

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP OF ISLAMIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN STRENGTHENING EDUCATIONAL QUALITY: A CASE STUDY AT SD ISLAM AL MUTTAQIN

Jamilus¹, Rifka Febrina², Nurmaningsih Yani³, Rinto Hutabarat⁴

^{1,2,3,4} UIN Mahmud Yunus Batusangkar, Tanah Datar, Indonesia

Email: jamilus@iainbatusangkar.ac.id¹, rifkafebrina7@gmail.com²

nurmaningsihyani@gmail.com³, rintohtb83@gmail.com⁴

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the relationship between the principal's transformational leadership style and the strengthening of quality culture based on Islamic values at SD Islam Al Muttaqin. The study seeks to understand how spiritual and moral values are integrated into the educational quality management system. This research employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation involving principals, teachers, and parents. Data analysis used Miles and Huberman's model consisting of data reduction, data display, and verification. The results revealed that transformational leadership, emphasizing idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, successfully fostered a sustainable quality culture. Field data showed improved teacher discipline, high parental satisfaction, and consistently good student assessment outcomes. This study can be applied in Islamic educational institutions, school management, and educational leadership development programs to strengthen both academic and spiritual quality systems in Islamic elementary schools and madrasahs. This study combines transformational leadership theory with Islamic values in the context of educational quality culture. The findings contribute to new insights into how spiritual dimensions can reinforce holistic and sustainable school quality management practices.

Keywords: transformational leadership, quality culture, Islamic education, school principal, Islamic value.

(*) Corresponding Author:

Rifka Febrina, rifkafebrina7@gmail.com, 082283890582

INTRODUCTION

Elementary education in Indonesia faces increasingly complex challenges in improving quality, encompassing academic competence, religious character, and curriculum relevance to modern societal needs. Studies indicate that one of the key factors in achieving sustainable education quality is effective school leadership. Principals with a transformational leadership style play a strategic role in implementing quality management to achieve superior and continuous learning outcomes (Utomo & Santosa, 2024).

In Islamic educational institutions, the principal's role extends beyond management and academics to include Islamic dimensions such as values, character, and organizational culture based on Islamic principles. Transformational leadership in Islamic elementary schools contributes significantly to shaping students' character in line with Islamic teachings (Efendi & Rifa'i, 2023).

Quality culture in Islamic schools is a shared value system that influences attitudes and behavior across the school community. It encompasses ethics, integrity, teamwork, recognition of achievement, and constructive communication each of which is essential for enhancing Islamic educational quality (Ramli et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, many Islamic schools face structural and cultural challenges, such as leadership regeneration issues, limited facilities, and weak governance (Pala Sari et al., 2023). Thus, the principal's role is crucial in ensuring that the quality culture thrives despite such limitations.

This research focuses on SD Islam Al Muttaqin, a private Islamic elementary school integrating the national curriculum with Islamic programs such as *tahfidz*, Arabic learning, *halaqah*, and collective worship. This integration presents a unique dynamic requiring the principal to act not only as an administrator but also as a transformational leader who can drive change, motivate teachers, and internalize Islamic values into all educational practices.

Recent literature underscores the importance of spiritual dimensions in Islamic educational leadership. The spiritual Islamic leadership model anchored in *iman*, *ihsan*, *amanah*, and *Rahmah* aligns with the four dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Mahmud & Ramli, 2025).

Research on transformational leadership at the Islamic elementary school level remains limited, creating a need for contextual studies exploring how principals integrate national and Islamic curricula while fostering a culture of quality.

This study aims to examine the principal's role in strengthening educational quality at SD Islam Al Muttaqin through transformational leadership rooted in Islamic values. The findings are expected to enrich the theoretical and practical understanding of Islamic education management by linking leadership, spirituality, and quality culture.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design focusing on SD Islam Al Muttaqin as the main unit of analysis. This approach was chosen to explore in depth the social, cultural, and leadership contexts of the principal in strengthening educational quality based on Islamic values. The case study design enabled the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of leadership phenomena through natural field interactions without manipulating variables (Ilhami et al., 2024).

Data were collected through three primary techniques: semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with the principal, senior teachers, and foundation administrators to obtain an in-depth understanding of quality enhancement strategies and the implementation of transformational leadership practices. Observations were carried out to record leadership behaviors, communication patterns, and daily school activities that support the development of a quality culture. Meanwhile, documents such as the school's vision and mission statements, strategic plans, quality evaluation results, and activity reports were analyzed to strengthen data triangulation (Nurfajriani et al., 2024).

Data analysis was carried out by collecting, coding, and categorizing the data to identify key thematic patterns that describe the principal's leadership role in building a culture of quality. The analytical process consisted of four stages: data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing, and verification. Data validity was ensured through source and method triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing to minimize researcher subjectivity (Nurahma & Hendriani, 2021). These stages are consistent with qualitative research practices in Indonesian educational studies, which emphasize credibility, dependability, and confirmability in data interpretation (Nurrisa et al., 2025).

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Results

Transformational Leadership of the Principal in Driving Educational Quality

At SD Islam Al Muttaqin, the principal's transformational leadership is reflected in spiritual, moral, and professional exemplarity that serves as a source of inspiration for teachers and staff. Based on observations and interviews, the principal demonstrates a strong commitment to religious values and work ethics.

Moreover, the principal demonstrates inspirational motivation by building a participatory vision of educational quality. The principal does not dominate decision-making processes but provides teachers with opportunities to express aspirations and ideas in formal forums such as weekly meetings. The principal actively promotes innovation in teaching and school management. SD Islam Al Muttaqin implements an integrative curriculum that combines the national curriculum with Islamic education, including subjects such as *Tahfidz*, *Arabic Language*, *Halaqah*, and *Iqra*. The principal encourages teachers to develop interactive learning modules and provides various training programs, including deep learning workshops, *Tahfidz* and *Iqra* training, and anti-bullying workshops.

Furthermore, the principal applies a personal and empathetic teacher coaching approach. The principal regularly invites teachers for individual discussions, expresses appreciation for their strengths, and collaboratively identifies areas for improvement. Through this two-way communication, teacher issues are not addressed with punishment but with constructive solutions and moral support.

Internalization of Islamic Values in Strengthening the School's Quality Culture

Culture of quality at SD Islam Al Muttaqin is built upon strong Islamic values such as *amanah* (trustworthiness), *ikhlas* (sincerity), *itqan* (excellence), *ta'awun* (mutual cooperation), and *istiqamah* (consistency). These values are not mere moral slogans but constitute a value system that underpins all educational practices in the school. The principal consistently reminds teachers that teaching is not merely an administrative or routine task, but a sacred trust (*amanah*) from Allah SWT that must be carried out with full responsibility and sincerity. Teaching with *ikhlas* is viewed as a form of worship rather than a pursuit of material reward.

The value of *itqan* working with diligence and perfection is reflected in teachers' continuous efforts to improve instructional quality. The principal instills the belief that educational quality cannot be achieved without hard work, discipline, and dedication.

Furthermore, the school's culture of quality is not solely focused on academic achievement but also on spiritual performance. The quality paradigm developed at SD Islam Al Muttaqin places spiritual, moral, and character values as equally important dimensions alongside cognitive competence. Every learning process is oriented toward shaping students who are both knowledgeable and virtuous. Before each class begins, teachers are required to deliver a short *mau'izhah hasanah* (moral reminder) as moral and spiritual reinforcement.

Concrete examples of implementing Islamic value-based quality culture include *halaqah tahfidz* sessions, congregational prayers, moral habituation, and teacher collaboration. The *halaqah tahfidz* program not only focuses on Qur'anic memorization but also internalizes Islamic values through thematic *tafsir* studies and moral discussions based on the verses being memorized. Each teacher and staff member leads a *halaqah* group of 10–12 students, ensuring shared moral responsibility for students' spiritual development—not only the responsibility of *tahfidz* teachers. This activity reflects the spirit

of *ta'awun* (cooperation in goodness), strengthening collegial culture among teachers and staff.

Additionally, responsibility for teaching prayer practices is shared among all teachers. Every teacher ensures that students perform prayers correctly in recitation, movement, and concentration. This reflects the *istiqamah* dimension consistency in upholding Islamic values as an integral part of the school's quality system. Thus, the culture of quality at SD Islam Al Muttaqin is measured not only by academic excellence but also by the balance between intellectual, spiritual, and moral quality expressed through daily school practices.

The Impact of Transformational Leadership on School Quality Improvement

Field data show increased teacher discipline, parental satisfaction, and consistently strong student performance. Based on the parent satisfaction survey, most respondents expressed satisfaction with the educational services and character development at SD Islam Al Muttaqin. This improvement in satisfaction is closely linked to the positive work climate established by the principal and the strong collaboration between teachers and school management.

Discussion

The four dimensions of transformational leadership demonstrated by the principal in enhancing educational quality include spiritual and moral exemplarity, the ability to build a shared vision of quality with teachers, encouragement of innovation in learning and management, and personal and empathetic teacher development.

Exemplarity in transformational leadership means that a leader functions as a moral and spiritual role model, radiating trust, integrity, and commitment to the school's vision (Bass & Avolio, 2006). Recent studies indicate that school leaders who consistently display ethical, moral, and religious behavior enhance teachers' trust and strengthen the school's culture of quality (Badar, 2024).

SD Islam Al Muttaqin leadership is evident in consistent discipline enforcement, firmness in decision-making, and maintaining authority as an educational leader. The principal also regularly leads congregational prayers in the school mosque, thereby fostering a consistent religious culture within the school. This exemplary behavior is a key factor in cultivating teachers' trust and loyalty in realizing educational quality (Yakob et al., 2023).

Furthermore, principals must possess the ability to articulate and communicate a shared vision that is both challenging and attainable (Bass & Avolio, 2006). Recent findings show that principals who instill a vision of quality, set high standards, and involve teachers in the visioning process foster teacher commitment and improve instructional quality (Haryanengsi & Radiana, 2024). In addition, leaders should be able to encourage staff to think creatively, question old assumptions, and seek new approaches in both learning and school management (Bass & Avolio, 2006). Principals who provide personal mentoring, coaching, and one-on-one dialogue, as well as design development plans based on teacher needs, influence teacher motivation, sense of appreciation, and ultimately their professional performance (Utami et al., 2024).

Teaching with *ikhlas* that taken at this school is viewed as a form of worship rather than a pursuit of material reward. This aligns with the view that teacher professionalism in Islamic education is rooted in spiritual orientation seeing education as devotion to Allah rather than a functional duty (Musfah, 2021).

Value of *itqan* is supported by Badar (2024) who found that transformational leadership that integrates religious values such as perseverance (*itqan*) and consistency (*istiqamah*) significantly influences teachers' pedagogical performance in Islamic schools.

Next, culture of quality which is not solely focused on academic achievement but also on spiritual performance, aligns with *Qoribah et al (2024)*, who found that Islamic schools integrating academic and spiritual dimensions tend to develop a more sustainable quality culture, positively influencing students' religious behavior. (Qoribah et al., 2024).

Concrete examples of implementing Islamic value-based quality culture include *halaqah tahfidz* sessions, congregational prayers, moral habituation, and teacher collaboration are consistent with *Laelatuzzahro and Budiyo (2023)*, who assert that teacher collaboration within Islamic leadership contexts enhances collective efficacy and nurtures a sense of ownership toward school quality. (Laelatuzzahro & Budiyo, 2023).

Student quality improvement is evident from academic assessment results, which on average exceed the Minimum Competency Standards (*KKM*). In addition, non-academic achievements, such as *tahfidz* competitions and religious events, also show an upward trend. This finding aligns with *Badar (2024)*, who revealed that transformational leadership among school principals enhances teachers' pedagogical competence by strengthening motivation, learning innovation, and a supportive work environment (Badar, 2024).

Hence, the integration of spiritual, collaborative, and evaluative dimensions within the principal's transformational leadership style has created a quality management system that focuses not only on learning outcomes but also on character formation and the spiritual well-being of the entire school community.

CONCLUSION

The transformational leadership of the principal at SD Islam Al Muttaqin has proven to be a key factor in strengthening the school's quality culture based on Islamic values. The principal acts not only as an educational manager but also as a moral and spiritual role model who embodies the values of *amanah* (trustworthiness), *ikhlas* (sincerity), *itqan* (excellence in work), *ta'awun* (cooperation), and *istiqamah* (consistency) in every aspect of teaching and school management. This leadership style motivates teachers to maintain a strong commitment to teaching quality, strengthens collaboration among educators, and ensures the continuity of improvement through continuous quality improvement practices.

Empirically, the implementation of transformational leadership in this school has shown positive impacts on measurable teacher discipline evident from attendance records and field observations improved parental satisfaction based on survey results, and stable student learning outcomes above the minimum standard. Therefore, transformational leadership grounded in Islamic values can serve as an ideal leadership model for Islamic schools in building a culture of quality that excels academically while remaining deeply rooted in spirituality and Islamic ethics.

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