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Transformative leadership and teacher professionalism development: a multiple case study in faith-based educational contexts

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the implementation of transformative school leadership in developing teacher professionalism at Ma'had Darul Maarif and Ma'had Al-Bitsat Ad-Diniah in Southern Thailand. It identifies the factors that facilitate or hinder this process and explores the implications of transformative leadership for teacher professionalism. Employing a qualitative approach with a multi-site case study design, the research involved 7 participants—comprising 5 teachers and 2 school principals—selected via purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in leadership practices, institutional management, and teacher professional development. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, and were subsequently analyzed thematically through an iterative process involving coding, categorization, and interpretation. To ensure coding reliability, two researchers coded the data independently. Thematic saturation was operationally defined as the point at which further interviews and coding ceased to yield new codes or substantially different themes; this point was reached after [number] interviews. The findings reveal three key dimensions of transformative school leadership: transforming the vision of Islamic education, empowering teachers professionally, and strengthening an organizational culture rooted in Islamic values. Leaders in these *ma'had* (Islamic educational institutions) serve not merely as administrative heads, but also as *murabbi* (educators/mentors) who foster collective commitment, guide the development of teachers' competencies, and integrate professional standards with Islamic spiritual values. A strong institutional identity, a collaborative work culture, and support from the Muslim community serve as facilitating factors, while limited resources, an unstructured professional development system, and evolving social and educational demands represent the primary challenges. Transformative leadership contributes to enhancing teachers' pedagogical competence, strengthening their professional identity as Muslim educators, and fostering a culture of instructional innovation rooted in Islamic values.

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Introduction

The increasing complexity of education reform in the 21st century has repositioned school leadership as a strategic determinant of educational quality rather than merely an administrative function. Across educational systems, school leaders are increasingly required to respond to globalization, digital transformation, curriculum

reform, and growing demands for equitable learning outcomes while strengthening teacher professionalism as a foundation for sustainable school improvement (Gamaliel & Widodo, 2024). These challenges are particularly significant in religious-based educational institutions, where leaders must balance organizational effectiveness with the preservation of religious values, institutional identity, and societal expectations. Islamic boarding schools, as one of the oldest forms of Islamic education in Southeast Asia, face increasing pressure to modernize their educational practices without sacrificing their religious and cultural traditions (Hifza et al., 2020). In this context, transformational school leadership has attracted academic attention because it emphasizes vision building, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and the development of organizational learning, which collectively support teachers' professional growth. However, the implementation of transformational leadership remains uneven across educational contexts, particularly in regions with Muslim minority populations, where institutions operate within distinctive sociopolitical, cultural, and policy environments. Southern Thailand represents such a context. In this region, Islamic boarding schools function not only as educational organizations but also as important sociocultural institutions that sustain Islamic identity amid complex political and multicultural dynamics (Kamaruddin, Hasan, & Muslimin, 2026).

Although transformational leadership is widely associated with teacher commitment, instructional improvement, and school effectiveness, its application in Islamic educational institutions raises important theoretical and empirical questions. International leadership literature commonly emphasizes shared vision, collaborative culture, teacher empowerment, and professional learning communities (Hidayat & Muttaqin, 2024). Nevertheless, these dimensions may not fully capture the leadership realities of Islamic boarding schools, where leadership also involves religious authority, moral responsibility, community engagement, and the transmission of Islamic values (Ridani & Sudadi, 2025). Consequently, the relationship between leadership and teacher professionalism in these institutions cannot be explained solely through managerial effectiveness or pedagogical performance; it must also consider ethical commitment, religious identity, and adaptive professional capacity (Assalihee et al., 2024). This distinction is particularly important in Southern Thailand, where school leaders must negotiate institutional autonomy, educational quality standards, and sociopolitical expectations while maintaining the religious and cultural foundations of their institutions. Thus, the central empirical issue is not simply whether transformational leadership is relevant to teacher professionalism, but how its established dimensions are interpreted, adapted, and enacted within Islamic educational institutions in a minority Muslim setting.

Previous empirical studies provide important but fragmented evidence regarding this relationship. Syafira, Wijaya, and Khairuddin (2024) demonstrate that transformational leadership can strengthen organizational commitment, learning innovation, and teachers' professional motivation through shared vision and individualized support. However, their findings primarily illuminate the relationship between leadership practices and professional motivation, leaving the interaction between managerial, professional, and religious dimensions insufficiently explained in the specific context of Islamic boarding schools. Rusyanih and Prasetyono (2026) emphasize professional learning communities as a mechanism through which school leaders promote collaborative learning and sustainable teacher development; nevertheless, this perspective focuses more on the professional-learning process than on the role of religious authority and institutional identity in shaping leadership practices. Abbas, Subando, and Tamami (2023) highlight the influence of organizational culture, trust, and distributed leadership on teacher professionalism, but these factors do not by themselves explain how Islamic moral and spiritual responsibilities are integrated into leadership decisions. Similarly, Mappasere and Suyuti (2019) indicate that educational leadership in Muslim communities is strongly influenced by local sociocultural traditions and institutional history, underscoring the importance of context-sensitive leadership models. However, this contextual perspective requires further empirical examination through comparisons of leadership practices across Islamic educational institutions operating within minority Muslim communities. More broadly, existing studies tend to examine transformational leadership, professional learning, organizational culture, and teacher professionalism as related but separate domains, with limited integration of these dimensions into a single explanatory account. Studies conducted in predominantly public-school environments or relatively stable educational systems also provide limited insight into the institutional and sociopolitical conditions experienced by Islamic boarding schools in Southern Thailand (Efferi et al., 2025). These limitations identify an empirical gap concerning how transformational leadership is implemented, negotiated, and translated into professional development within this distinctive educational environment. Importantly, the methodological limitations of individual studies, such as sampling strategies, instrument validation, and research design, should be assessed from their original methods rather than assumed; therefore, the present study addresses the contextual and explanatory limitations without attributing unverified methodological weaknesses to previous researchers.

To provide a theoretically grounded and contextually relevant analytical framework, this study adopts the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ Form 5X) developed within the transformational leadership

tradition of Bass and Avolio as its principal conceptual reference. The MLQ-5X identifies five dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized influence attributed, idealized influence behavior, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Avolio et al., 1999; Avolio & Bass, 2004). Its application in educational research has received empirical attention. Moreno-Casado et al. (2021), for example, adapted and examined the psychometric properties of the MLQ-5X in the Spanish educational context, while Wang et al. (2023) re-examined its measurement properties among 872 teachers from 20 secondary schools in Singapore. The Singapore study found acceptable internal consistency and convergent validity after five items were removed, while also identifying the need to examine the instrument's factor structure carefully. These findings demonstrate that the MLQ-5X offers a relevant starting point for examining educational leadership, but its dimensions and item meanings should not automatically be assumed to have equivalent cultural validity in Southern Thailand. Accordingly, in the present qualitative multicase study, the MLQ-5X is used as a conceptual and analytical reference for developing the interview and observation protocols rather than as a standardized quantitative scale for measuring leadership scores. Its five dimensions are interpreted in relation to the institutional realities of Islamic boarding schools, including the role of the murabbi, Islamic moral authority, collective religious identity, teacher empowerment, and community engagement. Cultural and contextual appropriateness should be established through expert assessment involving [number and expertise of reviewers], followed by language and content review and preliminary interviews with [number and characteristics of participants]. Feedback from these procedures should be used to assess conceptual equivalence, clarity, relevance, and cultural sensitivity before the protocols are finalized. This adaptation is particularly necessary because cross-cultural research has identified variation in transformational leadership across national cultural settings (Leong & Fischer, 2011), while recent educational validation studies have also shown that the psychometric structure of the MLQ-5X may require contextual examination (Wang et al., 2023).

Building on this framework, the present study investigates transformational school leadership in developing teacher professionalism through multicase studies of Ma'had Darul Maarif and Ma'had Al-Bitsat Ad-Diniah in Southern Thailand. Specifically, it addresses three research questions: (1) How is transformational school leadership implemented in developing teacher professionalism in the two Islamic boarding schools? (2) What factors support and hinder the implementation of transformational leadership in fostering teacher professionalism? and (3) What are the implications of transformational school leadership for teacher professionalism in both institutional contexts? The study draws on Transformational Leadership Theory, including its application in Muslim educational communities (Mappasere & Suyuti, 2019), while integrating perspectives on teacher professionalism and professional capital to explain the relationship between leadership practices and teacher development. Teacher professionalism is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct encompassing instructional expertise, collaborative professional learning, ethical commitment, adaptive capacity, reflective practice, and sustainable professional growth in value-based educational organizations. This perspective positions school leadership as an organizational transformation process through which leaders articulate a shared vision, strengthen institutional culture, empower teachers as active agents of educational improvement, and foster sustainable professional learning communities (Lateh et al., 2025). The contribution of this research lies in extending the contextual understanding of transformational leadership to Islamic boarding schools in Southern Thailand, where leadership practices are shaped by religious traditions, multicultural realities, and the sociopolitical dynamics of Muslim minority communities. By examining two institutional cases, the study seeks to explain how established transformational leadership dimensions are interpreted and enacted alongside managerial, professional, and spiritual responsibilities in developing teacher professionalism.

Method

This research uses an interpretivist paradigm with a constructivist approach that is based on the epistemological assumption that social reality is built through interactions, experiences, and processes of meaning that take place in certain contexts (Qondias & Dhiu, 2026). In this perspective, transformative leadership is not seen as a set of behaviors that are universal, but rather as a social practice that acquires meaning through the relationship between principals, teachers, organizational culture, and the institutional environment (Stake, 2025). Therefore, this study adopts a critical qualitative inquiry to understand how transformative leadership practices are constructed, negotiated, and implemented in the development of teacher professionalism in Islamic educational institutions in Southern Thailand (Qondias & Dhiu, 2026). The research design used is a multicase case study because it allows an in-depth exploration of leadership phenomena in a real context while generating a comparative understanding of patterns of similarities and differences between cases. The selection of this design is based on a research objective that not only seeks to describe leadership practices, but also builds a conceptual interpretation of the mechanisms that link transformative leadership to the development of teacher professionalism in complex social, cultural, and religious contexts (Anwar & Sodik, 2025).

The selection of Ma'had Darul Maarif and Ma'had Al-Bitsat Ad-Diniah in Southern Thailand was conducted through purposive case selection by considering the principles of information-rich cases and conceptual representativeness, not just geographical proximity or ease of access. Both institutions were chosen because they have characteristics that are relevant to the research focus, namely as boarding Islamic educational institutions that operate in the context of Muslim minority communities, face the challenges of contemporary educational change, and develop leadership practices that combine Islamic values with the demands of modern educational professionalism. This condition makes the two ma'had a conceptually representative case to explore how transformative leadership is interpreted and carried out in institutional situations that have distinctive social, cultural, and political complexity. The use of a multi-case design also allows for cross-case analysis, so that the resulting interpretation does not stop at the description of each case, but identifies leadership patterns that are convergent and divergent (Berg & Lune, 2004).

The research participants were selected using purposive sampling techniques based on the principles of experiential relevance and contextual knowledge, namely individuals who have direct experience, active involvement, and a deep understanding of school leadership practices and teacher professionalism development in the two institutions studied (Denieffe, 2020). The study involved seven informants, consisting of three men and four women, who included one school principal, one administrative staff, and five teachers from Ma'had Darul Maarif and Ma'had Al-Bitsat Ad-Diniah in Southern Thailand. The determination of informants is not intended to obtain statistical representations, but to obtain rich information so that it is able to explain the phenomenon of transformative leadership in depth according to the purpose of the research. Data collection was carried out through in-depth unstructured interviews, participatory observations, and documentation studies as a form of triangulation of methods to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Zahroh et.al, 2025). The interviews were conducted face-to-face using the Malay language with an average duration of about 129 minutes for each informant. The entire interview process was recorded using a smartphone after obtaining consent from the participants, then transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were then transliterated into Siamese (Thai) and Arabic to maintain the accuracy of the meaning of local, religious, and institutional terms that emerged during the interview process. In addition, participatory observations were carried out on the principal's leadership activities, interaction between teachers, professional development activities, and organizational culture in the ma'had environment.

Table 1. Informant profiles

Intial	Gender	Where to Work	Remarks
MD1	Male	Ma'had Darul Maarif Patani	Principal
MD2	Male	Ma'had Al-Bitsat Ad-Diniah yala	Principal
GR1	Male	Ma'had Al-Bitsat Ad-Diniah Yala	Teacher
GR2	Women	Ma'had Al-Bitsat Ad-Diniah Yala	Teacher
GR3	Women	Ma'had Al-Bitsat Ad-Diniah Yala	Teacher
GR4	Women	Ma'had Darul Maarif Patani	Teacher
GR5	Women	Ma'had Darul Maarif Patani	Teacher

The study employed a purposive sampling strategy to select two information-rich cases, namely Ma'had Darul Maarif in Patani and Ma'had Al-Bitsat Ad-Diniah in Yala, involving seven participants: two principals (one from each institution), five teachers (three from Ma'had Al-Bitsat Ad-Diniah and two from Ma'had Darul Maarif), and one administrative staff member, selected based on their direct involvement and experience in transformative leadership and teacher professionalism development. Data were collected through three instruments: a semi-structured in-depth interview protocol, a participatory observation checklist, and a document analysis guide, which were developed based on the research objectives and relevant literature, reviewed by experts in educational leadership and qualitative research, and refined through preliminary testing to ensure content relevance and contextual appropriateness. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in Malay, audio-recorded with participants' consent, transcribed verbatim, and translated or transliterated into Thai and Arabic where necessary, while observations and institutional documents were recorded systematically using field notes and documentation sheets. Data analysis followed a systematic six-step thematic procedure: (1) organizing and familiarizing with interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents; (2) conducting initial open coding to identify meaningful statements; (3) grouping related codes into categories through axial coding; (4) developing overarching themes through selective coding; (5) conducting within-case analysis for each institution; and (6) performing cross-case comparison to identify convergent and divergent patterns. Trustworthiness was ensured through methodological and source triangulation, participant verification (member checking), peer debriefing, an audit trail documenting research decisions, and reflexive field notes to strengthen credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Data collection is carried out iteratively, where the process of data collection and analysis takes place simultaneously so that researchers can identify initial themes that arise and determine the need for further exploration based on the development of findings in the field (Purnomo, 2011). The data collection process is stopped after reaching thematic saturation, which is a condition when interviews, observations, or additional documents no longer produce significant new categories or themes to focus (Mustafa, & Hermina, 2025). During the study, the researcher also applied the principle of reflexivity by realizing that the cultural background, Malay language skills, and the researcher's proximity to the context of Islamic education in Southern Thailand have the potential to influence the data interpretation process. On the one hand, this closeness makes it easier for researchers to build a relationship of mutual trust with informants and understand contextual meanings that are not always explicitly apparent. On the other hand, to minimize the potential for interpretive bias, researchers consistently conduct critical reflection through reflective recording, discussions with supervisors and peers.

Results and Discussions

Application of Transformative School Leadership in Developing Teacher Professionalism

The findings of the study show that the implementation of transformative school leadership in Ma'had Darul Maarif and Ma'had Al-Bitsat Ad-Diniah in Southern Thailand takes place through three main processes, namely the transformation of the vision of Islamic education, the professional empowerment of teachers, and the formation of an organizational culture based on Islamic values. The head of ma'had not only carries out the administrative function as the manager of the institution, but also acts as a murabbi who directs change through example, spiritual guidance, and strengthening collective commitment. The initial process of transformation was carried out by building a common vision that Islamic education not only aims to produce students who have academic ability, but also to form a generation of Muslims who are moral, knowledgeable, and able to maintain the Islamic identity of the Malay Muslim community of Southern Thailand. In developing teacher professionalism, the two ma'had implemented empowerment strategies through internal coaching activities, academic discussions, mentoring of senior teachers to young teachers, and encouragement to participate in competency development activities. The uniqueness of transformative leadership in both institutions lies in the integration between modern professionalism and the values of Islamic educational traditions. Teachers are not only directed to improve pedagogic competence and mastery of materials, but also to strengthen the spiritual dimension as mu'allim and murabbi. In addition, organizational culture is built through the practice of shura (deliberation), Islamic ukhuwah, and leadership example, so that the relationship between the head of ma'had and the teacher is more collective than hierarchical. Thus, transformative leadership in both ma'had develops as a process of change that combines managerial, professional, and spiritual aspects in building the quality.

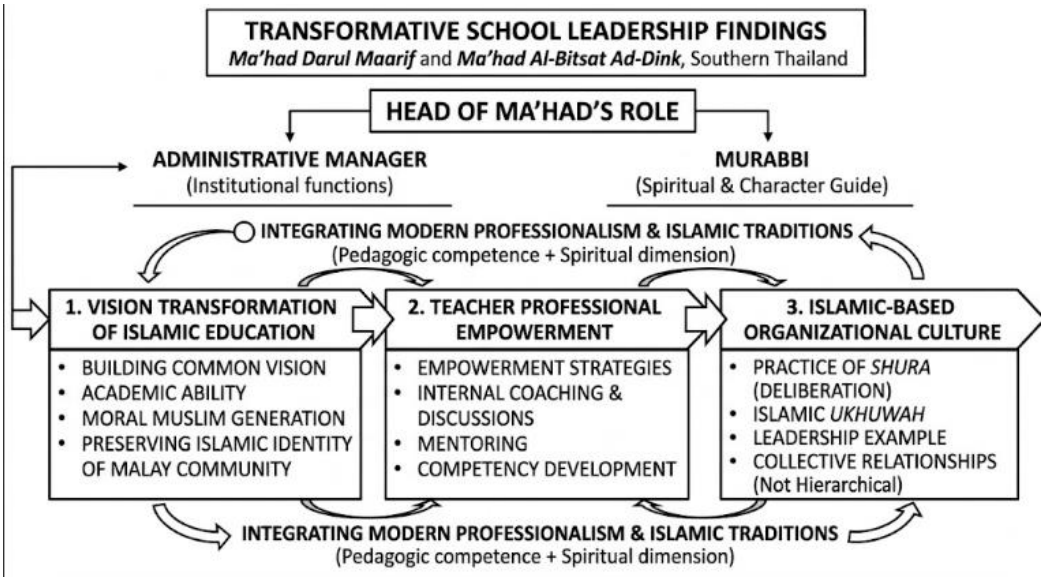


Figure 1. Application of Transformative School Leadership

The transformation process began with the formation of a common vision that Islamic education is not only oriented to academic achievements, but also to the formation of a generation of Muslims who are moral, knowledgeable, and able to maintain the Islamic identity of the Malay Muslim community of Southern Thailand. In developing teacher professionalism, the two ma'had implemented internal coaching, academic discussions, mentoring senior teachers to young teachers, and encouraging teachers to participate in various

competency improvement activities. The uniqueness of transformative leadership in these two institutions lies in the integration between modern professionalism and Islamic educational traditions, so that the strengthening of pedagogic competence goes hand in hand with the spiritual development of teachers as mu'allim and murabbi. The organizational culture is also built through the practice of shura (deliberation), Islamic ukhuwah, and leadership example so that the relationship between the head of ma'had and the teacher develops collectively, not just hierarchical.

The results of observations show that the transformation process is seen in various institutional activities. At the teacher's meeting, the head of ma'had consistently opened the meeting by reminding the vision of Islamic education and associating it with the responsibility of teachers in shaping the character of students. The entire teacher development agenda is discussed through deliberation and is directed not only to improve the quality of learning, but also to strengthen the moral development of students. In addition, the researcher observed informal discussions between teachers after learning activities, the involvement of all teachers in the preparation of the semester program in a participatory manner, and the implementation of teacher development activities which began with the reading of Qur'anic verses and short tausiah before entering the academic discussion.

The Head of Ma'had explained that the leadership transformation begins with the equalization of the vision of Islamic education which is the basis of all teacher development programs.

> "From the beginning, we agreed that the goal of education in ma'had is not only to pursue academic achievements. Teachers must understand that they are responsible for shaping morals, maintaining Islamic identity, and being role models for students. Therefore, we always associate every teacher development program with the mission of Islamic education. (MD1, July 2, 2025)

The data shows that the vision of Islamic education is the main foundation in the implementation of transformative leadership. The development of teacher professionalism is not positioned as an effort to improve technical competence alone, but is directed to support the achievement of the goals of Islamic education as a whole through the formation of character and strengthening the Islamic identity of students.

The teacher explained that the professional development process takes place through joint learning which is carried out continuously in the ma'had environment.

> "We often discuss after teaching to share experiences. Senior teachers not only provide input on how to teach, but also guide how to become educators who can be role models for students. This kind of atmosphere keeps us learning." (GR4, interview, March 2025).

The findings show that teacher professional empowerment is carried out through a collaborative culture that encourages the learning process between teachers. Senior teacher mentoring not only focuses on improving pedagogical skills, but also on forming the character of teachers as role models for students so that professionalism develops in the academic and moral dimensions at the same time.

The Head of Ma'had also explained that the formation of organizational culture is carried out through the practice of deliberation that involves all teachers in the decision-making process.

> "We try to build decisions through deliberation so that teachers feel that they have every program. Our relationship is not just superiors and subordinates, but reminds each other in the trust of education. That way change is easier for all teachers to accept. (MD2, interview, March 2025).

This finding is supported by the results of observations that show that in the preparation of the semester program, all teachers are given the opportunity to express their opinions, while the head of ma'had plays the role of a facilitator without dominating the course of the discussion. This condition shows that the culture of shura builds a sense of belonging to the institution's programs while strengthening the collective relationship between leaders and teachers in supporting organizational change.

The teacher further explained that professionalism in the ma'had environment is understood as a combination of academic competence and spiritual guidance.

> "In my opinion, being a teacher in ma'had is not just mastering the subject matter. We are also required to maintain morals, be an example for students, and continue to improve ourselves. Therefore, teacher development always touches on the aspect of knowledge as well as spiritual development. (GR5, interview, March 2025).

These findings show that the development of teacher professionalism in both ma'had is not separated from the strengthening of spiritual values. This is in line with the results of observations that show that every teacher development activity begins with the reading of verses of the Qur'an and a brief tausiah before entering the academic discussion. The practice illustrates that professional competency improvement is carried out in an

integrated manner with spiritual coaching, so that transformative leadership develops through the integration of managerial, professional, and religious dimensions in the ma'had organizational culture.

The three main themes were identified through a systematic thematic analysis of interview transcripts from seven participants (two principals, five teachers, and one administrative staff member), participatory observation records, and institutional documents collected at Ma'had Darul Maarif and Ma'had Al-Bitsat Ad-Diniah. The analysis involved repeated reading of the data, initial open coding, grouping related codes into categories through axial coding, and developing overarching themes through selective coding, followed by within-case and cross-case comparisons. The theme of *transformation of the vision of Islamic education* was identified through statements from both principals and supporting observations of teacher meetings; *professional empowerment of teachers* emerged from teachers' accounts of collaborative learning, mentoring, and professional development activities; while *the formation of an organizational culture based on Islamic values* was derived from interview evidence concerning shura, ukhuwah, and spiritual guidance, corroborated by observations of participatory decision-making and religious practices during teacher development activities. The consistency of these themes was examined through triangulation across participants, data collection methods, and the two institutional cases, as well as peer debriefing and researcher reflexive notes. Thus, the three themes represent recurring patterns supported by convergent qualitative evidence rather than predetermined analytical categories.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors for the Implementation of Transformative School Leadership

The findings of the study show that the application of transformative school leadership in developing teacher professionalism is influenced by three main dimensions, namely institutional, organizational, and socio-cultural factors. In the institutional aspect, the main supporting factor comes from the strength of the Islamic identity which is the foundation of the two ma'had. The vision of education based on religious values provides moral legitimacy to the head of ma'had to direct change and gain support from teachers and the community. Values such as trust, sincerity, solemnity, and respect for knowledge are cultural capital that strengthens acceptance of teacher professional development programs. However, the limitation of institutional resources is an obstacle, especially in the provision of learning facilities, funding training programs, and the development of a teacher competency improvement system in a sustainable manner. From an organizational aspect, a close and familial work culture is a supporting factor because it creates open communication between leaders and teachers. The head of ma'had is relatively easy to move change because of the relationship of trust and internal solidarity. However, challenges arise because part of the management system still relies on leadership figures, while performance evaluation mechanisms, program documentation, and human resource development planning are not fully structured. In the socio-cultural aspect, the support of the Muslim community in Southern Thailand is an important force because ma'had is seen as a center for the preservation of religion and cultural identity. However, social changes, economic development, and societal demands for career-oriented education are challenges for the sustainability of the institution. This condition requires the leadership of the ma'had to continue to innovate in order to be able to maintain a balance between maintaining Islamic traditions and responding to the needs of modern education.

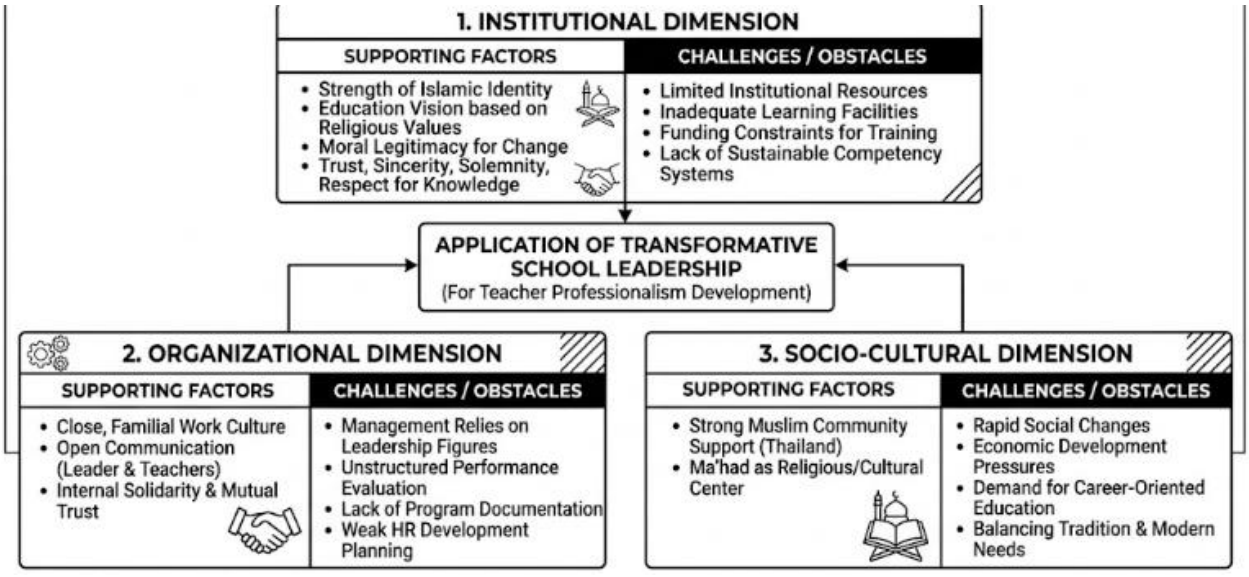


Figure 2. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors for the Implementation of Transformative School Leadership

The results of observations show that all teacher development programs always begin with the re-delivery of the vision of the institution and the values of Islamic education. In various meetings, the head of ma'had involves teachers through deliberation to develop teacher development programs. The researcher also observed informal discussions between teachers as a form of joint learning when opportunities to participate in external training were still limited. On the other hand, the documentation of program evaluation has not been systematically compiled, while in the meeting with the guardians of the students, there is hope that graduates will have a balance between the mastery of religious knowledge and the competencies needed in modern life.

The Head of Ma'had Darul Maarif explained that the main strength in carrying out change comes from Islamic values which have become the basis of all institutional activities.

> "Our main foundation is actually not just school rules, but the value of trust and responsibility in Islamic education. When teachers understand that each program aims to maintain the quality of knowledge and morals of students, they are more likely to accept changes. Therefore, we always associate teacher development with the vision of Islam which has become a shared commitment in ma'had. (MD1, interview, March 5, 2025).

The data shows that institutional identity based on Islamic values is the main supporting factor in the implementation of transformative leadership. The value of trust and responsibility builds a shared commitment so that the teacher's professional development program receives support from all institutional residents.

Teachers Ma'had Darul Maarif revealed that the implementation of teacher professional development still faces limited institutional resources.

> "Teachers' desire to participate in training is actually quite high, but opportunities are not always available. Some competency development activities must adjust the institution's funding capabilities. Nevertheless, we still try to learn through discussions with fellow teachers and share experiences so that the learning process continues to develop. (GR4, interview, March 12, 2025).

The findings show that limited funding and facilities are obstacles in teachers' professional development. Nonetheless, the culture of shared learning that develops among teachers becomes an internal mechanism to maintain the process of improving competence.

Head of Ma'had Al-Bitsat Ad-Diniah explained that the working relationship built through deliberation is a supporting factor in driving organizational change.

> "Our relationship with teachers is built more through deliberation than instruction. When teachers are involved from the beginning in developing programs, they feel responsible for their implementation. The challenge now is to develop a neater evaluation and documentation system so that the program does not depend only on the leadership" (MD2, interview, March 20, 2025).

The findings are supported by observation results that show that all teachers are given the opportunity to express their opinions in the preparation of the semester program, while the head of ma'had plays the role of a facilitator without dominating the course of the discussion. The researcher also found that some program evaluation documents are still compiled simply so that not all activities have a structured documentation system. This condition shows that a participatory organizational culture is a strength in the implementation of transformative leadership, while evaluation and documentation systems are still aspects that need to be developed.

Table 2. Observation results in the Mahad community

Observation Aspect	Observation Results	Indication of Findings
Islamic Values as Institutional Foundation	Teacher development activities and institutional programs were associated with the values of trust, responsibility, and the improvement of students' knowledge and morals.	Islamic values serve as the main foundation for encouraging institutional change.
Teacher Professional Development	Teachers were observed engaging in discussions and sharing experiences with colleagues when opportunities for formal training were limited.	Limited funding and facilities are addressed through a collaborative learning culture.
Teacher Participation in Program Planning	Teachers were given opportunities to express their opinions during the preparation of the semester program, while the head of the ma'had facilitated the discussion.	A deliberative and participatory culture supports the implementation of transformative leadership.
Leadership Role of the Head of Ma'had	The head of the ma'had did not dominate discussions but facilitated the decision-making process and encouraged teacher involvement.	A collaborative relationship between the leader and teachers strengthens shared responsibility for institutional programs.

Observation Aspect	Observation Results	Indication of Findings
Evaluation and Documentation	Several activities were evaluated, but evaluation records and program documentation were still simple and not systematically organized.	The evaluation and documentation system remains an area requiring further development.

The teacher of Ma'had Al-Bitsat Ad-Diniah further explained that community support is a strength as well as a challenge for the development of the institution.

> "The community still places great trust in ma'had as a place to protect Malay Muslim religion and culture. But now parents also hope that graduates have the ability to compete in the world of work. Therefore, we must continue to adapt the way of teaching without abandoning the Islamic values that are the basis of education" (GR2, interview, March 27, 2025).

The findings show that public support for the existence of ma'had remains strong because the institution is seen as a center for the preservation of religious and cultural values. However, the increasing public demands on the competence of graduates encourage the heads of ma'had and teachers to continue to innovate in the development of teachers' professionalism in order to be able to maintain a balance between the tradition of Islamic education and the needs of modern education.

Implications of Transformative Leadership for Teacher Professionalism

The findings of the study show that transformative school leadership has implications for the professionalism of teachers in Ma'had Darul Maarif and Ma'had Al-Bitsat Ad-Diniah through three main changes, namely improving professional competence, strengthening the identity of teachers as Islamic educators, and forming a culture of learning innovation. First, transformative leadership encourages the improvement of teachers' pedagogic competence through the creation of a professional learning environment that allows teachers to develop teaching skills in a sustainable manner. Teachers are starting to be more active in reflecting on learning, improving teaching methods, and developing strategies that suit the needs of students. Second, transformative leadership has an influence on changes in the orientation of teachers' professions. Teachers understand not only professionalism as a technical ability in teaching, but as a moral and spiritual responsibility in shaping the character of the Muslim generation. The values of sincerity, patience, example, and social responsibility are important parts of the construction of teachers' professionalism in both ma'had.

Third, transformative leadership encourages the emergence of a culture of innovation in educational development. Teachers are starting to have space to try new learning approaches, utilize various learning resources, and develop creativity in facing contemporary educational challenges. However, these innovations remain within the framework of Islamic values and do not replace the educational tradition that has become the identity of ma'had. In the context of Southern Thailand's Muslim minority community, the most important implication of transformative leadership is the formation of a model of teacher professionalism that integrates academic competence, Islamic spirituality, and social responsibility. Thus, the leadership of the head of ma'had not only results in an improvement in the quality of individual teachers, but also strengthens the sustainability of Islamic educational institutions as a center for the formation of the character and identity of the Muslim community

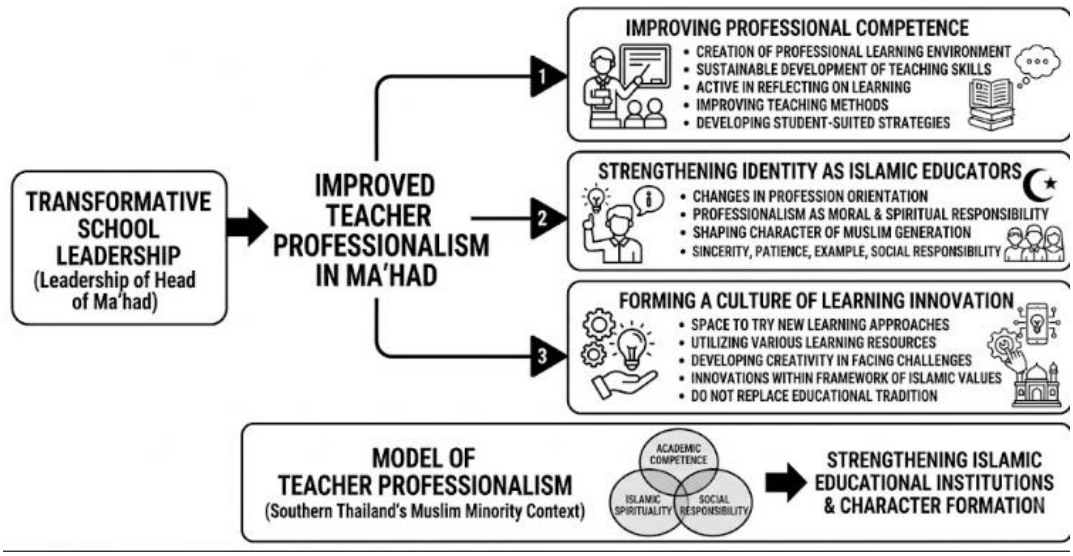


Figure 3. Implications of Transformative Leadership for Teacher Professionalism

The leadership of the head of ma'had encourages the creation of a professional learning environment that allows teachers to reflect on learning practices, improve teaching strategies, and develop competencies in an ongoing manner. At the same time, the professionalism of teachers is not only understood as pedagogical ability, but also as a moral and spiritual responsibility in shaping the character of the Muslim generation. In addition, transformative leadership opens up space for teachers to develop various learning innovations that remain based on Islamic values so that teachers' professionalism develops through the integration of academic competence, spirituality, and social responsibility.

The results of observations show that the development of teachers' professionalism takes place in various institutional activities. The researcher observed a reflective discussion between teachers after learning activities, the implementation of teacher development which began with the reading of the Qur'an and tausiah, the provision of opportunities for teachers to implement various innovative learning strategies, and the involvement of teachers in community development activities with the head of ma'had. The head of ma'had actively provides feedback on the learning process, facilitates the exchange of experiences between teachers, and encourages each teacher to continue to improve the quality of learning according to the needs of students.

The Head of Ma'had Darul Maarif explained that improving the professionalism of teachers is carried out through a continuous learning process within the institution.

> "We not only ask teachers to teach well, but continue to learn to improve their teaching methods. Every time we finish the learning activity, we encourage teachers to reflect together, share experiences, and give each other input. In that way, pedagogic abilities develop gradually without always having to wait for training from outside the institution" (MD1, interview, March 4, 2025).

The data shows that the leadership of the head of ma'had encourages the formation of a professional learning environment that allows teachers to improve pedagogic competence through reflection and collaboration. The professional development process does not rely entirely on formal training, but takes place on an ongoing basis through interaction between teachers in the daily work environment.

Teacher of Ma'had Darul Maarif explained that the leadership of the head of ma'had also shaped the teacher's perspective on the meaning of professionalism as an Islamic educator.

> "Now we understand that being a teacher is not just delivering subject matter. The head of ma'had always reminds that teachers are role models for students. Therefore, we try to improve morals, maintain sincerity, and build good relationships with students as part of the responsibility of Islamic education. ″ (GR5, interview, March 11, 2025).

The findings show that teacher professionalism is understood as a combination of teaching competence and the formation of personal character. Strengthening the values of sincerity, example, and moral responsibility are an inseparable part of the professional development process of teachers in both ma'had.

The Head of Ma'had Al-Bitsat Ad-Diniah explained that teachers are given space to develop creativity in learning as long as they are guided by Islamic educational values.

> "We give teachers the opportunity to try learning methods that are more in line with the needs of students. As long as it does not conflict with Islamic values and the purpose of ma'had education, teachers are free to develop new media, strategies, and forms of learning. Our innovation is encouraged as part of improving the quality of education. ″(MD2, interview, March 19, 2025).

The findings are supported by observational results that show that some teachers use digital learning media, group discussions, and simple project-based learning in the classroom. The head of ma'had supervises learning, gives appreciation for the creativity of teachers, and discusses the results of learning implementation as part of the professional development process. This condition shows that the culture of learning innovation develops through direct support from institutional leaders.

Ma'had teacher Al-Bitsat Ad-Diniah further explained that the leadership of the head of ma'had forms the professionalism of teachers who combine academic competence with social responsibility.

> "The change that I feel the most is that we no longer look at professionalism only from teaching ability. The head of ma'had invited us to balance the mastery of knowledge, moral development, and concern for the community. Teachers are encouraged to become educators who are beneficial to students as well as the surrounding environment. ″(GR2, interview, March 26, 2025).

The findings show that teacher professionalism develops not only in the context of classroom learning, but also through the involvement of teachers in the social life of the community. The role of teachers is understood

as part of the responsibility of education which includes fostering students as well as strengthening the relationship between ma'had and society.

Overall, the data from the study shows that the implementation of transformative school leadership results in a gradual change in teacher professionalism through the collective learning process, character development, provision of innovation space, and strengthening social responsibility. The four forms of change do not stand alone, but are interrelated in forming a complete teacher professionalism in accordance with the characteristics of Islamic education in both ma'had.

The findings also show that the implications of transformative leadership are not only seen in improving the individual abilities of teachers, but also in the development of a professional culture within the institution. A culture of reflection, collaboration, innovation, and spirituality is part of teachers' daily practices so that the professional development process takes place in a sustainable manner. Thus, the leadership of the head of ma'had contributes to the formation of teacher professionalism that integrates academic competence, Islamic values, and social responsibility as the main character of Islamic education in Ma'had Darul Maarif Patani and Ma'had Al-Bitsat Ad-Diniah Yala.

The findings of the study show that the transformative school leadership pattern in Ma'had Darul Maarif and Ma'had Al-Bitsat Ad-Diniah is applied through three main dimensions, namely the transformation of the vision of Islamic education, the professional empowerment of teachers, and the strengthening of organizational culture based on Islamic values. The leadership of the head of ma'had is not only oriented to managerial functions, but also integrates the role of a murabbi who builds collective commitment, guides the development of teacher competencies, and strengthens spiritual values in professional practice. The implementation of this leadership is supported by a strong Islamic institutional identity, a collaborative work culture, and the support of the Muslim community, (Arifin, Z., & Ardiansyah, D.2025). However, it still faces obstacles in the form of limited resources, the lack of optimal professional development and teacher performance evaluation systems, as well as the demands of modern social and educational changes. This study also found that transformative school leadership has implications for increasing teachers' pedagogic competence, strengthening professional identity as Islamic educators (Hendriani, S, 2026) and developing a culture of learning innovation that remains based on Islamic values. Overall, these findings confirm that transformative school leadership in both ma'had is a leadership model that integrates managerial, professional, and spiritual dimensions contextually, so as to be able to develop teacher professionalism while strengthening the sustainability of the quality of education and the identity of Islamic educational institutions in Southern Thailand (Gamaliel, F. X., & Widodo, B. S, 2024)

In this context, the head of ma'had not only functions as an administrative leader, but also as a murabbi who has moral and spiritual authority in shaping the teacher's professional orientation. These findings show that teacher professionalism is not built only through the improvement of pedagogic competence, but also through the internalization of values, the formation of collective commitment, and the strengthening of moral responsibility for the sustainability of Islamic education. (Luvianingtias, Ayu, M.2026) This condition shows that transformative leadership undergoes a process of reconstruction when applied in Islamic educational institutions, because the success of transformation is determined not only by the leader's ability to manage organizational change, but also by his ability to build symbolic legitimacy accepted by the school community. Thus, the transformation of leadership takes place through negotiations between the demands of modern professionalism and religious authority that has been rooted in institutional culture. (Karim, M. 2018) This phenomenon also shows that organizational change does not always take place through structural innovation, but also through the reproduction of values that provide common meaning for all members of the organization. Therefore, transformative leadership in the context of ma'had develops as a hybrid form of leadership that combines managerial, pedagogical, and spiritual dimensions in a unity of leadership practices that reinforce each other. (Akbari, A. R., & Annisa, Y. N. 2026).

A systematic comparison with previous empirical studies indicates that the findings of this research both converge with and extend established models of transformative and transformational educational leadership. First, the three identified dimensions, namely the transformation of Islamic educational vision, professional empowerment of teachers, and the strengthening of Islamic organizational culture, are consistent with Leithwood and Jantzi (2005), who demonstrated that transformational school leadership influences organizational improvement through shared vision, collaborative culture, and teacher commitment, as well as Leithwood and Sun (2012), whose meta-analytic findings established the positive effects of transformational leadership on teachers' professional conditions and organizational effectiveness. Similarly, Damanik and Aldridge (2017) found that transformational leadership is positively associated with school climate and teacher self-efficacy, while Liu (2015) demonstrated its contribution to teachers' commitment to educational change. Further support is provided by Joo (2020), who identified the contribution of distributed leadership to teacher professionalism through collective teacher efficacy and professional learning communities, and Amzat et al.

(2022), who confirmed the positive relationship between instructional and distributed leadership and teachers' professional development.

These findings also converge with Bektaş et al. (2022), who emphasized the mediating roles of trust and work motivation in teacher professional learning, and Heenan et al. (2023), whose systematic review highlighted the importance of transformational leadership in developing positive school cultures and supporting school staff. Furthermore, Lei et al. (2024) demonstrated that transformational leadership strengthens professional learning communities through organizational learning, shared responsibility, and reflective dialogue, while Listyasari et al. (2025) identified a significant relationship between transformational leadership and professional learning communities in Indonesian public high schools. Zhao et al. (2025) additionally demonstrated that distributed leadership promotes teachers' pedagogical innovation through organizational commitment and collaboration, while Gümüş et al. (2026) confirmed the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational learning across K–12 schools. Particularly relevant to the present research, Efendi et al. (2026) conceptualized transformative educational leadership as an organizational practice that develops teacher agency, collaborative professional culture, and hybrid professionalism within Islamic educational institutions. Nevertheless, the present study extends these established models by demonstrating that leadership transformation in Ma'had Darul Maarif and Ma'had Al-Bitsat Ad-Diniah is not exclusively driven by inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, or organizational restructuring, but also depends on the integration of Islamic spiritual authority, the role of the head of ma'had as a murabbi, and the preservation of Malay Muslim institutional identity. This represents a contextual divergence from predominantly secular and managerial interpretations of transformational leadership, suggesting that educational transformation in minority Muslim institutions involves the continuous negotiation between professional modernization and religious-cultural continuity.

Methodologically, these findings were established through the integration of data obtained from [semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and institutional document analysis], with the interview protocols focusing on leadership vision, teacher empowerment, organizational culture, professional development, and institutional challenges. The collected data were analyzed using [thematic analysis], beginning with data familiarization and initial coding, followed by the grouping of related codes into categories and the development of three overarching themes corresponding to the principal research findings.

Specifically, evidence concerning the articulation of institutional goals and Islamic educational identity was coded under vision transformation; evidence concerning teacher mentoring, competency development, and professional participation was categorized under teacher empowerment; and evidence concerning shura, collaboration, religious values, and collective commitment was classified under Islamic organizational culture. The credibility and consistency of these themes were subsequently examined through [data triangulation across interviews, observations, and institutional documents, member checking, and cross-case comparison between the two ma'had], while contradictory evidence and differences between the two institutional settings were considered during the interpretation process. This analytical procedure established a traceable relationship between the research instruments, empirical evidence, coding categories, and theoretical interpretations, thereby strengthening methodological transparency and the construct validity of the study. Consequently, the findings contribute to the existing literature by repositioning transformative educational leadership as a contextually embedded and multidimensional process that integrates managerial effectiveness, pedagogical empowerment, spiritual legitimacy, and institutional sustainability within Islamic educational institutions.

Furthermore, the findings of this study reveal a conceptual tension that is not widely discussed in the educational leadership literature, namely the paradox between the need to transform education and the obligation to maintain institutional identity based on Islamic traditions. On the one hand, ma'had is required to produce teachers who are professional, adaptive to change, and able to respond to the development of science, technology, and the needs of contemporary society. (Aziz, F. A., & Hanif, M., 2026). On the other hand, the institution still bears the responsibility as the guardian of Islamic values, Malay Muslim culture, and the tradition of pesantren education which is the source of its social legitimacy. These findings show that the transformation process does not take place through the replacement of tradition with modernity, but through a negotiation process that results in a hybrid institutional identity. In the process, educational innovation is not positioned as a threat to tradition, but as an adaptation mechanism that allows institutions to maintain their relevance without losing their ideological foundations (Sulistiowati, I., & Mumtazah, A. H 2026). This perspective challenges the assumption that educational transformation has always been synonymous with a shift towards an increasingly secular or market-oriented organizational model. On the contrary, the transformation in both ma'had shows that modernization can go hand in hand with the strengthening of religious values if the leadership is able to integrate the two into a coherent institutional vision. Therefore, transformative leadership in this study does not only result in organizational change, but also builds a balance between the sustainability of tradition, the demands of professionalism, and adaptation to the dynamics of global education (Syarif, Z., & Thabrani, A. M. 2020).

The findings of this study also show that the effectiveness of transformative school leadership is not only determined by the individual capacity of the head of ma'had, but is greatly influenced by the ability of the institution to build an adaptation mechanism to change without losing the social legitimacy that has long been attached to Islamic educational institutions. This condition shows that teacher professionalism is the result of the interaction between leadership, organizational culture, and institutional structure, not solely due to human resource development policies. (Aziz, F. A., & Hanif, M. 2026). On the one hand, collaborative work cultures, shura practices, and trust-based relationships strengthen the process of teacher empowerment and encourage the continuous growth of professional learning. However, on the other hand, this study reveals the paradox that high dependence on the figure of the head of ma'had has the potential to limit the institutionalization of a more sustainable leadership system. (Fadil, F. 2025) When the transformation process relies more on the charisma and moral authority of the leader, the success of change becomes highly dependent on the individual, rather than on an organizational system capable of reproducing professional practices consistently. This tension shows that institutional transformation is not enough to be realized through inspirational leadership, but requires strengthening governance, evaluation systems, professional development mechanisms, and leadership distribution so that change continues despite the change of leadership. Thus, these findings expand the understanding that the sustainability of transformative leadership is determined by the ability to transform personal capital into institutional capacity embedded in organizational culture. (Wutoy & Wang, 2026).

On a broader level, this study shows that transformative school leadership in the environment of ma'had results in a hybrid educational identity, that is, an educational model that does not place Islamic traditions and modernization as two polar opposites, but as two dynamically negotiated sources of value. (Abrori, A. M., & Fathih, M. A. 2026) These findings show that the professionalism of teachers is not solely directed at improving technical competence or employability, but also at strengthening the social responsibility, moral integrity, and sustainability of the Islamic identity of the minority Muslim community in Southern Thailand. In this perspective, educational institutions function not only as a space for knowledge transfer, but also as an arena for the reproduction of social values, the formation of professional habitus, and the negotiation of symbolic legitimacy in the midst of societal changes. At a time when many educational institutions are facing global pressures that drive market orientation, quality standardization, and academic competition, the two ma'had are actually developing adaptation strategies that maintain the character of value-based education without ignoring the need for innovation. (RATNA, D. S. (2026). This approach shows that educational transformation does not necessarily result in the homogenization of leadership models or curricula, but can develop through sensitive adjustments to cultural, religious, and local contexts. Therefore, this study provides a conceptual repositioning of transformative school leadership as an institutional adaptation process that integrates managerial, pedagogical, spiritual, and social dimensions simultaneously, so as to strengthen teacher professionalism while maintaining the sustainability of the identity of Islamic educational institutions in facing the dynamics of 21st century education. (Rasyid, M. R. 2026).

Conceptually, the findings of this study broaden the understanding of transformative school leadership by showing that the effectiveness of leadership is not only determined by the leader's ability to inspire change, but also by his or her capacity to integrate managerial, pedagogical, spiritual, and social dimensions into the institutional system in a sustainable manner. This perspective results in a conceptual repositioning that transformative leadership in Islamic educational institutions is not solely oriented to organizational transformation (Sugiarto, J. (2025). but it also serves as a mechanism for the reproduction of values, the formation of professional habitus, as well as the negotiation of symbolic legitimacy that maintains the sustainability of institutional identity in the midst of social change. Thus, teacher professionalism emerges as a multidimensional construct that includes academic competence, moral integrity, pedagogical leadership, and social responsibility towards the community. (Hermawan, A., & A.K., S. E. 2026). At the structural level, these findings indicate that the success of educational transformation requires strengthening a more institutionalized teacher professional development system, a wider distribution of leadership, and an evaluation mechanism that is able to ensure the sustainability of innovation without relying on the figure of the head of ma'had. This implication is increasingly important considering that Islamic educational institutions are currently faced with the demands of improving quality, accountability, digitizing education, and the need to produce graduates who have global competitiveness without losing their Islamic identity. Therefore, this study offers a transformative school leadership model that places institutional adaptation and strengthening organizational culture as the main foundation for teacher professional development. (Missouri, R. (2026).

Conclusions

This study found that transformative school leadership in Ma'had Darul Maarif and Ma'had Al-Bitsat Ad-Diniah did not develop as a direct adoption of a generalized transformative leadership model, but rather underwent reconstruction through the integration of managerial, pedagogical, and spiritual functions in one contextual

leadership practice. These findings are important because they show that teachers' professionalism is not only determined by the improvement of pedagogic competence or organizational effectiveness, but also by the process of internalizing Islamic values, forming collective commitments, and strengthening the teacher's identity as murabbi. Thus, leadership transformation in Islamic educational institutions is not directed at replacing tradition with modernity, but building a hybrid leadership model that is able to harmonize educational innovation with the preservation of Islamic values. The findings broaden the understanding of transformative school leadership by affirming that the success of educational transformation is strongly influenced by the leader's ability to build social legitimacy, values-based organizational culture, and institutional adaptation to contemporary educational changes without losing institutional identity. This research has several limitations that need to be considered. First, the study was only conducted on two ma'had in Southern Thailand, so the findings were contextual and could not yet describe the diversity of leadership practices in Islamic educational institutions in other regions or countries. Second, the research uses a qualitative approach with a limited number of informants so that the resulting interpretation emphasizes the depth of understanding rather than empirical generalizations. Third, the research focuses on the perspectives of the head of ma'had, teachers, and staff, so that it does not accommodate the views of students, parents, alumni, and other stakeholders that can enrich understanding of the impact of transformative leadership on the quality of education. Therefore, future research needs to develop comparative studies involving more Islamic educational institutions in various social and cultural contexts, using mixed methods designs or longitudinal studies to examine leadership dynamics over time, as well as exploring the relationship between transformative leadership, organizational culture, teacher professionalism, and learner learning outcomes. This approach is expected to be able to produce a more comprehensive leadership model and have a wider conceptual exploration for the development of Islamic education leadership theory and practice.

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