

# Transformational Leadership in the Perspective of Islamic Education: A Comparative Analysis of Al-Ghazali's Thought and Modern Leadership Theory

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## ABSTRACT

Leadership in Islamic educational institutions continuously faces a critical dichotomy between the relentless demands of modern, secular transformational management and the imperative to preserve classical religious values. This study aims to comparatively analyze the epistemological and ontological foundations of Al-Ghazali's leadership thought and modern transformational leadership theory to construct an integrative synthesis. Employing a qualitative library research method with a historical-philosophical and comparative approach, this study extracts conceptual data from Al-Ghazali's classical texts alongside foundational theories developed by Burns and Bass. The results reveal a profound paradigmatic contrast: transformational leadership operates on a positivistic, anthropocentric epistemology focused exclusively on observable organizational behaviors (the Four I's), whereas Al-Ghazali's framework relies on a theocentric (Tawhid) foundation emphasizing internal moral character. To resolve this dichotomy, this study constructs the "Transformational-Ghazalian Leadership Model". In this novel framework, Al-Ghazali's four cardinal virtues (Hikmah, Syaja'ab, Iffab, 'Adl) serve as the inner spiritual core that strictly guides and purifies the external operationalization of transformational behaviors. Consequently, idealized influence is rooted in iffab, inspirational motivation in syaja'ab, intellectual stimulation in hikmah, and individualized consideration in 'adl. This integrative synthesis provides a critical theoretical breakthrough, legitimizing modern organizational changes within Islamic institutions without compromising their eschatological objectives (falah). Future research is highly recommended to empirically validate this conceptual model through quantitative or mixed-methods assessments across various Islamic educational institutions.

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## INTRODUCTION

Leadership constitutes one of the most determinative factors in shaping the quality and sustainability of Islamic educational institutions. In this context, leadership is not understood merely as a technical managerial function; rather, it represents a moral practice embedded within Islamic religious values and ethics (Hilmiatussadiah et al., 2026). Recent bibliometric studies indicate that research on leadership in Islamic schools has grown significantly over the past two decades, with a strong emphasis on spiritual leadership, religious values, moral legitimacy, and character development dimensions that reflect the fundamental limitations of Western leadership theories such as instructional, transformational, and distributive models in explaining Islamic school leadership practices rooted in belief systems and spiritual values (Hilmiatussadiah et al., 2026; Novianti et al., 2025). This reality underscores the urgency of exploring leadership frameworks that are epistemologically grounded in the Islamic intellectual tradition, rather than simply adopting Western models uncritically.

Among the great thinkers in Islamic history, Al-Ghazali (1058–1111 CE) occupies an unrivalled position as an intellectual authority whose works remain relevant to the twenty-first century. His thought on ethics, morality, and socio-political governance not only shaped classical Islamic scholarship but continues to serve as a reference in contemporary leadership studies (Mahadi et al., 2023); (Budur, 2026). Al-Ghazali articulated four fundamental leadership virtues hikmah (wisdom), 'adl (justice), syaja'ah (courage), and iffah (temperance) which conceptually constitute a holistic, integrative, and morally centred model of leadership (Budur, 2026; Azzuhri et al., 2024). Furthermore, in his works on organisational management, Al-Ghazali elaborated four core leadership functions: al-Takhtit (planning), al-Tanzim (organising), al-Wiqayah (supervision), and al-Qiyadah (leadership execution), with Tawhid as the ontological foundation of all managerial practice (Mahadi et al., 2023). This thought represents a leadership system that considerably predates modern theory while simultaneously offering a rich alternative perspective to the dominant Western paradigm in educational leadership scholarship.

In the contemporary leadership landscape, transformational leadership theory pioneered by Burns (1978) and developed by Bass (1985) has become one of the most influential and widely studied frameworks in educational organisational contexts. Transformational leadership is characterised by four principal dimensions: idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration, which collectively drive transformative change in followers and institutions alike (Yusuf et al., 2024); (Munajat & Muqowim, 2025). Numerous empirical studies in Indonesian and Malaysian Islamic educational settings have confirmed the effectiveness of transformational leadership in improving educational quality, organisational innovation, lecturer performance, and human resource development (Siswanto et al., 2022); (Jusriadi et al., 2026; Mukhlisin et al., 2021). Nonetheless, in-depth scholarship on how this transformational theory engages conceptually with Al-Ghazali's thought remains highly limited, leaving a significant academic space open for exploration.

A number of prior studies have endeavoured to explore leadership from an Islamic perspective, yet they have generally done so partially and in isolation. Some focus on spiritual leadership in pesantren (Karim et al., 2025); (Muharom, 2023), while others examine the implementation of transformational leadership in madrasah and Islamic higher education (Asmendri et al., 2024; Auliya et al., 2026). Studies that specifically and systematically compare Al-Ghazali's thought with modern leadership theory in a comparative framework within the context of Islamic education remain exceedingly scarce. Yet such integrative endeavours carry considerable theoretical significance: as argued by Azzuhri et al. (2024), a leadership approach grounded in Al-Ghazali's cardinal virtues is capable of filling the gap in the conventional Spiritual Leadership Model (SLM) that has prevailed for two decades, particularly when applied in countries where religion-based spirituality is practised extensively. Shah (2006) has long cautioned that ethnocentric dominance in educational leadership literature risks overlooking perspectives held by Muslim communities, making a reconceptualisation of leadership from an Islamic standpoint an intellectual imperative.

Indonesia, as the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation, provides an exceptionally rich and relevant context for examining values-based Islamic leadership. Islamic educational institutions ranging from pesantren and madrasah to state and private Islamic universities have long served as living laboratories for leadership practices that integrate Islamic values with the

demands of modernisation (Novianti et al., 2025; Bahri et al., 2026). Case studies at major pesantren such as Tebuireng demonstrate that visionary leaders can implement transformational leadership principles while simultaneously preserving a strong Islamic identity (Yusuf et al., 2024). Furthermore, the bibliometric findings of Hilmiatussadiyah et al. (2026) affirm that leadership in Islamic schools constitutes an integrative model that encompasses managerial, pedagogical, and spiritual dimensions a model inherently consonant with Al-Ghazali's system of ethical leadership grounded in Tawhid. This context strengthens the urgency of a comparative study capable of offering a theoretical synthesis between the classical Islamic intellectual heritage and contemporary leadership frameworks.

Departing from the totality of the academic problem delineated above, this article poses three foundational questions that constitute its analytical pivot. First, what are the ontological and epistemological foundations of leadership in Al-Ghazali's thought, as compared with modern transformational leadership theory? Second, where do the points of convergence and divergence between Al-Ghazali's concept of leadership and transformational leadership lie, particularly in the dimensions of moral ethics, leadership functions, and the leader follower relationship? Third, how can an integrative synthesis of both paradigms be formulated as a relevant leadership framework for contemporary Islamic educational institutions? These three questions arise from the recognition that the leadership crisis in Islamic educational institutions is not merely technical-managerial in nature but is rooted in an epistemological vacuum namely, the absence of a conceptual framework authentically grounded in the Islamic intellectual tradition yet simultaneously capable of responding to the complexity of modernity's challenges (Muthoifin et al., 2020); (Najah et al., 2025; Hakiem et al., 2023). Accordingly, this study does not merely fill a literature gap; it endeavours to offer an epistemic contribution of genuine significance to the development of Islamic educational leadership as an autonomous, contextual, and characterful discipline.

## **METHODS**

This research is qualitative in nature, employing library research (*kajian kepustakaan*) as its primary method that is, research centred on the exploration, analysis, and interpretation of written sources relevant to the problem under investigation (Zed, 2008). This methodological choice is justified by the conceptual-philosophical character of the objects of study: Al-Ghazali's thought on leadership and modern transformational leadership theory, neither of which can be approached through field observation but must instead be examined through texts, documents, and documented scholarly works. The approaches adopted are the historical-philosophical approach and the comparative approach. The historical-philosophical approach is used to understand Al-Ghazali's thought contextually within the classical Islamic intellectual landscape, while simultaneously tracing the conceptual genealogy of transformational leadership theory within the modern Western scholarly tradition (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985). The comparative approach is then employed to systematically identify points of convergence, divergence, and possible integrative synthesis between the two paradigms, in line with the tradition of comparative inquiry in Islamic education that has flourished considerably over the past decade (Shah, 2006; Mahadi et al., 2023).

The data sources in this study are distinguished into two categories. Primary sources consist of Al-Ghazali's original works relevant to the themes of leadership, ethics, and governance

principally the *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, *Nasihāt al-Muluk*, and *Mi' yār al-'Ilm* as well as the foundational works of transformational leadership theory, namely Burns (1978) and Bass (1985), including their subsequent development by Bass and Avolio (1994). Secondary sources encompass scholarly articles indexed in Scopus and Sinta that address Islamic leadership, transformational leadership in Islamic educational contexts, and contemporary studies on Al-Ghazali's thought in the domain of organisational management and leadership (Budur, 2026; Azzuhri et al., 2024); (Munajat & Muqowim, 2025; Yusuf et al., 2024). All sources were retrieved through the Scopus database, Google Scholar, and nationally indexed journal portals, with the publication range for secondary sources prioritised at 2015–2026 to ensure the currency and relevance of the literature employed.

The validity of the data is ensured through two principal mechanisms. First, source triangulation confirming each conceptual claim from at least two independent and authoritative sources, both primary and secondary, all of which have undergone peer review (Miles et al., 2020). Second, conceptual member-checking testing the consistency of the interpretations produced against the academic consensus reflected in recent internationally indexed literature (Karim et al., 2025; Hilmiatussadiyah et al., 2026). The data analysis techniques employed are content analysis and comparative analysis. Content analysis is used to identify, classify, and interpret leadership concepts contained within the sources examined, in a systematic and thorough manner. Comparative analysis is then applied to map the similarities and differences between Al-Ghazali's thought and modern transformational leadership theory across four principal dimensions: ontological-epistemological foundations, moral-ethical dimensions of leadership, leadership functions and roles within institutions, and practical relevance for contemporary Islamic educational institutions (Novianti et al., 2025; Muthoifin et al., 2020). The synthesis derived from both analyses is subsequently formulated as an integrative conceptual framework, which constitutes the principal theoretical contribution of this research.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **RESULTS**

Exploration of the data through a literature review of Al-Ghazali's classical works and the foundational literature of transformational leadership yielded conceptual findings that can be classified into several major themes. This section presents the ontological and epistemological data of both paradigms as a foundation prior to the comparative analysis.

#### **Conceptual Data: Foundations of Leadership from Al-Ghazali's Perspective**

Textual extraction from Al-Ghazali's works principally the *Ihya Ulum al-Din* and *Nasihāt al-Muluk* demonstrates that the construction of Islamic leadership rests upon specific foundations. The literature maps these foundations across two primary dimensions:

##### **Tauhid and Amanah-Based Ontology**

The reality of leadership in Al-Ghazali's thought is absolutely rooted in the concept of Tawhid. Evidence from the literature indicates that Allah is positioned as the supreme authority and ultimate purpose of all human managerial activity (Mutalib & Rafiki, 2021). The essence of the leader (*khalifah*) in Al-Ghazali's texts is not merely an agent of organisational target achievement but a custodian of divine trust (*amanah*), bearing a dual responsibility: vertically to God and horizontally to humankind (Budur, 2026). Leadership is defined as a functional act of worship

(ibadah) whose purpose is to guide the organisational entity toward falah (transcendental salvation), rather than mere operational efficiency.

#### Integrative Epistemology (Revelation and 'Aql)

The source of knowledge concerning ideal leadership, according to Al-Ghazali's textual data, is not derived solely from empirical observation. His epistemology integrates revealed truth with the instrument of reason ('aql) that has undergone the process of tazkiyat al-nafs (purification of the soul) (Azzuhri et al., 2024). Managerial wisdom (hikmah) is acquired through the integration of intellectual acuity and spiritual illumination (kashf), such that a leader's decisions remain bound to the normative values of religion (Hakiem et al., 2023; Shah, 2015).

#### Conceptual Data: Modern Transformational Leadership

The literature on the grand theory of transformational leadership, as formulated by James MacGregor Burns (1978) and Bernard M. Bass (1985), presents a distinctly different philosophical framework.

#### Anthropocentric and Relational Ontology

The essence of transformational leadership traces its roots to the traditions of sociology and psychological humanism (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985). The data demonstrate that the ontology of this theory situates the reality of leadership purely as a socio-psychological interaction phenomenon, wherein leaders and followers collaborate mutually. Its highest purpose centres on self-actualisation, optimisation of subordinate potential, and the attainment of the institution's vision (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Although this theory stresses morality (as originally articulated by Burns), the meaning of morality here is secular-anthropocentric measured by improvements in human well-being, motivation, and innovative capacity within a worldly reality (Mukhlisin et al., 2021).

#### Empirical-Positivistic Epistemology

Epistemologically, the construction of transformational leadership knowledge is grounded in Western scientific methods (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985). The theory's validity was developed through empirical observation, behavioural testing, and organisational experimentation. Instruments such as the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) were created to quantify leadership elements into four measurable dimensions: idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration (Munajat & Muqowim, 2025). Leadership knowledge is validated when it can be statistically demonstrated to improve performance, job satisfaction, and innovation in educational institutions (Siswanto et al., 2022; Asmendri et al., 2024). To consolidate the philosophical data findings from both bodies of literature above, a comprehensive mapping of the data extraction is presented in Table 1.

Conceptual Aspect	Al-Ghazali's Leadership	Transformational Leadership (Burns & Bass)
<b>Root of Reality (Ontology)</b>	Theocentric (centred on Tawhid); leadership as divine trust (amanah) and transcendental worship	Anthropocentric-Sociological; leadership as a phenomenon of psycho-social interaction and human social relations

<b>Orientation / Ultimate Goal</b>	Attaining falah (worldly and eschatological salvation), upholding divine justice, and serving the common good of the ummah	Self-actualisation of followers, realisation of vision, and optimal effectiveness of the worldly organisation
<b>Source of Knowledge (Epistemology)</b>	Integrative: Divine Revelation (Qur'an & Sunnah) combined with Reason ('aql) and spiritual illumination (kashf / tazkiyat al-nafs)	Empirical-Positivist: Behavioural observation, managerial experimentation, and sociological research based on scientific methods
<b>Validity Parameters</b>	Adherence to Islamic moral-ethical principles and preservation of the leader's and followers' spirituality	Objective measurement (e.g., MLQ instrument) of performance, job satisfaction, extra effort, and innovation

**Table 1.** Conceptual Data Extraction: Foundations of Leadership

The data in Table 1 confirm the existence of a clear philosophical line of demarcation between the two paradigms. Transformational leadership theory demonstrably constructs its understanding of leadership entirely on empirical achievement and the effectiveness of organisational interaction within the worldly sphere. Conversely, the classical literature positions Al-Ghazali's framework by drawing its line of orientation linearly beyond material limits toward eschatological accountability (ukhrawi), wherein Tawhid and spirituality act as the primary axis of the entire managerial edifice.

### **Conceptual Data: Moral and Ethical Dimensions of Leadership**

Further examination of the literature reveals a specific mapping of the moral and ethical dimensions required of a leader from each perspective. In Al-Ghazali's framework, textual data refer to the concept of cardinal virtues that must be internalised within the leader. Based on the studies of Budur (2026) and Azzuhri et al. (2024), Al-Ghazali identifies four absolute ethical pillars: (1) Hikmah (wisdom) born of sound reason and a purified heart; (2) Syaja'ah (courage) to uphold truth proportionally; (3) Iffah (temperance) in the face of material appetites; and (4) 'Adl (justice) as the functional culmination of the preceding three virtues. These moral characteristics are positioned as an absolute prerequisite (*conditio sine qua non*), not merely as a supporting instrument.

Within the transformational framework, the moral dimension is operationalised in the form of measurable behaviours termed the Four I's. Bass (1985) formulates them as: (1) Idealised Influence, wherein the leader becomes a respected role model; (2) Inspirational Motivation, achieved through the articulation of a compelling vision; (3) Intellectual Stimulation, which encourages follower innovation; and (4) Individualised Consideration, which attends to the specific needs of each follower (Yusuf et al., 2024); (Munajat & Muqowim, 2025). The validity of these behaviours is evaluated based on how effectively the leader moves followers beyond their self-interest (beyond expectations).

### Conceptual Data: Leadership Functions and Relations

Regarding managerial functions and leader–follower relations, the data reveal a structural overlap but with substantially different content. Literature examining Al-Ghazali's thought identifies four organisational leadership functions consonant with modern management: al-Takhtit (planning oriented toward public benefit), al-Tanzim (fair task organisation), al-Wiqayah (supervision grounded in shari'ah), and al-Qiyadah (the very exercise of leadership) (Mahadi et al., 2023). In executing these functions, the relationship between leader and follower is constructed as a relationship of amanah and spiritual guardianship (Novianti et al., 2025). The leader assumes the role of murabbi (educator) bearing responsibility for the moral and spiritual welfare of followers, transcending the merely transactional employer–employee relationship.

In the transformational paradigm, leadership functions centre on the role of agent of change. The relationship that forms is one of mutual escalation; leader and follower raise each other to higher levels of morality and motivation (Burns, 1978). This relationship is dynamic and proactive, focused on empowerment so that followers may ultimately develop into new leaders who are autonomous and professionally competent (Bass & Avolio, 1994); (Auliya et al., 2026). To summarise the data mapping regarding these moral and operational dimensions, the data are presented in Table 2.

Conceptual Indicator	Al-Ghazli's Perspective	Transformational Theory (Bass & Burns)
Primary Moral Pillars	Four Cardinal Virtues: Hikmah (wisdom), Syaja'ah (courage), Iffah (self-restraint), and 'Adl (justice)	Four Behavioural Dimensions (Four I's): Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, Individualized Consideration
Managerial Functions	Al-Takhtit, Al-Tanzim, Al-Wiqayah, Al-Qiyadah all bound by Islamic law (shari'ah)	Acting as an agent of change, articulating vision, and fostering innovation and achievement
Leader–Follower Relationship	Relationship grounded in amanah and spiritual guardianship (murabbi); the leader bears responsibility for the followers' worldly and spiritual well-being	Relationship of mutual escalation; the leader empowers followers to reach their highest professional potential

**Table 2.** *Conceptual Data: Leadership Dimensions, Functions, and Relations*

The data in Table 2 illustrate a sharp difference in emphasis regarding how the morality and functions of leadership are constructed. Al-Ghazali's thought grounds leadership in the substance of the leader's internal moral character (virtue-based), which is absolute in nature and rooted in religious spirituality. By contrast, transformational theory represents morality in the form

of functional and measurable external behaviour (behavioural-based), with an emphasis on the effectiveness of the agent of change's influence on institutional dynamics.

## **DISCUSSION**

This section interprets and places in dialogue the conceptual data findings presented in the results. Given the complexity of the challenges confronting Islamic educational institutions simultaneously pressed by modern managerial demands and the imperative to preserve religious values the comparative data between Al-Ghazali's thought and transformational leadership theory are subjected to critical analysis in order to identify areas of convergence, limitation, and epistemological integration. The interpretation of this data is articulated across three principal discourses: ontological critique, the deconstruction of morality, and the limitations of positivistic epistemology.

### **Critical Ontological Dialogue: Transcending Anthropocentrism toward Integrative Theocentrism**

The first interpretation of the ontological foundations reveals that uncritical adoption (taken for granted) of transformational leadership theory within Islamic educational settings entails the risk of philosophical fallacy. The transformational theory formulated by Burns (1978) and Bass (1985) confines the horizon of leadership success to material limits, social relations, and the achievement of worldly institutional vision. The success of a transformational leader is measured by how greatly he can transform his followers to achieve performance beyond expectations for the glory of the organisation (Bass, 1985); (Bass & Avolio, 1994). In the framework of Islamic education, however, such worldly achievement falls short of the true purpose if it is severed from the chain of Tawhid.

According to Al-Ghazali's thought, leadership cannot be reduced to a mere socio-psychological transaction among human beings. Al-Ghazali's ontology positions leadership as an amanah (divine trust) and an act of worship whose ultimate goal is falah (eschatological salvation) (Budur, 2026); (Musalib & Rafiki, 2021). This data holds profound meaning: in Islamic educational institutions such as madrasah, pesantren, or Islamic universities, a rector or kiai who adopts a transformational style may indeed succeed in raising accreditation, fostering research innovation, or improving subordinate performance (Siswanto et al., 2022). However, if the motivating force is purely secular and neglects spiritual development as Al-Ghazali insists is essential then that leadership suffers a vacancy of meaning (Novianti et al., 2025); (Zakaria et al., 2025).

Therefore, the integrative interpretation of both bodies of data gives rise to a synthesis: transformational theory provides a highly effective operational vehicle for change management, but Al-Ghazali's framework is indispensable as the ontological compass that determines the direction in which that vehicle travels. Al-Ghazali's thought elevates the anthropocentric motivation of transformational theory into a theocentric one, wherein the extraordinary innovation and extra effort of subordinates is understood not merely as professional satisfaction but as a path toward attaining the pleasure of Allah (Muthoifin et al., 2020).

### **Redefining 'Morality': From Behavioural Influence to Virtue-Based Character**

The second discourse meriting critical attention is the claim of morality within the transformational framework. Burns (1978) explicitly states that transformational leadership is

moral leadership one that elevates followers to a higher level of morality. However, when operationalised by Bass (1985) into empirical instruments, this morality is reduced to merely Idealised Influence and Inspirational Motivation. In practice, a transformational leader may deploy charisma and vision to influence followers for organisational ends, provided that behaviourally he appears inspiring (Yusuf et al., 2024); (Munajat & Muqowim, 2025).

Here, the data from Al-Ghazali's cardinal virtues provide a fundamental corrective. The virtues of Hikmah (wisdom), Syaja'ah (courage), Iffah (temperance), and 'Adl (justice) do not focus on how a leader 'influences' others, but rather on how a leader first 'subjugates' himself from base desires (Azzuhri et al., 2024); (Mahadi et al., 2023). The interpretation of this data indicates that Idealised Influence will never be authentic in the context of an Islamic institution if it does not originate from Iffah (the leader's purity from corruptive and materialistic motives). Likewise, the Individualized Consideration taught by Bass (1985) becomes a hollow managerial technique if not grounded in the character of 'Adl (genuine justice) embedded in the leader's conscience, as taught by Al-Ghazali (Budur, 2026); (Najah et al., 2025).

Integrating both frameworks therefore means placing Al-Ghazali's Four Virtues as the inner core (batin) driving the Four I's (transformational dimensions) as outer behaviour. This synthesis resolves the dilemma of 'false charisma' in Islamic educational leadership, wherein a leader is respected not merely for rhetorical ability (inspirational) but above all for spiritual integrity and the alignment between words and deeds (walk the talk) (Auliya et al., 2026); (Bahri et al., 2026).

### **Critique of the Limitations of Positivist Epistemology in Measuring Islamic Educational Leadership**

The third interpretation concerns how leadership is assessed and validated. The hegemony of Western research instruments such as the use of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) to measure transformational leadership in Islamic institutions carries serious epistemological bias (Shah, 2006). Such questionnaires demand observable and quantifiable items (positivistic). Yet how can an empirical instrument measure the depth of a rector's sincerity (ikhlas), the humility (tawadu') of a kiai, or the blessing (barakah) of an institutional decision (Karim et al., 2025); (Muharom, 2023).

Through Al-Ghazali's epistemology which integrates reason with the purification of the soul (tazkiyat al-nafs) there is an affirmation that not all aspects of effective leadership can be quantified mathematically. Spirituality, divine guidance-based intuition (kashf), and the steadfastness of faith are latent variables that are imperceptible yet highly determinative in generating loyalty, sincere dedication to work, and organisational culture within Islamic educational institutions (Ahmad et al., 2021); (Hakiem et al., 2023).

Literature such as Hilmiatussadiyah et al. (2026) and Hariadi et al. (2024) confirms that Islamic school leaders who practise prayer, dhikr, and fasting (practices of tazkiyat al-nafs) radiate a leadership quality that far surpasses those who merely apply psycho-transformational manipulation. This discussion therefore necessitates that scholars of Islamic educational administration refrain from fully submitting to the dictates of Western positivistic methodology. Islamic educational institutions require new leadership assessment instruments that not only evaluate Key Performance Indicator (KPI) achievement quantitatively but also validate the

spiritual and ethical health of the leadership process itself (Asmendri et al., 2024); (Musdiani et al., 2026).

**Integrative Synthesis: Constructing the Ghazalian-Transformational Leadership Model**

The critical dialectic between the Western ontological-epistemological paradigm and the classical Islamic tradition demands a resolution. This resolution must not be merely eclectic — arbitrarily mixing concepts without philosophical grounding but must represent a substantive fusion that engenders a new paradigm. Based on the preceding data interpretations, this study proposes a novel theoretical construction termed the 'Ghazalian-Transformational Leadership Model'.

This model positions Al-Ghazali's thought as the inner architecture (of character) and Bass's transformational theory as the outer operationalisation (of behaviour). This integrative concept resolves the deadlock in the literature that has long separated the spiritual leadership approach from the functional-change approach (transformational leadership) in Islamic educational institutions (Azzuhri et al., 2024; (Hilmiatussadiyah et al., 2026).



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework of Transformational-Ghazalian Leadership  
 Source: Author's Elaboration (2024/2025)

Based on the conceptual architecture of the model, its operationalisation unites each transformational behavioural dimension (Bass, 1985) with the principal moral pillar (cardinal virtue) from Al-Ghazali (Budur, 2026). This integrative fusion is elaborated in detail in the Integration Matrix presented in Table 3.

Transformational Demension (Bass & Burns)	A-Ghazali's Moral Pillar (Cardinal Virtues)	Integrative Synthesis Result (Behavioural Indicators for Islamic Education Leaderahip)
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<b>Idealized Influence (Ideal Influence / Charisma)</b>	Iffah (Temperance / Self-Restraint and Purity)	Charisma that radiates not from image manipulation but from spiritual integrity, an attitude of zuhud (detachment from rank/material), and exemplary conduct (uswah hasanah)
<b>Inspirational Motivation</b>	Syaja'ah (Courage / Moral Courage)	The courage to articulate a transcendental vision oriented toward truth (haqq), to reject ethical compromise, and to motivate followers toward falah beyond worldly metrics
<b>Intellectual Stimulation</b>	Hikmah (Wisdom / Divine Wisdom)	Encouraging critical innovation and problem-solving that does not transgress shari'ah; innovative thinking ('aql) constantly guided by clarity of conscience and divine revelation
<b>Individualized Consideration</b>	'Adl (Justice / Proportional Justice)	Treating subordinates justly according to their capacity; positioning oneself as a murabbi (educator of the soul) who attends not only to institutional performance but also to the spiritual welfare of staff and students

**Table 3.** Operational Integration Matrix: Transformational-Ghazalian Model

With reference to the Synthesis Matrix above (Table 3), the integration of Idealized Influence with Iffah yields a reconceptualisation of charisma. An Islamic educational leader such as a rector or head of madrasah is respected not solely by virtue of structural authority or academic track record, but because of the capacity for self-restraint (iffah) in the face of the commodification of education and the abuse of power (Azzuhri et al., 2024); (Yusuf et al., 2024). Transformational charisma becomes authentic because it is born from a tradition of exemplary conduct unsullied by conflict of interest.

The fusion of Inspirational Motivation with Syaja'ah infuses the articulation of organisational vision with soul. In an increasingly competitive and secular educational climate, motivating teaching staff or lecturers through financial incentives or Key Performance Indicators alone is insufficient. The leader requires moral courage (syaja'ah) to convince the academic community that the work of educating is a prophetic duty. The motivation constructed aims to

produce a generation that is scientifically excellent while spiritually grounded in faith (Bahri et al., 2026); (Zakaria et al., 2025). This courage ensures that Islamic educational institutions do not lose their identity amidst global educational trends.

In the domain of innovation, the marriage of Intellectual Stimulation with Hikmah ensures that the modernisation of educational systems is managed proportionally. A transformational leader stimulates followers to think outside the box, to evaluate teaching methods, and to adopt new technologies (Auliya et al., 2026); (Munajat & Muqowim, 2025). With the guidance of Hikmah, however, such innovation is filtered so as not to disrupt the values of akhlakul karimah. Intellectual stimulation does not culminate in destructive free thinking; rather, it is channelled toward the discovery of solutions that serve the common good of the ummah (Hakiem et al., 2023); (Mahadi et al., 2023).

Finally, the integration of Individualized Consideration with 'Adl transforms the managerial relationship into a relationship of tarbiyah (spiritual guidance and care). Bass (1985) emphasises the need for leaders to attend to the individual needs of their followers. In the Ghazalian synthesis, this care is executed through the principle of proportional justice ('adl), wherein the leader acts as a murabbi who distributes workloads equitably, mentors staff personally, and bears responsibility for the mental and spiritual health of subordinates (Karim et al., 2025); (Najah et al., 2025). Through this model, institutional transformation is not achieved by exploiting human resources but by humanising and empowering them fully (Asmendri et al., 2024); (Musdiani et al., 2026).

### **Practical Implications and Contextualisation of the Model in Islamic Educational Institutions**

The construction of the Ghazalian-Transformational Leadership Model does not rest as a mere conceptual utopia; it carries logical consequences and profound practical implications for the Islamic educational ecosystem. In the contemporary landscape, Islamic educational institutions whether madrasah, pesantren, or universities frequently confront an institutional paradox (Novianti et al., 2025). On one hand, they are required to comply with national accreditation standards, adopt digital technology, and compete globally (Asmendri et al., 2024). On the other, they bear the moral burden of preserving the tradition of tafaquh fiddin (deepening of religious knowledge) and safeguarding spirituality (Bahri et al., 2026). This integrative model offers a resolution to that paradox through three dimensions of contextualisation: cultural transformation, recalibration of leadership assessment systems, and the restoration of academic climate.

First, in the dimension of cultural transformation, the Transformational-Ghazalian synthesis provides theological legitimacy for kiai, mudir, and rectors to act as aggressive agents of change without forfeiting their spiritual identity. Historically, resistance to managerial change in traditional Islamic educational institutions has often arisen from concerns about systemic secularisation (Zakaria et al., 2025). Through this framework, leaders can ground modernisation programmes in language and values rooted in Tawhid. For example, the demand for increased scholarly publication or innovation in educational technology (Intellectual Stimulation) need no longer be dictated purely as the fulfilment of performance targets; it is instead reframed through the lens of Hikmah. Leaders transform the perception of subordinates so that mastery of science and technology becomes a manifestation of intellectual worship aimed at bringing benefit

(masalah) to the ummah (Hakim et al., 2023). This integrative approach has been shown sociologically to reduce staff resistance and escalate work motivation (extra effort), because the organisational vision is aligned with their eschatological convictions (Muharom, 2023); (Karim et al., 2025).

Second, at the structural and policy level, this model demands a radical recalibration of recruitment, assessment, and promotion systems for leadership in Islamic educational institutions. Current performance evaluations of rectors or heads of madrasah tend to be elitist and quantitative-positivistic in character measuring how efficiently they manage budgets and improve institutional rankings (Siswanto et al., 2022). Although efficiency (Idealised Influence and Inspirational Motivation) is an indispensable prerequisite in modern transformational theory, the Ghazalian model provides a critical warning: efficiency without moral integrity constitutes a managerial deficiency. Leadership selection instruments must therefore be expanded to incorporate parameters drawn from Al-Ghazali's cardinal virtues. For instance, in the selection process for mid-level and senior leaders, the capacity for *Syaja'ah* (ethical courage) and *Iffah* (the ability to restrain oneself from conflicts of interest) must be explored in depth (Budur, 2026); (Najah et al., 2025). A leader who excels in fundraising for the institution (transformational) yet exhibits signs of hedonism or the abuse of authority (loss of *iffah*) cannot be classified as an ideal leader within the framework of Islamic education (Azzuhri et al., 2024). The implication is that leadership development programmes conducted by foundations, ministries, or relevant bodies must incorporate curricula in *tazkiyat al-nafs* (spiritual/soul purification management) running alongside strategic management training (Mahadi et al., 2023).

Third, the contextualisation of this model bears direct impact on the restoration of the academic climate and relational patterns within institutions. The dimension of Individualized Consideration synthesised with proportional justice ('*Adl*) places the relationship between leaders and lecturers, or between heads of madrasah and teachers, beyond contractual-administrative boundaries (Munajat & Muqowim, 2025). In a competitive environment, a secular transformational leader may drive subordinates to their maximum capacity, leaving them vulnerable to burnout in pursuit of institutional targets. In contrast, a Ghazalian-Transformational leader positions himself as a *murabbi* (guardian of souls) (Yusuf et al., 2024). The implementation of justice ('*Adl*) requires the leader to distribute workloads humanely, to provide space for recovery among subordinates, and to refrain from sacrificing the personal rights of staff for the sake of institutional ambition (Ahmad et al., 2021). This just organisational climate, in turn, stimulates the emergence of authentic loyalty and substantive job satisfaction rather than a merely transactional one (Jusriadi et al., 2026; Musdiani et al., 2026).

Taken as a whole, the foregoing discourse affirms that the Ghazalian-Transformational Leadership Model does not represent a retreat toward traditionalism but a forward epistemological leap. Amid the crisis of exemplary leadership that so often afflicts educational management figures, the fusion of transformational behavioural effectiveness with the depth of Al-Ghazali's moral character offers a navigational compass. Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, and in the Muslim world at large, need no longer suffer from an identity schizophrenia oscillating between being a professional Western institution or a *salaf* establishment left behind by the times (Shah, 2015); (Auliya et al., 2026). With the internalisation of theocentrism into every operational instrument, the organisational transformation envisioned by Islamic educational leaders will be

shielded from anthropocentric bias and fully oriented toward the achievement of a divinely sanctioned civilisation.

## CONCLUSION

This research comprehensively analyses and concludes that a clear philosophical line of demarcation exists between modern transformational leadership theory and Al-Ghazali's classical leadership thought. From an ontological and epistemological standpoint, the transformational theory formulated by Burns and Bass demonstrably rests upon an anthropocentric and positivistic paradigm, wherein a leader's success is measured purely by the effectiveness of worldly achievement, the manipulation of external behaviour, and sociological interaction. By contrast, Al-Ghazali's thought offers a theocentric foundation that positions leadership as a divine trust oriented toward eschatological salvation (falah). Despite this philosophical divide, this study finds that a point of convergence can be realised when the limitations of modern managerial instruments are intervened upon by the depth of Islamic spirituality. The four operational dimensions of transformational leadership Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration which frequently fall into the trap of false charisma or value-empty efficiency, stand in absolute need of the guidance and filtration provided by Al-Ghazali's four cardinal virtues: Hikmah (wisdom), Syaja'ah (moral courage), Iffah (self-restraint), and 'Adl (proportional justice). Through this conceptual fusion, transformational behaviour in the external domain can be animated by robust spiritual integrity in the internal domain, ensuring that every organisational change in Islamic educational institutions remains within the bounds of shari'ah and the ultimate purpose of creation.

The primary novelty of this study which at the same time distinguishes it from previous literature on Islamic educational leadership lies in the construction of the 'Ghazalian-Transformational Leadership Model'. Unlike prior studies that generally examined spiritual and transformational leadership separately, or that merely appended religious precepts to Western theory in an eclectic fashion, this research offers an integrative synthesis that positions Al-Ghazali's classical values as the inner architecture (inner core) that actively governs the managerial dimension (outer behaviour). This model provides a theoretical and practical framework that systematically resolves the chronic dichotomy in pesantren, madrasah, and Islamic universities the dilemma between the imperative to fulfil quantitative modern performance indicators and the urgency to preserve the noble values of Islam. With this integrative framework, Islamic educational leaders gain strong theological legitimacy to act progressively, to innovate at the cutting edge, and to enhance institutional competitiveness at the global level without having to sacrifice the dignity of their Tawhid. To measure and validate the effectiveness of this conceptual framework objectively in the field, future research is strongly recommended to develop new measurement instruments that incorporate Al-Ghazali's virtue variables for empirical testing using quantitative or mixed-methods approaches across populations of Islamic educational institution leaders.

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