

LEADERSHIP STYLE OF WOMEN IN EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF SCHOOLS IN JAKARTA

Desy Natalia Kristanty¹, Freddy Rumambi², Auderey G Tangkudung³ and Pingkan Luciawati Sompi⁴

^{1,2,3,4} Ekonomi, IBM asmi, Jl. Pacuan Kuda Raya No.1, Kota Jakarta Timur, Daerah Khusus Ibukota Jakarta 13210

E-mail: desynatalialawfirm@gmail.com; freddyrumambi@gmail.com; audereyt@ibmasmi.ac.id; pingkansompi@ibmasmi.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the influence of women leadership styles in educational environments on the character building. The study uses a qualitative approach by comparing the leadership of principals in two junior high schools in the context of character education, namely SMP GIS and SMP Negeri 99 Jakarta. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and literature studies. Data were analyzed using the Miles & Huberman (1992) approach, which consists of 4 stages, namely: 1) data collection, 2) data reduction, 3) data presentation, and 4) conclusions/verification. The results of the study indicate that women principals: 1) apply a transformational leadership style, 2) become a source of collective inspiration and motivation for teachers and students, and 3) build emotional without losing professional authority. Fundamental differences are seen in the reflection of the success of character application and problem handling. By applying a transformational leadership style, women principals are able to create a conducive educational climate, encouraging the development of character values in students such as responsibility, discipline, empathy, and independence. A transformational leadership style that emphasizes empathy, participation, and inspiration enables women principals to become strong moral role models and shape a positive school culture. This research strengthens the transformational leadership style theoretically and practically, because it is able to address the challenges of character building for the younger generation, especially amidst the dynamics of the digital era and Generation Z culture. Therefore, it is recommended that the Government and Educational Institutions provide greater support to women principals to improve their capabilities. Abstracts must be written in one-spaced paragraphs, containing a maximum of 250 words, and written in Times New Roman 10 pt. Abstracts must be written in Indonesian and English. The abstract must include research objectives, methods (participant characteristics, population, samples, sampling methods, data collection, and data analysis), findings, and conclusions. If necessary, recommendations can be given at the end of the paragraph. After the abstract, provide five keywords separated by semicolons (;). Choose keywords carefully that allow search engines to find your article.

Keywords: character building; education; junior high school; transformational leadership style; women principals

GAYA KEPEMIMPINAN PEREMPUAN DALAM PENDIDIKAN: STUDI KASUS SEKOLAH DI JAKARTA

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji pengaruh gaya kepemimpinan perempuan dalam lingkungan pendidikan terhadap pembentukan karakter. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan membandingkan kepemimpinan kepala sekolah di dua sekolah menengah pertama dalam konteks pendidikan karakter, yaitu SMP GIS dan SMP Negeri 99 Jakarta. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan studi literatur. Data dianalisis menggunakan pendekatan Miles & Huberman (1994), yang terdiri dari 4 tahapan, yaitu: 1) pengumpulan data, 2) reduksi data, 3) penyajian data, dan 4) kesimpulan/verifikasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepala sekolah perempuan: 1) menerapkan gaya kepemimpinan transformasional, 2) menjadi sumber inspirasi dan motivasi kolektif bagi guru dan siswa, dan 3) membangun hubungan emosional tanpa kehilangan otoritas profesional. Perbedaan mendasar terlihat pada refleksi keberhasilan penerapan karakter dan penanganan masalah. Dengan menerapkan gaya kepemimpinan transformasional, kepala sekolah perempuan mampu menciptakan iklim pendidikan yang kondusif, mendorong pengembangan nilai-nilai karakter pada siswa seperti tanggung jawab, disiplin, empati, dan kemandirian. Gaya kepemimpinan transformasional yang menekankan empati, partisipasi, dan inspirasi memungkinkan kepala sekolah perempuan untuk menjadi panutan moral yang kuat dan membentuk budaya sekolah yang positif. Penelitian ini memperkuat gaya kepemimpinan transformasional secara teoritis dan praktis, karena mampu mengatasi tantangan pembentukan karakter bagi generasi muda, terutama di tengah dinamika era digital dan budaya Generasi Z. Oleh karena itu, disarankan agar Pemerintah dan Lembaga Pendidikan memberikan dukungan yang lebih besar kepada kepala sekolah perempuan untuk meningkatkan kemampuannya.

Kata kunci: pendidikan; pendidikan karakter; sekolah menengah pertama; gaya kepemimpinan transformasional; kepala sekolah perempuan.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership in education has long been recognized as a determining factor in achieving institutional goals, particularly in shaping the character of the younger generation (Charteris et al., 2026; Macpherson, 2025). In the school context, the principal serves not only as an administrator but also as an agent of change with a significant influence on organizational culture, collective spirit, and the learning climate (Glowach, 2025). Character education, which is now a major concern in the national education system, because it is considered capable of being the answer to the deadlock in the national education system (Efendi & Ningsih, 2024) and is highly dependent on the quality and orientation of leadership exercised by school leaders (Ariyanto et al., 2025; Syarifah, 2019). Effective leadership enables the creation of a learning environment that supports the internalization of values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, and social awareness in students.

In recent years, the number of women principals in Indonesia has continued to increase. Data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (2022) shows that more than 58% of principals in public schools are women, and this figure reaches more than 63% in the DKI Jakarta area. This increase marks a significant shift in the educational leadership structure, which was previously dominated by men. However, studies specifically examining the contribution of women leadership styles—characterized by empathy, communication, and collaboration—to shaping student character are still very limited (Hajuan et al., 2023). Furthermore, most studies on educational leadership still focus on managerial aspects and have not explored the affective and moral dimensions that are the distinctive strengths of women leadership (Thien et al., 2025; Wulandari & Ahmad, 2025). On the other hand, today's educational challenges are increasingly complex, particularly due to the influence of digital culture on student behavior and the weakening of ethical values among the younger generation (Musfiah et al., 2022).

The increase in the number of women principals should ideally be accompanied by an increase in the proportion of women principals participating in training programs and other policies that favor women principals. However, because leadership positions in education in Indonesia are gender-neutral, women principals are treated equally with men principals (Thompson & Stokes, 2025).

Based on this background, this study aims to examine the influence of transformational leadership

styles applied by women principals on character building in Indonesia's next generation. This study expands on previous research on women leadership in education conducted by Zulfitri (2022), which demonstrated that women leaders in Islamic schools play a crucial role in fostering collective spirit and creating a positive learning environment. However, this study was limited to the context of Islamic boarding schools and did not explicitly address the structural and psychosocial challenges faced by women leaders in the public school context.

This study also addresses the findings of Kafidhoh (2019), who emphasized that emotional approaches and moral role models from women leaders are effective in shaping an ethical and spiritual climate. However, Kafidhoh (2019) focused more on religious values in the context of Islamic education, while this study broadens its scope to public education and interactions with Generation Z, who are digital natives and more autonomous. The study also examines the obstacles faced by women principals in implementing transformational leadership amidst current administrative burdens, technological demands, and student behavioral dynamics (Wen & Harms, 2025).

By comparing the implementation of character building in two schools in Jakarta, this study aims not only to understand the patterns and strategies of women leadership in education, but also to contextually reveal how humanistic and consistent leadership practices can be an effective medium in shaping students' character (Rohmatika, 2023). This study provides a theoretical contribution by enriching the literature on transformational leadership from a gender and character education perspective, as well as a practical contribution to the formulation of educational policies that are more affirmative of the needs of women leadership in Indonesian schools. Therefore, this study is expected to provide an empirical basis for improving the capabilities of women principals in facing the challenges of character formation for the nation's generation in the digital era.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach by comparing the educational characteristics of two junior high schools. This approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of women principals' leadership styles and their impact on student character building. This study sampled two junior high schools in Jakarta: SMP GIS, a private school based on Islamic values, and SMP Negeri

99 Jakarta, a public school with more heterogeneous demographic characteristics. The selection of junior high school education as a research field is because this period is an important transition phase from childhood to adolescence. The selection of these schools, in addition to being led by women principals, was also based on the characteristics of the curriculum content contained in the schools' vision and mission, which, according to the researcher, have contrasting differences.

The research subjects consisted of the principals, several senior teachers, members of School Committee, and students selected using purposive sampling method. Students are selected in a balanced manner, both in terms of gender and grade level. Selecting informants using purposive techniques aims to obtain the most relevant information, understand the problem in depth, and meet specific research criteria. Data collection techniques were conducted through in-depth interviews, direct observation of leadership activities at school, and documentation of activities related to student character building programs. To ensure data validity, source and method triangulation were used.

Data analysis was conducted using the Miles & Huberman (1994) approach, sorting data by theme, reducing irrelevant data, presenting data, and drawing conclusions. Several important questions for further research were asked again to the same informant or compared with information provided by other informant sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Transformational Leadership Style

The results of the study show that the leadership style adopted by women principals at both schools is characterized by strong transformational leadership. They prioritize exemplary behavior, moral values, empathy, and participatory communication in carrying out their leadership. These characteristics are reflected in their daily interactions with both teachers and students, which are always grounded in the values of openness, trust, and fairness.

At SMP GIS, the principal applies a maternal approach rooted in religious values. She actively participates in students' religious activities, serves as a role model for discipline and worship, and builds close personal yet professional relationships with the entire school community. On the other hand, at SMP Negeri 99 Jakarta, she practices a balance between assertiveness and empathy. She leads by providing space for teachers and students to participate in decision-making processes, encourages open dialogue, and responds to student concerns with a restorative approach.

The Principal implements various strategies to shape students' character, ranging from integrating moral values into the curriculum, conducting routine activities such as flag-raising ceremonies and class assignments, to weekly reflections and con-

Table 1. Student Character Development Strategies Based on Observation Results

Observed Strategies	Form of Implementation	School
Integration of moral values into the curriculum	Teachers incorporate values of honesty, responsibility, and empathy into every subject	Both schools
Flag ceremony	The ceremony is held regularly every Monday with a message from the principal on the theme of character values	Both schools
Class duty	Students perform daily duties to foster a sense of responsibility and care	Both schools
Weekly reflection	Guidance counselors and homeroom teachers hold sessions to reflect on moral and social values	GIS
Restorative conflict resolution	Mediation and open discussion between students and teachers in the event of violations	SMP Negeri 99 Jakarta

Source: Primary Data

flict resolution using a non-punitive approach. The effectiveness of this leadership is supported by a supportive school culture, teacher loyalty, and active parent participation. However, there are also obstacles such as student resistance to rules, the administrative burden on principals, and the challenges of adapting to the rapidly changing digital world. To minimize and address these challenges, the Principal implemented the following leadership strategies: 1) implementing gentle yet firm leadership, 2) making it a habit to go directly into the field (supervision), both in the learning process and in character internalization, and 3) being consistent.

The women principal's implementation of a transformational leadership style is reinforced by observations. In shaping ideal student character, the principal integrates it into the students' daily lives at school. For example, teachers integrate moral values into subjects, linking them to real-life situations. This emphasizes that character building is not positioned as an add-on, but as a core part of the educational process.

Routine activities such as flag-raising ceremonies and class assignments are not merely administrative tasks, but rather spaces for internalizing values such as responsibility, discipline, and cooperation. At SMP GIS, weekly reflection activities demonstrate a spiritual and personal approach to educating students, a hallmark of a motherly leadership style: one that taps into aspects of compassion and inner meaning. Meanwhile, at SMP Negeri 99 Jakarta, the implementation of a restorative approach to resolving student conflicts demonstrates the principal's social sensitivity to the dynamics of Generation Z, which requires a dialogical approach rather than simply punishment.

The transformational leadership style implemented by the women principals at both schools reflects that character building is not merely normative but must be accompanied by empathy and contextualization, aligned with the students' socio-psychological characteristics, the school environment, and the challenges of the times.

Table 2. Interview Results Related to Supporting Factors and Obstacles

Category	Interview Findings	Source
Supporting Factors	The principal is trusted by teachers because of his consistency and exemplary behavior	Interview with Senior Teachers at SMP 99
	Parents actively support school activities & character building through the school committee forum	Interview with the Principal of GIS
	The school culture encourages students to respect each other and be responsible	Interview with the Vice Principal
	Some students tend to reject rules that are considered restrictive, especially regarding the use of gadgets	Interview with the Guidance Counselor of SMP Negeri 99
Barriers	The principal is burdened by administrative responsibilities that take time away from direct character building	Interview with the Principal of SMP 99
	Teachers face difficulties in adapting character education methods to the digital context and learning preferences of Generation Z students	Interview with GIS Subject Teacher

Source: Primary data

Based on the interview results, the main supporting factor for the success of women leadership in shaping student character is the strong emotional connection between the principal and the school community. The exemplary behavior demonstrated by women leaders inspires teacher loyalty and student trust. The established school culture also serves as social capital that enables the sustainability of character-building strategies. This conclusion is drawn based on interpretations of interviews with

parents, students, and school committee members, including the following.

A parent of a student from GIS Middle School stated:

“..In my personal assessment as a parent, the principal's leadership at GIS Middle School is very satisfactory. One aspect I can highlight is the principal's approach to designing various constructive activities, such as outreach and community service, which have a

significant impact on student character development.”

This opinion aligns with that of a GIS Middle School student who stated:

“Mrs. Dwi is firm but gentle. We as students are honestly not afraid of her because she's not intimidating. Furthermore, she's always enthusiastic and motivates the students in a fun way.”

Meanwhile, a School Committee Member at SMP Negeri 99 Jakarta commented on the principal's leadership:

“The principal believes that to advance this school, success cannot be achieved through individual efforts alone, but rather requires collaboration from all parties. Therefore, all stakeholders are consistently involved in meetings and discussions as an effort to achieve the institution's vision.”

Parental support through the school committee forum demonstrates that successful character development is not solely determined by the school itself but is also significantly influenced by the synergy between the school and the family. This aligns with Ki Hadjar Dewantara's Tri Pusat Pendidikan (Three Centers of Education) concept (family-school-community), which emphasizes collaboration. Women principals are able to build bridges between these centers of education through collaborative and communicative leadership styles.

However, several obstacles were also clearly identified. One major obstacle was student resistance to school regulations, particularly those related to discipline and technology use. This illustrates the challenges educational leaders face in educating Generation Z, who are more digitally literate, independent, and often skeptical of formal authority.

Principals also face a high administrative burden, making it difficult for them to be directly involved in the day-to-day character development of their students. This suggests that although women leaders possess strong affective and social skills, bureaucratic organizational structures can hinder the realization of their leadership potential.

Teachers also expressed difficulties in adapting character learning methods to digital platforms or technological approaches, which led to a gap between character goals and the learning methods used.

Overall, the results show that women leadership styles in educational environments are capable of creating a strong, reflective, and collaborative character-building ecosystem. The strategies implemented not only touch on the cognitive aspects of

students, but also shape their affective and social domains. However, to optimize the results, structural support is needed in the form of reducing the administrative burden on school principals, increasing teacher capacity in digital-based character education, and actively involving parents in strengthening school culture.

If reinforced by institutional policies and appropriate training programs, women leadership in education can become a key pillar in addressing the crisis of character and morality in the modern era.

These findings support the theory of transformational leadership and gender, which states that women have a higher tendency to prioritize participatory, reflective, and empathetic approaches than men (Bass, 1990; Eagly & Johnson, 1990).

The Impact of Women Principals' Leadership Practices on Character Building

The results of this study provide concrete evidence to support the transformational leadership theory proposed by (Bass, 1990) and the gender-based leadership theory of (Eagly & Johnson, 1990), which states that women tend to prioritize a participatory, reflective, and empathetic approach in their leadership style. In this context, women principals at both research sites consistently demonstrated participatory leadership patterns, particularly through the involvement of teachers and students in various decision-making processes. This was reflected in the deliberation process used to formulate school regulations and design character development activities. Teachers stated that women principals provided open dialogue, valued input, and were non-authoritarian in directing school policy.

The principals' implementation of a characteristic transformational leadership style through inspirational motivation was also observed at both schools. At SMP GIS, the principal actively encouraged the implementation of a weekly reflection program where students were encouraged to reflect on the values they had learned and emulate their own behavior. Teachers were also encouraged to focus not only on academic teaching but also on guiding students through moral and spiritual approaches. This leadership style demonstrates that women leaders not only manage the institution but also act as facilitators and motivators in the value-formation process. Furthermore, an empathetic approach, which considers individual characteristics, is evident in the principal's restorative approach to resolving student conflicts. Before imposing sanctions, the principal chooses to listen to students' ex-

planations, involve parents, and seek constructive solutions rather than punitive ones. Guidance counselors even noted that the principal frequently directly assists students experiencing emotional problems, demonstrating a high level of sensitivity to their psychological well-being.

The study also identified characteristics of idealized influence demonstrated through the principal's moral example. The principal not only directs through instruction but also serves as a visible role model for discipline, courtesy, and social awareness. Students expressed that they felt valued because the principal knew their names and frequently greeted them or inquired about their personal well-being. This aligns with the concept of idealized influence in transformational leadership, where leaders serve as role models capable of inspiring both emotionally and ethically. Furthermore, the character-building strategy implemented is holistic, integrating moral values into various aspects of the curriculum and daily activities, such as on-duty duties, guidance, and the cafeteria honesty program.

Thus, this evidence suggests that the women principals in this study have implemented a transformational leadership style in practice. This style is not only effective in fostering healthy social relationships within the school environment but also in deeply and sustainably shaping the foundation of students' character. The approach adopted is communicative, empathetic, and exemplary, substantially strengthening the theoretical claim that women have leadership advantages.

This transformational leadership style is demonstrated through a combination of moral example, inspiring motivation, and personal attention to the emotional needs of students and teachers. In an educational context, this leadership style has proven effective in creating a positive school climate, which ultimately contributes significantly to the internalization of character values in students.

The women principals focused on in this study not only fulfill their structural role as decision-makers but also act as inspirational facilitators and facilitators in the process of teaching values. Exemplary behavior demonstrated through concrete actions—such as discipline, consistency, and interaction—serves as a more powerful medium for building character than simply delivering material. This aligns with the findings of Zulfitri (2022), who stated that women leadership in madrasas has a strong influence on motivating teachers, fostering collective work spirit, and creating a learning environment conducive to the formation of values.

The results of this study provide evidence that the women principals studied play a significant role in student character formation, as they serve beyond simply being structural decision-makers; they also serve as role models for the entire school community. This exemplary behavior is reflected in their consistent attendance at school activities, punctuality, modesty in dress, and politeness in daily communication. At SMP Negeri 99 Jakarta, for example, the principal always arrives earlier than the teachers and students every morning, welcoming students at the school gate and greeting them personally. Teachers say the principal has a principle of "managing by example," which has been shown to influence teachers' attitudes and work ethic. One teacher said, "We feel bad about being late because the principal always arrives first. He never scolds us, but his presence and example make us feel ashamed if we are not disciplined." This attitude has sparked a collective spirit among teachers to perform to the best of their ability and act professionally, not out of coercion, but because of the moral influence of their leader.

At SMP GIS, the women principal even positions herself as a "moral mother" who not only directs but also guides. She is actively involved in overseeing religious services, assisting students in religious guidance activities, and assisting teachers in designing activities to instill values. In an interview with one of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, it was stated that the principal encourages teachers to instill character values through exemplary behavior, not just lectures. "She always says, 'Don't talk too much about morals if you don't lead by example.' That has become our guiding principle." This attitude fosters a culture of values-based learning that is integrated into daily practice and creates a warm yet focused learning atmosphere.

Students also feel the impact of this inspirational leadership style. Several students stated that they feel valued and motivated when the principal calls their names, asks how they are, or even encourages them when their grades are dropping. One student said, "The principal likes to talk directly to us, encouraging us when we're feeling lazy. So it feels like having a parent at school." This relationship demonstrates a strong emotional closeness, which psychologically strengthens the influence of the values taught.

These findings indicate that women principals not only perform administrative functions but also serve as a source of collective inspiration and moral motivation for teachers and students. This dual role reinforces the impact of women leadership in the

context of character education, which not only shapes but also embodies values. This empirical evidence aligns with the findings of Zulfitri (2022), who demonstrated that women leadership in madrasas can create a value-rich learning environment, increase enthusiasm for collective work, and strengthen meaningful social relationships between principals, teachers, and students.

The practice of implementing a transformational leadership style by women principals has been shown to foster emotional closeness without losing professional authority. Principals can guide without dominating, lead without pressuring, and motivate through dialogue rather than unilateral instruction.

This is evident in the way the principal builds open, friendly, and empathetic communication while maintaining professional distance in decision-making. At SMP Negeri 99 Jakarta, the principal demonstrates a gentle yet firm leadership style. He often engages teachers in informal discussions before establishing policies. One teacher said, "The principal doesn't give direct orders. He usually talks to us first, asks for our opinions, and then makes a decision. But once a decision is made, we all follow it because we feel involved." This demonstrates a leadership style that prioritizes two-way communication while maintaining clear direction and control.

A similar approach is evident in the principal's interactions with students. At SMP GIS, the principal is known for his close relationship with students, greeting them personally and often providing a channel for students to confide in when they encounter problems. However, this closeness does not diminish his authority. In direct observations, when disciplinary violations occur, the principal still issues firm reprimands but does so through dialogue. He calls students in private, listens to their reasons, and encourages them to reflect on their mistakes. One student said, "The principal is indeed kind and approachable, but if we break the rules, we still get reprimanded. The difference is that we aren't afraid, but instead feel heard and realize our mistakes." This demonstrates that the close relationship fostered is not permissive, but fosters awareness and responsibility.

At both schools, teachers and students stated that the principals do not use an authoritarian approach to impose their will. Instead, they lead through dialogue, deliberation, and personal engagement. However, the decisions they make are respected because they are perceived as fair, transparent, and in the common interest. The principals also maintain a balanced and professional stance.

Thus, the transformational leadership style practiced by the women principals in this study demonstrated the ability to guide without dominating, lead without pressuring, and motivate with a dialogical approach. This can be a strength that women principals can practice to build meaningful emotional closeness while maintaining professional boundaries and structural authority as school leaders. This field evidence aligns with the characteristics of transformational leadership, which emphasizes idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration as characteristics of effective leadership.

In the context of Generation Z, known for being critical, autonomous, and highly exposed to digital culture, a communicative and open maternal approach is highly relevant. This finding is also supported by a study by Nurvita et al., (2020), which found that the effectiveness of women leadership styles in improving school culture is largely determined by interpersonal skills, prudent human resource management, and a participatory approach to decision-making.

Although the women principals in this study demonstrated success in building emotional connections through the implementation of transformational leadership, they still faced significant challenges in effectively carrying out this role. One of the most prominent challenges was the difficulty in maintaining a balance between strictness in enforcing rules and flexibility in educating students individually. The principal of SMP Negeri 99 Jakarta, for example, stated in an interview that some students frequently rejected or violated school rules, such as the ban on cell phone use in class or the requirement to participate in religious activities. She said, "Students today are very critical. They like to question rules, feeling that everything is negotiable. If we're too strict, we're called authoritarian; if we're too lenient, they do whatever they want." This suggests that the more open, digital, and autonomous nature of Generation Z requires principals to continually adapt their approach without losing sight of their leadership direction.

Furthermore, observations and interviews with teachers revealed that principals are often burdened by time and energy-consuming administrative tasks, diminishing their direct involvement in student character development. A teacher at SMP GIS said, "The principal really cares about the children, but now she's often busy with online meetings, filling out reports, and coordinating with authorities. We rarely see her like we used to." Bureaucratic burdens and administrative obligations are among

the main obstacles that reduce the principal's inspirational role to a technical administrative one. This highlights the gap between expectations for women's leadership roles and the structural support available to support their performance.

Another challenge is students' reliance on technology. Some principals and teachers complain that it's more difficult to engage students in direct dialogue because they're more accustomed to interacting through social media. Even in guidance activities, students prefer texting to face-to-face conversations. A guidance counselor noted, "Kids now respond more quickly via WhatsApp than when we talk to them face-to-face. They're not comfortable with verbal communication." This phenomenon highlights a cultural gap between the school leadership generation and students, which, if unaddressed, can diminish the effectiveness of character-building strategies.

Thus, evidence from the field suggests that while the transformational leadership style implemented by women principals has a positive impact on character development, its effectiveness still depends heavily on structural support, technological readiness, and the ability to adapt to generational dynamics.

Furthermore, the findings of this study indicate that successful character education in schools relies not only on formal curriculum documents or structured programs, but rather on the daily leadership practices demonstrated directly by the principal. Role modelling is the most powerful instrument in the process of internalizing values in students. At SMP GIS, the principal not only develops the character program administratively but is also directly involved in students' spiritual guidance, participates in monitoring religious guidance activities, and demonstrates attitudes that reflect politeness, patience, and discipline. In an interview, a teacher stated, "We often see the principal not only talking about morals, but also demonstrating them in her actions, from the way she greets teachers to the way she responds to students who misbehave."

This exemplary behavior has a greater impact than the character material taught in the classroom. One student said, "The principal doesn't talk much about morals, but we know he's patient, kind, and firm. So we're ashamed if we do something bad at school." This confirms that students more easily absorb values when they see them directly implemented in the concrete actions of their leaders, not just in textbooks or moral slogans.

Furthermore, a humanistic and empathetic approach was also observed as a dominant pattern. At SMP Negeri 99 Jakarta, the principal consistently

provides personal attention to students facing difficulties, both academic and non-academic. A guidance counselor stated that the principal never ignores reports of student problems, often calling them privately and speaking directly with them without judgment. "He's like a mother to the students. He never gets angry in public, but his approach makes the children think and feel ashamed of themselves." This type of leadership practice is not included in the formal curriculum but has a powerful influence on shaping students' moral awareness and sense of responsibility.

Observations at both schools also showed that although the character education curriculum is written, its implementation becomes meaningful when the principal and teachers truly embody these values in their daily interactions. Students learn character not from theory, but from the school atmosphere created by its leaders. A culture of discipline, mutual respect, and cooperation develops through modeling, not just cognitive instruction.

This evidence reinforces the view that character education requires leaders who not only formulate policies but also live these values consistently and authentically. This aligns with the research findings of Kafidhoh (2019), which confirms that in the context of Islamic education, women leadership that prioritizes emotional and spiritual approaches can create a strong ethical and religious climate in the school environment. Thus, the success of character development is largely determined by leaders who not only have a vision of values but also embody them in their daily actions.

The implication of these findings is the importance of enhancing women's leadership capacity in education, not only through technical managerial training but also through mentoring, strengthening soft skills, and affirmative policies that support women to emerge as strategic leaders in educational settings. Character education will be optimal if the leader is able to serve as a source of inspiration, not just instruction.

Therefore, the transformational leadership style practiced by the women principal is not simply a variant of leadership style, but a future leadership strategy relevant to contemporary educational challenges, particularly in developing a generation of strong, competitive, and highly integrated citizens (Hariyasasti, 2025).

The similarities and differences between the principals in building character in the two schools can be summarized in the following table.

Table 3. Principal and Character Building

No	Equality	Difference
1	Implementation of transformational leadership style	Reflection and conflict handling
2	The Principal's Leadership Role: to be a source of inspiration and collective moral motivation.	Conflict resolution through mediation and open discussion.
3	Building emotional closeness, without losing professional authority.	Contextual challenges.

Source: Primary Data

CONCLUSION

The application of transformational leadership by women leaders in education has been shown to significantly contribute to shaping the character of the nation's future generation, such as providing role models, being an inspiration and collective moral motivation, and building strong emotional relationships. This study provides empirical evidence that principals who implement this leadership style are able to serve as a source of collective inspiration and moral motivation for teachers and students, as well as build emotional closeness, without losing professional authority. This leadership style can create an inclusive, reflective, and meaningful learning environment for students. These findings strengthen the transformational leadership style theoretically.

This study identifies the supporting factors for women's leadership in education as follows: 1) the ability to build warm and open communication, 2) a restorative approach to problem-solving, and 3) a passion for continuous learning and innovation. Meanwhile, the inhibiting factors are as follows: 1) gaps in facing technological advances, 2) limited structural and institutional support, 3) characteristics of Generation Z, and 4) the dual role of a woman. Empirically, despite internal and external challenges, the transformational leadership style remains relevant and strategic in responding to the challenges of character education in the contemporary era.

This study recommends that the government and educational institutions provide more support for the development of women leadership through training, mentoring, and affirmative policies that encourage women to occupy strategic positions in

school management, such as: leadership management training, academic supervision training, or entrepreneurship trainings.

REFERENCES

- Ariyanto, A., Hastutiningsih, A. D., Sutapa, M., Astuti, Y., & Masae, A. (2025). Gaya Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah yang Berdampak Pada Pendidikan Karakter Siswa. *DWIJA CENDEKIA: Jurnal Riset Pedagogik*, 9(2), 378. <https://doi.org/10.20961/jdc.v9i2.104179>
- Bass, B. M. (1990). From transactional to transformational leadership: Learning to share the vision. *Organizational Dynamics*, 18(3), 19–31. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0090-2616\(90\)90061-S](https://doi.org/10.1016/0090-2616(90)90061-S)
- Charteris, J., Nye, A., & Oluk, S. (2026). Crisis, care, and community: Advancing trauma-informed leadership in education. *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 58(2), 221–242. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220620.2025.2551553>
- Eagly, A. H., & Johnson, B. T. (1990). Gender and leadership style: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 108(2), 233–256. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.108.2.233>
- Efendi, R., & Ningsih, A. R. (2024). *Pendidikan Karakter di Sekolah* (Vol. 2). Qiara Media.
- Glowach, T. (2025). A systematic review of systems leadership in education: Taking a social justice lens. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2025.2481060>
- Hajuan, M. A., Pristiani, Y. D., Widodo, A., & Sasmita, W. (2023). Strengthening Student Citizenship Character Using Problem-Based Learning Models in the Covid-19 Era. *Sosiohumaniora*, 25(2), 218. <https://doi.org/10.24198/sosiohumaniora.v25i2.37557>
- Hariyasasti, Y. (2025). The Role of Transformational Leadership and Principal's Work Motivation on the Performance of Elementary School Teachers in Gunungwungkal District. *Journal of Industrial Engineering & Management Research*, 6(1), 68–72. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.7777/jiemar.v6i1.569>
- Kafidhoh, S. (2019). Kepemimpinan Perempuan Dalam Pendidikan Islam. *Alim | Journal of Islamic Education*, 1(2), 427–462. <https://doi.org/10.51275/alim.v1i2.151>
- Macpherson, R. J. S. (2025). Building educative leadership theories: A non-foundational and culturally

- specific approach. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 57(11), 1003–1013. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2025.2468429>
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publication.
- Musfiah, I., Nur Kholis, & Hanun Asrohah. (2022). Peran Kepala Madrasah Perempuan Dalam Pembangunan Karakter Siswa Perspektif Kepemimpinan Transformasional Di MTs Alif Laam Miim Surabaya. *Jurnal Administrasi Pendidikan Islam*, 4(2), 178–189. <https://doi.org/10.15642/japi.2022.4.2.178-189>
- Nurvita, A., Alam, F., & Abdullah, I. (2020). Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah Perempuan Dalam Meningkatkan Budaya Sekolah. *Jurnal Administrasi Pendidikan*, 17(1), 45–56. <https://doi.org/10.17509/jap.v27i1.24399>
- Rohmatika, D. (2023). Karakteristik dan Praktik Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah Perempuan: Suatu Studi Kualitatif. *Nusantara: Jurnal Pendidikan Indonesia*, 3(2), 141–164. <https://doi.org/10.14421/njpi.2023.v3i2-1>
- Syarifah, L. S. (2019). Implementasi Pendidikan Karakter: Sebuah Kajian Ilmiah dari Perspektif Gaya Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah. *Nizamul Ilmi*, 4(1), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1234/nizamulilmi.v4i01.6>
- Thien, L. M., Lim, H. L., Ahmad Shabudin, A. F., Che Aman, R., Ismail, A., Zuharah, W. F., & Muftahu, M. (2025). Women leadership in higher education: Exploring enablers and challenges from middle-level academics' perspective. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 12(1), 95. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-04278-6>
- Thompson, P., & Stokes, H. (2025). Perspectives of women as they navigate their path to principalship in Australian secondary schools. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 53(6), 1417–1434. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17411432231218820>
- Wen, Y., & Harms, R. (2025). Transformational leadership transitions and employees' entrepreneurial behavior in higher education institutions: A fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2025.2559749>
- Wulandari, R. W., & Ahmad, N. (2025). The Influence of Women's Leadership Policy on Challenges and Opportunities in the Digital Age. *Journal of Human Rights, Culture and Legal System*, 5(1), 124–157. <https://doi.org/10.53955/jhcls.v5i1.503>
- Zulfitri, P. W. (2022). Peran Kepemimpinan Perempuan Dalam Meningkatkan Kualitas Pendidikan Di Madrasah Tsanawiyah Al Jam'iyatul Washliyah Pangkalan Berandan. *Education Achievement: Journal of Science and Research*, 8–16. <https://doi.org/10.51178/jsr.v3i2.617>