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Research Article

Transformational Leadership and Teacher Competency Enhancement: Lessons from Faith-Based Private Schools in Remote Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: This study examines how a principal operationalizes transformational leadership strategies to enhance teacher competencies, identify institutional challenges, and develop a contextual leadership framework in a resource-constrained, faith-based private middle school in remote Indonesia.

Methodology: A qualitative single-case study design was executed using purposeful sampling (N = 8). Data collection tools included semi-structured interviews, non-participant classroom observations, and analysis of institutional documents. Qualitative analysis followed the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana interactive data condensation model, and trustworthiness was established using Lincoln and Guba's evaluative framework.

Main Findings: The principal operationalized transformational leadership through a three-phase onboarding cycle, weekly spiritual mentoring (*Bina Pribadi Islam*), and internal frugal professional development. These strategies bridged pedagogical divergence among early-career educators, mitigated early-career pedagogical shock, and aligned staff with integrated curricula, while circumventing systemic exclusion from state-funded training through internal, peer-led networks.

Novelty/Originality of this study: This study establishes a Contextualized Hybrid Leadership Framework, revealing how transformational and spiritual leadership converges through frugal educational innovation. It advances existing knowledge by demonstrating how resource-constrained private faith-based schools overcome state-level policy barriers by leveraging internal social capital and communities of practice to build teacher self-efficacy.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Teacher professional competence is universally recognized as a foundational pillar for sustaining educational quality, driving student achievement, and fostering long-term institutional resilience [1]. In contemporary educational discourse, the demands placed upon educators have shifted from mere information delivery to holistic pedagogical facilitation [2]. This paradigm shift is particularly pronounced within faith-based educational ecosystems, such as Integrated Islamic Middle Schools in Indonesia. In these institutions, teachers

operate under rigorous dual-role expectations: they are mandated to fulfill standardized national competencies—encompassing pedagogical mastery, professional knowledge, personal integrity, and social adaptability while simultaneously serving as spiritual mentors (murobbi) responsible for integrating Islamic values, fostering moral character, and implementing integrated curriculum frameworks [3], [4].

Despite the noble framework of faith-based education, operationalizing this dual-role capacity presents significant socio-pedagogical hurdles, particularly in resource-constrained or emerging rural regions [5]-[7]. Teachers in these localized settings frequently confront structural limitations, including restricted access to state-sponsored professional development, inadequate instructional technology, and intense workload pressures stemming from full-day schooling schedules [8], [9]. Furthermore, a critical pedagogical mismatch emerges when early-career educators largely recruited from conventional, non-religious higher education institutions enter the Integrated Islamic Middle Schools system without prior exposure to faith-integrated instructional design or spiritual mentoring protocols [10]-[12]. Consequently, these intersecting pressures heighten the risk of professional burnout, pedagogical ambiguity, and operational disorientation, directly jeopardizing instructional quality and institutional retention.

While an extensive body of literature has evaluated school leadership and teacher professional development, existing scholarship exhibits notable empirical and geographical biases [13]-[16]. A substantial majority of leadership studies focus predominantly on public and large-scale urban schools, where administrative infrastructure is well-established and resource allocation is relatively stable [17]-[19]. Conversely, the precise mechanisms through which principal leadership drives capacity-building within private, faith-based secondary schools in peripheral or developing regions remain drastically under-researched. Furthermore, while the paradigm of transformational leadership [20]-[22] has been widely celebrated for enhancing general organizational performance and teacher satisfaction [23]-[26], its nuanced execution within Islamic educational contexts specifically the strategic synthesis of spiritual values, individualized consideration (individualized mentoring), and intellectual stimulation in small-scale environments lacks sufficient empirical articulation.

To bridge this empirical and theoretical divide, this study examines the operationalization of transformational principal leadership in enhancing teacher professional competencies within a private faith-based middle school in Tanjung Jabung Timur, Jambi Province, Indonesia. Establishing its operations in a developing district adjacent to regional administrative centers, this institution presents a compelling case study defined by unique organizational dynamics. Notably, the school operates with an exceptionally high teacher-to-student ratio (~1:3), consisting of 23 educators managing 74 students. While such a ratio theoretically offers unprecedented avenues for personalized supervision, direct clinical mentoring, and tight-knit collaborative governance, it simultaneously exposes the administrative strain of aligning a young, diverse teaching staff with the stringent standards of the Integrated Islamic School Network (JSIT).

Investigating this specific educational setting yields significant scholarly value for global educational leadership literature. Rather than viewing resource constraints and rural geographic positioning purely as operational deficits, this research treats the institutional setting as a rich environment for examining leadership adaptability and resource-constrained innovation [27]-[28]. Understanding how a principal leverages transformational leadership dimensions specifically idealized influence (role modeling), inspirational motivation (vision alignment), intellectual stimulation (pedagogical innovation), and individualized consideration (contextual coaching) provides a crucial model for institutional survival and academic growth. The findings contribute directly to the broader academic discourse on educational governance, offering scalable insights for faith-based and community-driven private schools operating under similar socio-economic conditions across the Global South.

Guided by these imperative contextual and theoretical parameters, this study aims to systematically analyze and formulate a contextual framework for principal leadership in faith-based teacher development. Specifically, the investigation addresses three central research questions: a) How does the principal operationalize transformational leadership strategies encompassing idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration to cultivate teacher competencies within a faith-based private middle school? b) What institutional, structural, and contextual challenges impede sustainable teacher competency development within this specialized educational ecosystem? c) How can an integrated leadership framework be formulated to optimize continuous, resilient, and context-responsive teacher professional development in resource-constrained private Islamic schools?

2. RESEARCH METHOD

To investigate how principal leadership shapes teacher capacity-building within a faith-based educational setting, this study employed a qualitative single-case study design [29], [30]. A single-case study is uniquely suited for examining complex, context-bound leadership behaviors and organizational dynamics within real-world educational institutions [31], [32]. The research was conducted at Integrated Islamic Middle Schools Nurul Hikmah, an Integrated Islamic Middle School located in Tanjung Jabung Timur Regency, Indonesia.

Operating in an emerging rural area with a full-day schooling model, this institutional setting presents a unique organizational profile defined by a high teacher-to-student ratio (~1:3; 23 teachers instructing 74 students). Using purposeful sampling [33], [34], key informants *(N = 8)* were selected based on their strategic roles in instructional governance and professional development, comprising the school principal *(n = 1),* the vice principal for curriculum affairs (n = 1), senior and junior teachers representing both general and religious disciplines *(n = 5)*, and an academic quality assurance officer (n = 1).

Data were collected over a five-month field investigation through three complementary qualitative techniques [35]. First, semi-structured in-depth interviews (lasting 45–90 minutes each) were conducted using a protocol grounded in Bass and Avolio's (1994) four dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Second, non-participant field observations were carried out during weekly teacher coordination meetings, clinical supervision sessions in classrooms, internal workshops (In-House Training), and teacher spiritual mentoring routines (Bina Pribadi Islam). Third, documentary analysis was performed on institutional artifacts, including the school strategic plan, principal supervision logs, teacher performance evaluations, and internal training modules. All interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent and transcribed verbatim to maintain empirical fidelity.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana [36], progressing through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Transcripts, observational field notes, and documents were systematically coded into primary thematic categories aligning with transformational leadership dimensions and institutional challenges. Methodological rigor and trustworthiness were ensured using Lincoln and Guba's [37] evaluative framework: credibility was established through source/method triangulation and member-checking; transferability was supported via thick, contextual descriptions of the faith-based rural setting; and dependability and confirmability were maintained through a comprehensive audit trail documenting raw analytical decisions and coding schemes.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Empirical observations reveal that the institutional ecosystem operates under a highly specialized structural configuration, characterized by an exceptionally low teacher-to-student ratio of one teacher to three students comprising twenty-three educators managing seventy-four students within a full-day schooling framework. The faculty profile is demographically skewed toward early-career educators, with the median age falling below thirty years, and exhibits significant educational heterogeneity, split almost evenly between graduates of secular state universities at fifty-two percent and Islamic higher education institutions at forty-eight percent. To bridge this pedagogical and ideological divergence, the principal operationalizes transformational leadership through a three-phase onboarding program, institutionalized spiritual mentoring (Bina Pribadi Islam), and localized capacity-building networks. These leadership mechanisms collectively address the dual-role demand placed on educators requiring simultaneous mastery in national curriculum delivery and faith-integrated character modeling.

To map the empirical data against established leadership constructs, Table 1 synthesizes the core operational strategies, their execution mechanisms, and the corresponding institutional outcomes observed during the field investigation.

Table 1. Empirical Findings Matrix of Transformational Leadership Operationalization

Theoretical Dimension	Operational Strategy	Execution Mechanism	Empirical Outcome
Individualized Consideration	3-Month Structured Onboarding	Phase I: Culture Immersion & Observation; Phase II: Guided Co-Teaching & Feedback; Phase III: Evaluated Autonomous Delivery	Mitigated early-career pedagogical shock; aligned secular graduates with TERPADU syntax
Idealized Influence	Institutionalized Spiritual Mentoring	Weekly Bina Pribadi Islam (BPI) sessions led by leadership and senior mentors	High faculty moral alignment; established spiritual role-modeling (qudwah hasanah) as professional core.
Intellectual Stimulation	Frugal Professional Development	In-House Training (IHT), peer coaching, and internal micro-workshops	Countered systemic exclusion from state-funded training; built internal problem-solving capacity.
Inspirational Motivation	Dual-Vision Alignment	Integration of national educational standards with JSIT faith-based mandates	Enhanced organizational commitment despite dense full-day operational schedules.

Despite these structured interventions, the implementation ecosystem encounters substantial external and structural constraints that limit optimal capacity expansion. Systemic marginalization by local educational authorities frequently excludes private faith-based schools from state-funded professional training initiatives, while strict national policies such as the minimum 5-year tenure requirement for the Guru Penggerak program disqualify the institution's predominantly young faculty. Furthermore, the temporal compression inherent in full-day schooling restricts the time available for external professional development without disrupting classroom hours. To circumvent these structural bottlenecks, the leadership exercises frugal innovation, leveraging internal social capital, peer-to-peer mentoring, and internal quality assurance audits to sustain continuous professional learning without relying on external state infrastructure.

Empirical findings indicate that implementing transformational leadership in resource-constrained, faith-based secondary schools requires a contextual synthesis integrated with structured human resource development mechanisms. School principals bridge pedagogical and ideological divides—stemming from disparities in teaching staff backgrounds, such as differences between graduates of secular public universities and alumni of Islamic higher education institutions—through targeted capacity-building strategies. By applying the principle of individualized consideration via a three-phase structured orientation cycle (immersion, guided collaborative teaching, and evaluated independent practice), leadership provides instructional scaffolding [38]–[41]. This approach mitigates the pedagogical shock novice educators experience and accelerates adoption of the integrated learning framework. Furthermore, the institutionalization of *Bina Pribadi Islam* (BPI)—a program for Islamic personal development—extends the classical concept of transformational leadership [42]–[44] into the realm of Spiritual Leadership [45]–[47]. The active participation of leadership in weekly spiritual mentoring sessions serves as a mechanism for idealized influence, establishing moral exemplarity (*qudwah hasanah*) as a vital dimension of professional competence, on par with conventional academic metrics.

The primary novelty of this study lies in its conceptualization of a Contextualized Hybrid Leadership Framework. This framework addresses the dual-role challenges novice educators in private schools with limited networks face: mastering national curriculum standards while also serving as role models for character integrated with religious values. While existing literature generally addresses transformational leadership within resource-rich, secular contexts—or focuses exclusively on abstract spiritual leadership within religious institutions—this research reveals how dimensions of transformational and spiritual leadership can be operationally integrated through frugal educational innovation [48]-[50]. Specifically, this study presents an empirical model demonstrating how resource-constrained private schools can overcome systemic marginalization—such as exclusion from state-funded training or rigid national tenure requirements—by leveraging internal social capital [51]-[53] and peer-led Communities of Practice [54]-[56]. This process fosters sustained teacher self-efficacy [57]-[59] without reliance on external financial or governmental support.

These findings carry significant theoretical and practical implications for educational management in developing regions. Theoretically, this study expands transformational leadership theory by showing that leadership effectiveness in faith-based private schools depends heavily on integrating institutionalized spiritual training with scaffolded peer mentoring. Practically, the three-month onboarding model and the frugal capacity-building system identified in this research offer an operational blueprint that other private school administrators can replicate to improve novice teacher retention, bridge gaps in academic backgrounds, and maintain instructional continuity despite limited access to government-led training programs. In policy terms, these results highlight an urgent need for educational authorities to reform professional development policies by creating more inclusive, decentralized access to training that supports early-career educators in non-state, full-day school ecosystems.

4. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the strategic operationalization of principal leadership in enhancing teacher competencies within a resource-constrained, faith-based private middle school operating under a full-day system in remote Indonesia. The empirical findings indicate that principal leadership transforms recruitment and talent onboarding into a rigorous, multi-tiered quality assurance mechanism. Rather than relying solely on formal academic credentials, the leadership operationalizes a selective entry protocol combined with a structured three-phase, three-month onboarding program encompassing cultural immersion and syntax mastery, guided co-teaching with faith-integrated lesson planning, and evaluated autonomous delivery. This systematic scaffold effectively bridges the pedagogical and ideological divergence between secular and Islamic higher education graduates while mitigating early-career reality shock. Furthermore, competence enhancement extends beyond standard national metrics to institutionalize spiritual mentoring (*Bina Pribadi Islam*) and Quranic integration, framing spiritual role-modeling (qudwah hasanah) as a core professional requirement. However, the operationalization of teacher capacity-building remains constrained by intersecting structural and regulatory bottlenecks, including systemic marginalization by local education authorities regarding state-funded training quotas, rigid government tenure requirements that exclude early-career faculty, dense full-day schooling

schedules, and initial baseline heterogeneity among new recruits. To circumvent these systemic constraints without state or external financial dependency, the leadership exercises frugal educational innovation through a contextualized hybrid capacity-building model that leverages internal social capital via structured In-House Training (IHT), peer mentoring, digital self-paced learning, and strategic networking with the Integrated Islamic School Network (JSIT).

Overall, the empirical findings and subsequent analysis in the results and discussion chapters directly fulfill the theoretical and contextual expectations outlined in the introduction. While the study set out to examine how transformational leadership operates within a faith-based, resource-constrained secondary school facing dual-role expectations, the findings successfully demonstrate that principal leadership achieves this through the interplay of structured onboarding, spiritual mentorship, and frugal innovation, establishing complete compatibility between initial research objectives and observed field realities. Building upon this established framework, several promising avenues for future research and practical application emerge. Future studies should quantitatively test and validate the three-month onboarding model across a broader sample of private Islamic schools in various rural regions to evaluate its longitudinal impact on teacher retention and student character outcomes. Additionally, subsequent research could explore the integration of lightweight, low-bandwidth e-learning platforms to scale peer-led communities of practice within network-sparse areas, while action-oriented policy research should investigate pathways to formally incorporate internal private-school mentorship programs into national teacher professional development certification standards.

The theoretical and practical contributions of this study offer meaningful insights for educational management, particularly within resource-sparse environments across the Global South. Scientifically, this study advances educational leadership literature by conceptualizing a Contextualized Hybrid Leadership Framework that integrates classical Transformational Leadership with Spiritual Leadership and Experiential Learning Theory. It extends talent management models in private religious schooling by proving that a scaffolded onboarding cycle combined with institutionalized spiritual mentoring serves as a vital structural buffer that mitigates early-career attrition, enhances teacher self-efficacy, and demonstrates how peripheral private schools build institutional resilience through peer-led Communities of Practice and internal social capital in lieu of state infrastructure. Managerially, the findings offer a scalable operational blueprint for school administrators, demonstrating that sustainable teacher quality requires an integrated human resource lifecycle combining rigorous pre-service onboarding, clinical peer-mentoring, and continuous spiritual alignment to withstand full-day operational demands. For educators, this structured mentorship fosters a collaborative school culture that boosts emotional resilience against full-day teaching fatigue and develops instructional mastery in synthesizing national curricula with faith-integrated character education. Finally, from a policy perspective, the results highlight an urgent need for government educational authorities to reform decentralized teacher professional development policies by creating inclusive, flexible training access for early-career educators in non-state institutions, thereby dismantling systemic barriers that hinder private-sector educational quality.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization, R.S. and J.; Methodology, R.S. and K.I.R.; Formal Analysis, R.S. and J.; Investigation, R.S. and J.; Data Curation, R.S.; Writing – Original Draft Preparation, R.S.; Writing – Review & Editing, J. and K.I.R.; Validation, K.I.R. and J.; Supervision, K.I.R. and J.; Project Administration, R.S. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author(s) declare no conflict of interest.

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants involved in the study. Prior to data collection, each participant was provided with a detailed explanation regarding the research objectives, qualitative procedures, audio-recording protocols, and guarantees of confidentiality. All participants voluntarily

agreed to participate and signed a written informed consent form prior to the commencement of field investigations. All images in this article have been authorized and are the property of the authors.

USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGY

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in the generation, analysis, or writing of this manuscript. All aspects of the research, including data collection, interpretation, and manuscript preparation, were carried out entirely by the authors without the assistance of AI-based technologies.

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