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Transformational Leadership Practices and Teacher Work Culture at MTs NU 02 Gringsing: A Phenomenological Study

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study explored how transformational leadership was understood and enacted by the principal and how participants perceived its relationship with teacher work culture at MTs NU 02 Gringsing, Indonesia. **Methods:** A qualitative phenomenological design involved ten participants: one principal, five teachers, three students, and one school committee member. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. Data analysis involved data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Credibility was strengthened through source, technique, and time triangulation, as well as member checking. **Findings:** The principal's transformational leadership was reflected in exemplary conduct, motivational communication, encouragement of instructional innovation, and individualized support. Participants described perceived improvements in teacher discipline, responsibility, independence, professionalism, and classroom practices. These accounts were supported by observations and school records, although they do not establish a direct causal effect. Teacher participation, institutional support, leadership competence, and available facilities facilitated implementation, while limited funding, time constraints, and interpersonal misunderstandings presented challenges. **Research Implications:** Transformational leadership development should integrate role modeling, motivation, professional learning, individualized support, and open communication while accounting for institutional constraints. **Originality:** This study provides a phenomenological account of how the four dimensions of transformational leadership are enacted together in everyday madrasah practices and how contextual conditions shape their relationship with teacher work culture.

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INTRODUCTION

Education plays a fundamental role in national development because the quality of education strongly influences a country's progress and competitiveness. At the school level, educational quality is closely associated with the quality of teaching and learning processes, in which teachers occupy a central position. Teachers' performance is particularly important because their professional practices shape classroom effectiveness, student engagement, and the achievement of educational goals. Research across Asian educational settings indicates that transformational school leadership is positively associated with important teacher-related outcomes, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and self-efficacy, which are closely related to teachers' capacity to perform their professional responsibilities effectively (Firmansyah et al., 2022).

Teacher performance does not develop independently of the organizational environment in which teachers work. Individual factors such as motivation, competence, and commitment interact with organizational factors such as school climate, leadership, communication, and available resources. School principals therefore occupy a strategic position because they coordinate organizational resources and influence the conditions under which teachers carry out their professional responsibilities. Recent studies have shown that principals' transformational leadership is associated with teacher performance through mechanisms involving motivation, commitment, discipline, and the creation of a supportive school culture (Andarin et al., 2025). Leadership at the school level consequently needs to extend beyond administrative control toward practices that encourage teacher development, participation, professional commitment, and continuous improvement.

Transformational leadership provides a leadership framework that is particularly relevant to such demands. The theory emphasizes the ability of leaders to influence followers by articulating a shared vision, strengthening intrinsic motivation, encouraging intellectual development, and attending to individual needs. The four core dimensions commonly associated with transformational leadership are Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration (Bass & Riggio, 2006). These dimensions enable school principals to function not only as organizational managers but also as role models, motivators, facilitators of innovation, and mentors for teachers. Empirical evidence from Indonesian schools indicates that principals who consistently enact these four dimensions can strengthen teacher motivation, commitment, innovation, and professional performance (Aditya, Novianto, & Prasojo, 2025).

The organizational significance of transformational leadership becomes clearer when it is connected to school culture and teachers' everyday work practices. A systematic review of international literature found that transformational school leadership is closely connected with positive effects on school staff and school culture, particularly through increased motivation, collaboration, organizational commitment, collective efficacy, staff development, and organizational health (Heenan et al., 2023). A separate systematic literature review also identified a strong relationship between transformational leadership and organizational culture, indicating that leadership practices can influence how organizational values and behavioral norms are developed and sustained (Zhong & Zhu, 2024). These findings suggest that transformational leadership should not be understood merely as a strategy for improving individual teacher performance but also as an organizational process for cultivating a positive work culture.

Teacher work culture refers to the shared values, norms, attitudes, habits, and behavioral patterns that shape how teachers perform their responsibilities within an educational organization. A positive work culture can be recognized through discipline, responsibility, professional commitment, collaboration, initiative, independence, and willingness to develop professional competence. The relationship between transformational leadership, organizational culture, and teacher performance has been emphasized in recent literature, with organizational culture identified as an important pathway through which transformational leadership can contribute to improved teacher work performance (Lin, Azar, & Ahmad, 2024). Transformational leadership can thus influence teacher work culture by establishing shared expectations, encouraging participation, recognizing individual contributions, supporting professional learning, and modeling the values expected within the school community.

The relationship is also visible in the Indonesian educational context. A qualitative study at SMP Negeri 3 Baleendah found that transformational leadership contributed to a more positive work culture through clear vision, collaboration, communication, and increased teacher motivation and work enthusiasm (Muchtar et al., 2025). A more recent case study at an Indonesian elementary school similarly reported that principals' transformational practices were reflected in exemplary behavior, open communication, teacher involvement, professional support, and appreciation, with corresponding improvements in discipline, collaboration, motivation, and professionalism (Ariyanti et al., 2026). Such findings reinforce the argument that the principal's leadership behavior is closely connected with the development of teachers' collective work habits and professional culture.

The madrasah context presents an additional dimension that deserves attention. Madrasahs operate not only as educational institutions but also as organizations in which professional, social, moral, and religious values interact in shaping leadership and teacher behavior. Transformational leadership in this context requires principals to establish direction, provide motivation, encourage innovation, and offer individualized support while maintaining ethical and institutional values. Recent research on transformational leadership in educational environments emphasizes the principal's role in empowering teachers, strengthening motivation, and developing a positive school culture as part of broader efforts to improve educational quality (Yoserizal et al., 2024). Evidence from a recent study in a madrasah setting also indicates that transformational leadership can be connected with teacher performance in areas such as instructional planning, teaching implementation, assessment, discipline, and professionalism, while contextual constraints continue to affect implementation (Nurdin et al., 2026).

The empirical situation at MTs NU 02 Gringsing, Gringsing District, provides a relevant setting for examining these leadership dynamics. Preliminary observations and informal interviews conducted with several teachers indicated that teacher performance and work culture had not yet reached an optimal condition. The identified issues included limited innovation in teaching methods, relatively low participation in professional development activities such as scientific writing, the need to strengthen teacher participation in school activities beyond classroom teaching, and less-than-optimal collaboration among teachers. At the same time, the principal had participated in educational leadership training and expressed a commitment to applying a more transformative approach to school leadership. This situation creates an important empirical context for exploring how transformational leadership is actually enacted and experienced within the daily life of a madrasah.

Previous research has provided substantial evidence regarding the relationship between transformational leadership and teacher performance, motivation, organizational culture, and school effectiveness. A considerable portion of this literature, however, emphasizes quantitative relationships, meta-analysis, or general school settings, while fewer studies explore in depth how teachers and principals experience and interpret the day-to-day implementation of transformational leadership within a specific madrasah context. Recent qualitative studies have begun to address leadership and work culture through school-based case studies, yet contextual differences between public schools and Islamic madrasahs make further investigation necessary. The present study addresses this gap by examining transformational leadership through a phenomenological perspective at MTs NU 02 Gringsing, focusing on participants' understanding and perceptions, the enactment of the four transformational leadership dimensions, perceived changes in teacher work culture, and the supporting and inhibiting factors influencing implementation.

The study aims to analyze the implementation of transformational leadership by the principal in improving teacher work culture at MTs NU 02 Gringsing, Gringsing District. The study specifically examines how Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration are enacted in daily leadership practices, how teacher work culture is perceived to develop across dimensions such as discipline, competence, professionalism, independence, and initiative, and how organizational conditions support or constrain the process. The study is expected to contribute empirical insight into transformational leadership in a madrasah environment while providing a contextual understanding of how principal leadership can become a mechanism for strengthening a professional, collaborative, disciplined, and improvement-oriented teacher work culture.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological research design to examine the lived experiences, perceptions, and meanings of participants concerning the implementation of transformational leadership by the principal in improving teacher work culture at MTs NU 02 Gringsing, Gringsing District, Batang Regency. A qualitative approach is appropriate for understanding phenomena experienced by research subjects and presenting their meanings descriptively through words and language within a natural context (Moleong, 2021). The phenomenological design was selected because the study sought to explore participants' experiences and interpretations of transformational leadership as experienced in their daily activities at the madrasah.

The research was conducted at MTs NU 02 Gringsing, Gringsing District, Batang Regency, during the even semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The site was selected because the phenomenon of transformational leadership was being implemented in the madrasah and the research setting provided opportunities for direct observation and in-depth interaction with relevant participants. Research conducted in a natural setting enables qualitative researchers to understand social phenomena through the meanings and experiences of the participants involved (Moleong, 2021).

The participants were selected purposively according to their relevance to the phenomenon under investigation. The selection criteria for teacher participants included having at least three years of teaching experience at MTs NU 02 Gringsing, having experienced the previous principal's leadership period, representing different subjects and grade levels, and being willing to participate actively in the research. The research involved the principal as the key informant, five subject teachers as the main participants, and supporting informants consisting of students and a school committee member for triangulation. Purposive selection is appropriate in qualitative research when participants are chosen because they are considered capable of providing information relevant to the research focus (Sugiyono, 2023).

The researcher served as the primary instrument in collecting and interpreting the data, supported by observation guidelines, interview guidelines, and documentation guidelines. In qualitative research, the researcher functions as the main instrument because the researcher directly observes, interacts with participants, collects information, and interprets the meaning of the data obtained in the field (Sugiyono, 2023). Data were collected through three principal techniques, namely in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. These techniques were used complementarily to obtain comprehensive information concerning the principal's transformational leadership practices, teachers' experiences, teacher work culture, and contextual factors influencing implementation.

In-depth interviews were conducted with the principal, teachers, students, and school committee member using semi-structured interview guidelines that allowed the researcher to develop questions according to the responses and circumstances encountered during the interviews. Interview activities focused on participants' understanding and perceptions of transformational leadership, the implementation of Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration, the development of teacher work culture, and the supporting and inhibiting factors affecting implementation. Interviews were conducted on different dates during July 2026 according to the availability of participants. Observation was conducted using active and passive participation according to the characteristics of the activities and situations observed in the field. The observed aspects included the

principal's leadership behavior, communication and problem-solving practices, motivational activities, teacher discipline and compliance, classroom-related practices, and the principal's humanistic approach in dealing with problems. Documentation was used to obtain supporting evidence in the form of school profiles, budget documents, supervision records, teacher and student data, facilities and infrastructure records, school vision and mission, and school curriculum documents.

Data analysis was conducted continuously throughout the research process. The analysis followed the qualitative data analysis procedures described by Sugiyono, involving systematic organization, categorization, synthesis, pattern identification, selection of relevant information, and formulation of conclusions from interview data, field notes, and documentation (Sugiyono, 2023). The analytical process consisted of data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data collected from interviews, observations, and documents were first organized and transcribed, after which relevant information was selected and categorized according to themes emerging from the research focus. The condensed data were presented through narrative descriptions and relationships among categories, while conclusions were developed gradually and continuously verified against the available evidence.

The trustworthiness of the data was ensured through source triangulation, technique triangulation, time triangulation, and member checking. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from different participants, while technique triangulation involved comparing interview findings with observation and documentation results. Time triangulation was conducted by collecting information at different times to examine the consistency of participants' responses. Member checking was conducted by reconfirming interview transcripts and relevant observation findings with participants. These procedures were employed to ensure that the findings represented the information and experiences conveyed by the research participants accurately (Sugiyono, 2023).

The research procedure consisted of four stages: pre-field preparation, field implementation, data analysis, and report preparation. The pre-field stage included preparation of the research proposal and instruments, research licensing, coordination with the madrasah, and preparation of interview guidelines. The field stage involved conducting in-depth interviews, participant observation, documentation, and systematic field-note recording. The analysis stage included transcription, reduction and categorization of data, thematic analysis, and interpretation of meaning, while the final stage involved presenting the findings, discussing the results, and formulating conclusions and recommendations.

RESULTS

The findings indicate that the principal and teachers at MTs NU 02 Gringsing have a relatively consistent understanding of transformational leadership, both conceptually and in practice. Participants described transformational leadership as a leadership approach that inspires, motivates, guides, and embraces all members of the madrasah in pursuing positive change and improved performance. The principal explained transformational leadership through four interconnected dimensions: becoming a role model, motivating teachers and students, stimulating critical and creative thinking, and providing individual attention to teachers. Teachers expressed similar perceptions, describing transformational leadership as the ability of the principal to encourage teachers and other members of the madrasah to improve teaching practices, work performance, problem-solving abilities, and professional development. The convergence of these views indicates that transformational leadership was not understood merely as a theoretical concept but had been interpreted through concrete leadership behavior in the daily life of the madrasah.

The participants also associated transformational leadership with the principal's ability to create a shared sense of direction and collective responsibility. Teachers viewed the principal as someone who could bring together different members of the madrasah and encourage them to work toward common institutional goals. The principal similarly emphasized the importance of involving teachers, students, and educational staff in creating positive changes in the learning environment. The findings therefore show that transformational leadership was perceived as a relational process in which the principal sought to influence behavior not only through formal authority but also through communication, motivation, personal example, and interpersonal relationships. The shared understanding among participants provided an important foundation for the implementation of transformational leadership in the madrasah.

The implementation of transformational leadership was visible across the four dimensions of Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, Individualized Consideration, and Idealized Influence. Inspirational Motivation was demonstrated through the principal's efforts to encourage teachers, students, and educational staff to develop their abilities, participate in training and workshops, and contribute actively to school programs. Teachers reported that the principal frequently encouraged them to participate in seminars, workshops, and other professional development activities. The principal also communicated motivation during staff meetings, school ceremonies, and classroom visits. Observation data showed that the principal provided appreciation and publicly recognized achievement, including the

promise of rewards for students with strong academic performance. The principal was also observed giving motivational messages to students and teachers, emphasizing achievement, active participation, child-centered learning, and the creation of a safe and comfortable educational environment.

The inspirational role of the principal was also reflected in the way teachers and students described his leadership presence. Teachers considered the principal to be an active figure who encouraged them to continue developing their professional capabilities and to participate in school improvement programs. Students similarly perceived the principal as a figure who frequently encouraged them to develop their talents, skills, and academic potential. Observation during classroom visits showed that the principal delivered inspirational messages and encouraged students to recognize and develop their interests and abilities. These findings indicate that motivational practices were directed toward both teachers and students and were integrated into routine school activities rather than being limited to formal meetings.

Intellectual Stimulation was reflected in the principal's efforts to encourage teachers to develop creativity, innovation, and critical thinking in classroom practice. Teachers reported that they were encouraged to avoid monotonous teaching patterns and to develop learning approaches that were more engaging, meaningful, and responsive to students' needs. Observation findings confirmed the use of varied instructional approaches, including Discovery Learning and cooperative learning practices, as well as the preparation of teaching materials before instruction. Teachers were also encouraged to use learning methods that supported student participation and reduced dependence on conventional teacher-centered instruction. The school environment was supported by facilities such as LCD projectors, a library, consultation spaces, classroom equipment, and other learning resources. The principal also organized workshops and teacher professional learning activities through the school-level learning community to strengthen instructional innovation.

The findings further show that intellectual stimulation extended beyond classroom methods to the professional development of teachers. Teachers were encouraged to identify problems in their teaching practices and to seek alternative approaches rather than waiting for direct solutions from the principal. The principal was perceived as a source of ideas and a facilitator who could connect teachers with opportunities for training and professional learning. Documentary evidence regarding the principal's academic background and leadership experience also supported participants' perceptions of his capacity to stimulate the development of school members. The combination of encouragement, professional learning opportunities, instructional experimentation, and available facilities created conditions that enabled teachers to expand their pedagogical practices.

Individualized Consideration was implemented through respect for differences, attention to individual needs, appreciation of contributions, openness to suggestions, and personal approaches to teachers and students. Teachers described the principal as someone who listened to different opinions and considered ideas and suggestions expressed during meetings and discussions. Appreciation was demonstrated through recognition of teachers' efforts and informal forms of acknowledgment after school activities. The principal emphasized the importance of respecting differences and bringing diverse members of the school community together around shared institutional goals. Teachers also reported that the principal approached individuals personally, listened to their concerns, and used their aspirations as one basis for decision making. The findings further show that the principal's interpersonal closeness created a sense of being valued, supported, and included among teachers and students.

Personal interaction was an important feature of this leadership practice. Teachers described the principal as approachable and willing to act as a personal conversational partner when difficulties arose. Concerns experienced by teachers, educational staff, or students could be communicated through direct interaction rather than only through formal institutional channels. The principal also attempted to resolve problems through deliberation and family-oriented communication so that disagreements would not develop into prolonged internal conflict. Observation of classroom activities additionally showed teachers providing special assistance and guidance to students who required greater academic or emotional support, indicating that individualized attention was also visible in the broader learning environment.

Idealized Influence was demonstrated through the principal's exemplary behavior, discipline, communication style, and active participation in school activities. Participants described the principal as a leader who attempted to practice what he expected from teachers and students rather than simply issuing instructions. Observation showed that the principal arrived early at school and participated in welcoming students, displayed polite and respectful behavior, and interacted with teachers, students, and the wider community in a friendly manner. The principal also responded to teacher lateness by listening to the circumstances involved and sought to address empty classrooms without publicly blaming teachers. Documentary evidence indicated that the principal consistently participated in school activities. These practices strengthened the perception of the principal as a role model whose conduct could be followed by teachers and students.

The principal's exemplary behavior was particularly visible through daily routines. Arriving early, speaking politely, respecting teachers' explanations, participating directly in school activities, and demonstrating concern for students were described as forms of leadership by example. Teachers perceived the principal as someone who combined direction with personal involvement, so that instructions were accompanied by direct practice. Such behavior contributed to a perception that discipline and school values were not only regulations to be followed but also standards demonstrated directly by the school leader.

The implementation of transformational leadership was accompanied by observable changes in teacher work culture. Participants consistently described improvement in teacher discipline, independence, competence, professionalism, initiative, and responsibility after the implementation of transformational leadership. Teachers reported that work patterns that had previously tended to depend on direct instructions gradually became more independent, with teachers increasingly capable of handling classroom and instructional problems on their own. Observation findings showed teachers carrying out teaching responsibilities seriously and in accordance with their assigned subjects and curriculum. Students also perceived that teachers were increasingly professional, disciplined, responsible, and capable of explaining learning materials according to the curriculum and schedule. Documentary evidence from teacher performance assessments and classroom supervision further indicated improvements in teacher quality and competence.

The changes were not limited to individual discipline but were also reflected in teachers' initiative and professional responsibility. Participants reported that teachers increasingly understood their respective duties, completed instructional and administrative responsibilities more seriously, and became more capable of dealing with classroom problems independently. Teachers were also perceived as more willing to improve their teaching practices and professional competence. Students confirmed these changes by describing teachers as increasingly consistent in following schedules, delivering curriculum content, and providing personal assistance when students experienced learning difficulties. The findings suggest that the perceived improvement in work culture involved both behavioral and professional dimensions.

The observed improvement in teacher work culture was manifested in several specific aspects of classroom and professional practice. The findings identified eight indicators: maintaining an orderly classroom environment, applying positive discipline, facilitating interactive student participation, providing constructive feedback, delivering structured instruction, adapting instruction to students' levels of understanding, demonstrating attention and care toward students, and maintaining high expectations for student development. These indicators suggest that the improvement was not limited to attendance, punctuality, or task completion but extended to the quality of instructional interaction and teachers' responsiveness to students. The principal also attributed the improvement not solely to his leadership but to the cooperation of the entire school community. Evidence of professional development was additionally reflected in teacher achievement in a teacher competition organized at the regency level.

The findings also reveal several factors that supported the implementation of transformational leadership. Teachers were identified as a central supporting factor because they functioned as the primary actors translating the principal's vision and policies into classroom practice. Foundation support contributed to the implementation of school programs and reinforced institutional cooperation. Principal competence, including academic background, leadership experience, and interpersonal ability, was perceived as an important resource for mobilizing the school community. Awareness and commitment among school members, including teachers, educational staff, students, and the school committee, also strengthened implementation. Facilities and infrastructure provided practical support for leadership and instructional programs. Participants specifically highlighted the availability of learning facilities and the support provided by the school committee and other stakeholders.

The role of the school community was particularly significant because transformational leadership did not operate independently of stakeholder participation. Teachers actively supported school programs, while the foundation was perceived as providing institutional backing. The school committee also contributed through suggestions and support for programs initiated by the principal. The principal's capacity to communicate with and involve different members of the school community was viewed as an important mechanism for maintaining collective support. The availability of facilities further enabled the implementation of instructional and professional development activities, particularly those requiring learning technology and classroom resources.

Several factors simultaneously constrained implementation. The most prominent obstacles were limited funding, limited operational time, and misunderstandings among some teachers. Financial constraints restricted opportunities to organize teacher development and other improvement programs, particularly because the madrasah operates as a private educational institution. Limited time also reduced opportunities for intensive coaching and professional guidance because teachers' schedules were largely occupied by teaching responsibilities and the school day ended relatively early. Some participants also identified misunderstandings or unintended negative interpretations of the

principal's guidance as an interpersonal challenge. These obstacles, however, were described as manageable through communication, collegiality, family-oriented relationships, and deliberative problem solving.

The findings show that the constraints did not completely prevent the implementation of transformational leadership. The principal and school community attempted to address them through discussion, mutual understanding, and collaborative problem solving. The limited budget encouraged the madrasah to prioritize essential development programs, while time constraints required professional guidance and communication to be managed efficiently. Interpersonal misunderstandings were addressed through personal approaches and deliberation. The ability to manage these constraints contributed to the continuity of transformational leadership practices despite the limitations experienced by the madrasah.

Table 1. Summary of the Main Findings

Research Focus	Main Findings	Supporting Evidence
Understanding of transformational leadership	Principal and teachers demonstrated a consistent understanding of transformational leadership as inspiring, motivating, empowering, and role-model-based leadership.	Interviews
Inspirational Motivation	Motivation was delivered through meetings, ceremonies, classroom visits, professional development encouragement, appreciation, and recognition of achievement.	Interviews and observations
Intellectual Stimulation	Teachers were encouraged to use creative and innovative instructional approaches and participate in workshops and professional learning activities.	Interviews, observations, and documents
Individualized Consideration	Principal respected different opinions, listened to aspirations, provided appreciation, and used personal approaches in addressing individual concerns.	Interviews and observations
Idealized Influence	Principal demonstrated discipline, politeness, responsibility, active participation, and exemplary conduct.	Interviews, observations, and documents
Teacher work culture	Improvement was found in discipline, independence, competence, professionalism, initiative, responsibility, and classroom instructional practices.	Interviews, observations, performance assessments, and supervision documents
Supporting factors	Teachers, foundation support, principal competence, school-member awareness, school committee, and facilities supported implementation.	Interviews and documentation
Inhibiting factors	Limited budget, limited time, and misunderstandings among some teachers constrained implementation.	Interviews and supporting documents

The findings present transformational leadership at MTs NU 02 Gringsing as an integrated pattern of leadership practice rather than a single intervention. The principal's role as a motivator, intellectual stimulator, individually attentive leader, and role model was experienced simultaneously in daily interactions. These practices were accompanied by changes in teacher work culture, particularly in discipline, professionalism, competence, independence, initiative, and instructional quality. The process was reinforced by teacher participation, foundation and committee support, principal competence, stakeholder awareness, and school facilities, while funding, time, and interpersonal challenges remained the main constraints.

DISCUSSION

The findings show that the principal and teachers at MTs NU 02 Gringsing have developed a relatively consistent understanding of transformational leadership as a leadership approach based on inspiration, motivation, role modeling, empowerment, and attention to individual needs. This understanding is consistent with the central conception of transformational leadership, which emphasizes the ability of leaders to encourage followers to move beyond routine task completion toward higher levels of motivation, commitment, and performance. The consistency between participants' perceptions and the practices observed in the madrasah indicates that transformational leadership was not perceived merely as an administrative strategy but as a pattern of interpersonal and organizational behavior. This interpretation is supported by evidence from Asian educational settings showing that transformational school leadership is positively related to teacher job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and self-efficacy (Firmansyah

et al., 2022). The broader literature also positions transformational school leadership as a leadership process capable of influencing staff motivation, organizational development, and school culture rather than functioning solely through formal authority (Heenan et al., 2023).

The findings concerning Inspirational Motivation demonstrate that the principal's leadership was enacted through encouragement, communication of expectations, professional-development opportunities, appreciation, and motivational messages during formal and informal school activities. The principal encouraged teachers to participate in workshops, seminars, and other professional activities while also motivating students to develop their talents and achieve academic and non-academic goals. This pattern is consistent with the transformational leadership dimension in which leaders communicate meaning, strengthen collective aspirations, and encourage members to pursue shared goals. Evidence from recent Indonesian educational research shows that transformational leadership can strengthen teacher motivation and commitment by creating supportive working conditions and communicating a clear direction for institutional development (Nurrizayani, Niswanto, & Usman, 2024). Research conducted in an elementary school context also identifies inspiration and motivation as important elements through which principals build teacher engagement and encourage professional improvement (Pujilestari, Rubini, & Sunaryo, 2023). The present findings extend these observations by showing that motivational leadership at the madrasah was communicated not only through formal policy but also through daily interaction, classroom visits, recognition of achievement, and personal encouragement.

The role of Inspirational Motivation in this study also appears to be connected with the development of shared responsibility. Teachers did not merely interpret the principal's motivation as encouragement to complete assigned tasks but as an invitation to participate in the broader improvement of the madrasah. The principal's repeated emphasis on student welfare, participation, non-discrimination, and a safe learning environment provided a moral and practical direction for teachers' work. Such findings correspond with systematic evidence that transformational school leaders influence school culture by articulating collective goals, strengthening teacher commitment, and encouraging shared responsibility for institutional improvement (Heenan et al., 2023). A recent systematic review of transformational leadership in educational environments similarly concludes that effective principals strengthen collaboration, teacher empowerment, positive school culture, and teacher creativity through leadership practices that involve the wider educational community (Yoserizal et al., 2024).

The findings related to Intellectual Stimulation reveal that the principal encouraged teachers to move beyond monotonous instructional routines and to experiment with more creative and innovative approaches. Teachers reported greater encouragement to use varied learning strategies, develop teaching materials, participate in professional learning activities, and identify alternative solutions to classroom problems. Classroom observations supported these accounts by showing the use of approaches such as Discovery Learning and cooperative learning, as well as the utilization of learning technologies and other instructional resources. This finding is highly consistent with research emphasizing that intellectual stimulation encourages teachers to challenge conventional practices, explore alternative approaches, and develop innovative behavior (Noviyanti, Hadiyanto, & Sulastri, 2024). Research in an Indonesian Qur'an-based school context similarly found transformational leadership to be relevant to the development of teachers' intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation, particularly in relation to instructional improvement and professional development (Sholihah & Ratnaningsih, 2024).

Intellectual Stimulation in the present study was not limited to the provision of ideas by the principal. The principal also created opportunities for teachers to learn, share practices, and develop their own instructional solutions. This practice is important because transformational leadership becomes meaningful when intellectual encouragement is translated into teacher agency. Teachers who are given opportunities to question routines and develop alternative solutions are more likely to regard themselves as active contributors to institutional improvement. Meta-analytic evidence from Asia has shown that transformational leadership is associated with teacher self-efficacy, commitment, and job satisfaction, suggesting that leadership practices that empower teachers can strengthen the psychological conditions supporting professional performance (Firmansyah et al., 2022). The present study adds a qualitative explanation of how such empowerment may be enacted through everyday encouragement, professional learning, collaborative discussion, and support for instructional experimentation.

The implementation of Individualized Consideration was reflected in the principal's respect for differences, openness to teachers' opinions, appreciation of contributions, and personal approach to professional and interpersonal problems. Teachers described the principal as approachable and willing to listen to individual concerns before making decisions. This pattern corresponds with the transformational leadership principle that followers need to be treated as individuals with different needs, capacities, aspirations, and developmental requirements. Contemporary research identifies individualized consideration as an important pathway through which leaders provide coaching, emotional support, and professional opportunities that respond to individual teacher conditions. The findings are also consistent

with evidence that transformational leadership creates stronger professional relationships when teachers experience recognition, support, and respect in their everyday work (Heenan et al., 2023).

The humanistic and personalized approach identified at MTs NU 02 Gringsing also appears to have supported a more harmonious work environment. The principal reportedly used face-to-face communication, listened to teachers' concerns, respected differences of opinion, and attempted to resolve misunderstandings through deliberation rather than confrontation. Such practices are particularly important in educational organizations because professional relationships influence trust, collaboration, and teachers' willingness to participate in organizational change. Research examining transformational leadership and school culture found that leadership can contribute to more positive organizational conditions by strengthening collaboration, communication, and shared commitment (Alzoraiki et al., 2024). Evidence from Indonesian schools likewise indicates that transformational leadership is connected with teacher performance through organizational culture and supportive working conditions (Bektiarso, 2024).

Idealized Influence emerged through the principal's exemplary conduct, especially discipline, punctuality, respectful communication, direct participation in school activities, and visible commitment to institutional programs. The principal was observed arriving early, welcoming students, participating in school activities, and demonstrating the behaviors expected from teachers and students. Such practices illustrate the importance of leadership by example in transforming organizational values into observable behavior. Transformational leadership research consistently identifies role modeling and leader credibility as important mechanisms through which followers develop trust and internalize organizational expectations. A systematic review of transformational school leadership found that principals who demonstrate shared values and confidence in collective goals can contribute to collaboration, empowerment, and a stronger school culture (Heenan et al., 2023).

The results concerning teacher work culture indicate that teachers experienced meaningful improvement in discipline, independence, competence, professionalism, initiative, responsibility, and classroom instructional practices following the implementation of transformational leadership. These findings are consistent with research showing a positive relationship between transformational leadership and teacher performance. A literature review synthesizing studies from different educational contexts found that principal transformational leadership generally has a positive relationship with teacher performance and, indirectly, student achievement (Ginanjar et al., 2024). Research in Indonesian junior high schools similarly found that transformational leadership and organizational culture were positively associated with teacher performance, while work ethic strengthened these relationships (Bektiarso, 2024).

The improvement identified in this study should nevertheless be interpreted as a qualitative change associated with the leadership process rather than as evidence of a statistically established causal effect. The participants perceived that teachers became more disciplined, independent, professional, and proactive, and these perceptions were supported by classroom observations and school documents. The principal himself emphasized that improvements in teacher performance were also attributable to cooperation among school members rather than to leadership alone. Such an interpretation is consistent with contemporary research suggesting that the relationship between transformational leadership and teacher performance may operate through organizational and psychological mechanisms, including school culture and work climate. Transformational leadership has been shown to influence teaching performance directly as well as indirectly through school culture (Alzoraiki et al., 2024). Research from Indonesia also indicates that transformational leadership may affect teacher performance through supportive school climate rather than exclusively through direct leadership effects (Irawan, Wijaya, & Jaolis, 2024).

The eight indicators of teacher improvement identified in this study provide a more detailed explanation of how work culture was expressed at the classroom level. Better classroom organization, positive discipline, interactive learning, constructive feedback, structured instruction, adaptive teaching, teacher attentiveness, and high expectations for students indicate that changes in work culture extended beyond punctuality or administrative compliance. The findings are consistent with studies linking transformational leadership to teacher creativity, innovation, self-efficacy, and improved teaching practice (Yoserizal et al., 2024). They are also consistent with the literature indicating that intellectual stimulation and supportive leadership can create conditions in which teachers become more confident in experimenting with new instructional practices (Noviyanti et al., 2024). The combination of leadership support and teacher initiative therefore appears to be important in translating transformational leadership into observable classroom practices.

The relationship between transformational leadership and teacher work culture is especially important because culture develops through repeated behavior rather than through isolated leadership events. The present findings show that repeated practices of motivating, listening, appreciating, guiding, and modeling behavior gradually became associated with more disciplined and professional teacher practices. Research on teacher work culture has likewise demonstrated that work culture is closely related to leadership practices and the availability of organizational resources, indicating that teachers' daily behaviors are shaped by both leadership and organizational conditions (Rostiawati,

Sapriati, & Rosita, 2021). A recent study of transformational leadership and school culture further suggests that leadership can contribute to a positive organizational environment characterized by collaboration, openness, and commitment to quality (Permana & Yuslimah, 2025).

The supporting factors identified in this study demonstrate that transformational leadership depends on an organizational ecosystem rather than the principal alone. Teacher willingness to implement programs, foundation support, principal competence, stakeholder awareness, school committee involvement, and adequate facilities collectively strengthened the leadership process. This finding is consistent with systematic evidence showing that transformational leadership is most productive when it is accompanied by collaborative relationships, teacher participation, professional learning opportunities, and supportive school structures (Heenan et al., 2023). A recent study of principals' transformational leadership in Indonesia similarly emphasizes the importance of involving teachers, parents, committees, and other members of the educational community in building a supportive environment for school improvement (Yoserizal et al., 2024). The present case demonstrates that stakeholder support at the madrasah level can function as an enabling condition for translating leadership vision into routine professional practice.

The role of infrastructure also deserves attention because leadership practices require material and organizational support to become sustainable. The availability of LCD projectors, learning spaces, libraries, and other facilities enabled teachers to implement more varied learning approaches and participate in school programs. This finding is consistent with research indicating that teacher work culture is influenced not only by leadership but also by infrastructure and the work environment (Rostiawati, Sapriati, & Rosita, 2021). Recent Indonesian research similarly identifies supportive work climates and organizational conditions as important complements to transformational leadership in improving teacher performance (Nurrizayani, Niswanto, & Usman, 2024). Leadership development therefore needs to be accompanied by attention to the material conditions that enable teachers to act on the expectations communicated by the principal.

The inhibiting factors identified in the study limited funding, limited time, and misunderstandings among some teachers—demonstrate that transformational leadership is implemented within practical organizational constraints. Financial limitations reduced the madrasah's ability to organize extensive professional development activities, while the limited school schedule reduced opportunities for intensive coaching and consultation. Interpersonal misunderstandings also created challenges when leadership guidance was interpreted differently by individual teachers. Such constraints are consistent with the broader literature indicating that transformational leadership is affected by organizational conditions and that positive leadership outcomes require supportive climates, adequate resources, and constructive relationships among staff (Alzoraiki et al., 2024). The present findings suggest that strong interpersonal communication and deliberative problem solving can partially mitigate these constraints, even when material resources remain limited.

The madrasah context provides an important contribution to the interpretation of these findings. The leadership practices observed at MTs NU 02 Gringsing were enacted within an educational environment that simultaneously emphasized teacher professionalism, student participation, moral conduct, non-discrimination, and communal responsibility. Transformational leadership consequently operated not only as a mechanism for improving work performance but also as a process for integrating institutional values into everyday behavior. Recent systematic evidence on educational leadership indicates that transformational principals can foster positive school culture by strengthening empowerment, collaboration, relationships, and shared educational values (Yoserizal et al., 2024). The present study contributes to this literature by showing how these processes are experienced within a specific Indonesian madrasah where leadership practices are embedded in a close, family-oriented organizational environment.

The study also strengthens the argument that transformational leadership should be understood as a multidimensional and relational process. Inspirational motivation alone did not explain the observed changes in teacher work culture; the process was reinforced by intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and idealized influence operating together. Such integration is consistent with the broader empirical literature, in which transformational leadership is associated with teacher motivation, commitment, innovation, school culture, and professional performance through interconnected leadership behaviors rather than through a single dimension (Firmansyah et al., 2022). Research on school organizational culture likewise indicates that leadership effects are strengthened when vision, collaboration, empowerment, and supportive relationships operate simultaneously within the organization (Permana & Yuslimah, 2025). The findings therefore suggest that sustainable improvement in teacher work culture requires a leadership pattern that combines example, inspiration, intellectual challenge, and individualized support.

From a practical perspective, the findings indicate that principals seeking to strengthen teacher work culture should maintain consistency between what they communicate and what they demonstrate in daily practice. Professional development should be connected with opportunities for teachers to experiment, collaborate, and reflect on their

instructional practices rather than being limited to attendance at training activities. Communication with teachers should remain open and personal enough to identify concerns before they develop into resistance or misunderstanding. Recognition of achievement, teacher participation in decision making, and efficient use of available resources can further strengthen ownership of school programs. Such implications are supported by evidence that transformational leadership is most effective when accompanied by teacher participation, collaborative culture, professional learning, and supportive organizational conditions (Heenan et al., 2023).

The distinctive contribution of this study lies in providing a contextual, qualitative account of how transformational leadership is experienced and translated into teacher work culture within a specific Indonesian madrasah. Much of the recent literature establishes relationships between transformational leadership, teacher performance, motivation, school culture, or climate through quantitative designs and broader school samples (Firmansyah et al., 2022). The present findings provide a complementary perspective by showing the concrete practices through which transformational leadership becomes visible in everyday school life: motivating teachers and students, encouraging instructional innovation, listening to individual concerns, modeling discipline, involving stakeholders, and responding to resource and interpersonal constraints. This contextual explanation strengthens understanding of transformational leadership as a lived organizational practice rather than merely a measurable leadership construct.

CONCLUSION

This study provides a contextual understanding of how transformational leadership is enacted in everyday practices at MTs NU 02 Gringsing and how participants perceive its relationship with teacher work culture. The principal's leadership was reflected in four interconnected dimensions: Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration. Participants described perceived developments in teacher discipline, responsibility, independence, professionalism, initiative, and classroom practices. These accounts were supported by observations and school documentation, although the findings do not establish that transformational leadership directly caused these developments.

The study's main contribution lies in explaining how the four dimensions of transformational leadership are expressed through daily interactions, professional encouragement, instructional innovation, individualized support, and exemplary conduct within an Indonesian madrasah. Their implementation was supported by teacher participation, institutional backing, stakeholder involvement, and available facilities, while limited funding, time constraints, and interpersonal misunderstandings presented continuing challenges. These findings suggest that transformational leadership should be considered in relation to the organizational conditions that enable or constrain its everyday practice.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study was conducted at a single madrasah and involved a small, purposively selected group of participants; therefore, its findings provide contextual insights rather than broadly generalizable conclusions. Furthermore, the qualitative design and absence of longitudinal or comparative evidence limit the ability to determine whether the reported developments resulted directly from the principal's leadership. For educational practice, principals may consider integrating role modeling, open communication, professional learning, encouragement of instructional innovation, and individualized support while addressing resource and time constraints. Future research could examine multiple madrasahs and use longitudinal or comparative qualitative designs to explore how transformational leadership practices and teacher work culture develop over time.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Rochani contributed to the conceptualization of the study, research design, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, and preparation and revision of the manuscript. Ghufron Abdullah contributed to research supervision, methodological guidance, critical review, interpretation of findings, and revision of the manuscript. Harjito contributed to academic supervision, critical review, methodological direction, interpretation of findings, and revision of the manuscript. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors declare that this research was prepared, researched, written, and edited without the aid of artificial intelligence (AI) techniques.

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