



## **Integrating Transformational, Spiritual, and Incremental Socially Innovative Leadership: A Historical Perspective**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research reconnoiters the integrated leadership style of Nana Asma'u (1793–1864)—a pioneering West African poet, scholar, and reformer—through the combined perspectives of transformational, spiritual, and socially innovative incremental leadership. The study explores how Asma'u's unique leadership approach synthesized visionary inspiration, ethical integrity, and spiritual cognizance with community-based social reforms.

Drawing upon the theoretical foundations of transformational leadership (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985), spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003), and incremental social innovation (Mumford, 2002; Marcy, 2015; Mahmood, 2025), this paper identifies integral dimensions in Asma'u's leadership style—idealized influence, altruistic love, intellectual stimulation, and collaborative reform. Using a qualitative case study design, the research analyzes historical texts, literary works, and scholarly interpretations of Asma'u's life and legacy to explore how she mobilized education and faith for ethical and social transformation of her society.

Findings disclose that Asma'u's leadership was multidimensional: transformational in its capability to inspire moral and intellectual revitalization; spiritual in nurturing faith-based compassion and purpose; and incremental in attaining gradual, sustainable change within her era's social and cultural structures. Her Yan'taru movement for women's education demonstrated a socially innovative reform that balanced continuity with advancement, ensuring lasting impact.

This study concludes that Nana Asma'u's leadership exemplifies a holistic and values-based model that integrates moral vision, spiritual depth, and incremental social innovation, offering a timeless archetype for contemporary leadership rooted in ethics, inclusivity, and sustainable development.

## **1. Introduction**

Leadership, throughout olden times, has displayed in diverse forms shaped by cultural, spiritual, and social contexts. In contemporary decades, leadership research have evolved beyond transactional and bureaucratic exemplars toward more holistic models that integrate ethics, spirituality, and social innovation (Leonard, Lewis, Freedman, & Passmore, 2013). This research explores the convergence of three major leadership theoretical perspectives—transformational leadership, spiritual leadership, and socially innovative incremental leadership—through the historical case study of Nana Asma'u (1793–1864), the 19th-century West African poet, scholar, and reformer. Asma'u's leadership, rooted in Islamic values and Sufi traditions, establishes how moral vision, spiritual depth, and incremental social reform can collectively transmute societies.

Transformational leadership, first conceptualized by James MacGregor Burns (1978) and extended by Bernard Bass (1985), emphasizes moral elevation and inspiration that moves followers beyond self-interest toward collective good. Spiritual leadership, proposed by Fry (2003), integrates vision, altruistic love, and hope/faith to cultivate meaning, interconnectedness, and spiritual well-being among followers. Meanwhile, socially innovative incremental leadership, articulated by Mumford (2002), Marcy (2015), and Mahmood (2025), underlines gradual and context-sensitive reform achieved through collaboration, ethical legitimacy, and continuity. Each of these frameworks, when examined through the life and work of Nana Asma'u, highlights a different dimension of her enduring influence as a moral educator, social reformer, and spiritual mentor.

Nana Asma'u's leadership evolved in a patriarchal 19th-century Nigerian society, where women's education and public participation were severely restricted. Through her educational movement, Yan'taru, she empowered women as teachers and moral leaders who spread education, ethical conduct, and spiritual awakening across the Sokoto Caliphate. Her leadership style was intrinsically transformational, as she inspired her followers through vision, integrity, and moral example; spiritual, as she infused faith and compassion into her teachings; and incremental, as she worked within cultural and institutional boundaries to bring steady yet enduring change.

This study stations Nana Asma'u as a case exemplar of how integrated leadership—combining moral conviction, spiritual insight, and social innovation—can nurture sustainable transformation without opposition. Her leadership was not revolutionary but evolutionary; it sought to harmonize faith with reform, and tradition with progress. By amalgamating these three theoretical perspectives, Asma'u's legacy transcends historic and spatial boundaries, offering valuable lessons for contemporary leaders striving for ethical and all-inclusive progress.

Hence, this paper aims to analyze Asma'u's leadership through interconnecting these three theoretical lenses, recognizing how her approach reflected the essence of transformational, spiritual, and incremental leadership concurrently. The discussion will demonstrate that Asma'u's leadership was not a single-style spectacle but an integrated leadership framework capable of driving genuine change while preserving social harmon and embodying a model of transformational spirituality through incremental innovation.

## **2. Literature review**

In this section, three major leadership theoretical perspectives—transformational leadership, spiritual leadership, and socially innovative incremental leadership—will be explored in depth. Each of these styles characterizes a distinctive yet harmonizing approach to guiding followers toward development, ethical behavior, and supportable development.

The review will study the fundamental principles and theoretical foundations, and key dimensions of each leadership style as established in prior research. Transformational

leadership (Bass, 1985) highlights moral influence, visionary inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration; spiritual leadership centers on values-driven guidance through vision, altruistic love, and hope/faith (Fry, 2003); while socially innovative incremental leadership (Mumford, 2002) highpoints the steady and contextually grounded improvement of social arrangements through collaboration and adaptive problem-solving.

By examining the conceptual connections and unique influences of these models, this section aims to identify the possibility of their amalgamation into an integrated framework of ethically stranded, socially receptive, and innovation-oriented leadership. Such consolidation may offer an all-inclusive understanding of how leaders from history and modern leaders can stimulate moral purpose, sustain motivation, and drive incremental yet significant innovation among their followers and society.

## **2.1 Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership, first theorized by James MacGregor Burns (1978) and later extended by Bernard Bass (1985), symbolizes a leadership style that inspires followers to outdo their self-interest for the greater shared good. It goes past transactional exchanges by nurturing higher levels of motivation, morality, and commitment. The framework identifies four key dimensions, often referred to as the “Four I’s”: *Idealized Influence*, *Inspirational Motivation*, *Intellectual Stimulation*, and *Individualized Consideration*.

**2.1.1. Idealized Influence (Charisma):** This dimension exudes the leader’s example as a role model who establishes high ethical standards, vision, and integrity through their charisma and idealized values, role modelling and thinking. Through such principled thinking, transformational leaders motivate followers to reflect their behavior and internalize communal ideals beyond self-interests (Leonard, Lewis, Freedman, & Passmore, 2013). This dimension refers to the leader’s role as a moral and visionary role model who inspires ideals and respect in their followers. Leaders demonstrating idealized influence set high ethical standards, portray integrity, and exemplify a compelling vision that aligns with shared objectives for societal benefit.

**2.1.2. Inspirational Motivation:** Transformational leaders express an engaging vision that provides significance and challenge to their followers’ lives. Transformational leaders convey a clear, engaging, and emotionally uplifting vision that gives meaning and direction to followers’ work and lives. They articulate high expectations and use symbolic communication, optimism, and enthusiasm to unify their teams under a shared sense of purpose. This motivation energizes followers to transcend routine performance and see their contributions as part of a larger, inspiring mission (Rafferty, & Griffin, 2004).

**2.1.3. Intellectual Stimulation:** This element focuses on enhancing creativity, innovation, and problem-solving. This dimension emphasizes a leader’s capacity to encourage creativity, innovation, and critical thinking among followers. Leaders stimulate intellectual growth by challenging prevailing assumptions, encouraging new perspectives, and orchestrating an environment of psychological safety where questioning and experimentation are prevalent (Deinert, Homan, Boer, Voelpel, & Gutermann, 2015). As a result, followers develop confidence in their problem-solving abilities and contribute novel ideas to societal or institutional development.

**2.1.4. Individualized Consideration:** This factor highpoints the leader’s compassion with followers’ individual needs, aspirations, and potential. This dimension reflects the leader’s genuine empathetic concern for each follower’s unique individual needs, and potential. Transformational leaders act as mentors and coaches, offering personalized directions and guidance, constructive feedback, and developmental opportunities. By recognizing each person’s unique strengths and weaknesses, they foster trust, commitment, and long-term growth within their followers (Saad Alessa, 2021).

Collectively, these dimensions donate to a leader's ability to uplift both performance and moral values of their followers. From the above discussion following hypotheses can be generated.

#### **2.1.5. Proposed Hypotheses for Transformational Leadership**

**H1:** Nana Asma'u as transformational leaders exhibited *idealized influence* to stimulate followers to embrace higher ethical and moral standards, nurturing trust and emotional commitment in them.

**H2:** Nana Asma'u as transformational leaders used *inspirational motivation* to augment followers' logic of purpose and alignment with collective goals through a joint, emotionally convincing vision.

**H3:** Nana Asma'u provided *Intellectual stimulation* to her followers to inspire creativity, problem-solving, and ingenuousness among her followers, leading to continuous learning and improvement.

**H4:** Nana Asma'u as transformational leaders showed *individualized consideration* to reinforce follower gratification and devotion by addressing their individual needs and providing mentoring and developmental backing.

#### **2.2 Spiritual Leadership**

Spiritual leadership, theorized by Fry (2003), is a values-based model that assimilates spirituality, inspiration, and leadership to nurture personal fulfillment. Unlike traditional leadership approaches focused principally on performance outcomes, spiritual leadership accentuates inner life, meaning, and interconnectedness as drivers of sustainable performance and well-being of followers. It aims to generate a sense of *calling* (meaning in work) and *membership* (sense of belonging) among followers. The model principally encompasses three core dimensions: Vision, Altruistic Love, and Hope/Faith—reinforced by the leader's *inner life* and resulting in *spiritual well-being*.

**2.2.1. Vision:** A clear and convincing vision provides direction and persistence to followers. Spiritual leaders transfer a divine vision that make parallel personal values with communal mission. A clear and compelling vision provides followers a sense of direction, meaning, and significance in their lives. Spiritual leaders articulate a transcendent aims that connect personal values with a higher spiritual ideal, enabling individuals to see their endeavors as part of something larger than themselves. This vision act not only as a motivational force but also as a moral compass, guiding behavior toward service, integrity, and community well-being (Malone, & Fry, 2003).

**2.2.2. Altruistic Love:** Altruistic love refers to genuine care, compassion, and appreciation for others. Altruistic love signifies genuine care, compassion, empathetic care, and appreciation for others. It reflects a deep sense of respect and kindness that nurtures trust, harmony, and emotional safety within a community or followers. Spiritual leaders demonstrate forgiveness, patience, and fairness, creating a supportive environment where followers feel valued, understood, and motivated to contribute wholeheartedly (Malone, & Fry, 2003).

**2.2.3. Hope/Faith:** Hope and faith represent the leader's confidence and optimism in achieving a higher vision despite adversity. Hope encourages perseverance and resilience, while faith maintains belief in the meaningfulness of collective endeavors. Together, they inspire followers to remain committed and positive, reinforcing morale and spiritual strength even during challenging circumstances (Malone, & Fry, 2003).

**2.2.4. Inner Life:** The inner life—the reflective, spiritual core of the leader—is central to all dimensions of spiritual leadership. At the core of spiritual leadership lies the inner life—a reflective, spiritual core cultivated through practices such as mindfulness, prayer, meditation, or self-reflection. This inner discipline helps leaders maintain authenticity, humility, and integrity, ensuring that their practical life remains congruent with internal values (Malone, &

Fry, 2003). The rituals or practices such as mindfulness, prayer, meditation, or self-reflection, help leaders develop authenticity and integrity not in themselves but through their role modelling in their followers as well.

### **2.2.5. Proposed Hypotheses for Spiritual Leadership**

From the above discussion following hypotheses can be generated.

**H5:** Nana Asma'u as spiritual leader articulated a clear and meaningful *vision* to produce a sense of mission and inherent motivation among followers, connecting their personal values to collective purpose.

**H6:** The incidence of *altruistic love* in spiritual leadership as exuded by Nana Asma'u enhanced psychological safety, trust, and emotional well-being within the community.

**H7:** *Hope and faith* in spiritual leadership as embodied by Nana Asma'u nurtured resilience and persistence among her followers, supporting continued commitment through hardship.

**H8:** The leader's *inner life*—replicated by Nana Asma'u through her self-reflection and spiritual values acted as the foundation that sustained genuineness, ethical conduct, and value-driven leadership behavior.

### **2.3 Socially Innovative Incremental Leadership**

Social innovation has been defined as how people should act together in social and interpersonal contexts to achieve mutually beneficial objectives which solve common man communal problems (Marcy & Mumford, 2007; Mumford, 2002). The same definition of social innovators can be expanded by differentiating between radical and incremental social innovative leaders that, the former bring radical changes in society by reforming maladaptive linkages of elites' mental models while the latter bring incremental developments in society in physical, financial, and technical domains (Marcy, 2015). Incremental leadership, a subcategory of socially innovative leadership, focuses on gradual improvement and sustainable development within existing social and communal structures. It contrasts with radical leadership, which seeks to disrupt entrenched systems and mental models. Drawing from the works of Marcy (2015), Mumford (2002), and Mahmood (2025), incremental leadership is characterized by *continuousness, acceptability, and consensus-oriented innovation*. Rather than breach from custom, it evolves within it, confirming societal balance while pursuing enlightened development.

#### **2.3.1. Peaceful Evolving Upbringing and Mental Model Formation**

Incremental social innovators are often nurtured in *secure, peaceful, and socially stable environments* (Marcy, 2015; Mahmood, 2025). Their influential initial experiences foster *belongingness, discipline, and reverence for established norms*. This early social conditioning gives rise to mental models that mimic closely with prevalent cultural and institutional values. Unlike radical leaders who develop reflective and critical mental models from exposure to conflict or exclusion, incremental leaders derive meaning from permanency and harmony within society. This steady background allows them to approach modification in the society as an act of stewardship rather than revolution—seeking to improve, not substitute, societal structures.

#### **2.3.2. Shared Mental Models and Alignment with Elites**

Incremental leaders share analogous mental models with societal elites (Marcy, 2015 and Mahmood, 2025). Their understanding is fashioned by an acceptance of conventional hierarchies, customs, and institutional logic. This coalition supports them to work within established power systems rather than outside them. Because they “think similar to” the elite, their innovations are taken as legitimate additions of accepted norms rather than dissident challenges. Thus, incremental leadership flourishes on *continuity, legitimacy, and adaptive harmony*, retaining trust between reformers and traditional power centers.

### 2.3.3. Legitimated, Coercive, and Reward Power Bases

Another defining feature is the type of power incremental leaders employ. As noted by Marcy (2015), they work through *legitimated power*, often resulting from formal positions, moral standing, or institutional association. They may also use *coercive power*—applying regulations or standards—and *reward power*, providing encouragements for contribution in incremental reorganizations. This triad of power ensures compliance without confrontation. Their power base reflects governance embedded within the system—leaders who reform from within rather than revolutionize from outside.

### 2.3.4. Protected and Entrenched Settings for Transformation

Incremental leadership typically arises in protected or stable environs where social order and established mechanisms allow novelty to thrive safely (Marcy, 2015). Such fortification may stem from political support, elite ratification, or societal confidence. These secure settings guard continuing innovation from resistance, allowing improvement to advance progressively. As Marcy (2015) suggests, incremental innovation necessitates *cognitive safety*—a social framework where change can be established and absorbed without subverting existing structures.

### 2.3.5. Collaborative Implementation Strategies

A core dimension of incremental leadership lies in its collaborative implementation strategies. It has been observed that incremental leaders engross directly with elites and the wider public through collaboration, influence, and dialogue (Marcy, 2015 and Mahmood, 2025). Their enactment strategy is consensual, not provocative. Collaboration allows incremental leaders to align contributor interests and abate resistance. They build alliances across diverse groups, using cooperation rather than pressure to embed restructurings. This cooperative approach ensures the acknowledgment and sustainability of change.

### 2.3.6. Incremental Value Addition and Societal Well-being Outcomes

The outcomes of incremental leadership are typically manifested as steady enhancements or value additions in technical, financial, or social domains. Instead of sweeping revolution, the results appear as *enlightened refinement*—small but significant steps toward social welfare. Mahmood (2025) notes that these micro improvements are acknowledged by both elite and the public, reinforcing social interconnection and the validity of the leader. By preserving balance between transformation and steadiness, incremental leaders promote collective development without intimidating prevailing power dynamics.

### 2.3.7. Ethical Legitimacy and Stability Orientation

Underlying all these dimensions is a commitment to ethical legitimacy and stability. Incremental leaders view social reform as a moral responsibility, not a disrupting struggle. Their decisions are guided by practicality, accountability, and empathy. They understand that rapid change may break the social fabric; hence, they pursue reforms through ethical cooperation, fortitude, and veneration for steadiness. This coordination makes incremental leadership particularly suitable for societies valuing belief, congruence, and moral order.

### 2.3.8 Proposed Hypotheses for Socially Innovative Incremental Leadership

From the above discussion following hypotheses can be generated.

**H9:** Nana Asma'u as an incremental social innovator **grew up in steady and peaceable surroundings**, which nurture a strong sense of belonging, title, and connection with her social context.

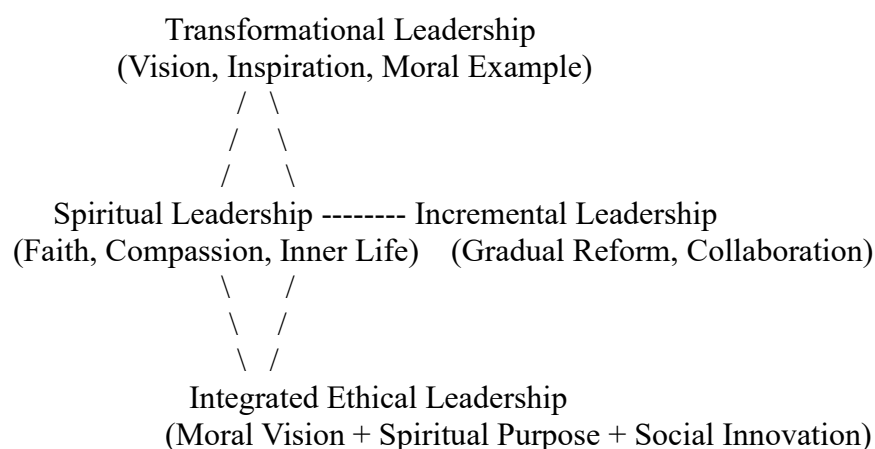
**H10:** Because she was reared in protected and socially entrenched settings, Nana Asma'u as an incremental social innovators **developed mental models congruent to her surroundings** that pursued to develop communal humanistic rights while safeguarding and respecting surviving standards.

**H11:** Nana Asma’u as an incremental social innovator **participated steadfastly with societal elites and the general public** while realizing her resourcefulness **for solving societal problems**.

**H12:** The **implementation strategies** of Nana Asma’u as an incremental social innovator were primarily **collaborative, emphasizing negotiation, education, and opinion-building of community**.

**H13:** The **consequences of Nana Asma’u toils and works** as an incremental social innovator were replicated through **gradual enhancements and value additions** in the society that stimulated the wellbeing of both elites and the society and community of her times.

## 2.4 Conceptual Model: The Intersections of Transformational, Spiritual, and Incremental Socially Innovative Leadership in Nana Asma’u’s Legacy



This model illustrates Nana Asma’u’s leadership as a dynamic intersection of three leadership paradigms: Transformational Leadership (moral inspiration), Spiritual Leadership (inner life and compassion), and Incremental Socially Innovative Leadership (gradual, context-sensitive reform). The overlapping center represents Integrated Ethical Leadership, where her faith-based education movement and reform strategies merged transformational vision, spiritual grounding, and practical innovation for sustainable societal change.

## 3. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach, focusing on an interpretive case study design (Yin, 1994) to analyze the leadership approaches of Nana Asma’u. A case study approach is suitable for exploring complex social phenomena within their historical and cultural contexts, allowing for a detailed understanding of leadership behavior, values, and outcomes. Multiple sources of evidence—historical accounts, archival materials, literary works, and previous scholarly interpretations—were consulted to ensure data triangulation. Primary texts, including *One Woman’s Jihad: Nana Asma’u, Scholar and Scribe* (Mack & Boyd, 2000) and *Educating Muslim Women* (Mack & Boyd, 2013), serve as foundational references. Thematic analysis was used to interpret textual data, identifying recurring patterns aligned with the dimensions of transformational, spiritual, and incremental leadership.

The central research question guiding this study is: “How do transformational, spiritual, and socially innovative incremental leadership styles reflect in the life and works of Nana Asma’u?” This qualitative inquiry also explores why Asma’u’s leadership evolved as a harmonious blend of these models, emphasizing moral development, community empowerment, and sustainable reform. The findings are analyzed inductively against established theoretical frameworks (Bass, 1985; Fry, 2003; Mumford, 2002), ensuring both conceptual alignment and contextual validity. The study thereby contributes to leadership

scholarship by illustrating how Asma'u's integrative leadership style embodies ethical transformation and incremental social innovation rooted in spiritual consciousness.

#### **4 Findings**

In this section various historical accounts have been consulted to explore various facets of the life of Nana Asma'u dan Fodio.

##### **4.1. Initial Life**

Nana Asma'u dan Fodio was born in Degel in the year 1793, (Mack & Boyd., 2000) to a family that holds intellectual scholarships in high esteem. The era that she was born in was marked with orthodox, superstitious beliefs wherein the education of women was either suppressed or not seen as a matter of importance. Her father Sheikh Uthman dan Fodio as a learned scholar, teacher, and reformer founded the Sokoto Caliphate that continues to this day. The word 'Fodio' means 'the learned' in the Fulani language and was the name of Asma'u's grandfather. Her father carried the name 'bin Fodio' (the son of learned).

##### **4.2. Early Life influences**

Uthman Shehu (Asma'u's father), and Asma'u's whole family lived among the Fulani clan known as the Toronkawa in the western suburbs of the Kingdom of Gobir (Mack & Boyd., 2000).

Mack & Boyd (2000) recounted her early education wherein the first ten years of Asma'u's life were stable and dedicated to scholarly study. Her family in her early & teenage years taught her Islamic philosophy behind prayer, Sufism/mysticism, legal matters, fiqh/Islamic jurisprudence, tawhid/oneness of God, Quran & Prophet's Sunna. Asma'u was strongly influenced by her father Sheikh Uthman dan Fodio who fought for women's education and criticized men and society for abandoning the rights of women. He thereby propagated education and social justice for women on Islamic principles. All this activism and reform was going on before Asma'u's birth and she would later draw inspiration from it.

When Asama'u turned eleven her people migrated to escape persecution at the hands of the Gobir kingdom, and the fight for jihad began. Decades of warfare were initiated wherein Asma'u relentlessly pursued her studies, and through her married years to Gidado dan Laima, who later became chief adviser of the Sokoto Caliphate, she bore six children to her husband. Throughout her life, she carried on with her poetic works and provided elaborate service to her community through social activism.

Asma'u died in 1864, and her later generations have included many scholars in the house she resided in with her family, which is known as "Gidan Karatu--meaning it is the home of a family where scholarship is at the center of things" (Mack & Boyd, 2000, p.13). She also was known as "uwar gari" which means "mother of all" indicating her exceptional standing in her community (Mack & Boyd, 2013, p. 200).

##### **4.3. Her Literary Works**

Nana Asma'u was a savvy author, well-qualified in Islamic teachings, and quadrilingual in Arabic, Fulfulde, Hausa, and Tamachek languages. She is recognized as an Islamic author of international repute who wrote prolifically for her sub-Saharan African Muslim community (Mack & Boyd, 2000, p.1).

Azuonye (2006) not only commemorated the literary stature of Asma'u but also recognized her as a reformist of African society. African society wherein Asma'u was born bred and led her life was reformed by her resilient efforts through her poems and social activism. She tried to correct the stereotypical understanding of the Quran by upgrading women from their low status and challenging the abhorrent practice of physical and social abuse and witchcraft (Mack & Boyd, 2013). Asma'u reaffirmed the misunderstood perceptions of her region not only through her strong character, noble family lineage, and literary works but also her continuous social activist endeavors.



Many commentators comment on the recapitalized useful role of educated women in the Fodio caliphate (Boyd 2009; Adamu, 2006). They elaborate on the literary and practical community works of Asma'u as an outstanding woman leader of her time.

Most of the syllabus designed by Asma'u is in the form of easily comprehensible and memorizable poems. These poems carry the message of the teachings of Islam, morals, ethics, history, 'Sunnah' [the mode of life of the last prophet], and the ideology of her father's movement. She, as a celebrated scribe, mystic, and scholar wrote a memorable poem in thirty couplets mentioning all one hundred and fourteen Quranic chapters. Every Quranic chapter is either mentioned explicitly or implicitly to remind people about the importance of the Quran for not only scholarly purposes but also to remember the essence of Quranic chapters in their daily lives (Boyd, 1997).

Dangana (1999) commented on the positive role of Asma'u's father with commendable leadership skills that were reflected in his daughter's upbringing as well. He educated her daughter in the best possible manner allowing her to be committed to community work. Through her literary work and teachings, Asma'u orchestrated her struggle, termed "jihad". In the book *One Woman's Jihad: Nana Asma'u Scholar & Scribe* (Mack & Boyd., 2000), Asma'u is described as a driving force for emancipating women from the darkness of stereotypical cultural ignorance to enlightened education. The times of Asma'u favored women as a kind of sex gratification tool and commodity, usually used through their fruitful years while being neglected through their later years. Both daughter and father enabled the African women to be truly educated on Quranic principles of seeking knowledge, as important as performing any other worship or fulfilling other religious obligations (Dangana, 1999). Asma'u revived this spirit of seeking knowledge in society through her sheer commitment to communal works.

#### **4.4. Mystic inclinations**

Asma'u's aim through her Sufism was to guide her pupils toward union with one true reality/God, in whatever life situations they may face. Self-absorption and mere worldly pursuits were condemned while living a simple life was taught. Through her Sufi paradigm and using her poems as a medium, she taught qualities of patience, repentance, righteousness, trust in God, and ordained destiny, and emphasized that these virtues should be inculcated to achieve salvation. While, on the other hand, she warned that jealousy, hatred, greed, and arrogance should be avoided to avoid damnation in present and eternal lives (Mack & Boyd, 2000).

In a Patriarchal society where men subjugated women, Asma'u maintained her female Muslim authority through her Qadiriyya Sufism, her literary works, and active community service (Hassan, 2023). Asma'u imbibed in women a different role of women hood who could play a positive and constructive role in building and maintaining a caliphate through 'allowance of more liberty' (Sanni, 2015).

With the Prophet's Sunna and Quran playing a pivotal role in Asma'u's Qadiriyya community, there are ongoing endeavors to teach and preach on a global scale, the importance of spiritual transcendence over materialism and practical community work.

#### **4.5. Political and Social Opinions/Actions---Yan'taru movement**

Asma'u enabled the active participation of women in seeking knowledge and acting as morally responsible persons along with fulfilling other religious duties by founding a movement known as the Yan'taru. Through her teachings, she revived the consciousness that Muslims have to uphold what is right and refrain from evil (Shehu, 2003).

Asma'u organized and trained women jujis/teachers (Mack & Boyd, 2000) acting as a team to provide education to rural masses and to facilitate the assimilation of thousands of non-Muslims into the Sokoto Caliphate through education.

Yan'taru literally meant a sisterhood network referring to a class of literate women who traveled throughout the caliphate, disseminating the instructive poems of Asma'u, among the indigenous masses. These women called jujis were conferred with a hat called "Malfa" (Mack & Boyd, 2000) after their graduation signifying their authority which is strengthened by knowledge and character over the people to whom they taught.

Asma'u's established class of literate women educators (Jujis) inculcated her educative moral principles among the masses using Asma'u's poetic works (Bawa, 2017). These jujis/women teachers provided religious advice and instructions (Usman, 2002) to the women so that they may play a better-informed role in their society. These teachers mustered a spiritual awakening among women and children (Edwin, 2016).

The lessons taught to masses comprised Quranic chapters, prayers, rituals, works of Sufi women in history, moral lessons extracted from battle victories, elegies to those who fought, and a biography of the Prophet Muhammad. Poetic works composed by Asma'u were mnemonic devices for teaching the Quran and other Sufi or moral lessons, and literacy training. Students were taught to memorize the poems and were later required to read and write the wisdom learned from these poems in their daily lives. Then those women whom jujis taught passed on the learnt pearls of wisdom to their children and families. Not only this but women were taught about daily lives as well like prayer times, dress code, and how to trade honestly while selling vegetables, farm products, or thread.

#### **4.6. Role in the History of Sociology:**

The *Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures: Methodologies, Paradigms and Sources* commemorates her services to the human community in these words:

Asma'u was also a chronicler and teacher whose texts – in Hausa, Fulfulde, Arabic, and Tamachek (the Tuareg language) – give insight into women's roles not only in the intelligentsia into which she was born but also in creating a post-jihad Islamic community. (Moosa, 2003, p. 187)

The importance of her Yan'taru movement is quoted in the *Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures: Supplement & Index*.

Promoting the education of girls remains an important thrust of Muslim women's organizations especially in areas where patriarchal authority has inclined to limit the access of girls and women to secular education. (Dunbar, 2006, p. 163)

Mack & Boyd (2013) elaborated on the origins, objectives, and mode of operation of the Yan'taru (women associates) movement which served to educate the rural Muslim women community of her times. This "sisterhood movement," as termed in *Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures: Methodologies, Paradigms, and Sources* (2003, p.187), was a network established not only to educate Muslim women about performing Islamic rituals but also to warn them about the dangers of native magical practices of Bori women (Mack & Boyd, 2000). Through her poetic writings and jujis, Asma'u countered these negative practices and educated women about family issues, health, and hygiene practices with principles derived from Tibe-Nabawi/medicine of the last Prophet (Mack & Boyd, 2000), the wondrous teachings of the Quran & Prophet's ways (Sunnah).

As quoted by Mack & Boyd (2013, p.95)

From small beginnings during the reign of Caliph Muhammad Bello, groups of women, who became known as the 'Yan Taru, the Associates, began to visit Asma'u under the leadership of representatives appointed by her. The impetus that propelled Asma'u into initiating this was the growing threat of an upsurge of Bori, the non-Islamic cult of spirit possession favored in Gobir. It is important to understand why this was considered dangerous.

Under the leadership of her brother Bello (Asma'u's half-brother), more pagans were captured and defeated, and many women who practiced witchcraft and belonged to the Bori cult were also captured. These Bori women used to be consulted for spiritual guidance and diseases.

Bello realized there was a need to appoint a woman to check this witchcraft practice and educate women in true Islamic traditions instead so that they could be safely included in their culture. Thus, Asma'u was given this extraordinary task by her brother, and the following extract in a snapshot depicts her efforts in this respect ((Mack & Boyd, 2013, pp.99-100).

Therefore, Asma'u made herself knowledgeable about the interests of women and used her intelligence to collate and corroborate the information she received to benefit the aims of the Caliphate. Thus, was she able to conceive of an organization of women with aims different from purging spirits in nocturnal ceremonies. Realizing that many rural women were captives who knew little about Islam, she sought to befriend them in the context of welcoming them into Caliphate culture. This required educating them about reformed Islam and women's rights and obligations in it. The form Asma'u's rural women's organization took had to blend satisfactorily with existing social conditions.

It can thereby be argued that the spiritual dimension in the leadership approach practiced by Asma'u and her jujis enabled Nigerian women to think more holistically and to act more responsibly in their society. Thus, orthodox stereotypical roles of both genders were challenged by a deeper and more authentic understanding of the Quran. This cognizance enhanced not only their individual and societal characters but also their mutual dealings. Jujis with Asma'u's soft poetical messages and positive communal standing thereby served as the spiritual guide to African learning communities.

#### **4.7 Intellectual Legacy and Affect and Its Relatability with the Present day leadership styles:**

One could see the results of Asma'u's Yan'Taru women's movement preparing African women to take an interest in societal welfare works. In the later years, this tradition imbibed by Asma'u in the Hausa Muslim society translated into the involvement of women in social welfare works in Nigerian society and all across the globe even to this day through online media like websites.

According to Sanni (2015, p. 348): "Women's leadership in intellectual, social, and spiritual voyages had never been lacking in the West African Sufi tradition." The same message seems to be reiterated in the writings of Mack (2017, p. 87) in his book chapter "Full Circle: Muslim Women's Education from the Maghrib to America and Back" under the sub-title, "Twenty-first-century American 'Yan Taru (Boyd and Mack 2013, Chapter 6)",

When we discuss the original students of 'Yan Taru, the focus on Asma'u's poetry should not blind us to the point of the poem's messages: the point of each work is its content, not its literary style. Thus, what the contemporary website emphasises – community service, health care, childcare – are issues that would have been major topics of instruction in the course of discussing Asma'u's poems one hundred and fifty years ago. The delivery may be different, but the product is the same.

Analyzing Asma'u's personality from the perspective of spiritual educational leadership (Riaz, & Normore, 2008), it can be said that spirituality is an integral component of her literary and communal works. Her spiritual leadership enabled herself, her jujis, and the masses whom she taught, to find deeper meaning in their lives by being more knowledgeable and morally responsible and by making a connection with a transcendental eternal source i.e. God.

Commenting on her leadership style as a social activist, it may be seen that Asma'u adopted the present-day transformational leadership style (Bass & Avolio, 1995; Homan, Boer, Voelpel, & Gutermann, 2015). She incorporated "idealized influence" from the Quran, Prophet Muhammad's mode of life (sunnah), and Qadriyya Sufi teachings; imbibed "inspirational motivation" in her disciples through her poetic works and service to her community; opted for a strategy of "intellectual stimulation" of her disciples by especially educating them in a thought-provoking manner, and lastly but not the least, provided "individualized

consideration” to masses through her network of jujis. Furthermore, Asma’u leadership style can also be commemorated as an incremental social leader (Marcy, 2015; Mahmood, 2025; Mumford, 2002) who was able to orchestrate incremental improvements in technical, financial, and physical spheres of African society.

According to Mack & Boyd, (2000, p. 181), the analogy of a pearl is appropriate to sum up her personality since her nickname was “Inji.” In the Hausa language, it is translated as “I hear,” for she used to hear people’s problems and offered them pure wise guidance. In Turkish and Sufi contexts, the word “inci”, means “pearl,” symbolizing purity, grace, and sacredness which are hallmarks of Asmau’s pious life and commendable literary and community service.

Summing it up, her luminous presence in African society as a reformer and celebrated scribe and scholar portrays a kaleidoscope of dimensions. We might call it the spiritual hues (Fry, 2003) of her educational leadership style (Riaz, & Normore, 2008), remember her transformational leadership style (Bass & Avolio, 1995), or recollect her social occurrence as an incremental social leader (Marcy, 2015; Mahmood & Aamir, 2023; Mumford, 2002). From all perspectives, Asma’u provided and practiced opportunities for the spiritual and educative growth of her learning women community. This learning of the women consequently enabled them to reflect upon their lives, values, stereotypical norms, and experiences that had figured their lives. Thereby, such women were able to redefine and replay their societal roles with a more transcendental purpose. Education accentuates not only the “objective” acquisition of knowledge but also provides a means of personal connection of a learner’s life with the eternal source of the transcendental meaning of life. Miller (2006) suggests that the transcendent purpose is an original, self-guiding verve of enlightenment that we ought not to curb. Asma’u’s literary works and her Fry, (2003) and her spiritual leadership style (therefore be seen as the most influential spiritual awakening movement for posterior Nigerian generations in particular, and a torch bearer mode of conduct that, if adopted, can be instructive on a global scale.

## **5. Discussion**

This section further explores in greater depths the three leadership styles—transformational, spiritual, and socially innovative incremental leadership—as reflected and intertwined in the remarkable leadership of Nana Asma’u. Each of these styles supports a distinct yet complementary perspective on her tactics of inspiring, guiding, and uplifting her community. Transformational leadership reflects her ability to motivate followers through vision, moral integrity, and personal influence; spiritual leadership highlights her emphasis on faith, compassion, and inner moral grounding; while socially innovative incremental leadership captures her gradual, community-based approach to social reform and education. Collectively, these perspectives reveal how Nana Asma’u’s leadership transcended conventional boundaries, integrating ethical conviction, spiritual wisdom, and practical innovation to foster sustainable and inclusive societal transformation.

### **5.1 Nana Asma’u as Transformational Leadership**

Leaders with idealized are often perceived as trustworthy and morally grounded, generating emotional promise rather than mere compliance. For instance, Nana Asma’u as transformational leaders inspired moral conviction through authenticity and service in her community. By communicating optimism and keenness, she inspired her fellow community members to align personal goals with collective objectives, thus authenticating first hypotheses. Nana Asma’u incorporated symbolic actions, storytelling, and emotionally charged communication to build a shared sense of purpose. This emotional appeal instills hope and direction, particularly in her followers, thereby confirming the second hypotheses. Transformational leaders challenged traditions, promote inquisition, and value new standpoints. Nana Asma’u generated a psychologically safe environment where her

community feel poised to express ideas without fear of disapproval. By highlighting critical thinking and encouraging autonomy, she helped followers develop their cognitive capacities and nurture a culture of continuous learning and adaptableness, thus supporting the third hypotheses. Transformational leaders act as mentors or coaches, identifying that each individual gives exclusively to the community. Nana Asma'u listened actively, provided personalized advice, and offer developmental opportunities that enrich personal and professional development to her community members especially women folk of her community thereby ratifying the fourth hypotheses. In conclusion, Nana Asma'u created a setting of inspiration and mutual growth. By integrating the four dimensions, she mobilized not only the minds but also the hearts of her followers building their potential toward a higher united perseverance.

### **5.2 Nana Asma'u as Spiritual Leader**

The model of spiritual leadership principally encompasses three core dimensions: Vision, Altruistic Love, and Hope/Faith—reinforced by the leader's inner life and resulting in *spiritual well-being*.

This shared sense of higher purpose persuades individuals beyond material rewards, connecting work with a sense of calling or service to humanity. Vision given by Nana Asma'u served not purely as a premeditated tool but as a spiritual anchor that gives significance to collective endeavors thus supporting fifth hypothesis.

Nana Asma'u expressed empathy, forgiveness, and kindness, cultivating trust and harmony in the workplace. This form of love built a psychologically safe environment in her followers. Through acts of compassion and fairness, she enhanced emotional well-being and collective morale, reducing stress and encouraging loyalty among her followers thus supporting sixth hypothesis.

The hope component of spiritual leadership reproduces leaders' trust in attaining the vision through determination and hopefulness. Determination motivates persistence despite challenges, while faith reinforces the belief that efforts will produce meaningful outcomes. Nana Asma'u with strong hope and faith fostered resilience, inspiring her followers to remain committed even under hardship confirming the seventh hypothesis.

Through a developed inner mystic life, Nana Asma'u endeavored to exemplify for her followers so that they can associate actions with values, signifying consistency and integrity thereby confirming eighth hypothesis. Spiritual leadership of Nana Asma'u promoted both spiritual survival by addressing followers' intrinsic needs for meaning and connection. She nurtured a culture of ethical behavior, compassion, and purpose—qualities increasingly recognized as vital in turbulent and uncertain environments.

In conclusion, the reflections of dimensions of spiritual leadership—vision, altruistic love, and hope/faith— by Nana Asma'u offered a holistic framework that integrated ethical leadership, personal growth, and collective well-being of her followers. By nurturing both inner life and communal purpose, she shaped sustainable community grounded in human dignity and moral responsibility.

### **5.3 Nana Asma'u as Socially Innovative Incremental Leadership**

Incremental leadership is regarded as a leadership bearing fruit of shared mental models with elites, legitimated right, protected environments, collaborative tactics, and incremental value additions. These dimensions together describe leaders who innovate *within* the system, guided by permanency, rightfulness, and gradualism. Drawing from Marcy (2015) and Mahmood (2025), incremental leadership demonstrates how lasting social progress can be achieved through consensus, adaptive continuous learning, and moral responsibility rather than commotion. It accentuates that leadership for sustainable reform must evolve gently—conserving societal truthfulness while advancing innovation step by step.

Nana Asma'u typically emerged from stable and secure environment and was reared under her father. In her formative years she was fostered in a setting of belongingness, social harmony, and respect for norms, shaping her non-disruptive leadership mindset. This confirms hypothesis number ten.

Nana Asma'u's cognition aligned with that of societal elites and general public reflecting conformity with religious and cultural norms. This alignment enabled her to work within established power structures, ensuring legitimacy. Nana Asma'u as an incremental leader relied on formally sanctioned power sources—legitimacy, coercion, and reward—to enforce gradual reforms while maintaining order and authority. This supports hypothesis number eleven.

Nana Asma'u employed collaborative implementation tactics. She worked through consensus, negotiation, and alliance-building with elites and the public. Their reforms are co-created rather than imposed, ensuring sustainability. This authenticates hypothesis number twelve.

The influence of Nana Asma'u's innovative strategies resulted in incremental value additions and social welfare reforms resulting in gradual, cumulative improvements that enhanced societal welfare for both elites and common citizens, promoting cohesion rather than disruption. The effect of Nana Asma'u's incremental innovative implementation strategies thrived in protected, stable contexts where gradual change occurred without destabilizing existing institutions. These environments under her brother and father's protective umbrella shielded her from backlash of oppressive segments of the society. This supports hypothesis number thirteen.

#### 5.4 Conclusion

In short, Nana Asma'u's efforts resulted in ethical legitimacy for a stable society. She was guided by moral responsibility, prudence, and respect for continuity with her mysticism & humanistic orientation. Her goal was a sustainable social reform through ethical engagement, not confrontation of elites and general community of her times.

Her style of incremental leadership represented a consensual, legitimacy-based approach rooted in stability, ethics, and collaboration. It contrasted with radical leadership by prioritizing small, sustainable innovations that improved social systems without disrupting them.

Summarizing it all, the three interconnected leadership styles as reflected in the leadership relic of Nana Asma'u offered unique insights into her visionary, ethical, and community-centered approach. Together, they illustrated how Asma'u combined moral inspiration, spiritual depth, and gradual social change to empower her followers and promote sustainable societal revolution.

**Table 5.5: Comparison of Key Leadership Dimensions Reflected in Nana Asma'u's Leadership**

Dimension	Transformational Leadership	Spiritual Leadership	Incremental Socially Innovative Leadership	Reflection in Nana Asma'u's Leadership
<b>Vision</b>	Inspires followers through an idealistic and moral vision.	Provides divine or transcendent sense of purpose.	Focuses on feasible, long-term societal improvements.	Combined moral reform with religious education and empowerment of women.
<b>Motivation</b>	Inspires beyond self-interest;	Instills faith and meaning	Motivates through collaboration and	Encouraged followers to align

Dimension	Transformational Leadership	Spiritual Leadership	Incremental Socially Innovative Leadership	Reflection in Nana Asma'u's Leadership
	promotes shared goals.	in work; emphasizes calling.	community engagement.	personal growth with communal service.
<b>Ethical Foundation</b>	Centers on moral integrity and fairness.	Rooted in compassion, altruism, and spiritual ethics.	Aligns with societal norms while gradually enhancing justice and equity.	Promoted education as moral and spiritual duty, enhancing social harmony.
<b>Approach to Change</b>	Seeks transformation through moral inspiration.	Seeks transformation through faith and inner life.	Advocates gradual and contextually sensitive social innovation.	Brought reform within cultural and religious frameworks without conflict.
<b>Outcome</b>	Empowered, value-driven followers.	Spiritually fulfilled and cohesive communities.	Sustainable, incremental reforms in social structure.	Created enduring legacy of female literacy and spiritual empowerment.

The above table 5.5 provides a comparative overview of how transformational, spiritual, and incremental socially innovative leadership converge in the leadership model of Nana Asma'u. Each dimension contributes a unique strength: transformational leadership fosters moral vision and inspiration; spiritual leadership grounds ethical practice in faith and compassion; and incremental leadership ensures sustainable, culturally sensitive progress. Collectively, these styles demonstrate how Asma'u balanced moral conviction with practical wisdom, empowering her community through education and ethical guidance. Her leadership exemplifies a multidimensional approach where ethical integrity, faith, and gradual reform merge to create enduring social transformation.

Nana Asma'u's leadership exemplifies a timeless integration of transformational motivation, spiritual depth, and incremental innovation. Her moral clarity, educational reform, and compassionate service present a holistic model for ethical leadership that transcends eras and cultures. In synthesizing inspiration, spirituality, and pragmatic reform, she offers modern leaders a blueprint for driving positive change that is both sustainable and humane.

Building on these comparative dimensions, the subsequent discussion delves deeper into how Nana Asma'u's leadership demonstrates an intricate interplay between moral authority, spiritual insight, and incremental innovation. It examines how her methods not only transformed individual lives but also redefined social and cultural norms within her historical context. By integrating the moral drive of transformational leadership, the compassion of spiritual leadership, and the pragmatism of incremental leadership, Asma'u established a leadership model that remains profoundly relevant to contemporary issues of ethics, education, and inclusive social reform.

## 6. Limitations

This research, while comprehensive in theoretical and historical scope, is limited by its dependence on secondary historical sources, which may reflect interpretive biases of previous scholars. The absence of firsthand oral testimonies from Asma'u's immediate context constrains the empirical verification of inferred leadership behaviors. Additionally, the

study's focus on one historical figure limits generalizability across cultural and temporal settings. Since the framework combines three leadership models, theoretical overlap may challenge precise attribution of behaviors to specific paradigms. Finally, linguistic translations of Asma'u's poetry and writings may affect the interpretation of nuanced meanings, especially regarding her spiritual symbolism and educational intent.

#### 7. **Future Research Directions**

Future research could expand this work through comparative case studies involving other historical or contemporary female leaders who exhibit similar integrative leadership traits. Cross-cultural analyses may further validate the conceptual framework linking transformational, spiritual, and incremental leadership. Empirical studies employing content or discourse analysis of Asma'u's original texts in Hausa, Arabic, or Fulfulde could deepen understanding of her leadership messages. Additionally, modern leadership development programs could adapt Asma'u's ethical and educational principles to evaluate their relevance in contemporary organizational, societal and educational contexts. A quantitative approach, such as survey-based analysis using constructs derived from this study, may also be employed to test the combined model's applicability in modern institutional settings—bridging historical insight with current leadership practice.

#### 8. **Linking Findings with Modern Leadership Challenges**

In today's rapidly changing world, leaders face multilayered challenges such as ethical crises, deteriorating trust in organizations, gender inequality, and cultural divergence. The integrated leadership approach typified by Nana Asma'u offers a relevant framework to circumnavigate these challenges. Her transformational qualities establish how vision and moral belief can reestablish trust and inspire collective resolve. Her spiritual foundation offers resilience and ethical clarity in the face of moral dilemmas, while her incremental approach teaches compliance—encouraging reform through understanding, not disturbance. In modern organizational and societal milieus, this triadic model of leadership can help nurture ethical workplaces, inclusive societies, and socially responsible authority.

#### 9. **Implications for Contemporary Leaders and Educators**

Following are key takeaways for contemporary leaders and educators from this case study approach.

1. **Ethical Integrity and Vision:** Modern leaders can follow Asma'u's ability to combine ethical vision with practical action, ensuring that moral values escort innovation and decision-making.
2. **Gender Inclusion and Empowerment:** Asma'u's work highlights the significance of women's education and leadership as fundamental to community development—a lasting lesson for organizations pursuing gender equality.
3. **Spiritual Resilience:** Leaders and educators should cultivate inner reflection, empathy, and faith in purpose, enhancing well-being and ethical foundation in leadership practice.
4. **Incremental Social Innovation:** Sustainable reform is often gradual. Leaders must embrace patience and collaboration when implementing long-term change.
5. **Cross-Cultural Learning:** Asma'u's model demonstrates how indigenous and faith-based leadership customs can apprise modern leadership treatise, offering culturally inclusive methodologies to revolutionary transformation.

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