

Women's Transformational Leadership in Educational Institutions from A Gender Perspective

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Abstract:

According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2025 (WEF), gender equality in Indonesia remains unequal globally, although women's roles in public leadership, including education, have been shown to increase institutional presence. However, previous research has not comprehensively analyzed the characteristics of women's transformational leadership. This study aims to examine the characteristics of women's transformational leadership from a gender perspective. The study used a qualitative approach through interviews, documentation, and observation, and analyzed the data using a multi-case study, including individual and cross-case analysis. The results show that the characteristics of women's transformational leadership include idealized influence with feminist role models grounded in religious values, inspirational motivation grounded in development, intellectual stimulation grounded in globalization, and individualized consideration grounded in personal growth. This research contributes to the development of knowledge on transformational leadership from a gender perspective. It provides practical recommendations for women's leadership models and a paradigm shift in gender bias in education.

Keywords: *Transformational Leadership, Women's Leadership, Gender Equality*

Abstrak:

Berdasarkan Global Gender Gap Report 2025 (WEF), kesetaraan gender di Indonesia masih belum seimbang secara global, meskipun peran perempuan dalam kepemimpinan publik, termasuk pendidikan, terbukti meningkatkan keberadaan lembaga. Namun, penelitian sebelumnya belum menganalisis karakteristik kepemimpinan transformasional perempuan secara komprehensif. Penelitian ini bertujuan menelaah karakteristik kepemimpinan transformasional perempuan dari perspektif gender. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, melalui wawancara, dokumentasi, dan observasi, dianalisis dengan multi-case study, termasuk analisis kasus individual dan lintas kasus. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa karakteristik kepemimpinan transformasional perempuan mencakup idealized influence dengan teladan feminis berbasis nilai religius, inspirational motivation berbasis pengembangan, intellectual stimulation berbasis globalisasi, dan individualized consideration berbasis pertumbuhan personal. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan pengetahuan kepemimpinan transformasional dari perspektif gender serta memberikan rekomendasi praktis bagi model kepemimpinan perempuan dan perubahan paradigma bias gender di pendidikan.

Kata Kunci: *Kepemimpinan Transformasional, Kepemimpinan Perempuan, Kesetaraan Gender*

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INTRODUCTION

The stereotype that women are less capable than men has led to gender inequality in society. The patriarchal paradigm places women in a subordinate position. It causes injustice, which has been happening since pre-Islamic times, when women were considered second-class citizens, bought and sold, did not have inheritance rights, and were under the authority of their husbands or noble families (Balgis, 2022). Discrimination against women persists today, even though some groups are becoming more open. According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2025 (WEF), Indonesia ranks 97th out of 146 countries with a score of 0.692, a slight improvement from 100th place the previous year. Globally, the gender gap reaches 68.8%, with the lowest political empowerment index at only 23.4%, while the other three indices average 83% (Black, 2025; Linardou et al., 2023).

Although patriarchal culture still exists, the role of women in public space is increasingly developing, including in Leadership (Balgis, 2022). Research shows that female Leadership is capable of building healthier, more egalitarian organizations and producing inclusive decisions (Abdulrahman & Amoush, 2020; Mareque et al., 2022). Female leadership is also associated with a strong work ethic, high resilience, and longevity, which improves the quality of the institutions they lead (Buss et al., 2025; Mulawarman et al., 2021).

This finding underscores the importance of promoting gender equality in educational leadership and public organizations. In the world of education, women play a role in management and leadership. Shemahonge et al. (2022) state that female leaders must be able to adapt to various leadership styles to achieve educational goals. Collaborative, empathetic, and inclusive leadership styles have advantages in creating adaptive and innovative educational environments. To become transformational leaders, institutions need to implement inclusive policies, support mentoring programs, and challenge gender-biased cultural norms (Hartinah et al., & Angkananon, 2025). Nasikhah et al. (2022) emphasize the need for self-awareness as a leader, understanding leadership theory, influencing, building cooperation, effective communication, work motivation, setting an example, and maintaining good relationships.

The role of women is also evident in non-formal education, such as Islamic boarding schools. Lailatu shows that Bu Nyai's leadership influenced the development of the pesantren through her leadership style and spiritual strength. The leadership style of women relevant to pesantren traditions is charismatic-authoritative, according to Prasetiawan & Lis (2019). The application of women's transformational leadership characteristics contributes to achieving educational goals.

This research was conducted through a multi-case study, specifically at two educational institutions with successful female leaders who differ in their characteristics. First at Gadjah Mada University (UGM), which provides general formal education, and second at the Al Lathifiyyah 2 Tambakberas Islamic boarding school, which provides non-formal religious education. This multi-case analysis was conducted to find the common thread among the findings of each case. Regarding the multi-case analysis of these characteristics of female

leadership, it has not been found in previous studies either.

Regarding this research, Prof. Dr. Ova Emilia, M.Med., Ed., Sp. OG(K), Ph.D., as a female leader/rector of Gadjah Mada University (UGM), is an example of a successful female leader in building an educational institution's success (Wikipedia, 2025). His transformational leadership style is beyond doubt. This led to many achievements during his leadership, and UGM was ranked second among higher education institutions in terms of quality by Webometrics in 2025. Meanwhile, the second research case is the figure of a female leader at a pesantren, namely Ibu Nyai. Hj. Mundjidah Wahab, who has been the sole caretaker of the Al Lathifiyyah 2 Tambakberas pesantren since the passing of her husband, Alm. KH. Imam Asy'ari Muhsin. Ibu Nyai Hj. Mundjidah Wahab is a transformative female leader who has ensured the survival of the pesantren to this day. In fact, he was not only the leader of the pesantren but also active in the political world. This actually did not hinder the management of the pesantren; in fact, many achievements were made by the female students.

This research is important to be conducted immediately, considering that the results of this research are expected to have theoretical implications, namely contributing to the development of knowledge related to transformational Leadership from a gender perspective, and practical implications, providing recommendations as a leadership model for women and changing the gender bias paradigm in educational leadership.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative, multi-case study design (Bogdan, 1998) to gain insight into women's transformational leadership across various characteristics and types of educational institutions. The research was conducted at two educational institutions with female leaders: the Rector of Gadjah Mada University (UGM) in Yogyakarta, representing formal leadership, and the Head of the Al Lathifiah II Bahrul 'Ulum Islamic Boarding School in Jombang, representing non-formal leadership. The primary informants for this research were the two leaders, with additional informants recruited through snowball sampling techniques, including the Vice Rector, lecturers, and staff at UGM, as well as ustadz/ustadzah, administrators, and santri at the pesantren.

Data were collected through interviews, document analysis, and observations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), then analyzed using a multisite design, including individual and cross-case analysis (Yin, 2006). Individual case analysis used an interactive model, namely: 1) reducing data, 2) presenting data to find patterns of relationships, and 3) verifying or forming patterns to conclude (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Cross-case analysis was conducted to obtain initial findings and cross-case propositions, thereby identifying common threads between the two cases.

Data validity is tested through credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility ensures the data reflects the actual situation, transferability is achieved by describing the findings in detail, and confirmability is obtained by examining physical evidence from the research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Idealized Influence Women's Leadership

Idealized Influence is one of the characteristics of transformational leadership, referring to a leader's ability to set an example (a role model) for members in both behavior and commitment. This characteristic is possessed and demonstrated by the Rector of Gadjah Mada University (UGM) as the top leader. This is, as stated by Prof. AN, one of the lecturers and structural officials at UGM, who mentioned that the Rector has a strong commitment to achieving the institution's goals. This illustrates how the Rector's mother truly guides each study program toward international recognition, both through accreditation and collaborations (AN Interview, 18082024).

This is, as Prof. ND stated, one of the lecturers and officials at UGM. He mentioned that one of his commitments to guiding the program toward international accreditation, which is currently UGM's main priority, was that there was a time when one of UGM's programs saw a decrease in its accreditation score and had not yet achieved international accreditation. In this case, the Rector and her staff went directly to the program to evaluate, guide in finding solutions, and accompany them on the next steps, until the desired goal was truly achieved (ND Interview, 18082024).

The Rector is also a decisive leader. Anything that does not comply with the rules of governance, he will immediately follow up on. He also always involves his subordinates in decision-making and problem-solving through regular meetings (AN Interview, 08/18/2024). As a leader at a large and prestigious university, the Rector also has a very friendly personality. This is evident in how he interacts with others. The Rector, who is also a doctor, is very friendly in her care of her patients (AN Interview, 18082024).

The figure who embodies a hardworking spirit is also very evident in the Rector's mother's personality. This can be felt and seen by his subordinates, demonstrating his seriousness and commitment to developing the institution. Supervising and accompanying study programs in great detail and meticulously, identifying any obstacles and problems from each study program (AN Interview, 18082024).

Characteristics of idealized Influence are one of the characteristics of transformational leadership. This character is demonstrated by the caretaker of the al-Lathifiyah II Islamic boarding school in Jombang, who leads and manages the boarding school. This is as stated by one of his daughters, who also helped manage the pesantren. He stated that, amid his busy schedule, in which the mother/caretaker also serves as the Regent of Jombang, he always makes time for direct interaction and supervision of the students. One of the efforts being made is to become the imam for the dawn and evening congregational prayers, where all the students at al Lathifiyah 2 are female. After performing congregational prayer, he gave a short sermon and some advice to the students. This is a form of his commitment to nurturing and building closeness with the students (LN Interview, 17082024).

The statement made by his daughter, as reported by a student and an administrator of the al Lathifiyah 2 Islamic boarding school, was that the mother

set an exemplary example for the students by frequently offering advice and directly reminding them of the importance of women maintaining good morals. He conveyed this after he finished leading the congregation in the dawn and evening prayers. Bu Nyai directly exemplified the importance of maintaining good morals for women through her gentle demeanor and ability to remain calm in the face of problems (RF Interview, 17082024).

Regarding the implementation of the pesantren programs, the example he provided and demonstrated was direct monitoring, assisted by one of his daughters, to assess how the pesantren activities were progressing and identify any obstacles or problems. Next, to address the problems that arise, he provided examples of how to solve each issue. In this regard, he always involves the managers in discussions/consultations to provide input that will later be used as a solution (RF Interview, 08/17/2024).

The characteristics of idealized Influence possessed and exemplified by the caregivers of the al Lathifiyah 2 Islamic boarding school, as mentioned by several informants above, relate to maintaining commitment. Commitment to worship, maintaining morals, following rules, maintaining cleanliness, and commitment to providing solutions to problems that arise. In his commitment to worship, he exemplified how to remain steadfast amid such a busy schedule.

Inspirational Motivation Women's Leadership

The motivator and inspirer shown by the UGM Rector, as the institution's leader, as stated by Prof. AN, is that the Rector had previously expressed her commitment and full support for the institution's international achievements. With this, he motivated his subordinates with full financial support. Programs and units that will engage in international cooperation or apply for international accreditation are fully funded by the Institution. This also serves as motivation for all levels, including the study programs, to continue developing their programs to achieve international recognition. Besides providing material support, he also accompanied and oversaw each study program or unit with care throughout the implementation process until the end (AN Interview, 18082024).

Another form of motivation provided by the Rector to her subordinates is the awarding of recognition to outstanding lecturers and employees. For lecturers, both in the fields of education/academics, research, and community service. Lecturers and employees are also supported in continuously improving and developing their competencies by participating in various training/workshops at both national and international levels (AN Interview, 18082024).

The second characteristic of transformational leaders is inspirational motivation, which refers to how leaders inspire and motivate others to achieve a specific goal. In this case, the caretaker of the Al Lathifiyah 2 Islamic boarding school, in motivating the students, as stated by the boarding school management, does so through cultural activities after the dawn and evening prayers. Additionally, it is also when the students are approaching a long holiday before they return to their hometowns. In that sermon, the head of the pesantren, in this case, the mother nyai, always reminded and advised the female students to

become successful, well-mannered, and beneficial students in this world and the hereafter, especially regarding the importance of women in maintaining their morals. Women should be more polite, keep their tongues in check, behave, maintain cleanliness, and so on (RF Interview, 17082024).

The caregivers' motivation for the students was also conveyed through the pond management, which included awarding high-achieving students in both formal and non-formal education. The rewards/prizes given include direct gifts from the caregivers and family of the boarding school, as well as congratulations through social media (LN Interview, 17082024).

The motivation provided by the caregivers certainly gives the female students an extra boost in achieving their goals. It is proven that female students have achieved significant results in both formal and non-formal education (RF Interview, 17082024).

Intellectual Stimulation Women's Leadership

In this regard, Prof. AN stated that the Rector's current priority is to improve the university's international ranking. Therefore, she continues to encourage each unit and study program to go international, both to achieve accreditation, collaborate, and improve performance. In the field of collaboration, the Rector also emphasized choosing universities ranked among the top 100 internationally. Of course, with the hope of providing positive implications for the institution's development in achieving international recognition (AN Interview, 18082024).

The Rector is also open and supportive of innovations from both faculty and staff. As long as the new ideas put forward fully support the institution's quality, the Rector always responds very well. The work culture established through the systems implemented across all fields of work at UGM is conducive to monitoring and facilitating work. In addition, he also monitors all work activities through regular Leadership meetings. Each unit leader will present their performance progress and the challenges they face (ND Interview, 08/18/2024).

The characteristic of intellectual stimulation concerns how a leader generates new ideas and innovates in solving a problem. In this regard, the head of the Al Lathifiyah 2 Islamic boarding school believes that female students, in addition to being equipped with religious knowledge, must also be equipped with general knowledge needed in today's society, so that they will be ready to enter society in the current global conditions. This was stated by one of Ibu Nyai's daughters, who is also a caregiver, that at the Al Lathifiyah 2 Islamic boarding school, in addition to studying religious knowledge, there are also extracurricular activities related to community service. This is part of the boarding school's program to prepare the students to enter society (LN Interview, 17082024).

This Al Lathifiyah 2 Islamic boarding school also has a special/flagship program as a form of innovation, designed to benefit female students in understanding religious issues and preparing them for balancing life outside later. This special program is the Amsilati program (a technique for reading

books), and Arabic and English language courses. Through the Amtsilati program, it is hoped that the female students will be able to read yellow books, making it easier for them to understand the rules of religious knowledge, whether from the sciences of creed, law, or reality. Meanwhile, it is hoped that this Arabic and English language course program can equip the female students to improve their knowledge and socialize globally (RF Interview, 17082024).

To improve the quality of Islamic boarding schools. Al Lathifiyah 2 also has several social media accounts that provide information about the activities and achievements of the al Lathifiyah 2 Islamic boarding school. Among the social media accounts he owns are Instagram, the pesantren's website, TikTok, Twitter, and YouTube.

Individualized Consideration of Women's Leadership

Concern for subordinates/individualized consideration is also a characteristic of the Rector of UGM. One form of care provided is direct accompaniment and offering solutions to study programs/units experiencing difficulties in their development. As previously mentioned, he and his staff directly accompanied one of the study programs that experienced a decline in accreditation scores (ND Interview, 18082024).

The Rector also demonstrated her concern by awarding outstanding lecturers and employees and by providing opportunities to participate in various development programs at both the national and international levels. This statement is also supported by what Prof. ND said, which the Rector very much supports, including in terms of funding for human resource development. This is because it is essential for driving improvements in the Institution's quality (ND Interview, 18082024).

Individualized consideration is the fourth characteristic of transformational leaders. This characteristic is a form of care that leaders provide to their subordinates. The forms of care provided are through attention to the needs, abilities, and aspirations of their subordinates (HD Interview, 08/17/2024). In this case, the individualized consideration character is demonstrated by the caregivers of the al Lathifiyah 2 Islamic boarding school, as stated by the boarding school administrators in the explanation above. They mentioned that the mother/boarding school caregiver provides guidance and attention through meetings/lectures after dawn and evening prayers, as well as through incidental activities such as giving sermons during the Prophet's birthday celebrations and boarding school farewells (RF Interview, 08/17/2024).

Discussion

The findings of this research align with the existing literature on women's transformational leadership, particularly in integrating values-based leadership with a strong emphasis on religious, moral, and feminist principles. The concept of idealized influence, as reflected in the Exemplary Feminism Style Based on Religious Values, aligns with previous studies that emphasize the importance of female leaders as role models. According to Mulyani (2018), women's leadership often incorporates feminist values, which align with this study's findings, as both the Rector of UGM and the caretaker of Al-Lathifiyah 2 Islamic Boarding School

embody leadership that combines academic excellence with religious and moral integrity. These findings also resonate with Bass (1985), who emphasized that transformational leaders foster loyalty, trust, and admiration through exemplary behavior, a characteristic seen in both leaders' commitment to their institutions' goals.

The inspirational motivation dimension, defined as the ability of transformational leaders to motivate and inspire followers through a clear vision, is further reinforced by the study's findings. The Rector of UGM's focus on achieving the institution's international standards, and the caretaker's dual leadership role in both the pesantren and as a regent, exemplify women leaders' capacity to influence through vision and dedication. These findings support Wiyono's (2019) argument that transformational leaders set positive examples across various aspects, including leadership style and commitment. The combination of extrinsic motivation (e.g., rewards and incentives) at UGM and intrinsic motivation (e.g., spiritual and social reinforcement) at the pesantren offers a balanced approach to leadership, aligning with the perspectives of Sihite et al. (2024) and Cheng & Zhu (2025), who highlighted the importance of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in transformational leadership.

The study's results on intellectual stimulation, in which both leaders encourage creativity and problem-solving through innovation and adaptability, further corroborate the findings of Wiyono (2019) and Dema et al. (2021). The Rector of UGM's focus on fostering a digital work culture and international collaboration mirrors the work of Heenan et al. (2023), who found that intellectual stimulation in leaders leads to improved performance and innovation. At the pesantren, the leader's emphasis on preparing students for global society while maintaining local cultural and religious values aligns with the research by Jun & Lee (2023), who found that intellectual stimulation in educational leadership fosters creativity and organizational innovation. The integration of these values-based leadership styles with global adaptation demonstrates women leaders' ability to stimulate scholarly engagement and promote innovation within their institutions.

Individualized consideration, as demonstrated in the study, reflects women leaders' ability to attend to the unique needs and growth of their followers, consistent with the findings of Artanto (2022) and Dema et al. (2021). The Rector's recognition of staff achievements and investment in professional development through training and seminars highlights how personalized support can drive individual growth and institutional progress. Similarly, the leader's attention to both academic and non-academic students' personal development reflects the transformational leadership traits discussed by Tanjung et al. (2020), in which leaders actively engage in developing their followers' full potential. This aligns with the work of Huang et al. (2025), who found that individualized consideration strengthens the leader-follower relationship through emotional support, as was evident in both leaders in this study.

The integration of the four dimensions of transformational leadership – idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration – forms a cohesive Values-Based Progressivism

model. This model, as proposed in this research, demonstrates that women's leadership is not only focused on achieving organizational goals but also integrates moral, ethical, and spiritual values as a foundation for institutional transformation. This finding aligns with previous studies by Jun & Lee (2023) and Rocha et al. (2023), which emphasized the importance of combining leadership behaviors with values of innovation, creativity, and moral integrity. Furthermore, this study extends the concept of transformational leadership by showing that women leaders' models go beyond institutional goals and create a leadership paradigm rooted in ethical values, with practical implications for leadership development in educational settings.

The theoretical implications of this study suggest that transformational leadership, remarkably when grounded in feminist, religious, and moral values, can be a powerful tool for driving institutional transformation, especially in educational settings. The study extends the literature by providing a gendered perspective on transformational leadership, particularly the integration of local and global values to foster academic excellence and moral integrity. From a practical standpoint, the study offers recommendations for developing leadership models to reduce gender bias in education, providing a framework for empowering female leaders to integrate moral and intellectual values into their leadership practices. The findings underscore the importance of creating leadership models that emphasize the holistic development of students, thereby contributing to more sustainable educational practices and outcomes in the future.

CONCLUSION

The Rector of UGM and the Head of the Al Lathifiyah 2 Islamic Boarding School demonstrate transformational leadership through four main characteristics. Idealized influence is evident in role modeling, commitment, and a feminine leadership style that is friendly, gentle yet firm, and that upholds religious values. Inspirational motivation is evident in the support and encouragement provided to subordinates, both in terms of attention and resources. Intellectual stimulation is fostered through a transparent organizational culture, digitalization, and the encouragement of innovation. Individualized consideration, on the other hand, is reflected in the response to problems, human resource development, and recognition of high-achieving members. The findings indicate that the transformational leadership of both leaders reflects an effective, value-based, progressive style that builds a healthy, progressive, and human resource development-oriented organizational culture.

It is recommended that other educational institutions adopt a similar approach, emphasizing role modeling, religious values, digitalization, and attention to individual Well-being, with a potential to improve institutional governance and performance. Further research is suggested to involve more female leaders to measure the influence of transformational characteristics on organizational performance.

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