



The Principal's Transformational Leadership in Enhancing Teacher Performance in the Digital Era

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Abstract

This study is motivated by the challenges faced by Islamic educational institutions in the digital era, where teachers are required to adapt to technological developments without neglecting spiritual values in the learning process. The main problem identified is the low performance of teachers in utilizing educational technology and developing innovative learning, partly influenced by the lack of visionary and transformational leadership at the principal level. This study aims to analyze how the transformational leadership of the school principal can improve teacher performance at MI Fattahul Huda Pungpungan. The research employs a qualitative approach with a field research design, using in-depth interviews, direct observation, and document analysis. The findings show that the principal applies four dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Through the application of these values, the principal is able to build motivation, enhance professionalism, and encourage teachers to innovate in digital-based learning. Furthermore, the religious and moral values instilled by the principal reinforce teachers' integrity and work ethic. The implications of this study emphasize that transformational leadership grounded in Islamic values is not only relevant for addressing the challenges of the digital era but also effective in creating a collaborative, innovative, and integrity-driven work culture within Islamic educational settings.

Keywords

Transformational Leadership, Teacher Performance, Digital Era

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the fundamental factors in building the quality of human resources that are superior, competitive, and characterized in the era of globalization (Amet, 2023; Budiarto et al., 2024). The changing times, marked by advances in information and communication technology, have brought about a major transformation in the field of education, including in leadership and school management patterns (Rodney, 2020). The principal, as the leader of an educational institution, has a



strategic responsibility to direct the vision, mission, and goals of the school to align with the demands of the changing times (Kipasika, 2024; Palah et al., 2022). Adaptive and innovative leadership becomes the key to the success of educational institutions in surviving and developing amid rapid changes (Fernandes et al., 2023; Mukaram et al., 2021). Therefore, transformational leadership has become one of the most relevant and necessary leadership models in the context of modern education.

Transformational leadership emphasizes a leader's ability to inspire, motivate, and guide teachers to work with high enthusiasm and to adapt to change (Yakob et al., 2025). In the educational context, a principal who applies a transformational leadership style does not only focus on achieving administrative targets but also acts as an agent of change who encourages teachers to continuously innovate in learning (Sliwka et al., 2024). A transformational principal is able to foster a positive work climate, strengthen professional commitment, and develop teachers' potential to face the challenges of the 21st century (Ermita & Baysa, 2025). Such leadership not only creates a harmonious working relationship but also builds a creative learning environment oriented toward improving student learning outcomes.

The paradigm shift in education in the digital era requires principals to develop visionary and technology-based leadership strategies (Okunlola & Naicker, 2025; Syahfitri, 2025). The digitalization of education demands that teachers be able to adapt to various digital learning platforms, integrate technology into teaching processes, and develop students' digital literacy (Alenezi et al., 2023; Falloon, 2020). In this situation, principals are required not only to serve as administrators but also as inspirers and facilitators of change (Cheng & Szeto, 2016). Through transformational leadership, principals are expected to cultivate a culture of innovation, collaboration, and continuous learning within the school environment. Thus, transformational leadership becomes an urgent necessity for educational institutions in facing a fast-paced and competitive digital era.

However, in reality, many schools still face various challenges in implementing leadership in the digital era. Some principals still tend to apply conventional, top-down, and bureaucratic leadership styles, which provide limited room for teachers to participate in decision-making processes. This condition leads to low work motivation, lack of creativity, and resistance to change among teachers. In addition, principals' abilities to utilize digital technology for school management and academic supervision are still limited. As a result, digital transformation in schools does not run optimally and



impacts teachers' performance, particularly in technological innovation in teaching. This problem indicates the need for a more humanistic, participatory, and visionary leadership approach—transformational leadership that can change teachers' mindsets and work culture toward professionalism in the digital era.

Several previous studies have highlighted the importance of transformational leadership in improving teacher performance. The research conducted by Elevenson Nadapda et al. (2025) shows that digital competence, work-life balance, and transformational leadership positively influence teacher productivity in rural schools through increased job satisfaction. These findings confirm that job satisfaction is a key factor mediating the relationship between these variables and teacher productivity (Nadapdap et al., 2025). Research written by Wini Handayani, et al. states that transformational leadership of school principals has been proven to be a key driver in accelerating the implementation of digital learning in elementary schools. This leadership style enhances teacher readiness, encourages innovation, and strengthens a school culture that supports digital transformation (Handayani et al., 2025).

Research written by Septana Nur Hidayat et al. states that the transformational leadership competence of school principals significantly enhances teacher performance through providing motivation, inspiration, and effective guidance. Principals who are able to serve as role models and encourage innovation have been proven to create a more productive and high-quality work environment (Hidayat et al., 2023). Research conducted by Novi Susanti et al. shows that school principals' transformational leadership and teachers' digital literacy have a significant positive influence on the professionalism of public high school teachers. The combination of both enhances teachers' ability to adapt, innovate, and perform professional duties more effectively (Susanti et al., 2023).

Based on previous studies, there is a research gap that is interesting to explore further, namely how the transformational leadership of principals can effectively improve teacher performance in the digital era, especially in Islamic educational institutions or vocational schools. Previous research has mostly discussed aspects of motivation and job satisfaction, while studies on concrete strategies used by principals to leverage digital technology in improving teacher performance remain limited. Moreover, the novelty of this research lies in the integration of transformational leadership and digital



adaptation within the context of Islamic education, which not only emphasizes managerial aspects but also spiritual, ethical, and humanitarian values as the foundation of leadership.

Based on this description, this study aims to analyze and describe how principals' transformational leadership can enhance teacher performance in the digital era. It also seeks to identify supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation of transformational leadership, as well as its impact on teachers' motivation, professionalism, and innovation in technology-based learning. The findings of this study are expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of modern educational leadership concepts and practical implications for principals in managing change in a digitally driven era full of challenges and opportunities.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design focused on analyzing the transformational leadership of school principals in improving teacher performance in the digital era. (Luthfiah, 2017) This approach was chosen because it provides ample opportunity for the researcher to deeply understand the processes, meanings, and dynamics of school leadership within real-life contexts. The research was conducted at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) Fattahul Huda Pungpungan, located in Kalitidu District, Bojonegoro Regency—an Islamic elementary institution that demonstrates a strong commitment to adapting to digital technology developments. The researcher acted as the main instrument, directly interacting with the research subjects to obtain natural and in-depth data. This approach allowed the researcher to explore how the principal functions as an agent of change who inspires, motivates, and guides teachers to transform their professional practices amid the accelerating pace of digital transformation.

Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis to obtain comprehensive and credible data (Khilmiyah, 2016). Interviews were conducted with the principal, teachers, and educational staff to gather insights, experiences, and strategies related to transformational leadership practices. Participatory observation was carried out by directly observing classroom activities, interactions between the principal and teachers, as well as the implementation of the school's digitalization programs. Meanwhile, documentation served to complement primary data through the review of school documents such as the institution's vision and mission statements, annual work plans, teacher competency development programs, supervision



reports, and performance evaluations. To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, this study applied source and method triangulation by comparing data from interviews, observations, and documentation, thereby producing accurate and scientifically accountable results.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification (Huberman & others, 2019). During the data reduction stage, the researcher selected and simplified relevant data according to the research focus, then presented it in descriptive narrative form to facilitate understanding of the transformational leadership patterns identified at MI Fattahul Huda Pungpungan. The process of drawing conclusions was conducted continuously from the beginning of data collection until the final stage to derive the substantive meanings of each field finding. The credibility of the research results was ensured through techniques of credibility, dependability, and confirmability by conducting member checks and peer discussions. Through this method, the study is expected to provide an in-depth understanding of the transformational leadership practices of the school principal, who plays a crucial role in developing professional, creative, and adaptive teachers capable of meeting the demands of the digital era.

RESULT DAN DISCUSSION

RESULT

a. Forms of Transformational Leadership of the Principal at MI Fattahul Huda Pungpungan

The transformational leadership of the principal at *MI Fattahul Huda Pungpungan* is clearly reflected through a leadership style that emphasizes inspiration, exemplary conduct, and moral guidance in every managerial aspect of the school. The principal does not merely act as a decision-maker but also serves as a role model who inspires and motivates teachers to innovate and grow. In daily practice, the principal demonstrates openness, effective communication, and empathy toward the needs and conditions of each teacher. This approach fosters a more harmonious and productive work environment within the school. Teachers feel a sense of meaning in their work and are motivated to give their best performance for the advancement of the institution. Such a leadership pattern illustrates that the principal has successfully positioned himself not only as an administrator but as an inspirer who cultivates a positive and visionary organizational culture.



The principal also exhibits transformational qualities through a long-term vision that emphasizes the integration of Islamic values with the advancement of digital technology. In various meetings and internal forums, the principal consistently reminds teachers that institutional progress cannot be achieved merely through hard work, but also through smart work and adaptability to the times. He encourages all teachers to utilize technology as a learning medium—through the use of digital learning applications, online-based administrative systems, and social media for school activity promotion. This visionary leadership has become a source of new energy for teachers to innovate, particularly in developing more interactive and relevant learning approaches that suit the characteristics of today's digital generation of students.

In its implementation, the principal practices *inspirational motivation* by providing strong moral encouragement to teachers through motivational words and personal approaches. He often organizes informal meetings to share experiences, listen to challenges, and instill a spirit of optimism amid the challenges of educational digitalization. His humble yet assertive attitude creates a conducive atmosphere for the growth of teachers' intrinsic motivation. Thus, transformational leadership at *MI Fattahul Huda Pungpungan* is not solely result-oriented toward performance improvement but also focuses on shaping the character and moral commitment of educators.

Another hallmark of the principal's transformational leadership in this institution is the ability to foster *intellectual stimulation* encouraging teachers to think creatively and find new ways to solve instructional problems. The principal grants teachers responsible academic freedom to innovate in teaching methods and media. He discourages monotonous teaching practices and motivates every teacher to continually update their knowledge through digital training, educational webinars, and collaboration with other schools. This encouragement of innovation creates a learning environment that is adaptive to technological change and fosters collective awareness that every teacher is a lifelong learner.

The principal also strengthens *individualized consideration* by giving personal attention to the needs and potential of each teacher. He recognizes that not all teachers possess the same level of digital competence or experience, making a personalized approach key to successful transformation. Teachers with limited digital skills receive direct mentoring and simple training to



enhance their abilities, while those who are already proficient are given opportunities to share best practices through internal school forums. This humanistic approach makes teachers feel valued and motivated to continuously improve themselves without feeling pressured by the changes.

Ultimately, the transformational leadership model implemented at *MI Fattahul Huda Pungpungan* has successfully created synergy between religious vision and the spirit of digital innovation. The principal functions not only as an administrative leader but also as a cultural architect who fosters creativity, independence, and sincerity among educators. This leadership model stands as a concrete example of how Islamic spiritual values can harmoniously coexist with the demands of educational modernization in the digital era.

b. Strategies of the Principal in Improving Teacher Performance in the Digital Era

The madrasah principal plays a central role in enhancing teacher performance through inspirational and empowering leadership strategies. By providing clear direction, fostering open communication, and creating a supportive work environment, the principal encourages teachers to be more professional and innovative in carrying out their duties. Support in the form of training, continuous coaching, and appreciation for teacher achievements further strengthens their motivation to improve. In addition, the principal's exemplary discipline, integrity, and work ethic exert a strong influence on teachers in enhancing the quality of learning. Through these efforts, teacher performance grows more optimally and contributes positively to the overall quality of education in the madrasah. There are several strategies employed by the head of the madrasah to improve teacher performance at MI Fattahul Huda Pungpungan, namely:

1. Integration of vision strengthening, competency development, spiritual guidance, and work motivation.

The principal plays an active role in formulating the school's vision and mission, which emphasize mastery of educational technology grounded in Islamic values. He underscores that teachers must be able to adapt to technological developments without abandoning moral principles and Islamic ethics. This vision is then translated into various concrete programs, such as training on the use of digital learning applications, the development of technology-based teaching materials, and the implementation of an online teacher administration system. Through these initiatives, the principal has successfully mobilized all elements of the school



community to share a common commitment to enhancing the quality of education in the digital era.

2. Intensive training and mentoring activities

The principal collaborates with educational institutions and technology practitioners to provide training on the use of digital platforms such as Google Classroom, Canva for Education, and Learning Management Systems (LMS). Beyond technical training, the principal also encourages teachers to apply the knowledge gained from these trainings in their daily teaching practices. Regular evaluations are conducted through academic supervision and teacher performance reflection forums. Thus, professional development is not merely ceremonial but becomes an integral part of a sustainable and contextual work culture aligned with the needs of the school.

3. Motivation- and role-model-based leadership.

He presents himself as a leader who is open to innovation, actively engaged in digitalization efforts, and consistently provides concrete examples of technology use within the school environment. For instance, the principal utilizes digital media to deliver announcements, prepares reports through online systems, and manages administrative documents using data-sharing applications. This exemplary conduct fosters confidence and positive imitation among teachers. They feel encouraged to follow the principal's lead, seeing that digital transformation is not merely demanded but directly demonstrated by their leader.

4. Two-way communication and a collaborative culture as key components of performance improvement strategies.

He holds regular meetings to discuss the challenges teachers face in adapting to digital practices and welcomes feedback for improving work programs. Each teacher is given the opportunity to share ideas or innovations that can be implemented in technology-based learning. This participatory approach creates an inclusive work atmosphere and fosters a sense of belonging among teachers. In these forums, the principal acts as a facilitator who bridges creative ideas with school policies, ensuring that every teacher feels they have made a meaningful contribution to the school's progress.



5. Spiritual and moral guidance to maintain a balance between technological advancement and Islamic values

The principal routinely incorporates religious talks (*tausiyah*), collective prayers, and Islamic studies into all teacher activities. The aim is to ensure that technological advancement does not cause teachers to lose their spiritual orientation. This guidance instills the awareness that technology is merely a tool, while the essence of Islamic education remains focused on shaping students' character and personality. Through this approach, the principal successfully integrates educational digitalization with the spiritual development of teachers, creating a harmony between digital intelligence and moral intelligence.

6. Implementation of performance evaluation based on appreciation and reward systems to motivate teachers in implementing digital innovations

Teachers who successfully develop technology-based learning media or achieve high learning outcomes are publicly recognized and rewarded. Recognition extends beyond material rewards to include social acknowledgment in front of colleagues. This system fosters healthy competition among teachers without causing envy, as every success is regarded as a collective achievement. Through this comprehensive strategy, the principal has successfully cultivated a work culture that is adaptive, productive, and oriented toward the professional development of teachers in the digital era.

c. **Challenges and Solutions in Implementing Transformational Leadership in the Digital Era**

Transformational leadership in the digital era emphasizes the ability of leaders to inspire, guide, and empower their teams to adapt to rapid technological changes while fostering a culture of innovation and continuous learning. Leaders in this era are expected to articulate a clear vision, encourage creative problem solving, and support the development of digital competencies among their members. They build trust through strong communication, model adaptability, and motivate individuals to embrace new tools and approaches. By nurturing collaboration, offering personalized support, and promoting a forward-thinking mindset, transformational leaders help organizations remain resilient, agile, and competitive in an increasingly digital landscape. Although



transformational leadership at MI Fattahul Huda Pungpungan has had a significant positive impact, its implementation is not without various structural and cultural challenges..

1. Limited technological facilities and infrastructure within the school environment

Some equipment, such as computers, internet networks, and projectors, are still insufficient in quantity to optimally support digital-based learning. This situation requires teachers to innovate by using personal devices or simple methods to continue implementing technology-based instruction. The principal faces a dilemma between the desire to rapidly implement digital transformation and the limitations of available resources. Therefore, transformational leadership demands the ability to adapt and be creative in utilizing existing resources while maintaining a spirit of innovation among teachers.

2. Resistance from some teachers who are not yet ready to embrace change

Senior teachers who are accustomed to conventional methods sometimes feel awkward and lack confidence in using digital tools. They worry about making technical mistakes or being perceived as incompetent by younger colleagues. This creates a generational gap in the implementation of technology-based learning. The principal faces the challenge of building teachers' self-confidence and mental readiness so that digital transformation is seen not as a threat but as a necessity. To address this, the principal applies a persuasive approach by providing gradual training, personal mentoring, and recognition for every small effort teachers make in integrating technology.

3. High administrative and managerial workload in the digital era

The principal serves not only as a spiritual and academic leader but also as a technology manager who must ensure the sustainability of the digital learning system. The increase in online activities has created new demands, such as digital data management, information security, and platform-based evaluation systems. In this situation, the principal must be able to balance administrative duties with the functions of transformational leadership. To address this, the principal at *MI Fattahul Huda* established an internal educational technology team consisting of competent young teachers to assist with digitalization processes and peer-to-peer training. This initiative has proven effective in fostering a collaborative spirit and reducing the leadership burden at the top level.



4. Psychological factors and work culture aspects

Not all teachers possess high intrinsic motivation to change, especially when such changes require adapting to new practices. Some teachers feel that digital innovation increases their workload and requires additional time to prepare teaching materials. In this context, the principal strives to cultivate a work culture that is appreciative and oriented toward self-development. He instills the value that every small effort toward change is part of worship and a form of professional responsibility. Through a spiritual and motivational approach, the principal is able to shift teachers' mindsets, helping them view transformation not as a burden but as an opportunity to improve their service to students and the community.

DISCUSSION

1. Transformational Leadership as a Driver of Change in the Digital Era

The research findings indicate that the principal of MI Fattahul Huda Pungpungan has implemented a transformational leadership style by emphasizing inspiration, innovation, and teacher empowerment in addressing the challenges of educational digitalization. These findings align with Bass and Avolio's (1994) theory, which posits that transformational leadership focuses on four key dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. The principal serves as a role model who demonstrates integrity and enthusiasm for change, particularly in adopting digital learning technologies. This is evident from various initiatives undertaken by the principal, such as encouraging teachers to participate in digital training programs, utilize e-learning platforms, and integrate technology-based media into the teaching process. Thus, transformational leadership is not only conceptual but also practical in preparing teachers to face the era of technological disruption.

Furthermore, the results reveal that the principal does not merely act as a controller but also as a motivator who encourages teachers to adapt to educational innovations. This reinforces Yukl's (2013) theory, which states that transformational leaders play a vital role in creating a shared vision and fostering followers' confidence to achieve higher goals. The principal at MI Fattahul Huda successfully inspires teachers through persuasive communication and the articulation of a realistic and contextually grounded vision of digitalization. Teachers feel valued in every decision-



making process, which cultivates a strong sense of commitment and awareness to enhance the quality of learning through the effective use of technology.

2. The Principal's Role as a Change Agent in Enhancing Teachers' Digital Competence

The principal of MI Fattahul Huda plays a strategic role as a change agent by cultivating a digital learning culture within the madrasa environment. This finding aligns with Robbins and Judge's (2019) perspective, which states that transformational leaders are capable of building an organizational culture that is adaptive to external changes. The principal actively encourages teachers to innovate through digital-based training, such as the use of Google Classroom, Canva for Education, and simple Learning Management Systems (LMS). He also initiated internal teacher learning groups aimed at improving digital literacy and educational technology skills.

This form of leadership demonstrates that the principal not only leads administratively but also acts as a facilitator in enhancing teachers' professional competencies. This supports Susanto's (2020) study, which found that transformational leadership effectively improves teachers' ability to utilize educational technology. Through a participatory approach, the principal provides opportunities for teachers to experiment with digital teaching methods, fostering confidence and creativity. Therefore, transformational leadership has proven effective in building digital readiness among educators in the madrasa context.

3. Integration of Islamic Values in Transformational Leadership

A distinctive characteristic of the principal's leadership at MI Fattahul Huda Pungpungan is the integration of Islamic values into the practice of transformational leadership. The principles of *uswah hasanah* (exemplary conduct), *syura* (consultation), and *amanah* (trustworthiness) serve as the foundation for every leadership policy and action. This finding reinforces the theories of Al-Ghazali and Quthb on Islamic leadership, which emphasize the balance between spirituality and professionalism. The principal not only motivates teachers intellectually but also morally and spiritually by instilling values such as sincerity (*ikhlas*), brotherhood (*ukhuwah*), and viewing work as a form of worship (*ibadah*).

This value-based leadership approach distinguishes it from the general models of transformational leadership found in secular institutions. Consistent with Sari's (2021) research, transformational leadership integrated with Islamic values has proven to be more effective in



fostering a harmonious and religious work culture. At MI Fattahul Huda, the principal instills religious values through routine activities such as communal tadarus (Qur'an recitation), prayer before teaching, and the cultivation of noble character in social interactions. These practices affirm that transformational leadership in Islamic educational institutions is not merely a managerial tool but also a medium of dakwah (religious outreach) and character building for both teachers and students.

CONCLUSION

The transformational leadership of the principal at MI Fattahul Huda Pungpungan plays a central role in enhancing teacher performance in the digital era through a visionary, inspirational, and Islamic value-based approach. The principal functions not only as a policymaker but also as a motivator, facilitator, and moral role model who fosters a spirit of innovation and professional responsibility among teachers. The implementation of transformational leadership principles—such as inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration—has been proven to encourage teachers to be more adaptive to technology, creative in teaching, and collaborative in creating a positive work climate. The integration of Islamic values, including amanah (trustworthiness), syura (consultation), and uswah hasanah (exemplary conduct), ensures that leadership practices are not only managerially effective but also spiritually meaningful, creating an educational environment that is religious, harmonious, and quality-oriented. Thus, the Islamic-infused transformational leadership model applied at MI Fattahul Huda represents a significant paradigm for developing teacher professionalism and delivering Islamic education that is relevant to the challenges of the digital era.

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