assets valued at IDR 26,465,358,400, including educational equipment, teaching aids, electronics, vehicles, buildings, and land. BIAS has also expanded into religious education and social outreach, while simultaneously developing its economic sector through business units such as BIAS Supermarket, BIAS Furniture, a school cooperative, student tutoring services, and BIAS Café. These units are managed under the leadership of Bu Lilik and a board of commissioners. Additionally, BIAS established BMT Ya Ummi Fatimah, a Sharia-compliant financial institution based in Pati, reflecting its commitment to financial independence rooted in Islamic principles.

The transformational leadership style adopted by Bu Lilik is characterized by inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and strong personal values – core components as defined in leadership theory. In the educational context, such leadership enhances the quality of schooling by creating a supportive, innovative, and value-driven environment. Mrs. Lilik's leadership journey was shaped by her upbringing in a family deeply involved in religious activities and community service. Influenced by her grandmother, a female da'i, and her desire to offer a more impactful approach to Islamic outreach, she developed a vision to create an educational institution that balances Islamic law and modern needs. Her initial efforts began with Qur'an study groups in Yogyakarta in 1987. They culminated in the establishment of a kindergarten in 1992, motivated further by her desire to provide quality religious and general education for her children in the face of secularism.

Transformational leadership at Bina Anak Sholeh (BIAS) plays a pivotal role in improving educational quality. Mrs. Lilik's leadership style combines academic excellence with spiritual development, fostering a learning environment that emphasizes Islamic values. Under her guidance, the institution has evolved into an educational establishment that promotes both academic and moral growth among its students. She uses inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration to guide teachers and students, ensuring that they are not only knowledgeable but also morally grounded. This combination of educational and spiritual focus enhances the overall quality of education, resulting in a school where students thrive both academically and ethically.

Based on the findings from various interviews and observations, it became clear that Mrs. Lilik's leadership has a direct influence on the quality of education delivered at BIAS. Teachers and students alike have reported feeling more motivated to contribute to the school's goals, driven by the institutional vision set forth by Mrs. Lilik. Her ability to foster a supportive and innovative environment has transformed BIAS into a model institution where educational quality is consistently raised. Additionally, the integration of faith into the school's academic activities has helped build a more cohesive and purpose-driven community.



Figure 1. The Influence of Transformational Leadership

In Figure 1, it is evident that transformational leadership has a profound impact on educational quality at BIAS. By inspiring teachers, empowering students, and fostering a supportive learning environment, Mrs. Lilik ensures that the school not only provides high-quality education but also upholds Islamic values. Her leadership has been instrumental in fostering an environment where academic excellence and moral integrity are mutually reinforcing. Transformational leadership, remarkably when grounded in strong values such as Islamic principles, is a powerful driver of educational quality and excellence. The BIAS case demonstrates how a leader's vision and values can align the entire institution toward continuous improvement in education, contributing to a well-rounded and morally conscious student body.

Building Commitment and Stakeholder Engagement

A key factor contributing to the success of BIAS has been its ability to effectively engage both internal and external stakeholders. Mrs. Lilik emphasizes the importance of collaboration and involvement from all members of the school community, including teachers, parents, students, and external entities such as the Department of Education and LP2KS. Stakeholder engagement at BIAS extends beyond resource provision; it involves participation in decision-making, curriculum development, and setting institutional goals. This collaborative approach has led to better alignment with national educational standards, ensuring the school remains responsive to the evolving needs of its community.

Through interviews and observations, it was found that Mrs. Lilik's inclusive leadership style has encouraged stakeholders to actively contribute to the school's development. Parents are involved in the educational process, while teachers are provided with the opportunity to influence curriculum and teaching methods. This has helped create a sense of ownership and shared responsibility among stakeholders, which in turn has contributed to a more unified and

supportive school environment.

Transformational leadership at BIAS also involves engaging both internal and external stakeholders. Stakeholders—including teachers, parents, students, the Department of Education, and LP2KS—play a significant role in supporting and sustaining the school's progress. Mrs. Lilik has successfully fostered partnerships that strengthen the institution's capacity to improve educational facilities, teacher training, and policy alignment with national standards. These collaborations ensure that BIAS can continue growing while maintaining its Islamic educational values.

Stakeholder involvement goes beyond resource provision. It includes participation in decision-making, curriculum development, and the overall strategic planning process. This participatory approach encourages ownership and shared commitment to BIAS's vision and mission. When stakeholders are genuinely engaged, they become active contributors to the school's success and are more likely to support long-term development. Additionally, BIAS's emphasis on a curriculum that balances modern knowledge with Islamic teachings allows it to produce students who are both intellectually competent and spiritually grounded. Through this dual focus, BIAS prepares learners to face contemporary challenges while remaining rooted in faith.

BIAS demonstrates its commitment to maintaining educational quality through continuous development and improvement activities. Programs such as regular religious study sessions (*pengajian*), teacher training for ustadz and ustadzah, and the development of students and parents are tangible examples of these efforts. Regular religious study sessions play a crucial role in deepening the understanding of Islamic teachings among students, teachers, and parents while reinforcing students' moral character in their daily lives. These activities also provide teachers with the opportunity to reflect on their role as educators and character builders, while enabling parents to actively participate in their children's educational journey.

In addition to academic competence, BIAS emphasizes the importance of integrating Islamic values into the teaching process. Teachers are expected to model exemplary behavior by Islamic principles, both in and out of the classroom. This includes demonstrating honesty, patience, empathy, discipline, and respect for values that are essential in creating a positive and nurturing educational environment. Teachers are encouraged to incorporate Islamic teachings into their lesson plans, whether through examples, discussions, or character-building activities.

The impact of this dual focus on professionalism and Islamic values is significant. When teachers are both knowledgeable and ethically grounded, they can deliver lessons that are not only informative but also character-building. This approach equips students with critical thinking skills and academic knowledge while reinforcing their moral and spiritual development. As a result, students become well-rounded individuals who are prepared to face academic challenges and navigate life with strong ethical principles.

Mrs. Lilik's leadership encourages an inclusive approach that empowers all stakeholders to contribute meaningfully to the school's development. This

engagement not only strengthens the institution's capacity but also helps ensure that the school's activities align with community expectations and national standards. The Importance of Stakeholder Engagement in the Educational Development Process. Schools that foster strong relationships with all involved parties are more likely to succeed in achieving their goals and maintaining a high standard of education. BIAS's commitment to stakeholder involvement is an effective model for other educational institutions.

Overcoming Gender Barriers and Challenges

Ms. Lilik has demonstrated exceptional leadership in overcoming gender barriers, particularly in a context where women often face challenges in leadership roles. Despite the demands of balancing professional duties and personal responsibilities, she remains undeterred by gender stereotypes. Her ability to navigate these challenges while maintaining high leadership standards serves as an inspiration to others at BIAS. Ms. Lilik's leadership demonstrates that gender does not determine one's ability to lead effectively, and her success has encouraged other women to pursue leadership roles within the institution.

Ms. Lilik's leadership creates a culture where gender is not a barrier to success. She manages a dual workload, including professional and personal responsibilities, without experiencing gender-based discrimination, a feat often difficult for women in leadership roles. This example has set a precedent for other women within the institution, who are now more likely to pursue leadership positions and contribute to decision-making processes. Table 1 below highlights the factors contributing to overcoming gender barriers at BIAS.

Table 1. Contribution Factors

Factor	Contribution to Overcoming Gender Barriers
Dual Workload Management	Effectively balanced professional and personal responsibilities.
Role Model	The served as a positive example for other women in leadership.
Supportive Culture	A culture was fostered where women were encouraged to take on leadership roles.

Mrs. Lilik's leadership exemplifies how gender barriers can be overcome through resilience, competence, and support. Her success in balancing her professional and personal life without experiencing discrimination sends a powerful message to the educational community at BIAS, emphasizing that leadership ability is not determined by gender but by dedication and skill. The findings can be generalized to suggest that overcoming gender barriers in leadership requires a combination of personal competence and organizational support. The BIAS case underscores the importance of fostering a culture where women are empowered to lead and make meaningful contributions to decision-making processes.

Furthermore, that attitude strengthens the overall educational environment at BIAS. When leadership and educational quality are assessed independently of gender bias, the organization can focus on enhancing teaching standards, improving administrative efficiency, and advancing the school's mission. It

ensures that students receive high-quality education from leaders who are recognized for their expertise and leadership abilities, rather than being judged by gender stereotypes.

Discussion

The transformational leadership implemented by Mrs. Lilik at Bina Anak Sholeh (BIAS) demonstrates a significant contribution to the quality of education at the institution. The leader's stance against gender discrimination sends a powerful message to the entire educational community at BIAS. It challenges the notion that gender stereotypes should dictate leadership capabilities or educational quality. By breaking these stereotypes, the leader paves the way for other staff members, especially women (Tang et al., 2024), to pursue leadership positions and actively engage in decision-making processes without fear of bias or discrimination.

Transformational leadership at BIAS plays a central role in this innovation. Transformational leaders are recognized for their ability to inspire positive change, foster innovation, and provide a clear vision for organizational growth and development (Dian et al., 2022). In the context of curriculum development at BIAS, the leadership successfully creates an educational vision that integrates general knowledge and religious values while motivating teachers to continuously enhance the quality of instruction through more applicable and relevant teaching methods.

The transformational leadership at BIAS aligns with the findings of several academic studies that emphasize the role of leadership in improving educational quality. Leadership grounded in values has a significant impact on student motivation and academic performance. Lokarieva and Chorna (2022) noted that transformational leadership creates an environment conducive to continuous improvement, much like the case at BIAS. Supporting the findings of transformational leadership at BIAS, effective leadership fosters an innovative environment that encourages professional growth, which is evident in BIAS's ongoing curriculum updates and professional development programs. Transformational leadership has a direct influence on the professional development of educators, as reflected in the school's ongoing efforts to enhance teaching quality.

The emphasis on stakeholder engagement at BIAS is supported by Wang et al. (2023), who argue that schools that engage a wide range of stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and local authorities, tend to achieve better educational outcomes. The stakeholder engagement stems from the fact that collaboration with stakeholders enhances school performance by aligning educational goals with community values. This participatory approach is shown to create a sense of shared responsibility and commitment, which is crucial for the sustainability of educational improvements.

Gender barriers in leadership require both individual resilience and institutional support. This is consistent with the findings at BIAS, where Mrs.

Lilik's ability to manage professional and personal roles without facing gender discrimination has set a precedent for others. Gender-inclusive leadership fosters a positive work environment, encouraging more women to take on leadership roles (Alqahtani, 2021; Koburtay et al., 2023). Breaking gender barriers in leadership is critical for fostering an inclusive school culture. The successful leadership of Mrs. Lilik has reinforced the idea that gender should not be a limiting factor in leadership roles, thereby challenging traditional stereotypes and promoting equality within the organization.

The findings of this research have important implications for educational leadership, particularly in faith-based institutions. The integration of transformational leadership, stakeholder engagement, and the overcoming of gender barriers presents a comprehensive model for schools seeking to enhance educational quality and foster an inclusive environment. Further studies could investigate the impact of these leadership strategies in various cultural and educational contexts, offering valuable insights into the adaptability of these practices.

CONCLUSION

This study found that the transformational leadership applied at Bina Anak Sholeh (BIAS) has a significant impact on the quality of education at the institution. The transformational leadership applied not only increases staff awareness and motivation but also ensures that education at BIAS is not only focused on academic aspects but also on character formation and Islamic values. This study also demonstrates that transformational leadership can enhance the quality of education by motivating staff to improve their professionalism and integrate Islamic values into the learning process.

This study makes a scientific contribution to the field of education and leadership. The findings of this study can serve as a reference for other educational institutions seeking to enhance the quality of education by implementing transformational leadership. This study has limitations in its sample and research method. This study was only conducted at one educational institution, so the findings may not be generalizable to other academic institutions. Therefore, further research is needed to validate the findings of this study and increase the generalizability of the results.

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