

The Role of the Principal's Transformational Leadership in Islamic Religious Education Curriculum Innovation at Panca Budi Middle School Medan

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ABSTRACT

The transformation of national education marked by the implementation of the Independent Curriculum has placed principals in a strategic position as leaders of change. Not only as administrators, principals are required to be the driving force of curriculum innovation, particularly in the field of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) which has unique characteristics of values and spirituality. This study aims to investigate the role of the principal's transformational leadership in initiating and implementing PAI curriculum innovation at Panca Budi Middle School, Medan. A qualitative research method with a case study approach was used to explore data in depth through interview techniques, participatory observation, and documentation. The research findings show that; (1) the principal plays an active role in developing a PAI learning vision that is contextual and relevant to current developments; (2) encouraging teachers to innovate in learning methods, and creating a collaborative culture in curriculum development. The innovations carried out include the integration of Islamic values with an active learning approach; (3) Utilization of digital technology, as well as strengthening the affective dimension and character of students. Thus, transformational leadership is a key element in presenting a new face of religious education that is humanistic, transformative, and future-oriented.

Keywords: *Leadership Transformational, Innovation Curriculum, Islamic Religious Education, Independent Curriculum , Principal School*

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a crucial factor in the success of an organization. Without leadership, an organization's existence is difficult to sustain. The existence of an organization is closely related to the capacity or style of leadership, which is crucial for its success. Without leadership, an organization's existence is difficult to sustain. The existence of an organization is closely related to the capacity or style of leadership.²

Transformational leadership emphasizes the leader's ability to inspire, motivate, and stimulate intellectually, as well as provide individual attention to organizational members³. The principal's transformational leadership is one that can strengthen development and advancement. The principal's transformational leadership, viewed based on conceptual richness through charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and attention to individuals, is believed to be able to generate forward-thinking ideas based on the principles of democracy and transparency⁴.

Furthermore, innovation in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum does not only involve changes in content or teaching materials, but also transformations in pedagogical

approaches, the use of technology, and the integration of Islamic values in the current context. The integration of Islamic values with an active learning approach can significantly increase student participation and understanding ⁵. No matter how good the curriculum is made, if the teachers who implement it do not have good skills, the curriculum will not run well ⁶. Therefore, the involvement of the principal in designing, overseeing, and evaluating the implementation of curriculum innovation is absolute. This is in line with the word of Allah SWT. in Surah Al-Mujadila verse 11:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا قِيلَ لَكُمْ تَفَسَّحُوا فِي الْمَجَالِسِ فَافْسَحُوا يَفْسَحِ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ
وَإِذَا قِيلَ انْشُرُوا فَانْشُرُوا يَرْفَعِ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ
دَرَجَاتٍ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ ﴿١١﴾

O you who believe! If it is said to you, "Give room in the assemblies," then make room, surely Allah will make room for you. And when it is said, "Stand up," then stand up, surely Allah will raise (the degree of) those who believe among you and those who have been given knowledge to a few degrees. And Allah is most careful in what you do." (QS. Al-Mujadila: 11)

This verse emphasizes the importance of knowledge and faith as the primary foundations of education, so Islamic Education curriculum innovation must be directed toward developing individuals who are both knowledgeable and devout. Based on the urgency of transformational leadership for the change and advancement of (Islamic) educational institutions, aligning the concept of transformational leadership with its practical application in Islamic educational institutions is deemed essential.

By conducting this study, the researcher hopes to not only add to the academic literature but also inspire education practitioners that innovation in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum in the Independent Curriculum era is inevitable, and visionary leadership is the key to unlocking this change.

Thus, this research goes beyond merely examining the role of the principal in a normative manner, but rather positions leadership as a transformative force that lives and operates within the pulse of contemporary Islamic education. It serves as a reference for principals and Islamic Education teachers in designing and implementing curriculum innovations based on Islamic values and the needs of 21st-century learning.

Theoretical Review

Transformational Leadership

Leadership is a term that refers to the ability or power to direct the educational process to achieve academic goals ⁷. The transformational leadership model provides a comprehensive approach to school leadership, which focuses primarily on the process by which leaders seek to influence comprehensive school goals ⁸.

According to Danim, transformational leadership has indicators, namely (1) reformer; (2) setting an example; (3) encouraging subordinate performance; (4) harmonizing the work environment; empowering subordinates; (6) acting on a value system; (7) continuously improving one's abilities; and (8) being able to face complex situations ⁹. According to Bass & Riggio, transformational leadership includes four main dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. This style encourages the growth of intrinsic motivation, trust, and creativity in the organization ¹⁰.

Transformational leadership is leadership that has dimensions of charisma, intellectual stimulation, individual consideration, inspiration, and idealism¹¹. The concept and practice of transformational leadership were developed in response to the limitations of existing leadership concepts in managing human resources and organizations in a changing environment¹².

In practice, transformational leaders typically exhibit several key characteristics, including idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration¹³.

The Relationship between Islamic Education Curriculum Innovation and Transformational Leadership

Zuhairini stated that the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum must be responsive to current developments, including integrating the principles of religious moderation and utilizing technology in the learning process. An innovative curriculum encompasses not only cognitive but also affective and psychomotor skills.¹⁴ Mawardi emphasized that transformational leadership contributes to improving curriculum quality by creating a shared vision, strengthening a culture of innovation, and developing teacher professionalism¹⁵.

In the context of the relationship between PAI curriculum innovation and transformational leadership, it becomes very essential, because the principal is expected not only to be a manager but also an agent of change who can motivate and inspire teachers and students to achieve common goals¹⁶.

The Principal's Role in Curriculum Innovation

Innovations in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum can include integrating local and global themes, such as the environment, multiculturalism, and technology, from an Islamic perspective. This will help students understand that Islamic teachings are universal and relevant throughout time. An integrative curriculum also requires cross-subject learning. For example, the Islamic value of honesty can be emphasized in math or science lessons, while social awareness can be discussed in social studies lessons using an Islamic approach¹⁷.

According to Mulyasa, the ideal principal should be *an instructional leader*, not only managing school administration but also actively participating in teacher professional development and curriculum updates. A principal must possess a clear vision and strong managerial and leadership skills.¹⁸

With strong and visionary leadership, the principal at Panca Budi Middle School Medan can be the main driving force in creating a superior, contextual Islamic Religious Education curriculum and forming a generation of Muslims with noble morals and open minds.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to examine the role of the principal's transformational leadership in the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum innovation at Panca Budi Middle School, Medan. The main participants in this study consisted of the principal, PAI teachers, several homeroom teachers, and students, selected through purposive sampling techniques based on their active involvement in the curriculum innovation process. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and documentation analysis. The data collection instrument was designed based on Bass & Riggio's transformational leadership theory and curriculum innovation models relevant to the Merdeka Curriculum. Data analysis was conducted using

the interactive model of Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification.¹⁹

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Showing respect, based on the results of research at Panca Budi Middle School Medan, it was identified that the head of the school, Dr. Hernawan Syahputra Lubis, holds a strategic role in initiating and mobilizing innovation in the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum through the implementation of transformational leadership. On the dimension of ideal influence (idealized influence), he succeeded in creating a conducive and inspiring school climate through exemplary behavior, open communication, as well as consistent and harmonious conduct aligned with Islamic values.

The dimension of inspirational motivation is reflected in his commitment and involvement in various religious and social activities, as well as his encouragement to develop contextual programs, such as project-based learning, the integration of Islamic values into general subjects, and teacher training based on Islamic digital technology.

Next, intellectual stimulation is demonstrated through his courage in inviting teachers and students to think critically, engage in open dialogue, and appreciate creativity and learning innovation. In the dimension of individualized consideration, the head of the school encourages cross-disciplinary collaboration, strengthens partnerships with parents, and shows concern for the holistic development of students, which includes cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects.

Thus, innovation in the PAI curriculum at Panca Budi Middle School Medan is not only oriented toward the mastery of religious knowledge, but also emphasizes value internalization, character formation, and the spiritual development of students. This approach is in line with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which focuses on meaningful, contextual, and learner-centered education, thereby contributing to the emergence of a generation that is intellectually smart, spiritually mature, and adaptive to social dynamics.

Innovation Islamic Education Curriculum Based on Implementation Table

Innovation in the Islamic Education curriculum at Panca Budi Middle School, Medan, is designed as a network of mutually supportive and locally rooted activities, with the objective of instilling and practicing Islamic values in everyday life. Programs such as the Daily Morals Journal encourage students' personal reflection, which is then integrated into cross-disciplinary learning through the Interdisciplinary Module. These values are practiced in Thematic Character Project-Based Learning, for example through activities like reforestation or waste management.

Collective spiritual strengthening is realized through Guided Congregational Prayer and Morning Murojaah, while social concern is fostered through the Friday Caring Donation program. From the educators' side, the Digital Learning Media Workshop ensures that teachers are able to support innovation with relevant and interactive media.

At its peak, the program that allows students to become Friday prayer preachers provides space for them to express their understanding and commitment to Islamic values in a public setting. This series of innovations demonstrates that the PAI curriculum is not only theory-oriented but also forms students' character, spirituality, leadership, and social awareness in a holistic manner.



Figure 1.

Wrong form of program Innovation Islamic Religious Education Curriculum for
Friday Sermons for Middle School Students
Five Characters of Medan

With this mutually connected approach, Panca Budi Middle School Medan not only implements the religious curriculum in an administrative manner, but also forms an organic and sustainable ecosystem of Islamic learning. The leadership of the school principal becomes a catalyst that ensures all elements are interconnected and work in one direction—creating meaningful transformation that shapes students to be religious, reflective, active, caring, and visionary in living their lives.

Table 1. Innovation Islamic Religious Education Curriculum and Its Implementation at Panca Budi Middle School, Medan

No	Form Innovation Education Curriculum	Islamic	Implementation Real in School
1	Journal Daily Morals		Student write and discuss reflection Islamic values such as patient, honest, and trustworthy.
2	Interdisciplinary Module		Integration of Islamic Education (PAI) material with Science and Civics through theme like justice and cleanliness.
3	<i>Project-Based Learning</i>		Project student about preservation environment based Islamic teachings.
4	Guided Congregational Prayer		Student take turns became imam, muezzin and bilal in prayer congregation guided by the teacher.
5	Friday Caring Donation		Student share, as practice mark social Islam.
6	Digital Learning Workshop	Media	The teacher follows training video creation, online quizzes, and presentations interactive.
7	Morning Murojaah		Student do memorize the Qur'an regularly before lesson starte .
8	Becoming a Friday Khatib	Prayer	Student selected deliver the sermon during the implementation Friday prayers in the neighborhood school and outside school.

Overall innovation the show that head school No only lead in a way administrative, but also as an inspirator, motivator, and facilitator. His role proven create environment learning religion in a fun, participatory, and meaningful way for participant educate.

Discussion

The transformational leadership model implemented at Panca Budi Middle School Medan has proven effective in integrating the holistic vision of Islamic education with the innovative approach of the Independent Curriculum. In line with Bass & Riggio's theory, the school principal plays a role as a catalyst for change through role modeling, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized attention. The strength of this model lies in its ability to build a participatory and collaborative learning ecosystem with a shared and measurable vision, allowing PAI curriculum innovation to function as an interconnected network of mutually reinforcing programs within a whole-school approach.

However, the success of this implementation is greatly influenced by leadership capacity, organizational culture, and the support of school resources. Replication in other schools has the potential to face obstacles if these factors are not adequately met, especially in addressing teachers who are still bound by bureaucratic patterns. In addition, program sustainability requires an evaluation system based on holistic competence—not merely cognitive aspects—as well as adaptive leadership capable of responding to national policy dynamics, including developments in the Independent Curriculum.

Academically, the experience of Panca Budi Middle School Medan contributes significantly to contemporary Islamic education discourse by demonstrating that PAI can be developed creatively, contextually, and in alignment with modern needs without losing the essence of religious teachings. Nonetheless, replication efforts in other schools must pay close attention to social, cultural, and resource contexts so that the innovations implemented do not merely imitate the programs, but instead bring about substantive transformation.

CONCLUSION

Research conducted at Panca Budi Middle School in Medan demonstrates that the principal's transformational leadership plays a strategic role in driving innovation in the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum. Through a visionary, inspiring, and collaborative leadership style, the principal successfully integrated Islamic values with a modern educational approach. This research is evidenced by the presence of a Daily Morals Journal, Interdisciplinary Modules, Congregational Prayer, Morning Murojaah, Friday Caring Donations, digital workshops for teachers, and a student leadership program. These efforts enable the school to create a vibrant, meaningful, and relevant Islamic education ecosystem, serving as an example for other schools.

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