



# The Role of Transformational Leadership in Intellectual Stimulation of The Curriculum in Educational Institutions

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## ABSTRACT

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This study examines the role of transformational leadership in stimulating teachers' intellectuality in curriculum development in Islamic educational institutions, especially in Nurul Jadid Senior High School. The main focus of this study is how the principal as a leader can build a culture of critical, reflective, and innovative thinking through participatory and visionary leadership strategies. This study uses an approach where the results of the study show that the role of the principal is very influential in creating a learning ecosystem that encourages teachers to be actively involved in curriculum development. Three main findings that support the intellectual stimulation process are: a culture of criticism and reflection that is systematically facilitated, a curriculum mentoring program between teachers that strengthens professional collaboration, and the provision of access to information that supports knowledge renewal. These three aspects show that transformational leadership is symbolic and has practical implications in improving the quality of the curriculum based on values and the needs of the times. This study makes an important contribution to the development of leadership theory in Islamic education and recommends strengthening leadership capacity based on continuous learning.

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## INTRODUCTION

Curriculum transformation in educational institutions is not merely an administrative process, but rather part of a broader social dynamic in responding to the challenges of the times (Chung & Li, 2021; I. U. Khan, Amin, & Saif, 2022). In the last decade, changes in the educational paradigm have demanded a shift from a memorization-based teaching model to a learning approach that encourages critical, creative, and collaborative thinking (Fauzi, Martin, &

Ravesangar, 2021; Lefebvre, Turnnidge, & Côté, 2021; Malik, 2024). UNESCO data (2023) notes that only 43% of educational institutions in developing countries have implemented a curriculum approach that is adaptive to global and local changes (S. N. Khan et al., 2020; Zurita-Ortega et al., 2020). This indicates that many institutions have yet to systematically encourage curriculum innovation.

This condition becomes increasingly complex when curriculum changes are not followed by changes in the way of thinking of educational actors, especially principals, and educators. Many curriculum development programs fail to achieve their goals due to the lack of leadership support that encourages profound changes in mindset and learning culture (Awang et al., 2020; Teoh et al., 2022). This is where the role of transformational leadership is important, namely a leadership style that not only leads administratively but also inspires and stimulates the intellectual potential of teachers to innovate in learning. Transformational leadership is able to create a school atmosphere that is open to new ideas and facilitates the growth of curriculum innovation from below (Minai et al., 2020; Prabhu et al., 2022). Bass and Avolio (1994) explain that one of the key dimensions of transformational leadership is intellectual stimulation, namely the ability of leaders to encourage their subordinates to rethink old ways of working and seek new, more effective approaches (Moreno-Casado et al., 2021; Iraizoz-Iraizoz et al., 2023). This dimension is very relevant in the context of curriculum development which requires fresh ideas and continuous renewal.

Thus, this study is academically important because it seeks to explore the relationship between transformational leadership and intellectual stimulation in curriculum development, two aspects that have often been discussed separately. Focusing on how the head of an educational institution plays a role in fostering teacher ideas and innovation in designing the curriculum, is a contribution that is not only theoretically relevant but also practically in the world of contemporary education. Based on previous studies, it is known that most studies discuss transformational leadership in general, without highlighting in depth how intellectual stimulation is applied in the context of curriculum development. Research by Kasımoğlu & Ammari (2020) dan Ntalakos et al (2021) in *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* shows that transformational leadership has a direct influence on increasing teacher capacity in making innovative curriculum decisions. They found that when leaders encourage intellectual reflection, teachers are more active in designing meaningful learning.

This study aims to analyze in depth the role of transformational leadership in stimulating and enhancing teachers' intellectual stimulation in curriculum development in Islamic educational institutions. This objective is important because it is directly related to efforts to improve the quality of learning that is responsive to the challenges of the times. In the context of rapid social, cultural, and technological change, educational institutions are required to continue to

update their curriculum to remain relevant. This study is expected to provide insight into the most effective leadership strategies for building a culture of critical and innovative thinking among educators. Thus, this study not only provides academic contributions but also has a direct impact on educational practices in the field. The novelty in this study lies in the focus of the analysis that combines transformational leadership theory with the practice of developing a curriculum based on intellectual stimulation in the context of Islamic educational institutions. This study not only describes leadership in general, but explores how leaders encourage teachers' creative thinking, develop innovative strategies, and create a living culture of curriculum reflection. This perspective is still rarely used as the main focus, especially in research in educational environments based on religious values.

Based on the provisional argument, this study argues that transformational leadership plays an important role in encouraging the intellectual stimulation of teachers, especially in the context of curriculum development in Islamic educational institutions. Amidst the demands of changing times and social complexity, the role of leaders is not only administrative but must be able to inspire and foster a culture of critical and innovative thinking in the school environment. The intellectual stimulation dimension in transformational leadership, as explained by Bass and Avolio, is relevant to addressing the stagnation of ideas in learning practices (Afnidar, 2024). When leaders actively facilitate discussion spaces, reflections, and access to new information, teachers become more involved in creating contextual and adaptive curricula. Therefore, the involvement of leaders in shaping teachers' ways of thinking is not merely a complement, but a key element that determines the effectiveness of curriculum transformation. This argument is the basis for exploring how transformational leadership strategies are applied in real terms in Islamic education practices.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative approach with the aim of deeply understanding the role of transformational leadership in the intellectual stimulation of the curriculum in an Islamic educational environment. The location of the study was at Nurul Jadid Senior High School, an Islamic educational institution known to be active in curriculum renewal and has visionary leadership. Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation studies. The research subjects included the principal, teachers, and curriculum development team. The collected data were analyzed using an interactive model from Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) which consists of three main stages: condensation of data (data reduction), data display (data presentation), and drawing and verifying conclusions (drawing and verifying conclusions) (Morkevičiūtė & Endriulaitienė, 2020; Scheuer & Loughlin, 2021). This process is carried out

continuously from the beginning of data collection to the final stage, to ensure that the results of the analysis truly reflect the meaning contained in social interactions in the madrasah environment.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSION**

### **Result**

#### **Culture of Criticism and Reflection among Teachers**

The culture of criticism and reflection among teachers refers to a condition in which teachers have the habit and courage to openly review, evaluate, and provide constructive input on learning practices, curriculum policies, and the dynamics of educational institutions. At Nurul Jadid Senior High School, the culture of criticism and reflection refers to a pattern of professional interaction characterized by openness, self-evaluation, and ongoing pedagogical dialogue between educators in order to improve the quality of learning and curriculum development. This culture is formed through the habit of teachers reflecting on their teaching practices, providing constructive feedback to colleagues, and conveying ideas for improvement argumentatively in internal academic forums. In an institutional context, Nurul Jadid Senior High School actively facilitates discussion spaces, reflective training, and learning evaluation systems that encourage the development of collective critical awareness. This culture is important because it is the foundation for creating an adaptive, innovative, and value-based educational ecosystem. By prioritizing reflection and criticism as part of the professional process, teachers at Nurul Jadid Senior High School can renew their teaching approaches more contextually and responsively to the dynamics of student needs and curriculum development.

The Islamic Religious Education subject teacher said that the principal actively directed and organized a monthly meeting entitled Reflective Curriculum Discussion as a forum for sharing ideas and evaluating learning. Although initially this forum was considered an additional burden, over time the forum became a space that was awaited because it opened up opportunities to convey learning ideas openly. (AY\_2025)

A Bahasa Indonesia teacher also added that the principal always opened the forum with reflective questions, such as "What can we improve from this month's RPP?", which then became a spark for discussion and critical thinking among teachers. (UK\_2025)

A similar thing was also conveyed by a young Mathematics subject teacher, who considered that this forum had increased the courage and confidence of teachers in evaluating the curriculum. (SH\_2025)

Based on the results of interviews with the three informants above, a consistent picture was obtained regarding the role of the principal as the main initiator in encouraging the growth of the teacher's intellectual forum. The results of direct observation in the forum showed that the principal did not monopolize the discussion, but rather facilitated two-way dialogue, recorded teacher suggestions, and followed up on them in real terms in the curriculum document.

Based on this information, it can be seen that the principal is not only present administratively but also actively creates an intellectual ecosystem that supports teachers to think reflectively and critically. This finding strengthens the role of transformational leadership in creating intellectual stimulation of the curriculum through participatory and dialogical leadership practices.

Based on the findings obtained, it can be concluded that the role of transformational leadership in encouraging intellectual stimulation of the curriculum lies not only in the capacity for strategic decision-making but also in its ability to form a reflective and participatory academic culture. Effective leaders in this context are those who are able to position themselves as collective learning facilitators and open up space for educators to be actively involved in the curriculum development process. The existence of sustainable professional forums shows that leadership oriented towards intellectual empowerment is not top-down, but grows through horizontal interactions that uphold collaboration, trust, and critical values. In the context of Islamic educational institutions, this kind of approach is increasingly relevant because it is able to bridge traditional values with the demands of contemporary educational innovation. Thus, transformational leadership can be seen as a strategic instrument that contributes directly to substantially improving the quality of the curriculum, through a humanist approach that prioritizes dialogue, reflection, and continuous professional growth among educators. This study emphasizes that educational transformation begins with leadership that is able to foster a critical-thinking ecosystem, not merely from structural policies that are administrative in nature.

### **Curriculum Mentoring Program between Teachers**

The curriculum mentoring program between teachers is a collaborative approach to developing the professional capacity of educators, where more experienced teachers guide and assist other teachers in the process of curriculum planning, development, and evaluation. The curriculum mentoring program between teachers carried out at Nurul Jadid Senior High School is through professional coaching carried out collaboratively between senior teachers and younger or new teachers in order to improve the competence of curriculum planning, implementation, and evaluation. This program is designed to create a systematic flow of pedagogical and curricular knowledge transfer, through direct guidance, reflective discussions, and ongoing assistance in the preparation of teaching materials and learning innovations. In the Nurul Jadid Senior High School environment, this program not only emphasizes the technical mastery of the preparation of RPP or syllabus, but also fosters critical, creative, and adaptive thinking skills to the dynamics of education that continue to develop. Through this mentoring approach, a professional learning network is built based on trust, dialogue, and a spirit of sharing between teachers, so that it becomes a strategic instrument in strengthening the quality of the curriculum that is contextual, valuable, and relevant to the needs of students.

**Table 1. Implementation of Curriculum Mentoring Between Teachers**

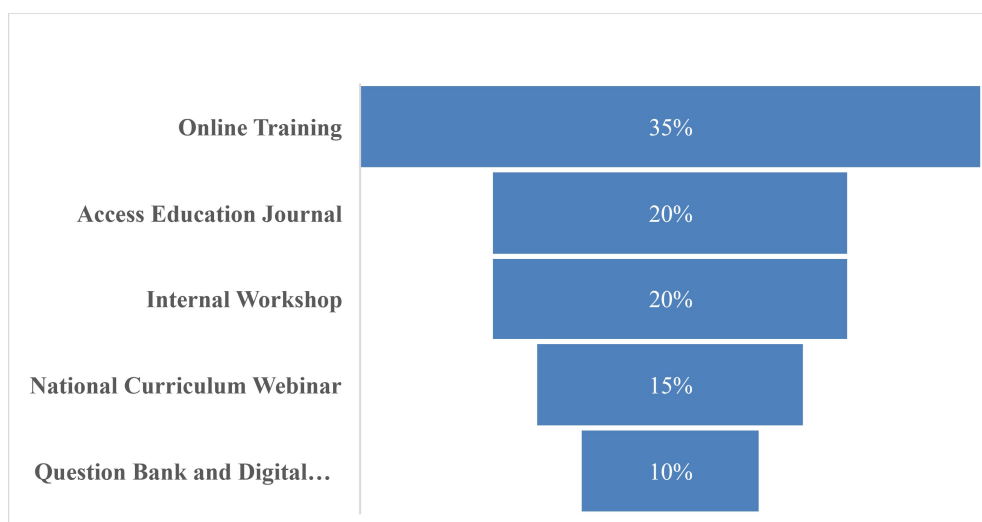
COMPONENT	DESCRIPTION
Mentoring Goals	Improving teacher capacity in designing and evaluating curriculum
Mentor	Senior teachers experienced in curriculum development
Mentee	New teachers or teachers who need assistance in preparing the curriculum
Main Activities	Assistance in preparing lesson plans, discussing learning designs, reflecting on practice
Meeting Frequency	Twice a month (scheduled and structured)
Evaluation and Feedback	Conducted at the end of each month collectively by the curriculum development team

Based on the table above, shows that the curriculum mentoring program between teachers implemented at Nurul Jadid Senior High School shows a systematic effort in building professional collaboration among educators. This program not only aims to improve teachers' technical competence in preparing teaching materials but also encourages the creation of a collective learning culture based on trust and dialogue. The role of senior teachers as mentors strengthens the institutional function in transferring good curriculum practices, while beneficiary teachers (mentees) get space to develop their pedagogical potential in a more focused manner. Structured periodic evaluations show that this program is not symbolic, but operational and results-oriented. Thus, this curriculum mentoring represents a strategy for strengthening teacher professionalism that is in line with the values of transformational leadership, especially in facilitating intellectual growth and learning innovation in Islamic educational environments.

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the curriculum mentoring program between teachers is an effective strategy that strengthens the curriculum transformation process in Islamic educational institutions. The existence of this program shows that collaboration between teachers not only has an impact on improving technical skills, but also on developing reflective, adaptive, and innovative ways of thinking. The interaction patterns that are built in the mentoring program show a collective awareness to continue learning and improve learning practices sustainably. In addition, this program is able to create a professional learning space that does not depend solely on formal structures, but on the strength of a mutually supportive pedagogical community. Thus, curriculum mentoring is not only an instrument for increasing individual capacity but also a medium for forming an organizational culture that is responsive to the demands of today's education. This finding confirms that internal collaboration-based strategies can be an important foundation in developing a contextual, relevant, and quality-oriented curriculum.

### **Provision of Access to Information to Improve Curriculum Quality**

Providing access to information to improve the quality of the curriculum refers to the systematic efforts of educational institutions in opening, facilitating, and managing relevant information sources to support the process of planning, implementing, and evaluating the curriculum on an ongoing basis. This has become a strategic effort by Nurul Jadid Senior High School to facilitate educators to have easy and complete information resources that are relevant to support the development of a quality curriculum. This access to information includes various forms, such as scientific literature sources, the latest education journals, online training and webinars, national curriculum policy materials, and references to innovative learning methodologies. At Nurul Jadid Senior High School, the provision of this access is integrated into the teacher capacity-building program, both through the use of digital platforms and institutional support in the form of training facilitation and subscriptions to reading sources. The purpose of providing this access is so that teachers are able to design a curriculum that is more adaptive, contextual, and based on student needs. Thus, access to information becomes an important foundation in the process of improving the quality of the curriculum and creating a reflective learning environment that is oriented towards continuous scientific renewal.



**Picture 1. Types of Access Facilitated by the Institution**

The graph above shows that online training is the form of information access most utilized by teachers at Nurul Jadid Senior High School, with a percentage of 35%. This indicates a preference for flexible learning models that can be accessed independently. On the other hand, access to educational journals and internal workshops is also quite significant, reflecting that teachers need scientific references and discussion spaces for curriculum development. Although access to question banks and digital sources is still low, this trend shows potential for improvement if supported by technical training. In general, the provision of information access by institutions has contributed to the formation of an academic ecosystem that encourages teachers to update their

knowledge and skills, so that the quality of the curriculum developed is more actual, contextual, and in accordance with the needs of 21st century learning.

Based on field findings, it can be concluded that the provision of structured and sustainable access to information plays a significant role in supporting the strengthening of curriculum capacity in educational institutions. The availability of various sources of knowledge, both in the form of online training, scientific references, and professional discussion forums, makes a real contribution to improving curriculum literacy and teachers' pedagogical abilities. This access to information not only broadens horizons but also encourages the creation of teaching practices that are more relevant to the demands of the times and the needs of students. Furthermore, the provision of information that is managed systematically shows institutional awareness to build a learning ecosystem based on continuous professional development. Thus, this strategy can be categorized as an important component in institutional transformation that is oriented towards quality. This finding strengthens the view that effective curriculum renewal is not only determined by formal structures but also by support for expanding access to knowledge resources for educators.

## Discussion

The culture of criticism and reflection has strategic implications for improving the quality of the curriculum and the professionalism of teachers (Meng, 2022; Patnaik & Bakkar, 2024; Luo et al., 2025). When this culture functions optimally, teachers are encouraged to continuously evaluate learning practices, improve teaching approaches, and produce relevant pedagogical innovations (Kehr et al., 2023). This reflective function strengthens the quality of learning based on student needs and social dynamics. However, if this culture is dysfunctional, for example, due to authoritarian leadership, lack of dialogue forums, or individual resistance, there will be professional stagnation and lag in curriculum development. In the context of transformational leadership theory, especially the intellectual stimulation dimension proposed by Bass and Avolio, leaders act as catalysts who challenge teachers to think differently, get out of routines, and develop more creative and relevant learning approaches (Mahmud, 2022; Hundie & Habtewold, 2024). Structurally, the existence of a reflective culture is highly dependent on the support of transformational leadership that encourages intellectual stimulation and an inclusive and open organizational system to change. The correlation between a participatory leadership structure and a reflective culture shows that changes in teacher behavior in curriculum renewal are determined by the configuration of values, leadership, and a collaborative climate in the school environment. research by Corti et al (2023) dan Soomro & Shah (2022) which emphasizes that leaders who create reflective and dialogical spaces can increase teachers' capacity in contributing innovative ideas to curriculum development.

The curriculum mentoring program between teachers has significant

implications for the continuous improvement of curriculum quality. When this program functions well, there is an effective transfer of knowledge between senior and new teachers, strengthening curriculum competencies and forming a collaborative culture that supports learning innovation (Bosselut et al., 2020). Conversely, if this program is dysfunctional due to weak commitment, minimal mentor training, or an unplanned mentoring structure, then there will be competency gaps and stagnation in curriculum development. Structurally, the success of mentoring is largely determined by a supportive organizational system, including leadership that facilitates collective learning, open academic policies, and special time and space for professional collaboration (Baquero et al., 2020; Zamroni et al., 2021). The correlation between supportive institutional structures and the effectiveness of mentoring programs shows that this practice does not stand alone, but rather depends heavily on institutional governance that ensures the sustainability of the teacher professional development process. The findings of Alghusin & Al-Ajlouni (2020) state that collaboration between teachers in curriculum development can significantly increase teachers' reflective and innovative capacity.

Providing access to information has direct implications for the effectiveness of improving the quality of the curriculum. When this access is optimally utilized, teachers have the opportunity to access various up-to-date references, enrich pedagogical insights, and adapt the curriculum to scientific developments and student needs. This supports the creation of a more adaptive, contextual, and innovative curriculum (Ntseke et al., 2022). Conversely, if access to information is not managed systematically, for example, due to limited digital infrastructure, lack of training, or weak technological literacy, the curriculum renewal process will be hampered and innovation stagnation cannot be avoided. Structurally, the success of providing access to information depends on the managerial support of educational institutions, proactive internal policies, and leadership that encourages continuous learning (Vargas-Sevalle et al., 2020; Ali & Baihaki, 2021). The correlation between supportive institutional structures and the use of access to information shows that curriculum quality is largely determined by the organizational environment that encourages data-based and knowledge-based transformation. This study makes an important contribution to the development of leadership theory in Islamic education and recommends strengthening leadership capacity based on continuous learning.

## CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study confirms that transformational leadership in Islamic educational institutions plays a crucial role in stimulating teachers' intellectual development, particularly in curriculum development. The key lesson is that curriculum transformation cannot be achieved solely through structural regulation, but requires a humanistic and transformative leadership approach. The implications of this study suggest that dialogic leadership that

encourages reflection, mentoring, and access to information can build a progressive and sustainable learning ecosystem. Scientifically, this study expands the theory of transformational leadership in the context of Islamic values-based education by providing examples of real-life practices in madrasas, while enriching the global literature that has so far under-recognized this context. Practically, the results provide an applicable model for educational leaders in fostering curriculum innovation. The strength of this study lies in its in-depth qualitative analysis using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña model, which reveals the relational dynamics of leaders and teachers. Its limitations include its narrow scope within a single institution, the interpretive nature of the qualitative method, and the lack of consideration of teacher demographic variables. Therefore, further research is recommended to employ a mixed approach across institutions and regions to obtain a more comprehensive picture.

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