



TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP OF MADRASAH PRINCIPALS IN DEVELOPING STUDENTS' RELIGIOUS CHARACTER

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Abstract:

This study uses transformational leadership as a theoretical lens to understand the practices of school principals, not just as a label. is motivated by the importance of developing students' religious character amidst the challenges of the digital era, especially in rural madrasas facing limited resources and minimal leadership training. MI Tarbiyatul Athfal in Gunungwungkal District, Pati Regency, became the locus of study because it was deemed successful in implementing religious values habituation despite limited conditions. The research objectives were to describe the role and leadership strategies of the principal, analyze supporting and inhibiting factors, and reveal their impact on the formation of students' religious character. The study used library research methods with a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach and content analysis techniques on internal madrasah documents and the latest scientific literature (2015–2025). The results show that the principal plays a role as a moral agent and spiritual leader through four dimensions: formulation of a religious vision, exemplary morals and worship, management of value habituation (Dhuha prayer, tadarus, daily etiquette), and collaboration with teachers and parents. The main strategy is sustainable habituation integrated into the school culture. Supporting factors include the principal's religious commitment and local environmental support, while the main obstacles are limited human resources, minimal training, and negative digital influences. This study proposes an adaptive, contextual model of religious leadership in semi-rural areas.

Keywords: *Principal; Religious Leadership; Religious Character; Islamicelementary School; Values Instillation*

INTRODUCTION

Character education, especially religious character, is the main foundation in forming a generation with integrity, noble morals, and a resilient spirit amidst the challenges of the times. As mandated in Presidential Regulation Number 87 of 2017 concerning Strengthening Character Education (PPK), (Hasibuan and Ag 2025). Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) Tarbiyatul Athfal in Gunungwungkal District, Pati Regency, is one of the Islamic-based elementary educational institutions that is active in developing religious character through programs such as congregational Dhuha prayers, Al-Quran recitation, and the habit of praying and studying which are carried out regularly. However, the success of the program is

highly dependent on the quality of the leadership of the Madrasah principal. The Madrasah principal is not merely an administrator, but a moral agent and spiritual leader who is responsible for creating a religious school climate while ensuring the consistency of internalization of Islamic values in the governance, learning, and culture of the Madrasah (Mujahidin 2025). In the digital era and massive flow of information, the challenges of forming religious character in students are increasingly complex. Exposure to negative content, individualism, and the weakening of role models in the family environment require madrasah principals to be more proactive, creative, and visionary. A recent paper shows that the religious leadership of madrasah principals significantly influences teacher motivation, the quality of moral development, and the consistency of the instillation of religious values in madrasahs (Ramdani, Nurshobahi, and Bariyah 2025).

This study aims to describe the role of madrasah principals as transformational leaders in building a religious culture within the madrasah environment, analyze the strategies used to instill religious values through various habituation programs, and identify factors that support and hinder the implementation of the development of students' religious character. Furthermore, this study also aims to provide theoretical contributions to the development of Islamic educational leadership studies and provide input for madrasah principals and education practitioners in optimizing the formation of students' religious character in madrasahs.

Based on an analysis of previous research, three key gaps were identified that form the basis for the novelty of this study. First, the majority of previous studies used a quantitative-correlational approach or case studies in urban/semi-urban areas with adequate resource support. Therefore, they failed to fully explore the dynamics of transformational leadership in the context of rural madrasahs, which face limited human resources, minimal leadership training, and heterogeneous parental support. Second, previous studies tended to isolate leadership dimensions (for example, focusing solely on role models or learning management) without holistically integrating them within a transformational leadership framework that has been epistemologically and normatively reconstructed from an Islamic perspective. Third, no research has in-depth explored the mechanisms of sustainable religious value instillation as a primary strategy of transformational leadership in shaping the religious character of elementary madrasah students.

This study aims to address this gap through a qualitative, descriptive-analytical approach, using a case study of MI Tarbiyatul Athfal Gunungwungkal Pati, a madrasah with limited resources but deemed successful in instilling religious values. Unlike previous fragmentary studies, this study integrates four dimensions of transformational leadership (Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, Individualized Consideration) within the framework of Islamic values (uswah hasanah, tazkiyatun nafs, tafakkur, and rahmatan lil 'alamin) to explain how madrasah principals carry out their roles as moral agents and spiritual leaders through sustainable habituation strategies integrated into the school culture. Thus, this study not only enriches the literature on Islamic educational leadership but also offers an adaptive contextual religious leadership model for madrasahs in Central Java.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research employed library research with a descriptive qualitative approach. Library research was conducted through the collection, review, and analysis of various literature sources relevant to the research focus, without directly collecting data in the field. A qualitative approach was chosen because it provides an in-depth understanding of the transformational leadership of madrasah principals in developing students' religious character, based on theoretical studies from various scientific sources.

The research data sources consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data included books and e-books on transformational leadership, character education, Islamic education management, and relevant national and international scientific journal articles. Secondary data were obtained from theses, dissertations, seminar proceedings, education policy documents, government regulations, and various other scientific references supporting the research.

Data collection was conducted through documentation study, namely by identifying, selecting, reading, recording, and categorizing various literature based on relevance to the research focus. Next, the data was analyzed using content analysis through the stages of data reduction, classification based on themes, interpretation, and drawing conclusions. This technique is used to gain a comprehensive understanding of the concept and implementation of transformational leadership in developing students' religious character based on the results of a literature review.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The Role of the Madrasah Principal's Transformational Leadership in Developing Students' Religious Character. Based on a review of various literature, transformational leadership is a leadership model oriented towards changing the values, attitudes, and behavior of organizational members through role modeling, motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual attention. In the context of Islamic education, the madrasah principal serves not only as an educational administrator but also as a spiritual leader responsible for shaping students' character. The role of the madrasah principal in transformational leadership can be seen through four main dimensions proposed by Bernard M. Bass, namely:

a. Idealized Influence

The madrasah principal serves as a role model for teachers and students in practicing Islamic values. This exemplary behavior is demonstrated through discipline, honesty, responsibility, simplicity, and consistency in performing religious duties. This exemplary behavior is a key factor in the process of internalizing students' religious character.

b. Inspirational Motivation

The principal motivates the entire madrasa community to realize the institution's religious vision. This motivation is realized through routine guidance, the delivery of religious values, and encouragement to teachers and students to carry out religious activities sustainably.

c. Intellectual Stimulation

The principal encourages innovative religious character development programs through various engaging religious activities that are relevant to students' needs. These innovations help increase religious awareness and

build a religious culture within the madrasa environment.

d. Individualized Consideration

The principal pays attention to the character development of each student through personalized guidance, mentoring, and mentoring. This approach enables more effective religious character development because it considers the needs and circumstances of each student. The study showed that the success of religious character development is greatly influenced by the madrasa principal's ability to implement these four dimensions of transformational leadership in an integrated manner.

Implementation of Transformational Leadership Theory in Developing Religious Character

The implementation of transformational leadership theory in developing religious character is carried out through various habituation programs and madrasah culture based on Islamic values.

a. Implementation of Idealized Influence

This theory is applied through the exemplary behavior of the madrasah principal and teachers in worship, discipline, greetings, politeness, and other religious behaviors that can be emulated by students.

b. Implementation of Inspirational Motivation

The madrasah principal builds a religious vision and culture through religious slogans, regular guidance, religious lectures, and motivational activities so that students develop an awareness of religious teachings.

c. Implementation of Intellectual Stimulation

This dimension is implemented through the development of creative programs such as Quran recitation, short surah memorization, religious competitions, short Islamic boarding schools, Islamic holiday commemorations, and social and religious activities.

d. Implementation of Individualized Consideration

Implementation is carried out through personal development, mentoring students who experience difficulties in practicing religious practices, and providing awards to students who demonstrate good religious character development. Through this implementation, transformational leadership theory becomes not only a theoretical concept but also a practical strategy for fostering a sustainable religious culture in madrasahs.

Developing Student Religious Character Based on Character Theory Based on the character theory proposed by Thomas Lickona, character consists of three main components: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action.

a. Moral Knowing

Students gain an understanding of religious values through Islamic Religious Education learning, religious activities, and guidance provided by teachers and the madrasah principal.

b. Moral Feeling

Religious values are instilled through habits that foster awareness, a love for worship, a sense of responsibility, and concern for others.

c. Moral Action

Religious character is manifested in concrete behaviors such as performing congregational prayers, reading the Quran, greeting others, respecting teachers and parents, maintaining cleanliness, being honest, disciplined, and responsible. Furthermore, religious character in Islamic education encompasses three main indicators: faith, demonstrated through belief in

Islamic teachings. Worship, demonstrated through the habit of regularly performing religious services.

Morals are demonstrated through behavior consistent with Islamic values in daily life. The study results show that the transformational leadership of madrasah principals contributes significantly to the formation of these three aspects of religious character through role modeling, habituation, guidance, and the creation of a religious culture within the madrasah environment.

Based on the results of a literature review sourced from various books, scientific journals, and previous research results, it was found that the transformational leadership of madrasah principals has a significant contribution in the development of religious character of students. Transformational leadership is understood as a leadership model that is able to inspire, motivate, and change the behavior of organizational members towards better goals through role models, coaching, and strengthening moral values. In the context of Islamic education, transformational leadership is not only oriented towards achieving academic goals, but also on the formation of character and personality of students based on Islamic values. The results of the study show that the implementation of transformational leadership of madrasah principals is reflected in the four main dimensions proposed by Bernard M. Bass, namely idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. The idealized influence dimension is seen from the ability of madrasah principals to be role models in attitudes, behavior, discipline, and implementation of religious teachings.

This role model is an important factor in the process of internalizing religious values to students because the behavior of leaders tends to be used as examples by madrasah residents. The inspirational motivation dimension is manifested through the madrasah principal's ability to develop a vision, mission, and culture oriented toward the formation of religious character. The madrasah principal motivates teachers and students to actively participate in various religious activities, thus creating an educational environment that supports the development of spiritual values. The motivation provided is not only administrative in nature, but also touches on aspects of religious awareness and moral responsibility of students. Furthermore, the intellectual stimulation dimension is evident in the madrasah principal's efforts to encourage innovation and creativity in the implementation of religious programs. Various activities such as habituating Quran reading, congregational prayer, memorization of short surahs, commemoration of Islamic holidays, and social activities based on Islamic values are effective means of instilling religious character. These programs demonstrate that religious character development can be achieved through a creative and sustainable approach. The individualized consideration dimension is manifested through the madrasah principal's attention to the needs and development of each student. The madrasah principal strives to provide guidance, direction, and mentoring to students so they can develop their spiritual and moral potential. This individual approach is considered important because each student has a different background, abilities, and level of religious understanding. Furthermore, the results of the literature review indicate that religious character reflects an individual's adherence to the teachings of their religion. Religious character is demonstrated not only through the performance of ritual worship but also through social behavior that reflects the values of honesty, responsibility, discipline, tolerance, caring, and noble character. Thus, religious character has broad dimensions, encompassing both the relationship

between humans and God (hablum minallah) and the relationship between humans and others (hablum minannas).

Based on various analyzed studies, it was found that the success of developing students' religious character is greatly influenced by the madrasah culture established by the principal. This religious culture is manifested through the habituation of religious activities, the example of teachers, the implementation of religiously nuanced rules, and the creation of a school environment that supports the strengthening of Islamic values. A religious environment has been proven to help students internalize religious values into their daily behavior. The study also shows that developing religious character cannot be achieved instantly but rather through a continuous process. This process involves synergy between the madrasah principal, teachers, students, parents, and the community. The madrasah principal, as a leader, holds a strategic position in coordinating all these components to optimally achieve the goals of character education. Therefore, transformational leadership is a relevant and effective approach to supporting the development of students' religious character in madrasahs. Overall, the literature review shows that the transformational leadership of madrasah principals plays a crucial role in building a religious culture, improving the quality of character development, and shaping students who excel not only academically but also possess faith, piety, and noble morals. These findings indicate that the success of religious character education is greatly influenced by the quality of the madrasah principal's leadership in managing and directing all educational activities toward creating a religious and character-based learning environment.

DISCUSSION

Transformational Leadership of Madrasah Principals in Developing Students' Religious Character

Based on the results of the literature review, the transformational leadership of madrasah principals plays a crucial role in developing students' religious character. Transformational leadership is a leadership model that focuses not only on achieving organizational goals but also on changing individual attitudes, values, and behaviors for the better. In the context of Islamic education, madrasah principals are required to be leaders who can inspire, motivate, guide, and set an example for all members of the madrasah community. According to Bernard M. Bass, transformational leadership consists of four main components known as the Four I's: Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration. These four components are closely related to efforts to develop students' religious character. In the Idealized Influence aspect, the madrasah principal acts as a role model for teachers and students. Role modelling is one of the most effective educational methods for character formation. In Islamic education, the concept of role modeling is known as *uswah hasanah*, which refers to providing examples of good behavior for students to emulate. A madrasah principal who demonstrates discipline, honesty, responsibility, and devotion to religious practices will positively influence the development of students' religious character. Furthermore, in terms of Inspirational Motivation, the madrasah principal plays a role in building enthusiasm and awareness among madrasah members to apply religious values in their daily lives. This motivation is not only related to academic achievement but also to strengthening spiritual and moral values. The madrasah principal can instill a religious vision through various habituation programs, so

that students develop a sense of responsibility and willingness to practice religious teachings.

In terms of Intellectual Stimulation, the madrasah principal encourages innovation in the development of character education programs. Creatively designed religious activities can increase student participation in the process of religious character formation. Meanwhile, Individualized Consideration demonstrates that the madrasah principal pays attention to the needs, development, and challenges of each student. This personal approach is crucial because religious character cannot be formed through a general approach alone but requires ongoing development tailored to each individual's circumstances. Therefore, the transformational leadership of a madrasah principal is a strategic factor that can create an educational environment that optimally supports the development of students' religious character.

Implementation of Transformational Leadership in Building Religious Character

The study's findings indicate that the implementation of transformational leadership in building students' religious character is carried out through various programs and activities integrated into the madrasah culture. These programs serve not only as routine activities but also as a means of internalizing religious values in students' lives. One form of implementation frequently found in the literature is the habituation of religious activities. Habituation is an effective method in character education because it is carried out continuously, thus forming positive habits in students. Activities such as reading the Quran before class, congregational Dhuha prayer, congregational Dhuhur prayer, communal prayer, memorization of short surahs, and commemoration of Islamic holidays are forms of habituation that can strengthen students' religious character. In addition to habituation, the implementation of transformational leadership is also carried out through strengthening the madrasah's religious culture. Religious culture is an environment that reflects religious values in all educational activities. The madrasah principal plays a role in creating this culture through the development of policies, regulations, and programs that support the formation of religious character. A religious madrasah environment will provide students with direct experience in practicing religious values in their daily lives. Another implementation is evident in the madrasah principal's efforts to empower teachers as agents of character education.

Teachers play a crucial role because they interact directly with students in the learning process. Therefore, the madrasah principal needs to provide guidance and motivation to teachers so they can serve as role models in attitudes, behavior, and the implementation of religious teachings. When teachers and madrasah principals demonstrate behavior consistent with Islamic values, the process of developing students' religious character will be more effective. From an Islamic education perspective, the implementation of transformational leadership aligns with the goals of Islamic education, which emphasize a balance between intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and social aspects. Education aims not only to produce students who are academically intelligent but also possess noble morals and a religious personality. Therefore, transformational leadership is a relevant approach to supporting the achievement of the overall goals of Islamic education.

Implications of Transformational Leadership for the Development of Students' Religious Character.

Based on the results of the literature review, transformational leadership has various positive implications for the development of students' religious character. These implications are evident in aspects of students' faith, worship, morals, and social behavior. In the faith aspect, transformational leadership helps foster students' awareness of the importance of religious values in life. Through the role model and motivation provided by the madrasah principal, students are encouraged to strengthen their faith and commitment to religious teachings. This awareness forms the foundation for developing a strong religious character. In the worship aspect, various habituation programs developed by the madrasah principal can increase student involvement in religious activities. Regular worship activities will form positive habits and strengthen students' relationship with Allah SWT. Thus, religious character is not only understood theoretically but also manifested in daily life. In the moral aspect, transformational leadership contributes to the formation of behavior that reflects Islamic values, such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, courtesy, and social concern. These values are important indicators of religious character because they demonstrate the implementation of religious teachings in real life. Students with religious character will be able to behave in accordance with religious norms both at school and in society. Furthermore, transformational leadership also has implications for the creation of a positive and conducive madrasa culture. A strong religious culture will create a comfortable, harmonious learning environment that supports the development of student character. Such an environment allows students to gain learning experiences that are not only oriented towards knowledge, but also towards moral and spiritual formation. Overall, the results of the study indicate that the transformational leadership of the madrasa principal has a significant influence on the development of students' religious character. The success of religious character formation is not only determined by the curriculum or learning program, but is also greatly influenced by the quality of the madrasa principal's leadership in creating exemplary behavior, motivation, habits, and a sustainable religious culture. Therefore, the application of transformational leadership is an important strategy in realizing the goals of Islamic education, namely to produce a generation that is faithful, pious, knowledgeable, and has noble character.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the literature review and discussion regarding the role of the transformational leadership of madrasah principals in developing the religious character of students, it can be concluded that transformational leadership is one of the effective leadership models in supporting the achievement of Islamic education goals, particularly in the formation of students' religious character. Transformational leadership is not only oriented towards achieving organizational targets and improving the quality of education, but also focuses on changing the values, attitudes, and behavior of all madrasah members through a process of role modeling, motivation, coaching, and the continuous development of individual potential. The results of the study indicate that madrasah principals have a very strategic position in shaping a religious educational environment. Through the application of transformational leadership dimensions that include idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, madrasah principals

are able to create an educational atmosphere that supports the internalization of Islamic values in the lives of students. The role model shown by madrasah principals is a major factor in building religious character because students tend to imitate the behavior they see directly from their leaders. In addition, the motivation provided by madrasah principals can arouse students' enthusiasm to practice religious teachings consciously and responsibly. Madrasah principals also play a role in encouraging various innovative religious programs that can strengthen the process of habituating religious values in daily life. Furthermore, attention to the needs and development of individual students is a crucial aspect in ensuring that the character development process is optimal and sustainable. Religious character reflects faith, piety, and the practice of religious teachings in daily life. This character is demonstrated not only through the performance of ritual worship but also through social behavior that reflects the values of honesty, discipline, responsibility, caring, tolerance, and noble character. Therefore, developing religious character requires a continuous process through habituation, role modeling, supervision, and strengthening of religious culture within the educational environment. This study also shows that the successful development of students' religious character cannot be separated from the role of all educational components. Madrasah principals, teachers, parents, and the community must work together to create an environment that supports character formation. Synergy between schools, families, and the community is a crucial factor in ensuring that the religious values instilled in madrasahs are consistently applied in daily life. Thus, the transformational leadership of madrasah principals can be understood as a crucial instrument in developing a generation that not only excels academically but also possesses strong faith, noble morals, and the ability to face the challenges of modern development without losing its Islamic identity. Transformational leadership is a relevant approach to addressing the needs of modern education, which demands a balance between intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual intelligence.

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