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Transformational Leadership In Islamic Education For Strengthening Religious Moderation In Madrasahs And Islamic Higher Education

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Abstract: This study investigates the role of transformational leadership in strengthening religious moderation within Islamic educational institutions, focusing on SMK Islam Sunan Kalijaga Tulungagung. The study addresses leadership practices, implementation of moderation values, and their impact on students and institutional development. A qualitative descriptive design was employed using in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis involving school leaders, teachers, and students. Data were analyzed through condensation, display, and interpretation supported by triangulation to ensure credibility. The findings show that transformational leadership is enacted through value-driven vision, exemplary behavior, and participatory engagement that shape institutional culture and learning practices. Moderation values are embedded across curriculum, extracurricular activities, and daily interactions, creating a consistent environment of tolerance and inclusivity. Students demonstrate increased openness, critical awareness, and respectful communication in diverse contexts. Institutional development reflects sustainability through continuous program innovation and stakeholder collaboration. The study concludes that transformational leadership strengthens religious moderation by integrating ethical guidance, policy alignment, and pedagogical practices within Islamic education.

Keywords: Transformational Leadership, Islamic Education, Religious Moderation, Madrasah, Educational Leadership

INTRODUCTION

The growing complexity of social and religious dynamics places Islamic educational institutions in a strategic position to cultivate balanced religious understanding. Educational spaces are expected to respond to pluralistic realities while maintaining theological integrity and social harmony. Leadership becomes a central element in directing institutional vision and shaping educational outcomes. Transformational leadership is widely recognized as a model that emphasizes inspiration, ethical values, and long-term development of human resources within educational settings. This leadership approach is associated with the ability to influence beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors through example and shared vision (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Within Islamic



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education, such leadership is closely linked to the cultivation of religious moderation, which promotes tolerance, inclusivity, and peaceful coexistence in diverse societies (Azra, 2020). This study raises the question of how transformational leadership is practiced in Islamic educational institutions to promote religious moderation.

Educational institutions such as madrasahs and Islamic vocational schools are increasingly confronted with challenges related to intolerance, exclusivism, and the spread of rigid religious interpretations. These challenges require educational leaders to design adaptive strategies that integrate moderation values into curriculum, pedagogy, and institutional culture. Leadership practices influence how teachers deliver content, how students interact, and how policies are formulated to support inclusive education. Transformational leaders tend to encourage participatory decision-making, collaborative learning, and reflective thinking, which are essential for fostering moderation values (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). In the Indonesian context, religious moderation has been promoted as a national educational agenda to strengthen unity and prevent radicalism (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019). The second question addressed in this study concerns how leadership patterns are implemented in fostering a culture of moderation within the school environment.

Religious moderation requires not only conceptual understanding but also internalization through consistent practices embedded in institutional life. Students need to experience values such as respect, empathy, and dialogue in their daily interactions. Leadership plays a crucial role in integrating these values into both formal and informal learning processes. Transformational leadership supports this integration by aligning institutional vision, teacher practices, and student activities toward shared ethical goals. Research indicates that leadership significantly affects school climate, student character formation, and institutional sustainability (Day et al., 2016). In Islamic education, leadership grounded in moral authority and cultural sensitivity strengthens the relevance of moderation values in contemporary contexts (Sahin, 2018). The third question explores how transformational leadership impacts students' attitudes and institutional sustainability in promoting moderate religious perspectives.

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the practice of transformational leadership in strengthening religious moderation within an Islamic educational setting. A qualitative design was selected to capture participants' experiences, perceptions, and institutional dynamics in a natural context. Such an approach allows an in-depth understanding of social phenomena that are closely related to values, beliefs, and leadership practices in education (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research was conducted at SMK Islam Sunan Kalijaga Tulungagung, an institution that integrates vocational education with Islamic values and character formation. The site was selected based on its active efforts in promoting moderation values within school culture and leadership practices.

Data were collected through multiple techniques to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. In-depth interviews were conducted with the school principal, several teachers, and students to obtain insights into leadership strategies, implementation processes, and perceived impacts. Observations were carried out during teaching and learning activities, religious programs, and daily interactions within the school environment. Documentation analysis included school policies, curriculum documents, and institutional programs related to religious moderation. The use of multiple data sources enables the researcher to construct a rich and contextualized description of the phenomenon under study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The data analysis process followed an interactive model consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data condensation involved selecting, focusing, and simplifying raw data obtained from the field. Data were then organized into meaningful categories and presented in a structured form to facilitate interpretation. Patterns and themes were identified to answer the research questions related to leadership practices, implementation of moderation values, and their impacts. This analytical process aligns with qualitative data analysis procedures that emphasize iterative and reflective interpretation (Miles et al., 2014).

Credibility and trustworthiness were ensured through triangulation of sources and methods. Information obtained from interviews was compared with observational findings and documentary evidence to validate consistency. Prolonged engagement in the field strengthened the depth of

understanding and minimized potential bias. Member checking was also conducted by confirming key findings with participants to ensure accuracy of interpretation. These strategies enhance the rigor of qualitative research and support the validity of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Transformational Leadership Practices in Islamic Education

The leadership at SMK Islam Sunan Kalijaga Tulungagung reflects a strong orientation toward religious moderation and character development through a value-driven vision. The principal articulates institutional goals that emphasize tolerance, inclusivity, and ethical conduct, which are consistently communicated in formal meetings, school programs, and daily interactions. This vision is not only symbolic but is translated into concrete practices that shape the school environment. Leadership is enacted through personal example, where the principal demonstrates respectful communication, openness to differing perspectives, and a balanced religious outlook. Such practices reinforce the role of leaders as moral agents who influence organizational culture and individual behavior (Bush, 2011).

Transformational leadership within this context is evident in the way leaders inspire teachers to adopt pedagogical approaches that encourage dialogue, critical thinking, and reflective learning. Teachers are guided to integrate moderation values into subject matter, creating learning experiences that connect religious teachings with social realities. Classroom interactions show a shift from teacher-centered instruction to participatory engagement, where students are invited to express opinions and appreciate diversity. This reflects the core dimension of transformational leadership that focuses on intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration, enabling teachers and students to develop shared understanding and mutual respect (Hallinger, 2003).

The findings also reveal that leadership extends beyond administrative duties into the realm of cultural and ethical formation. School activities such as religious discussions, community service, and collaborative programs are designed to strengthen moderation values in practical contexts. Students are encouraged to practice empathy, cooperation, and peaceful interaction as part of their daily routines. Leadership creates an environment where values are lived rather than



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merely taught. This approach aligns with research highlighting that effective educational leadership contributes to the development of positive school culture and student character formation (Robinson et al., 2008).

The integration of vision, practice, and institutional culture demonstrates that transformational leadership plays a central role in embedding religious moderation within Islamic education. Leadership influence is visible in the consistency between policy, teaching practices, and student behavior. The school environment reflects a coherent system where moderation values are internalized through continuous interaction and guided experience. This indicates that leadership effectiveness is closely linked to the ability to align organizational goals with ethical principles and educational practices.

Implementation of Moderation Values in Institutional Culture

Religious moderation at SMK Islam Sunan Kalijaga Tulungagung is embedded within the institutional culture through consistent integration in daily activities, learning processes, and social engagement. The school positions moderation not as an abstract concept but as a lived value that guides interactions among students, teachers, and the wider school community. Classroom learning becomes a primary space where moderation is introduced and reinforced. Teachers incorporate themes such as tolerance, respect for differences, and peaceful coexistence into lesson plans across subjects. Religious education classes emphasize balanced interpretations of Islamic teachings that align with inclusive and contextual understanding. This approach reflects the broader orientation of Islamic education that seeks to harmonize religious commitment with social pluralism (Rahman, 2012).

The integration of moderation values is also visible in extracurricular programs that encourage collaboration and intercultural awareness. Students participate in group activities, community service, and school events that promote teamwork and empathy. These programs are designed to create opportunities for students to engage with peers from different backgrounds while practicing respectful communication. Social interactions within the school environment are guided by norms that prioritize mutual respect and collective responsibility. Such practices contribute to the formation of a positive school climate where diversity is recognized as a strength

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rather than a source of conflict. Research indicates that school culture plays a significant role in shaping students' attitudes toward diversity and inclusion (Deal & Peterson, 2016).

Institutional policies support the sustainability of moderation values by establishing clear guidelines for behavior, curriculum development, and program implementation. The school leadership ensures that policies align with the vision of fostering religious moderation and social harmony. These policies regulate not only academic activities but also interpersonal relationships and conflict resolution mechanisms. Teachers are encouraged to model inclusive attitudes, while students are guided to internalize ethical values through consistent reinforcement. The presence of supportive policies strengthens the institutional commitment to moderation and provides a structured framework for its implementation. Educational institutions that align policy and practice tend to demonstrate stronger outcomes in value-based education (Fullan, 2007).

The curriculum at SMK Islam Sunan Kalijaga reflects an integrative approach where moderation values are embedded across disciplines. Subjects such as Islamic studies, civic education, and social sciences explicitly address themes related to tolerance, diversity, and national unity. Other subjects integrate these values implicitly through collaborative learning and problem-solving activities. This cross-curricular integration ensures that moderation is not confined to a single subject but becomes part of the overall educational experience. Students are encouraged to critically engage with issues related to religion and society, fostering analytical thinking and ethical awareness. Such an approach aligns with contemporary perspectives on education that emphasize holistic development and interdisciplinary learning (Banks, 2015).

Leadership plays a crucial role in fostering a participatory environment where all members of the school community contribute to building a harmonious culture. The principal and teachers create spaces for dialogue and reflection, allowing students to express their views and engage in constructive discussions. Decision-making processes involve collaboration between leadership, staff, and students, which strengthens a sense of ownership and shared responsibility. This participatory culture supports the internalization of moderation values by making them part of collective practice rather than imposed rules. Studies on school leadership highlight that



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participatory environments enhance trust, engagement, and commitment among stakeholders (Harris, 2014).

The implementation of moderation values also extends to informal interactions that occur outside structured activities. Daily communication among students reflects a growing awareness of respect and empathy. Conflicts are addressed through dialogue and mediation, guided by principles of fairness and understanding. Teachers act as facilitators who help students navigate differences in a constructive manner. These informal practices reinforce the lessons learned in formal settings and contribute to the consistency of moderation values across contexts. The alignment between formal and informal practices strengthens the credibility of the institution in promoting ethical behavior.

The findings indicate that the success of moderation implementation is closely linked to the coherence between vision, policy, curriculum, and daily practice. Leadership ensures that these elements function as an integrated system that supports value internalization. The institutional culture becomes a dynamic space where moderation is continuously practiced and reinforced. This process contributes to the development of students who are not only academically competent but also socially responsible and open-minded. The experience at SMK Islam Sunan Kalijaga demonstrates that religious moderation can be effectively cultivated through intentional design and consistent practice within educational institutions.

Impact of Leadership on Student Attitudes and Institutional Development

The findings at SMK Islam Sunan Kalijaga Tulungagung indicate that transformational leadership contributes significantly to shaping students' attitudes toward religious diversity. Students demonstrate increased tolerance, openness, and critical awareness when engaging with differences in belief and practice. These attitudes are not formed through theoretical instruction alone but emerge from continuous exposure to a school environment that models respect and dialogue. Leadership plays a central role in establishing this environment by promoting values that encourage empathy and mutual understanding. The influence of leadership on student outcomes has been widely discussed in educational research, particularly in relation to value formation and social behavior (Leithwood et al., 2008). Students in this context show a tendency to engage in

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constructive conversations and avoid exclusionary attitudes, reflecting the internalization of moderation values.

Changes in student behavior are visible in daily communication patterns and participation in school activities. Students interact with peers using respectful language and demonstrate sensitivity toward differences. Group discussions in classrooms reveal a willingness to listen and consider alternative perspectives. This shift in behavior indicates that leadership-driven initiatives have a direct impact on how students perceive and respond to diversity. Educational leadership that emphasizes ethical guidance and role modeling is known to influence student character and interpersonal skills (Nucci & Narvaez, 2008). At SMK Islam Sunan Kalijaga, teachers act as facilitators who reinforce these values, while the principal ensures consistency through institutional support. The alignment between leadership vision and classroom practice strengthens the effectiveness of moderation initiatives.

Student engagement in social and extracurricular activities further reflects the impact of leadership on developing inclusive attitudes. Activities such as community service, collaborative projects, and religious discussions provide opportunities for students to practice moderation values in real-life contexts. Participation in these programs fosters a sense of responsibility and social awareness. Students learn to navigate differences through cooperation and shared goals, which enhances their ability to function in diverse environments. Research on student engagement highlights the importance of experiential learning in shaping attitudes and promoting active citizenship (Fredricks et al., 2004). The leadership at the school ensures that such opportunities are consistently available and aligned with institutional objectives.

The influence of transformational leadership extends beyond individual student outcomes to the broader development of the institution. The school demonstrates sustainability in maintaining a moderate environment through continuous program development and active involvement of stakeholders. Leadership encourages collaboration among teachers, parents, and community members to support educational initiatives. This collaborative approach strengthens institutional capacity and ensures that moderation values are reinforced across different contexts. Organizational development in educational settings is closely linked to leadership practices that

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promote shared vision and collective responsibility (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). The case of SMK Islam Sunan Kalijaga shows that leadership can create a stable yet dynamic environment that adapts to changing social conditions.

Institutional resilience is another key outcome of transformational leadership. The school is able to respond to challenges related to social change and potential ideological tensions by maintaining a balanced and inclusive approach. Leadership fosters a culture of reflection and continuous improvement, allowing the institution to evaluate and refine its programs. This adaptability is essential in ensuring that educational practices remain relevant and effective. Studies on school effectiveness emphasize that leadership contributes to institutional resilience by aligning resources, policies, and practices with long-term goals (Day & Sammons, 2016). At SMK Islam Sunan Kalijaga, resilience is reflected in the ability to sustain moderation values while addressing emerging challenges.

The development of institutional identity is also influenced by leadership practices. The school is recognized as an environment that promotes religious moderation and character education. This identity is built through consistent implementation of values and visible outcomes in student behavior. Leadership ensures that the institution maintains its credibility by aligning its vision with practice. A strong institutional identity enhances trust among stakeholders and supports long-term sustainability. Research suggests that leadership plays a critical role in shaping organizational identity and culture in educational settings (Gumus et al., 2018). The experience of SMK Islam Sunan Kalijaga demonstrates that leadership can position an institution as a model for moderation-based education.

The relationship between leadership and institutional development is further strengthened by the integration of evaluation and feedback mechanisms. Leadership encourages reflection on program effectiveness and student outcomes, allowing for continuous improvement. Teachers and students are involved in providing feedback, which contributes to a sense of ownership and accountability. This process supports the sustainability of moderation initiatives and ensures that they remain responsive to the needs of the school community. Continuous evaluation is recognized as a key component of effective educational leadership and organizational growth (Hallinger,

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2011). The school's commitment to reflection and adaptation enhances its capacity to maintain a supportive and inclusive environment.

The findings suggest that transformational leadership has a multidimensional impact on both students and the institution. Students develop attitudes that reflect tolerance, openness, and critical awareness, while the institution evolves into a resilient and sustainable environment that supports moderation values. Leadership serves as the driving force that connects individual development with organizational growth. The case of SMK Islam Sunan Kalijaga illustrates that effective leadership can create meaningful change by integrating vision, practice, and culture. The impact of leadership is evident in the consistency between student behavior, institutional programs, and long-term development goals.

CONCLUSION

Transformational leadership in Islamic education demonstrates a strong capacity to cultivate religious moderation through coherent alignment between vision, practice, and institutional culture. Leadership at SMK Islam Sunan Kalijaga Tulungagung reflects an approach that integrates moral authority with participatory engagement, allowing values of tolerance, inclusivity, and dialogue to be internalized in both formal and informal educational processes. The findings show that leadership influence extends beyond managerial functions into shaping beliefs, attitudes, and social behavior. Students experience moderation not only through instruction but through lived interactions that reinforce empathy and mutual respect.

The study also highlights that transformational leadership contributes to institutional resilience and long-term development. The school demonstrates the ability to maintain a balanced and adaptive educational environment in response to social and ideological challenges. Collaboration among stakeholders strengthens institutional capacity and reinforces shared responsibility in promoting moderation values. Students develop critical awareness and openness that prepare them for engagement in diverse societies. The institutional identity evolves as a center of inclusive and moderate Islamic education, supported by continuous evaluation and reflective practices. These findings indicate that transformational leadership serves as a strategic foundation

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for advancing religious moderation in Islamic educational institutions. The integration of ethical vision, participatory culture, and educational innovation offers a sustainable model for fostering harmonious and inclusive learning environments.

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