

# Transformational Leadership: Women's Role in Building Competitive Integrated Islamic School

Kasman<sup>1\*</sup>, Fadlan Masykura Setiadi<sup>2</sup>, Zulfikar<sup>3</sup>

Islamic Educational Management Department, Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri  
Mandailing Natal, North Sumatra, Indonesia

Email: kasman@stain-madina.ac.id<sup>1</sup>, fadlanmasykura@stain-madina.ac.id<sup>2</sup>,  
zulfikar@stain-madina.ac.id<sup>3</sup>

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.33650/al-tanzim.v8i3.8817>

Received: 10 June 2024

Revised: 13 July 2024

Accepted: 2 August 2024

## Abstract:

This study aims to analyze the principal's strategy in overcoming obstacles such as gender stereotypes and patriarchal culture and its impact on the management of educational institutions into competitive integrated Islamic schools. The research method used is field research with a qualitative case study approach. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. Data were analyzed thematically to identify themes of women's leadership and patriarchal challenges and interpreted to understand their impact on school culture. The results of the study indicate that women's leadership in schools has shown extraordinary abilities in overcoming the obstacles faced, especially gender stereotypes and patriarchal culture. With an inclusive, participatory, and transformational leadership approach, the principal has proven her capability to manage educational institutions with solid vision, integrity, and commitment. This study contributes to the field of educational leadership by providing empirical evidence of the effectiveness of women's transformational leadership in the context of Islamic education, especially in overcoming gender-based challenges.

**Keywords:** *Gender Stereotypes, Inclusive, Transformative, Women's Leadership*

## Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis tentang strategi kepala sekolah dalam mengatasi rintangan seperti stereotip gender dan budaya patriarki, serta dampaknya terhadap pengelolaan lembaga pendidikan menjadi sebuah sekolah Islam terpadu yang kompetitif. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah penelitian lapangan (*field research*) dengan pendekatan kualitatif jenis studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan dengan cara interview, observasi dan dokumentasi. Data dianalisis secara tematik untuk mengidentifikasi tema kepemimpinan perempuan dan tantangan patriarki, serta diinterpretasi untuk memahami dampaknya terhadap budaya sekolah. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan perempuan di sekolah telah menonjolkan kemampuan luar biasa dalam mengatasi rintangan yang dihadapi, terutama stereotip gender dan budaya patriarki. Dengan pendekatan gaya kepemimpinan yang inklusif, partisipatif, dan transformasional kepala sekolah telah membuktikan kapabilitasnya dalam mengelola lembaga pendidikan dengan visi, integritas, dan komitmen yang kuat. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada bidang kepemimpinan pendidikan dengan memberikan bukti empiris tentang efektivitas kepemimpinan transformasional perempuan dalam konteks pendidikan Islam, khususnya dalam mengatasi tantangan berbasis gender.

**Kata Kunci:** *Stereotip Gender, Inklusif, Transformatif, Kepemimpinan Perempuan*

## INTRODUCTION

The Islamic education landscape has undergone a significant transformation in recent years, with an increased emphasis on competitiveness and innovation (Fandir, 2024). In this context, the role of leadership, especially women, is increasingly receiving attention as a driving force for the development and success of integrated Islamic schools (Hamengkubuwono & Pratama, 2022). Despite prevailing cultural norms and gender bias, women leaders have emerged as influential agents of change, championing the principles of transformational leadership to foster excellence and competitiveness in educational institutions (Fitriana et al., 2021). Integrated Islamic schools, which often lie at the intersection of religious teachings and contemporary education, face various challenges adapting to the demands of a rapidly evolving educational landscape (Wahdi et al., 2024). In facing these increasingly complex and dynamic challenges, awareness of the importance of transformational leadership is increasing because this leadership has the potential to guide integrated Islamic schools toward better competitiveness and more robust sustainability (Saifullah et al., 2023).

Transformational leadership, characterized by visionary thinking, inspiration, and empowerment, is particularly relevant in building competitive, integrated Islamic schools (Wahrudin, 2023). In addition, transformational leadership directly impacts teacher performance, demonstrating that it does not require organizational commitment as a mediator (Soelistya, 2024). In their capacities as educators, administrators, and community leaders, women leaders play an essential role in realizing and advancing the principles of transformational leadership in these institutions (Yulianti et al., 2018). Through their visionary leadership, female leaders can inspire innovation, encourage inclusivity, and foster a culture of academic excellence, thereby contributing to integrated Islamic schools' overall success and reputation (Rachman et al., 2023).

Despite their invaluable contributions, female leaders in Islamic schools often face challenges stemming from conservative cultural norms, widespread gender discrimination (Zohriah et al., 2023), and resistance to change (Cardozo et al., 2022). These challenges highlight the importance of a deeper understanding of women leaders' unique experiences and perspectives in facing the complexities of educational leadership, especially in the context of Islamic values and principles. By understanding the challenges women leaders face in Islamic educational institutions more fully, we can better respond to their needs and create a supportive environment for their advancement and the development of inclusive and competitive education.

In the social structure, women are often perceived as individuals at the second level, considered less capable of carrying out roles that are usually considered robust, assertive, and dominant, as are often identified with men (Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). Amid societal realities, women are often only seen as complements (Febri, 2022). This enduring perception has fueled ongoing discrimination against women, which is evident in various areas such as education, economic, social, political, and leadership positions (Lawson et al.,

2022). Likewise, in the political realm, women are often unable to play a significant role, even though they are often used to gain electoral support in the leadership mechanism process (Aspinall et al., 2021).

Studies on the leadership of female school principals involve analyses of gender issues. Even though many women serve as leaders, especially at schools, they often face unique challenges regarding careers and household responsibilities (Afandi et al., 2023). In addition, as leaders, they often face obstacles originating from societal cultural norms, stereotypes, and physical perceptions about women's capacities in completing tasks that are considered demanding (Setiadi, 2023). Tan (2019), in detail, identifies several obstacles women face in leadership, including physical obstacles, theological challenges, cultural barriers, and obstacles in a dichotomous perspective.

Various literature has shown changes in women's leadership in Islamic educational institutions in several regions. Currently, several Islamic schools are led by female principals. Al-Husnayain Integrated Islamic High School (SMA-IT) is one of the Islamic schools in Mandailing Natal Regency, which, under the leadership of a woman named Desfianti, has achieved B accreditation. This indicates that the Islamic boarding school has viewed leadership from a more inclusive perspective. This fact certainly contradicts Sumadi's (2017) findings, which show that patriarchal domination is still deeply rooted in Islamic boarding schools and deprives women of equal rights and positions in Islamic boarding school culture. However, this research supports and fills the gap in the research conducted by Abidin et al. (2020), which asserts that the transformation of attitudes and behavior in the Islamic boarding school environment regarding gender relations was born from the *kiai's* awareness that men and women have equal dignity and are able to work together without discrimination.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on the unique intersection between gender, leadership, and Islamic educational culture in the context of Islamic boarding schools, an environment traditionally governed by patriarchal norms. By exploring the experiences, challenges, and strategies female leaders use, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how transformational leadership can be successfully implemented in Islamic educational institutions.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This was field research with a qualitative case study approach (Creswell, 2014). Data for this research was collected through various techniques, including in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis (Sugiyono, 2015). In-depth interviews were conducted with the principal, teachers, and students to gain diverse perspectives on women's transformational leadership in integrated Islamic schools. Observations were conducted to examine the principal's strategies for addressing gender stereotypes and patriarchal culture and their impact on managing the school as a competitive, integrated Islamic institution. Additionally, document analysis was used to review relevant literature on gender-based transformational leadership by women. This study was carried out at SMA-IT Al-Husnayain in Mandailing Natal Regency.

Meanwhile, at the data analysis stage, the first step was transcribing the interview recordings and documenting observations. The data was then processed through coding, where key segments were labeled according to relevant themes. These codes were grouped into categories, and a thematic analysis was conducted to identify central themes, such as female leadership strategies and the challenges of addressing patriarchal culture. The final step was data interpretation, which aimed to understand better how female leadership shapes school dynamics and culture.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Challenges and Stereotypes Faced by Women Leaders

In general, women's leadership is still an exciting topic to discuss. This is caused by the prevailing assumption that men are more robust and more suitable to lead in an establishment (Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). Even though currently, recognition of women's presence in public spaces is increasingly recognized by society, there has not been a widespread change in the view that women can appropriately occupy the highest positions in an organization (Galsanjimed & Sekiguchi, 2023). Society still believes that it is not appropriate for women to be prominent figures in the public sphere, influenced by the traditional belief that women's role is at home and not in the public sphere.

As stated by Offiong et al. (2021), the structural challenges faced by women are often overlooked by a social perspective dominated by male viewpoints, which, bolstered by an intricately woven cultural fabric, has resulted in the cultivation of a lenient disposition among women towards their roles within the public sphere. The global phenomenon of female leadership highlights the importance of implementing policies that pay attention to gender, as well as encouraging increased participation of women in the public sphere, mainly by providing equal access to education, which will allow them to be involved in various work sectors, including leadership in the field of education. Women can show their presence, strength, and assertiveness in this effort.

Transformational leadership has a significant implication in the context of integrated Islamic schools. These schools not only function as centers for academic learning but also as institutions for fostering religious values and principles (Noor & Dartim, 2021). Therefore, women leaders are crucial in shaping integrated Islamic schools' culture, values, and academic standards. In addition, the school principal, in carrying out his or her leadership, is influenced by his or her managerial ability to manage reliably to achieve the institutional goals as expected.

The success of a school principal in managing a school is often determined by his or her leadership style or pattern in his or her work environment (Jannah & Wahyuningsih, 2024). Usually, the highest positions in an institution are held by males. In societal perception, leadership within educational institutions is frequently deemed more apt for men, as they are perceived to possess superior assertiveness, discipline, and responsibility (Martínez et al., 2020). However, as the emancipation movement progressed, female school principals emerged, as exemplified by the appointment at this school.

Based on Jl, SMA-IT Al-Husnayain is an Islamic educational institution under the Al-Husnayain Foundation. Willem Iskandar, Pidoli Dolok,

Panyabungan, Mandailing Natal Regency. Inaugurated on 16 July 2003, the school was led by male principals until 2018, when a female principal was appointed (Helvia, 2017). Before her promotion to school principal, Desfianti harbored concerns about the potential resistance from the general public towards a female principal, particularly given that this institution was initially funded by a foundation owned by the Al-Husnayain family. She also grappled with the foundation's direct request, finding it challenging to align with her beliefs. Originally just a regular teacher and not from the Al-Husnayain family, her steadfast abilities prompted even the foundation's management to request an extension of her tenure as principal for the next term.

As a female principal in an educational institution deeply entrenched in Islamic boarding school traditions, Desfianti faced significant challenges and internal conflicts regarding her ability to lead a prestigious institution closely associated with the esteemed legacy of the Al-Husnayain Foundation. Through interviews, Desfianti shared that her initial phase was marked by profound self-doubt, stating, "I often questioned whether I, as a woman, could uphold the responsibilities that come with leading such a reputable institution." This self-doubt led her to delegate many leadership responsibilities to male colleagues, reflecting her struggle to assert her authority in an environment traditionally dominated by men.

During Desfianti's tenure, the school has experienced significant changes and progress. During her early term as principal, the school was still C-accredited. It has successfully achieved B accreditation from BAN-S/M (National Accreditation Body) for Schools/Madrasahs. In addition, she implemented numerous efforts to transform the school into a renowned educational establishment favored by the community. During Desfianti's tenure, this school has experienced significant changes and progress. These efforts consist of internal and external initiatives, as summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1. Internal and External Initiatives**

Initiatives	Efforts Taken	Details
Internal Initiatives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Forming the right cabinet structure.</li> <li>Creating a dynamic, conducive, and warm working environment.</li> <li>Strengthening relationships among all educational elements at school.</li> </ol>	<p>Involving the board of teachers and staff in creating a strong and effective leadership team.</p> <p>Fostering a positive and supportive atmosphere for teachers, staff, and students.</p> <p>Building a sense of community and collaboration.</p>
External Initiatives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaborating with all parties, including the foundation and teachers, to transform the school.</li> <li>Building good relations with the surrounding community.</li> <li>Proactively inviting the community to enroll their children at SMA-IT Al-Husnayain.</li> <li>Optimizing all available resources, both internal and external.</li> </ol>	<p>Working with the foundation and educators to elevate the school's status as a competitive Islamic high school.</p> <p>Actively participating in local activities to foster goodwill and mutual support.</p> <p>Engaging with the community to promote the school and increase student enrollment.</p> <p>Utilizing every resource to support the growth and development of the school.</p>

The findings revealed that the leadership implemented strategic internal and external initiatives to enhance the school's performance and reputation. Internally, she focused on forming an effective leadership structure by involving teachers and staff, creating a dynamic and supportive working environment, and strengthening relationships among all educational elements, including students. Externally, she collaborated closely with the foundation and teachers to transform the school into a competitive, integrated Islamic high school. She also worked to build strong ties with the surrounding community, actively participated in local activities, and encouraged community members to enroll their children at the school. Additionally, she optimized all available resources, both within the school and from external sources, to support the institution's development and growth. These combined efforts have contributed significantly to the school's success and integration into the wider community.

The breakthrough made by Desfianti has been welcomed with high enthusiasm by various parties, including the local community. Gradually, the achievements and reputation of the school are increasingly attracting public interest, as evident in the fact that by 2024, the number of students at the school has significantly increased. However, this achievement does not make Desfianti complacent. On the contrary, she continues to work hard and encourages all stakeholders in the school to actively participate in improving their performance by their respective responsibilities. She believes this collaborative spirit is the key to realizing the school's vision and mission as a superior and quality educational institution.

In many cases, female leadership is often associated with stereotypes rooted in traditional notions of femininity. According to Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi (2023), stereotypes like this often give rise to hidden and unconscious gender biases, which in turn result in the undervaluation of women's contributions and achievements, as well as the dismissal of their strenuous efforts to achieve success and progress. One of the reasons behind this phenomenon is that society has not entirely accepted women's roles in the public sector. In the same work environment, especially in places where women hold leadership positions, they often have to interact with subordinates who are predominantly male. Even though it is not explicitly stated, it is often assumed that decisions or actions taken by female leaders can be influenced by emotional factors, not rational or professional considerations (Mohan et al., 2023). This view may sometimes refer to perceptions that tend to underestimate women's leadership abilities because of their gender. Therefore, it is essential to realize that evaluating a leader's performance and decisions should be based on performance quality and professional competence, not on unfounded gender assumptions or stereotypes.

The issue of female school principals not only raises support from outside but also from within the organization. In this situation, school principals often face difficult choices, mainly when schools are administratively busy and require long working hours extending into late nights. As a woman, balancing these demands can sometimes strain familial relationships, causing discomfort with spouses and children due to unconventional work hours. However, realizing her responsibilities as a school leader, the first proactive step Desfianti took was to

communicate openly with her family to avoid possible conflict. Intensive communication within the family is the key to achieving mutual understanding. Good time management is also needed so that no one feels neglected or not prioritized. She manages her time equitably, prioritizing house chores in the morning and ensuring all familial needs are met to ensure her family does not feel neglected amidst her late-night work commitments.

Based on the data presented, female leadership can significantly impact the development and progress of this educational institution. This is due to various factors, including implementing innovative teaching methods that adapt to student needs and development, developing a supportive and inclusive school culture that creates a conducive learning environment, and promoting academic excellence while maintaining a solid commitment to Islamic values and ethics. In addition, female leaders' inclusive and supportive attitude can help build the trust and participation of students, teachers, and school staff in teaching and learning. All of these efforts can significantly contribute to improving the quality of education and improving students' academic and non-academic achievements.

### **Women's Leadership Style in Building Competitive Integrated Islamic School**

Women's leadership styles in integrated Islamic schools have become the focus of attention in rapidly growing educational research (Afandi et al., 2023). In this context, researchers sought to understand the characteristics, influences, and challenges female leaders face in this unique Islamic educational environment. One crucial aspect discussed is the distinctive characteristics of women's leadership styles, which often emphasize empathy, collaboration, and concern for individual well-being. Research conducted by Tsany and Setiawan (2022) has shown that female leaders tend to exhibit this tendency in managing educational institutions, which often reflects a holistic approach to student development. In addition, women's leadership in integrated Islamic schools is often infused with Islamic values emphasizing justice, equality, and concern for society (Suhada, 2019). This is reflected in their decision-making practices and building an inclusive school culture that strengthens Islamic identity and values.

Nevertheless, female leaders still face various challenges, including gender bias, cultural expectations, limited access to resources and professional development opportunities (Alzahrani et al., 2022). However, there is an increasing trend in the representation of women in the management of integrated Islamic schools, reflecting a shift to a more inclusive culture and an appreciation of the unique contribution that female leaders bring to the Islamic educational environment. In this context, discussions about women's leadership styles will provide a solid foundation for more sustainable and competitive leadership development in Islamic education in Mandailing Natal Regency.

In general, the leadership style applied by Desfianti at the beginning of her tenure as principal can be characterized as transformational. This is reflected through a series of actions and policies that demonstrate the typical transformational leadership, characterized by charisma, attention to individual needs, intellectual stimulation, cooperation, flexibility, and sufficient time for decision-making (Iqbal, 2021). Leadership style in an organizational context is crucial in creating a conducive environment and building motivation for other

members (Suaidy & Rony, 2023). Thus, member productivity will increase with a transformative, inclusive, and participative leadership style, and organizational goals can be better achieved.

The principal has demonstrated a transformational leadership style through her inclusive approach that involves all parties. This female leadership is more capable of winning the hearts of everyone to improve overall working conditions. Even though she tends to consider individual factors in making decisions, she still has a solid drive to optimally develop teachers' intelligence and skills. This approach is implemented flexibly, where the principal pays attention to and adapts to the situations and conditions in the school environment. Thus, this transformational leadership approach builds harmonious relationships between principals and staff and inspires individual growth and progress within the school community.

The leadership style Desfianti applied at the beginning of her leadership period aimed to build the image of a superior, trustworthy, and vision-oriented institution so that various innovations are introduced to achieve the stated goals. In addition, additionally, instructional leadership patterns were implemented during her tenure as the school principal by combining instructional and participatory patterns (Kumari, 2023). Groove (Murniati & Sutanto, 2023) refers to this pattern as facilitative leadership, characterized by intense interaction between the principal and various parties in the school environment, such as teachers, students, parents, colleagues, and the community. Moreover, this pattern supports participation in decision-making, empowers individuals to take an active role in the decision-making process, increases feelings of self-worth, and encourages sharing information and power. In addition, this leadership pattern helps transform personal interests into organizational goals and influences teachers to implement more desirable teaching methods in daily learning activities.

This interaction pattern is exemplified at school by Desfianti, who actively engages with teachers, students, and the community. Reflecting on her tenure, she stated: "Throughout my leadership period at this school, I always prioritized establishing close relationships with all teachers and students. This school consists of individuals from diverse backgrounds and age groups, from those who are very experienced and approaching retirement to those who are still young and need a lot of guidance. Therefore, understanding each person's unique circumstances is important for me. Similarly, the majority of our students come from various middle-class backgrounds. By approaching them as a parent figure at school, I try to earn their trust and steer them away from negative environments. I don't want students to be afraid of me; I always open up time for them if they want to talk about personal problems, and sometimes during breaks I also always give them guidance to steer them clear of detrimental choices." (Interview with the principal, 25 January 2024)

A practical leadership attitude was visible in the efforts made by the principal. Her leadership aims to advance the school by involving all parties and fostering close-knit relationships that motivate others to work together to achieve the institution's goals. Leadership theory maintains that leadership dimensions



encompass two main aspects; first, directing and understanding the needs of the individuals under one's leadership; and second, collaborative leadership that rallies support from all parties to drive the progress of the institution (Wang et al., 2022). These two aspects can be used as indicators of the school principal's managerial success. Thus, Desfianti's management was based on an effective leadership style, mobilizing all parties to work together to carry out their duties and responsibilities for the school's progress.

As previously stated, leadership includes various aspects such as guiding, helping, motivating, directing, supervising, and facilitating communication to steer the organization towards overarching goals. The principal applied this process to create a conducive work environment. A consultative leadership pattern, where the principal determines the direction of the task after carrying out a consultation process with colleagues, was also applied. This approach was also used in making decisions regarding student rule violations. Desfianti would engage in comprehensive discussions with various related personnel, such as homeroom teachers, guidance and counseling teachers, and the student affairs department. This inclusive decision-making process ensures that decisions are taken based on careful consultation and communication with competent parties based on her initiative and the opinions of the various parties involved.

In the context of women's leadership within integrated Islamic schools, the leadership style applied by Mrs. Desfianti reflects unique characteristics. Through an inclusive, participatory, and transformational approach, she built close relationships with all parties in the school, including teachers, students, and parents. This leadership style created a conducive work environment where everyone felt appreciated, supported, and respected. In addition, the leadership pattern that encourages teacher participation in decision-making shows Desfianti's commitment to building inclusive and democratic teamwork. As a result, schools are not only places of learning but also spaces where Islamic values of justice, equality, and inclusion are concretely implemented. Despite facing challenges such as gender bias and cultural expectations, Desfianti adeptly navigates these hurdles through problem-solving and collaborative leadership.

### **Female Principals in Building Competitive Integrated Islamic School**

Cultural norms and societal expectations often pose significant obstacles for female leaders in building a competitive culture in an integrated Islamic school. In many Islamic societies, traditional gender roles require men to be the primary decision-makers and leaders, while women are expected to fulfill household and childcare responsibilities (Delgado-Herrera et al., 2024). As a result, women leaders may face skepticism or resistance from stakeholders who question their authority and abilities based on prevailing gender stereotypes. In addition, according to Chanda and Ngulube (2024), cultural norms perpetuate implicit bias against women in leadership roles, weakening their credibility and influence in the school community.

Resistance to change is another prominent challenge female leaders face in Islamic schools (Cardozo & Srimulyani, 2021). Educational institutions, especially those rooted in tradition and religious principles, often resist change due to

concerns about preserving heritage and maintaining stability. Women leaders who advocate innovative practices or reforms may face resistance from conservative elements within the school community who perceive change as a threat to existing norms and values. To overcome these obstacles, women leaders must demonstrate patience, persistence, and diplomacy in navigating organizational dynamics and garnering support for their initiatives.

During her tenure as a school principal in the public sector, Desfianti encountered a blend of challenges and successes. At the beginning of her leadership, skepticism arose from herself and outside parties who gave an unpleasant impression of his election as a school principal. However, with her unwavering dedication and high enthusiasm over a decade, she has successfully propelled significant improvement within the institution she leads. She firmly believes her team can work together to drive the institution forward. The highest achievement of her efforts as a school principal manifested in securing accreditation during her initial term as a principal. Despite facing negative stereotypes because of her gender, Desfianti continued to prove that women can achieve extraordinary success when given the opportunity. Significant achievements are concrete evidence that women can manage organizations effectively and achieve brilliant achievements.

Apart from that, this school has showcased remarkable achievements in various competitive and Olympic events in both scientific and religious fields, not only at the rayon, district, and provincial levels but also at the national level. Notably, under Desfianti's leadership, the school has secured consecutive wins in the national environmental Olympiad for three years and clinched the prestigious high school preaching competition champion in Jakarta. This success has propelled the school's reputation to resonate within educational circles and among the general public. As a result, Mandailing Natal Education and Culture Service has previously recognized the school as the leading private school in the region. These achievements not only elevated the school's profile but also positively impacted educational development and ignited student enthusiasm for learning within this school and throughout the Mandailing Natal area.

With optimal work achievements, those who previously doubted Desfianti's capabilities increasingly believed in her leadership. In addition, a leadership approach that involves participation and collaboration from subordinates made her subordinates feel comfortable. Research by Rosyidah and Nurwati (2019) revealed that stereotypes about women's abilities based solely on their gender are no longer a determining factor in work outcomes. Although it is sometimes assumed that women tend to rely on feelings in their work, their academic abilities can overcome feminine stereotypes, which often become obstacles in their professional work, especially as leaders in a school.

The principal also serves his or her role as a manager who needs to possess the four main competencies and skills in organizational management, including the ability to plan, organize resources, carry out activities, and control and evaluate (Samsilayurni, 2023). Desfiyanti, as a principal, employed her managerial skills to implement effective management processes with a primary focus on the planning process. She needed a comprehensive plan that encompasses

encompassing- and long-term planning. Additionally, she is also responsible for overseeing the organization's operations. Considering the complexity of the resources owned by the school – consisting of teachers, employees, students, financial resources, and physical infrastructure – the principal must be able to manage and optimize them. Even though resources are limited, utilizing existing resources is an essential first step in carrying out her duties.

Utilizing this initial capital, the principal can benefit from the school's existing resources to develop it. At this school, various measures have been implemented to improve teacher competency. These initiatives encompass policies requiring teachers' continuous innovation in teaching methodologies and educational skills. Notably, the school has implemented the policies of hosting expert-led workshops to improve teachers' computer proficiency. This step was taken to recognize the critical role of information technology and computer-based applications in modern education. Teachers are also encouraged to utilize laptops as educational tools and improve the quality of their instruction. The principal's support in improving the competence of teachers has received a positive response and has had a good impact on the school.

The findings of this research align with and expand upon existing studies on female leadership in educational settings. Sumadi (2017) argues that patriarchal dominance in Islamic boarding schools often undermines the leadership potential of women. However, the success of Desfianti, as demonstrated in this study, challenges this narrative by showing that a female principal can not only overcome such barriers but also foster a dynamic and competitive learning environment. This research supports and extends the work of Abidin et al. (2020), who noted that the transformation of gender attitudes within Islamic educational institutions is crucial for fostering gender equality. Desfianti's leadership, characterized by innovation and inclusiveness, is a practical example of how women's transformational leadership can positively influence teacher performance and school culture.

The contribution of this research is significant, as it provides empirical evidence that female leadership in Islamic educational settings can lead to positive outcomes, even in environments where gender stereotypes are deeply rooted. Future research can build on these findings by exploring how these leadership strategies can be replicated in other Islamic schools within and beyond the Mandailing Natal Regency. Moreover, this study suggests that further investigation into the long-term impact of female leadership on student achievement and school reputation could offer valuable insights for educational policymakers and practitioners. By highlighting the importance of leadership competencies over gender, this research paves the way for more inclusive leadership models in Islamic educational institutions.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis and discussions presented, the presence of female leadership at integrated Islamic schools has demonstrated the extraordinary abilities of female leaders to overcome various challenges, especially gender stereotypes and patriarchal culture, which still characterize today's local society. Using an inclusive, participatory, and transformational approach, Desfianti, as the

female principal, has proven her capability in managing educational institutions with full vision, courage, and sincere commitment. By focusing on achieving tangible results and applying entrepreneurial principles, female leadership is an inspiring example for Islamic education. These findings also underline the importance of supporting the role and contribution of women in improving the quality of education and creating an inclusive and competitive learning environment. Thus, the transformational leadership implemented by Desfianti not only has a significant positive impact on educational development and student progress and inspires efforts to improve the quality of educational institutions. This research recommends that educational institutions and policymakers develop inclusive and gender equality policies. Specific recommendations include: first, developing inclusive policies that create a gender-discrimination-free work environment and support work-life balance; second, implementing gender equality policies in recruitment and promotion, ensuring women have equal access to leadership positions and professional development opportunities.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We want to express our sincere gratitude to the leadership and staff of SMA-IT Al-Husnayain for their invaluable support and cooperation throughout this research. Special thanks go to the school's principal, whose exemplary leadership and willingness to share her experiences were crucial to this study. We also appreciate our reviewer's invaluable guidance, feedback, and encouragement. Without the contributions of all these individuals, this research would not have been possible.

#### REFERENCES

- Abidin, A. Z., Ahmadi, I., & Imamah, F. M. (2020). Kiai, Transformasi Pesantren dan Pencarian Model Gender Mainstreaming di Pesantren Subulussalam Tulungagung. *Jurnal Penelitian*, 14(1), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.21043/jp.v14i1.7128>
- Afandi, R., Mardiyah, L., & Sugiarti, I. (2023). Pola Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah Perempuan di Sekolah Berbasis Islam. *Munaddhomah: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam*, 4(2), 228–241. <https://doi.org/10.31538/munaddhomah.v4i2.377>
- Alzahrani, F., Al-Mansour, K., Alarifi, G., Alyahya, S., AlMehaizie, N., & Almoaibed, H. (2022). Estimating Implicit and Explicit Gender Leadership Bias among Primary Healthcare Professionals in Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(23), 15871. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph192315871>
- Aspinall, E., White, S., & Savirani, A. (2021). Women's Political Representation in Indonesia: Who Wins and How? *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 40(1), 3–27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1868103421989720>

- Cardozo, M. T. A. L., Affiat, R. A., Zaman, F., Irawani, M., & Srimulyani, E. (2022). Silent struggles: women education leaders' agency for peacebuilding in Islamic schools in post-conflict Aceh. *Journal of Peace Education*, 19(2), 158–181. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17400201.2022.2052826>
- Cardozo, M. T. A. L., & Srimulyani, E. (2021). Analysing the spectrum of female education leaders' agency in Islamic boarding schools in post-conflict Aceh, Indonesia. *Gender and Education*, 33(7), 847–863. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2018.1544361>
- Chanda, T., & Ngulube, L. (2024). Women in Leadership: Examining Barriers to Women's Advancement in Leadership Positions. *Asian Journal of Advanced Research and Reports*, 18(6), 273–290. <https://doi.org/10.9734/ajarr/2024/v18i6671>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Delgado-Herrera, M., Aceves-Gómez, A. C., & Reyes-Aguilar, A. (2024). Relationship between gender roles, motherhood beliefs and mental health. *PloS One*, 19(3), e0298750. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0298750>
- Fandir, A. (2024). Transformation of Islamic Education: Implementation of Technological Innovation in Education Management. *Jurnal Ilmiah Mandala Education*, 10(1), 187. <https://doi.org/10.58258/jime.v10i1.6625>
- Febri, H. (2022). Persepsi Masyarakat Mengenai Kesetaraan Gender dalam Keluarga di Krandegan Kebonsari Madiun. *IjouGS: Indonesian Journal of Gender Studies*, 3(2), 11–24. <https://doi.org/10.21154/ijougs.v3i2.4366>
- Fitriana, Fitria, H., & Eddy, S. (2021). The Influence of Transformational Leadership and Work Motivation on Teacher Performance in Principals. *Proceedings of the International Conference on Education Universitas PGRI Palembang (INCoEPP 2021)*, 1497–1501. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.210716.299>
- Galsanjigmed, E., & Sekiguchi, T. (2023). Challenges Women Experience in Leadership Careers: An Integrative Review. In *Merits* (Vol. 3, Issue 2, pp. 366–389). <https://doi.org/10.3390/merits3020021>
- Hamengkubuwono, & Pratama, M. I. L. (2022). Leadership in Integrated Islamic Public Private Schools in Rejang Lebong Regency. *International Journal of Educational Review*, 4(1), 28–46. <https://doi.org/10.33369/ijer.v4i1.21794>
- Helvia, N. (2017). *Internalisasi Nilai-Nilai Agama Melalui Penciptaan Suasana Religius Di SMA Islam Terpadu Al-Husnayain Panyabungan Kabupaten Mandailing Natal* [IAIN Padangsidempuan].
- Iqbal, M. (2021). Kepemimpinan Transformasional Dalam Upaya Pengembangan Sekolah/Madrasah. *Pionir: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 10(3), 119–129. <https://doi.org/10.22373/pjp.v10i3.12187>
- Jannah, R., & Wahyuningsih, O. (2024). The Leadership Role of The School Principal in Effective Educational Management. *Asian Journal of Engineering, Social and Health*, 3(3), 663–668. <https://doi.org/10.46799/ajesh.v3i3.282>
- Kumari, L. (2023). Instructional Leadership Role of Primary School Principals in Sri Lanka. *International Journal of Latest Technology in Engineering, Management & Applied Science*, 12(4), 8–17. <https://doi.org/10.51583/IJLTEMAS.2023.12402>

- Lawson, M. A., Martin, A. E., Huda, I., & Matz, S. C. (2022). Hiring women into senior leadership positions is associated with a reduction in gender stereotypes in organizational language. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 119(9), e2026443119. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2026443119>
- Martínez, M. M., Molina-López, M. M., & de Cabo, R. M. (2020). Explaining the Gender Gap in School Principalship: A Tale of Two Sides. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 49(6), 863–882. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143220918258>
- Mohan, G., Seijts, G., & Miller, R. (2023). Does Leader Character Have a Gender? *Journal of Business Ethics*, 188(1), 169–186. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-022-05313-9>
- Murniati, J., & Sutanto, E. (2023). “Guyub” as a Mediator Between Facilitative Leadership and Global Mindset: A Study of Indonesian State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs). *ANIMA: Indonesian Psychological Journal*, 38(1), 24–46. <https://doi.org/10.24123/aipj.v38i1.2827>
- Noor, I. H., & Dartim, D. (2021). Kepemimpinan Transformasional Dalam Pendidikan Islam Yang Unggul. *Iseedu: Journal of Islamic Educational Thoughts and Practices*, 5(1), 68–84. <https://doi.org/10.23917/iseedu.v5i1.15993>
- Offiong, E. E., Eyo, E. I., & Offiong, A. E. (2021). Patriarchy, Culture and the Social Development Of Women in Nigeria. *Pinisi: Journal of Art, Humanity and Social Studies*, 1(4), 78–86.
- Rachman, E. A., Humaeroh, D., Sari, D. Y., & Mulyanto, A. (2023). Kepemimpinan Visioner Dalam Pendidikan Karakter. *Jurnal Educatio FKIP UNMA*, 9(2), 1024–1033. <https://doi.org/10.31949/educatio.v9i2.5053>
- Rosyidah, F. N., & Nurwati, N. (2019). Gender dan Stereotipe: Konstruksi Realitas dalam Media Sosial Instagram. *Share: Social Work Journal*, 9(1), 10. <https://doi.org/10.24198/share.v9i1.19691>
- Saifullah, A., Maunah, B., Patoni, A., & Saputra, P. R. (2023). Dimensions of Transformational Leadership in Improving the Competitiveness of Islamic Education Institutions. *Cendekia: Jurnal Kependidikan Dan Kemasyarakatan*, 21(2), 163–179. <https://doi.org/10.21154/cendekia.v21i2.6702>
- Samsilayurni, S. (2023). Kepala Sekolah Sebagai Pemimpin Dan Manajer Sekolah. *Journal of Innovation in Teaching and Instructional Media*, 2(2), 101–108. <https://doi.org/10.52690/jitim.v2i2.284>
- Setiadi, F. M. (2023). Women’s Participation in the Traditional Institution of Tuha Peut in Resolving Domestic Violence: A Case Study in Alue Pineung Timue Village, Langsa City. *Prosiding Konferensi Gender Dan Gerakan Sosial*, 1(01), 605–619. <https://doi.org/10.2022/kggs.v1i01.428>
- Soelistya, D. (2024). Investigating the Relationship between Transformational Leadership, Compensation, and Teacher Performance through Organizational Commitment in an Islamic Foundation Setting. *Al-Tanzim: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam*, 08(02), 377–391. <http://doi.org/10.33650/al-tanzim.v8i2.6428>

- Suaidy, H. M., & Rony, Z. T. (2023). Pentingnya Gaya Kepemimpinan Dalam Mengelola Organisasi : Sebuah Studi Literatur Sistematis. *Jurnal Bisnis Dan Ekonomi*, 1(01), 29–49. <https://doi.org/10.61597/jbe-ogzrp.v1i1.2>
- Sugiyono. (2015). *Metode Penelitian Pendidikan: Pendekatan Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, dan R&D* (21st ed.). Alfabeta.
- Suhada, S. (2019). Kesetaraan Gender: Posisi Kepemimpinan Perempuan dalam Islam. *Mumtaz: Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an Dan Keislaman*, 3(2), 169–190. <https://doi.org/10.36671/mumtaz.v3i2.39>
- Sumadi. (2017). Islam Dan Seksualitas: Bias Gender Dalam Humor Pesantren. *El Harakah Jurnal Budaya Islam*, 19(1), 21–40. <http://dx.doi.org/10.18860/el.v19i1.3914>
- Tabassum, N., & Nayak, B. S. (2021). Gender Stereotypes and Their Impact on Women's Career Progressions from a Managerial Perspective. *IIM Kozhikode Society & Management Review*, 10(2), 192–208. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2277975220975513>
- Tan, M. G. (2019). *Perempuan Indonesia Pemimpin Masa Depan*. Pustaka Sinar Harapan.
- Tsany, A. S., & Setiawan, A. C. (2022). Efektivitas Gaya Kepemimpinan “Women Leadership” Dalam Meningkatkan Kinerja Guru. *Jurnal Inspirasi Manajemen Pendidikan*, 10(3), 539–550.
- Wahdi, Asari, H., & Arsyad, J. (2024). Modernization of Islamic Education: A Network Study of Integrated Islamic Schools in North Sumatra. *Edukasi Islami: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 13(2), 243–250. <https://doi.org/10.30868/ei.v13i02.5629>
- Wahrudin, B. (2023). Kepemimpinan Transformasional di Pondok Pesantren. *Southeast Asian Journal of Islamic Education Management*, 4(2), 131–148. <https://doi.org/10.21154/sajiem.v4i2.211>
- Wang, Q., Hou, H., & Li, Z. (2022). Participative Leadership: A Literature Review and Prospects for Future Research. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 924357. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.924357>
- Yulianti, R., Putra, D., & Takanjanji, P. (2018). Women Leadership: Telaah Kapasitas Perempuan Sebagai Pemimpin. *Madani Jurnal Politik Dan Sosial Kemasyarakatan*, 10(2), 14–29. <https://doi.org/10.52166/madani.v10i2.973>
- Zohriah, A., Rafiudin, C., & Fauzi, A. (2023). Women's Leadership in Islamic Educational Institutions. *Journal on Education*, 06(01), 5784–5792. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.31004/joe.v6i1.374>