



## Leadership as a Catalyst: Promoting Teacher Mental Health and Well-being in Islamic Education

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### ABSTRACT

**Keywords:**

Transformational Leadership, Teacher Mental Health, Madrasah, Case Study, Teacher Well-Being

This study aims to investigate the transformational leadership role of Madrasah Heads in supporting teachers' mental health in MAN I Plus Skills Bengkalis. This issue is relevant considering psychological challenges such as stress and burnout are often faced by educators. Using a qualitative approach and a single-case study design, this study examines the leadership practices that directly impact teachers' mental well-being from the perspective of their personal experiences. In-depth interviews with madrasah heads and teachers, as well as document analysis, reveal that effective leadership is characterised by three main strategies: serving as a mentor and emotional supporter; fostering a participatory and collaborative work environment; and establishing policies that promote work-life balance. These findings confirm that leadership interventions focused on the humanitarian and psychological aspects have a significant impact on increasing teacher motivation, resilience, and job satisfaction. Implicitly, this study recommends that education leaders adopt a holistic approach that prioritizes the psychological well-being of teachers, ultimately improving the quality of teaching and the sustainability of educator professionalism.

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## INTRODUCTION

Teachers' mental health has become a global issue that has received serious attention in the educational literature and organizational psychology (Hammoudi Halat et al., 2023; Nwoko et al., 2023; O'Farrell et al., 2023). Stress, anxiety, and professional fatigue (*Burnout*) are reported as common challenges faced by educators around the world (Agyapong et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2023; Vargas Rubilar & Oros, 2021). This phenomenon not only affects teacher performance but also has a direct impact on the quality of classroom interactions and student learning outcomes (Frenzel et al., 2021; Kilag et al., 2023; Miao et al., 2022). This phenomenon also does not escape the madrasah environment, where this is exacerbated by various unique factors, including the dual demands

between the national curriculum and religious values, as well as limited resources (Ihsan et al., 2024; Muzawir Munawarsyah, 2023; Purwowidodo & Zaini, 2024). Understanding that a toxic work environment can be a major predictor of mental problems, it is important to identify factors that can mitigate them. One of the key factors hypothesized is the effective leadership style of madrasah heads. The study aims to investigate these causal relationships, offering more profound insights into the actual conditions on the ground.

The existing literature consistently demonstrates that leadership plays a crucial role in supporting teacher well-being. Research conducted by Alwali (2022) reveals a strong correlation between transformational leadership and job satisfaction, while research by Jolly et al. (2021) highlights social support from superiors as a significant factor in mitigating stress. The same point was also conveyed by Kinsella et al. (2024) in their research, which emphasises that teachers' participation in decision-making fosters a sense of ownership. Collectively, these findings lead to a single conclusion: Supportive, participatory, and transformational leadership are important prerequisites for teacher well-being. Although these studies have provided a solid foundation, most have focused on the context of public schools in Western countries, with limited literature specifically examining similar dynamics in madrasah settings in Indonesia. This gap presents a compelling reason for contextual research that aims to gain a deep understanding of how transformational leadership principles are adapted within the organisational culture of Islamic education.

Although the existing literature has demonstrated a link between leadership and teacher well-being, significant gaps remain that have not been addressed. Previous studies, which have been primarily quantitative, have tended to focus on general correlations and measurement without delving deeply into concrete leadership practices that affect teachers' mental health. There has been no research that qualitatively investigates how transformational leadership is implemented factually in the context of madrasahs in Indonesia, as well as how the teachers themselves perceive these practices. This lack of in-depth understanding makes it difficult to formulate relevant and targeted intervention strategies. Thus, the problem addressed in this research is to fill this gap by exploring the dynamics of leadership among madrasah heads and their impact on the mental well-being of teachers, as perceived through their personal experiences.

This research offers significant novelty by providing in-depth qualitative insights into a phenomenon that is rarely explored. In contrast to previous studies that tended to focus on correlation, this study investigated in detail how certain leadership practices affect teachers' mental states. Using a case study approach in MAN I Plus Skills Bengkalis, this research provides a rich cultural

and organizational context, which allows for a more nuanced understanding. We not only identify transformational leadership practices but also analyze how they are perceived and experienced by teachers, as well as how they contribute to the creation of a supportive work climate. This contribution goes beyond mere description by providing practical models of empathetic and effective leadership that are relevant to the context of madrasahs in Indonesia.

The primary objective of this study is to analyze the transformational leadership strategies employed by madrasah heads and their impact on the mental health of teachers. This study aims to identify and describe qualitatively the leadership practices that teachers perceive as supporting factors for their psychological well-being. Furthermore, this research will investigate how these practices influence a participatory, collaborative, and supportive work-life balance, ultimately contributing to increased teacher motivation, resilience, and job satisfaction. The results of this study are expected to provide practical recommendations for education leaders to develop effective strategies in creating a work environment conducive to the mental health of educators.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a single-case study design to investigate in-depth the phenomenon of leadership among Madrasah Heads in promoting teachers' mental health (Alam, 2021; Khoa et al., 2023; Song et al., 2024). The selection of this design was based on the need to understand in depth the complex interaction between the leadership style of the madrasah head and the mental state of the teacher in the specific context of MAN I Plus Bengkalis Skills. Thus, this design allows researchers to understand dynamics, processes, and interactions that cannot be fully explored in depth by quantitative methods. This approach, through descriptive research, is particularly relevant for exploring the subjective meanings and perceptions of informants, allowing for a holistic interpretation of data and analysis of findings with academic rigor (Priya, 2021; Saldaña, 2020; Sridharan, 2021). It provides rich and detailed insights into how transformational leadership practices concretely affect the psychological state of teachers.

Data collection in this study was conducted using the in-depth interview method and document analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore the teachers' perceptions, experiences, and views in detail regarding the leadership practices of madrasah heads. This technique enables researchers to establish more personal relationships with informants and gather rich, contextual information. Document analysis is conducted to complement interview data, including the examination of the school's internal policies, activity schedules, and other relevant documents related to the teacher's leadership practices and activities. Researchers play a crucial role as key instruments in research,

conducting interviews, recording field findings, and analysing data. This research was conducted at MAN I Plus Skills Bengkalis from April to June 2025. To ensure the credibility of the findings, researchers use data triangulation, comparing information from interviews, field findings, and documents. Here is Table 1: research informants.

**Table 1. Research Informant**

Name of the Informant	Interview Code	Description
Teacher	W1	Provide insights into the teaching experience, daily challenges, and impact of school policies in the classroom.
Vice Principal for Curriculum	W2	Provide views on policy implementation, curriculum management, and its impact on teachers' workload.
Vice Principal for Public Relations	W3	Provide insight into the school's communication with external parties and its impact on the school's image and environment.
Official	W4	Provide the perspective of the administrative staff, who are also influenced by the leadership style and work atmosphere.

The data analysis technique employed is thematic analysis, a model developed by Miles and Huberman (Donkoh, 2023; Gill, 2020; Loose et al., 2023). The analysis process begins with data reduction, which involves summarising, selecting, and focusing on relevant data from interview transcripts and documents. The reduced data is then presented in the form of a descriptive narrative and a table of findings to facilitate interpretation. The next stage is drawing conclusions, where the researcher seeks patterns, themes, and relationships within the existing data to answer the research question. This process is not linear, but interactive and continuous. To ensure the credibility and rigor of the results, each stage of data analysis is validated by member checking, where the initial findings are reconfirmed with the informant (Hendren et al., 2023; Mezmir, 2020; Missier, 2025). These measures, taken as a whole, aim to produce an in-depth and detailed interpretation, ensuring that the findings presented are not only descriptions but also accurate representations of the reality being studied, thereby making a significant contribution to the understanding of the issue under review.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Results

In the context of education, this leadership focuses not only on the administration or achievement of academic goals but also on the development of individual potential, including the psychological well-being and mental health of teachers. This approach is relevant because teachers' mental health has a

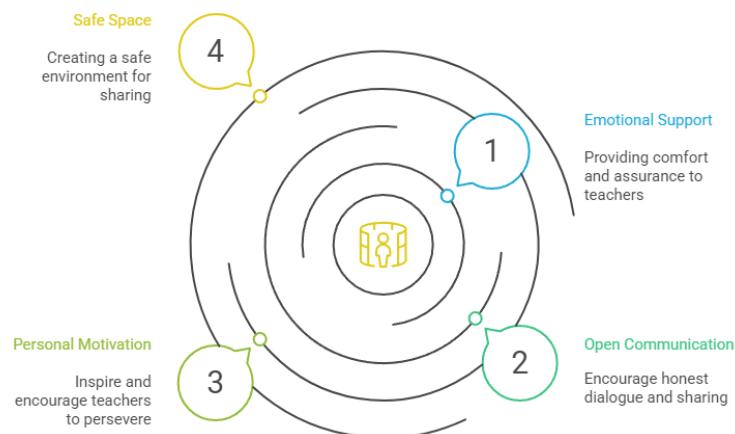
significant impact on the quality of teaching, student motivation, and the overall learning environment. An effective transformational leader will create a favorable, supportive, and empathetic work climate, which in turn will minimize work stress and increase professional satisfaction. Thus, transformational leadership strategies become a crucial cornerstone for building and maintaining teachers' mental health in madrasas, as found in research in MAN I Plus Skills Bengkalis, ensuring that educators feel valued and supported across the board.

### **The Role of Madrasah Heads as Mentors and Emotional Supporters**

The role of the madrasah head as a mentor and emotional supporter reflects how a leader not only carries out managerial functions but is also present as a figure who cares and supports the psychological well-being of the teachers. The emotional support provided, whether through open communication or tangible actions, is essential to creating a safe and comfortable work environment. At MAN I Plus Skills Bengkalis, with this support, teachers feel valued, heard, and not alone in facing both professional and personal challenges. An informant's statement reveals that the role of leadership extends beyond administrative boundaries, penetrating a deeply personal realm. The following informant's statement evidences this:

"The principal often holds informal confidential sessions. Sometimes, after the meeting, we were invited to have a casual chat, discussing the burden of our thoughts. Not only curriculum issues, but also pressure from students' parents or problems at home. It makes us feel lighter and there is a place to share (W1)." Other statements from the informant also reinforce these findings. The opening sentence used to corroborate this point is: "This is also reinforced by the statements of other informants who feel personally guided and supported." "He always provides personal motivation and guidance. When I felt burned out and wanted to give up, he came to me, talked to me, and reminded me of my original goal: to become a teacher. His support is what keeps me going (W2)."

Through interviews, it becomes clear that the head of the madrasah employs an approach that extends beyond mere managerial functions. He created a safe space for teachers to share their burdens, both work-related and personal, through regular informal communication. Additionally, his leadership is proactive in providing personal support and motivation, particularly when teachers face challenges or experience burnout. This indicates a profound understanding that the mental well-being of teachers is a top priority. This leadership practice fosters a sense of appreciation, ensuring that each teacher feels supported and can persevere and stay motivated in carrying out their duties. In addition, departing from this, it can be seen that the leadership role of the principal at MAN I Plus is as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. The Principal's Leadership Role**

Based on the findings presented previously, it is clear that the transformational leadership applied by the Head of MAN I Plus Skills Bengkalis provides a crucial foundation for creating optimal mental health among teachers. His role is not only limited to structural managerial functions, but also extends to a more personal and empathetic dimension, namely as a mentor and emotional supporter. Practices such as informal confidant sessions and personal guidance, carried out regularly and openly, have been proven successful in fostering a supportive and respectful work environment. This significantly helps reduce the psychological burden and work stress experienced by teachers, thus fostering a climate conducive to self-development and holistic performance improvement. Thus, the implementation of leadership management that is oriented towards the humanitarian aspect is the key to maintaining the sustainability of professionalism and the welfare of educators.

### **Creating a Participatory and Collaborative Work Climate**

Creating a participatory and collaborative work environment is a leadership strategy that emphasises the active involvement of all teachers in decision-making and program implementation. When teachers feel they have a voice and their contributions are valued, they will feel more motivated and have a sense of ownership of the institution. The collaborative work environment at MAN I Plus Skills Bengkalis also enables teachers to support one another, share workloads, and jointly find solutions to problems that arise. The importance of teacher involvement in decision-making is a crucial aspect. The following informant's statement evidences this:

"Every time there is a new policy, the principal always invites us to discuss. We were allowed to submit inputs and objections. The final decision is in his hands, but we feel involved and heard. This makes us not feel like a 'robot'

that executes commands (W3)." The same thing was also conveyed by another informant, who said that, "We often hold 'sharing' sessions between subject teachers. For example, math teachers can discuss with science teachers to create integrated projects. The school's head facilitated this. This not only eases the burden of teaching, but also improves the quality of learning because we can learn from each other and collaborate (W4)."

Based on the interviews, it is evident that the head of the madrasah actively involves teachers in the policy-making process, fostering a participatory and collaborative work culture. By providing opportunities for teachers to offer input and engage in discussion, he fosters a sense of ownership and reduces feelings of a rigid hierarchy. In addition, the initiative to facilitate "sharing" sessions between teachers demonstrates a commitment to collaboration, which not only improves the quality of learning but also creates a social support network among educators. These two practices collectively form a healthy work environment, where teachers feel valued, heard, and work as a solid team.

Listening to the description conveyed, a common thread can be drawn that the principal's leadership strategy has a close correlation with teachers' mental health. Specifically, a participatory and collaborative leadership approach places teachers not only as implementers but also as subjects who have a crucial role in the decision-making process in schools. This active involvement fundamentally fosters a sense of belonging and appreciation, which ultimately triggers the intrinsic motivation of educators. From the perspective of organisational psychology, a collaborative work climate enables the distribution of the workload, thereby reducing its individual-centred focus. This significantly reduces the potential for stress and burnout. Furthermore, collaborative interaction also strengthens solidarity and social support among fellow teachers, which serves as a collective psychological safety net. Thus, it can be concluded that proactive leadership management in fostering participation and collaboration is an essential foundation for promoting sustainable mental well-being among the entire educator community.

### **Policies and Practices That Support Work-Life Balance**

Policies and practices that support *work-life balance* are leadership strategies that recognize the importance of break time and personal life for teachers. Teachers' mental health is significantly influenced by their ability to effectively manage the demands of their job and their personal needs. A leader, such as the principal at MAN I Plus Skills Bengkalis, who is wise, will implement a flexible policy that does not require teachers to work excessively outside of working hours, as well as support non-academic activities that can refresh the mind. The policies implemented by the principal play a crucial role in this. The

following informant's statement evidences this:

"The principal is very strict in terms of working hours. After the curfew, he forbade us to bring work home unless it was very urgent. He also often reminds us to make time for family and hobbies. This makes us less stressed and gives us time for ourselves (W5)." The informant also expressed the importance of support for non-academic activities. This is also reinforced by the informant's statement, "This madrasah has a sports and arts club for teachers. Every Friday afternoon, we could play badminton or paint together. The principal initiated and always participated. It is a great way to unwind and strengthen relationships between teachers outside of the formal context (W6)."

From the interview, it is clear that the head of the madrasah has a deep understanding of the importance of striking a balance between professional and personal life for teachers. He proactively implemented a firm policy to limit work outside of office hours, demonstrating a real commitment to preventing burnout among teaching staff. Furthermore, his leadership also facilitates and encourages teachers' participation in recreational and non-academic activities. These activities, such as sports and art clubs, not only serve as a means of de-stressing but are also effective in building strong interpersonal relationships outside of formal contexts. Through this data, it is evident that the policies and practices supporting work-life balance among school principals are as outlined in Table 2.

**Table 2. Principal's Policies and Practices**

<b>Policies/Practices</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Benefits for Teachers' Mental Health</b>
Restrictions on Work Outside Working Hours	The head of the madrasah forbids teachers from bringing work home, except in very urgent circumstances. He also often reminds teachers to make time for family and hobbies.	Reduce the risk of <i>burnout</i> (professional burnout) and work pressure. Give the teacher a clear time to rest and recuperate.
Facilitation of Non-Academic Activities	The head of the madrasah initiates and facilitates sports and arts clubs for teachers, which are held regularly (for example, every Friday afternoon).	Serves as a means of relieving fatigue and reducing stress. Strengthen interpersonal relationships between teachers outside the formal context.
Personal Support and Empathy	Madrasah heads have a deep understanding of the importance of work-life balance and proactively provide personal support to achieve this.	Foster a sense of being valued and cared for, which increases teacher motivation and commitment, showing that the welfare of teachers is a leadership priority.

Based on the table presented, a deep understanding of the leadership commitment of the Head of Madrasah in prioritizing the mental well-being of teachers can be drawn. The policies implemented, such as restrictions on working outside office hours and facilitating non-academic activities, are not just formal rules, but proactive strategies to prevent *burnout* and reduce work stress. The ban on bringing work home explicitly creates healthy boundaries between professional and personal life, giving teachers room to rest and recuperate. Furthermore, the initiation of sports and art clubs serves as an effective forum for unwinding and building close interpersonal relationships, which are a crucial foundation for social support. Additionally, the principal's leadership strategy in supporting teachers' work-life balance has proven effective in maintaining their mental health. Restrictions on working hours and support for recreational and non-academic activities create an environment that is not only productive but also humane. The implementation of these practices ensures teachers have enough time to recuperate, which ultimately increases their resilience and commitment to the profession.

## Discussion

This study presents crucial findings regarding the transformational leadership strategy of the Head of MAN I Plus Bengkalis Skills in supporting teachers' mental health. The results of the study indicate that the principal's leadership extends beyond managerial functions, manifesting in three main pillars: serving as a mentor and emotional supporter, fostering a participatory and collaborative work environment, and establishing policies that promote a work-life balance. Practices such as informal venting sessions, personal guidance, teacher involvement in decision-making, and initiation of recreational activities collectively form a supportive and empathetic work environment. These findings specifically demonstrate that leadership interventions focused on humanitarian and psychological aspects have a direct impact on enhancing the mental well-being, motivation, and resilience of educators, confirming the importance of the role of madrasah heads in creating a healthy and productive organizational climate.

The findings of this study strengthen and enrich the existing literature on transformational leadership in the education sector. Previous research has underlined that this leadership style is positively correlated with job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Obeng et al., 2024; Oyewobi, 2024; Panagopoulos et al., 2024). This study extends the existing research by providing empirical evidence from the context of madrasahs in Indonesia, thereby filling a research gap that has lacked exploration of the concrete manifestations of transformational leadership in the Islamic educational environment. Findings on the importance of emotional support, teacher participation, and work-life

balance align with research on preventing *burnout* and establishing a healthy school climate (Abdulaziz et al., 2022; Mulyani et al., 2021; Wei & Ye, 2022). Thus, this study supports previous findings, but also provides new nuances by showing how transformational leadership principles are specifically adapted to address teachers' mental health issues in the madrasah environment.

The findings of this research can be firmly situated within the framework of Transformational Leadership theory, particularly through its two primary elements: *individualised consideration* and *inspirational motivation* (Afshari, 2022; Bakker et al., 2023; Teoh et al., 2022). Informal confidant sessions and personal guidance conducted by the head of the madrasah reflect *individualized consideration*, where leaders pay personal attention to each individual's needs, including their emotional well-being. Meanwhile, the involvement of teachers in decision-making and initiation of collaborative programs reflects *inspirational motivation*, where the leader inspires his followers to work beyond personal interests for a collective goal. This framework successfully explains why teachers feel valued and have a sense of belonging. The theoretical contribution of this study is to show how the abstract principles of transformational leadership are implemented through contextual and culturally relevant practices, which effectively address teachers' mental health issues.

Overall, this study emphasizes that the transformational leadership of the Head of MAN I Plus Bengkalis Skills is a key factor in supporting teachers' mental health. The findings of this study are significant because they not only confirm existing leadership theories but also make substantial contributions to theory and practice. Theoretically, this research enriches the understanding of how elements of transformational leadership are manifested in the context of madrasahs, providing a practical model that can expand on that theoretical framework. Practically, this research offers a clear roadmap for education leaders to create a supportive, collaborative, and humane work environment. This research highlights that investing in teachers' mental well-being through empathetic and proactive leadership is a strategic step that not only improves the quality of education but also builds the sustainability of professionalism and happiness of educators.

## CONCLUSION

This research examines the role of transformational leadership in addressing teachers' mental health challenges, a crucial issue that is often overlooked in educational settings. Through a case study at MAN I Plus Skills Bengkalis, it was found that empathetic and proactive leadership interventions, such as serving as mentors and emotional supporters, creating a collaborative work environment, and establishing policies that support work-life balance, have a significant positive impact. These findings confirm that teachers' mental health is not an individual issue, but rather an organizational responsibility that must

be responded to through a planned leadership strategy. Therefore, this study recommends that education leaders, especially madrasah heads, adopt a holistic approach that prioritizes the psychological well-being of teachers. By doing this, not only will the quality of teaching improve, but it will also create a sustainable work environment where educators feel valued, supported, and motivated to give their best contribution.

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