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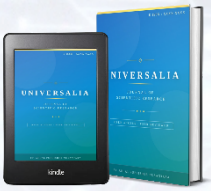

Strengthening Islamic Education Management Through Principal Leadership: A Study of Quality Improvement in Madrasah

Ahlal Kamal
Universitas Islam An Nur Lampung, Indonesia
ahlal.pkl@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study examines the role of principal leadership in strengthening Islamic education management to improve the quality of madrasah education. The quality of Islamic educational institutions depends not only on curriculum adequacy but also on the effectiveness of managerial and leadership processes. Using a qualitative descriptive research approach with data collected through interviews, observation, and documentation at three madrasah in Lampung Province, this study analyzes how principal leadership styles—particularly transformational and instructional leadership—correlate with improvements in educational management functions including planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling (POAC). Findings reveal that principals who apply transformational leadership significantly improve teacher performance, institutional discipline, and academic achievement. Key factors identified include clear vision-setting, democratic decision-making, and consistent supervision. The study concludes that effective Islamic education management requires an integration of spiritual values with modern managerial competencies, and that principal professional development programs must be prioritized as a strategic policy in improving madrasah quality in Indonesia.

Keywords: *Islamic education management, principal leadership, madrasah quality, transformational leadership, educational improvement*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji peran kepemimpinan kepala madrasah dalam memperkuat manajemen pendidikan Islam guna meningkatkan mutu lembaga pendidikan madrasah. Kualitas lembaga pendidikan Islam tidak hanya bergantung pada kecukupan kurikulum, tetapi juga pada efektivitas proses manajerial dan kepemimpinan. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan penelitian deskriptif kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi pada tiga madrasah di Provinsi Lampung. Penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana gaya kepemimpinan kepala madrasah—terutama kepemimpinan transformasional dan instruksional—berkorelasi dengan peningkatan fungsi manajemen pendidikan yang meliputi perencanaan, pengorganisasian, penggerakan, dan pengendalian (POAC). Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kepala madrasah yang menerapkan kepemimpinan transformasional secara signifikan mampu meningkatkan kinerja guru, disiplin kelembagaan, dan prestasi akademik. Faktor kunci yang teridentifikasi mencakup

penetapan visi yang jelas, pengambilan keputusan yang demokratis, dan supervisi yang konsisten. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa manajemen pendidikan Islam yang efektif memerlukan integrasi nilai-nilai spiritual dengan kompetensi manajerial modern, dan bahwa program pengembangan profesional kepala madrasah harus diprioritaskan sebagai kebijakan strategis dalam peningkatan mutu madrasah di Indonesia.

Keywords: manajemen pendidikan Islam, kepemimpinan kepala madrasah, kualitas madrasah, kepemimpinan transformasional, peningkatan mutu pendidikan

1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic education management (Manajemen Pendidikan Islam) plays a critical role in shaping the quality and effectiveness of madrasah institutions in Indonesia. As educational demands continue to evolve in the 21st century, madrasah are expected not only to transmit Islamic knowledge and values but also to deliver academic competencies that are competitive at the national level. This dual responsibility places considerable pressure on educational managers, particularly principals, to adopt effective and adaptive leadership approaches.

Indonesia is home to more than 82,000 madrasah at various levels, making it one of the largest Islamic educational systems in the world (Kemenag RI, 2023). Despite this scale, many madrasah continue to face challenges related to educational quality, teacher competency, administrative management, and institutional governance. Research by Mulyasa (2021) indicates that principal leadership is among the most influential factors determining the quality of school management, outweighing even curriculum design in its practical impact on institutional performance.

The concept of Islamic education management integrates universal management principles—planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling—with Islamic values such as amanah (trustworthiness), shura (consultation), and adl (justice). These values are not merely ethical supplements but serve as foundational principles that guide decision-making, resource allocation, and institutional culture (Fatah, 2019). When management practices are grounded in these principles, educational institutions tend to demonstrate higher levels of internal cohesion, staff motivation, and student achievement.

However, there remains a significant gap between theoretical frameworks of Islamic education management and their practical implementation in madrasah settings. Many principals

lack formal training in educational management and rely on informal or ad hoc approaches to leadership. This gap is particularly pronounced in madrasah located in rural or semi-urban areas, where access to professional development resources is limited (Hasibuan, 2022).

This study therefore aims to explore how principal leadership contributes to the strengthening of Islamic education management in madrasah in Lampung Province. By examining the leadership styles employed by principals and their effects on key management outcomes, this research seeks to contribute to both scholarly understanding and practical policy development in Indonesian Islamic education.

The research questions guiding this study are: (1) What leadership styles are most prevalent among madrasah principals in the study area? (2) How do these leadership styles affect the implementation of educational management functions? (3) What factors mediate the relationship between principal leadership and madrasah quality outcomes?

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design, which is appropriate for investigating complex social phenomena within their natural contexts (Creswell, 2018). The qualitative approach allows for an in-depth exploration of principal leadership practices and their effects on educational management, capturing nuances that quantitative methods may overlook.

The research was conducted at three madrasah tsanawiyah (MTs) located in Lampung Province, selected through purposive sampling based on variation in institutional size, geographic location (urban, peri-urban, and rural), and accreditation status. This variation ensures that findings are not confined to a single institutional type and can offer broader insights into the relationship between leadership and management quality.

Data were collected through three primary methods: (1) semi-structured in-depth interviews with principals, vice-principals, teachers, and selected administrative staff; (2) non-participant observation of school management activities including staff meetings, classroom supervision, and administrative procedures; and (3) document analysis of school planning documents, performance evaluation reports, and institutional policy statements. A total of 24 interviews were conducted, each lasting between 45 and 90 minutes.

Data analysis followed the thematic analysis framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2019), comprising six phases: familiarization with data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Member checking and peer debriefing were employed to enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of findings. All data were anonymized to protect participant confidentiality.

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the institutional research committee of Universitas Islam An Nur Lampung. Participants were provided with informed consent forms and were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without consequence.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Dominant Leadership Styles in Madrasah

The findings reveal that transformational leadership is the most prevalent style among the three principals studied, though with varying degrees of application. Principal A, who leads an urban madrasah with A-accreditation, demonstrated highly consistent transformational leadership behaviors including inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration of teacher needs. Principal B, heading a peri-urban madrasah, adopted a hybrid approach combining transformational and transactional elements. Principal C, in a rural setting, relied more heavily on traditional or instructional leadership approaches.

These findings are consistent with those of Hidayat and Machali (2020), who found that transformational leadership is positively correlated with organizational commitment and academic performance in Indonesian Islamic schools. The variation observed across sites, however, underscores the importance of contextual factors—including community expectations, teacher educational background, and institutional history—in shaping how leadership styles are expressed.

A distinctive finding of this study is that all three principals drew explicitly on Islamic values in their leadership discourse. Terms such as amanah, shura, and tawadhu (humility) featured prominently in interviews as guiding principles. This integration of spiritual and managerial frameworks appears to serve as a legitimizing mechanism for leadership authority and a source of intrinsic motivation for staff.

3.2 Effects on Educational Management Functions

The study examined the four core management functions—planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling (POAC)—and found notable differences in how each was enacted across the three madrasah.

In the area of planning, the urban madrasah demonstrated a comprehensive and participatory annual planning process in which teachers and administrative staff contributed to the development of institutional goals, program targets, and resource allocation plans. The principal facilitated this process using a visioning workshop approach aligned with the school's strategic plan. By contrast, planning in the rural madrasah was largely top-down and reactive, driven by government directives rather than internal institutional vision.

Organizing was most effective in the site led by Principal B, who implemented a clear division of responsibilities through a formal organizational chart and job description system. This structure reduced ambiguity in role expectations and was associated with higher levels of administrative efficiency. The absence of such structures in the rural site contributed to role overlap and occasional confusion among staff.

In terms of actuating, transformational leadership directly supported teacher motivation through recognition practices, professional development opportunities, and empowerment in classroom-level decision-making. Teachers at the urban madrasah reported higher levels of job satisfaction and autonomy compared to their counterparts at the rural site.

Controlling functions—including academic supervision, performance evaluation, and feedback mechanisms—were most systematically implemented at the urban madrasah. Principal A conducted structured classroom observations quarterly and provided written feedback to teachers, creating a culture of continuous improvement. This practice aligns with instructional leadership theory, which emphasizes the principal's role as a curriculum and instructional leader (Bush, 2020).

3.3 Mediating Factors in Leadership-Quality Relationship

Several mediating factors were identified that influence the relationship between principal leadership and madrasah quality outcomes. First, teacher receptiveness to leadership emerged as a critical variable. In madrasah where teachers held higher levels of formal education and had exposure to professional development programs, transformational leadership was more readily

embraced and operationalized. Second, community trust in the principal's religious authority served as a social capital resource that facilitated institutional change and parent engagement. Third, available resources—including budget, facilities, and administrative support—moderated the extent to which leadership vision could be translated into management practice.

These findings suggest that principal leadership, while essential, does not operate in isolation. Effective Islamic education management requires a supportive ecosystem comprising qualified teachers, engaged communities, adequate resources, and enabling government policies. The study's findings therefore have implications not only for principal leadership development but also for systemic policy reform in Indonesian madrasah education.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that principal leadership is a central determinant of Islamic education management quality in madrasah. Principals who apply transformational leadership—grounded in Islamic ethical values—are more effective in implementing comprehensive management functions and in fostering institutional cultures that support continuous improvement. The integration of Islamic principles such as amanah, shura, and adl with modern management competencies represents a distinctive and productive approach to educational governance in Islamic educational contexts.

The study identifies three key implications for policy and practice. First, pre-service and in-service training programs for madrasah principals should explicitly incorporate Islamic management frameworks alongside conventional educational leadership theory. Second, government accreditation and quality assurance systems should evaluate not only academic outputs but also the quality of management processes and leadership practices. Third, community engagement mechanisms should be strengthened to leverage social capital as a resource for institutional quality improvement.

Future research should extend these findings through longitudinal designs and larger samples to establish more robust causal relationships between leadership, management, and quality outcomes. Quantitative methods, including structural equation modeling, may be particularly valuable in testing the mediating and moderating relationships identified in this qualitative study.

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Review artikel

Artikel berjudul Strengthening Islamic Education Management Through Principal Leadership: A Study of Quality Improvement in Madrasah membahas pentingnya kepemimpinan kepala madrasah dalam meningkatkan mutu pendidikan Islam. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan pengumpulan data melalui wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi pada tiga madrasah di Provinsi Lampung.

Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan transformasional

mampu meningkatkan kinerja guru, kedisiplinan, prestasi akademik, serta efektivitas manajemen pendidikan. Penelitian juga menekankan bahwa nilai-nilai Islam seperti amanah, syura, dan adil perlu

dipadukan dengan kemampuan manajerial modern agar kualitas madrasah semakin baik.

Menurut saya, artikel ini mudah dipahami karena penyusunannya sistematis dan didukung data lapangan. Namun, penelitian hanya dilakukan pada tiga madrasah sehingga hasilnya belum dapat mewakili seluruh madrasah di Indonesia. Secara keseluruhan, artikel ini memberikan informasi yang bermanfaat dan dapat menjadi referensi bagi pengembangan manajemen pendidikan Islam.

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