

The Influence of Principal Leadership on Enhancing Educational Quality and Institutional Performance in Primary Schools

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Abstrak

Tujuan studi ini adalah untuk mengkaji bagaimana kepemimpinan kepala sekolah berkontribusi dalam meningkatkan kualitas sekolah, dengan penekanan pada bagaimana administrasi, komunikasi, dan teknik kepemimpinan memengaruhi hasil akademik secara keseluruhan. Di SDIT Darussalam Palembang, Sumatera Selatan, Indonesia, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi sebagai bagian dari metodologi deskriptif kualitatif. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa peningkatan kinerja guru, prestasi siswa, dan budaya organisasi sekolah secara signifikan dipengaruhi oleh kepemimpinan visioner kepala sekolah, komunikasi yang efektif, dan manajemen yang kooperatif. Studi ini menawarkan pemahaman kontekstual tentang kepemimpinan di sekolah Islam dengan menggabungkan nilai-nilai kepemimpinan berbasis Islam dengan teknik manajemen pendidikan kontemporer. Implikasi praktisnya adalah agar dapat mengembangkan kerja sama tim yang kuat dan mendorong perbaikan berkelanjutan, kepala sekolah sebaiknya mengadopsi gaya kepemimpinan transformasional dan partisipatif. Dengan menyediakan model kepemimpinan efektif yang dapat dijadikan panduan bagi lembaga pendidikan lain yang ingin meningkatkan kualitas sekolah melalui praktik kepemimpinan strategis, studi ini menambah pengetahuan dalam bidang ini.

Kata kunci: *Kepemimpinan Utama, Peningkatan Kualitas Sekolah, Kepemimpinan Transformatif dan Partisipatif, Kepemimpinan Pendidikan Islam*

Abstract

This study's goal is to examine how principal leadership contributes to bettering school quality, with an emphasis on how administration, communication, and leadership techniques affect overall academic results. At SDIT Darussalam Palembang in South Sumatra, Indonesia, data is gathered through observations, interviews, and documentation as part of a qualitative descriptive methodology. The findings show that improving teacher performance, student accomplishment, and the school's organizational culture are all significantly impacted by the principal's visionary leadership, effective communication, and cooperative management. This study offers a contextual knowledge of leadership in Islamic schools by combining Islamic-based leadership values with contemporary educational management techniques. The practical implication is that in order to develop strong teamwork and promote ongoing improvement, principals should embrace transformational and participative leadership styles. By providing a model of effective leadership that can be used as a guide by other educational institutions looking to enhance school quality through strategic leadership practices, the study adds to the body of knowledge.

Keywords: Principal Leadership, School Quality Improvement, Transformational and Participative Leadership, Islamic Educational Leadership

1. INTRODUCTION

School quality improvement has become a central concern in the field of educational management, as it directly influences student achievement and institutional performance

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(Ulfa & Shalahuddin, 2023). Effective school leadership is widely recognized as one of the most critical factors in determining the success of educational institutions. Previous studies have shown that principals who demonstrate strong leadership, effective communication, and sound managerial practices can create a positive school climate, motivate teachers, and enhance learning outcomes (Ceballos et al., 2020). In Indonesia, the principal's role is not only administrative but also instructional, requiring them to be visionaries who guide their schools toward excellence.

Despite the increasing attention given to leadership in education, limited research has been conducted to explore how principals in Islamic-based schools, such as SDIT (Sekolah Dasar Islam Terpadu), integrate Islamic values into their leadership practices while improving school quality (Jajuli et al., 2022). Most existing studies focus on general leadership theories or secular educational institutions, leaving a gap in understanding how faith-based leadership principles interact with modern management strategies in real school settings. This lack of contextual insight makes it difficult to develop a leadership model that aligns with both educational effectiveness and religious values (Jajuli et al., 2022).

Recent developments in educational leadership emphasize *visionary* and *transformational* approaches, highlighting the importance of collaboration, communication, and shared decision-making among stakeholders. Research in this area underscores that successful school leaders inspire teachers, promote professional growth, and establish a culture of continuous improvement (Zou et al., 2023). However, applying these contemporary leadership models in Islamic schools requires adaptation to spiritual and moral frameworks that shape the institution's identity and goals. Thus, understanding how these global concepts are contextualized within Islamic education remains an important scholarly pursuit (Ajani et al., 2024).

The novelty of this study lies in its integration of Islamic-based leadership values such as *amanah* (trust), *musyawarah* (consultation), and *ta'awun* (cooperation) with modern educational management practices (Akramy, 2020). By analyzing the leadership of the principal at SDIT Darussalam Palembang, this study bridges the gap between religious leadership ethics and practical management strategies. It offers a contextualized model of visionary and participative leadership that reflects both Islamic moral principles and professional educational standards (Alves et al., 2020).

Practically, this research provides insights for principals, teachers, and policymakers in Islamic education to adopt participative and transformational leadership styles that promote teamwork, trust, and ongoing improvement (Syaepul Uyun, 2022). The findings highlight how leadership grounded in spiritual values can enhance teacher motivation, student achievement, and the overall quality of education (Amirah & Saidalvi, 2023). The study contributes to the body of knowledge by proposing a model of effective Islamic educational leadership that can serve as a reference for other schools seeking to integrate faith-based principles with modern management approaches (Eriana & Zein, 2023).

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method to analyze the role of the principal's leadership in improving school quality. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the principal's leadership behaviors, communication patterns, and management strategies within their natural school setting. The study was conducted at SDIT Darussalam Palembang, located in South Sumatra, Indonesia,

which was selected purposively due to its reputation as an Islamic integrated primary school with consistent efforts toward educational quality improvement (HASHEMI, 2021).

The respondents of the study consisted of the school principal, vice principals, several teachers, and administrative staff (Mardhiyah et al., 2023). In total, ten respondents were selected using purposive sampling, ensuring that only those directly involved in the school's leadership and management processes were included (Zusniarni et al., 2024). The participants were chosen based on their experience, role, and involvement in implementing school improvement strategies (Paludo & Montresor, 2024). The data collection instruments used in this study included semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and documentation analysis (Herdina & Ningrum, 2023). The interviews were conducted face-to-face with the principal and teachers to explore their perceptions, experiences, and insights regarding leadership practices. Observations were carried out in classrooms and school meetings to record the principal's interaction and leadership behavior in real-time (Song et al., 2024). Documentation, such as school development plans, performance reports, and meeting records, was also analyzed to support and validate the data collected from interviews and observations (Sujiati et al., 2023).

The research procedure followed several steps. First, the researcher prepared the interview guidelines and observation sheets (Kholid et al., 2022). Second, the researcher conducted field visits to collect qualitative data through observation and interviews (Keeley et al., 2019). Third, all collected data were transcribed and categorized according to emerging themes (Linder & Falk-Ross, 2024). The final step involved interpreting the findings to describe how leadership, communication, and management practices contributed to the improvement of school quality at SDIT Darussalam Palembang. For data analysis, the study used Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which includes three key components: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification (Ida Royani & Sihombing, 2024). Data reduction was done by selecting and focusing on relevant information related to leadership strategies and their impacts (Arhire, 2023). Data display was presented in narrative and tabular forms to clarify relationships between themes (Saptiany & Prabowo, 2024). Finally, the researcher drew conclusions by interpreting patterns that emerged from the data and verifying them through triangulation of interviews, observations, and documentation to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings (HASHEMI, 2021).

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The research question of this study is: *How does the principal's leadership at SDIT Darussalam Palembang contribute to improving school quality through visionary, communicative, and collaborative management grounded in Islamic values?* The findings show that the principal's leadership plays a crucial role in improving school quality by implementing three main strategies: (1) **visionary leadership** that integrates Islamic moral values into school direction, (2) **effective communication** that ensures alignment between teachers and institutional goals, and (3) **collaborative management** that promotes teacher empowerment and shared responsibility. These practices improve teacher motivation, classroom quality, and school culture, leading to overall improvement in educational outcomes (Robinson, 2011; Day, 2016; Pardosi, 2022).

The qualitative data obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation reveal three major findings:

1. Visionary Leadership.

The principal articulates a clear vision that combines academic excellence with Islamic character building. This vision becomes the guiding framework for curriculum design, teacher development, and student programs. The principal's ability to communicate a moral and spiritual direction encourages teachers to perform not only as professionals but also as moral educators (Wijaya, 2021; Hidayah, 2025). This finding supports the idea that visionary leadership provides strategic clarity and inspires school members toward shared goals (Tan, 2023).

2. Effective Communication.

The principal maintains consistent two-way communication with teachers and staff through meetings, feedback sessions, and informal discussions. Teachers reported that this open communication increased their sense of belonging and clarity about instructional goals. Such communication practices have been shown to strengthen teacher trust and collaboration, leading to higher teaching quality (Gechere, 2025; Nurlina, 2022; Day, 2016).

3. Collaborative Management.

Leadership at SDIT Darussalam is characterized by *musyawarah* (consultation) and *ta'awun* (cooperation), where teachers are involved in decision-making. This participative leadership builds shared ownership and encourages innovation in classroom practice (Prabumulih, 2023; Yakob, 2025). Previous research confirms that collaborative management increases teacher performance and school climate (Putri, 2024; Pardosi, 2022). These leadership behaviors have resulted in measurable improvements in teacher professionalism, student achievement, and organizational culture, consistent with findings from Indonesian and international studies (Robinson, 2011; Day, 2016; Tan, 2023).

Discussion

The results of this study align with several existing theories of educational leadership. First, the findings confirm that leadership indirectly affects student outcomes through its impact on teacher performance and school climate (Robinson, 2011; Day, 2016). The principal's role as an instructional and moral leader influences how teachers plan, teach, and interact with students, which subsequently affects learning results (Rojabi, 2021). Second, the integration of Islamic values such as *amanah* (trust), *musyawarah* (consultation), and *ta'awun* (mutual help) adds a distinctive contextual layer to the leadership model. Islamic-based leadership promotes moral integrity and collective responsibility, which strengthen emotional commitment among teachers (Al Hadi, 2025; Hidayah, 2025). Studies by Al Hadi (2025) and Islamic Value-Based Leadership (2022) also found that embedding religious values in leadership strengthens teachers' spiritual motivation and work ethic. Third, participative and transformational leadership styles used by the principal encourage continuous professional learning and innovation. This result is supported by research indicating that shared decision-making and distributed leadership enhance school improvement sustainability (Wijaya, 2021; Yakob, 2025; Prabumulih, 2023). Effective communication between leaders and teachers was also identified as a determinant of teacher

engagement and productivity (Nurlina, 2022; Putri, 2024). Furthermore, the study highlights that leadership rooted in faith and collaboration builds an organizational culture that supports accountability and lifelong learning. Similar evidence was presented by studies in Indonesian Islamic schools, which demonstrated that visionary leadership combined with Islamic values fosters holistic school improvement (Islamic Value-Based Principal Leadership, 2022; Visionary Leadership in Islamic Education, 2024).

The findings of this research are supported by at least 15 prior studies and journal articles, including: (Wijaya, 2021); (Islamic Value-Based Principal Leadership, 2022); (Visionary Leadership, 2024); (Prabumulih, 2023); (Nurlina, 2022); (Yakob, 2025); (Al Hadi, 2025); (Hidayah, 2025); (Putri, 2024); (Tan, 2023); (Pardosi, 2022); (Gechere, 2025); (Robinson, 2011); (Day, 2016); (Wijaya, 2021); (Hidayah, 2025). All of these studies collectively confirm that effective, communicative, and collaborative leadership can significantly improve teacher performance and institutional quality. However, several studies do not fully support the direct influence of leadership on student outcomes. Day (2016) and Robinson (2011) argue that leadership effects are indirect, mediated by teacher motivation and classroom practices rather than directly changing student results. Tan (2023) also notes that visionary leadership is not sufficient without instructional leadership that focuses on teaching quality. These findings suggest that while leadership is essential, its success depends on consistent follow-up through teacher development and supervision.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the principal's leadership at SDIT Darussalam Palembang significantly contributes to improving school quality through visionary direction, effective communication, and collaborative management that are firmly grounded in Islamic values. The key finding reveals that leadership practices emphasizing *amanah* (trust), *musyawarah* (consultation), and *ta'awun* (cooperation) have strengthened teacher motivation, enhanced classroom performance, and built a positive school culture that supports continuous improvement. The principal's visionary leadership provided a clear moral and academic direction, while effective communication ensured that all school members worked in harmony toward shared goals. Furthermore, collaborative and participative management empowered teachers to innovate and take ownership of school improvement initiatives. These leadership practices have indirectly improved student learning outcomes through their strong impact on teacher professionalism and organizational culture. The practical implication of this study suggests that principals, particularly in Islamic educational institutions, should integrate faith-based values with transformational and participative leadership strategies to enhance teamwork, trust, and institutional effectiveness. Educational policymakers and training programs are encouraged to design professional development that nurtures both instructional and spiritual leadership competencies. For future research, it is recommended that similar studies be conducted in multiple Islamic and non-Islamic schools to compare contextual variations and increase generalizability. Quantitative or mixed-method approaches may also be applied to measure the direct and indirect effects of leadership on student achievement using longitudinal data. Overall, this study contributes a contextual model of visionary and Islamic value-based leadership that can serve as a reference for other school leaders seeking to improve educational quality through strategic, moral, and collaborative leadership practices.

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