



Transformational Leadership and Self-Discipline Strategies in Student Organizations

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Abstract :

This study examines the dynamics of transformational leadership and self-discipline among student leaders of DEMA UNIDA Gontor (Student Executive Board of UNIDA Gontor), an Islamic higher education institution with a pesantren-based environment. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, the research collected primary data through in-depth interviews with seven student leaders who actively manage organizational programs and responsibilities. Additional observational data were gathered from Leadership training activities and routine organizational meetings to enrich the contextual understanding of Leadership practices and the formation of discipline. The findings reveal that transformational Leadership is consistently reflected through clarity of vision, moral exemplification, encouragement of creativity, and opportunities for members to grow. At the same time, self-discipline emerges as a fundamental mechanism that supports fulfilling organizational duties, particularly through daily planning, prioritization, avoiding procrastination, and consistent time management. The integration of these two elements forms a leadership model that is value-oriented, participatory, and rooted in Islamic principles of amanah and adab. Furthermore, the study highlights that self-discipline not only strengthens organizational effectiveness but also contributes to the character formation of student leaders within the pesantren culture. These findings provide important implications for leadership development in student organizations, emphasizing the need for integrated leadership training that combines vision, role modeling, and structured discipline.

INTRODUCTION

Social changes in the higher education environment require student organizations to adapt to new dynamics, such as increased academic load, greater activity intensity, and demands to strengthen student character. In this context, student organizations play an important role as a space for Leadership coaching and self-development that is not wholly obtained in the classroom (Bjerke, 2024; Narenji Thani et al., 2022; Rosch & Collins, 2017). In a pesantren-based campus environment such as UNIDA Gontor, the coaching process has distinctive characteristics, rooted in Islamic values, discipline, and a student life tradition that emphasizes responsibility, independence, and exemplary behavior conduct (Hanafiah et al., 2024). This condition underscores the need to understand how Leadership models in student organizations can function effectively amid changing learning patterns and increasingly complex academic demands.

In various studies, transformative Leadership is seen as one of the Leadership models able to address the challenges of modern organizations. This model emphasizes strong vision, motivation, exemplary, and attention to individual development as the foundation for building a productive and adaptive organizational culture (Hai et al., 2021;

Schiuma et al., 2024; Suwanto et al., 2022). Transformative Leadership in student organizations is not only about leading members but also about building participation, fostering motivation, and strengthening collaboration in managing various work programs. However, the effectiveness of Leadership in an organization cannot be separated from members' ability to apply self-discipline, especially in time management, maintaining consistency, and completing tasks appropriately (Bataineh et al., 2025; Satriawati et al., 2023; O'Neill, 2021). Thus, integrating transformative Leadership and self-discipline is an important factor in understanding the dynamics of student organizations.

Several studies have highlighted the importance of these two aspects separately. Research on student organizational Leadership states that a persuasive, open, and inspirational Leadership style has a significant impact on member participation and the success of the organization's program (Gultekin & Kara, 2022; Judson et al., 2024; Khan et al., 2023). On the other hand, research on self-discipline shows that the ability to manage time, set priorities, and maintain consistency significantly influences academic achievement and organizational effectiveness (Mbaluka et al., 2021; Shi, 2024; Shi & Qu, 2022). However, research examining the relationship between transformative Leadership and self-discipline in the context of pesantren-based student organizations is still limited. There have been few studies examining how students interpret their experience of simultaneously leading and managing self-discipline.

This research was conducted to fill this gap by exploring in depth the experience of DEMA UNIDA Gontor (Student Executive Board of UNIDA Gontor) administrators in implementing transformative Leadership and self-discipline in organizational activities. Using a phenomenological approach, this study explores the meaning of informants' experiences regarding the application of vision, example, role division, self-control, prioritization, and time management in organizational life. The findings of the research are expected not only to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of student Leadership, but also to contribute to the development of a model of student organization development based on Islamic values in the Islamic boarding school higher education environment.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative design with a phenomenological approach to deeply understand informants' experiences with transformative Leadership practices and self-discipline strategies within the DEMA UNIDA Gontor organization. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the meaning of experiences directly experienced by administrators of student organizations, especially in the context of character development, time management, and Leadership regeneration (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Ellis & Hart, 2023; Watson, 2025). The phenomenological focus provides researchers with space to examine how informants interpret Leadership roles, self-discipline, and collaboration dynamics within the unique characteristics of the pesantren-based organizational environment.

The research participants were seven informants, active administrators of DEMA UNIDA Gontor, including the chairman, vice chairman, and several members from various departments. The selection of informants is based on purposive sampling, focusing on their roles and experiences in running work programs, facing organizational challenges, and managing academic and Leadership responsibilities (Aikins et al., 2022; Hicks et al.,

2021; Pahwa et al., 2023). Data is collected through in-depth interviews with open-ended questions so that informants can explain their experiences freely and in detail. In addition to interviews, the researcher observed coordination meetings, Leadership training, and program evaluation activities to gain a contextual understanding of Leadership practices and self-discipline at DEMA UNIDA Gontor.

Data analysis was carried out through phenomenological stages, including the identification of significant statements, the coding of meaning units, and the grouping of core themes that represent the everyday experiences of the informants (Aguas, 2022; Monaro et al., 2022; Muttaqin & Birton, 2025). The researcher compiled a textural description of the informant's experience and a structural description of how the experience occurred in the context of student organizations. Triangulation is used to compare interview data and observations to maintain the validity of the findings. This process allows researchers to identify consistent patterns of experience and to identify differences that enrich understanding of transformative Leadership practices and self-discipline within the organizational dynamics of DEMA UNIDA Gontor.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Transformative Leadership

The informants explained that transformative Leadership is one of the most visible Leadership models in DEMA UNIDA Gontor's organizational dynamics. They assessed that DEMA leaders were able to instill a clear vision, foster motivation, and provide space for members to grow. This approach aligns with the four main dimensions of transformative Leadership: *idealized influence*, *inspirational motivation*, *intellectual stimulation*, and *individualized consideration*. In practice, these four aspects are evident in how leaders manage meetings, assign roles, and provide opportunities for members to improve their capacity. One of the informants mentioned that leaders always start programs by delivering a clear vision. He said, "Every time a new period or program starts, the chairman explains the vision and direction of the organization. From there, we feel more confident and it's easier to align our tasks with the big goals we want to achieve." This statement illustrates the strong dimension of *inspirational motivation*, in which leaders can move members through clear, inspiring direction. Another informant added that the open delivery of the vision made members feel involved in the decision-making process.

His narrative shows that transformative Leadership not only provides instructions but also fosters members' trust in the organization. Leaders can provide direction while strengthening members' morale. In this context, transformative Leadership becomes an effective tool to build a sense of belonging and commitment to the organization. This aligns with the theory that transformative leaders combine vision, motivation, and interpersonal relationships to drive change. Another informant revealed the dimension of *individualized consideration* through the experience of being given the role of leading a small meeting. He said, "The chairman often asks me to lead deliberations or present activity plans. It makes me more confident because I am given room to grow." This attitude reflects the leader's attention to members' individual development, which is a key indicator of transformative Leadership. Providing learning space and Leadership experience is an important part of the Leadership regeneration process at DEMA. The process of strengthening student Leadership character is also evident in the

implementation of *Basic Leadership Training*, which serves as a vehicle for cadre regeneration and competency development, as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Documentation of DEMA UNIDA Gontor Basic Leadership Training as part of the process of strengthening student Leadership capacity
(Source: DEMA UNIDA Gontor)

The existence of Leadership training, such as Basic Leadership Training, is strong evidence that DEMA not only runs organizational programs but also emphasizes character development and Leadership competencies. The informants view the activity as a coaching tool that strengthens strategic thinking, communication, and decision-making skills. The program also emphasizes that transformative Leadership does not stand alone but is supported by a structured, ongoing training process.

Another informant explained that the organizational climate becomes more dynamic when leaders encourage discussion and creativity among members. He said that leaders often invite members to provide new ideas, especially in Leadership seminars, community service, and extensive event management. This encouragement shows the dimension of *intellectual stimulation*, where members are encouraged to think critically and generate innovation. Thus, transformative Leadership not only shapes the direction of the organization's movement but also fosters a creative culture among members.

In addition, the informants also highlighted the example of leaders as a very influential aspect. Leaders who show up on time, complete tasks as agreed, and demonstrate commitment in every activity are important factors in strengthening member trust. Examples like this are at the heart of *idealized influence*, where leaders are respected for their integrity and consistency. In the pesantren environment, for example, is the primary foundation in building student Leadership character.

Another informant explained that dialogue is an important element in Leadership at DEMA. Leaders not only direct, but also assist members in understanding organizational challenges. This process creates a strong emotional connection between leaders and members, enabling more effective collaboration. This approach shows that transformative Leadership emphasizes interpersonal relationships as a key mechanism for developing members' potential.

Based on the research above, this study shows that transformative Leadership at DEMA UNIDA Gontor plays an important role in shaping an organizational culture that is innovative, participatory, and character-oriented. The informants described this Leadership style as encouraging members to be more productive, to take on roles, and to work together to address organizational dynamics. Through a strong vision, directional coaching, and example, transformative Leadership has proven to be a solid foundation for student Leadership development at UNIDA Gontor.

Self-Discipline

The study's findings show that self-discipline is the primary strategy supporting the effectiveness of organizational management at DEMA UNIDA Gontor. The informants described discipline as not only about self-control but also about moral responsibility as a pesantren student. Self-discipline is the ability to manage time, set priorities, maintain consistency, and be responsible for fulfilling all organizational and academic mandates. In this context, self-discipline is an important foundation for the formation of student Leadership character. The informants explained that compiling a daily agenda is the most widely practiced way to maintain organizational performance stability. One informant stated: "I always make a schedule every day so that I know what to do first. Otherwise, college and organizational activities can collide." This statement shows that self-discipline is closely related to the ability to prioritize and avoid procrastinating behavior. Another informant said that consistency in task completion is an important part of preventing work buildup.

In addition, the informants also emphasized the importance of self-evaluation as part of efforts to optimize time. They said that evaluating daily activities helps determine tasks that need to be accelerated and prevent delays. One informant said, "Every night I double-check my unfinished tasks so I can finish them tomorrow." This shows that time management is not only technical, but also reflective and sustainable. The informants also assessed that this habit made academic and organizational tasks run more regularly. The interview findings were then grouped into several units of meaning that represented the informant's experience in applying self-discipline. Details of themes and units of meaning are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 shows that self-discipline is understood not only as an individual habit but also as a structured strategy consciously carried out by members of the organization. Self-discipline is a mechanism that strengthens work order, from setting priorities and avoiding procrastination to consistently carrying out daily evaluations. The informants assessed that when discipline is applied thoroughly, organizational activities run more effectively and do not interfere with the academic process. In addition to individual habits, DEMA UNIDA Gontor also applies a collective approach in strengthening disciplines, such as routine deliberations, inter-group mentoring, and weekly evaluations. The informants explained that the activity strengthened commitment and a sense of shared responsibility. The habit of discipline eventually develops into an organizational culture that encourages independence, order, and a sense of trust in carrying out duties. Building on this, self-discipline is a key element in developing independent, directed, and responsible student leaders. These findings confirm that self-discipline strategies play a central role in maintaining a balance between academic and organizational demands and in contributing to the effectiveness of the work program at DEMA UNIDA Gontor.

Table 1. Self-Discipline DEMA UNIDA Gontor

Self-Discipline Theme	Unit of Meaning	Informant Statement
Daily Activity Planning	Set a daily agenda to set priorities	"I always make a schedule every day so I know what to do first."
Avoiding Procrastination	Self-control so as not to procrastinate work	"I try to avoid postponing assignments so that lecture and organizational activities do not clash."
Task Completion Accuracy	Completing the mandate according to the deadline	"I always check for unfinished tasks so I can complete them on time."
Time Use Evaluation	Monitor and assess the effectiveness of time use	"Every night I evaluate what hasn't been done."
Productivity Commitment	Keeping consistent productivity in the midst of a busy schedule	"I still try to be productive even though organizational activities and lectures are busy."
College–Organizational Balance	Manage the timing of two roles proportionally	"I learned to manage my time so that organizational activities do not interfere with lectures."
Prioritization	Determine tasks that need to be completed first	"I always set priorities so that tasks don't overlap."

Discussion

The findings of this study show that transformative Leadership and self-discipline are the two main pillars that shape DEMA UNIDA Gontor's organizational dynamics. These two elements complement each other in building a student Leadership pattern that is adaptive, value-oriented, and consistent in the implementation of organizational tasks. Transformative Leadership provides vision, direction, and moral exemplar, while self-discipline ensures the effectiveness and orderliness of program implementation. This combination shows that student Leadership development does not only depend on the ability to influence others, but also on the ability to manage themselves independently and consistently.

Within the Bass and Avolio theory framework (Ladkin & Patrick, 2022; Olley, 2021), the dimensions of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration are evident in DEMA UNIDA Gontor's organizational practice. The informant explains how leaders communicate their vision clearly, encourage participation, and provide space for members to take on strategic roles. These findings align with the view of Yang et al. (2025), which emphasizes that transformative Leadership plays an important role in fostering collaboration and organizational resilience. However, in the context of Islamic boarding schools, this Leadership is strengthened by values of manners, trust, and moral exemplars, thereby expanding the scope of theory that has been more widely discussed in general education (M. Wahyu Hidayat & Janan, 2023).

The integration of Islamic values is a distinctive characteristic of this study's findings. The informants describe Leadership as understood not only as a technical ability but also as a spiritual responsibility that demands honesty, exemplarity, and caring. These findings build on previous research that has placed more emphasis on the structural or administrative aspects of Leadership. Leaders at UNIDA Gontor are seen as moral figures who build trust through discipline and consistency of behavior. This perspective enriches the literature by showing that the ethical and spiritual dimensions are the foundation of transformative Leadership in the pesantren environment.

The link between transformative Leadership and self-discipline is seen in how members manage academic and organizational responsibilities. Leaders provide inspiration and motivation, while members implement self-discipline through task prioritization, procrastination control, and daily evaluations. These findings align with Erduran Tekin's (2024) research, which found that self-discipline-based time management increases organizational effectiveness. However, this study makes a new contribution by showing that self-discipline in the pesantren environment is not only a personal strategy, but also part of a culture of trust that continues to be instilled through habituation.

In the dynamics of student organizations, the ability to set priorities and maintain consistency is an operational mechanism that ensures that the vision of Leadership can be implemented. Without self-discipline, a strong vision will not be effectively implemented. These findings reinforce Kunzl & Messner's (2023) view regarding the role of self-discipline in maintaining stable organizational behavior. In the context of this research, self-discipline is not only a technical management tool, but also the process of forming the character of young leaders who are emotionally and spiritually mature.

The findings of this study also indicate that transformative Leadership encourages the creation of a creative and participatory organizational climate. Leaders provide a space for members to pitch ideas, design activities, and make decisions through a deliberative mechanism. This practice shows that intellectual stimulation is not only a theoretical concept, but is brought to life in a culture of open discussion. These findings are consistent with the results of the study by Hidayat & Janan (2023). Regarding the influence of transformative Leadership on innovation and team effectiveness, it offers a new perspective because it is practiced within the context of Islamic boarding school student organizations that prioritize values of manners and togetherness.

The dimension of exemplary is the most prominent finding in the Leadership of DEMA UNIDA Gontor. The informant described how the behavior of a punctual, disciplined, and highly committed leader significantly impacts member motivation. This emphasizes that idealized influence is the strongest dimension in Leadership in the pesantren environment. In contrast to other studies that emphasize managerial skills, this study shows that integrity and behavioral consistency are the main factors in student Leadership success. This finding adds to the theoretical contribution by illustrating the peculiarities of transformative Leadership in the context of pesantren.

The integration of transformative Leadership and self-discipline shows that the effectiveness of the organization is not determined solely by Leadership ability, but also by members' ability to manage time and maintain commitment. The informant stated that a balance between college and organization can be achieved through consistent self-discipline. These findings reinforce Feng's view of self-discipline as a predictor of organizational success. However, this study shows that in the context of pesantren, self-discipline develops into a collective culture built through deliberation, mentoring, and periodic evaluation, thus providing a new context for the literature on student organizations.

CONCLUSION

This study found that transformative Leadership practiced within DEMA UNIDA Gontor has a vital role in shaping an organizational culture that is adaptive, participatory, and oriented towards character development. In contrast to the conventional view that

separates Leadership from the formation of self-discipline, this study's findings show that vision, motivation, example, and providing space for members' growth go hand in hand with systematic self-discipline practices. The integration of the direction of the leader's vision, emotional closeness, the drive to think critically, and attention to individual development creates an inclusive organizational environment conducive to strengthening student Leadership capacity. These findings open up a new discussion space on how value-based transformative Leadership models can be effectively applied in pesantren-based student organizations.

This research corroborates previous studies that emphasize the importance of adaptive and collaborative Leadership but makes a new contribution by framing self-discipline as an integral part of student Leadership effectiveness. The limitations of this study include the small number of informants and the focus on a single institution, so the findings cannot be generalized widely. Further research is suggested, involving more student organizations from various Islamic boarding schools or colleges to test the model's consistency across different contexts. Future studies also need to explore further how the integration of Islamic values, discipline, and transformative Leadership can shape a more comprehensive student Leadership model and be ready to face the challenges of the digital age.

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