Evaluasi: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam
ISSN (P): 2580-3387, ISSN (E): 2615-2886
DOI: http://doi.org/10.32478/evaluasi.v10i2.zb63px53
Item Type: Original Research Article

THE ROLE OF THE HEAD OF THE MADRASAH AS A TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADER IN MADRASAH IBTIDAIYAH ISLAM TERPADU (MI IT) NURUL IKHWAN PALEMBANG

Eka Karmila[*1], Saipul Annur[2], Yulia Tri Samiha[3], Yuniar[4]
Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Fatah Palembang, Indonesia.[1234]
Email: ekarmila143@gmail.com, Saipulannur_uin@radenfatah.ac.id, yuliatrisamiha_uin@radenfatah.ac.id, yuniar_uin@radenfatah.ac.id

*Corresponding author: ekarmila143@gmail.com

Submission Track:

Submission : 12-04-2026

Accept Submission: 30-09-2026

Available Online : 03-10-2026

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Abstract.

This study is motivated by the gap between the increasing demands of digital-era Islamic education and the limited implementation of transformational leadership in madrasahs. It aims to analyze the role of madrasah heads as transformational leaders in improving educational quality at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Islam Terpadu (MI IT) Nurul Ikhwan Palembang. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study as the primary design. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving the head of the madrasah, teachers, administrative staff, foundation representatives, and students. Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results show that transformational leadership has been applied effectively through four dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. The strongest dimension is idealized influence, reflected in exemplary and value-based leadership, while intellectual stimulation is relatively weaker due to varying teacher digital

competencies. Strategies are implemented holistically through strengthening management, developing teacher competence, digitizing systems, and integrating Islamic values. The findings contribute practically by recommending continuous digital training for teachers and participatory leadership to support sustainable quality improvement.
Keywords: *transformational leadership, madrasah heads, quality of education, Islamic education, digital era*

Abstrak.

Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh adanya kesenjangan antara meningkatnya tuntutan pendidikan Islam di era digital dengan masih terbatasnya penerapan kepemimpinan transformasional di madrasah. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran kepala madrasah sebagai pemimpin transformasional dalam meningkatkan mutu pendidikan di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Islam Terpadu (MI IT) Nurul Ikhwan Palembang. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan studi kasus sebagai desain utama. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi yang melibatkan kepala madrasah, guru, tenaga administrasi, pihak yayasan, serta siswa. Analisis data dilakukan melalui reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan transformasional telah diterapkan secara efektif melalui empat dimensi, yaitu keteladanan (idealized influence), motivasi inspirasional (inspirational motivation), stimulasi intelektual (intellectual stimulation), dan perhatian individual (individualized consideration). Dimensi yang paling dominan adalah keteladanan, sedangkan stimulasi intelektual masih relatif lemah karena perbedaan kompetensi digital guru. Strategi yang diterapkan bersifat holistik melalui penguatan manajemen, pengembangan kompetensi guru, digitalisasi sistem, serta integrasi nilai-nilai Islam. Temuan ini memberikan kontribusi praktis berupa rekomendasi penguatan pelatihan digital guru dan kepemimpinan partisipatif untuk mendukung peningkatan mutu pendidikan secara berkelanjutan.
Kata kunci: *kepemimpinan transformasional, kepala madrasah, mutu pendidikan, pendidikan Islam, era digital*

INTRODUCTION

In a global era marked by the digital revolution and rapid information flow, the education system is required to continuously adapt to remain relevant and maintain quality. Islamic education, as an integral part of the national education system, is expected not only to develop intellectual competence but also to strengthen Qur'anic character in facing modern challenges (Nufuz et al., 2025). This condition demands a shift in leadership paradigms within educational institutions, particularly in the role of

madrasah heads, who are no longer limited to administrative functions but must be able to inspire, motivate, and mobilize all institutional elements toward sustainable quality improvement (Ghufron, 2020). Transformational leadership is therefore considered essential in responding to digital disruption and fostering innovation while maintaining Islamic values (Mardizal et al., 2023).

Despite its importance, many madrasahs still face challenges in adapting to technological developments and changes in learning patterns among digital-native students. Teachers often experience difficulties in implementing digital-based learning and administrative systems (Didik Hadiyatno, 2024). This condition indicates that leadership plays a strategic role in creating an innovative and productive learning environment. Failure to respond to these changes may lead to stagnation in educational quality, declining teacher motivation, and limited achievement of institutional goals, making leadership capability in managing digital transformation a critical factor in educational success.

Previous studies have confirmed that madrasah leadership significantly influences educational quality, particularly in the digital era (Oktaviany et al., 2023),. However, other findings highlight that weak integration between managerial competence and technology utilization can hinder innovation (Rismawati et al., 2023), while low teacher participation and limited collaborative culture remain major obstacles (Tacap, 2025). These findings reveal a gap between the ideal concept of transformational leadership and its implementation in practice, which often remains bureaucratic, less participatory, and not optimally supported by digital integration. Therefore, this study does not aim to develop a new model, but to provide an in-depth analysis of how transformational leadership is implemented in a specific madrasah context and how it contributes to improving educational quality.

This research focuses on Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Islam Terpadu (MI IT) Nurul Ikhwan Palembang as a case study, which reflects various challenges such as limited teacher digital competence, suboptimal data-based quality management, and insufficient integration of technology in learning. Based on these conditions, this study aims to analyze the role of the madrasah head as a transformational leader and its impact on improving the quality of Islamic education. The research specifically addresses two questions: (1) how transformational leadership is implemented by the madrasah head, and (2) how this leadership contributes to improving educational quality in the digital era.

RESEARCH METHODS

1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a single instrumental case study design to obtain an in-depth understanding of transformational leadership practices within a specific institutional context. The research was conducted at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Islam Terpadu (MI IT) Nurul Ikhwan Palembang, which represents the

dynamics of Islamic education in the digital era, particularly in integrating general education with Islamic values through the use of information technology. This design follows the framework proposed by (J. W. Creswell & Creswell, 2023), emphasizing contextual and interpretive analysis. The study was carried out from October 2025 to April 2026, covering stages from instrument preparation to final reporting.

2. Participant Selection Criteria

Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in leadership practices and educational quality management. The selection aimed to obtain rich and relevant data from various perspectives within the madrasah environment. The details of research informants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Informant

Informant Code	Position/Role in Madrasah	Informant Categories	Description of the Role in Research
IF01	Head of Madrasah	Principal Informant	Key leaders who carry out transformational leadership roles and design strategies to improve the quality of education
IF02	Chairman of the Foundation	Principal Informant	Strategic policy makers who provide direction for institutional development and support the implementation of the leadership of madrasah heads
IF03	Teacher	Supporting Informants	Learning implementers who experience firsthand the impact of transformational leadership and quality improvement strategies
IF04	Administrative Staff (TU/Admin Staff)	Supporting Informants	Supporting the management, administration, and digitization system of madrasah as part of the quality strategy
IF05	Students	Supporting Informants	Recipients of educational services who feel the direct impact of leadership and quality improvement strategies

Source: Researcher Observation Data (2026)

3. Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through multiple techniques to ensure comprehensive understanding. First, non-participant observations were conducted in three sessions to examine leadership practices and institutional dynamics. Second, in-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out with each informant, with a duration of approximately 45–60 minutes. Third, document analysis was conducted on

institutional records related to management, learning processes, and policy implementation. Research instruments, including interview and observation guidelines, were developed based on the four dimensions of transformational leadership.

4. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, involving coding, categorization, and interpretation to identify patterns and themes related to transformational leadership practices. This approach emphasizes meaning-making and contextual understanding rather than merely reducing and presenting data, as suggested by (J. Creswell, 2017).

5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical protocols were applied throughout the research process. All participants provided informed consent prior to data collection. Anonymity was ensured by using informant codes (e.g., IF01–IF05), and all data were stored securely. These procedures were implemented to maintain the credibility, trustworthiness, and ethical integrity of the research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

1. Research Setting

Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Islam Terpadu (MI IT) Nurul Ikhwan Palembang is an Islamic basic education institution that exists as an answer to the community's need for education that not only emphasizes the academic aspect, but also the formation of spiritual character in the midst of the development of the digital era. This institution carries the concept of integrated education that integrates general science with Islamic values, so as to be able to create a balance between intellectual intelligence and noble morals. The history of its establishment is motivated by the concern of education leaders and the community for the importance of adaptive and quality Islamic education, even though it initially faced various challenges such as limited facilities, human resources, and public acceptance. However, through strong commitment and support for the surrounding environment, this madrasah has developed into an innovative institution by adopting digital technology in learning, such as the use of online platforms, as well as strengthening religious programs such as tahfidz Al-Qur'an and worship habits.

2. Research findings

Based on the results of observations and interviews, the role of the head of the madrasah at MI IT Nurul Ikhwan Cahaya Ananda Palembang shows a strong leadership character leading to transformation, not only limited to administrative functions, but also as a driver of organizational change. Madrasah heads are active in building open communication, creating a collaborative work atmosphere, and setting an example

through direct involvement in academic and religious activities. The vision of improving the quality of Islamic education in the digital era is not only conveyed formally, but internalized through strategic policies and programs that encourage learning innovation and strengthen Qur'anic values. This is strengthened by the statement of the head of the madrasah: *"As the head of the madrasah, I not only regulate, but try to move teachers to have the same spirit in improving the quality of education and building a generation of faith and achievement"* (IF01). In addition, the aspect of idealized influence can be seen from a consistent disciplined and religious attitude, as the teacher expressed: *"The head of the madrasah always gives a direct example... so we feel encouraged to be more disciplined"* (IF03). This condition shows that leadership is value-based and is able to build collective awareness, loyalty, and commitment of teachers in improving the quality of education.

Figure 1. Documentation of Interviews with Madrasah Heads, Teachers, and Administrative Staff
Source: Researcher Documentation (2026)

The transformational role of madrasah heads is also reflected through the dimensions of inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual attention that encourage the development of teacher capacity and the madrasah system as a whole. Madrasah heads actively motivate teachers to innovate and utilize technology, as conveyed: *"We are often motivated to continue learning and trying new things..."* (IF03), as well as supporting the digitalization of administration: *"Madrasah heads always encourage the use of digital systems..."* (IF04). In addition, attention to the individual needs of teachers is also seen through professional development support: *"The head of the madrasah always pays attention to our needs..."* (IF03). The strategic role of the head of the madrasah is also seen in his ability to bridge the foundation's policies with implementation in the field, as stated: *"The head of the madrasah has a strategic role in translating the foundation's policies..."* (IF02). The impact of this leadership was even felt by the students, who stated: *"We feel more enthusiastic*

about learning..." (IF05). Overall, these findings confirm that the leadership of madrasah heads has been able to create systemic changes that not only improve teacher performance, but also build a conducive, religious, and adaptive learning environment to the demands of the digital age.

Based on the results of observations and interviews, the strategy of the head of the madrasah at MI IT Nurul Ikhwan Cahaya Ananda Palembang in improving the quality of education shows a comprehensive, systematic, and adaptive approach to the demands of the digital era. The head of the madrasah not only plays the role of an administrative manager, but also a strategist who is able to integrate academic, managerial, and religious cultural aspects in a balanced manner. Efforts to improve quality are carried out through strengthening learning coordination, improving teacher competence, and developing a more effective and structured technology-based management system. The vision of quality improvement is not only formal, but is manifested in concrete programs that involve all madrasah residents collaboratively. This is confirmed by the statement of the head of the madrasah: *"In improving the quality of education, we focus not only on results, but also on the process..."* (IF01), which shows that the strategy implemented is oriented towards the quality of the learning process and the development of human resources in a sustainable manner. In addition, teachers also feel the encouragement of innovation through the use of technology, as conveyed: *"We are encouraged to use technology in learning..."* (IF03), which indicates that the strategy of madrasah heads is able to increase digital literacy and teachers' creativity in creating more interactive and relevant learning.

Figure 2. Documentation of Interviews with Administrative Staff, Teachers, and Students

Source: Researcher Documentation (2026)

The strategy of the madrasah head also reflects the strengthening of the management system and attention to individual development as part of improving the quality of education holistically. The digitization of administration and the use of information

systems is one of the strategic steps to improve work efficiency, as stated: *"The head of the madrasah consistently directs us to utilize the digital system..."* (IF04). In addition, the head of the madrasah also provides support for the professional development of teachers, as stated: *"The head of the madrasah always provides support so that we can develop..."* (IF03), which shows that there is concern for increasing the capacity of human resources. The strategic role of the madrasah head is also seen in his ability to bridge the foundation's policies with implementation in the field, *"The head of the madrasah has a strategic role in translating the foundation's policies..."* (IF02), so that the program runs more directed and applicative. The impact of this strategy was felt directly by students, who stated: *"We feel more passionate about learning..."* (IF05), indicating that the changes made have an impact not only on the system and teachers, but also on the quality of the student learning experience. Overall, the strategy of madrasah heads reflects transformational leadership that is able to create comprehensive, adaptive, and sustainable changes in improving the quality of Islamic education.

Based on the overall results of the study, it can be concluded that the head of the madrasah at MI IT Nurul Ikhwan Cahaya Ananda Palembang has carried out the role and strategy of transformational leadership effectively in improving the quality of Islamic education in the digital era. The leadership applied does not only focus on administrative aspects, but is able to integrate example, motivation, innovation, and attention to the individual development of teachers and education personnel. Through comprehensive strategies, such as strengthening the vision and quality culture, improving teacher competence, utilizing digital technology, and managing structured management, madrasah heads have succeeded in creating a collaborative, adaptive, and education-oriented environment that improves the quality of learning. The impact of this leadership can be seen in improving teacher performance, the effectiveness of the management system, and a more conducive, interactive, and meaningful student learning experience. Thus, the transformational leadership of madrasah heads is a key factor in encouraging the realization of madrasas that are superior, have character, and are able to compete in the midst of the dynamics of educational development in the digital era.

DISCUSSION

3.1 Analysis of the Role of Madrasah Heads as Transformational Leaders in the Perspective of Bass & Avolio Theory

The findings of this study indicate that the leadership of the head of the madrasah at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Islam Terpadu (MI IT) Nurul Ikhwan Cahaya Ananda Palembang reflects the characteristics of transformational leadership, particularly in shaping organizational values, strengthening work culture, and improving teacher capacity.

Rather than merely performing administrative duties, the madrasah head plays a strategic role in fostering a shared vision and encouraging collective commitment toward educational quality improvement. This aligns with the Transformational Leadership Theory of Bass and Avolio, which emphasizes the leader's ability to influence followers beyond personal interests and direct them toward broader institutional goals (McCall Jr., 1986). However, the findings also suggest that the effectiveness of this leadership is closely linked to contextual factors, such as teacher readiness and institutional support, which determine the extent to which transformational practices can be fully implemented.

The dimension of *idealized influence* appears to be the most prominent, as reflected in the consistent demonstration of discipline, responsibility, and the integration of Islamic values in daily practices. This form of exemplary leadership contributes to building trust and strengthening teachers' emotional attachment to the institution. Previous studies by (Afifah et al., 2024) and (Devi Sartika et al., 2023) similarly highlight that role modeling plays a crucial role in shaping positive organizational culture and enhancing loyalty. In this study, however, the impact of idealized influence is not only cultural but also motivational, as it directly affects teachers' willingness to align their behavior with institutional values.

Meanwhile, the dimensions of *inspirational motivation* and *intellectual stimulation* are evident through efforts to promote innovation and the use of technology in learning. The madrasah head encourages teachers to adopt new approaches and engage in continuous learning, which is consistent with findings from (Mutiara et al., 2024), (Mubarok et al., 2024), and (Istanto, 2022). Nevertheless, this study reveals that intellectual stimulation is not uniformly experienced by all teachers, as variations in digital competence influence their ability to respond to innovation initiatives. This suggests that, unlike prior studies that emphasize the positive effects of these dimensions, the implementation in this context still faces practical limitations that need to be addressed through targeted capacity building.

The dimension of *individualized consideration* further demonstrates a human-centered leadership approach, where the madrasah head provides personal support, mentoring, and professional development opportunities for teachers. This finding is consistent with (Kartiko et al., 2023) and (Fakhrurrazi et al., 2022), which emphasize the role of personalized leadership in enhancing job satisfaction and commitment. However, this study also highlights that such attention must be accompanied by systematic organizational support to ensure sustainability. Overall, the findings reinforce previous research (Mubarok, Sari, Wibowo, 2025; Susanti et al., 2023) while also showing that transformational leadership in this madrasah is shaped by

contextual challenges, particularly in digital adaptation and teacher readiness, making its implementation dynamic rather than uniformly optimal.

3.2 Analysis of Madrasah Heads' Strategies in Improving the Quality of Islamic Education in the Digital Era

The findings of this study show that the strategies implemented by the head of the madrasah in improving the quality of Islamic education in the digital era are comprehensive, adaptive, and integrative, particularly in aligning technology utilization, human resource development, and the strengthening of Islamic values (Alshrbaji et al., 2022). The leadership approach is not merely reactive to technological changes but demonstrates a proactive orientation by anticipating future educational needs. This is reflected in policies that simultaneously emphasize improving learning quality, strengthening management systems, and developing a collaborative organizational culture. Such strategies indicate that the madrasah head plays a strategic role as a change agent in fostering sustainable educational transformation.

From a theoretical perspective, these practices can be understood through the lens of Total Quality Management (TQM), which emphasizes continuous improvement, stakeholder involvement, and a strong orientation toward service quality. As emphasized by (Sallis, 2023), educational quality is not a static outcome but a continuous and systematic process involving all elements of the organization. In this study, the implementation of TQM principles is evident in the integration of academic, managerial, and value-based dimensions within a unified system. However, unlike the ideal TQM framework, which requires fully institutionalized quality assurance mechanisms, the findings suggest that the implementation in this madrasah is still developing, particularly in terms of data-driven decision-making and system consistency.

Another key strategy identified is the strengthening of teachers' digital literacy through the integration of technology in both learning and administration. The madrasah head actively encourages the use of digital platforms and innovative teaching methods, which aligns with the TPACK framework highlighted by (Ojokheta, 2023) and (Salsabila Rania Ahrefani, 2023). Nevertheless, this study reveals that the effectiveness of this strategy is uneven, as differences in teachers' digital competencies create variations in implementation. This indicates that, while previous studies emphasize the positive impact of technology integration, contextual challenges such as readiness and access to training remain significant barriers in practice.

Furthermore, the development of a collaborative organizational culture and the provision of professional support for teachers contribute to improving motivation, engagement, and learning quality. However, this study also identifies that such

collaboration is still influenced by hierarchical structures and institutional culture, which may limit full participation in decision-making processes. This finding suggests that, although the strategies applied are aligned with transformational leadership and TQM principles, their implementation is context-dependent and not entirely optimal. Overall, the study extends previous research by highlighting that strategic leadership in Islamic education is shaped not only by theoretical frameworks but also by local conditions, including digital readiness, organizational culture, and the capacity of human resources.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that the head of the madrasah at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Islam Terpadu (MI IT) Nurul Ikhwan Palembang has effectively demonstrated transformational leadership in improving the quality of Islamic education in the digital era. This leadership is reflected in the ability to inspire shared vision, foster collaborative culture, and integrate technology with Islamic values in educational practices. As a result, the madrasah has developed a more adaptive learning environment, enhanced teacher engagement, and improved student motivation, indicating that transformational leadership plays a crucial role in driving sustainable educational quality improvement.

However, this study has several limitations. It was conducted in a single madrasah context and relied primarily on qualitative data, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the relatively short research period and potential researcher bias in interpreting data should be considered. Therefore, it is recommended that madrasah leaders strengthen their competencies in digital leadership and participatory management to support continuous improvement. Future research is suggested to involve multiple madrasahs and apply mixed-method approaches to provide a more comprehensive and comparative understanding of transformational leadership practices in Islamic education.

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