

Transformational Leadership of Tuan Guru for Educational Quality Improvement in Islamic Boarding Schools

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Abstract

Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) have undergone rapid institutional transformation in response to globalization, digitalization, educational accountability, and increasing public expectations of educational quality. Within this context, the leadership of *Tuan Guru*, who serves simultaneously as a spiritual guide, educational leader, and institutional decision-maker, has become increasingly strategic. Although transformational leadership has been widely examined in educational organizations, empirical studies explaining how the transformational leadership of *Tuan Guru* contributes to educational quality improvement remain fragmented, particularly in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools. This study aims to explore how *Tuan Guru* exercises transformational leadership to enhance educational quality through vision development, teacher empowerment, organizational culture, innovation, and stakeholder collaboration. A qualitative multiple-case study design was employed in two established Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observations, and document analysis involving *Tuan Guru*, school principals, teachers, administrative staff, students, alumni, and community representatives. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which comprises data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that transformational leadership is manifested through five interconnected dimensions: visionary leadership grounded in Islamic values, exemplary moral leadership, teacher professional empowerment, adaptive educational innovation, and collaborative governance involving internal and external stakeholders. These leadership practices strengthen institutional governance, teacher professionalism, student

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achievement, organizational culture, and community trust, thereby supporting sustainable educational quality improvement. This study extends transformational leadership theory by integrating Islamic spiritual leadership values embodied by *Tuan Guru* with contemporary educational management principles. Practically, the findings offer a strategic framework for Islamic boarding school leaders and policymakers seeking to improve institutional quality while preserving religious identity.

Keywords: Transformational Leadership; *Tuan Guru*; Educational Quality; Islamic Boarding School; *Pesantren*

INTRODUCTION

Educational leadership has become one of the most influential factors in improving educational quality in the twenty-first century. The rapid development of technology, globalization, and increasingly complex societal demands require educational institutions to produce graduates who are not only academically competent but also possess strong character, creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and adaptability. Consequently, educational leaders are expected to move beyond conventional administrative roles toward transformational leadership capable of inspiring organizational change, empowering teachers, promoting innovation, and fostering continuous institutional improvement. Transformational leadership has therefore emerged as one of the most widely adopted leadership paradigms in educational organizations because it emphasizes vision, commitment, collaboration, and organizational learning as key drivers of sustainable educational development (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005).

The growing importance of educational leadership is also reflected in the global commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4, which emphasizes inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all. Achieving educational quality requires more than curriculum reform or infrastructure development; it also depends on leadership capable of strengthening institutional governance, enhancing teacher professionalism, encouraging innovation, and creating collaborative learning environments. International reports published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) consistently highlight leadership as one of the key determinants of sustainable educational improvement (OECD, 2024; UNESCO, 2024). Likewise, recent

studies indicate that transformational leadership positively influences teacher commitment, organizational learning, school effectiveness, and educational innovation across various educational contexts (Hallinger, 2024; Leithwood et al., 2020).

Within the Indonesian educational context, Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) represent one of the oldest and most influential Islamic educational institutions. Beyond functioning as centers for religious learning, pesantren play significant roles in character education, community empowerment, social development, and the preservation of Islamic values. Unlike formal schools, the governance of pesantren is strongly centered on the leadership of the Tuan Guru (or Kiai in other regions), whose authority extends beyond administrative management to encompass spiritual guidance, moral exemplarity, institutional vision, curriculum development, and community engagement. Consequently, leadership effectiveness in pesantren is shaped not only by managerial competence but also by religious legitimacy, ethical leadership, and cultural authority embedded within the institution.

The development of pesantren in recent decades has brought both opportunities and challenges. Increasing public expectations regarding educational quality, accreditation, curriculum integration, digital transformation, teacher professionalism, and graduate competitiveness require pesantren leaders to balance Islamic traditions with contemporary educational management. Many Islamic boarding schools have successfully developed integrated educational systems combining religious education, formal schooling, entrepreneurship, vocational education, and community service. However, disparities in institutional governance, innovation capacity, human resource development, and educational quality remain evident among pesantren, highlighting the strategic importance of effective leadership in achieving sustainable institutional improvement (Alawiyah et al., 2024; Hasanah, 2025).

Recent studies consistently demonstrate that transformational leadership contributes significantly to improving educational quality within Islamic educational institutions. Transformational leaders encourage teachers to participate actively in institutional development, strengthen organizational commitment, stimulate innovation, and cultivate collaborative cultures that support continuous improvement. In the context of Islamic boarding schools, transformational leadership has also been shown to strengthen organizational learning, curriculum development, character education, and institutional

adaptability while maintaining the religious identity of the institution (Muhammad & Sari, 2021; Abidin et al., 2026). More recent phenomenological evidence further reveals that transformational leadership in pesantren differs from conventional Western organizational models because leadership is primarily expressed through moral exemplarity, spiritual presence, relational interaction, and the daily internalization of Islamic values rather than merely formal organizational authority (Sulaiman et al., 2025).

Previous studies have consistently reported that transformational leadership positively influences various dimensions of educational quality. In general educational settings, transformational leaders have been found to strengthen teacher commitment, organizational learning, innovation, school effectiveness, and student achievement by developing a shared vision, empowering teachers, and fostering collaborative organizational cultures (Leithwood et al., 2020; Hallinger, 2024). Within Islamic educational institutions, transformational leadership has similarly been associated with improved teacher professionalism, curriculum development, institutional effectiveness, and character education through the integration of managerial competence and Islamic values (Muhammad & Sari, 2021; Alawiyah et al., 2024). These findings indicate that transformational leadership has become an increasingly important strategy for improving educational quality across diverse educational contexts.

Although the existing literature has provided valuable insights, several limitations remain. First, most previous studies emphasize the outcomes of transformational leadership, such as teacher performance, student achievement, or organizational effectiveness, while relatively limited attention has been given to understanding the leadership processes through which educational quality is continuously developed. Second, transformational leadership in pesantren is frequently examined using conventional organizational perspectives, whereas the distinctive roles of spiritual authority, religious legitimacy, and moral exemplarity exercised by the Tuan Guru remain insufficiently explored. Third, many studies investigate leadership within a single institutional setting, limiting comparative understanding of how transformational leadership is practiced across different pesantren contexts. Consequently, a more comprehensive understanding of transformational leadership in Islamic boarding schools remains necessary.

This study addresses these gaps by examining the transformational leadership practices of Tuan Guru through a multiple-case study involving two Islamic boarding

schools with different institutional characteristics. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on organizational performance indicators, this research conceptualizes educational quality as a multidimensional construct encompassing institutional governance, teacher professional development, curriculum innovation, organizational culture, stakeholder collaboration, and continuous quality improvement. Furthermore, the study integrates the transformational leadership framework with the unique characteristics of Islamic educational leadership, particularly spiritual authority, value-based leadership, and community-oriented governance. This integration is expected to enrich the existing literature on educational leadership while providing a contextual understanding of leadership practices within Indonesian pesantren.

Based on the preceding discussion, this study aims to explore how Tuan Guru exercises transformational leadership to improve educational quality in Islamic boarding schools. Specifically, the study seeks to analyze leadership strategies employed in developing institutional vision, empowering teachers, strengthening organizational culture, encouraging educational innovation, and fostering collaboration with various stakeholders to achieve sustainable educational quality improvement. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to the development of transformational leadership studies within Islamic educational contexts and practically to provide recommendations for educational leaders, policymakers, and Islamic boarding schools seeking to strengthen institutional quality and sustainability.

METHODS

Research Type

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore the transformational leadership practices of Tuan Guru in improving educational quality within Islamic boarding schools (pesantren). Qualitative research is appropriate for examining complex social phenomena because it enables researchers to understand participants' experiences, meanings, and interactions within their natural settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach was selected because transformational leadership in pesantren is closely intertwined with Islamic values, organizational culture, moral authority, and

interpersonal relationships, which cannot be adequately explained through quantitative measurement alone.

Research Design

The study adopted a multiple-case study design involving two Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia. According to Yin (2018), a multiple-case study enables researchers to investigate contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts while allowing comparison across cases to strengthen analytical generalization. The selected pesantren were chosen because they have consistently demonstrated educational quality improvement through curriculum development, teacher professional development, organizational governance, and educational innovation.

The research was conducted from January to June 2026, during which the researcher carried out interviews, observations, document analysis, and data verification to obtain comprehensive information regarding transformational leadership practices.

Research Sites and Participants

The research was conducted in two well-established Islamic boarding school-based senior madrasahs, namely Darul Abror NW Gunung Rajak Islamic Senior High School and Darul Furqan NW Mengkuru Islamic Senior High School, which were selected through purposive sampling based on their relevance to the research objectives (Patton, 2015). The selection criteria included institutions that had operated for more than twenty years, integrated formal and non-formal education systems, were led by actively involved Tuan Guru, had received accreditation or public recognition for educational quality, and had implemented educational innovations during the previous five years. Both institutions were considered appropriate research sites because they have consistently demonstrated educational development through the integration of Islamic values, transformational leadership practices, teacher professional development, and continuous quality improvement initiatives, making them suitable cases for exploring the role of Tuan Guru's transformational leadership in enhancing educational quality.

The study involved 26 participants consisting of two Tuan Guru, two school principals, four vice principals, eight senior teachers, two administrative staff members, four students, two alumni, and two community leaders. The inclusion of participants from different institutional roles provided diverse perspectives on leadership practices and educational quality improvement.

Data Collection Instruments and Techniques

The researcher served as the primary research instrument throughout the study, supported by interview guidelines, observation sheets, document analysis protocols, field notes, audio recordings, and digital transcription software (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data were collected using three complementary techniques: semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis.

Semi-structured interviews constituted the primary source of data and were developed based on the transformational leadership framework proposed by Bass and Avolio, including idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, while incorporating Islamic educational leadership principles. Each interview lasted approximately 60–90 minutes and was recorded with participants' consent before being transcribed verbatim.

Participant observations were conducted during leadership meetings, classroom supervision, teacher development activities, religious programs, and other institutional activities to understand leadership practices within their natural context. In addition, institutional documents such as strategic plans, curriculum documents, accreditation reports, annual reports, teacher development programs, meeting minutes, and organizational policies were examined to complement the interview and observation data. The combination of these techniques strengthened data credibility through methodological triangulation (Moleong, 2017).

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification (Miles et al., 2014). Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary evidence were coded, categorized, and organized into themes describing transformational leadership practices across the two research sites. The analytical process was conducted iteratively through continuous comparison of data sources until thematic saturation was achieved.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, the study applied the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These were achieved through prolonged engagement, source and

method triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, researcher reflexivity, and maintaining an audit trail throughout the research process.

RESULTS

Analysis of the qualitative data generated five major themes illustrating how the transformational leadership of Tuan Guru contributes to educational quality improvement in Islamic boarding schools. These themes emerged consistently from interviews, observations, and document analysis across both research sites. Although each pesantren possesses unique organizational characteristics, both institutions demonstrated remarkably similar leadership patterns that emphasize visionary leadership, moral authority, teacher empowerment, educational innovation, and collaborative governance.

Visionary Leadership Based on Islamic Values

The first finding reveals that Tuan Guru plays a central role in formulating and communicating an institutional vision that integrates Islamic values with educational excellence. Rather than viewing modernization as a threat to religious traditions, both leaders perceived educational transformation as an Islamic responsibility (*amanah*) to prepare students capable of responding to contemporary societal challenges while maintaining strong religious identity.

Analysis of institutional documents indicates that the strategic vision of both pesantren emphasizes three interconnected goals: (1) strengthening Islamic character (*akhlaq al-karimah*); (2) improving academic excellence; (3) preparing globally competitive graduates.

Unlike conventional educational organizations where strategic planning is generally delegated to administrative leaders, the vision within pesantren is personally articulated and continuously reinforced by the Tuan Guru through sermons, teacher meetings, student mentoring, and community engagement. Dr. TGH. Lalu Muhammad Syarkawi, MA. stated:

"Our Tuan Guru never separates religious education from academic excellence. He repeatedly reminds us that mastering science is also part of worship and responsibility to society."

Participant observation confirmed that the institutional vision was consistently reflected in daily educational activities, classroom practices, leadership meetings, and extracurricular programs. The leader continuously connected organizational goals with

Islamic ethical principles, thereby strengthening organizational commitment among teachers and students.

Table 1. Visionary Leadership Practices Observed Across Both Case Studies

Leadership Practice	Case A	Case B
Shared institutional vision	✓	✓
Integration of Islamic and modern education	✓	✓
Long-term strategic planning	✓	✓
Communication of institutional goals	✓	✓
Continuous vision reinforcement	✓	✓

Table 1 shows that both case-study institutions consistently implemented the core practices of visionary leadership. Specifically, the leaders of both schools articulated a shared institutional vision, integrated Islamic and modern educational values, engaged in long-term strategic planning, communicated institutional goals effectively, and continuously reinforced the institutional vision. The presence of all five practices across the two cases indicates that visionary leadership constitutes a common foundation for educational quality improvement in both Islamic boarding schools.

Moral and Exemplary Leadership

The second theme demonstrates that transformational leadership in Islamic boarding schools extends beyond managerial competence toward moral and spiritual exemplarity. Participants consistently described the Tuan Guru as a role model whose daily behavior significantly influences teachers, students, and administrative staff.

Observation data revealed that the leaders maintained close interaction with organizational members through participation in congregational prayers, religious studies, informal discussions, classroom visits, and community activities. These daily interactions created a strong culture of trust and organizational commitment.

Teachers emphasized that leadership credibility originated primarily from personal integrity rather than organizational authority. TGH. Abdul Aziz explained: "Teachers obey because they respect his integrity, not because they fear his position."

Similarly, students perceived the Tuan Guru as an educational mentor rather than merely an institutional administrator. The observed leadership behaviors included: (1) consistency between words and actions; (2) fairness in organizational decision-making; (3)

openness to criticism; (4) humility in interpersonal communication; (5) commitment to Islamic ethics; (6) discipline and punctuality.

These behaviors collectively strengthened institutional trust and fostered an organizational culture characterized by mutual respect and shared responsibility.

Teacher Professional Empowerment

The third finding indicates that teacher empowerment represents one of the most significant manifestations of transformational leadership.

Both pesantren implemented systematic programs for improving teacher competence through continuous professional development. The programs included: (1) pedagogical workshops, (2) curriculum development training, (3) mentoring by senior teachers, (4) classroom supervision, (5) action research, (6) academic seminars, (7) digital learning training, (8) collaborative lesson planning.

Rather than emphasizing supervision solely as an evaluation mechanism, Tuan Guru positioned professional development as a continuous learning process. Dr. H. Lalu Sayuti, M.Pd.I explained: "Every supervision session is followed by constructive discussion rather than criticism. Teachers feel appreciated instead of being evaluated."

Teachers also reported increased opportunities to participate in institutional decision-making. Observation findings indicate that teachers actively contributed to: (1) curriculum revision (2) strategic planning (3) extracurricular program development (4) quality assurance activities (5) innovation projects. Such participation enhanced organizational ownership and professional commitment.

Table 2. Teacher Empowerment Programs

Program	Objective	Observed Outcome
Professional workshops	Improve pedagogical competence	Increased instructional quality
Classroom supervision	Improve teaching practice	Better classroom management
Mentoring system	Develop novice teachers	Faster professional adaptation
Collaborative lesson planning	Curriculum improvement	Greater instructional consistency
Academic seminars	Knowledge enhancement	Increased professional confidence

Table 2 illustrates the major teacher empowerment programs implemented in the two Islamic boarding schools, together with their objectives and observed outcomes. The findings indicate that a combination of professional workshops, classroom supervision, mentoring, collaborative lesson planning, and academic seminars contributed to improved instructional quality, more effective classroom management, enhanced curriculum implementation, and greater teacher confidence. These results demonstrate that systematic teacher empowerment serves as a key mechanism through which transformational leadership promotes sustainable educational quality improvement.

Educational Innovation and Organizational Learning

The fourth finding demonstrates that Tuan Guru actively encourages innovation without compromising Islamic educational traditions.

Document analysis identified numerous innovations implemented during the last five years, including: (1) integrated curriculum development (2) digital classroom implementation (3) electronic academic administration (4) entrepreneurship education (5) bilingual learning (6) research-based student activities (7) international institutional partnerships.

Rather than imposing innovation through top-down directives, leaders encouraged collaborative experimentation involving teachers, administrators, alumni, and community members. Imran Hady's one curriculum coordinator noted: "Innovation always begins with discussion. Teachers are encouraged to propose ideas before institutional decisions are made."

Observation data further revealed regular organizational reflection meetings where teachers evaluated program implementation and discussed improvement strategies.

These activities gradually developed a learning organization characterized by: (1) continuous reflection (2) collaborative problem-solving (3) evidence-based decision-making (4) adaptive organizational culture.

Consequently, innovation became an institutional habit rather than an isolated project.

Collaborative Governance for Sustainable Educational Quality

The final theme indicates that educational quality improvement depends significantly on collaborative governance involving multiple stakeholders.

Unlike hierarchical leadership models, Tuan Guru established strong partnerships with: (1) parents (2) alumni (3) local government (4) universities (5) Islamic organizations (6) community leaders (7) private sector partners.

These collaborations contributed to educational development through financial support, teacher training, scholarship programs, curriculum enrichment, infrastructure development, and student internships. They also strengthened institutional capacity by fostering shared responsibility, mutual trust, and the exchange of expertise among stakeholders. Consequently, collaborative governance became a key mechanism for promoting continuous improvement and sustainable educational quality in Islamic boarding schools.

Table 3. Stakeholder Collaboration in Educational Quality Improvement

Stakeholder	Forms of Collaboration	Contribution
Parents	Educational meetings	Student support
Alumni	Scholarships and mentoring	Human resource development
Universities	Research and training	Academic quality improvement
Government	Accreditation and funding	Institutional development
Community leaders	Social programs	Community trust

Table 3 presents the principal stakeholders involved in educational quality improvement and their respective forms of collaboration and contributions. The findings demonstrate that partnerships with parents, alumni, universities, government agencies, and community leaders provide complementary support in the form of student guidance, human resource development, academic enhancement, institutional strengthening

Interviews consistently revealed that collaborative governance increased institutional legitimacy and strengthened public confidence toward the pesantren. Sabaruddin's One community representative explained: *"The pesantren is no longer isolated. It has become a center for educational and community development."*

Integrated Model of Transformational Leadership

Cross-case analysis demonstrates that the transformational leadership of Tuan Guru operates through an integrated process connecting five interrelated dimensions.



Figure 1. Integrated Transformational Leadership Model of Tuan Guru

Figure 1 illustrates the Integrated Transformational Leadership Model of Tuan Guru developed from the findings of this study. The model depicts a sequential and mutually reinforcing process in which an Islamic vision provides the foundation for moral exemplary leadership, which in turn promotes teacher professional empowerment, educational innovation, and collaborative governance. The interaction of these dimensions ultimately leads to continuous educational quality improvement in Islamic boarding schools. Thus, the figure highlights that sustainable quality enhancement is achieved through the integration of transformational leadership practices with Islamic values and community engagement.

The model illustrates that educational quality improvement is not generated by isolated leadership behaviors but through the interaction of visionary leadership, moral authority, professional empowerment, organizational innovation, and stakeholder collaboration.

Overall, the findings indicate that transformational leadership within Islamic boarding schools extends beyond the classical dimensions proposed by Bass and Avolio. The leadership of Tuan Guru integrates transformational leadership principles with Islamic spiritual values, producing a context-specific leadership model that simultaneously

enhances organizational effectiveness, teacher professionalism, institutional innovation, community engagement, and sustainable educational quality improvement.

DISCUSSION

Visionary Leadership Based on Islamic Values

The findings demonstrate that visionary leadership based on Islamic values serves as the primary foundation for educational quality improvement in the two Islamic boarding schools. The results indicate that the Tuan Guru does not merely formulate the institutional vision as a formal organizational statement but continuously internalizes it through religious guidance, leadership meetings, teacher mentoring, student development, and community engagement. Consequently, the institutional vision becomes a shared commitment that directs organizational members toward achieving educational excellence while preserving Islamic values. This finding suggests that educational transformation within pesantren is initiated through a clear and value-oriented vision that is consistently communicated and practiced in daily institutional life.

These findings are consistent with the transformational leadership theory proposed by James MacGregor Burns (1978), which emphasizes that transformational leaders inspire followers by elevating their commitment toward collective goals through a shared vision. Likewise, Bernard M. Bass (1985) argues that visionary leadership enables organizational members to understand the long-term direction of the institution, thereby strengthening motivation, organizational commitment, and performance. This argument is further reinforced by Kenneth Leithwood, Alma Harris, and David Hopkins (2020), who contend that one of the most fundamental practices of successful educational leaders is building a shared vision and setting clear organizational directions, because these practices strengthen teachers' commitment, foster collaborative culture, and indirectly improve teaching quality and student learning outcomes. In the context of this study, however, the institutional vision extends beyond organizational effectiveness because it is closely integrated with Islamic principles, including amanah (responsibility), akhlaq al-karimah (noble character), and the responsibility to contribute positively to society. Therefore, educational quality is understood not only as academic achievement but also as the development of students' moral and religious character.

The findings also support previous studies indicating that visionary leadership contributes significantly to school improvement by strengthening organizational commitment and aligning institutional activities with shared educational goals (Leithwood et al., 2020). Similarly, Hallinger (2024) explains that effective educational leaders create sustainable school improvement by establishing a clear vision that guides decision-making, instructional development, and organizational learning. In the present study, this pattern was reflected in the integration of Islamic education and modern educational practices, long-term strategic planning, and the continuous reinforcement of institutional goals through both formal and informal leadership activities. These practices demonstrate that the institutional vision is translated into concrete educational programs rather than remaining a symbolic organizational statement.

An important finding of this study is that visionary leadership within pesantren is inseparable from the personal authority of the Tuan Guru. Unlike many formal educational institutions where strategic planning is largely delegated to school management teams, the institutional vision in both case studies was personally articulated and consistently reinforced by the Tuan Guru. This condition strengthens organizational commitment because teachers, students, and other stakeholders perceive the institutional vision as a moral and religious responsibility rather than merely an administrative objective. Such findings reinforce the distinctive characteristics of leadership within Islamic boarding schools, where visionary leadership derives not only from managerial competence but also from spiritual credibility and exemplary leadership.

Overall, this study indicates that visionary leadership based on Islamic values provides the strategic direction for educational quality improvement in Islamic boarding schools. By integrating educational excellence with religious values, the Tuan Guru creates a shared organizational commitment that supports teacher professionalism, strengthens institutional culture, and encourages continuous educational development. These findings confirm that visionary leadership is not only the starting point of transformational leadership but also the foundation upon which other leadership practices—such as teacher empowerment, educational innovation, and collaborative governance—can be effectively implemented.

Moral and Exemplary Leadership

The findings indicate that moral and exemplary leadership represents a central dimension of transformational leadership in the two Islamic boarding schools. The Tuan Guru was not perceived merely as an institutional administrator, but as a moral role model whose daily behavior influenced teachers, students, and administrative staff. Observation data revealed that the leaders maintained close interaction with organizational members through participation in congregational prayers, religious studies, informal discussions, classroom visits, and community activities. These interactions strengthened organizational trust and created a culture of mutual respect and shared responsibility.

This finding is closely related to the transformational leadership dimension of Idealized Influence, which emphasizes the leader's role as a respected model whose behavior inspires admiration, trust, and identification among followers (Bass & Avolio, 1994). In the context of this study, moral exemplarity was demonstrated through consistency between words and actions, fairness in decision-making, openness to criticism, humility in interpersonal communication, commitment to Islamic ethics, and discipline in carrying out institutional responsibilities. Such behaviors reinforced leadership credibility and encouraged organizational members to follow institutional direction voluntarily rather than through coercive authority. This finding is consistent with the empirical study of Podsakoff et al. (1990), which demonstrated that transformational leadership behaviors characterized by exemplary conduct, trustworthiness, and ethical integrity significantly enhance followers' trust, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and willingness to exert extra effort toward achieving organizational goals. These findings suggest that moral exemplarity functions not only as an ethical attribute of leadership but also as a strategic organizational resource that strengthens institutional effectiveness and long-term educational quality. The findings also support Northouse's (2022) argument that ethical leadership strengthens organizational commitment, trust, and institutional credibility. Furthermore, empirical evidence indicates that ethical leadership practices significantly increase organizational trust and create a positive school climate conducive to institutional effectiveness (Cemaloğlu & Kılınc, 2012). Research also demonstrates that trust in educational leadership develops through leaders' moral agency, ethical decision-making, and relational interactions that reinforce credibility and collective commitment (Kutsyruba & Walker, 2015). In addition, recent studies confirm that ethical leadership fosters trust and positive work behaviors by encouraging normatively appropriate conduct and

strengthening social exchange relationships between leaders and followers (Bush et al., 2021). Within Islamic educational settings, moral leadership is particularly important because leaders are perceived not only as managers but also as spiritual mentors whose conduct becomes an example for the educational community. This condition was reflected in participants' statements that teachers obeyed the Tuan Guru because they respected his integrity, not because they feared his position. Similarly, students viewed the Tuan Guru as an educational mentor whose personal behavior shaped their character development.

Compared with previous studies on transformational leadership, this study highlights the distinctive role of moral authority within Islamic boarding schools. While conventional leadership literature often emphasizes organizational charisma and professional competence, the present findings show that leadership effectiveness in pesantren is strongly rooted in religious devotion, simplicity, fairness, and daily exemplary conduct. Moral leadership therefore functions as an organizational mechanism through which transformational leadership generates trust, reduces resistance to institutional change, and strengthens collective commitment to educational quality improvement.

Overall, the findings suggest that moral and exemplary leadership is not merely a personal characteristic of the Tuan Guru, but an important factor that shapes organizational culture and institutional effectiveness. By consistently demonstrating Islamic ethical values in daily leadership practices, the Tuan Guru builds organizational trust, strengthens teacher motivation, and fosters a supportive environment for sustainable educational quality improvement.

Teacher Professional Empowerment

The findings demonstrate that teacher professional empowerment constitutes one of the most important manifestations of transformational leadership in improving educational quality within Islamic boarding schools. Rather than positioning teachers solely as implementers of institutional policies, the Tuan Guru actively encouraged their professional growth through continuous learning opportunities and active participation in institutional development. The implementation of pedagogical workshops, curriculum development training, mentoring programs, classroom supervision, academic seminars, digital learning training, and collaborative lesson planning reflects a systematic commitment to strengthening teachers' professional competence.

These findings are consistent with the transformational leadership theory of Bass and Riggio (2006), which emphasizes that transformational leaders motivate followers by developing their capacities, encouraging professional growth, and providing opportunities for continuous learning. The dimension of Individualized Consideration highlights the leader's responsibility to recognize individual needs, facilitate professional development, and create supportive learning environments. In this study, teacher development was not treated as an occasional activity but as an integral component of institutional quality improvement. This finding is consistent with Supendi et al. (2019), who found that transformational leadership in Islamic boarding schools strengthens teacher commitment, professional competence, and organizational effectiveness through continuous mentoring, collaborative learning, and value-based leadership practices. Likewise, Alawiyah et al. (2023) reported that transformational leadership contributes significantly to improving educational quality by empowering teachers, fostering professional collaboration, and integrating Islamic values into institutional management, thereby creating a sustainable culture of educational improvement. Similar conclusions have been reported by Bogler (2001), who demonstrated that teachers' perceptions of transformational leadership are positively associated with occupational self-efficacy and commitment; by Geijsel et al. (2003), who found that transformational leadership stimulates teacher learning and reform implementation; and by Kwan (2020), who showed that supportive principal leadership promotes teachers' professional learning and instructional improvement (Bogler, 2001; Geijsel et al., 2003; Kwan, 2020).

The findings further support Leithwood et al. (2020), who argue that successful educational leaders improve school effectiveness by investing in teacher capacity and creating professional learning communities. Professional empowerment enables teachers to strengthen instructional practices, enhance curriculum implementation, and respond more effectively to educational challenges. In the present study, professional development was accompanied by constructive supervision and collaborative reflection, allowing teachers to continuously improve their pedagogical practices without perceiving supervision as a mechanism of control. These findings are further reinforced by Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008), whose meta-analysis demonstrated that leadership practices focusing on promoting and participating in teacher learning and professional development have the strongest positive impact on student outcomes compared to other leadership dimensions. This evidence suggests that teacher professional empowerment should be regarded as a

strategic investment that enhances instructional quality while simultaneously fostering sustainable educational improvement. An important finding emerging from this study is the active involvement of teachers in institutional decision-making. Teachers participated in curriculum revision, strategic planning, extracurricular program development, quality assurance activities, and educational innovation projects. Such participation strengthened teachers' sense of ownership toward institutional programs and encouraged greater professional responsibility. This finding aligns with previous studies indicating that teacher participation in organizational decision-making contributes to stronger organizational commitment, improved collaboration, and sustainable school improvement (Harris, 2014).

Furthermore, the mentoring system implemented in both Islamic boarding schools facilitated knowledge sharing between senior and novice teachers, accelerating professional adaptation while maintaining instructional quality. The collaborative lesson planning observed during the study also promoted consistency in curriculum implementation and encouraged teachers to exchange experiences and instructional strategies. These practices illustrate that professional empowerment extends beyond individual competency development and contributes to the establishment of a collaborative professional culture within the institution.

Overall, the findings suggest that teacher professional empowerment functions as an essential mechanism through which transformational leadership enhances educational quality. By providing continuous professional development, encouraging teacher participation, and fostering collaborative learning, the 'Tuan Guru strengthens teachers' competence, commitment, and professional confidence. These conditions ultimately support the continuous improvement of teaching quality and institutional effectiveness in Islamic boarding schools.

Educational Innovation and Organizational Learning

The findings indicate that educational innovation and organizational learning constitute important dimensions of transformational leadership in improving educational quality within Islamic boarding schools. The results show that the 'Tuan Guru actively encouraged institutional innovation while preserving the fundamental values of Islamic education. Rather than viewing modernization as contradictory to religious traditions, both Islamic boarding schools integrated educational innovation into their long-term institutional development. Innovations identified during the study included integrated

curriculum development, digital classroom implementation, electronic academic administration, entrepreneurship education, bilingual learning, research-based student activities, and institutional partnerships. These initiatives demonstrate that innovation was implemented systematically to strengthen educational quality while maintaining the identity of the pesantren.

These findings are consistent with the transformational leadership perspective proposed by Bass and Riggio (2006), which emphasizes that transformational leaders stimulate creativity, encourage new ways of thinking, and support organizational members in responding to changing environments. This process is reflected in the dimension of Intellectual Stimulation, where leaders motivate followers to question existing practices, develop innovative solutions, and continuously improve organizational performance. In the present study, the Tuan Guru encouraged teachers and educational staff to actively contribute ideas and participate in institutional innovation through collaborative discussions and shared decision-making. This finding is in line with the work of Pieterse et al. (2010), who demonstrated that transformational leadership fosters employee creativity through intellectual stimulation and psychological empowerment. Likewise, Jaiswal and Dhar (2015) found that transformational leadership promotes innovative work behavior by cultivating a climate supportive of learning and idea generation. In educational settings, Nguni, Slegers, and Denessen (2006) further reported that transformational leadership positively influences teachers' job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and willingness to engage in school improvement initiatives (Pieterse et al., 2010; Jaiswal & Dhar, 2015; Nguni et al., 2006).

The findings also support Senge's (2006) concept of the learning organization, which argues that sustainable organizational development depends on continuous learning, collective reflection, knowledge sharing, and adaptive thinking. The regular reflection meetings observed in both Islamic boarding schools provided opportunities for teachers to evaluate educational programs, identify challenges, and formulate improvement strategies collaboratively. Such activities gradually developed an organizational culture characterized by continuous reflection, collaborative problem-solving, evidence-based decision-making, and institutional adaptability. As a result, innovation became part of the organizational culture rather than a temporary response to external demands. These findings are consistent with the study of Louis, Dretzke, and Wahlstrom (2010), which found that leadership fostering professional community, organizational learning, and collaborative

school culture significantly enhances teachers' instructional practices and ultimately improves student learning outcomes. This evidence indicates that organizational learning serves as an essential mechanism through which transformational leadership promotes sustainable educational quality by embedding innovation into everyday institutional practices rather than treating it as an episodic reform initiative. Previous studies similarly report that transformational leadership contributes significantly to educational innovation by creating supportive environments for professional learning and organizational change. Leithwood et al. (2020) emphasize that leaders who promote collaboration, reflective practice, and professional learning communities are more likely to achieve sustainable school improvement. Likewise, Hallinger (2024) argues that innovation in educational institutions is more effective when supported by leadership that encourages organizational learning and teacher participation. The present findings reinforce these perspectives by demonstrating that innovation within pesantren was implemented through participatory processes involving teachers, administrators, alumni, and community members rather than through hierarchical decision-making alone.

Overall, the findings suggest that educational innovation and organizational learning function as complementary mechanisms through which transformational leadership enhances institutional effectiveness. By fostering collaborative learning, encouraging reflective practices, and supporting continuous innovation, the Tuan Guru creates an adaptive educational environment capable of responding to changing educational needs while maintaining the religious values and educational traditions of the Islamic boarding school. These conditions contribute significantly to the continuous improvement of educational quality and institutional sustainability.

Collaborative Governance for Sustainable Educational Quality

The findings demonstrate that collaborative governance constitutes an important dimension of transformational leadership in improving educational quality within Islamic boarding schools. The results reveal that the Tuan Guru established collaborative relationships with various stakeholders, including parents, alumni, universities, government agencies, community leaders, Islamic organizations, and private sector partners. These partnerships contributed to institutional development through teacher professional development, scholarship programs, curriculum enrichment, research collaboration, infrastructure improvement, and student internship opportunities. Such collaboration

indicates that educational quality is achieved not solely through internal institutional management but also through active engagement with external stakeholders.

These findings are consistent with the transformational leadership perspective, which emphasizes that leaders build organizational commitment by encouraging participation, strengthening collaboration, and developing shared responsibility among organizational members and stakeholders (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Rather than relying on hierarchical decision-making, transformational leaders create an environment where various stakeholders contribute actively to achieving institutional goals. In the present study, the Tuan Guru acted as a bridge connecting the Islamic boarding school with external partners, thereby expanding institutional resources and strengthening public trust. Similar findings have been reported by Tschannen-Moran (2001), who showed that collaboration and trust are fundamental to successful school leadership and stakeholder engagement. Likewise, Somech (2005) found that participative leadership fosters organizational commitment and collaborative behavior among school personnel, while Hulpia and Devos (2010) demonstrated that supportive and collaborative leadership structures strengthen teachers' organizational commitment and identification with school goals (Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Somech, 2005; Hulpia & Devos, 2010).

The findings also support Bryson et al. (2015), who argue that collaborative governance enables organizations to address complex challenges through cooperation among multiple stakeholders. Educational institutions increasingly require collaborative networks to improve institutional effectiveness, mobilize resources, and respond to changing educational demands. Similarly, Epstein (2018) emphasizes that strong partnerships between schools, families, and communities contribute positively to student learning, institutional accountability, and sustainable educational development. The collaboration observed in both Islamic boarding schools reflects these principles, as stakeholder involvement was integrated into institutional planning, educational programs, and quality improvement initiatives.

An important finding of this study is that collaborative governance strengthened not only institutional resources but also the social legitimacy of the pesantren. Participants consistently reported that continuous communication and cooperation with parents, alumni, universities, government institutions, and community leaders increased public confidence in the institution. This finding suggests that stakeholder collaboration functions

as a strategic mechanism for sustaining educational quality by fostering mutual trust, shared responsibility, and long-term institutional support. Consequently, the pesantren is positioned not merely as an educational institution but also as a center for community development and social engagement.

Overall, the findings indicate that collaborative governance complements other dimensions of transformational leadership in improving educational quality. Visionary leadership provides strategic direction, moral leadership strengthens organizational trust, teacher empowerment enhances professional capacity, and educational innovation encourages continuous improvement. These dimensions are reinforced through stakeholder collaboration, enabling Islamic boarding schools to sustain educational quality while responding effectively to contemporary educational challenges. Therefore, collaborative governance serves as an essential component of transformational leadership that supports the long-term sustainability of educational institutions.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the transformational leadership of Tuan Guru plays a significant role in improving educational quality within Islamic boarding schools through the integration of visionary leadership, moral exemplarity, teacher professional empowerment, educational innovation, and collaborative governance. These five dimensions emerged consistently across the two case studies and demonstrate that educational quality improvement is achieved through interconnected leadership practices rather than isolated managerial activities. The findings indicate that the Tuan Guru not only provides strategic direction for institutional development but also strengthens organizational commitment, fosters teacher professionalism, encourages continuous innovation, and builds productive partnerships with various stakeholders. Collectively, these leadership practices contribute to creating sustainable educational quality while preserving the Islamic identity and values of the pesantren.

The study contributes to the growing literature on educational leadership by providing empirical evidence that transformational leadership within Islamic boarding schools is implemented through leadership practices that integrate organizational management with Islamic values. The findings enrich the understanding of transformational leadership in the context of pesantren by demonstrating how visionary

leadership, moral authority, professional development, innovation, and stakeholder collaboration collectively support institutional improvement. These findings also provide practical implications for Tuan Guru, school leaders, policymakers, and educational managers by emphasizing the importance of strengthening teacher capacity, promoting organizational learning, and expanding collaborative partnerships as strategic efforts to improve educational quality in Islamic educational institutions.

Although this study provides a comprehensive understanding of transformational leadership in two Islamic boarding schools, its findings are limited to the contexts investigated and therefore should not be generalized to all pesantren. Future research may involve a larger number of Islamic boarding schools from different regions or employ mixed-methods approaches to further examine the relationship between transformational leadership practices and educational quality across diverse institutional settings.

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