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# The Role of the Islamic Student Association (HMI) in Shaping Student Leadership Character in the Digital Age

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## Abstrak

Transformasi digital membawa perubahan signifikan terhadap pola interaksi dan kepemimpinan dalam organisasi kemahasiswaan, termasuk Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam (HMI). Mahasiswa kini dituntut tidak hanya kompeten secara intelektual tetapi juga memiliki karakter kepemimpinan yang adaptif, integratif, dan berorientasi pada nilai. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis peran HMI dalam membentuk karakter kepemimpinan mahasiswa di era digital melalui pendekatan teori kepemimpinan transformasional Bernard M. Bass dan teori pendidikan karakter Thomas Lickona. Metode penelitian menggunakan studi pustaka terhadap literatur kepemimpinan, pendidikan karakter, digital leadership, dan dokumentasi kaderisasi HMI. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sistem kaderisasi HMI memiliki kesesuaian dengan prinsip kepemimpinan transformasional dan pembentukan karakter, serta mampu beradaptasi dengan perkembangan era digital melalui program hybrid, literasi digital, dan ekosistem digital organisasi. Penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya integrasi nilai keislaman, keindonesiaan, dan kompetensi digital dalam mempersiapkan pemimpin muda yang visioner, berintegritas, dan adaptif terhadap perubahan.

**Kata Kunci:** *HMI, kepemimpinan mahasiswa, transformasi digital, karakter, kaderisasi.*

## Abstract

Digital transformation has significantly reshaped patterns of interaction and leadership within student organizations, including the Islamic Student Association (HMI). Students today must demonstrate not only intellectual competence but also adaptive and value-oriented leadership character. This study analyzes the role of HMI in shaping student leadership character in the digital era by applying Bernard M. Bass's transformational leadership theory and Thomas Lickona's character education framework. A literature review method was used, examining leadership theories, character formation, digital leadership, and HMI's cadre development structure. The findings indicate that HMI's cadre system aligns with transformational leadership principles and character-building approaches while demonstrating adaptability to digital-era demands through hybrid training models, digital literacy programs, and an expanded digital ecosystem. This study concludes that integrating Islamic values, national identity, and digital competence is essential for preparing visionary, ethical, and adaptive young leaders.

**Keywords:** *HMI, student leadership, digital transformation, character development, cadre formation.*

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## Introduction

Digital transformation has significantly changed student culture, communication patterns, and leadership models within organizations. Students in the digital age are not only required to have academic skills, but also strong, adaptive, and technology-based leadership skills. Data shows high internet and social media penetration in Indonesia, reflecting that students are a generation of digital natives who have the ability to access and utilize technology intensively.

However, technology does not automatically shape quality leadership character. Research shows a decline in student interest in organizational activities due to academic pressure and digital distractions. Amid these challenges, the Islamic Student Association (HMI) as the oldest Islamic student organization has a strategic role in developing student leadership character through a cadre system that has been tested since 1947.

HMI has a long history of producing national figures with transformative leadership capacities. To maintain its relevance in the digital era, this organization must adapt to technological developments without abandoning the values of Islam, Indonesianness, and youthfulness that form its identity. This paper aims to analyze this role through a theoretical and strategic approach.

### BASS'S TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP THEORY

BASS DEVELOPED FOUR COMPONENTS OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP:

- a. **Idealized Influence** (role modeling),
- b. **Inspirational Motivation** (inspirational motivation),
- c. **Intellectual Stimulation** (intellectual stimulation), and
- d. **Individualized Consideration** (personal coaching).

These four components form the framework for analyzing the effectiveness of HMI cadre development, especially in fostering exemplary behavior, vision, critical thinking skills, and tiered coaching.

### Lickona's Character Education Theory

Lickona defines character through three main components:

- a. **Moral Knowing**,
- b. **Moral Feeling**,
- c. **Moral Action**.

All three are in line with the basic values of HMI: Islam, Indonesianness, and youth—which shape the moral and spiritual intelligence of cadres.

### Student Organizations in Character Building

Organizations are leadership laboratories through the habit of responsibility, discipline, creativity, collaboration, and integrity. Organizational activities train students to deal with social dynamics directly.

### Digital Leadership

The digital era requires leaders to have the following competencies:

- digital literacy,
- innovation,
- digital ethics,
- online networking,
- technological adaptation.

These competencies form the foundation for strengthening HMI cadre development in the modern era.

## Methodology

This study uses a **literature study** method, which includes:

- analysis of relevant books, scientific journals, and articles;
- analysis of HMI cadre development documents;
- synthesis of Bass and Lickona's theories;
- mapping of digital challenges and opportunities for the cadre development system.

The data was analyzed using a thematic approach.

## Results and Discussion

### The Compatibility of HMI Cadre Development with Transformational Leadership

The HMI cadre development system is highly compatible with the concept of transformational leadership developed by Bass, especially in four main components—*idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration* (Bass in Coombs, 2014). Cadre regeneration programs such as LK 1 and LK 2 emphasize the role of senior cadres as moral and intellectual role models for new cadres, a concept that is in line with *idealized influence*.

Instilling HMI's organizational vision, which is oriented towards the formation of academically-minded individuals who are socially responsible, is a form of *inspirational motivation*, as it arouses the enthusiasm and commitment of cadres towards the organization's goals (Santoso, 2024). In addition, regular discussions, intellectual studies, and discourse forums, which are HMI traditions, provide space for intellectual stimulation that encourages cadres to think critically about socio-religious issues (Nugroho, 2024).

HMI also promotes a pattern of personal mentoring through senior-junior relationships, which is in line with the aspect of individualized consideration (Wardana, Aulia, & Suharyat, 2024). Thus, HMI's cadre development is not only technical in nature but is a transformational process that develops the intellectual capacity and integrity of its cadres.

### Integration of Values in Character Building of Cadres

The basic values of HMI—Islam, Indonesianness, and youth—are in line with Lickona's concept of character education, which emphasizes moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action (Lickona in Maryam, Wulandari, & Safitri, 2024). The habit of Islamic values through study, worship practices, and internalization of morals reflects the process of moral knowing.

Indonesian values strengthen moral feeling because cadres are trained to have a love for their country, national movements, and social awareness (Rahmawati & Sari, 2023). Meanwhile, youth values emphasize moral action through social practices, preaching, student advocacy, and other organizational work (Putri, 2024).

Research shows that student organizations such as HMI serve as laboratories for character building, fostering responsibility, discipline, honesty, and cooperation (Sibarani et al., 2025). This proves that HMI cadre training plays a significant role in shaping the character of young leaders.

### Digital Era Challenges for HMI Cadre Development

The digital era poses a major challenge to the sustainability of conventional cadre development culture. The decline in interest in organizations due to digital distractions has been documented in various studies (Setiawan, Kurniawati, & Saputro, 2019). Students tend to be more interested in instant social media-based activities than in long and hierarchical cadre development processes.

In addition, digital communication patterns often cause miscommunication due to the loss of emotional context in text interactions, which can trigger internal conflicts within the organization (Santoso, 2024). HMI also faces the obstacle of the digital divide, especially in regional branches with limited internet access, as highlighted by Hidayat (2024) regarding digital access inequality in Indonesia.

Digital technology also poses the risk of exposure to hoaxes, online political polarization, and a decline in spiritual depth due to unfiltered content consumption (Irwantini, 2023). These dynamics require an increase in digital literacy and media ethics among HMI cadres to maintain the quality of cadre development.

### Opportunities for Digital Transformation in the Cadre Development System

Despite the challenges, the digital era also opens up strategic opportunities for HMI. Digital technology accelerates the dissemination of information, facilitates coordination, and enables the implementation of online cadre forums (Irwantini & Cangara, 2024). The use of platforms such as Zoom, WhatsApp Group, and Google Classroom can expand cadre access to training and discussions without geographical limitations.

Digitalization can also increase organizational transparency and strengthen cadre trust, as shown by Santoso (2024) and reinforced by Hidayat (2024) in a study on digital communication transparency. In addition, HMI's extensive alumni network can be optimized through digital platforms, enabling cross-regional mentoring and coaching (Widodo, 2024).

Digital technology also serves as a medium to strengthen HMI's da'wah and intellectual discourse through the production of educational content that appeals to the younger generation, in line with Jenkins' (2006) idea of media convergence culture.

### Strategies to Strengthen HMI's Role in the Digital Age

Several comprehensive strategies can be implemented to address digital challenges:

- a. **Hybrid regeneration model**, combining face-to-face and digital learning methods, in accordance with the findings of Setiawan et al. (2019) on the effectiveness of digital communication.
- b. **Improvement of cadres' digital literacy**, especially in digital security, media ethics, and information verification (Syam, 2024).
- c. **Optimization of organizational social media**, prioritizing transparency and professionalism (Santoso, 2024).
- d. **Development of a digital cadre-alumni database**, supporting collaboration and resource mobilization (Widodo, 2024).
- e. **Digital innovation and entrepreneurship programs**, in line with the needs of modern leadership (Wartono, 2024).
- f. **Strengthening spirituality in the digital age**, as an effort to protect cadres' character from moral degradation due to the flow of information (Maryam et al., 2024).
- g. **Data-based monitoring** to evaluate the success of cadre development, as recommended in the organizational change management approach (Wartono, 2024).

With the implementation of these strategies, HMI has the potential to strengthen its role as a relevant, modern cadre development organization that remains rooted in Islamic and national values.

### Conclusion

HMI has historical capital and a relevant cadre system to shape student leadership character. Bass and Lickona's theory shows the compatibility of the concepts of leadership and character with HMI's cadre mechanism. Digital challenges require HMI to adapt its cadre model through a hybrid approach, digital training, and a stronger technological ecosystem. The integration of Islamic values, nationalism, and digital competence is key to HMI's success in producing adaptive, visionary, and integrity-driven young leaders.

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### Conflict Of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflict of interest in the preparation of this work.

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