WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION

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Abstract	This research aims to analyze women's leadership in Islamic education at Muhammadiyah Senior High School Special Program West City and its impact on the quality of education. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation. Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. The research results show that the leadership strategies implemented positively impact student's academic achievements, as evidenced by the improvement in national exam results and the high acceptance rates of students in prestigious universities. In addition, teacher training programs and data-driven evaluation systems create a more innovative and inclusive learning environment. In conclusion, women's leadership in Islamic education cannot only overcome social and cultural challenges but also significantly contribute to improving academic quality and school governance.
Keywords	Women's Leadership, Transformational Leadership, Educational Management, Muhammadiyah, Islamic Education.

INTRODUCTION

Women's leadership in education, especially in religious-based school environments like Muhammadiyah, often faces challenges in gaining legitimacy and social acceptance. This research found that women's leadership at Muhammadiyah Special Program High School in West City has successfully improved students' academic achievements by strengthening human resources, managerial transparency, and a participatory-based evaluation system (Randell & Yerbury, 2020). Based on an interview with the principal of Muhammadiyah Senior High School Special Program West City, the main policies implemented include improving teacher competence through regular training that encompasses innovative teaching methods, digital learning strategies and optimizing the use of technology in the teaching process (Azizuddin & Shamsuzzoha, 2024). The principal also consistently implements a system of periodic supervision and monitoring to identify the difficulties faced by students and teachers in the teaching and learning process and to find the best solutions to improve learning effectiveness (Bickel et al., 2002). This policy is reinforced with a mentoring system that involves successful alums as motivators for students to achieve better academic results (Sinyosi & Potokri, 2021). Alums who have successfully been accepted into prestigious universities are often invited to share their experiences, provide guidance, and motivate students to be more confident in pursuing academic achievements.

The female principal at Muhammadiyah Special Program High School in West City implemented a more inclusive and collaborative leadership strategy, directly impacting academic achievement improvement (Aulia Fitri et al., 2022). With good communication between educators and students, the principal can create a conducive learning environment where teachers feel more appreciated and students are more motivated to learn (Fatmawati et al., 2024). Academic achievement data shows an increase in national exam scores and the acceptance rate of students at leading public universities over the past three years (Patel et al., 2022). This success was achieved by implementing a data-based academic evaluation system, which allows schools to identify student difficulty patterns more specifically and design more effective remedial programs.

The principal also implements a leadership approach based on motivation and openness, which allows teachers to present innovative ideas in learning (Sinyosi & Potokri, 2021). Thus, students benefit from academic improvement, and teachers can enhance their professional capacity (S. O. Kim & Schniederjans, 1989). The principal provides space for teachers to be more active in developing innovative and adaptive learning strategies that meet the needs of students. This teacher

competency enhancement program involves various approaches, such as workshops, seminars, and academic discussions involving education practitioners, so that educators can continuously develop more engaging and effective teaching methods (Ciappei et al., 2023).

Although they have demonstrated effectiveness in advancing the school, the female principal at Muhammadiyah Senior High School Special Program West still faces several challenges in her leadership (Abukhalaf, 2023). Based on the interview results, social and cultural resistance is the main challenge, and leadership positions within the Muhammadiyah environment are still considered more suitable for men (Jones & Pal, 2021). This obstacle manifests in skepticism from some educators and the school community, which tests the credibility of female principals in making strategic decisions (Raudeliuniene & Matar, 2022). Some parties question the ability of female principals to handle complex managerial issues, especially related to school management policies, budget decision-making, and relationships with higher education authorities.

Another challenge is the limited access to high-level decision-making forums within the Muhammadiyah environment. Female school principals often face difficulties in obtaining the structural support needed to implement the progressive policies that have been designed (Mareque et al., 2022). Based on interviews with several teachers and staff, there are also challenges in balancing the professional responsibilities of female principals and their domestic roles within the family (Mbepera, 2023). These difficulties often burden female principals with higher work demands than their male counterparts, especially in managing a substantial administrative workload alongside more strategic leadership tasks (Yialamas, 2020). Additionally, psychological factors such as social pressure and high expectations for women in leadership also pose obstacles that must be overcome.

To address this challenge, the female principal at Muhammadiyah Special Program High School in West Jakarta implemented adaptation strategies, including enhancing open communication, a collaborative approach, and strengthening work networks with other education stakeholders (Adamu, 2023). By building credibility through concrete work results and overall school performance improvement, female principals have proven that women have the same capabilities in leading Islamic-based educational institutions (Cankül et al., 2024). The principal also strives to create a more open and transparent work culture where all educators and administrative staff can express ideas, engage in discussions, and actively participate in school decision-making.

Research on women's leadership in education has produced various important findings that reflect the complexity of roles and challenges women face in leadership positions (Lopes Cardozo et al., 2022). S. Kim & Shin (2017) Found that the leader's gender does not directly influence the effectiveness of transformational leadership but rather is related to the gender of the subordinates they lead. This study shows that male subordinates tend to be more influenced by transformational leadership than female subordinates. This indicates the presence of social and psychological factors that play a role in how female leadership is accepted and internalized within an organization.

In addition, Azizuddin and Shamsuzzoha (2024) Researched the impact of administrative reforms on the development of women's leadership in local government in South and Southeast Asia. Their research results show that more inclusive and gender equality-based policy reforms have opened up greater opportunities for women to hold leadership positions in the public sector. In education, policies that support gender equality can encourage more women to participate in leadership roles in educational institutions. However, this research is more focused on the government sector and has not specifically highlighted the impact of these policies on women's leadership in schools or universities.

Meanwhile, Ciappei et al. (2023) Conducted a systematic literature review. They found that the participation of women in top leadership positions in the corporate world can enhance the quality of management monitoring and transparency in disclosing corporate social responsibility. These findings indicate that the presence of women in strategic positions not only impacts the improvement of leadership effectiveness but also enhances the aspects of organizational governance. In the context of education, this research provides insight into how women's leadership can bring positive changes in the management of educational institutions, particularly in governance that are more accountable and community welfare-oriented.

On the other hand, research by Ramseook-Munhurrun et al. (2023) Reveals that women working in the information technology and engineering sectors still face significant barriers to achieving leadership positions. These obstacles stem from social stereotypes and second-generation bias, where women are confronted with cultural expectations that limit their access to leadership opportunities. Although this research is more focused on the industrial sector, its implications can be used to understand similar challenges that female principals may face, especially in educational environments still dominated by patriarchal culture.

In addition, the research conducted by Pawirosumarto et al. (2017) researched the relationship between leadership style, motivation, and discipline in influencing employee performance at PT. Kiyokuni Indonesia. Their research results show that effective leadership, when combined with the right motivation and strong work discipline, can enhance employee productivity. Although this research was conducted in the context of manufacturing companies, these findings can be adapted to the educational environment, where female school principals can use a combination of strong leadership, motivation, and a discipline-based approach to enhance the effectiveness of educators and student learning outcomes. Thus, this research provides insights into how female leadership can significantly impact institutional governance, organizational effectiveness, and individual performance achievements, both in the corporate world and the education sector.

These five studies show that women's leadership has a significant impact in various sectors, including education. However, several research gaps still need to be explored further. Most previous research has focused more on women's leadership in corporations and government. However, studies examining women's leadership in educational environments, especially in religious-based institutions like Muhammadiyah, are still limited. Moreover, few studies directly link women's leadership strategies with students' academic achievements and school culture changes. Therefore, the novelty of this research will lie in the in-depth exploration of how female principals in religious-based schools can overcome leadership challenges and how their leadership strategies can contribute to academic achievement and cultural transformation of the educational institutions they lead.

Although various studies have been conducted on women's leadership, several gaps have not been extensively explored, especially in religious-based education. Most previous studies have focused more on women's leadership in the corporate sector (Ciappei et al., 2023) and governance (Azizuddin & Shamsuzzoha, 2024). In contrast, studies on the role of women's leadership in educational institutions, especially religious-based schools like Muhammadiyah, are still very limited. Moreover, previous research has focused more on leadership styles and the challenges faced by women in the workplace (S. Kim & Shin, 2017; Ramseook-Munhurrun et al., 2023) without directly linking how women's leadership strategies contribute to student's academic achievements and school culture changes. Existing studies have also not extensively discussed the cultural and structural barriers faced by female principals in religious-based schools, particularly related to

patriarchal culture, social expectations regarding women's roles, and internal school policies that may still limit the scope of women's leadership. The lack of research on the specific impacts of gender equality policies in religious-based education further highlights the need for more in-depth exploration of this topic.

This research aims to fill the identified gap by exploring women's leadership in religious-based schools, particularly in the context of Muhammadiyah. This study will provide new insights into how female principals lead educational institutions with strong religious values and how their leadership influences the social and academic dynamics in those schools. Unlike previous research that has focused more on the administrative and managerial aspects of women's leadership, this study will deeply examine the relationship between women's leadership styles and students' academic achievements.

Furthermore, this research will highlight how female principals contribute to shaping a more inclusive, progressive school culture that focuses on student character development. By identifying the structural and cultural barriers female school principals face, this research will also offer evidence-based policy recommendations to enhance women's participation in educational leadership (Adamu, 2023). Thus, the results of this research will not only contribute to the development of women's leadership theory in education and provide practical implications for policymakers and educational institutions in creating a more inclusive environment that supports women's leadership.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to explore the phenomenon of women's leadership at Muhammadiyah Senior High School Special Program West City. The main focus of this research is to understand leadership strategies, the challenges faced, and their impact on improving the quality of education in Islamic-based schools (Isaac et al., 2012). The research data consists of primary and secondary data, with primary data obtained through three main techniques: in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted with the principal and teachers to explore information regarding women's leadership strategies, the challenges faced, and their impact on the quality of education at Muhammadiyah Senior High School Special Program West City. The questions in the interview focus on the principal's experience in managing the school, the approach used in decision-making,

and the policies implemented to improve teacher competence and student academic achievements. In addition, direct observations were conducted by observing the principal's interactions in various school activities, including the decision-making process, teacher supervision, and communication with students and school staff. This observation aims to understand better the leadership style and how female principals create a more inclusive learning environment. Documentation is also used as a primary data source, including school policy records, teacher performance evaluation results, and academic activity reports that demonstrate the effectiveness of the implemented leadership strategies.

Meanwhile, the secondary data in this study were obtained from various relevant written sources, such as official school documents, academic literature, and previous research on women's leadership in education. The official school documents used include the school annual report, academic policies, and the results of teacher and student performance evaluations, which help analyze the changes in the school since the female principal took office. In addition, this research also refers to various scientific literature and academic journals that discuss the concept of transformational leadership, the challenges faced by women in educational leadership, and similar case studies conducted in various Islamic educational institutions. The use of secondary data aims to provide a broader context for the research findings and to compare the results of this study with relevant previous studies (Valerio et al., 2024). Data collection techniques were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation to understand the leadership patterns implemented by female principals in building an inclusive and quality educational environment (Davies et al., 2020). Data analysis in this study uses thematic analysis methods, which include data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction is carried out by sorting information according to the main themes, such as leadership strategies, structural challenges, and the impact of leadership on the quality of education. The presentation of data is done in the form of descriptive narratives, including interview quotes as supporting evidence.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Women's leadership in education, especially in Islamic-based environments such as Muhammadiyah Senior High School Special Program West City, is interesting to study. Although school leadership is often associated with male figures, the role of women in educational leadership

increasingly demonstrates their contribution, which impacts the improvement of school quality. Female principals at Muhammadiyah Senior High School Special Program West City face social and cultural challenges and successfully implement innovative and progressive leadership strategies to improve the quality of education.

Through this research, interviews with the principal revealed various aspects of leadership that are implemented, ranging from leadership styles and managerial strategies to efforts to improve human resources and student achievements. Honesty, responsibility, good communication, and transparency are the main principles of leadership. In addition, a transformational leadership approach is also applied by building harmonious relationships between leaders, educators, administrative staff, and students to create a conducive and collaborative learning environment.

Table 1. Efforts of Women's Leadership at Muhammadiyah Special Program High School, West City

No	Category	Indicator	Findings
1.	Leadership Style	Honesty, responsibility, communication, empathy, and transparency	The principal emphasizes honesty and transparency in his leadership and harmonious communication with staff and students.
2.	Views on Women's Leadership	Women have the capacity and ability to lead, and it is important to build trust.	Women's leadership can be well-accepted if it is supported by competence, good communication, and trust in the school environment.
3.	Managerial Strategy	Weekly evaluations, two-way communication, openness to criticism, and involvement of all parties	Open-based management is implemented with a routine evaluation system to improve the effectiveness of school policies.
4.	Human Resource Management	Teacher training, professional skill enhancement, and strengthening teamwork culture	Teachers are regularly trained and encouraged to improve their skills continuously, with an emphasis on collaboration and teamwork.
5.	Improvement of School Performance	Improvement in UTBK rankings, the flagship programs Live in Society, University Exposure, and the active involvement of teachers in student preparation	Academic achievement improved with more structured learning strategies and teacher support in guiding students to face the UTBK and other competitions.

The female principal implements a leadership style based on honesty, responsibility, communication, empathy, and transparency. She emphasizes the importance of setting a good example for teachers and students to be professional and carry out their duties with trustworthiness. Moreover, harmonious communication between leaders, teachers, staff, and students is one of the main factors in creating a conducive school environment. The principal also emphasized the importance of the principle of justice in leadership, which is treating each individual according to their needs and proportions rather than with a uniform approach that is less effective.

The principal realized that initially, there was a perception that men dominated leadership in the Muhammadiyah environment. However, over time, women have begun to be recognized as having the capacity and ability to lead as long as they possess the expertise, decisiveness, and trust of their surrounding environment. The principal emphasized that a woman can become an effective leader with good communication skills, build trust, and uphold Islamic values in her leadership. In managing the school, the principal implements management based on transparency and the involvement of all parties. One of the main strategies implemented is weekly evaluations, where all teachers and staff hold meetings to discuss the school's progress, the obstacles faced, and the solutions that can be applied. The principal is always open to criticism and input from various parties, including teachers, students, and parents. With good two-way communication, every decision made becomes more targeted and receives support from all elements of the school.

One of the principal's main focuses is the improvement of the quality of educators. He actively encourages teachers to participate in regular training to improve their teaching skills and classroom management. Teachers are also encouraged to continue learning through formal training and internal school forums that allow them to share experiences. In addition, the principal strives to build a solid teamwork culture so that all educators feel a shared responsibility towards the school and work collaboratively to achieve better educational goals. To improve students' academic and non-academic achievements, the school implements various flagship programs such as Live in Society and University Exposure. These programs provide learning experiences outside the classroom, enhance students' social skills, and broaden their understanding of the academic and professional worlds. The principal also ensures that UTBK preparation is completed by involving teachers in question creation and providing intensive guidance for students. As a result, the school successfully improved its UTBK ranking, and more students were accepted into prestigious universities.

Discussion

Women's leadership in Islamic schools faces various challenges, especially in the continuously evolving digital era (Sobaih & Abu Elnasr, 2024). This research reveals that the female principal at Muhammadiyah Senior High School Special Program West City has implemented transformational leadership based on transparency, open communication, and active participation in decision-making. This aligns with transformational leadership theory, which emphasizes inspiration, motivation, and the empowerment of organizational members to achieve common goals (de la Varga-Salto & Galindo-Reyes, 2024).

In the digital era, the main challenge female school principals face is integrating technology into the learning and school management systems. According to previous research, female leadership often faces limited access to technology training and digital resources (Hegarty & Thompson, 2019). However, the principal in this study successfully overcame these obstacles by conducting regular training for teachers and optimizing the use of technology in the learning process. The results of this study confirm that an innovation-based leadership approach can enhance the effectiveness of education in the digital era (Kiat et al., 2020).

Other studies show that digital-based leadership requires structural adaptations and policies supporting female leaders' technological skills (Peñaloza, 2020). In the context of Muhammadiyah, female school principals still face challenges in gaining full support from the school community, which tends to be more accepting of male leadership (Helitzer et al., 2014). Therefore, developing more progressive policies and supporting women's participation in school leadership is important, especially in religious-based environments.

Furthermore, research by (Topa & Cerqueira, 2023) Shows that one of the biggest challenges female leaders face in the digital era is the gender gap in access to technology and information. This factor complicates adapting to digital transformation in the school environment. Therefore, female school principals need to receive stronger support through ongoing technology training and policies that allow them more freedom to develop digital-based innovations in their schools.

Quality education is one of the main pillars of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Kemechian et al., 2023). Women's educational leadership is important in achieving this goal, especially in creating an inclusive and quality learning environment (Alshdiefat et al., 2024). This research shows that the female principal at Muhammadiyah Senior High School Special Program West City has improved students' academic achievements through a transparency-based approach

and data-driven academic evaluation. These results are in line with the research (Varkey et al., 2012), which emphasizes that women's leadership has a positive impact on the improvement of education quality and school governance.

However, in Islamic schools, female principals still face challenges in obtaining social legitimacy and structural support. A study by Bibri (2019) Shows that women in educational leadership often face skepticism from colleagues and the surrounding community, who question their ability to make strategic decisions. This was also found in the research (Ludvig et al., 2024), where female principals must prove their credibility through tangible results before gaining full support from the school community.

Moreover, research shows that female leadership plays an important role in shaping a more inclusive school culture, which can encourage improvements in the quality of learning and student engagement (Bayram, 2021). In the context of this research, female principals have been striving to create a more inclusive learning environment by involving all elements of the school in decision-making and the implementation of academic policies.

Besides social aspects, the research (Pingleton et al., 2016) Highlights the importance of women's leadership in creating sustainable education policies. Female school principals are more likely to adopt policies oriented towards the welfare of the school community, including aspects of the environment, inclusive education, and student well-being (Morais et al., 2022). Therefore, supporting women's educational leadership supports the overall sustainable development agenda.

As an antithesis, some researchers argue that female leadership in education is not necessarily more effective than male leadership, especially in a still patriarchal culture (Bompolaki et al., 2022). Other studies also affirm that although women have high leadership capacity, structural systems, and social expectations often hinder them from reaching strategic positions (Marhoffer et al., 2024). Therefore, broader structural changes are needed to ensure women have equal opportunities to develop their leadership without facing excessive social barriers.

CONCLUSION

Women's leadership in religious-based schools still faces social and cultural challenges, such as resistance to the legitimacy of women in strategic positions, limited access to high-level decision-making, and the demands of dual roles between professionalism and domestic responsibilities. However, the female principal at Muhammadiyah Senior High School Special Program West City

overcame these obstacles by implementing transformational leadership, emphasizing transparency, open communication, and active participation in decision-making. This strategy has a positive impact on improving student's academic achievements, as reflected in the increased national exam results and the high acceptance rates of students at prestigious universities. In addition, the policy of strengthening teacher competencies through regular training and an evaluation-based supervision system has created a more innovative and inclusive learning environment.

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