



TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF BILINGUAL LEARNING AT MIN 2 JEPARA: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

Arina¹, Subaidi², Sukarman³

^{1,2,3} Universitas Islam Nahdlatul Ulama Jepara, Central Java, Indonesia

Email: arina.2561@student.unisnu.ac.id¹, subaidi@unisnu.ac.id², pakar@unisnu.ac.id³

Abstract:

This study analyses the role of transformational leadership in implementing bilingual learning within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri (MIN) 2 Jepara, a state Islamic primary school in rural Central Java. The research addresses how a madrasah principal mobilises leadership to sustain an English-medium bilingual programme that integrates global competence with Islamic values amid constrained linguistic and material resources. A qualitative single-case study design was employed, drawing on semi-structured interviews with five key informants (the principal, the bilingual-class coordinator, the vice-principal for curriculum, and bilingual teachers), participant observation in bilingual classrooms, and document analysis. Data were examined through thematic analysis and triangulated across sources. The findings indicate that the principal's transformational leadership, operating through idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration, functioned as the decisive mechanism converting a policy aspiration into a working classroom practice. Leadership effects were realised indirectly, mediated by teacher capacity built through continuous in-house training, professional learning communities, and technology-enabled pedagogy, rather than through structural mandate. The principal reframed limited English proficiency among teachers and students from a deficit into a shared developmental project, while embedding Islamic values into English instruction through practices such as English Morning and value-laden vocabulary, producing synergy rather than dichotomy between globalisation and religious identity. The study contributes a religio-cultural, rural extension to transformational-leadership theory and offers transferable strategies for resource-limited madrasahs. The single-site design limits statistical generalisation but supports analytical generalisation to comparable Islamic schools.

Keywords: *Transformational Leadership; Bilingual Learning; Merdeka Curriculum; Islamic Education; Madrasah*

INTRODUCTION

Madrasahs occupy a strategic position in Indonesia's educational landscape, charged with forming a generation that is academically competent yet rooted in religious character. Within the national system they operate as guardians of Islamic identity amid the modernisation of education (Wasiah, 2023). The introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum in 2022 marked a significant

shift toward flexible, project-based learning oriented to the holistic development of learners (Indonesia, 2022). For madrasahs, however, the reform produces a persistent dilemma: how to adopt a more open and competency-driven pedagogy without diluting the character and religious formation that constitute their reason for being (Emawati et al., 2024).

This tension is sharpened when bilingual learning, with English as the primary medium of instruction, is layered onto the madrasah ecosystem (Badrin, 2024). Such programmes aim to prepare pupils for a globalised order, yet limited English proficiency among both pupils and teachers frequently undermines their effectiveness (Wulandari, 2023). Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and English-medium models can advance language and content outcomes simultaneously, but the evidence base is uneven and highly sensitive to implementation quality, teacher preparedness, and contextual support rather than to policy ambition alone (Pittas, E., & Tompkins, 2024). In Islamic institutions the challenge is compounded: instructional materials must be adapted so that English-medium delivery does not displace the religious substance that defines the madrasah (Abrar, A., & Widiati, 2025).

At MIN 2 Jepara this innovation is realised through bilingual excellence classes that adopt the national curriculum delivered substantially in English. The model does not merely translate content; it positions English as the principal language of instruction while retaining Islamic values as the moral core, creating an unusual configuration for a state madrasah. The aim is to raise pupils' global competence without loosening their religious foundation. Yet the programme confronts conditions specific to a rural regency such as Jepara, where access to bilingual resources, qualified personnel, and exposure to English is constrained (Arpanudin et al., 2025).

The central dilemma, then, is one of simultaneous balancing: pursuing globalisation through bilingual instruction while safeguarding Islamic values, and doing so against infrastructural and human-resource limits (Nofitasari et al., 2023). Transformational leadership emerges as a plausible response, given its capacity to inspire innovation while preserving the harmony of traditional values (Gupta, 2025). The approach centres on a clear vision, motivation, and the cultivation of a learning-oriented organisational culture. In a setting such as MIN 2 Jepara, where transactional incentives are limited and change must be negotiated rather than imposed, a transformational orientation grounded in Islamic values appears necessary to drive holistic change (Fahrudin, 2014; Khoiruddin, 2016; Syah et al., 2025).

Importantly, recent meta-analytic evidence cautions against overstating leadership effects: across 108 studies, school leadership relates to student outcomes only modestly and largely indirectly, with the strongest practices being those that build teacher capacity and instructional quality rather than those that exercise positional authority (Tan, C. Y., Dimmock, C., & Walker, 2024). Complementary work using meta-analytic structural equation modelling shows that leadership for learning influences achievement principally through the mediation of teacher performance (Papadakis et al., 2024). These findings reframe the research problem: the pertinent question is not whether a principal can mandate a bilingual programme, but through what mechanisms transformational leadership reshapes teacher capacity and school culture so that bilingual learning becomes viable in a low-resource madrasah.

Accordingly, this study asks how transformational leadership can be adapted to support bilingual curriculum development at MIN 2 Jepara, given

barriers of limited language proficiency, the imperative of religious-value integration, and the demands of innovation in a non-urban setting. Its novelty lies in an empirical focus on a rural state madrasah, a setting rarely examined in the literature, which has concentrated on private or urban Islamic schools (Hoerudin, 2024). The objectives are threefold: to analyse the role of transformational leadership in optimising the bilingual curriculum; to identify specific challenges and the innovative strategies used to address them; and to evaluate the implications for teachers and pupils. Theoretically, the study extends transformational-leadership scholarship into a religio-cultural and rural context (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006); practically, it offers concrete guidance for principals and policymakers designing adaptive management in comparable madrasahs (Bush & Glover, 2014).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative single-case study design to examine the influence of transformational leadership on the development of bilingual learning at MIN 2 Jepara. The case study approach was selected because it enables a holistic, in-depth examination of a bounded contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, where individual experiences and situated meanings carry greater analytical weight than quantitative metrics (Yin, 2018). The bilingual excellence class constitutes the principal unit of analysis.

The research was conducted at MIN 2 Jepara during the 2025/2026 academic year. Informants were selected purposively for their direct involvement in the bilingual programme: the principal, the coordinator of the bilingual excellence classes, the vice-principal for curriculum, and bilingual teachers, totalling five key informants. Purposive selection ensured access to participants with rich, relevant knowledge of leadership practice and bilingual implementation.

Data were collected in three complementary stages. First, semi-structured interviews of 30–45 minutes per session were conducted using an interview guide focused on experiences of curriculum implementation, leadership practice, challenges, and coping strategies. Second, participant observation was carried out in bilingual classrooms over one to two weeks to record daily interactions, language use, and the enactment of Islamic values. Third, document analysis of lesson plans, the madrasah's operational curriculum document, and school reports was undertaken to corroborate and contextualise the primary data. All stages were conducted on site with written permission from the madrasah to ensure ethical access and informed participation.

Data were examined through reflexive thematic analysis conducted in two coding cycles. In the first cycle, interview transcripts and field notes were coded manually using open, largely descriptive codes; in the second cycle these were collated into focused, pattern-level codes and organised into the analytical themes reported below, such as “language barriers,” “leadership strategies,” “technology use,” and “Islamic-value integration.” Coding was carried out by the research team, with disagreements resolved through discussion to sharpen definitional boundaries between themes rather than to compute a single agreement coefficient, consistent with a reflexive rather than a coding-reliability orientation. Preliminary interpretations were returned to the principal and the bilingual coordinator for member checking, and their clarifications were incorporated.

The number of informants (five) was judged sufficient on the principle of

information power rather than numerical saturation: the aim was narrow, the sample was highly specific to the bilingual programme, the dialogue was strong, and the analysis was case-focused, conditions under which a small sample can carry adequate information for the question posed (Malterud, K., Siersma, V. D., & Guassora, 2016). Trustworthiness was pursued through the four criteria of Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, 1985). Credibility was supported by methodological triangulation across interviews, observation, and documents, and by member checking; transferability by thick description of the rural madrasah context; dependability by an auditable trail linking codes to themes and to documentary evidence; and confirmability by grounding each interpretive claim in specific data. The single-site design and small, purposively selected informant pool nonetheless constrain statistical generalisation, and the reliance on participant self-report is a limitation addressed directly in the findings; the study therefore pursues analytical, not population-level, generalisation to madrasahs of comparable character (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006).

Regarding positionality and ethics, the first author was connected to the research site, which afforded rich access while creating a risk of confirmation bias; this was mitigated by the two-cycle coding, member checking, and the deliberate search for disconfirming evidence reported below. Participation was voluntary and based on written permission from the madrasah and informed consent from each informant. Because the principal's role makes the institution identifiable, quotations were reviewed with participants, and no sensitive personal information is reported; the study reports a single named institution with its consent

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of MIN 2 Jepara

MIN 2 Jepara is located in Bawu Village, Batealit District, Jepara Regency, Central Java. Its rural setting situates it within a village society characterised by local custom, tradition, and a distinctive socio-economic base; notably, many parents are furniture entrepreneurs, a factor that shapes resource access, learner motivation, and the local cultural values that the madrasah negotiates. The school is a state madrasah (NPSN 60712459) accredited "A" (very good) under accreditation decree 817/BAN-SM/SK/2019, and operates under the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia.

In the 2025/2026 academic year the madrasah enrolled 1,210 pupils (582 boys and 628 girls), with 60 teachers and staff across 41 study groups, comprising 6 tahfidz excellence classes, 10 bilingual excellence classes, 2 full-day classes, and the remainder regular classes. The bilingual programme was launched in 2022, initiated by the principal, Muhajir, S.Ag., M.Pd., together with the madrasah committee, as an educational innovation intended to produce graduates who are both religiously grounded and globally competitive (KOM Document, MIN 2 Jepara, 2025).

The bilingual curriculum integrates the national curriculum with English as the principal medium of instruction, accounting for roughly seventy per cent of instructional time, from Grade 1. Pupils are admitted through a diagnostic test of literacy, numeracy, and Qur'anic reading and writing, with the explicit aim of developing global competence while preserving Islamic values such as good character, worship, and tolerance. Facilities are adequate, including representative, air-conditioned, and child-friendly classrooms. The madrasah collaborates with SDII Al Abidin Surakarta, a Cambridge-based school;

consequently, modules for Grades 1 to 3 partly draw on Al Abidin materials, while others are developed locally by teachers, and Grade 4 materials are developed entirely by subject teachers (Interview, Bilingual Coordinator, 2025). This trajectory, from imported modules toward locally authored materials, is itself an early signal of growing internal capacity, a theme developed below.

The Role of Transformational Leadership

Across the interviews, the principal's transformational leadership emerged as the central force driving bilingual curriculum development. The principal enacted recognisable elements of the model, namely inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and the harmonisation of traditional values, consistent with Bass & Riggio (2006) account of leadership that motivates holistic change. The principal framed transformational leadership as the capacity to inspire, motivate, and drive positive change, and translated this into concrete action by organising English-language training for teachers and embedding English in everyday school life:

"Transformational leadership, for me, is the capacity to inspire, motivate, and drive positive change in the organisation, especially in education. At MIN 2 Jepara I enact it by setting a direct example for teachers and pupils, organising training to raise teachers' English and instilling the importance of English in daily life through interactive activities." (Interview, Principal, 2025)

Read against the four dimensions of the full-range model, the account is analytically dense rather than rhetorical. Idealised influence is visible in the principal modelling English use personally; inspirational motivation in the articulation of a shared vision of globally competent yet pious graduates; intellectual stimulation in the encouragement of new pedagogies and locally authored materials; and individualised consideration in attention to teachers' differing starting points in English. Crucially, the principal operated less as a director than as a facilitator, cultivating an environment in which teachers and pupils could innovate. This repositioning matters theoretically: it converts the bilingual curriculum from an administrative directive into an integral component of an evolving learning culture, which is precisely the mechanism through which transformational leadership is expected to act.

This interpretation aligns with, and is disciplined by, recent meta-analytic evidence. Tan, C. Y., Dimmock, C., & Walker (2024) show that leadership relates to pupil outcomes only modestly and chiefly through capacity-building rather than positional control, while (Papadakis et al., 2024) demonstrate that leadership for learning reaches achievement primarily via teacher performance. The MIN 2 Jepara case is a vivid illustration of this indirect pathway: the principal's influence on bilingual learning was realised not by decree but by reshaping what teachers were willing and able to do. The leadership effect is real but mediated, a reading that guards against the romanticisation of heroic principals to which case studies are prone.

Challenges and Barriers in Implementing the Bilingual Curriculum

The principal constraint on the bilingual programme is limited English competence among both teachers and pupils. The madrasah's response, namely consistent in-house training combined with more participatory, project-based, and media-rich pedagogy, is well-judged, since such approaches can render English learning more engaging while equipping pupils to use the language in authentic situations (Beckett, G. H., & Slater, 2005). At the same time, materials must foreground Islamic principles so that English-medium delivery reinforces

rather than erodes religious identity (Mukti, E., & Tinus, n.d.). The bilingual coordinator described the barrier and the response directly:

“The greatest challenge is the limited English of some teachers and pupils. To address it we run English training classes for teachers and develop more interactive, engaging teaching methods, using technology and project-based activities, so pupils grasp English-medium material more easily.” (Interview, Bilingual Coordinator, 2025)

On participants’ accounts, the interactive techniques used at MIN 2 Jepara are reported to raise pupil enthusiasm and confidence in using English, a perception consistent with constructivist learning theory, which holds that optimal learning occurs when learners engage actively through authentic experience. It should be stressed that this study did not measure language proficiency or learning gains directly; claims about pupil and teacher outcomes therefore rest on self-report and observation, and are framed throughout as perceived rather than demonstrated effects. Yet the sharper analytical point concerns where the solution is located. The CLIL literature is explicit that programme success is contingent on teacher preparedness and sustained support rather than on the language policy itself (Pittas, E., & Tompkins, 2024). MIN 2 Jepara’s decision to treat teacher proficiency as the primary lever, rather than, say, simply recruiting external native speakers or importing a turnkey curriculum, reflects an implicit and accurate theory of change: the binding constraint is internal capacity, and that is where leadership invested. This is also why limited proficiency was reframed not as a disqualifying deficit but as a shared developmental project, a framing that itself is a leadership act.

Innovation Strategies and the Use of Technology

Technology was adopted at MIN 2 Jepara both to train teachers and to produce more adaptive teaching materials, signalling a proactive stance toward educational constraint. Online learning systems allowed teachers to access professional development flexibly, while digital tools made pupils’ learning more engaging, for instance through instructional video and language-learning applications (Ismaya et al., 2024). The principal’s comprehensive support was decisive in turning these tools into effective practice:

“I apply innovative strategies using technology, namely online platforms for teacher training, and I encourage a teacher working group for the bilingual classes. This reflects transformational leadership because it creates flexible, continuous opportunities to learn.” (Interview, Principal, 2025)

“We adopt an innovative approach using technology in teacher training, such as e-learning platforms and language-learning applications.” (Interview, Bilingual Coordinator, 2025)

In educational-technology theory, technology operates as a catalyst that can raise the efficiency and effectiveness of learning (Kalyani, 2024); with the principal’s backing it became an instrument enabling teachers and pupils to reach better outcomes in bilingual education (Shalehah et al., 2025; Qamariyah, 2024). The critical qualification, however, is that technology was not self-activating. Its value at MIN 2 Jepara depended on leadership decisions about access, training, and the cultivation of a digital culture, most concretely the establishment of a bilingual teacher working group (KKG) that institutionalised peer learning. The case therefore complements technically oriented accounts (Ismaya et al., 2024) by showing that the determinant of impact is organisational rather than purely technical, again routing the leadership effect through teacher capacity.

Harmonising Islamic Values within the Bilingual Curriculum

The integration of Islamic values into bilingual learning demonstrates that education at MIN 2 Jepara targets character formation alongside academic skill. Teachers actively embed Islamic values in English instruction, for example by teaching morally inflected vocabulary such as “respect,” “honesty,” and “trust,” and by conducting an English Morning routine in which daily supplications are introduced with English titles. The curriculum thus furnishes the language skills demanded by a global world while forming pupils of strong character (Yuliatin Yuliatin et al., 2025). Two teachers articulated the practice:

“I always ensure that every English lesson incorporates Islamic values such as good character, honesty, and courtesy. For example, I teach adab-related vocabulary like ‘respect,’ ‘honesty,’ and ‘trust.’” (Interview, Bilingual Teacher, 2025)

“I balance Islamic values and bilingual learning by linking English vocabulary to Islamic activities, such as the English Morning routine interspersed with daily prayers whose titles can be rendered in English.” (Interview, Bilingual Teacher, 2025)

Holistic education theory holds that schooling should develop the whole learner across the intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions (Noddings, 2005). The MIN 2 Jepara evidence advances this position empirically: integration is not merely possible but appears to increase the curriculum’s relevance and acceptance within a religious community. This directly contests the dichotomy thesis, the concern that global, English-medium education necessarily competes with Islamic identity (Abrar, A., & Widiati, 2025). At MIN 2 Jepara the two reinforce one another, with English functioning as a vehicle for, rather than a rival to, religious formation. The analytical significance is that value integration is also a leadership and legitimacy strategy: by binding English to familiar devotional practice, leadership lowered community resistance and secured the social licence the programme needed to survive in a rural, religiously conservative setting.

Tensions, Trade-offs, and Disconfirming Evidence

A credible reading of this case must resist presenting it as an unqualified success, and several tensions temper the largely positive accounts. First, the programme is structurally selective: bilingual excellence classes admit pupils through a diagnostic test in literacy, numeracy, and Qur’anic reading, so the model’s benefits accrue to a screened subset rather than to the full intake, raising an equity question about the distribution of the madrasah’s strongest provision. Second, allocating roughly seventy per cent of instructional time to English-medium delivery creates an unavoidable trade-off with time for religious and mother-tongue content; the harmony observed at the level of values does not dissolve the competition for hours, and the long-term effect on Arabic and Qur’anic attainment was not assessed. Third, the change rested heavily on a single, committed principal, which is also the model’s principal fragility: a leadership transition could expose key-person risk, and none of the data speak to how the programme would fare under a less convinced successor. Finally, because informants were close to the initiative and the lead author was connected to the site, the absence of overt resistance in the data may reflect selection and social-desirability effects as much as genuine consensus. These tensions do not overturn

the central finding, but they bound it, and they mark the most important questions for subsequent, multi-site and longitudinal inquiry.

Toward a Conceptual Model

Synthesising the evidence, the case is best understood not as classic heroic transformation but as capacity-building leadership in which value integration operates as a legitimacy strategy. The contribution can be stated as a compact model (Figure 1). Transformational leadership does not act on bilingual practice directly; it acts by building teacher capacity (training, a professional learning community, technology, and locally authored materials), which in turn enables bilingual classroom practice. Running in parallel, the leader's integration of Islamic values produces community legitimacy, the social licence without which an English-medium programme would struggle to survive in a rural, religious setting. The two pathways converge on a sustained, context-fit programme, with an iterative feedback loop through which classroom experience further develops teacher capacity. This framing names what is theoretically novel here: in the madrasah context, legitimation is not incidental to transformational leadership but a constitutive mechanism of it.

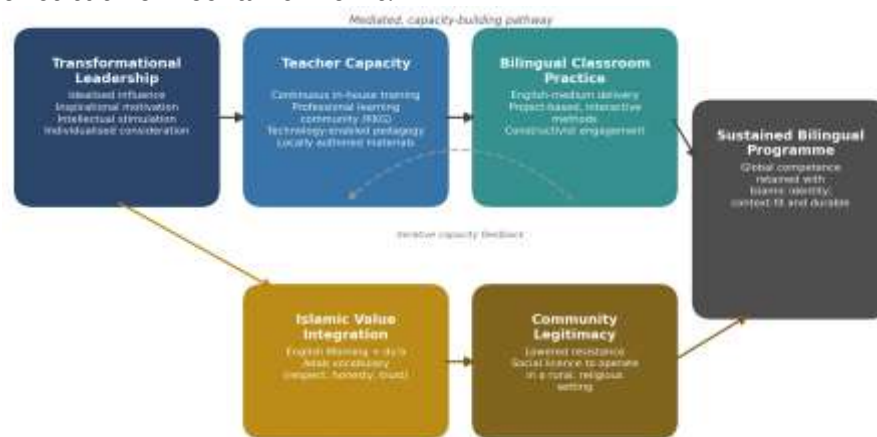


Figure 1. A capacity-building, legitimacy-securing model of transformational leadership for bilingual learning in a rural madrasah

Significance and Contribution to Theory and Prior Research

These findings reinforce Bass & Riggio (2006) transformational leadership theory while extending it. At MIN 2 Jepara the model was not applied as a generic management template but fused with local wisdom and Islamic principles, yielding a more contextual and comprehensive practice. This accords with Bush & Glover (2014), who argue that leadership effectiveness depends on alignment with organisational culture, and it introduces a religio cultural dimension under-examined in comparable work. The case thereby differs from studies concentrated on urban or private Islamic institutions (Hoerudin, 2024), and from accounts emphasising top-down, imported curricula in international Islamic schools (Arpannudin et al., 2025), by documenting a bottom-up, locally authored trajectory in a rural state madrasah.

The finding that limited English proficiency is the dominant barrier is consistent with Wulandari (2023) and Badrun (2024). The distinctive contribution lies in the specificity and locality of the response: madrasah-facilitated routine training, collaboration with a Cambridge-based school, and the progressive shift toward teacher-authored materials. Read alongside the meta-

analytic evidence that leadership works through teacher capacity (Papadakis et al., 2024; Tan et al., 2024) and that CLIL outcomes hinge on preparedness rather than policy (Pittas, E., & Tompkins, 2024), the case offers a coherent mechanism rather than an anecdote: leadership built capacity, capacity enabled bilingual practice, and value integration secured legitimacy.

Convergence and Divergence with Theory and Prior Findings

The harmonious integration of Islamic values within bilingual learning aligns with holistic education theory (Noddings, 2005), but the case supplies empirical evidence that such integration can enhance, not merely coexist with, curricular relevance, thereby qualifying the dichotomy concern documented by Abrar, A., & Widiati (2025). The catalytic role of technology converges with Kalyani (2024) and Qamariyah (2024), yet the case shows that technological effectiveness is contingent on leadership-provided access, training, and digital culture, complementing the more technical emphasis of Ismaya et al. (2024).

There are also points of divergence. Whereas Leithwood & Jantzi (2006) foreground large-scale, structured transformation, change at MIN 2 Jepara was incremental, participatory, and contextual, closer to distributed, capacity-centred leadership than to heroic reform. Likewise, although the study affirms the importance of teacher training, it suggests that internal, continuous, job-embedded development was more effective than the generic external programmes often privileged in policy recommendations (Emawati et al., 2024). This nuance is consequential for practice: it implies that scarce professional-development resources in rural madrasahs are better invested in sustained internal mentoring than in episodic external workshops.

Implications for the Research Questions and Objectives

The study answers its guiding questions. Transformational leadership was adapted to a rural madrasah by operating indirectly, through teacher capacity, professional community, and value integration, rather than through structural mandate, thereby overcoming barriers of language proficiency, religious-value integration, and constrained innovation. Visionary, empathetic, and contextual leadership proved capable of offsetting human-resource and infrastructural limits. The practical recommendations that follow, namely prioritising locally developed materials and continuous teacher mentoring, offer actionable guidance for madrasah-level decision-makers.

Theoretically, the study enriches the transformational-leadership framework by incorporating Islamic values and local wisdom as determinants of curricular innovation, and it helps fill a literature gap on bilingual implementation in rural state madrasahs. In doing so it not only confirms prior findings in several respects but also offers a fresh perspective on how transformational leadership can be operationalised in a distinctly Islamic educational setting, alongside adaptive strategies relevant to madrasahs with comparable characteristics.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that transformational leadership is decisive in the design and implementation of bilingual learning at MIN 2 Jepara. The principal enacted transformational leadership by inspiring, motivating, and stimulating creativity among teachers and pupils, fostering conditions conducive to a bilingual curriculum that pursues global language proficiency while upholding

the Islamic ideals underpinning madrasah education. Critically, the leadership effect operated indirectly, mediated by teacher capacity and school culture rather than by positional authority, consistent with current meta-analytic evidence and contrary to heroic accounts of principal influence.

The principal challenges were limited English competence among teachers and pupils and the difficulty of aligning English instruction with religious principles. These were addressed through routine in-house training, the purposeful use of technology, professional learning communities, and the progressive development of locally authored materials, with project-based methods giving pupils pragmatic, engaging opportunities to use English. The integration of Islamic values, through practices such as English Morning, devotional routines, and value-laden vocabulary, maintained a balance between global competence and character formation, demonstrating that bilingual learning and Islamic identity can be mutually reinforcing rather than opposed.

Overall, and on the evidence of participant accounts and observation rather than measured learning gains, transformational leadership at MIN 2 Jepara appears to have addressed key challenges of bilingual implementation, with benefits perceived by both pupils and teachers, producing a model that harmonises globalisation with local and religious values. These gains are nonetheless qualified by real trade-offs, the selectivity of the bilingual classes, the competition for instructional time, and the programme's dependence on a single committed leader, which together define the agenda for further study. The study's single-site design limits statistical generalisation, and future research should test these mechanisms across multiple madrasahs and, where possible, with longitudinal and mixed-method designs that trace effects on pupil learning over time. For practice, the recommendation is that other madrasahs adapt this capacity-centred, value-integrated model with due attention to local context, investing in continuous internal teacher development and locally relevant materials to raise educational quality holistically

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