

Transformational Leadership of Headteachers in Facilitating the Transformation of Pesantren-Based Schools

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ABSTRACT. This study was motivated by the importance of developing an educational model that focuses not only on academic aspects, but also on character building and religious values. The aim of this study is to analyse the role of the headteacher's transformational leadership in transforming formal schools into pesantren-based institutions. A qualitative approach using a case study design was employed. The research was conducted at SMA Primaganda Jombang, involving the headteacher, teachers, students, and boarding school supervisors as informants. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation, whilst data analysis utilised an interactive model comprising data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data validity was tested through triangulation of sources and techniques. The results of the study indicate that the headteacher's transformational leadership plays a crucial role in the success of boarding school-based school transformation. This role is evident through the headteacher's exemplary conduct in religious life, the articulation of a vision that emphasises a balance between academic achievement and moral values, the promotion of values-based learning innovation, and a personalised approach to mentoring teachers and pupils. The transformation has taken place not only in structural aspects but also in changes to the school culture, improved discipline, and the development of pupils' character. This study concludes that transformational leadership, which integrates managerial and spiritual dimensions, is a key factor in the success of boarding school-based education. Therefore, this leadership model can serve as an alternative in developing a more holistic and character-based education.

Keyword: Transformational Leadership, Pesantren Based Schools

Abstrak. Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh pentingnya pengembangan model pendidikan yang tidak hanya berfokus pada aspek akademik, tetapi juga pada pembentukan karakter dan nilai-nilai keagamaan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran kepemimpinan transformasional kepala sekolah dalam mentransformasikan sekolah formal menjadi berbasis pesantren. Pendekatan yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Penelitian dilakukan di SMA Primaganda Jombang dengan melibatkan kepala sekolah, guru, siswa, dan pengasuh pesantren sebagai informan. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan dokumentasi, sedangkan analisis data menggunakan model interaktif yang meliputi reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Keabsahan data diuji melalui triangulasi sumber dan teknik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan transformasional kepala sekolah berperan penting dalam keberhasilan transformasi sekolah berbasis pesantren. Peran tersebut terlihat melalui keteladanan kepala sekolah dalam kehidupan religius, penyampaian visi yang menekankan keseimbangan antara akademik dan akhlak, dorongan terhadap inovasi pembelajaran berbasis nilai, serta pendekatan personal dalam membina guru dan siswa. Transformasi yang terjadi tidak hanya pada aspek struktural, tetapi juga pada perubahan budaya sekolah, peningkatan kedisiplinan, serta pembentukan

karakter peserta didik. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa kepemimpinan transformasional yang mengintegrasikan dimensi manajerial dan spiritual menjadi faktor kunci dalam keberhasilan penyelenggaraan sekolah berbasis pesantren. Oleh karena itu, model kepemimpinan ini dapat menjadi alternatif dalam mengembangkan pendidikan yang lebih holistik dan berkarakter.

Kata Kunci : *Kepemimpinan Transformasional, Sekolah Berbasis Pesantren*

Pendahuluan

Educational reform in Indonesia faces complex challenges, particularly in relation to moral decline, a crisis of character, and the lack of integration between cognitive, affective and spiritual aspects within the current education system (Arbi & Amrullah, 2024; Hasan dkk., 2022). Schools tend to focus on academic achievement and the mastery of cognitive skills, whilst the aspect of character development has not yet received commensurate attention. Yet the objectives of national education emphasise the development of the whole person, encompassing spiritual, moral and social aspects (Mujahidin & Malusu, 2024; Solechan & Aulia, 2023). The rise in juvenile delinquency, low standards of conduct and a lack of religious awareness among students further underscore the urgent need to develop a more integrated alternative education model (Fatima & Putra, 2025; Putri dkk., 2025). In this context, the establishment of boarding school-based schools is particularly relevant as they offer a systematic and sustainable integration of formal education with character development grounded in Islamic values.

The pesantren-based school model is a form of integration between the national curriculum and the pesantren's distinctive curriculum, which emphasises religious education, moral development and the strengthening of spirituality through a boarding school system (Fachrudin, 2021; Yusuf & Rosid, 2025). In this model, students not only take part in academic activities in the classroom, but also lead a structured religious life through regular worship, the study of classical Islamic texts, and social interaction based on Islamic values (Munif dkk., 2021). This system enables values to be internalised more effectively as it takes place in a controlled and continuous environment (Akbar dkk., 2022). Therefore, pesantren-based schools are regarded as an educational model capable of addressing the need for a balance between intellectual development and the spiritual character-building of pupils.

Conversely, formal schools that are not based on Islamic boarding schools face various limitations, particularly in terms of character building and monitoring pupils' behaviour outside school hours (Rohili dkk., 2024). An uncontrolled social environment and a lack of integration of values into the learning process mean that education tends to be fragmented and fails to engage deeply with the affective dimension. Furthermore, an education system that is overly focused on academic results also risks producing individuals who are intellectually gifted but lacking in moral and spiritual development (Sanusi, 2023). This situation highlights a gap between the ideals of

education and the reality on the ground, making it necessary to develop a more comprehensive and integrated educational model.

In response to the various challenges faced by formal schools outside the pesantren system, there is a need for an alternative educational model capable of bridging the gap between academic achievement and the character development of pupils. In this context, the establishment of pesantren-based schools presents a strategic solution that not only emphasises cognitive aspects but also systematically integrates spiritual, moral and social dimensions. The implementation of this model cannot be separated from the central role of the headteacher as the leader who holds the authority to steer organisational change. Headteachers are required to be able to initiate, manage, and accelerate institutional transformation towards a pesantren-based education system through visionary and transformative leadership practices (Muntaha & Asyhari, 2025; Wahidah, 2024). From this perspective, transformational leadership is crucial as it enables fundamental changes to the school culture, the mindset of the school community, and a more integrative and values-based learning system (Hadi dkk., 2025; Safitri dkk., 2025).

A number of previous studies have examined pesantren-based education and leadership in the context of Islamic education. Research by (Sholihatunnisa' & Anam, 2025) shows that the integration of the pesantren and formal school curricula is capable of substantially enhancing pupils' religious character. Research (Melinda & Istanto, 2025) found that the headteacher's leadership plays a key role in fostering a religious culture in the implementation of pesantren-based education. Meanwhile, (Hafizah dkk., 2025) suggests that boarding school systems based on Islamic boarding schools are effective in improving pupils' discipline and independence. This finding is consistent with the findings (Ratnasari dkk., 2025) which state that the pesantren environment plays a significant role in character development and the internalisation of values. Nevertheless, these studies remain limited in scope as they have not specifically examined the role of the headteacher's transformational leadership in the process of transforming formal schools into pesantren-based institutions.

Given these limitations, this study aims to fill this gap by conducting an in-depth examination of the role of the headteacher's transformational leadership in transforming formal schools into pesantren-based institutions. This study was conducted at SMA Primaganda Jombang, one of the institutions developing the integration of formal education and pesantren education. The focus of this study is on how the headteacher implements dimensions of transformational leadership, such as idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration, in the process of educational organisational change. The objectives of this study are to analyse leadership strategies in school transformation, identify the dynamics of organisational cultural change, and examine their impact on the quality of pesantren-based education.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of a transformational leadership model based on pesantren values, whilst practically it can serve as a reference for educational institutions in developing an integrative, holistic, and character-based education system.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of the headteacher's transformational leadership in the process of transforming formal schools based on Islamic boarding schools. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore meanings, processes and social dynamics within a natural setting, thereby yielding a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Yin, 2017). A case study design was used because the research focused on a single specific case with unique characteristics, namely the institutional transformation of a formal school into a pesantren-based school.

The research location was Primaganda High School in Jombang, which was selected through purposive sampling because it implements the integration of the formal education system and the pesantren system. The research subjects were determined using purposive sampling, which involves selecting informants who possess knowledge of and are directly involved in the school's transformation process. The informants included the headteacher, deputy headteacher, teachers, pesantren supervisors, and students. The selection of informants was carried out in stages until data saturation was reached, that is, when the data obtained had become repetitive and no new information was found (Miles dkk., 2014).

Data collection was carried out using a triangulation of methods, namely in-depth interviews, participatory observation and documentary analysis. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore the school headteachers' experiences and leadership strategies during the transformation process. Observations were conducted to gain a direct understanding of teaching practices, school culture and the implementation of pesantren values in everyday life. Meanwhile, documentation was used to supplement the data through the analysis of documents such as the curriculum, school programmes, vision and mission statements, and relevant activity records.

Data analysis was conducted interactively and continuously using a model (Miles dkk., 2014), which comprised data reduction, data presentation and drawing conclusions. Data reduction was carried out by selecting and focusing on relevant data; data presentation took the form of systematic narratives; whilst conclusions were drawn inductively with ongoing verification. To ensure the validity of the data, this study employed tests of credibility, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was achieved through triangulation and member checking, whilst the other aspects were maintained through documentation of the research process and the transparent presentation of data based on empirical findings.

Research Findings and Discussion

Research Findings

The success of SMA Primaganda Jombang in transitioning into a pesantren-based school is largely determined by the headteacher's transformational leadership, which has been implemented in a comprehensive manner. This transformation is evident not only in structural aspects but also in cultural changes, patterns of interaction, and a learning system that integrates pesantren values. Based on interviews with teachers, it was found that the headteacher acts as a central figure who not only directs policy but also serves as a role model in the practice of religious life at the school. One teacher remarked, *"The headteacher is always present at religious activities such as congregational prayers and religious study sessions, so we feel encouraged to help maintain that culture"*. This is reinforced by a student's statement: *"We see first-hand how disciplined the headteacher is in worship, so we also feel we must follow suit"*. These findings are further supported by observational data showing the headteacher's direct involvement in daily religious activities, as well as documentation of structured religious development programmes. Exemplary behaviour serves as the primary strategy for building moral legitimacy and accelerating the internalisation of pesantren values.



Figure 1. The Headteacher's Exemplary Role in Daily Religious Activities

In line with this, the transformation process is also underpinned by the headteacher's ability to foster a collective vision regarding the importance of pesantren-based education. Based on the interview findings, the headteacher consistently conveyed the vision that the school is not only focused on academic achievement, but also on the development of students' moral values and character. The deputy headteacher stated, *"He always emphasises that the primary aim of this school is to produce students who are knowledgeable and of good moral character"*. This statement aligns with the findings from interviews with teachers, who noted that this vision is continually internalised through various formal and informal forums. Observations of staff meetings and teacher training sessions revealed the repeated reinforcement of messages regarding the importance

of integrating pesantren values. These findings indicate that transformation does not occur instantly, but rather through a process of shared meaning constructed continuously by the headteacher.



Figure 2. Reinforcing Pesantren Values Through Formal School Communication Forums

In terms of implementation, the transformation of pesantren-based schools is reflected in the development of an integrative curriculum and teaching practices. Interviews with teachers revealed that headteachers encourage teaching innovations that link academic content with Islamic values. One teacher stated, *“We are guided not only to teach the subject matter, but also to incorporate moral and Islamic values into our teaching.”* This is reinforced by classroom observations, which show the integration of values into the learning process, as well as documentation of teaching materials that reflect this approach. Furthermore, it was found that pesantren-based guidance systems such as regular religious activities, the reinforcement of etiquette, and discipline form an integral part of school life. The headteacher’s leadership not only drives change at the policy level but also fosters more contextual and meaningful pedagogical practices.

The success of the transformation was also supported by the headteacher’s personalised approach to mentoring teachers and pupils. Based on the interview results, the headteacher tends to use a dialogical approach in resolving problems and provides individual guidance. One student said, *“If there is a problem, the headteacher usually talks to us calmly, rather than scolding us straight away”*. Teachers also revealed that the headteacher provides space for self-development and supports the improvement of professional competence. These findings are reinforced by observations showing harmonious interpersonal relationships between the headteacher and the school community. The results of this study indicate that the pesantren-based school transformation at SMA Primaganda Jombang has led to a shift towards a more religious school culture, improved student discipline, and the development of better character. The success of the transformation is largely determined

by the effectiveness of the headteacher's transformational leadership, which integrates vision, exemplary behaviour, innovation, and a personalised approach into a unified leadership practice.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the transformation of pesantren-based schools is heavily dependent on the role of the headteacher as a leader of change. The headteacher not only performs administrative functions but also acts as a driving force in shaping the direction, culture, and educational practices within the school. This finding aligns with the theory of transformational leadership proposed by Bass and Avolio (Bass & Avolio, 1994), which explains that leaders play a role in changing the way members of an organisation think and act. However, in the context of pesantren-based schools, this change is not merely organisational in nature but touches upon aspects of values and spirituality, where the headteacher plays a role in instilling Islamic values as the foundation of every policy, as emphasised by (Nurhuda dkk., 2026) that Islamic educational leaders must carry out a mission of character transformation. This transformation process takes place through habit formation, setting an example, and strengthening religious culture within the school environment. The changes that occur are evident not only in the system but also in the attitudes and behaviour of the school community. This demonstrates that transformational leadership in the pesantren context has a more comprehensive dimension as it integrates managerial and spiritual aspects simultaneously.

In terms of setting an example, the research findings indicate that the headteacher is actively involved in religious activities and demonstrates a disciplined attitude in daily life. This encourages teachers and pupils to follow suit. This finding aligns with the concept of idealised influence in transformational leadership, where leaders serve as role models for their members (Maghfirah dkk., 2025). However, this study indicates that within the context of Islamic boarding schools, exemplary behaviour exerts a stronger influence as it is directly linked to religious practices, making it easier for the school community to accept and emulate. Such exemplary behaviour also creates consistency between the values taught and the behaviour demonstrated, which, according to (Hasan dkk., 2025) is key to building credibility and enhancing the school community's trust in the headteacher's leadership. Evidently, as explained by (Hutabarat, 2024), exemplary behaviour is the most effective strategy for building a religious and character-based school culture because it deeply touches on emotional and spiritual aspects.

In communicating the vision, the headteacher consistently emphasises the importance of striking a balance between academic achievement and character development. This vision is repeatedly conveyed during various activities, thereby becoming a shared understanding. This supports the view (Fadillah, 2024) that a clear vision can drive change within a school. In this study, the vision serves not only as a guiding principle but also as a shared framework that influences the

attitudes and daily actions of the school community. The repeated reinforcement of the vision ensures that the values it embodies become increasingly internalised within the school culture. Furthermore, the headteacher's consistency in communicating the vision creates alignment between policies, programmes, and educational practices. This fosters a collective commitment among teachers and students to pursue shared objectives. The vision is not merely understood but is also manifested in the tangible behaviour of the school community.

In teaching practice, the headteacher encourages teachers to integrate Islamic values into the curriculum. These findings indicate an effort to link academic knowledge with moral values. This is consistent with the concept of intellectual stimulation, which emphasises the importance of innovation in learning. However, this study shows that such innovation is undertaken not only to enhance pupils' understanding but also to shape their character. Learning becomes more meaningful as it encompasses not only content but also values. This integration encourages students to understand knowledge within a framework of ethics and responsibility, rather than merely as a cognitive achievement. Furthermore, teachers become more creative in designing learning that is contextual and relevant to everyday life. Consequently, students not only acquire knowledge but are also able to internalise and practise the values they have learnt. This demonstrates that pesantren-based learning is capable of producing a more holistic and sustainable educational process.

In addition, the headteacher also demonstrated concern for the individual needs of teachers and pupils through a more personalised approach. This approach makes the relationship between the headteacher and the school community closer and more open. This finding is in line with the concept of 'individualised consideration' in transformational leadership (Khodir dkk., 2026). However, in the context of Islamic boarding schools, this attention is not only related to performance but also to moral and attitudinal development, thereby impacting the formation of character as a whole. This personal approach also fosters a sense of being valued and cared for in every individual, thereby enhancing their motivation and engagement in school activities. Furthermore, open communication enables the headteacher to understand the challenges faced by teachers and students in greater depth. Consequently, the solutions provided become more precise and tailored to individual needs. Thus, strong interpersonal relationships emerge as a key factor in supporting the success of pesantren-based school transformation.

Compared to previous studies, such as, (Sholihatunnisa' & Anam, 2025), this study has a different focus. Previous studies have largely examined the pesantren education system, such as the curriculum, culture, or boarding system. Meanwhile, this study emphasises the role of the headteacher's leadership in driving the entire process. This study makes a new contribution by demonstrating that the success of pesantren-based schools is largely determined by how the

headteacher leads and directs change. Furthermore, this study shows that transformational leadership is a key factor that integrates the various components of the pesantren education system. These findings also offer the perspective that change will not proceed effectively without visionary and consistent leadership. Thus, this study not only complements previous research but also deepens our understanding of the importance of the leader's role within the context of values-based education. This simultaneously reaffirms that leadership is a strategic element in the success of educational transformation.

The findings of this study indicate that the transformational leadership of school principals plays a crucial role in the success of pesantren-based school transformation. School principals do not merely manage; they also shape values, culture and the direction of education. Therefore, this leadership model can serve as an alternative in developing an education system that focuses not only on academic achievement but also on character building and religious values. Consequently, strengthening the leadership capacity of school principals is of paramount importance in driving more holistic educational change. Furthermore, the integration of academic and spiritual aspects needs to be systematically designed into school policies and practices. These findings also provide a foundation for the development of educational models that are more relevant to community needs. Consequently, pesantren-based schools can serve as a strategic solution to address current educational challenges.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the transformational leadership of the headteacher plays a crucial role in transforming formal schools into pesantren-based institutions. The headteacher not only performs administrative functions but also acts as the primary driving force in shaping the direction, culture and educational practices that integrate academic aspects with Islamic values. The transformation that takes place is not merely structural in nature; it also encompasses changes in the attitudes, behaviour and character of the entire school community.

The implementation of transformational leadership is evident through the headteacher's exemplary conduct in religious life, the articulation of a vision that emphasises a balance between knowledge and moral values, the promotion of values-based learning innovation, and a personalised approach to mentoring teachers and pupils. These four aspects operate in an integrated and mutually reinforcing manner, thereby creating an educational environment that is not only focused on academic achievement but also on the character development and spirituality of the students. This demonstrates that transformational leadership within the context of a pesantren has a broader scope, as it encompasses both managerial and spiritual dimensions.

This study has several limitations that should be noted. It was conducted at a single location, namely Primaganda High School in Jombang, meaning that the findings cannot yet be generalised

to a broader context. Furthermore, the qualitative approach employed relies on the informants' perceptions, so there is a possibility of subjectivity in the interpretation of the data. This study also places greater emphasis on the role of the headteacher, and therefore has not examined in depth other factors such as the role of teachers, the family environment, and external policies that also influence the success of school transformation.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of research on transformational leadership within the context of pesantren-based education. In practical terms, the findings of this study can serve as a reference for school heads and education administrators in developing a more comprehensive leadership model. Therefore, further research is recommended to expand the geographical scope, employ a more diverse range of methodological approaches, and examine other variables in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the transformation of pesantren-based schools.

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