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### Beyond Scarcity: Transformational Leadership and Resource Bricolage in Navigating Geographical and Structural Barriers in an Indonesian Madrasah

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#### ABSTRACT

This study examines how transformational leadership addresses structural and geographical barriers in an Indonesian madrasah. The research focuses on MAN 2 Gresik, a school facing severe challenges related to chronic clean-water scarcity and regulatory constraints in accessing government infrastructure funding. Despite these limitations, the institution achieved remarkable academic and organizational performance, raising questions about the role of leadership in transforming institutional constraints into strategic advantages. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis of institutional achievements from 2021 to 2025. The findings reveal that transformational leadership was operationalized through adaptive and innovative strategies aligned with the dimensions of inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, idealized influence, and individualized consideration. Key strategies included transforming a water crisis and failed drilling attempts into a school-based business unit, "Mandagres Mineral," as well as resolving land-ownership barriers to secure government funding through SBSN schemes. In addition, digital leadership initiatives and performance-based recognition systems strengthened institutional resilience and human capital development. The study demonstrates that transformational leadership functions as a form of "resource bricolage," in which leaders creatively reconfigure limited resources and institutional constraints into organizational strengths. This research contributes to educational leadership literature by providing a practical framework for educational institutions operating in geographically and structurally constrained environments.

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#### 1. INTRODUCTION

The success of educational institutions is often associated with the availability of adequate infrastructure and favorable geographical conditions. However, in many contexts particularly in developing regions schools must operate under significant structural and environmental constraints. Structural barriers, such as regulatory limitations and restricted access to funding, can hinder institutional development and educational quality (Hasanah, 2021; Slahanti & Setyowati, 2021). Despite these constraints, some institutions demonstrate notable performance, suggesting that leadership plays a critical role in navigating limitations.

Transformational leadership has been widely recognized as an effective approach to driving organizational change and improving performance. Originally conceptualized by James MacGregor Burns (1978) and further developed by Bernard M. Bass and Ronald E. Riggio (2006), this model emphasizes four core dimensions: inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, idealized influence, and individualized consideration. These dimensions enable leaders to inspire, innovate, and develop human resources within organizations. Empirical studies in educational settings have shown that transformational leadership positively influences teacher commitment, organizational culture, and student outcomes (Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Yukl, 2013).

In the context of Islamic educational institutions, particularly madrasahs, transformational leadership plays an even more complex role as it must integrate organizational goals with cultural and religious values. Previous studies have highlighted its contribution to improving teacher performance, overcoming resource limitations, and enhancing educational quality (Sandi, 2022; Putra, 2023). Additionally, within the framework of sustainable human capital development, leadership is expected to foster adaptability, innovation, and long-term institutional resilience (Siamto & Rahayu, 2025).

Although previous studies have explored the contribution of transformational leadership in improving educational quality and economic independence in madrasahs (Hasanah, 2021; Sandi, 2022), there is a lack of empirical evidence regarding how leadership functions amidst concurrent extreme constraints. To clarify the position of this research within the educational literature, Table 1 presents a critical comparison with previous studies, specifically regarding aspects that remain unaddressed by prior research.

**Table 1. Comparison Between This Study and Previous Research**

<b>Author (Year)</b>	<b>Main Focus of Research</b>	<b>Aspects NOT Addressed (Research Gap)</b>	<b>Contribution of This Study (Current Research)</b>
<b>Hasanah (2021)</b>	Implementation of transformational leadership in improving educational quality in madrasahs in general.	Has not explored specific strategies to overcome extreme regulatory barriers related to government land status.	Demonstrates how bureaucratic diplomacy and strategic land acquisition overcome regulatory barriers for SBSN funding.
<b>Sandi (2022)</b>	Principal's leadership strategies in building school economic independence.	Does not address leadership responses to unique environmental crises (such as failed water drilling that yielded oil).	Proves how an environmental crisis is transformed into an economic opportunity through the "Mandages Mineral" business unit.
<b>Putra (2023)</b>	Challenges and opportunities of transformational leadership in Islamic educational institutions.	Lack of empirical evidence regarding the application of leadership under simultaneous double-barriers conditions.	Provides a practical framework on <i>resource bricolage</i> to transform limitations into organizational strengths.

However, existing literature tends to focus on relatively stable and well-resourced environments. There is a notable research gap regarding how transformational leadership functions in institutions facing extreme and simultaneous constraints. MAN 2 Gresik presents a unique and paradoxical case; geographically, it faces severe water scarcity where drilling yielded crude oil instead of water, and structurally, its waqf (endowment) status initially disqualified it from government infrastructure funding (SBSN). Despite these "double-barriers," this madrasah has recorded the highest university admission rates (SNBP) in the region.

Addressing this gap, transformational leadership can be viewed not only as a conceptual framework but also as a set of adaptive strategies that enable organizations to respond to constraints and environmental pressures. In resource-constrained educational settings, these

strategies often take the form of innovation, problem-solving, and the reconfiguration of available resources to achieve institutional goals. Nevertheless, empirical evidence illustrating how such strategies are enacted in madrasah contexts remains limited.

To understand how this adaptive strategy is operationalized under conditions of scarcity, this study utilizes the theoretical lens of resource bricolage. This concept, popularized by Baker & Nelson (2005), is defined as an effort of “making do by applying combinations of the resources at hand” to address new problems or exploit emerging opportunities.

In an educational context, resource bricolage enables school leaders to creatively reconfigure limited resources and institutional barriers into organizational strengths. This strategy is not merely about survival, but is a strategic mechanism through which geographical and structural constraints are transformed into competitive advantages through innovative and solution-oriented thinking. Thus, bricolage provides the theoretical framework to explain how MAN 2 Gresik is able to transcend its physical limitations.

This study focuses on a case study of an Indonesian madrasah that faces significant structural and geographical challenges, including regulatory constraints on land ownership and limited access to clean water resources. Despite these limitations, the institution demonstrates notable organizational performance, making it a relevant case for examining the practical implementation of transformational leadership.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze how transformational leadership strategies are implemented to overcome structural and geographical barriers in a madrasah context. Specifically, it seeks to identify how the four dimensions of transformational leadership are operationalized into concrete strategies and how these strategies contribute to transforming institutional constraints into organizational strengths. This research is expected to contribute to the development of educational leadership literature, particularly in resource-constrained contexts, while providing practical insights for educational leaders facing similar challenges.

## 2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design to explore transformational leadership strategies in overcoming structural and geographical barriers in an Indonesian madrasah. This approach is appropriate for understanding complex social phenomena within real-life contexts and allows for an in-depth exploration of leadership practices (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2018).

### 2.1 Research Context and Informants

The research was conducted at MAN 2 Gresik, an institution characterized by significant geographical and structural barriers. Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique to ensure data richness and relevance. This study involved a total of  $N = 10$  informants, consisting of 3 primary informants (the Head of Madrasah, Vice Principal of Facilities and Infrastructure, and Vice Principal of Curriculum) and 7 secondary informants (5 teachers and 2 administrative staff) to provide a holistic perspective on leadership impact.

### 2.2 Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through three primary methods: in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation. There is a clear distinction between the longitudinal document review period (2021–2025), which aimed to analyze student achievement trends and strategic planning documents (Renstra), and the primary data collection period conducted from March to April 2026. This timeframe for primary data collection is deemed sufficient as it allowed researchers to validate historical data against actual leadership practices and ongoing physical innovations (such as the “Mandagres Mineral” unit) at the research site.

### 2.3 Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

The data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which consists of three concurrent flows of activity:

1. Data Condensation: Selecting, focusing, and transforming the raw interview transcripts and field notes into manageable clusters.
2. Data Display: Organizing the condensed data into narrative forms, tables (e.g., achievement and population tables), and charts for systematic interpretation.

3. Conclusion Drawing and Verification: Identifying patterns and regularities to form a cohesive narrative of transformational leadership.

To ensure the trustworthiness (validity and reliability) of the findings, the researcher employed source triangulation by cross-verifying information between different informants and comparing interview data with physical evidence and documentation (Stake, 2013).

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Strategic Vision and the Cultivation of Public Trust

The initial phase of transformational leadership at MAN 2 Gresik began with the formulation of a clear, adaptive vision that prioritized human capital development over physical constraints. The Principal's leadership style emphasizes "Curriculum of Love" and a technology-forward mindset, which served as a magnet for the surrounding community.

This vision was not merely conceptual; it resulted in a significant and consistent increase in the student population. Despite the geographical challenges and ongoing infrastructure projects, the growing enrollment numbers serve as a quantitative indicator of the institution's rising reputation and public confidence.

**Table 2. Student Population and Classroom Distribution (2023–2026)**

Academic Year	Male	Female	Total Students	Classes (Rombel)	Trend
2023/2024	340	783	1,123	34	-
2024/2025	327	825	1,162	35	+3.47%
2025/2026	383	818	1,201	35	+3.35%

Source: Internal Data of MAN 2 Gresik (2024)

As illustrated in Table 2, the total number of students is projected to reach 1,201 by the 2025/2026 academic year. The leadership successfully managed this growth by optimizing existing facilities such as the temporary conversion of laboratories into classrooms while simultaneously securing land for new building projects through the SBSN scheme.

This steady growth highlights the Idealized Influence dimension of the Principal, where his personal integrity and clear orientation toward student success (e.g., the high SNBP admission rates mentioned later) convinced parents that MAN 2 Gresik is a premier destination for secondary education in the region. The leadership focus shifted the community's perception from a "geographically disadvantaged school" to a "high-achieving center of excellence."

The findings indicate that transformational leadership in the madrasah is strongly reflected in the dimension of *inspirational motivation*, particularly in mobilizing human resources despite institutional limitations. The school principal actively promotes a shared vision through structured capacity-building programs, including annual out-of-town workshops aimed at aligning teachers' perspectives and enhancing professional competencies. This strategy functions not only as a technical training mechanism but also as a symbolic effort to build collective commitment toward institutional excellence.

In addition, the development of an academic culture is emphasized through encouragement for teachers to pursue higher education at the master's and doctoral levels. This initiative is intended to differentiate the quality of madrasah graduates from those of lower educational levels. The impact of this strategy is evident in the increasing number of teachers achieving national recognition and academic advancement. For instance, one teacher was awarded first place in the national "Inspirational Teacher" competition organized by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, while others successfully obtained prestigious scholarships, including international study opportunities.

This practice also reflects the dimension of *individualized consideration*, as the principal provides recognition and appreciation for individual achievements. Such recognition strengthens motivation and reinforces a performance-oriented culture within the institution. These findings are

consistent with recent studies emphasizing the role of transformational leadership in enhancing teacher motivation, professional growth, and organizational commitment in educational settings (Nguyen et al., 2021; Leithwood & Sun, 2012).

### 3.2 Turning Environmental Constraints into Economic Opportunities: The “Mandagres Mineral” Innovation

The findings reveal that geographical constraints, particularly the chronic lack of clean water, serve as a critical challenge for MAN 2 Gresik. The institution’s efforts to secure an independent water source were met with significant geological obstacles; conventional deep-well drilling was attempted three times, but instead of water, the process yielded crude oil, rendering the wells unusable. This condition illustrates the severity of environmental limitations that could potentially paralyze educational operations.

In the face of this persistent crisis, the leadership demonstrated Intellectual Stimulation by reframing a chronic problem into a sustainable solution. Rather than remaining a “victim” of its environment, the madrasah implemented a multi-tiered adaptive strategy:

1. Adaptive Resource Management: To meet immediate needs, the leadership coordinated a partnership with the Metatu village government to rent water from a local pond (telaga) at a cost of IDR 3,000,000 per year, supplemented by daily water truck deliveries during the peak of the dry season.
2. Institutional Entrepreneurship: The leadership initiated the establishment of “Mandagres Mineral”, an in-house bottled water production unit managed by the school cooperative. This initiative not only addressed the immediate water scarcity but also transformed a “cost-center” (water expenses) into a “profit-center” (revenue stream) that supports institutional sustainability.

This shift exemplifies how transformational leadership encourages out-of-the-box thinking. By establishing “Mandagres Mineral,” the Principal empowered the staff to overcome a “scarcity mindset” and replace it with an entrepreneurial mindset. This finding aligns with the concept of Resource Bricolage, where leaders in resource-constrained environments utilize available resources to solve complex problems.

Furthermore, this strategic resource reconfiguration allows the madrasah to fund innovative programs not covered by government BOS funds, enhancing its brand as a self-sufficient institution. As noted in recent studies, leadership-driven innovation is essential for enabling educational institutions to adapt to severe environmental and resource limitations (Harris & Jones, 2020; Siamto & Rahayu, 2025).

### 3.3 Strategic Diplomacy and Structural Resilience: Navigating Land Ownership for SBSN Funding

Structural barriers, particularly those related to land ownership regulations and access to government funding programs such as the Sovereign Bond Strategy (SBSN), represent another significant challenge for MAN 2 Gresik. The institution’s initial status on waqf land (endowment) created a regulatory deadlock; efforts to secure SBSN funding were repeatedly rejected by BPN, Bappenas, and BPATK because the land status did not meet the criteria for state assets.

To address this issue, the principal implemented strategic decisions reflecting *idealized influence* and bureaucratic diplomacy. As a radical yet necessary solution, the leadership initiated the acquisition of new land behind the madrasah that could be certified to meet government requirements. Since BOS (School Operational Assistance) funds cannot be used for land purchases, the principal navigated this by involving third-party partnerships with installment systems. This strategic move enabled the institution to meet regulatory requirements and expand its infrastructure capacity, currently occupying approximately one hectare of land.

In addition, the institution developed alternative funding strategies to support infrastructure development. These include the utilization of revenue-generating facilities such as videotron media, a mini fuel station (*Pom Mini*), and collaborations for the construction of classrooms and multimedia facilities. These efforts demonstrate that transformational leadership not only responds to constraints but also proactively creates sustainable solutions without relying solely on government funding. This aligns with recent findings that effective school leadership involves strategic resource mobilization and innovative financing mechanisms in constrained environments (Bush, 2020; Slahanti & Setyowati, 2021).

### 3.4 Curriculum Innovation and Digital Leadership in the Era of AI

The leadership at MAN 2 Gresik extends beyond physical infrastructure into the realm of academic and digital transformation. The Principal introduced a unique pedagogical philosophy termed "Curriculum of Love" (Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta), which emphasizes a heart-centered approach to student development while maintaining rigorous academic standards. This vision is operationalized through the Intellectual Stimulation of the teaching staff, ensuring they remain updated with contemporary educational trends.

A significant finding in this study is the institution's proactive stance toward Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digitalization. Rather than perceiving AI as a threat, the leadership promotes "Digital Ethics" and AI integration in the classroom. Key initiatives include:

1. **Teacher Empowerment:** Regular workshops are held to train teachers in distinguishing AI-generated content from independent student work, ensuring that technology enhances—rather than replaces—critical thinking.
2. **Internal Digital Ecosystem:** The madrasah developed its own "Local Bank" system to accelerate administrative processes and digitalization of school services, reflecting a high level of digital maturity.
3. **Strategic Partnerships:** To overcome limited sports and vocational facilities, the leadership initiated "Resource Sharing" with external partners, such as PT Kawung for alumni employment and professional clubs (SKB Cerme and Petrokimia) for athletic training.

This adaptive curriculum and digital leadership have directly contributed to the institution's academic excellence. The effectiveness of this approach is evidenced by the 88 students admitted through the SNBP pathway in 2024, the highest record in the region. This demonstrates that when transformational leadership fosters a culture of continuous learning and technological adaptation, geographical and resource limitations no longer hinder student competitiveness. These findings resonate with the argument that digital leadership is a crucial component of modern institutional resilience (Siamto & Rahayu, 2025).

### 3.5 Longitudinal Achievement Trends and Resource Reconfiguration

The ultimate measure of transformational leadership is the tangible output of the organization. At MAN 2 Gresik, the leadership's ability to navigate through "oil-instead-of-water" geological issues and structural land barriers resulted in an unprecedented surge in institutional performance. This section analyzes how the internal motivation and resource reconfiguration translated into national and international recognition.

#### 3.5.1 Excellence in Human Capital

The strategy of Individualized Consideration specifically through the annual Teacher's Day (HGN) awards and full support for advanced studies has cultivated a high-performance culture. As shown in Table 2, the institution has successfully projected its human capital onto the global stage.

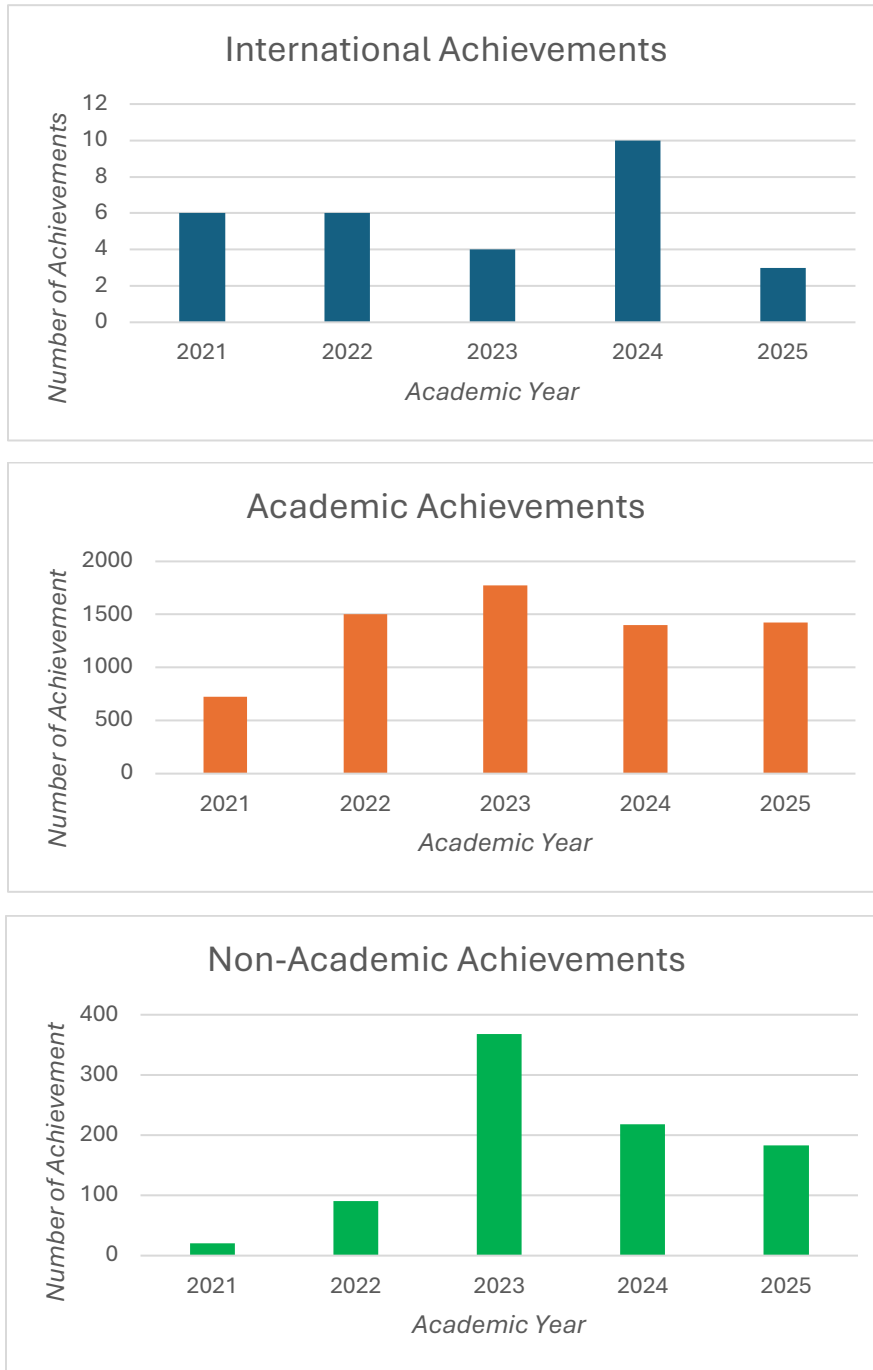
**Table 2. Summary of Institutional Achievement Highlights**

Category	Achievement Details	Scope
Teacher	1 Teachers awarded BIB Scholarships (Iowa, USA)	International
Teacher	1 Teachers awarded BIB Scholarships	National
Teacher	16 Teachers appointed as National AKMI Instructors	National
Teacher	1st Place National "Inspirational Teacher" (MoRA)	National
Student	88 Students admitted via SNBP (Highest in Region)	National
Student	Academic and Non-Academic Championships	Int'l & National

The presence of teachers studying in the United States and the high number of students passing the SNBP (National Selection Based on Merit) are indicators that the quality of education at MAN 2 Gresik has surpassed local standards, despite being located in a geographically challenged area.

### 3.5.2 Longitudinal Achievement Trends

To further validate the impact of transformational leadership, Figure 1 illustrates the trajectory of student achievements over the last five years.



\*Data as of October 2025

**Figure 1. Trends in Academic, Non-Academic, and International Achievements (2021–2025)**

Figure 1 illustrates the achievement trajectory of MAN 2 Gresik students over the last five years (2021–2025), reflecting the effectiveness of transformational leadership strategies within the institution. Data shows a significant surge in the academic achievement sector, peaking in 2023 with a total of 1,775 awards. This accomplishment represents a 145% increase compared to the achievement level in 2021. This drastic increase coincided with the implementation of intensive teacher capacity-building policies and the application of digital leadership policies. Furthermore, in 2024, this madrasah successfully recorded 10 international achievements, demonstrating that the quality of education at MAN 2 Gresik has surpassed local standards despite facing severe geographical and structural barriers. This trend serves as empirical evidence of how the mobilization of human capital through innovative leadership can transform limitations into a competitive advantage.

### 3.5.3 Synthesis of Leadership and Output

The correlation between leadership intervention and these quantitative results is evident. The “intellectual stimulation” provided by the Principal—such as encouraging AI mastery and ethical digital literacy has empowered both teachers and students to work more efficiently. The transformation of a “water crisis” into a business opportunity (Mandagres Mineral) not only solved a physical problem but also served as a psychological boost, proving to the entire school community that limitations are merely stepping stones to higher achievements.

### 3.6 Theoretical Implications: Expanding the HRD Model Through the Lens of Resource Bricolage

The findings of this study offer a significant theoretical contribution to Human Resource Development (HRD) literature, particularly within the context of educational institutions facing extreme resource constraints. Theoretically, this study expands the model of sustainable human capital development by demonstrating that in geographically and structurally constrained environments, HRD does not solely depend on infrastructure availability or stable government funding. Instead, the findings at MAN 2 Gresik confirm that transformational leadership functions as a catalyst for “resource bricolage,” wherein institutional barriers are re-engineered into organizational strengths.

The most crucial HRD implication is the paradigm shift of staff from a “scarcity mindset” to an “entrepreneurial mindset.” The application of resource bricolage theory (Baker & Nelson, 2005) in this study shows that teacher and staff competence development encompasses not only technical-pedagogical aspects, but also the development of adaptive capacity and pragmatic innovation. For instance, the transformation of a water crisis into the “Mandagres Mineral” business unit is not merely an economic solution, but also a form of intellectual stimulation that enhances collective confidence and institutional resilience. Consequently, this study proposes a new HRD model for schools in resource-constrained areas: a model that integrates digital leadership and AI ethics with the leader’s ability to perform “bricolage” on available local assets to achieve a national competitive advantage.

The quantitative data and qualitative evidence presented in the previous section suggest that the leadership interventions at MAN 2 Gresik are not merely administrative responses to challenges, but a strategic re-engineering of the institution’s potential. Overall, these empirical findings demonstrate that transformational leadership strategies enable the institution to convert structural and geographical barriers into organizational strengths. This transformation is evident in improved institutional performance, including student achievement outcomes. For example, a total of 88 students were successfully admitted through the national university entrance pathway (SNBP), indicating the effectiveness of leadership-driven strategies in enhancing educational quality.

The integration of motivational, innovative, strategic, and adaptive leadership practices confirms that transformational leadership operates not only at the level of vision but also through concrete and context-specific strategies. This study therefore extends existing literature by providing empirical evidence of how transformational leadership functions in resource-constrained and geographically challenged environments, particularly within the context of Indonesian madrasahs. This finding is consistent with recent research highlighting the importance of adaptive and context-responsive leadership in improving institutional resilience and performance (Harris, 2021).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that transformational leadership in resource-constrained environments functions as a strategic mechanism for resource bricolage. The success of MAN 2 Gresik in turning a geological crisis into the "Mandages Mineral" business unit and navigating land regulation obstacles demonstrates that structural and geographical constraints are not barriers to organizational excellence when managed with innovation and strong bureaucratic diplomacy.

To strengthen institutional resilience in madrasahs or schools facing similar challenges, the following specific recommendations are provided for stakeholders:

- a. For the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag)  
A review needs to be conducted on the regulations of the SBSN funding scheme, specifically regarding the flexibility of land status requirements. Kemenag is advised to provide an affirmative pathway for madrasahs built on waqf land that demonstrate high achievement, ensuring that structural deadlocks do not hinder crucial educational infrastructure development. Furthermore, a bricolage-based teacher capacity development model should be integrated into national leadership training programs.
- b. For Madrasah Principals  
School leaders must adopt an entrepreneurial mindset to identify hidden local assets amidst crises. Practical recommendations include remapping environmental constraints (such as water scarcity) to transform them into independent business unit opportunities, as well as actively building strategic "resource sharing" partnerships with external parties to overcome limitations in sports and vocational facilities. Additionally, the integration of digital ethics and artificial intelligence (AI) must be a curriculum priority, regardless of the condition of physical infrastructure.
- c. For Policymakers  
Future educational development policies must shift from merely providing top-down physical assistance to strengthening institutional resilience. Policymakers are advised to design a school performance evaluation framework that is based not only on the availability of standard infrastructure but also on the adaptive capacity and innovation of leaders in managing resource limitations.

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