

Transformational Leadership Strategies Of The Headmaster In Developing A Research-Based Madrasah

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the transformational leadership strategies employed by the headmaster in developing a research-based and to examine their implications. A qualitative case study approach was employed, involving participatory observation for six weeks, in-depth interviews with 12 informants (headmaster, vice principals, teachers, staff, and students), and document analysis. The findings reveal four main strategies: (1) love-based communication and the Panca Cinta (Five Loves) values to foster a sense of belonging; (2) continuous innovation through a dynamic research curriculum and the principle of "Be the best, the first, and different"; (3) provision of internationally standardized facilities with participatory planning; and (4) a humane evaluation and reward system that redefines failure as part of the learning process. These strategies resulted in 683 national and international achievements, the internalization of humble character, and the transformation of the madrasah into an adaptive learning organization. The study demonstrates that the integration of Islamic spirituality (hijrah, barakah, amanah) and servant leadership enriches Bass and Avolio's transformational leadership theory, offering insights for faith-based educational leadership. Practically, this research provides a replicable model for head of madrasah and contributes to the Ministry of Religious Affairs' policymaking in developing research-based madrasahs a cross Indonesia

Keywords: Transformational Leadership; Research-Based Madrasah; Islamic Spirituality; Servant Leadership; Educational Innovation.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi kepemimpinan transformasional kepala madrasah dalam pengembangan madrasah berbasis riset serta implikasinya. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis penelitian studi kasus, pengumpulan data melalui observasi partisipatif selama enam minggu, wawancara mendalam dengan 12 informan, dan analisis

dokumen. Hasil penelitian menemukan empat strategi utama: (1) komunikasi berbasis cinta dan nilai Panca Cinta untuk membangun rasa memiliki; (2) inovasi berkelanjutan melalui kurikulum riset dinamis dan prinsip “Jadilah yang terbaik, pertama, dan beda”; (3) penyediaan sarana prasarana berstandar internasional dengan perencanaan partisipatif; serta (4) sistem evaluasi dan penghargaan humanis yang meredefinisi kegagalan sebagai proses belajar. Strategi ini berimplikasi pada pencapaian 683 prestasi nasional dan internasional, internalisasi karakter rendah hati, serta transformasi madrasah menjadi organisasi pembelajaran yang adaptif. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa integrasi spiritualitas Islam (hijrah, barokah, amanah) dan kepemimpinan pelayan memperkaya teori kepemimpinan transformasional Bass dan Avolio, serta memberikan wawasan bagi kepemimpinan pendidikan berbasis agama. Secara praktis, penelitian ini menawarkan model yang dapat direplikasi bagi kepala madrasah dan berkontribusi pada perumusan kebijakan Kementerian Agama dalam pengembangan madrasah berbasis riset di Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: *Kepemimpinan Transformasional; Madrasah Berbasis Riset; Spiritualitas Islam; Kepemimpinan yang Melayani; Inovasi Pendidikan*

Introduction

In the era of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 and Society 5.0, educational institutions face increasingly complex challenges. Madrasahs, as Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, are required to transform from institutions focused solely on the transmission of religious knowledge into institutions capable of producing critical, innovative, and globally competitive generations (Sahri et al., 2023). In this context, the development of research-based madrasahs has become a strategic necessity, as mandated by the Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation No. 60 of 2015 concerning the Implementation of Madrasah Education. However, empirical data indicate that the research culture in Indonesian madrasahs remains low. Only a small fraction of madrasah aliyah have integrated structured research programs into their curricula, and many still lack adequate laboratory facilities and a tradition of scientific publication (Kemenag, 2023). This gap highlights the urgency of leadership that can drive a fundamental shift toward a research culture.

The headmaster plays a central role in realizing a research-based madrasah. The leadership of the headmaster is a determining factor in the success of a madrasah (Efferi, 2020). The headmaster is not only responsible for administrative management but must also act as an agent of change, innovator, and driver of an adaptive organizational culture (Raihani, 2010). Transformational leadership is considered the most relevant model in this context. According to Bass and Avolio, transformational leadership comprises four main dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass & Avolio, 1994). This leadership model emphasizes cultural change, empowerment, and shared vision. A leader with a transformational style will play a central role in creating a dynamic, innovative, and adaptive academic culture (Faeni, 2023). Recent systematic reviews confirm that transformational leadership is positively associated with school improvement and

innovation, particularly when leaders integrate local cultural and spiritual values (Kurniawan & Lestari, 2023).

Previous research has shown the positive impact of transformational leadership on madrasah quality, teacher work motivation, and teacher performance. Subaidi (2018) found that visionary motivation and individualized consideration significantly improved teacher commitment in a madrasah in Jepara (Subaidi, 2018). Saputra and Suri (2024) demonstrated that intellectual stimulation enhanced teacher work motivation in an Islamic vocational school (Saputra & Suri, 2024). Amin (2021) highlighted that transformational leaders in Indonesian Islamic schools successfully bridged spiritual values with academic innovation (Amin, 2021). Sayuti, Qomaruzzaman, Surya Siregar, and Imanuddin Effendi (2025) added that the managerial competence of the madrasah head together with transformational leadership significantly affects the quality of madrasah education (Sayuti et al., 2025).

However, studies that specifically examine the operational strategies of transformational leadership in developing research-based madrasahs are still limited. Most previous works have not elaborated on the concrete mechanisms through which Islamic values are interwoven with transformational leadership to build a sustainable research ecosystem. This gap calls for an in-depth exploration of leadership practices in an institution that has successfully integrated research into its identity.

MAN 2 Kudus is one of the leading madrasahs designated as a research-based academic madrasah in 2021. The madrasah has gained national and international recognition for its achievements in research and innovation (MAN 2 Kudus, 2020). The madrasah head at MAN 2 Kudus is widely recognized for demonstrating strong transformational leadership characteristics, as evidenced by various change initiatives in management, human resource development, and partnerships with universities and research institutions (Yaqin, Mulyadi, dan Marno, 2025). This makes MAN 2 Kudus an appropriate case study for examining the relationship between transformational leadership and the development of a research-based madrasah.

This study aims to analyze the transformational leadership strategies employed by the madrasah head in developing a research-based madrasah at MAN 2 Kudus. Specifically, the objectives of this research are formulated as follows: (1) to identify and describe the forms of transformational leadership implemented by the headmaster at MAN 2 Kudus; (2) to explore the strategies used by the headmaster in developing a research culture at MAN 2 Kudus; and (3) to analyze the implications of transformational leadership in developing a research-based madrasah at MAN 2 Kudus. By achieving these objectives, this research is expected to contribute theoretically to the study of educational leadership, as well as practically to the development of similar madrasahs across Indonesia.

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design (Yin, 2014). The research was conducted at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 2 Kudus, Central Java.

Selected purposively because of its strong research orientation, the innovative leadership of its head, adequate research facilities, and good data accessibility. Primary data were collected through three techniques. First, participatory observation was conducted for six-weeks (January–February 2025) in research classes, laboratories, and madrasah activities. The researcher acted as a passive participant and maintained a reflexive journal to minimize subjective bias. Second, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 informants: the headmaster (H. Ali Musyafak, S.Ag., M.Pd.I.), vice principals for curriculum, student affairs, facilities, and public relations, research teachers (sciences and social sciences), educational staff, and students. Third, documentation was gathered including madrasah strategic plans, syllabi, research activity reports, and online media articles. This study adhered to ethical research principles. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection, and they were assured of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by using pseudonyms (e.g., GR1, GR2) for all informants in the reporting of findings. The researcher also obtained official permission from head of madrasah and relevant authorities before commencing the study. To ensure data validity, source triangulation was carried out by comparing the perspectives of the headmaster, teachers, students, and staff, while technique triangulation compared findings from observation, interviews, and documents. Member checking was also performed by presenting key findings to informants for confirmation. Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles et al., 2014). Data reduction is the process of selecting, focusing, abstracting, and transforming the “raw” data that emerges from field notes. Data reduction occurs continuously throughout the course of a qualitative-oriented project. In short, data from observations, interviews, and documents are selected and sorted. Following data reduction, the data is presented in the form of narrative descriptions, interview excerpts, and photographic documentation. This presentation enables the researcher to identify patterns and relationships between themes. Data presentation involves displaying the reduced data using specific models to prevent misinterpretation. During the verification phase, the researcher draws conclusions based on the results of the data reduction and presentation. The researcher interprets the data holistically to address the research problem. Conclusions are validated through a re-examination of the data, ensuring the research findings are credible and accountable (Miles et al., 2014).

Result and Discussion

This integrated section presents the empirical findings alongside their theoretical analysis and interpretation. The discussion is organized thematically around the forms of transformational leadership observed, the specific strategies derived from those forms, and the resulting implications.

Forms of Transformational Leadership: Spiritualized Dimensions

The transformational leadership of the headmaster of MAN 2 Kudus manifests in four integrated dimensions idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual

stimulation, and individualized consideration each of which is deepened by Islamic values and a servant-oriented ethos (Avolio and Wernsing, 2024). Unlike purely secular applications of Bass and Avolio's model, these dimensions are infused with theological concepts such as *amanah* (trustworthiness), *barakah* (divine blessing), *hijrah* (migration toward improvement), and *uswatun hasanah* (excellent example).

1. Idealized Influence through Servant Exemplarity

The headmaster builds idealized influence not through positional authority but through consistent, visible embodiment of servant leadership. His daily schedule is the first symbol: he arrives at the madrasah before 06:00 WIB and is often the last to leave, after Maghrib or Isha prayers. Each morning, he stands at the main gate to greet every student, teacher, and staff member with a handshake, a smile, and often a brief personal remark. A teacher commented: “We are sometimes embarrassed if we arrive late, because the head is already at the gate greeting everyone. He never scolds, but his presence alone makes us want to be more disciplined.” (GR2, interview 20 January 2025).

Beyond punctuality, the head models religious commitment by regularly joining Duha prayers, congregational prayers, and Qur'an recitation sessions alongside students. He explicitly articulates the Prophetic tradition *sayyidul qaumi khadiimuhum* (a leader is the servant of his people), stating, “I am not the boss; I am the servant of MAN 2 Kudus. My bosses are the teachers, parents, and students.” This philosophy is operationalized in actions such as cleaning the mosque alongside students or personally delivering aid to staff members facing family crises. A staff member recalled: “When my father was hospitalized, the head himself visited and offered assistance, without any protocol. That made me feel that I am not merely an employee, but family.” (ST, interview 22 January 2025).

This servant exemplarity creates a powerful idealized influence. Teachers and students perceive the head not as a distant superior but as a credible moral anchor. In the framework of Bass and Avolio, such behavior cultivates trust, respect, and emulation, but here it is distinctively rooted in a theology of service (*khidmah*) rather than in a secular notion of heroic leadership. (Eva, Newman, Miao, Cooper, and Herbert, 2021). Eva, Newman, Miao, Cooper, and Herbert (2021) found that servant leadership incrementally adds to transformational leadership by deepening moral and relational engagement (Eva et al., 2021). However, a critical tension arises: if the leader's authority rests so heavily on personal virtue, how transferable is this model? The risk is that a successor lacking the same spiritual stature could face legitimacy deficits. The madrasah has partially mitigated this by codifying values in the BAHAGIA framework, but the deep emotional bond with the current head may not be fully replicable.

2. Inspirational Motivation through Transcendental Vision

The headmaster articulates a vision that is simultaneously ambitious and spiritually grounded. The motto “Be the best, the first, and different” (*Jadilah yang terbaik, pertama, dan beda*) is repeated in assemblies and official documents. However, its inspirational power derives from framing worldly ambition within a transcendent purpose: the pursuit of *barakah*. During a teacher meeting observed on 27 January 2025,

he stated: “We seek achievements not for the name of MAN 2 Kudus alone, but so that through this madrasah, Allah's light may spread. When we win, we pray that the knowledge benefits humanity. That is barakah.”

This vision is codified in the BAHAGIA value system, an acronym for *Barokah, Amanah, Humanis, Akuntabel, Genius, Istiqomah, Aman* (MAN 2 Kudus Official Website, 2025). Each term is unpacked in concrete behavioral expectations, with *Aman* (psychological safety) operationalized as a “safety zone” free from bullying, enforced through a multi-channel complaint system. A student informant described: “Here, if we see even a small act of intimidation, we can WhatsApp the head directly. He will immediately call the parties and resolve it. No one is afraid.” (SW, interview 5 February 2025).

This transcendental framing of inspirational motivation responds to calls for context-sensitive leadership studies (Hallinger & Hosseingholizadeh, 2020). Where Bass and Avolio's inspirational motivation typically involves articulating an attractive vision and using symbols to focus effort, the MAN 2 Kudus head adds a theological layer: the vision connects daily academic striving to ultimate spiritual meaning. This aligns with Hidayat and Nizar (2022), who found that Islamic work ethics mediate the relationship between leadership and organizational commitment (Hidayat & Nizar (2022) However, the use of *barakah* discourse carries a latent danger: it can moralize organizational change to such an extent that those who adapt slowly are implicitly cast as spiritually stagnant. The head's personalized approach visiting resistant teachers and providing step-by-step support reflects awareness of this risk, but it does not eliminate it entirely.

3. Intellectual Stimulation through the Theology of *Hijrah*

Intellectual stimulation at MAN 2 Kudus is driven by the concept of *hijrah*—a spiritual migration from a less good state to a better one. The head repeatedly asserts: “Without innovation, do not expect a madrasah to progress and prosper. Without innovation, a madrasah will experience decline, setback, even destruction.” He links this to the Prophetic tradition, “He whose two days are equal is a loser,” thereby framing stagnation as a spiritual deficit.

This stimulation is institutionalized through a dynamic research curriculum reviewed weekly by a team comprising the research coordinator, subject teachers, and student representatives (Widodo, Suyitno & Chotimah, 2024) For natural sciences, the team scans international competition trends, integrating topics such as nanotechnology and bioinformatics mid-semester. For social sciences, research themes emerge from viral societal phenomena. The research coordinator (GR1) explained: “The curriculum is never static. If a new discovery appears, we immediately discuss how our students can explore it. We teach them that knowledge is alive.”

Teachers are explicitly encouraged to step out of their comfort zones. A physics teacher recounted: “I am originally a pure physics teacher. The head challenged me to learn Python programming so I could mentor students in AI-based physics simulations. He arranged for a trainer from a university. At first it was difficult, but now I feel energized.” (GR3, interview 18 January 2025).

This finding enriches Bass and Avolio's intellectual stimulation dimension, which typically involves encouraging followers to question assumptions and approach problems creatively. The addition of *hijrah* language turns the anxiety of change into a sacred journey, reducing resistance and fostering a growth mindset. Yaqin, Mulyadi, and Marno (2025), in their study of pancatransformational leadership in adiwiyata madrasahs, also found the importance of adding a religious ideal influence element to the four "I"s of transformational leadership (Yaqin, Mulyadi, and Marno, 2025). However, the paradox noted earlier applies here as well: a theology of mercy and love could, if applied insensitively, create guilt-based pressure. The head's individualized support for struggling teachers mitigates this, but the sustainability of this approach under high external pressure remains an open question.

4. Individualized Consideration as Spiritual Pastoral Care

The headmaster practices individualized consideration that resembles pastoral care. He maintains an open-door policy, both physically and digitally; his WhatsApp is accessible to all, and he responds personally, often within minutes. During observation, he was seen receiving a message from a student anxious about an upcoming competition; the head called the student immediately, offered encouragement, and later visited the laboratory where the student was practicing.

This consideration is systematized through the Love-Based Curriculum (*Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta, KBC*), which rests on the *Panca Cinta* (Five Loves): love of Allah and the Prophet, love of knowledge, love of the environment, love of oneself and others, and love of the homeland. Teachers are trained to identify students' emotional and spiritual needs alongside academic ones. A homeroom teacher noted: "We have a 'cinta' mapping for each student. If a student seems down, we don't only ask about grades; we ask about their heart." (GR4, interview 25 January 2025).

This personalized care reduces dropout rates, increases engagement, and uncovers hidden talents. One student medalist reported: "I was an ordinary student, never thought I could do research. But the head once asked about my hobby in electronics and then connected me with a teacher who helped me develop a smart irrigation system. He believed in me before I believed in myself." (SW2, interview 8 February 2025).

In Bass and Avolio's framework, individualized consideration involves coaching, mentoring, and attending to followers' needs. The MAN 2 Kudus case extends this by adding a spiritual dimension: the leader attends not only to professional development but to the "heart" and the student's sense of being divinely loved. Recent research by Putri, Warsah, and Fathurrohman (2025) on the implementation of transformational leadership in the *Kurikulum Merdeka* also emphasizes the importance of the individualized consideration dimension in driving positive change (Putri, Warsah & Fathurrohman, 2025).

Transformational Leadership Strategies in Developing a Research-Based Madrasah

The four leadership dimensions above are translated into four comprehensive, interlocking strategies that directly shape the research-based madrasah ecosystem.

1. Love-Based Communication and the Panca Cinta as Cultural Foundation

The first strategy is building a deeply humanistic relational infrastructure. The head's morning greeting ritual is the entry point into a web of affectionate communication. Every interaction is infused with *Panca Cinta* vocabulary: teachers are addressed as *sahabat cinta* (friends of love), and students are reminded daily that they are loved. The communication style deliberately dismantles hierarchical barriers. In staff meetings, the head sits among teachers, not at the front, and insists on circular seating. He uses inclusive language like “we” and avoids command forms.

This strategy directly addresses a common obstacle in research culture: fear of judgment. Research requires intellectual risk-taking, and students will only take such risks if they feel psychologically secure (Edmondson, 2018). By embedding love as an institutional value, the madrasah creates a “holding environment” where mistakes are seen as part of the learning journey. A research teacher explained: “Students here dare to propose wild ideas because they know no one will laugh. If the experiment fails, the head says, 'Alhamdulillah, now we know one way that doesn't work. That is progress.’” (GR1).

Moreover, the *Panca Cinta* extends beyond the classroom. Love for the environment is manifested in the madrasah's green campus initiative, where each research group is responsible for maintaining a section of the garden or solar panel array. Love for the homeland is fostered through research projects on local Kudus heritage. Thus, love becomes both an emotional bond and a research catalyst. Research by Mulyadi and colleagues (2024) on transformational leadership in madrasahs also found that strengthening humanistic values is a key factor in successful madrasah transformation. (Mulyadi & Hasibuan, 2024).

2. Continuous Innovation Ecosystem Beyond a Static Program

The second strategy is a systemic commitment to continuous innovation, institutionalized not as a periodic event but as a permanent organizational state (Effendi & Rokhman, 2024). Key mechanisms include:

- a) Dynamic Research Curriculum: Reviewed weekly, with a digital platform allowing teachers and students to propose new topics and vote on them.
- b) Madrasah Achievement Center (PPM): A centralized intelligence unit that scans, classifies, and prioritizes competitions (A, B, C tiers), with tier A receiving full funding and mentoring.
- c) Strategic Partnerships: MOUs with the National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN), BRIDA Central Java, and universities, providing access to advanced laboratories and guest lectures (Hartono & Aziz, 2024).
- d) Alumni Network as Mentors: Successful alumni formally mentor current students, sometimes co-authoring papers.
- e) Innovation as Ritual: The annual YOURTH Camp and Innovation Award Competition (IAC) celebrate research, immersing the entire madrasah population in the research experience.

This strategy ensures that innovation is not dependent on a single charismatic figure but is embedded in routines, structures, and partnerships. This aligns with models of shared leadership and the concept of a learning organization (Senge, 1990); (Pearce & Conger, 2003). Research by Effendi and Rokhman (2024) on innovative leadership in

madrasah aliyah also emphasizes the importance of systems and structures that support continuous innovation (Effendi & Rokhman, 2024). However, it is important to recognize that these structures were initially built under the current head's vision, and their survival without his daily presence is not guaranteed.

3. Provision of Internationally Standardized Facilities with Participatory Planning

The third strategy is the provision of physical and technological infrastructure that meets global standards, but the head's approach to providing it is as important as the facilities themselves. Planning is deeply participatory. Each semester, the vice principal for facilities conducts a joint assessment with the madrasah committee, parent representatives, and student leaders to identify needs. The head then seeks funding from multiple sources—government budgets, parental contributions, CSR grants, and university collaborations.

The Integrated Science Olympiad Laboratory (OST) is equipped with advanced tools such as spectrophotometers, 3D printers, and biotechnology kits that rival university labs. Alongside it, the madrasah provides subscription access to international journals like IEEE and ScienceDirect. A robotics teacher noted: “Students can access journals that I myself couldn't read during my bachelor's degree. That changes the whole level of research.” (GR5, interview 30 January 2025). An online news outlet reported that research is taught as a subject to all students at MAN 2 Kudus as a preparation for university studies (Suara Merdeka, 2024).

Crucially, the head ensures that facility usage is not limited to a small elite. All students have scheduled access to the labs, democratizing resources and reinforcing the message that everyone is a researcher. The participatory planning process builds ownership and prevents the resentment that often accompanies top-down resource allocation.

4. Humane Evaluation and the Redefinition of Failure

The fourth and perhaps most transformative strategy is the creation of an evaluation system that redefines failure. The head counters the typical achievement-oriented fear of losing with the principle: “Competition is learning, the result is a bonus.” This is structurally reinforced: all students who participate in a competition regardless of outcome are publicly acknowledged in assemblies. Those who do not win are invited to reflection sessions where they analyze their work alongside mentors, not to assign blame but to extract lessons. A student who failed in an international robotics competition shared: “The head called me personally, not to console, but to discuss what I learned. He said, ‘This knowledge is your gold medal. The trophy can come later.’ I never felt like a loser.” (SW3, interview 12 February 2025).

This radical redefinition of failure as “learning” and “a bonus” goes further than existing educational models of failure tolerance. Most schools that embrace failure do so as a necessary evil on the way to success; at MAN 2 Kudus, failure is celebrated in its own right as a source of *barakah* (growth in goodness). Edmondson and Besieux (2021) argue that “intelligent failure” is essential for innovation; MAN 2 Kudus demonstrates that failure can also be “sacred failure,” carrying spiritual significance that neutralizes

shame (Edmondson & Besieux, 2021). Yet, the sustainability of this culture under extreme competitive pressure remains to be seen. As the madrasah's reputation grows, external expectations intensify. The head currently manages this by consistently emphasizing the “bonus” narrative, but a new leader, or an accumulation of losses, could test the system's robustness.

Implications of Transformational Leadership

The implementation of the four transformational leadership strategies described above has produced multi-layered positive outcomes, not only in terms of quantitative achievements but also in shaping the character and institutional culture of MAN 2 Kudus. The following are the main implications observed.

1. Improved Achievement and Competitiveness

The four strategies have generated a remarkable track record: 683 national and international achievements as of early 2025. MAN 2 Kudus ranks 1st among all schools and madrasahs in Kudus Regency, 1st among madrasahs in Central Java, 3rd among madrasahs nationally, and 4th among senior high schools/madrasah aliyah in Central Java on the Pusprenas ranking. Notable research outputs include bulletproof vests tested by the Indonesian military, advanced aircraft materials recognized by BRIN, VR-based rain therapy glasses, and educational pop-up books that won international awards in Korea and Malaysia. This broad distribution across STEM, social sciences, arts, and religious studies indicates that the research culture is not confined to an elite track but is genuinely institutionalized.

2. Internalization of Humble Character

Despite the accolades, the madrasah head continuously cultivates humility, repeatedly reminding students that “manners must be above knowledge” and that the highest ambition is spiritual salvation. This message is internalized: national and international medalists remain approachable, actively mentor junior students, and participate in routine madrasah chores. A senior student medalist said: “If we become arrogant, the head will call us and say, “Remember, all this intelligence comes from Allah. If you forget that, you have won nothing.” (SW4, interview 15 February 2025). This blending of high achievement with profound humility creates a unique institutional character that distinguishes MAN 2 Kudus from purely secular, achievement-driven schools.

3. Transformation into a Learning Organization

The systemic nature of the strategies has transformed the madrasah into a learning organization, (Senge, 1990). Continuous curriculum updates, the feedback-rich evaluation system, and shared leadership structures ensure that the madrasah does not freeze upon the departure of any single individual. The culture of *hijrah* and *barakah* incentivizes every member to be a learner-teacher.

A newly hired teacher described: “When I joined, I was assigned a mentor, but I was also expected to teach my mentor something new—like TikTok for educational outreach. This reciprocal learning is the norm.” (GR6, interview 20 February 2025). The organizational DNA now includes the capacity to self-renew, making the research-based

identity robust and enduring. Research by Ramli and Khasanah (2023) on leadership innovation in madrasahs also emphasizes that excellent madrasahs are built on a strong work ethic and adaptive leadership (Ramli & Khasanah, 2023)

Theoretical Contribution: Enriching Transformational Leadership Theory

This study does not propose a new, separate model of leadership; rather, it demonstrates how the four dimensions of Bass and Avolio's transformational leadership can be enriched and morally grounded when infused with Islamic spirituality and a servant philosophy. The resulting praxis is a spiritualized transformational leadership that adds dimensions of transcendence and relational depth. This responds to calls by Hallinger and Hosseingholizadeh (2020) for context-sensitive leadership studies and extends the work of Sulaiman, Hamid, and Yusof (2021) by providing a detailed case of how Islamic values operationalize leadership behaviors (Sulaiman, Hamid & Yusof, 2021). The integration of *hijrah* into intellectual stimulation, *barakah* into inspirational motivation, and *khadim* ethics into idealized influence offers a transferable framework for other faith-based schools seeking to integrate spiritual and academic excellence. These findings also reinforce the results of Widodo, Suyitno, and Chotimah (2024), who stated that excellent madrasahs have a strong commitment to integrating religious values and academic innovation (Widodo, Suyitno & Chotimah, 2024).

Conclusion

This study concludes that the transformational leadership of the head of MAN 2 Kudus integrates idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration with Islamic values and servant leadership. The four key strategies love-based communication and the *Panca Cinta*, continuous innovation, internationally standardized facilities, and humane evaluation have produced significant achievements in research culture and competitive performance. The implications include 683 awards, the internalization of humble character, and the transformation of the madrasah into a sustainable learning organization.

Theoretically, the study enriches transformational leadership theory by demonstrating how Islamic values and servant leadership can be interwoven with its dimensions, extending Bass and Avolio's framework in a faith-based educational context.

Practically, this research offers several contributions. First, heads of madrasah are advised to adopt a servant approach, love-based communication, and humane evaluation before demanding achievement, as these foundations create psychological safety essential for research culture. Second, the strategies identified particularly the dynamic research curriculum and participatory facility planning can serve as a replicable model for other madrasahs aspiring to become research-based institutions. Third, the Ministry of Religious Affairs may use these findings for leadership development programs and policy formulation to accelerate the transformation of madrasahs into research-oriented educational institutions. Further research is needed to test the generalizability of these findings in different contexts and to track the sustainability of the research culture transformation after leadership succession.

The single-case design limits generalizability, though the depth of analysis provides transferable insights. Future research should address these limitations by: (1) testing these findings using quantitative or mixed-methods approaches across diverse madrasah types to establish generalizability; (2) conducting longitudinal studies on graduate outcomes to assess the long-term impact of research-based education on university performance and career trajectories; (3) comparing MAN 2 Kudus with other research-based madrasahs to examine sustainability after leadership transitions; (4) exploring the student perspective on the potential emotional dependency created by love-based communication to provide a more balanced view; and (5) employing objective performance metrics alongside self-reported data to minimize social desirability bias.

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