Jurnal El-umdah

Jurnal Kajian Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir
doi: 10.26811/xxxx.xxxx.xxxx

TRANSFORMATIONAL-SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP STRATEGY IN AL-QUR'AN MEMORIZATION PROGRAM: INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

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Received: 2026-10-18	**Accepted:** 2026-11-15	**Published:** 2026-11-18

Abstract

Islamic schools in Indonesia must pursue academic competitiveness while preserving their religious mission, yet evidence on how spiritual leadership shapes institutional quality remains thin. This study examines how transformational-spiritual leadership operates through the Al-Qur'an memorization (tahfiz) program at Jihadul Muslim NW Islamic Middle School in West Lombok, Indonesia. A qualitative single-case design drew on 47 institutional documents from 2010–2023 and eight key informant interviews conducted in August–October 2023, analyzed through reflexive thematic analysis. Five leadership practice clusters emerged: visionary faith-centered goal-setting, participatory governance based on shura, intrinsic motivation cultivation through spiritual development, staff capacity-building, and evidence-based accountability within ethical frameworks. The tahfiz program functioned as an organizational technology that embedded these practices in daily routines. The school reports that 68% of students meet minimum competency standards against a district average of 52%, a 35% decline in discipline incidents between 2015 and 2023, and retention of 18 of 22 teachers. These associations are descriptive and do not establish causation. The discussion shows that explicit faith-ethical frameworks may strengthen transformational leadership and that authentic identity–practice alignment supports institutional legitimacy. The findings suggest that spiritual and academic objectives are complementary and offer guidance for Islamic school leaders and policymakers.

Keywords: *transformational-spiritual leadership; tahfiz program; Islamic education; institutional quality; student achievement.*

A. Introduction

Islamic educational institutions occupy a distinctive position within the plural education systems of Southeast Asia, serving approximately 98 million students across Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, and Thailand (World Bank, 2021). In Indonesia, roughly 34% of primary and secondary students attend Islamic schools, a sector that shapes social capital, cognitive development, and citizenship formation (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2023; Nilan, 2009) and whose post-2000 expansion reflects both demographic demand and deliberate investment (Hefner, 2009). West Lombok's Islamic schools illustrate the resulting pressures: they must compete academically with public schools, reconcile a religious mission with standardized curricula, retain qualified teachers, and operate with fewer resources.

Research on Islamic school effectiveness has moved from theological analysis toward empirical study of how faith-based organizations manage legitimacy pressures, quality assurance demands, and pedagogical innovation at once (Hefner, 2009; Raihani, 2008). Transformational leadership theory, formulated by Burns (1978) and operationalized by Bass (1985), holds that leaders who exercise idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration generate stronger commitment and performance than transactional leaders (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Judge & Piccolo, 2004). In schools, such principals improve teacher efficacy and instructional quality, which in turn predict student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2008). Yet the theory developed largely in secular settings and, in Islamic institutions, must be synthesized with principles such as *tawhid* and *amanah*, which turn the leader–follower relationship into a spiritual covenant (Al-Faruqi, 1992; Rahman, 2025). Islamic organizational ethics frames leadership as moral stewardship grounded in consultation (*shura*; Qur'an 42:38, 3:159), trustworthiness (*amanah*; Qur'an 4:58), justice (*adl*; Qur'an 4:135, 5:8), compassion (*rahmah*; Qur'an 9:128), and excellence (*ihsan*; Qur'an 2:112) (Beekun & Badawi, 1999). Leaders who ground decisions in these principles are associated with higher employee trust,

commitment, and stakeholder satisfaction (Farzin et al., 2021; Zaim et al., 2022).

Institutional theory adds a third lens. Organizations gain legitimacy when practice genuinely expresses declared identity rather than ceremonial conformity (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Suchman, 1995). Faith-based schools must satisfy pragmatic legitimacy (parents expect academic results), moral legitimacy (they expect religious values to be embodied), and cognitive legitimacy (they expect an authentic expression of religious identity). Decoupling formal policy from daily practice breeds tension and dissatisfaction (Bromley & Powell, 2012), and invoking Islamic principles only rhetorically creates a "value-practice gap" (Mawardi et al., 2026). Qur'an memorization (*tahfiz*) is a strategic site for alignment. It is a religious practice, a pedagogical method associated with metacognition and attention (Sirin et al., 2021), and an organizational technology of rules, incentives, performance metrics, and accountability mechanisms that embeds institutional values in daily routines and strengthens institutional brand identity (Farzin et al., 2021; I. Hasanah et al., 2023; Waziroh et al., 2026). Its institutional efficacy, however, depends on harmonizing spiritual intention with pedagogical rigor (Akmansyah et al., 2025). Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework that integrates these three lenses.

Three gaps remain. First, the intersection of transformational leadership and faith-based ethics in non-Western schools has received little empirical attention (Benefiel et al., 2014; Fry & Slocum, 2007). Second, Islamic educational leadership scholarship stays largely normative, describing what leaders should do rather than what they do and with what institutional correlates, while non-formal and hybrid frameworks remain neglected (Brooks & Mutohar, 2018; Saekan & Kayadibi, 2026). Third, *tahfiz* programs have not been systematically theorized as institutional transformation mechanisms (Taufikin et al., 2025). Practitioners therefore lack evidence-based frameworks and face a false binary between spiritual mission and academic rigor (Şahin, 2018). In West Lombok, only 19% of Islamic middle school graduates reach minimum national competency standards, against

53% in secular government schools, yet some Islamic schools appear to combine spiritually grounded leadership with rigorous pedagogy.

This study addresses these gaps through a qualitative case study of Jihadul Muslim NW Islamic Middle School, founded in 2010 as a community-based response to quality gaps. We (1) map the leadership practices through which the principal operationalizes transformational-spiritual leadership, (2) examine how the *tahfiz* program embeds these practices in school routines, and (3) analyze how participants and documents link them to legitimacy, staff commitment, and student motivation (Dahari & Hana, 2026; Ningrum et al., 2025). The study contributes to organizational theory by showing faith-based worldviews as legitimate organizing principles, to Islamic studies by tracing normative principles in observable practice (Amalia, 2026; Mundiri et al., 2025), and to school leadership by offering a values-based governance model for institutional resilience (Asiah et al., 2025; Khanom et al., 2025; Pratama et al., 2026; Suyatman et al., 2026).

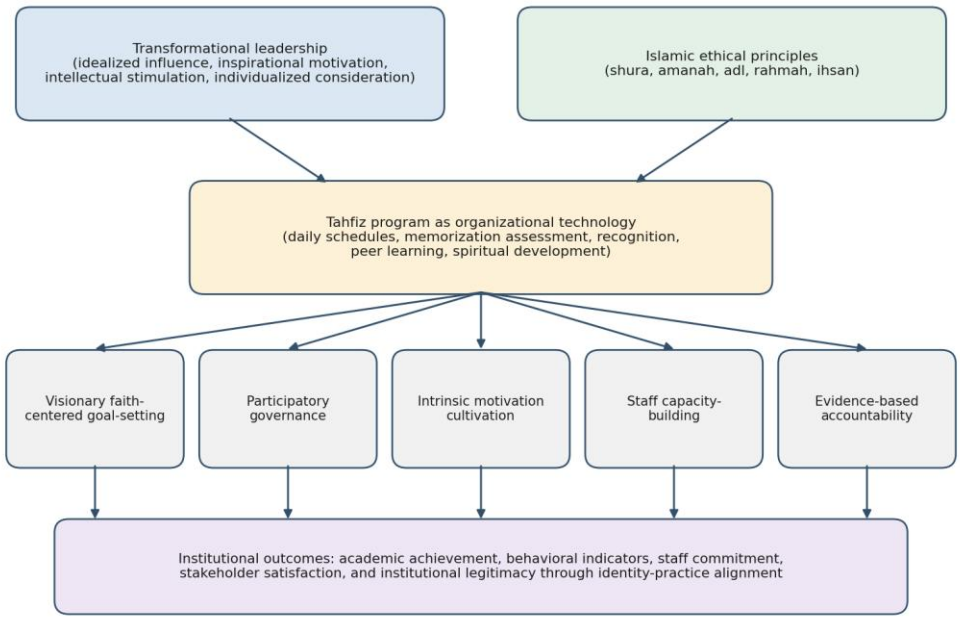


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Transformational-Spiritual Leadership in a Tahfiz-Based School

B. Method

This study employed a single-case design within a qualitative interpretive methodology grounded in a social constructivist worldview, in which institutional meaning emerges through stakeholder interpretation and social interaction (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Jihadul Muslim NW Islamic Middle School, established in 2010 in West Lombok's Sekotong District, was selected purposively because it demonstrates longitudinal practices that integrate religious values into the academic curriculum (Ramadhan et al., 2026). It serves 340 students (60% female) from low-income families and employs a principal with 17 years of Islamic education experience, a curriculum vice principal, 22 teachers, and 8 administrative staff. Its *tahfiz*-based curriculum occupies 40% of instructional time, and the school is funded mainly by tuition (average IDR 450,000 per month) supplemented by community contributions and limited government funding.

Data were drawn from two sources (Table 1). Document analysis covered 47 institutional texts from 2010 to 2023, accessed through the school administration with permission: strategic plans and quality assurance reports, *tahfiz* curriculum guides, leadership minutes and circulars, student achievement records, and parental communications. Semi-structured interviews were conducted from August to October 2023 with eight key informants, using open-ended guides with follow-up probes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and transcribed verbatim.

Table 1. Data Sources and Participants

Source	Type	Number	Period / timing
Annual strategic plans and quality assurance reports	Document	8	2010–2023
Curriculum guides (tahfiz program)	Document	6	2010–2023
Leadership meeting minutes, principal circulars, staff communications	Document	15	2010–2023
Student achievement data	Document	8	2010–2023
Parental communications	Document	4	2010–2023
School principal	Interview (90 min)	1	August–October 2023
Curriculum vice principal	Interview (75 min)	1	August–October 2023
Islamic studies coordinator	Interview (60 min)	1	August–October 2023
Teaching staff (different subject areas)	Interview (60–75 min)	3	August–October 2023
Parent representatives (school committee)	Interview (45–60 min)	2	August–October 2023

Documents and transcripts were analyzed through reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) using NVivo 12. Descriptive codes were collated into candidate themes and then reviewed for relationships among leadership practices, organizational mechanisms, and outcomes. Coding followed three dimensions drawn from the theoretical background: transformational leadership practices, Islamic ethical operationalization, and institutional legitimacy indicators. Student assessment data for 2015–2023 were examined descriptively to see how trends coincided with documented leadership or programmatic changes (Dian et al., 2026; Wasehudin et al., 2023).

Trustworthiness was strengthened by triangulating documents and interviews across leaders, teachers, and parents (Kusumaputri et al., 2023;

Lincoln & Guba, 1985), by team review meetings on coding consistency, and by member checking of preliminary findings with administrators and selected teachers. Interviewees consented to audio recording, and participants appear in the findings by role only, without names.

C. Results and Discussion

This section reports the findings first and then discusses them. The Results are organized around five leadership practice clusters identified in 47 documents and eight interviews, with tables and figures summarizing the supporting evidence. The Discussion interprets these findings through transformational leadership theory, Islamic organizational ethics, and institutional theory, and then sets out practical implications and the limits of the study.

Results

Analysis of documents and interviews identified five interconnected leadership practice clusters through which transformational-spiritual leadership operates. These practices simultaneously embody transformational leadership dimensions (vision, modeling, individualization, intellectual stimulation), operationalize Islamic ethical principles (*shura*, *amanah*, *adl*, *rahmah*, *ihsan*), and establish institutional legitimacy through identity-practice alignment. These clusters reflect a synergistic integration of administrative decisiveness and moral guidance, where the principal functions as both an organizational architect and a spiritual mentor (Shofiana et al., 2025). Table 2 maps each cluster to its transformational dimension, Islamic ethical basis, and illustrative evidence.

Table 2. Five Leadership Practice Clusters and Their Theoretical and Ethical Basis

Practice cluster	Transformational dimension	Islamic ethical principle	Illustrative evidence
Visionary faith-centered goal-setting	Inspirational motivation	Justice (adl); responsibility	Unifying vision repeated in strategic plans and principal circulars; spiritual and academic goals weighted equally
Participatory governance	Individualized consideration	Consultation (shura); trustworthiness (amanah)	Monthly staff meetings and quarterly academic committees; 7 of 8 interviewees reported feeling heard
Intrinsic motivation cultivation	Intellectual stimulation; individualized consideration	Excellence (ihsan)	Personal spiritual goal tracking; spiritual achievement celebrated at monthly school gatherings
Staff capacity-building	Individualized consideration	Compassion (rahmah)	12 staff development activities annually; mentoring and scholarships for teachers
Evidence-based accountability	Intellectual stimulation (growth-oriented review)	Justice (adl)	Multidimensional quality assurance covering achievement, behavior, attendance, tahfiz, and satisfaction

Visionary Faith-Centered Goal-Setting

School leadership articulated a unifying institutional vision integrating academic excellence and Islamic character formation: "Establishing a school producing graduates embodying Qur'anic values and scientific achievement, becoming leaders serving humanity with knowledge and moral integrity". This vision appears in school documents with consistent emphasis, repeated in principal circulars, annual plans, and staff orientation materials. Compared to typical school mission statements emphasizing academic achievement alone, this vision explicitly positions spiritual and academic development as equally weighted institutional objectives. The leadership operationalizes this dual-pathway approach by

aligning strategic planning with core Islamic tenets, such as justice and responsibility, ensuring that pedagogical structures are deeply rooted in spiritual devotion (Zahiri & Sahal, 2025). This approach establishes a quality culture where the principal's commitment acts as a primary foundation for staff and student performance, driven by habituation of worship and exemplary behavior (Mahmud & Ramli, 2025).

The principal's role in visionary articulation was documented through examination of principal communications spanning 2010–2023: early leadership (2010–2015) focused on establishing institutional infrastructure and *tahfiz* program viability; transitional period (2015–2019) emphasized integrating Islamic pedagogy with national curriculum requirements; recent leadership (2019–2023) systematized the integration through comprehensive vision revision articulating how *tahfiz* development enables character formation, which facilitates academic excellence. Interview data confirmed this strategic progression: staff members reported that early confusion about *tahfiz* program rationale gradually resolved as leadership clarified connections between Qur'anic memorization and attention development, self-discipline cultivation, and ethical foundation enabling academic learning. By embedding these spiritual frameworks into the daily educational ecosystem, the leadership successfully aligned individual student progress with broader institutional goals (Roziana et al., 2025).

Table 3. Phases of the Principal's Visionary Articulation, 2010–2023

Phase	Period	Focus of visionary articulation
Early leadership	2010–2015	Establishing institutional infrastructure and the viability of the tahfiz program
Transitional period	2015–2019	Integrating Islamic pedagogy with national curriculum requirements
Recent leadership	2019–2023	Systematizing integration: revised vision linking tahfiz development to character formation and academic excellence

A teacher stated, "Initially we wondered if *tahfiz* distracted from academics. Gradually the principal helped us see that the discipline, focus, and moral foundation students develop through *tahfiz* actually enable better

academic learning." This perception shift from viewing Islamic and academic objectives as potentially competing to viewing them as mutually enabling represents a critical outcome of visionary leadership operationalizing Islamic ethical principles (*ihsan*: excellence through spiritual consciousness; *rahmah*: commitment to holistic student development). This alignment mirrors models where spiritual leadership functions as a mechanism for both pedagogical enhancement and religious identity construction (Muslim et al., 2025).

Participatory Governance Structures

School leadership established formal consultation structures embodying the Islamic principle of *shura* (mandatory consultation) (Ghafran & Yasmin, 2019), monthly staff meetings, quarterly academic committees examining curriculum implementation, and school committee meetings including parent representatives convening bi-monthly. Analysis of meeting minutes (2015-2023) documented systematic agenda-setting facilitating broad participation: curriculum committees included teachers across subjects enabling cross-disciplinary input; academic review meetings included both instructional leaders and classroom teachers; parental meetings explicitly solicited family perspectives on program direction. Staff interviews confirmed participatory perception: Seven of eight interviewees reported feeling heard in institutional decisions, with specific examples of suggestions implemented (adjusting the *tahfiz* daily schedule based on teacher input; adopting the tutorial system following academic committee recommendation; expanding parent communication per parental requests). This structural *shura* operationalization simultaneously embedded the Islamic ethical principle (consultation requirement) and transformational leadership practice (individualized consideration through valuing follower input) (Jensen et al., 2020) into governance systems. One teacher stated: "The principal could simply decide everything, but she asks us first, values our perspectives, implements our suggestions. This makes us feel trusted, makes us work harder because we're invested in decisions we helped make." A

parent representative noted: "Unlike some schools where parents are just asked for money, here they actually listen to parent ideas about the school." This governance model operationalizes both the Islamic principle (*amanah*: trustee accountability requiring stakeholder input) (Basri et al., 2016) and transformational practice (individualized consideration).

Intrinsic Motivation Cultivation Through Spiritual Development

Leadership explicitly designed the *tahfiz* program to develop intrinsic motivation action driven by internal satisfaction and value alignment rather than external rewards. Curriculum analysis revealed that the *tahfiz* program is structured around: (1) Personal spiritual progress (students track individual memorization achievement against self-established goals, not comparative rankings); (2) Service motivation (students understand *tahfiz* as preparation for eventually becoming Qur'anic teachers/leaders serving the community); (3) Ethical development (curriculum links Qur'anic content to character qualities: patience, perseverance, mercy, justice); (4) Community recognition (achievement publicly celebrated through monthly school gatherings and annual competitions, but framed as spiritual accomplishment, not academic ranking). Teacher interviews and school documents revealed motivational effects: students were reported to study *tahfiz* because "it's important for my spiritual development" and "I want to become a *hafiz* to teach my community," rather than because parents demanded achievement or schools offered prizes. School behavioral records indicated fewer discipline incidents where *tahfiz* engagement was higher; teachers reported fewer behavioral problems among students engaged in intensive memorization; interviewed teachers attributed this to *tahfiz* developing self-regulation and ethical consciousness. Academic performance records showed higher average results among *tahfiz*-engaged students (76%) than among less-engaged cohorts (63%), a difference that may also reflect prior ability or selection into *tahfiz* groups and is consistent with, but does not establish, a transfer of intrinsic motivation and metacognitive development to academic contexts. This finding aligns with broader research suggesting

that pedagogical models prioritizing moral and spiritual exemplification effectively foster sustained enthusiasm for learning (Qosim & Siri, 2025), as students internalize the discipline required for *tahfiz* as a framework for general cognitive and ethical maturation (Gafur et al., 2025).

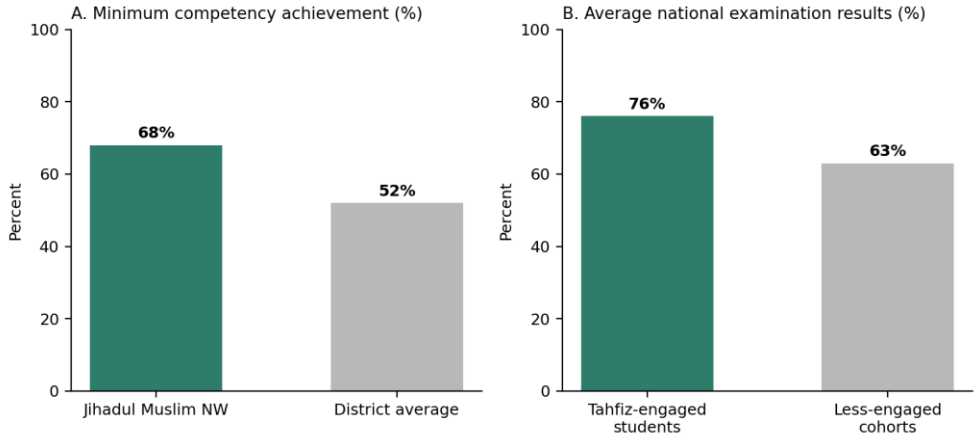


Figure 2. Reported Academic Outcomes: School vs. District Average (A) and Tahfiz-Engaged vs. Less-Engaged Cohorts (B)

This practice embodies multiple theoretical dimensions: transformational leadership's intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration (helping each student develop unique spiritual goals and supporting their achievement); the Islamic principle of *ihsan* (excellence through spiritual consciousness enabling peak performance); organizational psychology's intrinsic motivation theory (sustaining effort through value alignment rather than external incentives). By framing memorization as a spiritual vocation rather than a mere academic obligation, the institution fosters a profound sense of self-actualization among the student body (Taufikin et al., 2025).

Staff Capacity-Building and Empowerment

School leadership implemented systematic staff development supporting both Islamic scholarship and contemporary pedagogical skill: annual teaching staff seminars on Islamic education philosophy and methods; support for teachers pursuing advanced Islamic studies

qualifications (the principal arranged scholarships for three teachers attending Islamic teaching programs); mentoring systems pairing experienced teachers with newer staff; peer learning forums where teachers shared curricular innovations. Document analysis identified 12 staff development activities annually over the 2015-2023 period, representing substantial institutional investment in faculty growth. Interview data captured transformational leadership impact: teachers reported the principal's encouragement of professional development as a signal of being valued and trusted, creating reciprocal commitment. One teacher stated: "The principal invested in my Islamic education. Now I want to give 100% to this school because they invested in me." Staff records were consistent with this interpretation: the school retained 18 of 22 teachers across the 2010-2023 period despite limited salary resources compared to government schools, a retention rate that appears high (Juwarti & Octafian, 2025). Staff empowerment extended to leadership development: the vice principal role was explicitly structured to develop curriculum leadership capacity; the Islamic studies coordinator position created opportunities for subject matter expert influence on school direction; the academic committee gave teachers a substantive role in institutional decision-making. This capacity-building operationalized an Islamic ethical principle (*rahmah*: compassionate commitment to staff development) and transformational practice (individualized consideration through growth support), generating an organizational outcome of high-commitment workforce compensating for limited financial resources.

Evidence-Based Accountability Within Ethical Frameworks

School leadership established accountability systems measuring multiple outcome dimensions rather than test scores alone: annual quality assurance assessments examined academic achievement (national exam results: 68% minimum competency achievement 2022-2023), behavioral indicators (discipline incident rates declining 35% over 2015-2023), attendance patterns (average 92% attendance), *tahfiz* achievement (currently

65 students have memorized 5+ *juz*, 34 students have memorized 30 full *juz*, and stakeholder satisfaction (annual parent survey 2015-2023 showing 84-92% satisfaction with school direction). This comprehensive approach reflects a cyclical quality assurance model that harmonizes theological values with structured institutional evaluation (Jannana et al., 2025). Table 4 lists the outcome indicators reported in the institutional records and interviews.

Table 4. Reported Institutional Outcome Indicators

Domain	Indicator	Reported value	Reference period
Academic achievement	Students reaching minimum competency standards on national examinations	68% (district average 52%)	2022–2023
Academic achievement	Average national examination results: tahfiz-engaged vs. less-engaged cohorts	76% vs. 63%	Not specified
Behavior	Discipline incident rate	35% decline	2015–2023
Attendance	Average student attendance	92%	Not specified
Tahfiz achievement	Students who have memorized 5+ juz / 30 juz	65 / 34 students	Current
Staff commitment	Teachers retained	18 of 22 (82%)	2010–2023
Stakeholder satisfaction	Parent satisfaction with school direction	84–92%	2015–2023

Note. "Not specified" indicates that the text does not state the reference period.

This multidimensional accountability avoided over-emphasizing test scores, instead requiring leadership attention to holistic institutional effectiveness. Importantly, accountability operated within ethical constraints: no high-pressure test-preparation strategies compromising pedagogical quality; no selective admissions based on achievement screening (school accepted all applicants); no teaching-to-test narrowing the curriculum (*tahfiz* and character education received proportional emphasis). Leadership communications framed accountability as collective institutional improvement responsibility rather than individual blame: quality reviews examined systemic factors (resource allocation, program design, training

effectiveness) rather than individual teacher failure. This ethical accountability operationalized the Islamic principle (*adl*: justice requiring examination of systemic constraints and fair evaluation) and transformational leadership practices (framing accountability as growth opportunity). One teacher noted: "We examine our data together to see what's working and what needs improvement, not to blame individuals. This makes teachers willing to honestly acknowledge challenges and seek solutions." This collaborative approach mirrors broader findings that Islamic values-based management fosters organizational transparency and trust, effectively aligning individual professional practice with collective educational objectives (Jamaluddin et al., 2026).

Discussion

Integration of Transformational and Spiritual Leadership

Our findings contribute to transformational leadership theory by suggesting that integrating explicit faith-ethical frameworks may strengthen leadership effectiveness in religious organizational contexts. Bass and Riggio's (2006) transformational leadership model emphasizes idealized influence (modeling valued behaviors), but specifies behaviors through secular frameworks emphasizing integrity, competence, and vision. In Islamic educational contexts, idealized influence operates through explicit spiritual modeling: leaders demonstrating Qur'anic values, practicing Islamic ethical principles, and modeling spiritual discipline create profound leader identification among stakeholders whose identities are fundamentally constituted through religious identity (Egel & Fry, 2016). The school principal's visible commitment to Qur'anic study, regular prayer leadership, and public articulation of decisions grounded in Islamic ethical reasoning created what staff termed "a living example of what we are trying to develop in students." This spiritual dimension amplified transformational impact beyond what generic integrity or competence demonstration achieves. Scholars examining spiritual leadership in organizational contexts (Crossman, 2010) identify similar mechanisms: explicit spiritual frameworks

provide a transcendent sense of purpose motivating effort beyond material incentives, particularly powerful in resource-constrained contexts like this Indonesian school. Staff members worked substantially beyond standard employment terms (remaining after hours for student mentoring, developing curricular innovations) not primarily motivated by compensation (modest by Indonesian standards) but by alignment between work and spiritual purposes contributing to students' Islamic character formation and serving the community through education. This finding suggests transformational leadership theory's applicability improves substantially when adapted to explicitly incorporate faith-ethical frameworks legitimate in organizational contexts where stakeholders' worldviews are religiously constituted. Furthermore, this synergy between spiritual commitment and transformational practices fosters a unique organizational culture where internalizing Islamic ethics serves as a primary driver for both professional performance and long-term institutional resilience.

Tahfiz as Institutional Transformation Mechanism

Beyond theoretical contribution regarding leadership, findings illuminate how religious pedagogical practices function as organizational technologies enabling institutional transformation. Existing educational leadership scholarship emphasizes change management, instructional improvement, and capacity-building as distinct leadership functions (Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2008). This research indicates that *tahfiz* program implementation functioned simultaneously as pedagogical intervention (improving student metacognitive abilities), spiritual discipline (cultivating ethical consciousness), organizational ritual (reinforcing institutional identity), accountability mechanism (providing measurable progress metrics), and motivation structure (enabling intrinsic goal pursuit). This multifunctionality produced synergistic institutional effects: the same *tahfiz* program simultaneously addressed quality improvement (academic achievement), cultural preservation (Islamic identity), ethical development (character formation), and organizational commitment (staff retention).

Comparative education scholarship examining how faith-based institutions navigate institutional pressures (Hefner, 2009) suggests that schools achieving genuine integration of religious and academic missions rather than decoupling them generate stronger organizational coherence and stakeholder commitment. This case offers an empirical illustration: *tahfiz* program integration appears to have operationalized such coupling, enabling authentic practice alignment rather than ceremonial conformity. When parents and teachers described the school as genuinely integrating Islamic pedagogy with academic rigor not merely performing Islamic values while pursuing test score maximisation, they reported committing more deeply to institutional missions. Reported behavioural indicators, staff retention, and parent satisfaction were favourable over the period examined. This finding contributes to institutional theory by illustrating mechanisms through which organisations achieve moral legitimacy in contexts of institutional pluralism: authentic integration of valued principles into core practices, not superficial policy conformance. Furthermore, the implementation of structured *tahfiz* programs facilitates a culture of discipline and confidence, where the principal's spiritual-transformational approach systematically aligns pedagogical policies with institutional goals (Nisak & Ishari, 2025).

Implications for Islamic Educational Leadership

In practice, findings offer Islamic educational leaders' evidence-based guidance for strategic improvement. The research suggests that viewing spiritual leadership and academic excellence as competing objectives represents a false binary; instead, systematically integrating Islamic pedagogical principles with contemporary educational practices enables pursuit of both simultaneously. School leaders facing pressure to improve academic outcomes while maintaining religious mission need not choose between them. Rather, they can foster success by institutionalizing ethical values such as *amanah* (trustworthiness) and *'adl* (justice) directly into governance frameworks and daily operational management (Syukron et al., 2025). This approach mandates that principals adopt a demeanor

characterized by humility and inclusivity, prioritizing the spiritual development of the school community over rigid hierarchical displays (S. M. Hasanah et al., 2024).

The Jihadul Muslim case illustrates pathways: establishing clear visionary integration articulating how spiritual discipline enables academic focus; structuring governance enabling participatory Islamic consultation; designing pedagogical programs (*tahfiz*) with explicit intrinsic motivation and metacognitive development aims; investing in staff capacity development signaling institutional commitment to teacher growth; implementing multidimensional accountability avoiding test-score fixation. For the Ministry of Religious Affairs and provincial education officials overseeing Indonesian Islamic schools, findings suggest policy frameworks supporting Islamic school improvement should emphasize quality Islamic pedagogical implementation alongside academic standards. Currently, Islamic school policy often addresses Islamic and academic development separately, creating institutional confusion about relative priority (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2023). Research suggests that schools viewing Islamic pedagogy as a tool for enabling academic excellence (through developing discipline, focus, intrinsic motivation) rather than an alternative to academic rigor may generate stronger outcomes on both dimensions. This could reshape policy orientation from the academic/Islamic binary toward integration frameworks. Moreover, fostering deep collaborative networks between schools, parents, and community organizations further strengthens this holistic educational model, ensuring that religious identity remains a cornerstone of student growth while simultaneously facilitating broader societal contributions (Moslimany et al., 2024).

Contextual Limitations and Boundary Conditions

Findings should be read within several limits. The case is a single community-based school in West Lombok, serving low-income, religiously homogeneous communities and led by a principal with 17 years of Islamic education experience; whether the model works with different teacher

qualifications, student populations, or leadership backgrounds requires investigation. Outcome data were limited to achievement and behavioral records, without standardized instruments such as teacher efficacy, organizational commitment, or student motivation scales. The study relied on retrospective accounts and documents rather than direct observation, which may introduce selective-memory, documentation, and social-desirability bias, although interview protocols emphasized confidentiality. Most importantly, it describes associations between leadership practices and reported outcomes; causal claims require longitudinal designs that were not feasible here (Prasetyo et al., 2025; Said et al., 2023). Future research should compare Islamic schools that vary in context and resources, track leadership and outcomes over time, combine quantitative leadership and organizational measures with qualitative analysis, and validate these constructs across wider cultural and geographical settings (Capinding, 2025; Fuadi & Suyatno, 2020; Mariyono, 2024; Wang et al., 2023).

D. Conclusion

This study shows that, in the case examined, spiritual commitment and academic aspiration did not compete. Leaders at Jihadul Muslim NW Islamic Middle School treated consultation, trustworthiness, justice, compassion, and excellence as working managerial practices, and the *tahfiz* program gave those practices a daily routine in which vision, participation, motivation, staff development, and accountability became visible to teachers, students, and parents. Reported outcomes were favorable despite limited resources, which suggests that shared purpose can partly compensate where financial incentives are scarce.

The study makes three contributions. It extends transformational leadership theory by showing idealized influence exercised through explicit spiritual modeling. It extends institutional theory by locating moral legitimacy in the authentic coupling of religious identity and core practice rather than ceremonial conformity. It also moves Islamic educational scholarship from normative prescription toward observable practice. For

policymakers, the findings argue for improvement frameworks that treat Islamic pedagogy as an enabler of academic work rather than an alternative to it.

Because the evidence comes from one school, rests largely on retrospective accounts and school records, and shows associations rather than effects, it supports analytic rather than statistical generalization. Comparative and longitudinal studies, combined with standardized measures of teacher efficacy, commitment, and student motivation, are needed to test whether these practices travel to other types of Islamic schools and other settings.

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