

CHALLENGES OF FEMALE PRINCIPALS IN MADRASAH LEADERSHIP IN BANDA ACEH: A GENDER ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Women's leadership is gaining more recognition in the public eye, particularly in professional leadership roles within educational institutions. Despite facing challenges such as seniority, local customs, and societal perceptions, these obstacles do not deter women from their leadership roles in educational institutions. In fact, they strive to create better opportunities for future leadership. The challenges faced by female school principals are often influenced by the prevailing patriarchal culture in society and community life. This research employs a qualitative method with a gender analysis approach. The findings reveal that challenges related to seniority and local customs are dominant issues for female school principals in Aceh. Seniority comes into play when younger school principals are perceived as inexperienced leaders by their senior counterparts, even if they possess the necessary competencies for the role. On the other hand, local customs are influenced by the presence of teachers who are local residents in the school. Additionally, dealing with policy dualism in private schools and collaboration with committees presents straightforward challenges for school principals, influenced by the research location, student backgrounds, and school status. The strategies offered by school principals involve continuous engagement, fostering better collaboration, and early consultation with relevant stakeholders. These efforts have helped ease tensions and lead to more effective solutions for overcoming these challenges.

Keywords: *Challenges; Leadership; Female Madrasah Principals.*

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Abstrak

Kepemimpinan perempuan semakin mendapatkan ruang di mata publik dalam kepemimpinan terutama kepemimpinan profesional di lembaga pendidikan, walaupun terbiasa mendapatkan tantangan dalam kepemimpinan seperti senioritas, aso lhok dan persepsi masyarakat, hal ini tidak mempengaruhi kepemimpinannya di lembaga pendidikan bahkan berupaya untuk menciptakan peluang yang lebih baik dalam kepemimpinannya ke depan. Tantangan kepemimpinan bagi kepala madrasah perempuan dipengaruhi oleh budaya patriarki yang berkembang di masyarakat dalam kehidupan sosial bermasyarakat. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan analisis gender. Hasil yang didapatkan bahwa tantangan senioritas dan aso lhok mendominasi tantangan bagi kepala madrasah perempuan di Aceh. senioritas ini ketika kepala madrasah yang lebih muda usianya di anggap oleh senior sebagai pemimpin yang tidak berpengalaman walaupun memenuhi kompetensi sebagai kepala madrasah, sementara aso lhok ini dipengaruhi oleh guru sebagai penduduk setempat yang ada di madrasah tersebut. Kemudian juga ada tantangan dualisme kebijakan dari madrasah swasta dan kerjasama dengan komite merupakan tantangan yang sederhana yang dihadapi kepala madrasah, hal ini dipengaruhi dari lokasi penelitian dan latar belakang peserta didik dan status madrasah. Strategi yang ditawarkan oleh kepala madrasah adalah dengan melakukan pendekatan secara terus menerus merangkul, mengajak berkerjasama dengan lebih baik, menghargainya dengan menanyakan pendapatnya lebih awal. Hal ini telah mampu mencairkan suasana sehingga penyelesaian tantangan mendapatkan solusi lebih baik.

Kata kunci: Tantangan; Kepemimpinan; Kepala Madrasah Perempuan.

مستخلص

تحتل قيادة النساء بمزيد من الاعتراف في الرأي العام، ولا سيما في الأدوار القيادية المهنية داخل المؤسسات التعليمية. على الرغم من مواجهة تحديات مثل الأقدمية والعادات المحلية وتصورات المجتمع، إلا أن هذه الصعوبات لا تثني النساء عن أداء أدوارهن القيادية في المؤسسات التعليمية. في الواقع، يسعين إلى خلق فرص أفضل للقيادة في المستقبل. غالباً ما تكون التحديات التي تواجهها مديرات المدارس النساء متأثرة بالثقافة البطريرقية السائدة في المجتمع وحيات المجتمع. تستخدم هذه البحث منهجاً نوعياً بمنهج تحليل الجنس. تشير النتائج إلى أن التحديات المتعلقة بالأقدمية والعادات المحلية هي المسائل الرئيسية التي تواجه مديرات المدارس النساء في إقليم أتشيه. يأتي الأقدمية للعب دوراً عندما يُعتبر المديرون الأصغر سناً من قبل زملائهم الأكبر سناً على أنهم قادة غير مخضرمين، حتى إذا كانوا يمتلكون الكفاءات اللازمة للدور. من ناحية أخرى، تتأثر العادات المحلية بوجود معلمين مقيمين محلياً في المدرسة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، التعامل مع الانقسام في السياسات في المدارس الخاصة والتعاون مع اللجان يُعرض لمديرات المدارس تحديات بسيطة، تتأثر بموقع البحث وخلفيات الطلاب ووضع المدرسة. تتضمن الاستراتيجيات التي تُقدمها مديرات المدارس الجهد المستمر، وتعزيز التعاون بشكل أفضل، والتشاور المبكر مع أصحاب المصلحة المعنيين. هذه الجهود ساعدت في تخفيف التوترات والوصول إلى حلاً أكثر فعالية للتغلب على هذه التحديات.

الكلمات الرئيسية: التحديات، القيادة، قائدات مدارس البنات.

A. INTRODUCTION

The discourse on women is intriguing for study, and the stigma of women as domestic beings is the most famous theme discussed in academic circles worldwide. One question that truly troubles the author is the challenges faced by women as heads of madrasahs (Islamic schools).

Normatively, women's leadership has strong legitimacy, whether from a theological, philosophical, or legal perspective. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by United Nations member states, including Indonesia, mentions several articles that grant women the freedom to become leaders. This is reinforced by Presidential Instruction (Inpres) Number 9 of 2000 on the Mainstreaming of Gender in National Development, designed from a gender perspective.¹

The roles and contributions of women today are highly significant, whether in education, politics, literature, and various other fields. Women stand out and play a crucial role in human development, especially in educational institutions. The participation rate of women in higher education has also increased, reaching 33.42 percent in 2021.² With a higher participation rate of women in higher education, their participation in leadership positions, especially in educational institutions, is expected to increase.

According to Tjokroaminoto, the reasons for the low participation of women in development and their tendency to occupy subordinate positions are as follows: 1) The masculine/feminine dichotomy of human roles, often resulting from biological determinism, often leads to the marginalization of women; 2) The dichotomy between public and domestic roles rooted in the idea that "a woman's role is in the home" perpetuates the division of labor between productive and reproductive functions between men and women; 3) The concept of "double burden" perpetuates the perception that a woman's primary role is as a homemaker, hindering the full realization of women's potential; 4) The subordination syndrome and the

¹ Maria Ulfah Anshor, "Tantangan Kepemimpinan Perempuan Di Tingkat Lokal," *Yinyang: Jurnal Studi Islam Gender Dan Anak* 3, no. 1 (2008): 81–88.; Anton Widyanto, "Reformulating Strategies to Develop Democratization through Civic Education in Aceh," *Ulumuna* 21, no. 1 (October 27, 2017): 33–56, <https://doi.org/10.20414/UJIS.V21I1.1179>; Sulaiman Sulaiman, Siti Yusnaini, and Anton Widyanto, "Development of Islamic Sharia-Based Curriculum in Islamic Universities in Aceh: A Study on the Implementation of Aceh Qanun Number 9 of 2015," *Ulumuna* 27, no. 1 (June 12, 2023): 89–114, <https://doi.org/10.20414/UJIS.V27I1.521>. Evi Muafiah et al., "The Role of Female Lecturers of IAIN Ponorogo in Family Care During The Covid-19 Pandemic Period," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 7, no. 2 (June 10, 2023): 1054, <https://doi.org/10.22373/SJHK.V7I2.14803>.

² "Pusat Data Ekonomi Dan Bisnis Indonesia | Databoks," data issued on September 29, 2022, accessed October 14, 2023, <https://databoks.katadata.co.id/>.

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marginal role of women have perpetuated the view that women's roles and functions in society are secondary.³

Facing continuous stereotypes about women demonstrating their quality, women's participation in educational institutions has increased over the years, especially in the last ten years, with women's participation being higher than that of men (139 to 82),⁴ a study on the career advancement of female civil servants in Indonesia, especially in educational institutions, suggests that women and men have equal prospects for career advancement but do not strongly support gender equality emphasizing women's independence.⁵

The success of an institution, especially an educational one, is greatly influenced by its leaders. The head of the madrasah, as the focal point in this context, plays a vital role in managing emotions, perseverance, and problem-solving, all of which affect the progress of the madrasah. Female madrasah heads operate within the institution as leaders who handle many responsibilities simultaneously, both at home and at the madrasah. Balancing work and family is a unique challenge for female madrasah heads. Equal opportunities for madrasah heads and strong prospects for female teachers to access leadership roles are essential.⁶

Female madrasah heads face numerous challenges in leading educational institutions, which are still influenced by religious beliefs, norms, traditions, and patriarchal culture⁷

³ St Habibah, "Kepemimpinan Perempuan Dalam Perspektif Gender," *SOSIORELIGIUS: JURNAL ILMIAH SOSIOLOGI AGAMA* 1, no. 1 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.24252/SOSIORELIGIUS.V1I1.4527>.

⁴ Siti Habsari Pratiwi et al., "KEPEMIMPINAN KEPALA SEKOLAH PEREMPUAN DI SEKOLAH DASAR," *SCHOOL EDUCATION JOURNAL PGSD FIP UNIMED* 13, no. 2 (June 2023): 173–81, <https://doi.org/10.24114/SEJPGSD.V13I2.46293>.

⁵ Dzuriyatun Toyibah, *Perempuan Cendekia Dan Tantangan Neoliberalisme* (Jakarta: LKiS, 2020).

⁶ Hesti Kusumaningrum and Kastolan Kastolan, "Manajemen Strategi Rekrutmen Kepala Madrasah Yang Responsif Gender Di Lingkungan Kementerian Agama RI," *Jurnal Ilmiah Wahana Pendidikan* 8, no. 9 (June 2022): 354–63, <https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.6774586>. Usman Muhammad et al., "Internalisasi Nilai-Nilai Toleransi Dalam Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam Di SMA Negeri 1 Lhokseumawe," *DAYAH: Journal of Islamic Education* 2, no. 1 (January 24, 2019): 36–52, <https://doi.org/10.22373/JIE.V2I1.2939>; Nur Salami and Anton Widyanto, "Etika Hubungan Pendidik Dan Peserta Didik Menurut Perspektif Pendidikan Islam Dan Pendidikan Barat (Studi Komparatif Pemikiran Al-Zarnuji Dan Paulo Freire)," *DAYAH: Journal of Islamic Education* 1, no. 2 (July 10, 2018): 164, <https://doi.org/10.22373/jie.v1i2.2945>; Nisa Khairuni and Anton Widyanto, "Optimalisasi Fungsi Masjid Sebagai Sarana Pendidikan Islam Dalam Menyelesaikan Krisis Spiritual Remaja Di Banda Aceh," *DAYAH: Journal of Islamic Education* 1, no. 1 (March 18, 2018): 74, <https://doi.org/10.22373/jie.v1i1.2482>.

⁷ Ilhaamie Abdul Ghani Azmi, Sharifah Hayaati Syed Ismail, and Siti Arni Basir, "Women Career Advancement in Public Service: A Study in Indonesia," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 58 (October 2012): 298–306, <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.SBSPRO.2012.09.1004>. Mohd Zailani Mohd Yusoff and Aswati Hamzah, "Direction of Moral Education Teacher To Enrich Character Education," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 3, no. 1 (2015): 119, <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v3i1.58>; Nuranifah, Cut Zahri Harun, and Nasir Usman, "Management of Strengthening Islamic Character Education in Senior High School," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 10, no. 3 (2022): 629–40, <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v10i3.659>; Martin Kustati et al., "The Model for Maintaining Families with Noble Character During the Pandemic in Kampung KB Villages," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 12, no. 1 (2024): 1–26, <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v12i1.1126>; Hasnadi and Inayatillah, "Inculcating Character Values Through History Learning," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 10, no. 1 (2022): 33–46, <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v10i1.732>; Abubakar Abubakar et al., "The Implementation of Local Values in Aceh Education Curriculum," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 10, no. 1 (2022): 165–82,

which persist in society. Despite their efforts to balance careers and family, female leaders continue to be negatively perceived and stereotyped, but they should not be deterred from their leadership roles. After the tsunami in Aceh, opportunities for women to become leaders in the public sphere, especially in education, have expanded. From the Ministry of Religion data references, it can be observed that there are more female madrasah heads. We can see this in the following figure 1.⁸

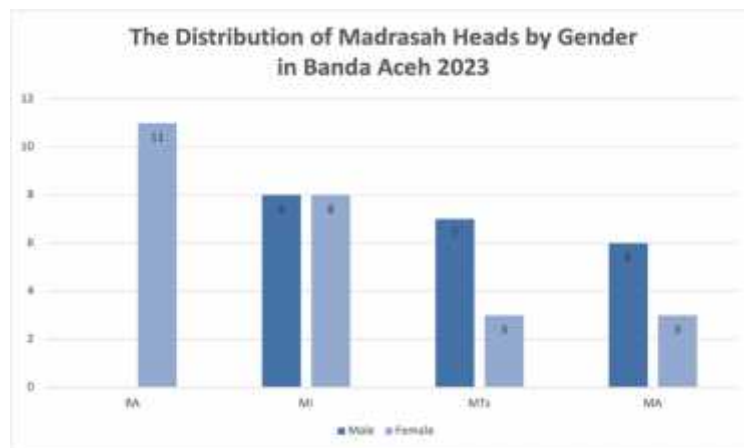


Figure 1: The Distribution of Madrasah Heads by Gender in Banda Aceh 2023.⁹

From the distribution of madrasah heads mentioned above, at the RA level, all are led by female heads. For Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, there are 16 madrasahs, both public and private, with 8 led by male heads and 8 led by female heads. For Tsanawiyah madrasahs, both public and private, there are 10 madrasahs, with 7 led by male heads and 3 led by female heads. Meanwhile, for Madrasah Aliyah, there are 9 madrasahs, with 6 led by male heads and 3 led by female heads.

His research employs two theories: the Glass Ceiling theory¹⁰ and the Glass Cliff theory. The Glass Ceiling concept, introduced by Marilyn Loden in 1978 during a discussion panel on women's aspirations, suggests that women can be seen as capable of reaching higher career positions in management but face invisible barriers, like a glass ceiling that is visible but difficult to break through due to cultural and social factors, work-family conflicts, and other challenges.

<https://doi.org/https://dx.doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v10i1.660>; ZA Tabrani, "Islamic Studies Dalam Pendekatan Multidisipliner (Suatu Kajian Gradual Menuju Paradigma Global)," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 2, no. 2 (May 28, 2014): 211–34, <https://doi.org/10.26811/PEURADEUN.V2I2.32>.

⁸ Patriarchal thinking which assumes that if women lead, they will be "different" because of the influence of emotional, natural and cultural traits, so they are considered unable to become leaders who are assertive, more responsible, smarter and have character in leading.

⁹ Initial observations of researchers with Mrs. Qadria as Head of Penmad Section on November 2, 2021.

¹⁰ "The Glass Ceiling: Definition, History, Effects, and Examples," n.d.

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The Glass Cliff theory is applied to madrasahs that are experiencing problems or a decline in their reputation, where female madrasah heads are assigned to tackle these challenges. This theory suggests that when an institution's reputation declines, women are tasked with improving it. This can be seen as a subtle form of gender inequality in educational leadership.¹¹

This research is compelling for in-depth investigation because there is no specific research that addresses the challenges faced by female madrasah heads in Aceh, particularly in Banda Aceh.

This research is located in Banda Aceh, with a sample of six madrasahs led by women. The research focuses on the challenges faced by female madrasah heads influenced by the madrasah environment, the backgrounds of students and parents, and the location of the madrasah.

The informants for this research include madrasah heads, deputy madrasah heads, committee members, and, if necessary, madrasah community members who are considered to have insights into the issues being studied. The research method used is qualitative with a gender perspective approach. The research techniques include interviews, observations, and in-depth analysis of data collected through these techniques.

Previous studies have addressed similar topics but differ in terms of the objects of study and research locations. For example, Dirga Ardiansa et al. analyzed survey data indicating that female school principals in elementary schools and madrasah ibtidaiyah (Islamic elementary schools) were perceived to make decisions more quickly, while men were preferred and considered more suitable for leadership positions in madrasah ibtidaiyah. However, gender norms placed women in roles related to administration rather than leadership in schools, both in elementary schools and madrasah ibtidaiyah. In fact, among madrasah ibtidaiyah teachers, gender norms imposed heavier burdens, as men were not only preferred but also deemed more suitable as madrasah heads.¹²

Dzuriyatun Toyibah's study discusses the presence of female students and academics as a relatively recent phenomenon, with women beginning to enter university institutions in the late nineteenth century.¹³ In terms of quantity, the participation of women in the academic

¹¹ Yael Oelbaum, "Understanding the Glass Cliff Effect: Why Are Female Leaders Being Pushed Toward the Edge?," *Dissertations, Theses, and Capstone Projects*, September 2016.

¹² Dirga Ardiansa et al., "Studi Persepsi Guru Tentang Norma Gender Dalam Manajemen Dan Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah Perempuan: Kompetensi Yang Tinggi Di Tengah Ketidaksetaraan Dukungan," n.d.

¹³ Christine Bucior and Alan Sica, "Sociology as a Female Preserve: Feminization and Redirection in Sociological Education and Research," *American Sociologist* 50, no. 1 (March 2019): 3–37,

world continues to increase. However, the percentage of women compared to men as students and faculty members varies from country to country and across different academic disciplines (Jöns, 2018; Popi ski, 2019). The percentage of female academics compared to male academics in the past decade, based on input from the University of Auckland's calendar for the year 2015, ranged from 40% to 60% (578 out of 853 in 2015). For example, in UIN Jakarta, there were only six female lecturers in 1982, but ten years later (around 1992), this number increased to 19, and another ten years later (around 2002), it grew to 74. By 2012, there were 78 female lecturers at UIN Jakarta. In Universitas Indonesia, based on data input from Forlap DIKTI (the Higher Education Data and Information System), out of 1547 fairly comprehensive data, the participation of women has been higher than that of men in the last ten years, with 139 women compared to 82 men. This data doesn't provide the exact total figures but indicates a relatively high level of female participation.¹⁴

The commonality between previous studies and this study lies in their exploration of the challenges of female leadership. However, the difference is that this study specifically focuses on the challenges faced by female madrasah heads in Aceh.

B. Discussion

Different madrasahs have different challenges faced by female madrasah principals in Banda Aceh, these challenges are influenced by the background conditions of the madrasah such as the location of the madrasah environment, the background conditions of parents and students, the competence of madrasah teachers, the level of madrasah and madrasah leadership, the tenacity of madrasah leadership greatly influences the process of handling the resolution of challenges and how to make challenges an opportunity for a better madrasah.

From the results of the research, it was found that the challenges and obstacles were not only from within the female madrasah head but also from outside her, the following will be presented separately between challenges from within and challenges from outside the female madrasah head to make it easier to understand.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/S12108-018-9395-Z/METRICS>; Heike Jöns, "Feminizing the University: The Mobilities, Careers, and Contributions of Early Female Academics in the University of Cambridge, 1926–1955," *The Professional Geographer* 69, no. 4 (October 2017): 670–82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00330124.2017.1289778>; Popi ski Krzysztof, "Feminization of Higher Education in Poland in 1918-2018," *Studia Historiae Oeconomicae* 37, no. 1 (December 2019): 116–46, <https://doi.org/10.2478/SHO-2019-0007>; Serdar Ünal and Berivan Binay, "Signs of the Feminization of Sociology in Turkey: Transformation of Gender Composition and Possible Scenarios," *Http://Dx.Doi.Org/10.1177/0268580917693174* 32, no. 3 (February 2017): 391–416, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580917693174>.

¹⁴ Toyibah, *Perempuan Cendekia Dan Tantangan Neoliberalisme*.

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1. *Internal challenges*

a. *Difficulty in balancing household chores and madrasah work*

Female headmasters often find it challenging to manage their time between domestic responsibilities and their work in the madrasah. However, by cooperating closely with their immediate families and sharing and delegating tasks within the family, they can alleviate the domestic burden effectively.¹⁵

b. *Challenges at home*

Challenges at home as a family that works together by making agreements with the family, children are trained to be independent by dividing tasks together at home, they do it like picket but not written. There is an agreement with the nuclear family, by building good communication and committing to always communicate together in dealing with problems and daily activities. Until the agreement discusses to be able to find another life partner, do not want the husband to become a "TKI, husband under the armpit of his wife".¹⁶

2. *External challenges*

a. *Challenges from the community*

1) Resistance to female leadership

The rejection of the attitude of dislike to be led by a woman in an organization or institution, this condition becomes difficult for the leadership of a female madrasah head in achieving success in leading in a male-dominant place. This does not appear transparently, but it will be seen when expressing opinions with harsh language, or when completing their duties, their faces look sour by issuing language that seems uncomfortable. This is actually his dislike for female leadership.¹⁷

2) Lack of support from fellow women

Fellow women are less supportive of women's leadership, which makes it difficult for women's leadership. In an election for the head of an activity or organization when there are male and female candidates, women themselves are reluctant to entrust leadership to women. "In the process of electing the chairperson of

¹⁵ Interview with MR on December 8, 2022.

¹⁶ Interview with ZR on December 20, 2022.

¹⁷ Interview with MR on December 8, 2022.

the KKG-MA, there were male and female candidates, the women were more qualified, but the results of the election of female teachers preferred a male chairperson".¹⁸

3) Suspicions regarding active women

There are allegations for women who are active outside the home or who have a career. Allegations of being a woman who is not true because sometimes they go home at night or don't come home for several days because of activities, which is where madrasah activities such as head training are held in hotels, the wrong image is built in the general public that hotels are improper and dirty places. In fact, hotels are not always dirty women's places, especially now that many useful activities, be it seminars, FGDs or other activities, are held in hotels so that participants are more focused.¹⁹

This illustrates an obstacle for female madrasah heads in Banda Aceh that comes from colleagues, female colleagues and family as well as themselves.

b. Challenges from the Madrasah

To make it easier for us to understand the explanation of external challenges, we will discuss them based on the challenges that exist in the madrasah that is the object of this research.

1) Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

a) Seniority

From the six madrasahs studied, all six madrasah principals revealed the challenge of seniority. "Indeed, seniority is not too obvious but feels reluctant when we deliberate in terms of madrasah activity programs, because he has served as madrasah head before, but this is also a place for us to learn so that what we do in the future is better" "This challenge is because there are still seniors, according to seniors, these seniors are more suitable to become madrasah heads, but the foundation trust chooses juniors". "Feeling of seniority, having been a teacher in the madrasah for a long time, thinking that he has memorized well and is very familiar with the conditions of the madrasah and has a high sense of negativity as well".²⁰

It is not only the madrasah principal who feels the challenge of seniority but students also feel the presence of seniority which causes frequent problems in the madrasah that must be resolved by the madrasah principal. The existence of a system of seniors who lead, seniority that regulates juniors makes students depressed and

¹⁸ Interview with SF on December 18, 2022.

¹⁹ Interview with EL on December 18, 2022.

²⁰ Interviews with NA, MR, IN, SM, HM, ZR. With different dates in late 2022.

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some have asked to move to another madrasah. "Why have some students transferred consecutively in two days, what is this problem, if they transfer to the same school this will have an effect on the madrasah that our madrasah is not good".²¹

This has a negative impact on the performance of the madrasah head if many students ask to move to another madrasah.

b) High sense of *aso lhok*²²

There is a sense of *asoe lhok* (local native) from parents who feel they have more power over the madrasah. "The sense of owning the land of the *aso lhok* family, because on average the land built by the madrasah by the ministry of religion is grant land and waqaf, *aso lhok* from the community around the madrasah and the extended family of the madrasah supervisor".²³

c) Discipline

This challenge comes from close neighbors or *aso lhok* who feel they are part of the madrasah from senior parents who want to regulate the school about discipline. The school should support discipline. "I was standing at the window of my office, then I saw that someone was late, at first I was reprimanded once by the security guard, after the third time I left because the parent guardian was angry while saying, "what kind of school is this, telling students to be late to go home, I myself have never told students to be late to go home", "madrasa residents who have not been able to carry out time discipline".²⁴

Another challenge perceived by female madrasah principals is security guards who do not show up on time and lack discipline. "I sometimes have to sort out my chest with the indiscipline of the security guard, when I need the security guard is not there, even the madrasah head is often present first than the security guard".²⁵

The lack of discipline of male teachers in compiling and submitting monthly performance reports so that the madrasah head reprimands during submission and slowly interrogates what problems the teacher is facing so that he is often undisciplined in completing work and is late in completing and submitting reports on the results of the Teaching and Learning Process. "Sir, I'm sorry for being late, but what problem is causing this? Why are you less serious about your work as a

²¹ Interview with MR on December 8, 2022 and SM on January 10, 2023.

²² Aso lhok refers to indigenous people or people who were born at an area and settled in a place for generations. "Kisahkan Istilah Asoe Lhoek, Ini Penjelasan Mukhlis Sulaiman | Prioritas.Co.Id," n.d.

²³ Interview with ZR on October 29, 2022.

²⁴ Interview with IN on September 19, 2022.

²⁵ Interview with ZR on October 29, 2022.

teacher?" "The teacher remains silent when questioned but gradually shows signs of change".²⁶

From the challenges above, what makes the madrasah principal uncomfortable is the neighbors in the madrasah environment who do not support student discipline and compare students with the students he supervises. There are personnel who are still undisciplined and do not like female leadership. "The teacher (ustadz) who lacks discipline in attending classes and, when reprimanded, feels a sense of seniority and perceives a woman as overseeing men, thus making it difficult to enforce discipline for those who still hold such views".²⁷

d) The Madrasah Committee

The Madrasah Committee, which has served for three terms (15 years), has been unable to be replaced because the committee chair holds significant power within the Aceh government. The strategy used to address this issue involves a gradual and step-by-step approach, involving and engaging the committee in madrasah activities, and inviting them to discuss and find solutions to various issues and follow-up plans for the madrasah's progress. For instance, the issue of the problematic toilets that greatly inconvenience parents when dropping off and picking up their children while waiting on the street became the first task undertaken by the madrasah head through building a rapport with the committee. However, the committee refused to dismantle and repair the toilets. Nonetheless, the madrasah head did not give up and continuously made efforts, using various justifications and even making strong statements. "If the committee doesn't have workers to do the job, then I will bring my own workers".²⁸

This approach became a boomerang for the Madrasah Committee chair, leading to the repair of the toilets, which are now usable again. The lack of support from the Madrasah Committee in implementing programs from the Ministry of Religious Affairs poses a separate obstacle for the private madrasah head whose madrasah operates under a foundation. "This madrasah is under a foundation, so naturally the committee represents the foundation. This becomes a constraint in implementing programs because the Ministry of Religious Affairs programs lack

²⁶ Interview with IN on September 19, 2022.

²⁷ Interview with ZR on October 29, 2022.

²⁸ Interview with HM on October 13, 2022.

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support from the foundation, while the madrasah must follow the rules of the Ministry of Religious Affairs".²⁹

e) Parents/guardians who have power as officials

Police officers who are transferred to different duty stations relocate their children as well. When they are reassigned back to Banda Aceh, they immediately move their children back to the madrasah without any hesitation, bringing them directly into the classroom they previously attended. They do not consider the disruption this causes to the madrasah's administration and EMIS data.

The madrasah head contemplates how to address this issue to prevent it from recurring and to ensure that the madrasah is not treated as the property of those who hold power as officials or civil servants. Consequently, a legally binding agreement was implemented, signed on a stamped paper, stating that students who have been transferred are not allowed to re-enroll in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 6 Banda Aceh. As a result, after the agreement was put into effect, incidents like the one mentioned above no longer occurred. "The main issue in this madrasah is the constant transfer of students whose parents have relocated for work. So, I thought the solution would be to create an agreement on stamped paper stating that students who have transferred from the madrasah are not allowed to re-enroll here".³⁰

The resolution of the above problems makes this madrasah more disciplined in terms of moving in students by parents and guardians and gives awareness to parents and guardians that orderly administration and data are the basis for madrasah progress.

f) The Limited Space of the Madrasah

The limited land available for constructing the madrasah has resulted in a restricted play area for students. However, this challenge has been addressed by utilizing open spaces and constructing minimalist, functional, and versatile buildings. For instance, a reading garden has been created, which also serves as a waiting area adjacent to the garden. Additionally, the courtyard has been covered with a roof, transforming it into an open hall for various madrasah activities.³¹

²⁹ Interview with HM on October 13, 2022.

³⁰ Interview with HM on October 13, 2022.

³¹ Researcher observations while conducting research from January 2022 to January 2023.

g) Limited Budget

The headmaster of the madrasah faces the challenge of limited funds in improving the quality of the institution. The School Operational Assistance (BOS) funds cannot be allocated to specific activities; instead, they must adhere to predetermined slots and accounts. However, significant financial resources are required for the renovation of the madrasah, student development, teacher training, and environmental arrangements. The headmaster emphasizes the need for substantial funding to enhance the infrastructure of the madrasah. Unfortunately, the BOS funds are insufficient and cannot be utilized for environmental improvements. Consequently, the headmaster engages in discussions with the committee to find alternative solutions for addressing the environmental concerns.³²

h) Difficulty in determining the vision and mission of the madrasah that aligns with the environmental conditions

Determining the vision and mission of the madrasah was difficult, because the mindset of the madrasah community was lazy to get out of their comfort zone and there were still typical madrasah residents who were difficult to accept change. "Because it is difficult to determine the vision and mission of the madrasah, then I try to dismantle the mindset of the madrasah community to be able to get out of their comfort zone, undergo habituation that has been agreed to be carried out continuously without having to be reminded again".

There are also fragmented groups within the madrasah community, with many individuals lacking awareness and responsiveness to the planned programs. Moreover, there is a low sense of responsibility towards the administrative tasks required for the smooth running of teaching and learning activities. The members of the madrasah community need continuous monitoring and guidance as any negligence in their duties can have detrimental consequences for the students, the environment, and local traditions such as gathering for coffee in local shops and participating in community feasts and celebrations.³³

i) Constraints from facilities and infrastructure

The condition of the building is worthy of a new building, because the tiles are broken, the ceiling is porous, the walls of the classrooms are porous due to weathering, the access road is narrow and crowded, the PDAM water flow is not

³² Interview with ZR on October 29, 2022.

³³ Interview with ZR on October 29, 2022.

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smooth, the lack of garbage cans and the lack of garbage transportation fleet and the amount of budget that must be spent on cutting weeds that thrive around the madrasah environment, this is because the madrasah building is located between rice fields, soccer fields and public cemeteries, and the road is narrow as a community traffic road."From the obstacles faced, both coming from the madrasah community and in terms of facilities, it makes me obliged to make efforts to realize a quality school that is able to compete with other madrasahs in the city of Banda Aceh".³⁴

j) Madrasah environment

The madrasah is situated between vacant lands, a football field, and a neglected public cemetery. A 30-meter-long ditch gives the impression that the madrasah is surrounded by overgrown grass and wild plants, creating an uncomfortable learning environment. To address this issue, a collaborative effort was undertaken by the teaching staff (GTK) and students through the Scout Community Service program and mass clean-up activities. Initially, the students were enthusiastic and excited to participate, but as the clean-up activities were repeated, they started to complain about the foul smell and the abundance of trash in the ditch.

To overcome this challenge, an idea emerged to cover the ditch by constructing a wooden frame lined with wire mesh, which would reduce the amount of trash entering the ditch. "During the communal work process, I involved the teachers, education staff, and students. The students were happy because they didn't have to study in the classrooms or hold pencils. This initiative helped instill a sense of environmental cleanliness, and eventually, the ditch was covered with wire mesh."³⁵

k) The effects of the online learning pandemic have caused students to develop less social competence

Social competence has shifted in terms of values in the process of interaction and communication with their peers. "During the COVID-19 pandemic and online learning, everything was done online, and the effect was that students lacked social competence. As a result, for this year's celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday, we focused on the theme of 'through the Prophet's birthday, let's enhance caring for others'.³⁶

³⁴ Interview with ZR on October 29, 2022.

³⁵ Interview with NS on October 25, 2022.

³⁶ Interview with ZR on October 29, 2022.

2) Madrasah Tsanawiyah

In every activity and work there are always challenges, sometimes these challenges are small and sometimes there are also big ones, all of which are dynamics in leadership. The challenges in the leadership of the head of Madrasah Tsanawiyah in Banda Aceh are: Different madrasahs have different challenges faced by the head of the madrasah, for the head of the Babun Najah Tsanawiyah madrasah also faces challenges, which are the dynamics of maturing leadership that must learn a lot. "There are challenges everywhere, it's just a matter of how we respond to them, even though sometimes they are small and sometimes they are big, we have to be good at getting around them, for me this is the dynamics of maturity in my leadership process".³⁷

Among the challenges faced are:

- a) Foundations that are less supportive of programs instructed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

"The lack of support from the foundation for madrasah programs such as in November 2022, there was a self-evaluation of the madrasah head conducted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, so the foundation was less responsive and less supportive for the completeness of the EDM adm, so the score on the madrasah head's cooperation with the committee was zero".³⁸

- b) Dualism of rules that sometimes clash.

"There are two rules that we have to follow, namely the foundation and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, sometimes these rules conflict with both of them, so this adds to the burden on us, for the implementation of the process of both we have to find a middle ground so that PBM can run well, and madrasah is still entrusted by the community as an educational institution".³⁹

- c) Difficulty in establishing communication with foundations and madrasah committees.

"The problem above is caused by the difficulty of building communication between the madrasah and the foundation, which is contradictory in terms of madrasah transformation programmed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs".⁴⁰

Foundations still think of building madrasahs with old patterns while madrasahs must follow the transformation of education, and there is still the thought that madrasahs do something for personal interests when what is done is for the benefit of madrasahs. "The foundation thinks what I do is for my personal interest,

³⁷ Interview with SM on January 10, 2023 and interview with SN on January 10, 2023.

³⁸ Interview with SM on January 10, 2023 and interview with SN on January 10, 2023.

³⁹ Interview with SM on January 10, 2023 and interview with SN on January 10, 2023.

⁴⁰ Interview with SM on January 10, 2023 and interviews with SN on January 10, 2023 and with MR on January 13, 2023.

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even though it is for the benefit of the madrasah which is getting tighter competition nowadays with more and more integrated madrasahs appearing".⁴¹

Receiving the treatment and words of the foundation about the understanding that what the madrasah head did clashed with the foundation, the madrasah head acted silently. "My silence and not fighting back is gold for me to prove that what I am doing is the rules of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, not running a job without clarity".⁴²

- d) A sense of *aso lhok* also dominates the challenges in the madrasah tsanawiyah such as when disciplining students, parents get angry and say "the madrasa doesn't know I'm *aso lhok* here".⁴³

3) Madrasah Aliyah

Some of the challenges of madrasah Aliyah in Banda Aceh that the author can analyze from the results of interviews and observations, among others:

- a) The narrowness of the madrasah environment and the old building, if there is an earthquake at any time, the safety of students is very much concerned, so the head of the madrasah is seeking new land for the madrasah. "If you look around the classrooms, and there is a fire escape next to the classrooms, if there is an earthquake the students can get off the fire escape, which is very worrying for the safety of the students".⁴⁴
- b) During the COVID-19 pandemic, some students did not effectively utilize online learning platforms and instead became addicted to online gaming, leading to a syndrome. As a result, these students needed homeschooling while their parents sought therapy from psychologists. Homeschooling was implemented to ensure that they didn't fall behind in their studies and could take final exams along with their peers. "Some students developed an online gaming syndrome, and they had to be homeschooled while their parents took them for therapy. This way, they could keep up with their studies and sit for the final exams alongside their classmates".⁴⁵

⁴¹ Interview with SM on January 10, 2023 and interviews with SN on January 10, 2023 and with MR on January 13, 2023.

⁴² Interview with SM on January 10, 2023 and interview with SN on January 10, 2023

⁴³ Interview with SM on January 10, 2023 and interview with SN on January 10, 2023

⁴⁴ Interview with IN on January 10, 2023.

⁴⁵ Interview with IN on January 10, 2023.

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The challenges of MAS in Banda Aceh are more unique than public madrasahs, to make it more interesting, we will describe these unique challenges in more detail below.

- a) For private madrasahs under foundations, there are two rules: the Ministry of Religious Affairs' rules and the foundation's rules. "There are two rules that must be completed and run in tandem, this makes the double burden increase for me with two rules and two different reports".⁴⁶
- b) The head of madrasah lacks communication with some teachers and staff. "Communication between personnel is lacking, especially with male teachers, maybe the influence of ustadz or because in dayah male students also rarely communicate with female students or maintain an image in front of students".⁴⁷
- c) It is difficult to divide time between home and work so that the balance has to be sacrificed. But it can be resolved by mutual agreement in the family. "It is difficult to manage myself between completing homework and assignments at the madrasa, sometimes something is sacrificed such as time to be together, but until now it can still be resolved even though something is sacrificed".⁴⁸
- d) From the explanation above, the author can analyze that the common challenges felt by female madrasah heads are *aso lhok* and seniority, this is also corroborated by the results of an interview with the head of the Penmad Section of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Banda Aceh. "Most of the reports on the challenges of madrasah principals that I receive are the high sense of *aso lhok* and the high sense of seniority that exists in GTK".⁴⁹

The above challenges require further study of the culture of *aso lhok* and seniority for the author and other researchers to answer what is wrong with the sense of *aso lhok* and the high sense of seniority. "Because the deputy student affairs officer is male, he rarely participates in meetings and madrasah activities, maybe he feels uncomfortable because the head of the madrasah is female and the other deputies are also female".⁵⁰

When the self-evaluation is conducted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the results of the madrasah head's score determine his/her future career and we usually assign positions that have many challenges to female madrasah heads,

⁴⁶ Interview with NS on October 25, 2022 and interview with KH on December 28, 2022.

⁴⁷ Interview with MR on September 20, 2022.

⁴⁸ Interview with MR on September 20, 2022.

⁴⁹ Interview with the Head of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Banda Aceh City on December 17th.

⁵⁰ Analysis of the strategies used by female madrasah principals during the research conduct research from September 2022 to January 2023.

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because the head of the madrassa is very flexible in solving problems and very detached in structuring the madrassa.⁵¹

3. *Strategies for dealing with challenges*

In dealing with such diverse challenges, female madrasah leaders employ various strategies:

- a. Developing a concept of madrasah transformation by utilizing a transformational leadership style in the implementation of educational programs.
- b. Enhancing their own leadership capabilities through various training programs in the field of educational leadership.
- c. Building collective commitment with the madrasah community to ensure the realization of the shared vision and mission of the madrasah.
- d. Instilling loyalty through open access to information within the educational institution.
- e. Initiating comprehensive measures to increase women's participation in shaping public policies within educational institutions.⁵²

C. CONCLUSION

The numerous challenges faced by female madrasah leaders do not solely originate from within themselves but also stem from the community and the madrasah institution itself. The most prominent challenges include the presence of the "*aso lhok*" (local dominance) and seniority, as well as the discomfort of leading in a male-dominated environment where some men may feel unfit to be led by a female leader due to persistent patriarchal attitudes. However, these challenges are not a barrier for women to continue to take part in the field of education and even female leadership convinces itself by motivating and showing its abilities by making challenges a better future opportunity. Female leaders bolster their confidence by motivating themselves and showcasing their abilities, viewing these challenges as opportunities for a better future (the "ceiling glass" concept). Furthermore, the challenge of placing female madrasah leaders in institutions with declining reputations is also addressed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Banda Aceh as part of its efforts to promote and enhance the quality of madrasahs (The Glass Cliff theory).

⁵¹ Interview with the Head of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Banda Aceh City on December 17th 2023.

⁵² Excerpted from Sakdiah, "Kepemimpinan Kepala Madrasah Perempuan Di Banda Aceh" (n.d.).

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