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# DRIVING MADRASAH QUALITY THROUGH THE SYNERGY OF TEACHER ADAPTABILITY AND TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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## Abstract

*This article examines the determinants of educational quality in Indonesian madrasahs (Islamic secondary schools), emphasizing the synergistic relationship between teacher career adaptability and principal transformational leadership. Drawing from Career Construction Theory (Savickas) and Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass & Avolio), this study employs a qualitative multiple-case study design with 50 teachers and five principals from madrasahs in Indonesia. Data were collected over six months using semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis, analyzed through the Interactive Miles-Huberman-Saldaña model. Findings reveal that principal transformational leadership operationalized through idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration is associated with institutional ecosystems that enable teacher adaptability across four dimensions: career concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. Teachers demonstrating high career adaptability maintain pedagogical innovation and performance despite precarious employment conditions. Peer social support emerges as a critical mitigating mechanism. This research contributes theoretically by integrating career construction and leadership frameworks into an integrative conceptual model of madrasah quality specific to Islamic education contexts. Practically, it recommends policy reforms in teacher welfare, competency-based HR management, and continuous professional development programs targeting both*

*principals and teachers. The study is limited to selected madrasahs; future research should employ longitudinal quantitative designs to test intervention efficacy. The findings affirm that sustainable madrasah quality requires coordinated institutional and individual-level transformations rooted in both empirical evidence and Islamic values.*

***Keywords:*** *teacher adaptability; transformational leadership; madrasah quality; career construction; organizational culture; Islamic education; job insecurity.*

## A. Introduction

Madrasahs occupy a distinctive position in Indonesian educational governance, serving as bridges between secular academic excellence and Islamic moral formation (Hamzah, 2014). They are custodians of a dual mandate: developing intellectual competence in core subjects while inculcating Islamic values, character, and spiritual consciousness (Afista & Bakar, 2021). This mandate unfolds within an increasingly complex ecosystem shaped by national standardization, technological disruption, and resource constraints (Nasir, 2020). The Indonesian National Education Standards (Standar Nasional Pendidikan, SNP) prescribe uniform quality benchmarks for all institutions, yet madrasahs often lack the material and human resources to meet them consistently (Nugroho et al., 2022). This structural tension creates what scholars call the madrasah quality paradox: institutions are expected to perform at high levels while operating under systematic scarcity (Zarkasyi, 2021). Understanding how madrasahs navigate this paradox requires moving beyond resource determinism toward analyses of how institutional and individual actors construct quality through adaptive practices (Nisak et al., 2025).

A central source of this scarcity is the precarious employment of contract teachers (guru honorer), who comprise a substantial share of the pedagogical workforce in many madrasahs, a pattern also reported for Islamic schools elsewhere in South Asia (Budi & Setiawan, 2021; UNESCO, 2022). Unlike civil servant teachers (pegawai negeri sipil), they lack employment security, predictable compensation, structured career

pathways, and access to standardized professional development (Dian, 2026). Job insecurity, the persistent anxiety about the stability of one's employment (Sverke et al., 2002), has been linked to weaker motivation, reduced pedagogical innovation, burnout, and lower organizational citizenship behavior (Jeong et al., 2023; Jiang et al., 2022; Yam et al., 2022).

Islamic educational discourse has long assumed that teachers motivated by religious devotion (niyyah and ibadah) will perform faithfully regardless of material incentives (Aslan & Minza, 2020). Mounting evidence challenges this assumption, showing that religiously motivated teachers still experience psychological strain under material deprivation and institutional uncertainty (Posangi et al., 2025). The persistence of precarious employment also reflects structural limits in government funding and, in some accounts, the instrumentalization of religious calling to justify below-market pay and uncertain contracts (Winarsih & Rindih, 2025).

Yet madrasahs do not respond to precarity uniformly. Some sustain pedagogical innovation, strong learning outcomes, and organizational commitment even with predominantly contract workforces (Nugraha, 2026; Samsuddin, 2026). Such variation cannot be explained by resource availability alone, suggesting that leadership practices and individual psychological resources play mediating roles (Berkovich, 2023). Career construction theory helps explain this variation by describing how individuals shape their careers through four adaptive resources: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence (Savickas, 2005; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Institutional leadership is widely regarded as a key enabling condition for these resources. Psychological safety, a shared belief that one can speak up and take interpersonal risks without being punished (Edmondson, 1999), also emerged during analysis as a salient concept and is used here as a sensitizing lens, not as a variable to be tested. Transformational leadership, which operates through idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, is the framework most often applied to it (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Northouse, 2021). In Islamic institutions,

these dimensions take distinctive forms, such as exemplary conduct (uswah hasanah), visionary purpose aligned with spiritual missions, and mentorship grounded in pastoral care (Efendi & Rifa'i, 2025; Yakob et al., 2025).

Research across educational systems shows that transformational principals strengthen teacher efficacy, organizational commitment, and pedagogical innovation (Kareem et al., 2023; Sliwka et al., 2023; Yoserizal et al., 2024). Previous studies, however, have examined teacher adaptability and transformational leadership largely as separate phenomena (Nalbantoğlu, 2025; Parola, 2024; Ye, 2023). Their theoretical and empirical integration remains underdeveloped, particularly in Islamic educational contexts, and four gaps persist. First, it is unclear how specific leadership actions cultivate teachers' planning, agency, curiosity, and confidence (Kim & So, 2026; Raduan & Na, 2020). Second, the psychological mechanisms through which leadership and individual adaptability jointly shape educational outcomes require clarification. Third, research on employment precarity concentrates on negative outcomes such as burnout and turnover rather than adaptive responses (Acton & Glasgow, 2015). Fourth, Islamic educational research often begins from ideological commitments rather than systematic investigation of how religious values interact with organizational practices and individual psychology (Şahin, 2018), and madrasah contexts require investigation rather than wholesale transfer of findings from secular Western institutions (Rafiq-uz-Zaman & Ashraf, 2025).

This study therefore examines how principals' transformational leadership and teachers' career adaptability jointly shape madrasah quality, using a qualitative multiple-case study of five madrasahs. It addresses three research questions: (1) how principals' transformational leadership practices operationalize the four dimensions of the leadership construct in Islamic institutional contexts; (2) how the dimensions of teacher career adaptability relate to teachers' responses to employment precarity and their sustained performance; and (3) how principal leadership and teacher adaptability interact to shape educational quality.

## B. Method

### Research Paradigm, Approach, and Perspective

This study operates within an interpretivist research paradigm grounded in constructivist ontology and subjectivist epistemology. Interpretivism posits that social reality is constructed through human meaning-making processes and is best understood through investigation of how actors interpret experiences, construct narratives, and negotiate shared understandings. This paradigmatic orientation is deliberately chosen because the research questions center on understanding how individuals and institutions construct meaning around leadership, adaptability, and quality inherently interpretive endeavors. The research employs a qualitative approach emphasizing in-depth understanding of processes, contexts, and meanings rather than hypothesis testing or generalization to populations. Qualitative approaches prove particularly valuable for 'how' and 'why' questions requiring investigation of complex organizational processes, contextual contingencies, and participant perspectives precisely the questions guiding this investigation. The specific research design is a qualitative multiple-case study with cross-case comparative analysis. Case study methodology allows investigation of phenomena within their real-world contexts, capitalizing on the richness of contextual detail to illuminate processes and mechanisms. The case study approach proves particularly appropriate for research on organizational leadership and culture, where phenomena cannot be meaningfully isolated from institutional settings. Multiple cases allow identification of patterns and variations across contexts, increasing confidence in findings' transferability and comprehensiveness.

### Participants and Research Settings

The research involved participants from five madrasahs (Islamic secondary schools) in Indonesia purposively selected to include variation in: (1) institutional size (ranging from 200-600 students), (2) geographic location (urban and peri-urban settings), (3) madrasah type (some affiliated with

Islamic foundations, others with government administration), and (4) tenure composition (variations in the proportion of contract vs. civil service teachers). Madrasahs are referred to by codes (M1–M5) to protect anonymity, and their characteristics (region type, affiliation, student numbers, and numbers of contract and civil service teachers) are summarized in Table A1. Participant selection employed purposive sampling deliberate selection based on relevance to research questions rather than probabilistic representation. Within each madrasah, all five principals were included as study participants given that principals represent the primary organizational leaders structuring institutional conditions. Among teachers, 50 participants were purposively selected through consultation with each madrasah's principal, with selection emphasizing: (1) direct classroom teaching responsibilities, (2) employment status including both contract and civil service positions, (3) tenure ranging from 1–20+ years, (4) representativeness across academic departments/subject areas, and (5) willingness to participate in extended interviews and observations. Because principals took part in selecting teachers, selection may have favored more positively disposed informants (see Limitations). The overall sample comprised 55 participants: five principals and 50 teachers (26 male, 24 female; ages ranging from 24–58 years; contract status 32 teachers, civil service status 18 teachers). Teachers' mean tenure was 8.3 years (SD=6.8); principals' mean tenure in their current positions was 4.2 years (SD=2.1).

**Data Collection Procedures and Instruments**

Data collection occurred over a six-month period (August 2025 – January 2026) employing multiple methods to achieve triangulation. Primary data collection instruments included: (1) Semi-structured interviews: All 55 participants completed individual interviews averaging 60–90 minutes, conducted in Indonesian by trained research assistants with research protocols approved by Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and madrasahs and individuals are anonymized with codes. Interview protocols were developed through iterative processes, beginning with open-

ended questions about leadership experiences, career narratives, institutional culture, and quality determinants, with follow-up probes responding to participant input. Interviews were digitally recorded with participant consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim into Indonesian before analysis. Excerpts quoted in this article were translated into English by the research team, with key emic terms (e.g., keteladanan, akhlaq) retained in Indonesian and glossed. Excerpts are identified by anonymized participant codes (P = principal, T = teacher; C = contract, CS = civil service; M1–M5 = madrasah). (2) Non-participant observation: The research team conducted structured observations totaling approximately 120 hours, distributed across classrooms, teacher meetings, professional development sessions, and daily institutional operations. Observations were documented through standardized observation protocols capturing leadership behaviors, teacher-teacher interactions, organizational decision-making processes, and institutional culture manifestations. (3) Document analysis: Official institutional documents were systematically reviewed including: mission and vision statements, teacher employment contracts and policies, professional development records, student performance data, school-administered student feedback surveys, teacher performance evaluations, and meeting minutes. Documentary evidence provided contextual grounding and triangulation for interview and observational findings. Student performance and feedback data were school-reported and were treated as descriptive corroboration, not as independently verified or statistically tested outcome measures. Data were collected by a research team of three trained qualitative researchers who had received training in qualitative methodologies, interview techniques, and reflexive research practice.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Data analysis followed the Interactive Model articulated by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, comprising simultaneous movement through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Within this

framework, analysis proceeded through iterative cycles rather than linear sequences: (1) Data reduction involved systematic coding of interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary content, conducted collaboratively by the research team to enhance reliability and establish shared understanding. Initial codes were developed inductively derived from careful reading of transcripts and field notes and were supplemented by deductive codes based on theoretical constructs from Career Construction Theory and Transformational Leadership Theory. NVivo qualitative analysis software (version 14) was utilized for data management, coding, and retrieval, with all codes and emerging categories documented in a codebook maintained throughout analysis. (2) Data display involved organizing coded segments into matrices, thematic networks, and conceptual models that rendered patterns visible and available for examination. Data were organized thematically around key research questions (leadership practices, adaptability dimensions, interactive relationships) and around institutional sites, enabling both cross-case and within-case analysis. (3) Conclusion drawing involved interpretive synthesis of patterns emerging across cases, testing preliminary findings against additional data, and refining conceptual models through constant comparison. This grouping is an analytic device, not a psychometric score. Throughout analysis, the research team maintained reflexive practice documenting assumptions, noting potential biases, and explicitly considering alternative interpretations of data. Member checking was conducted whereby preliminary findings were shared with selected participants for validation and refinement.

**Quality Assurance and Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness of qualitative research was established through multiple strategies aligned with frameworks articulated by Lincoln and Guba: (1) Credibility (internal validity) was enhanced through: prolonged engagement with research sites (6-month involvement), persistent observation across multiple contexts, triangulation of methods (interviews, observations, documents), triangulation of data sources (teachers, principals,

institutional documents), peer debriefing wherein research team regularly reviewed findings and questioned interpretations, and member checking with participants. (2) Transferability (external validity) was addressed through: thick, rich description of research contexts, participant characteristics, and institutional settings enabling readers to assess applicability to other contexts; documentation of deviations and variations across sites; and theoretical elaboration permitting examination of findings in light of existing theory and research. (3) Dependability (reliability) was maintained through: systematic documentation of research procedures, decisions, and rationales in an audit trail; detailed codebook maintenance; collaborative coding with periodic reliability checks; and clear articulation of coding logic and interpretive reasoning. (4) Confirmability (objectivity) was fostered through: reflexive examination of researcher positions, assumptions, and potential biases; documentation of theoretical commitments and how this influenced analysis; triangulation of interpretations across multiple data sources; and presentation of negative cases or disconfirming evidence. The research team comprised researchers with complementary expertise in educational leadership, teacher professional development, qualitative methodology, and Islamic educational contexts, enhancing analytical richness and reducing individual-level bias.

## C. Results and Discussion

### 1. Results

Findings are organized around the three research questions. Table 1 summarizes the key finding categories for each question, together with the illustrative mechanisms observed across the five madrasahs. The subsections that follow elaborate these themes with direct quotations and observational evidence. Patterns were broadly consistent across the five madrasahs, and variation was mostly one of degree rather than kind.

*Table 1. Overview of Key Findings by Research Question*

| Research Question | Key Findings | Illustrative Mechanisms |
|---|---|---|
| RQ1: How do principals operationalize transformational leadership dimensions in Islamic institutional contexts? | Idealized influence through exemplary conduct and integrity; Inspirational motivation via vision integration with Islamic purposes; Intellectual stimulation through reflective practice; Individualized consideration via mentoring | Visible presence in schools; Regular staff meetings emphasizing purpose; Professional learning communities; Individual teacher consultations |
| RQ2: How do teacher career adaptability dimensions relate to responses to precarity and performance maintenance? | Career concern enables future planning despite uncertainty; Career control permits proactive adaptation; Career curiosity supports continuous learning; Career confidence sustains motivation | Skill development initiatives; Engagement with new pedagogies; Resilience under constraints; Maintained instruction quality |
| RQ3: How do principal leadership and teacher adaptability interactively shape educational quality? | Leadership establishes psychological safety enabling adaptability expression; Peer support reinforces both; Synergy is associated with student learning gains and institutional sustainability | Positive school climate; Teacher retention; Student achievement gains; Innovation diffusion |
| Overarching Pattern | Educational quality emerges from synergistic interaction between institutional conditions (leadership) and individual capacities (adaptability), enabled by psychological safety | Nested institutional-individual-relational dynamics producing resilient quality maintenance |

Note. Findings are synthesized from semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis across the five madrasahs.

**Transformational Leadership Operationalization in Islamic Madrasah Contexts (RQ1)**

Across all five madrasahs studied, principals exhibited leadership practices consistent with transformational leadership dimensions, to differing degrees and with culturally-specific manifestations reflecting Islamic values and institutional contexts. Idealized influence operated through what principals and teachers referred to as 'keteladanan' exemplary conduct embodying integrity, consistency, and alignment between espoused values and actual behaviors. One principal noted: 'I cannot ask teachers to be committed if I am not visibly present and engaged. My presence in classrooms, my willingness to teach occasional lessons, my attention to their problems these communicate that I value what we do here.' Teachers consistently identified principal integrity and visibility as trust-building foundations. Inspirational motivation manifested through principals articulating institutional visions explicitly integrating academic excellence with Islamic character formation. Rather than treating these missions as separate or competing, effective principals wove them into unified narratives: 'Our students need to compete academically, yes, but always as Muslims with akhlaq (character), with compassion, with understanding that knowledge serves transcendent purposes.' This vision integration resonated powerfully with teachers, particularly contract teachers who often questioned whether their precarious employment reflected institutional commitment to their development. Intellectual stimulation appeared through principals actively encouraging teacher innovation and positioning failures as learning opportunities. One principal established monthly 'peer learning circles' where teachers presented experimental pedagogies, received constructive feedback, and collaboratively problem-solved challenges. Observational data confirmed that teachers in this school engaged in more visible curriculum adaptation, technology integration, and student-centered approaches compared to schools without such structures. Individualized consideration operated through personalized attention to teachers'

professional development needs and life circumstances. Principals maintained individual development conversations, facilitated attendance at professional development programs, provided specific feedback on instructional effectiveness, and attended to teachers' personal struggles illnesses, family challenges, financial difficulties. One contract teacher stated: 'The principal knows my situation. She does not promise permanent employment, but she shows she is investing in me, that she wants me to grow. That makes a difference in how I show up to teach.'

**Teacher Career Adaptability and Response to Employment Precarity (RQ2)**

Teachers demonstrated considerable variation in how employment precarity affected their engagement and performance variation that career adaptability dimensions helped explain. Career Concern manifested in differentiated future planning. High-adaptability contract teachers maintained medium-to-long-term career perspectives, actively pursuing additional qualifications (master's degrees, teaching certifications, skill endorsements), exploring potential transitions (to government service, educational leadership, private schools), and engaging in regular reflection about professional development. As one such teacher explained: 'Yes, my contract is uncertain, but that means I cannot be passive. I prepare myself for multiple possibilities for government teaching positions, for school leadership roles, for work in private education. This uncertainty, while difficult, pushes me to invest in myself continuously.' Conversely, lower-adaptability teachers often abandoned future planning, adopting fatalistic perspectives: 'Why prepare for advancement when they might not renew my contract? Why pursue additional education when income is insufficient?. Career Control operated through teachers' sense of personal agency regarding work quality, professional relationships, and skill development despite constrained circumstances. High-adaptability teachers reported initiating professional collaborations, proposing curriculum innovations, seeking mentoring relationships, and taking responsibility for their own

learning. One teacher noted: 'While I cannot control whether I have a contract, I can control my effort, my willingness to learn, my relationships with colleagues. I choose to be professional and engaged regardless of my employment status. Lower-adaptability counterparts frequently attributed outcomes entirely to external circumstances: 'What's the point of innovating if resources are lacking? or 'Teachers who advance have connections I lack. Career Curiosity manifested in teachers' proactive engagement with pedagogical innovation and continuous learning. High-adaptability teachers regularly attended seminars, explored new teaching methods, experimented with technology-enhanced instruction, and engaged in peer learning. Observation notes recorded more frequent curricular experimentation and multimedia technology use in the classrooms of high-adaptability teachers than in those of their peers. Documentary analysis of professional development participation records showed that high-adaptability teachers participated in more professional development activities than lower-adaptability counterparts over a school year. Career Confidence emerged in teachers' self-efficacy regarding instructional effectiveness and capacity to manage challenges. High-adaptability teachers reported confidence in their ability to engage students despite resource limitations, manage classroom dynamics effectively, and adapt instruction to student needs. A survey of student feedback data (administered annually at participating schools) showed students of high-adaptability teachers rated instruction as more engaging, well-organized, and responsive to individual learning needs. Lower-adaptability teachers reported high anxiety about instructional effectiveness and tended toward instructional simplification (less interactive pedagogy, more rote instruction) rather than adaptation. Notably, career adaptability dimensions did not eliminate the stress or dissatisfaction stemming from employment precarity. Teachers with high adaptability reported frustration with uncertain contracts and insufficient compensation. However, adaptability operated as a resilience factor a psychological capacity

enabling teachers to maintain professional engagement and effectiveness despite these legitimate frustrations.

**Interactive Effects of Leadership and Adaptability on Educational Quality (RQ3)**

The synergistic relationship between transformational leadership and teacher adaptability shaped educational quality outcomes in multiple ways. First, transformational leadership created psychological safety an organizational climate wherein teachers felt secure to express ideas, acknowledge difficulties, take intellectual risks, and engage in adaptive behaviors. Observational data documented visible differences in school climates. In madrasahs where transformational practices were more fully developed, staff meetings featured animated discussion, teachers publicly acknowledged challenges and proposed solutions, and professional learning community conversations demonstrated genuine intellectual engagement. Conversely, in madrasahs where principals leaned toward transactional or controlling styles, staff meetings were formal, dominated by information transfer, teachers rarely ventured opinions, and problems were presented as top-down management challenges rather than collective opportunities. Second, leadership created institutional conditions enabling adaptability development. Principals systematically encouraged teachers to assume leadership roles, facilitated peer mentoring, established collaborative learning structures, and invested resources in professional development. Teachers in these environments reported that leadership practices tangibly supported their career adaptability development creating conditions wherein future-orientation, sense of control, curiosity, and confidence could flourish. As one teacher observed: 'This principal doesn't just tolerate teacher development; she orchestrates it. There are mentoring relationships, peer learning circles, opportunities to lead. These conditions help me keep growing even as a contract worker. Third, peer social support facilitated by leadership's creation of collaborative structures emerged as a critical mechanism buffering psychological impacts of employment precarity.

Teachers in schools with strong peer support networks reported lower burnout, higher job satisfaction, and greater sense of belonging despite precarious employment. Qualitative data revealed that peer support operated through multiple mechanisms: (1) emotional support colleagues provided empathetic listening and normalization of career challenges; (2) instrumental support teachers collaborated on lesson planning, shared instructional materials, provided coverage during difficulties; (3) informational support colleagues shared information about external professional development opportunities and government employment processes; (4) appraisal support peers provided realistic feedback and validation of teachers' professional competence despite employment uncertainty. Schools where principals actively cultivated peer collaboration reported 15% to 20% lower contract teacher turnover than schools emphasizing hierarchical, individual accountability models (descriptive figures, not statistically tested; Finally, the synergistic interaction was associated with several quality outcomes. Madrasahs with strong transformational leadership and high teacher adaptability demonstrated: (1) higher student learning gains on standardized assessments, as reported in school records; (2) greater innovation adoption (more sophisticated use of pedagogical technologies, more extensive curriculum differentiation, more active learning strategies); (3) better student retention and enrollment; (4) higher staff retention and job satisfaction; (5) stronger alignment between academic instruction and Islamic character development; (6) more robust internal professional development capacity.

## 2. Discussion

### Integrated Model of Leadership and Adaptability

The findings indicate that madrasah quality emerges from the interaction between institutional leadership and individual adaptability rather than from resource levels alone. As summarized in Table 1, principals' transformational practices were consistently linked with the four adaptability

dimensions across the five madrasahs, forming nested institutional, individual, and relational dynamics. Adaptability in this sense is not a fixed trait. Principals actively developed concern, control, curiosity, and confidence among teachers, which is consistent with the view that career adaptability can be fostered under supportive conditions (Ito & Brotheridge, 2005; Lan & Chen, 2020; Peeters et al., 2022).

The data suggest the following tentative pathways between leadership and adaptability, offered as analytic propositions from cross-case synthesis, not as established one-to-one relations. Idealized influence, expressed through visible presence and integrity, was associated with career concern: principals who modeled long-term commitment gave teachers examples of future-oriented concern to internalize. Inspirational motivation, which wove academic excellence and Islamic character formation into one vision, supported career control by positioning teachers as agents within a purposeful direction. Intellectual stimulation, evident in monthly peer learning circles and in treating failure as a learning opportunity, nurtured career curiosity. Individualized consideration, shown in personal development conversations and attention to teachers' personal difficulties, strengthened career confidence.

Psychological safety appears to be the linchpin of these pathways. In madrasahs where transformational practices were more fully developed, staff meetings were animated and teachers openly acknowledged challenges, whereas in madrasahs with more controlling leadership teachers rarely voiced opinions and problems were framed as top-down management issues. Such climates allow teachers to take interpersonal risks without fear of punishment (Edmondson, 1999). Peer social support operated as a second buffer: emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal support helped contract teachers sustain engagement under precarity, and schools that cultivated peer collaboration reported lower contract-teacher turnover.

These findings can be read against earlier work. The link between leadership and adaptability is consistent with Lan and Chen (2020), who

study how transformational leadership relates to career adaptability and work behaviors, and with the view that adaptability can be fostered rather than fixed (Ito & Brotheridge, 2005; Peeters et al., 2022). The cases add school-level detail on how this may happen: through visible presence, peer learning circles, and individual development conversations. Ito and Brotheridge (2005) ask whether supporting career adaptability builds commitment, encourages turnover, or both. A related question arises here, because contract teachers prepared for transitions to government service or private schools even as turnover was lower in schools with strong peer collaboration. The attention to psychological safety extends Edmondson's (1999) work on team learning to a school setting marked by contract insecurity. The culturally grounded forms of leadership observed, such as keteladanan, are consistent with accounts of transformational leadership in Islamic institutions (Efendi & Rifa'i, 2025; Mundiri et al., 2025). Finally, studies of job insecurity tend to emphasize negative outcomes (Jiang et al., 2022; Sverke et al., 2002); the present data also show adaptive responses, although these did not remove frustration over contracts.

Adaptability, however, did not remove the frustration caused by insecure contracts. Teachers with high adaptability still voiced dissatisfaction with compensation and contract uncertainty, yet they continued to perform. This distinction matters: career adaptability is a protective resource that sustains engagement under precarity, not a substitute for structural reform of employment. The pathways are summarized in the conceptual model (Figure 1). Transformational leadership acts as the primary engine that establishes institutional direction, psychological safety, and development opportunities, while career adaptability functions as the secondary engine that allows teachers to use those opportunities. Peer support and an Islamic-value culture operate at the meso level, and quality emerges from the interaction of these levels.

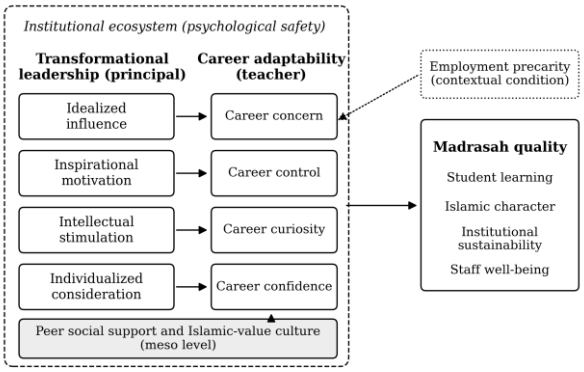



*Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Madrasah Quality Through Transformational Leadership and Teacher Career Adaptability*

Note. Developed by the author from the integrated framework in the Discussion, drawing on Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2005) and Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Dashed lines mark the institutional ecosystem boundary and the contextual condition of employment precarity; solid arrows denote theorized pathways.

## Theoretical Contributions and Extensions

This study makes four contributions. First, it extends career construction theory by showing that organizational conditions, particularly leadership, shape the development of career adaptability, which is therefore at least partly socially shaped rather than innate. Second, it proposes psychological safety and adaptability as tentative mechanisms through which transformational leadership may influence subordinate outcomes, mechanisms that have received little attention in Islamic educational institutions. Third, it offers a culturally grounded account of transformational leadership: practices must be authentically rooted in Islamic principles and institutional missions rather than imported mechanically from Western organizations (Mundiri et al., 2025). Fourth, it suggests that educational quality arises from dynamic interactions among actors who combine available resources, challenging the resource-deterministic assumptions that

dominate education policy. These contributions are integrated within an organizational culture framework (Deal & Peterson, 2009; Schein, 2010).

**Practical Implications for Leadership and Policy**

For leadership development, education authorities should prepare principals through programs that emphasize leadership for psychological safety, distributed leadership, culturally grounded authenticity, and explicit strategies for developing teachers' career adaptability. These programs should combine case-based learning drawn from successful Islamic institutions, peer mentoring, and sustained coaching. For teacher employment, the findings point to the value of predictability and recognition: even engaged teachers described uncertain contracts and insufficient compensation as persistent frustrations. Policymakers may therefore consider compensation linked to qualifications and responsibilities rather than contract status, clearer pathways to civil service positions, multi-year contracts with performance-based renewal, and wider access to professional development and welfare benefits. Because funding for these measures is structurally limited, as noted in the Introduction, phased and school-level steps, such as transparent renewal criteria and protected time for professional development, may be more immediately feasible. For professional development and institutional culture, madrasahs should institutionalize job-embedded learning through professional learning communities, peer mentoring, and school-based development, and should articulate visions that connect academic excellence with Islamic character formation. Such visions can be reinforced through practices such as opening meetings with Quranic reflection, recruiting staff aligned with institutional mission, and regular strategic reflection to counter cultural drift. Culturally grounded environments are particularly motivating in faith-based contexts, where they help sustain commitment despite external constraints.

**Study Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

This study has five main limitations. Its geographic scope is limited to five madrasahs, which restricts transferability to other Islamic institutions and educational levels. Its six-month, cross-sectional design limits causal inference about how leadership shapes adaptability over time, so longitudinal research with repeated measurement is needed. Its reliance on qualitative self-report, although triangulated with observation and document analysis, remains vulnerable to social desirability bias and should be complemented by objective indicators such as student achievement gains, teacher retention rates, and curriculum adoption. Teacher participants were selected in consultation with principals, which may over-represent favorable views of leadership. Finally, the study did not examine macro-level policy and resource constraints, gender differences, student outcomes beyond school-reported assessment and feedback records, which were used as descriptive corroboration and not independently verified, or how transformational leadership combines with instructional or distributed leadership models. Future research should address these gaps, including quantitative tests of intervention efficacy.

## D. Conclusion

This research has examined the fundamental question: How do madrasahs generate and sustain educational quality despite operating with constrained resources and employing substantial proportions of precarious contract teachers? The answer emerging from this investigation resists simplistic determinism. Quality does not appear to emerge simply from resource availability: the madrasahs studied all operated under constraints, yet differed in how well they sustained quality. Rather, quality emerges through synergistic interaction between leadership practices establishing institutional conditions, individual psychological capacities enabling adaptive responses, and interpersonal cultures supporting collective meaning-making and effort. Specifically, principals practicing transformational leadership help to construct the organizational ecosystems

within which teacher career adaptability can flourish. By modeling exemplary conduct, articulating compelling visions, encouraging intellectual engagement, and attending to individual development, transformational leaders cultivate psychological safety and create conditions enabling teachers to develop career concern, exercise control, pursue curiosity, and sustain confidence. Teachers with developed career adaptability, even under employment precarity, maintain future-orientation enabling career planning, exercise agency, pursue continuous learning and skill development, and sustain confidence in their professional effectiveness. Peer social support systems, deliberately cultivated through collaborative structures and cultures valuing collective problem-solving, buffer psychological impacts of employment uncertainty and reinforce individual adaptability. The synergistic result is sustainable educational quality characterized by student learning gains, pedagogical innovation, staff retention, and institutional vitality. This research thus contributes to the growing recognition that educational quality in resource-constrained contexts is not a matter of miracle-working but of strategic leadership practice, deliberate culture-building, and systematic development of individual and collective capacities. For Indonesian madrasahs and Islamic educational institutions globally, the implication is clear: while policy reforms addressing teacher welfare and resource allocation remain imperative, improvements in educational quality may be achievable through leadership development and culture cultivation, as the evidence presented here suggests. The urgent scholarly and practical challenge ahead involves both expanding this research through longitudinal, comparative, and quantitative investigations, and rigorously implementing evidence-based leadership and professional development approaches in real-world institutional contexts.

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