The Leadership Strategies Of Madrasah Principals In Developing An Innovative School Culture

Abdul Goffar Abdul Haq As

Postgraduate Program of the Islamic Institute (IAI) At-Taqwa Bondowoso, Indonesia
abdulgoffar81@gmail.com
abduh14888@gmail.com

Abstract: An innovative school culture is a crucial indicator for measuring the success of educational transformation, particularly in the context of Islamic-based madrasas (Islamic schools). This research is motivated by the importance of building a culture of innovation that is not only oriented toward technology and learning methods but also deeply rooted in spiritual values. The purpose of this study is to describe the leadership strategies of madrasa principals in developing an innovative school culture at Madrasah Aliyah(MA) Darul Huda Pengarang Jambesari Bondowoso and to identify the supporting factors and challenges faced in this process. This research used a qualitative case study approach, using in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. The results indicate that the madrasa principals implement transformational leadership, demonstrated through the creation of a shared vision, facilitating spaces for teacher reflection, and developing innovative programs based on Islamic values, such as "1 Student 1 Work" and Islamic Digital Literacy. Key supporting factors include leadership commitment, institutional support from the foundation, and an adaptive Islamic boarding school culture. Challenges include limited digital infrastructure and resistance to change by some senior teachers. This research contribution provides a contextual overview of how an innovative culture can be sustainably built within the Islamic education ecosystem through values-based collaborative leadership.

Keywords: innovative school culture, madrasah leadership, Islamic education, transformation, Islamic values.

INTRODUCTION

The changing times marked by globalization, era of society, and the digitalization of education require Islamic educational institutions, particularly madrasas, to not only maintain the tradition of learning based on Islamic values, but also to become adaptive and innovative institutions (Zamroni, 2011). In this context, an innovative school culture is essential to creating a learning environment that fosters creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking skills in students. An innovative school culture encompasses not only technological aspects but also encompasses collective values, norms, and habits that drive change toward progress (Schein, 2010).

Madrasah principals, as strategic players within the institutional structure, have primary responsibility for shaping and developing an innovative school culture. Effective leadership emphasizes not only administrative management but also the ability to inspire, facilitate, and direct all elements of the madrasah toward a shared vision oriented toward positive change (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Therefore, the leadership strategy of madrasah principals is the main key in accelerating the process of transforming organizational culture towards an innovative, religious, and superior environment. The Transformational Leadership theory developed by Leithwood & Jantzi (2005) emphasizes that transformational educational leaders can influence school culture through building a strong vision, empowering staff, and continuous professional development. In the madrasah context, transformational leadership is also a driving force in creating a learning environment that aligns Islamic values with the demands of global innovation. Fullan (2007) shows that systemic changes in school culture can only be achieved

if the madrasah principal is able to become an agent of change who builds strong interpersonal relationships, creates trust, and makes innovation a shared culture. Hariri, Monypenny, & Prideaux (2016) stated that a culture of innovation in schools develops when the principal demonstrates distributive leadership, provides space for experimentation for teachers, and creates a work climate that supports collaborative learning. Thus, the leadership strategy of madrasah principals is not only about planning and supervision, but also how to internalize the spirit of innovation into the overall organizational culture.

MA Darul Huda Pengarang Jambesari Bondowoso is a private Islamic boarding school (Islamic boarding school) known for its spirit of renewal and progressive educational program development. Innovation at this school is inseparable from visionary and transformative leadership. However, cultural change does not happen instantly. It requires a planned, collaborative leadership approach grounded in Islamic values and the local character of the Islamic boarding school.

Several previous studies have discussed the role of the madrasah principal in fostering an innovative climate. For example, Mulyasa (2013) emphasized the importance of the principal in motivating teachers to innovate through strengthened supervision and professional development. Meanwhile, Suprapto (2021) highlighted the importance of participatory leadership in creating changes in the school's organizational culture. Furthermore, research by Nawawi & Haryanto (2020) showed that the principal's involvement in strategic decision-making has a significant impact on improving the quality of learning.

Furthermore, research by Sumintono et al. (2015) in the context of schools in Southeast Asia revealed that

principals who implement an evidence-based leadership approach tend to be more successful in building a culture of innovation because their decisions are based on teacher performance data and student learning outcomes. This is reinforced by a study by Suyatno et al. (2019) which stated that Islamic spiritual values internalized in the leadership style of madrasah principals significantly strengthen teacher engagement and enhance an innovative work culture in Islamic schools. Another study by Rohmat (2022) also highlighted that the synergy between Islamic boarding school culture and modern managerial practices implemented by madrasah principals creates a balance between traditional values and educational innovation.

However, most of these studies are general in nature and have not specifically examined the dynamics of madrasah principals' leadership strategies within the context of an innovative culture, particularly in Islamic boarding school-based madrasahs, which possess unique characteristics: strong Islamic traditions, charismatic leadership, and a social system that tends to be collectivistic. This research gap underlies the urgency of this research.

Based on this background and gap, the objectives of this study are: To describe the madrasah principals' leadership strategies in developing an innovative school culture at MA Darul Huda, authored by Jambesari Bondowoso, and to analyze the challenges and supporting factors in implementing these leadership strategies.

This research contributes to enriching the literature in the field of Islamic education management, particularly in the aspect of transformative leadership applied to Islamic boarding school-based educational institutions. Furthermore, the results of this study are also expected to serve as a practical reference for other madrasah principals in developing an innovative school culture without neglecting the Islamic values that are the primary identity of the madrasah.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research was conducted at Darul Huda Pengarang Jambesari Islamic High School (MA) in Bondowoso, a pesantren-based Islamic school (MA) with unique characteristics in developing a culture of educational innovation. The study lasted two months, from May 5 to July 5, 2025. This study used a qualitative approach with a case study approach, aiming to gain a deeper understanding of the principal's leadership strategies in developing an innovative school culture through interactions, practices, and policies implemented in a real-world context (Creswell, 2014).

The subjects in this study included the principal as the primary informant, and teachers and staff as supporting informants directly involved in implementing an innovative culture within the madrasah. Data collection techniques used three main methods: (1) in-depth interviews with the principal, teachers, and education staff regarding strategies, challenges, and the implementation of innovation within the school culture; (2) participant observation, conducted during learning activities and the madrasah's flagship programs; and

(3) documentation, in the form of an analysis of the madrasah's vision and mission documents, annual work plans, evaluation reports, and innovation development policies.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1994), which consists of three main steps: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The reduction process was carried out by filtering information relevant to the research focus. Next, the data were presented in narrative form to reveal patterns and strategic findings, and concluded with conclusions drawn based on the relationship between field data and theory. To ensure data validity, validity tests were conducted through source triangulation (comparing information from the madrasah principal, teachers, and documents) and technical triangulation (combining interviews, observations, and documentation), as well as member checking with key informants to confirm the accuracy of the findings (Sugiyono, 2019).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
1. Madrasah Principal's Leadership Strategy

Based on research findings, the Principal of MA Darul Huda Pengarang Jambesari Bondowoso implements transformational leadership, demonstrated through a planned, values-based strategy that involves all components of the madrasah. One of the main characteristics of this leadership is the formulation of the madrasah's vision and mission, which is carried out collectively, involving teachers, staff, students, and the madrasah committee. The vision developed is not merely normative but serves as a strategic direction to establish innovation as an institutional identity. The madrasah principal actively instills values of change in all members of the madrasah, emphasizing the importance of innovation that aligns with Islamic values and the challenges of the times.

The madrasah principal's exemplary behavior is particularly prominent, particularly in terms of technology adoption and the implementation of active learning. He is a key figure in encouraging teachers not only to keep up with digital developments but also to incorporate them into the teaching and learning process. On various occasions, the madrasah principal directly leads training on the use of the Learning Management System (LMS), e-learning applications, and online evaluation platforms. This leadership style creates internal motivation for teachers to continuously learn and innovate.

Teacher empowerment is a key strategy. The madrasah principal regularly conducts internal training, invites external speakers, and strengthens coaching-based academic supervision activities, not merely evaluating but also assisting and facilitating teachers in discovering innovative teaching styles. Furthermore, a Teacher Learning Community (KLG) has been established, providing a space for discussion and collective reflection for teachers to share best practices and develop innovative learning tools.

Furthermore, the madrasah principal encourages the development of internal policies that support a culture of innovation, such as providing incentives for teachers who

produce creative learning media and supporting project-based learning programs that integrate a scientific approach with Islamic values. In terms of administration, the madrasah principal also initiated the digitization of documents, attendance, assessments, and reporting, making work processes more efficient, accountable, and transparent. These steps significantly shape an innovative school culture ecosystem that is not only adaptive to change but also maintains the Islamic authenticity that is the hallmark of the madrasah.

This strategy reflects the principles of transformational leadership as proposed by Bass & Riggio (2006), which involve idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. This theory is reinforced by research by Leithwood & Jantzi (2005), which confirms that transformational leadership in an educational context can enhance teachers' innovation capacity and foster an adaptive school culture.

This analysis is further refined by the theory from the international journal Educational Management Administration & Leadership by Hallinger (2011), which demonstrates that transformational leaders play a crucial role in establishing a shared vision and developing innovation-based school improvement through strengthening teacher capacity, collaboration, and instructional leadership. The strategy implemented by the principal of MA Darul Huda aligns with these findings, particularly in creating a learning climate that encourages exploration and continuous change based on Islamic values.

2. INNOVATIVE SCHOOL CULTURE DEVELOPED

The innovative culture that has developed at MA Darul Huda, authored by Jambesari Bondowoso, is the result of consistent and sustainable leadership in building a value system and learning practices that are adaptive to changing times. This culture did not develop instantly, but rather through a transformation process involving all elements of the school, from teachers and students to the principal as the primary agent of change. One strong characteristic of this innovative culture is the habit of regular reflection and evaluation of learning by teachers. At the end of each week, teachers compile a learning reflection report that includes achievements, challenges, and solutions that have been or will be implemented. A weekly discussion forum among teachers is also facilitated as a space for sharing strategies, new learning approaches, and good practices from their respective classes.

This reflection process fosters a learning culture for teachers themselves and creates a climate of mutual support for pedagogical innovation. Furthermore, active student participation is a crucial pillar of the innovative school culture at MA Darul Huda. Students are positioned not only as recipients of knowledge but also as subjects who play an active role in creating and developing ideas. Various programs are designed to foster student creativity and leadership, such as Islamic Digital Literacy, Digital Madrasah, and the "1 Student 1 Work" program. These programs integrate Islamic values with 21st-century competencies such as critical thinking, collaboration, problem-solving, and technological innovation. Each program instills the principles of piety, trustworthiness, and brotherhood (ukhuwah) to ensure students remain rooted in Islamic ethics and morals in their work.

Innovative culture is not limited to extracurricular activities; it also permeates academic activities through the development of project-based and portfolio-based lesson plans (RPPs). Teachers are encouraged to design lessons that challenge students to think, observe, experiment, and reflect on their results in the form of tangible, meaningful work. This integration of Islamic values and a spirit of innovation is a key strength of the school culture at MA Darul Huda.

Theoretically, the innovative school culture that has developed at MA Darul Huda reflects the characteristics of a learning organization as proposed by Senge (2006), which emphasizes the importance of continuous learning, systemic thinking, and collective empowerment in navigating the complexities of change. This innovative culture encourages all members of the madrasa community to become active learners and agents of change within the Islamic education system. Furthermore, Deal and Peterson's (2009) school culture theory explains that a strong and healthy school culture is characterized by collective values, beliefs, and practices that support innovation while maintaining the moral and spiritual integrity of the school community.

Support for the importance of an innovative culture is also strengthened by recent findings. According to Liu, Hallinger, and Feng (2022), an innovative school culture built through collaborative leadership has been shown to increase teachers' capacity to implement pedagogical innovation, particularly in the context of values-based schools. This is further supported by a study by Lee & Jeong (2021), which showed that the integration of local values and technological innovation within the school environment significantly strengthens the resilience and adaptability of educational institutions amidst global change. Meanwhile, research by Javed, Yasir, and Majid (2020) confirms the crucial role of transformational leadership in building an organizational learning culture, which serves as the primary foundation for sustainable innovation.

MA Darul Huda demonstrates that innovation in Islamic education is not simply an adaptation to modern technology, but a process of cultural transformation deeply rooted in Islamic values, such as piety, brotherhood, and trustworthiness. By integrating spiritual principles into educational innovation, this madrasah demonstrates a successful model for building a sustainable and contextually innovative school culture.

3. SUPPORTING AND INHIBITING FACTORS

Supporting factors in the development of an innovative school culture at MA Darul Huda, authored by Jambesari Bondowoso, are closely related to transformative leadership, institutional support, and an institutional culture that supports renewal. The principal's commitment as a transformational

leader is reflected in their active role in creating a shared vision and driving positive change. This aligns with Bass and Avolio's (1994) theory on transformational leadership, which emphasizes the importance of inspiration, motivation, idealized influence, and individualized attention in leading change. The principal at MA Darul Huda is not only a decision-maker but also a role model in the use of technology and the development of innovative learning methods, strengthening their legitimacy and influence among teachers and students.

Structural support from the foundation is also a key element. According to Leithwood et al. (2006), the success of educational innovation depends not only on leadership at the school level but also on support from external stakeholders with authority and resources. The MA Darul Huda Foundation plays an active role in providing policy support, funding training programs, and providing basic infrastructure such as digital devices. This strengthens the innovation ecosystem, allowing teachers and students to experiment without fear of failure.

The Islamic boarding school culture, open to innovation while remaining steadfast in Islamic values, is also a significant differentiating factor. As Schein (2010) points out, an adaptive organizational culture will facilitate institutional change if the organization's core values do not conflict with the direction of change. At MA Darul Huda, spiritual values serve as a binding force that keeps change within the framework of Islamic morality and ethics. Thus, these supporting factors interact to create a sustainable innovative climate within the madrasah environment.

The transformation process toward an innovative school culture at MA Darul Huda, author Jambesari Bondowoso, is inseparable from various complex structural and cultural challenges. One of the main challenges is limited technological infrastructure. Unstable internet access and limited digital devices pose significant obstacles to the implementation of technology-based learning. In this context, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) theory developed by Davis (1989) explains that technology adoption in education is highly dependent on perceived usefulness and ease of use. When basic infrastructure is inadequate, the perception of ease of use of technology declines, thus hindering the active involvement of teachers and students in digital innovation.

Another challenge arises from the resistance of some senior teachers to change. This phenomenon aligns with the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) theory by Hall and Hord (2015), which states that every individual in an organization experiences stages of concern when facing innovation, ranging from personal concerns, to task concerns, to impact concerns. Senior teachers are often at the initial stage, where fears of loss of control or uncertainty about personal competence dominate. In the case of MA Darul Huda, teachers who had long relied on lectures felt uncomfortable with project-based learning that required facilitator roles and the use of technology.

To address this challenge, madrasah leadership needs to adopt a humanistic and collaborative approach. Kotter's (1996) eight-stage model of organizational change emphasizes the importance of building a coalition of supporters and empowering individuals to take action. Principals can form mentor teams of more adaptable teachers to assist senior teachers and create spaces for reflective dialogue so that each change is understood as a shared need, not a structural pressure. Furthermore, contextual and gradual reinforcement of training will help reduce anxiety and increase teacher self-efficacy in innovation.

Thus, challenges in transforming an innovative culture are seen not merely as obstacles, but as opportunities to build collective capacity through inclusive leadership and participatory change management strategies.

CONCLUSION

The leadership strategy of the Principal of MA Darul Huda, authored by Jambesari Bondowoso, has enabled the creation of a school culture that is innovative and adaptable to changing times. The principal demonstrated a strong commitment to building a shared vision that encourages innovation in all elements of the school, while maintaining the distinctiveness of Islamic values. Modeling in the use of technology, active teacher involvement through training and learning communities, and internal policies that support creativity provide a strong foundation for driving change. These efforts create a collaborative, reflective, and open learning environment, enabling the school not only to meet the challenges of modern education but also to remain steadfast in its religious identity.

The innovative culture at MA Darul Huda is the result of consistent leadership in building a value system, collaborative learning, and continuous reflection that involves the entire school community. This culture developed through a structured transformation process, integrating Islamic values with a spirit of innovation in learning and student character development. Active teacher involvement in pedagogical reflection, support for student creativity, and the implementation of a project-based learning model are key pillars in establishing an adaptive, collaborative, and progress-oriented school culture. MA Darul Huda demonstrates that innovation in Islamic education can grow organically when supported by spiritual values, exemplary leadership, and a collective commitment to meaningful change.

The supporting factors in developing an innovative school culture at MA Darul Huda reflect the synergy between transformational leadership, institutional support, and an adaptive institutional culture. Challenges such as limited infrastructure and resistance from senior teachers are addressed with a collaborative and humanistic approach. The principal acts not only as a visionary leader but also as an agent of change capable of building an innovative learning ecosystem based on Islamic values. The foundation's support

in providing policies, training, and infrastructure strengthens the sustainability of this transformation. Meanwhile, technological constraints and the conservative attitudes of some teachers are addressed through empowering change strategies based on mentoring and gradual contextual training. This demonstrates that the success of building an innovative culture is not solely determined by the absence of obstacles, but rather by the institution's ability to manage challenges as momentum to increase collective capacity toward a more adaptive, collaborative, and transformative education.

REFERENCES

[1] Eason, G., Noble, B., & Sneddon, I. N. (1995). On certain integrals of Lipschitz-Hankel type involving products of Bessel functions, Phil. Trans. Roy. Soc. London, vol. A247, pp. 529-551.

[2] Bass, B. M., & Avolio, B. J. (1994). Improving Organizational Effectiveness through Transformational Leadership. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

[3] Bass, B. M., & Riggio, R. E. (2006). Transformational Leadership. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

[4] Creswell, J. W. (2014). Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches. 4th Ed. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

[5] Davis, F. D. (1989). Perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and user acceptance of information technology. MIS Quarterly, 13(3), 319–340.

[6] Deal, T. E., & Peterson, K. D. (2009). Shaping School Culture: Pitfalls, Paradoxes, and Promises. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

[7] Fullan, M. (2007). The New Meaning of Educational Change (4th ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

[8] Hall, G. E., & Hord, S. M. (2015). Implementing Change: Patterns, Principles, and Potholes. Boston, MA: Pearson.

[9] Hallinger, P. (2011). Leadership for learning: lessons from 40 years of empirical research. Journal of Educational Administration, 49(2), 125–142. https://doi.org/10.1108/09578231111116699

[10] Hariri, H., Monypenny, R., & Prideaux, M. (2016). Leadership Practices and School Community Engagement in Indonesian School Reform. School Leadership & Management, 36(2), 186–202. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2015.1070822

[11] Javed, B., Yasir, M., & Majid, A. (2020). The role of transformational leadership in organizational innovation: Evidence from emerging markets. Journal of Innovation & Knowledge, 5(1), 10–18. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jik.2018.07.003

[12] Kotter, J. P. (1996). Leading Change. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

[13] Lee, M., & Jeong, J. (2021). Exploring culturally responsive school leadership for innovation: A case study from South Korea. International Journal of Leadership in Education, 24(6), 861–875. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2019.1708477

[14] Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (2005). Transformational leadership. In B. Davies (Ed.), The Essentials of School Leadership (pp. 31–43). London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

[15] Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2006). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership. School Leadership and Management, 28(1), 27–42. London, UK: Routledge.

[16] Liu, S., Hallinger, P., & Feng, D. (2022). Principal leadership and teacher professional learning in China: A multilevel mediation model of school culture. Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 50(1), 102–121. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143220945704

[17] Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

[18] Mulyasa, E. (2013). Kepala Sekolah yang Profesional: Meningkatkan Mutu dan Daya Saing Sekolah. Bandung; Remaja Rosdakarya.

[19] Mulyasa, E. (2013). Manajemen dan Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah. Jakarta: Bumi Aksara.

[20] Nawawi, H., & Haryanto, S. (2020). "Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah dan Budaya Organisasi dalam Meningkatkan Kinerja Guru". Jurnal Administrasi Pendidikan Islam, 7(1), 14-28.

[21] Nawawi, M., & Haryanto, A. (2020). Peran Kepala Madrasah dalam Pengambilan Keputusan Strategis untuk Meningkatkan Mutu Pembelajaran. Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam, 8(2), 112–124.

[22] Rohmat, A. (2022). Kepemimpinan Kepala Madrasah Berbasis Nilai Pesantren dalam Mendorong Inovasi Pendidikan. Jurnal Edukasi Islami, 11(1), 88–101. https://doi.org/10.36729/jei.v11i1.2435

[23] Schein, E. H. (2010). Organizational Culture and Leadership (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

[24] Senge, P. M. (2006). The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization. New York: Doubleday.

[25] Sugiyono. (2019). Metode Penelitian Kualitatif, Kuantitatif, dan R&D. Bandung: Alfabeta.

[26] Sumintono, B., Mislan, N., & Johan, N. R. (2015). School Leadership in Southeast Asia: Challenges and Policy Context. Asia Pacific Journal of Education, 35(3), 353–365. https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2015.1056591

[27] Suprapto, H. (2021). "Strategi Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah dalam Meningkatkan Mutu Pendidikan". Jurnal Kepemimpinan Pendidikan Islam, 5(1), 15–27.

[28] Suprapto. (2021). Kepemimpinan Partisipatif Kepala Sekolah dalam Membangun Budaya Organisasi Sekolah. Jurnal Kepemimpinan dan Pendidikan Karakter, 8(1), 45–55. https://doi.org/10.21831/jkpk.v8i1.36271

[29] Suyatno, Hidayatullah, A., & Burhanuddin. (2019). Islamic Spirituality and Leadership Practices in Indonesian Islamic Schools. International Journal of Educational Management, 33(3), 576–591. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-04-2018-0129

[30] Zamroni. (2011). Pendidikan dan Tantangan Globalisasi. Jurnal Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 17(3), 279–288.

[31] Zamroni. (2011). Pendidikan untuk Demokrasi: Sebuah Model Pembelajaran Aktif di Sekolah. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar.