

Transformational Leadership and Teacher Performance in Islamic Schools: A Structural Equation Modelling Approach in the Era of Educational Disruption

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aims to examine the role of transformational leadership in enhancing teachers' creativity and performance in madrasah contexts, particularly in responding to the challenges of rapid educational change. **Method:** This study employed a quantitative approach using a survey design. Data were collected through questionnaires from 120 Madrasah Aliyah teachers in Purbalingga Regency, selected using convenience sampling. The data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to examine the relationships among transformational leadership, motivation, leader-member exchange (LMX), and teacher performance. **Findings:** The results indicate that transformational leadership has a significant positive effect on LMX ($\beta = 0.358$, $p = 0.012$) and teacher motivation ($\beta = 0.302$, $p = 0.009$), and directly influences teacher performance ($\beta = 0.299$, $p = 0.008$). In addition, motivation ($\beta = 0.299$, $p = 0.014$) and LMX ($\beta = 0.185$, $p = 0.041$) also have significant positive effects on teacher performance. These findings demonstrate that transformational leadership enhances teacher performance both directly and indirectly through motivation and relational quality (LMX). **Research Implications:** The findings highlight the importance of implementing transformational leadership practices to foster supportive relationships, strengthen teacher motivation, and promote improved performance and creativity in educational settings. **Originality:** This study contributes to the literature by empirically examining the mechanism linking transformational leadership, motivation, LMX, and teacher performance in madrasah contexts using SEM analysis.



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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary education systems across the world are currently facing increasingly complex and uncertain challenges driven by rapid technological transformation and globalization (Penalva, 2020; Hajri, 2023). In this context, improving educational quality has become a strategic priority for national development and global competitiveness (Budiharso & Tarman, 2020; Okubo et al., 2021). Consequently, many countries continue to strengthen educational governance, teacher capacity, and institutional effectiveness (Alhussein et al., 2023; Pramana et al., 2021). Among these efforts, school leadership particularly principals plays a critical role in shaping teacher performance and educational quality.

Transformational leadership has been widely recognized as an effective leadership style in education due to its ability to inspire, motivate, and intellectually stimulate teachers (Fauziyah & Maunah, 2022). Prior studies have shown that transformational leadership is associated with improved teacher performance (Moreno-Casado et al., 2022), enhanced engagement (Kuhn et al., 2024), and better learning outcomes (Sahlin, 2023). It also strengthens relational dynamics within schools, particularly through leader-teacher interactions that influence instructional quality (Moreno-Casado et al., 2022).

However, despite these positive findings, empirical evidence on teacher quality in many developing contexts still shows persistent challenges. Reports indicate that teacher competencies, particularly in pedagogy and digital literacy, remain limited and have not fully adapted to technological demands (Saerang et al., 2023; World Bank, 2020). In

Indonesia, international assessments such as PISA also highlight ongoing weaknesses in literacy, numeracy, and scientific reasoning (Rahayu et al., 2024). These conditions suggest that improvements in teacher performance cannot rely solely on policy reforms but require effective school leadership practices (Hawlitschek et al., 2024).

In addition, preliminary observations in madrasah settings indicate that many teachers still depend heavily on principal guidance in instructional practices. Limited intrinsic motivation, low engagement in professional development, and the persistence of conventional teaching approaches remain key challenges (Rahmayanti et al., 2021; Ristianey et al., 2021). This indicates that leadership not only plays an administrative role but also a motivational and developmental role in shaping teacher behavior.

Despite the growing body of research on transformational leadership, several gaps remain. First, most studies focus on direct effects of transformational leadership on teacher performance, while neglecting the underlying relational mechanism such as leader–member exchange (LMX) and motivational factors. Second, limited empirical evidence exists regarding how these variables interact simultaneously in madrasah contexts, which have unique socio-religious and institutional characteristics. Third, inconsistencies in previous findings suggest that the mechanism through which transformational leadership influences teacher performance is still not fully understood (Chen et al., 2022; Nadeem, 2024).

To address these gaps, this study examines the structural relationships between transformational leadership, LMX, teacher motivation, and teacher performance in madrasah settings. Specifically, this study investigates: (1) the effect of transformational leadership on LMX and teacher motivation, (2) the effect of transformational leadership on teacher performance, and (3) the mediating roles of LMX and motivation in shaping teacher performance. By integrating these variables into a single model using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), this study aims to provide a more comprehensive explanation of how leadership contributes to teacher effectiveness.

METHOD

This study employs a quantitative research approach (Johnson & Christensen, 2017) to examine the relationships among transformational leadership, leader–member exchange (LMX), teacher motivation, and teacher performance in Madrasah Aliyah (MA) institutions. The study involved a survey of MA teachers in Purbalingga Regency. A total of 120 teachers from 11 madrasahs participated in this study. Convenience sampling was used due to practical accessibility and the voluntary participation of teachers within institutional constraints. While this technique allows efficient data collection in educational settings, the findings should be interpreted with caution regarding generalizability beyond the sampled institutions, as convenience sampling may limit external validity (Etikan, 2016). Data were collected using structured questionnaires and supported by limited semi-structured interviews. In leadership research, visual and qualitative supports can enrich understanding; Grimm et al. (2023) note that visual methods help participants conceptualize organizational power relations and role dynamics.

Prior to analysis, the research instrument underwent validity and reliability testing. Content validity was ensured through expert judgment from educational management scholars. A pilot test was conducted to refine item clarity. Construct validity was assessed using factor loading criteria, while reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability. Convergent and discriminant validity were further examined using Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and HTMT ratios, following established guidelines (Hair et al., 2019).

The proposed model and hypotheses were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS 4 software. SEM enables simultaneous testing of complex relationships among variables and is widely applied in social and educational research (Rivera et al., 2018). The conceptual framework illustrating the relationships among variables is presented in Figure 1.

Based on this framework, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

- a. H1: LMX positively influences transformational leadership.
- b. H2: Transformational leadership positively affects teacher motivation.
- c. H3: Transformational leadership positively impacts teacher performance.
- d. H4: LMX positively affects teacher performance.
- e. H5: Teacher motivation has a positive effect on teacher performance.

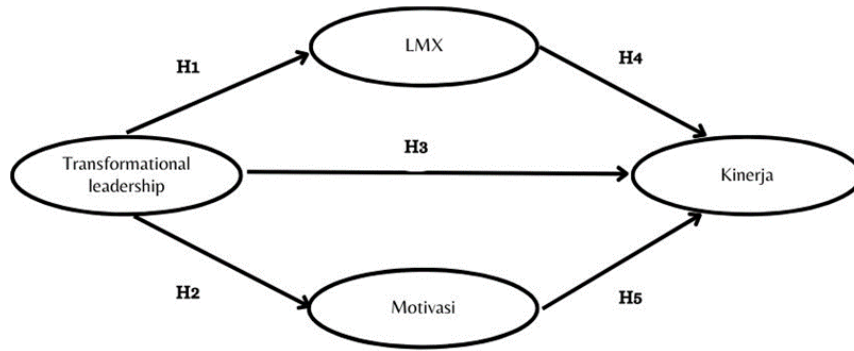


Figure 1. Research Formula Framework

RESULTS

Transformational Leadership in Madrasah

This study consists of two question models, namely open questions and closed questions. The distribution of responses from respondents is the respondents' perception of the variables studied. The responses of the respondents to the transformational leadership variable are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The respondents' answers to transformational leadership variables

No	score scale	Amount	Persentase	Total
1	1 - 2	44	6,3	
2	3 - 4	134	19,1	25,4
3	5 - 6	192	27,5	
4	7 - 8	176	25,2	
5	9 – 10	153	21,9	74,6
Total		700	100,00	

It is evident from Table 1 that 74.6 per cent of respondents answered questions in the transformational leadership variable with more than 5 answers, meaning that teachers have positive answers to the transformational leadership variable. This shows that most of the leadership styles applied to MA are transformational leadership. In addition, it can also be interpreted that the respondents considered their leaders to be sufficient.

As presented in Table 2, most respondents perceive transformational leadership to be highly effective. This perception is reflected in leadership behaviors that emphasize support and professional development for teachers. In particular, leaders demonstrate concern for enhancing teachers' competencies and fostering their growth, which are key characteristics of transformational leadership. These patterns, as illustrated in Table 2, highlight the presence of strong transformational leadership practices.

Table 2. Transformational Leadership Attitude

No	Respondent's answer	Amount	Persentase	Total
1	Respecting the teacher's opinion	145	20,71	93,71
2	Showing exemplary behavior	102	14,57	
3	Provide opportunities for teachers to participate in training, workshops, seminars	132	18,86	
4	Presenting the vision with passion and enthusiasm	91	13,00	
5	Develop vision and mission with teachers	148	21,14	3
6	Provides an opportunity to exchange ideas	38	5,43	
7	Regarding seniority	26	3,71	6,29
8	Not answered	18	2,57	
Total		700	100,00	100,00

Considering Table 2, Evidently, the majority of responders considered that the transformational leadership is very good. Transformational leadership attitudes are supportive of this circumstance. Transformational leadership is shown by the leader's concern for teachers' self-development, and does not see seniority in dividing tasks and trust.

The Structural Factors Model Testing

The findings from the SEM analysis are presented in Table 3. The results indicate that the critical ratio (C.R), which is equivalent to the t-statistic in regression analysis, shows that all estimated coefficients are significantly different from zero ($p < 0.05$). This confirms that the proposed relationships in the model are statistically supported, leading to the acceptance of the alternative hypotheses and the rejection of the null hypotheses.

Table 3. Standardized Regression Weight for Struktural Equation Modeling

Variable	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P values
LMX<--Transformasional_Leadership	0.358	0.143	2.512	0.012
Motivation<--Transformasional_Leadership	0.302	0.116	2.614	0.009
Teacher performance<--Transformasional_Leadership	0.299	0.112	2.667	0.008
Teacher performance <--Motivation	0.299	0.122	2.451	0.014
Teacher performance <--LMX	0.185	0.090	2.047	0.041

Table 3 demonstrates a statistically significant association between transformational leadership and LMX, with a critical ratio (C.R.) value of 2.512, exceeding the t-table criterion ($2.512 > 1.989$). This study found that transformative leadership improves leader-member exchange (LMX), suggesting that stronger transformational leadership practices contribute to improved relationships between madrasah principals and teachers. Furthermore, the C.R. value of 2.234, which is greater than ± 2.00 at a 5% significance level, reinforces the significance of this positive influence. Therefore, the first hypothesis, which proposes a positive impact of transformational leadership on LMX, is supported. The findings also confirm a positive association between LMX and transformational leadership. Leadership practices that actively involve teachers in formulating the vision and mission, while valuing their perspectives, play an important role in strengthening LMX relationships.

Table 3 shows that transformational leadership has a considerable positive impact on teacher motivation, with a critical ratio (C.R.) value of 2.614 exceeding the 5% significance level threshold of ± 1.989 . This research validates the second hypothesis, indicating that transformational leadership by madrasah principals positively affects teachers' job motivation. Teachers who are motivated are more likely to adopt transformational leadership approaches successfully. Leadership that provides strong support and facilitates opportunities for professional growth serves as a key driver of teacher motivation.

Table 3 shows that the critical ratio (C.R.) of 2.667 is higher than the required threshold of 1.989 at a 5% level of significance. Madrasah principals' transformative leadership positively impacts teacher performance, according to statistical analysis. The study found that stronger implementation of transformational leadership leads to improved teacher performance. Thus, the third hypothesis, that transformative leadership enhances teacher performance, is supported. Teacher performance tends to improve when school leaders adopt a transformational leadership approach that encourages creativity and innovation.

LMX on Teacher Performance

As indicated in Table 3, the critical ratio (C.R.) value of 2.047 exceeds the threshold of 1.989 at a 5% significance level, demonstrating that leader-member exchange (LMX) has a significant and positive effect on the performance of madrasah teachers. This finding supports the fourth hypothesis, confirming that stronger LMX relationships contribute to improved teacher performance.

Motivation on Teacher Performance

According to the significance test reported in Table 3, the critical ratio (C.R.) value of 2.451 exceeds the threshold of 1.989 at a 5% significance level, indicating that motivation has a statistically significant and positive effect on madrasah teacher performance. This finding suggests that higher levels of teacher motivation are associated with better performance outcomes. Therefore, the fifth hypothesis, which proposes that motivation enhances teacher performance, is supported.

DISCUSSION

Transformational Leadership and Organizational Mechanisms

The findings confirm that transformational leadership significantly enhances LMX and teacher performance. However, beyond statistical significance, the results suggest that transformational leadership operates primarily through relational and motivational pathways rather than direct control mechanisms. This supports Bass and Riggio's (2005) theory that transformational leaders influence followers by increasing intrinsic motivation and fostering trust-based relationships. In this study, leadership behaviors such as participatory decision-making and professional support appear to reduce hierarchical distance between principals and teachers, strengthening relational exchange quality. However,

the relatively moderate effect size of LMX suggests that relationship quality alone is insufficient unless reinforced by motivational structures. This aligns with Graen and Uhl-Bien's LMX theory, which emphasizes that high-quality exchanges require continuous reinforcement through organizational support systems.

Motivation as the Strongest Psychological Driver

Motivation emerged as a strong predictor of teacher performance, confirming Herzberg's motivation theory that internal motivators such as recognition and achievement are more influential than external factors (Herzberg, 1966). Interestingly, the results suggest that transformational leadership indirectly strengthens performance by enhancing teacher motivation. This indicates a potential mediating role of motivation, which is often overlooked in prior studies. Collie et al. (2023) also emphasize that autonomy-supportive leadership enhances teachers' psychological engagement, which directly translates into better classroom performance.

Critical Reflection on Leadership Impact

Although transformational leadership shows strong effects, the findings also reveal that its influence is not uniform. The moderate effect sizes suggest that contextual factors such as organizational culture in madrasahs may moderate leadership effectiveness. In Islamic educational settings, hierarchical traditions may still influence teacher responsiveness to leadership changes. This may explain why transformational leadership does not fully translate into maximal performance gains without strong motivational reinforcement.

Broader Implications

The study highlights that improving teacher performance requires a combined approach: leadership transformation, relational trust (LMX), and motivational enhancement. This supports the view that educational leadership effectiveness is multi-dimensional rather than linear. According to Day et al. (2016), sustainable school improvement depends on aligning leadership practices with teacher psychological needs and institutional culture.

Research Limitations

This study has several limitations: (a) Contextual limitation: The study is limited to madrasahs in one regency, which restricts generalizability. (b) Cross-sectional design: The data capture perceptions at one time point, limiting causal inference. (c) Measurement limitation: Although validity and reliability were tested, self-reported data may introduce bias. (d) Model limitation: The study does not include mediating or moderating variables such as organizational culture or job satisfaction, which may further explain performance outcomes. Future research should incorporate longitudinal designs and multi-level modeling to better capture dynamic leadership effects in educational institutions.

Overall, transformational leadership plays a central role in improving teacher performance, but its effectiveness is mediated through motivation and LMX. The findings emphasize that leadership alone is insufficient without strong psychological and relational support systems within schools.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study, transformational leadership practiced by madrasah principals significantly influences leader-member exchange (LMX), teacher motivation, and teacher performance. The findings indicate that transformational leadership not only improves interpersonal relationships between principals and teachers, but also strengthens teachers' intrinsic motivation, which ultimately contributes to better instructional performance.

Scientifically, this study contributes to the growing body of educational leadership research by empirically confirming that transformational leadership functions as a key driver of teacher performance both directly and indirectly through LMX and motivation. This highlights the importance of integrating relational and psychological mechanisms in explaining leadership effectiveness in madrasah contexts.

Practically, the findings suggest that madrasah principals should prioritize participatory leadership practices, strengthen communication with teachers, and provide continuous professional support to enhance motivation and performance outcomes. Policy makers in Islamic education institutions are encouraged to design leadership development programs that emphasize transformational leadership competencies, particularly in building trust, collaboration, and teacher empowerment.

For future research, it is recommended that studies include additional mediating or moderating variables such as organizational culture, job satisfaction, or teacher engagement, as well as employ longitudinal or multi-level designs to better capture the dynamic effects of leadership over time.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

W contributed to conceptualization, research design, data collection, formal analysis, and manuscript drafting. CS contributed to theoretical framework development, validation, and critical revision of the manuscript. AK was responsible for methodology, data analysis using SEM, and interpretation of results. NMI contributed to data curation, literature review, and manuscript editing. AZ contributed to supervision, review, and final approval of the manuscript. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors used ChatGPT during the preparation of this work for language refinement and editing purposes. After using the tool, the authors thoroughly reviewed and revised the content and take full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the publication.

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