

# The Role of Principal Leadership and the Implementation of Strategic Planning in Improving Learning Quality: A Qualitative Study at MI Mardhatillah Tanjung Marbu, Rambutan District

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## Abstrak

Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mendeskripsikan bagaimana kepemimpinan kepala sekolah dan pelaksanaan perencanaan strategis dapat meningkatkan kualitas hasil belajar di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) di Kecamatan Rambutan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis deskriptif. Subjek penelitian ini meliputi kepala sekolah, guru, dan staf pendidikan di MI Mardhatillah Tanjung Marbu, yang terletak di Kecamatan Rambutan, Kabupaten Banyuasin. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan analisis dokumen, kemudian dianalisis secara tematik melalui reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepala sekolah memegang peran penting dalam meningkatkan hasil belajar, terutama melalui kepemimpinan yang visioner, partisipatif, dan motivasional. Selain itu, pelaksanaan perencanaan strategis memberikan dampak positif terhadap pengelolaan program pendidikan, pengembangan kompetensi guru, dan efektivitas pelaksanaan pembelajaran. Kolaborasi antara kepemimpinan kepala sekolah dan pelaksanaan perencanaan strategis terbukti menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang positif serta memengaruhi peningkatan hasil belajar siswa.

**Kata kunci:** Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah, Kualitas Pembelajaran, MI, Penelitian Kualitatif, Perencanaan Strategis

## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to describe how school principal leadership and the implementation of strategic planning can improve the quality of learning outcomes at Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah (MI) in the Rambutan District. This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive type. The subjects of this study included the principal, teachers, and educational staff at MI Mardhatillah Tanjung Marbu, located in Rambutan District, Banyuasin Regency. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis, and then analyzed thematically through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings of this study show that the principal plays a crucial role in improving learning outcomes, particularly through visionary, participatory, and motivational leadership. In addition, the implementation of strategic planning has a positive impact on the management of educational programs, teachers' skill development, and the effectiveness of teaching implementation. The collaboration between the principal's leadership and strategic planning implementation has been proven to create a positive learning environment and influence the improvement of students' learning outcomes.

**Keywords:** Principal Leadership, Strategic Planning, Learning Quality, MI, Qualitative Research.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Education constitutes a fundamental pillar for national advancement, serving as a strategic instrument for shaping human capital and societal progress. Within this framework, the quality of students' learning outcomes represents a principal benchmark for evaluating the effectiveness and success of educational institutions (Susanto & Nanda, 2025;González

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Del Campo et al., 2020; Song & Song, 2023). The attainment of such quality necessitates the presence of a principal who possesses strong managerial competence and the capacity to formulate and execute a coherent and systematically structured strategic plan.

The role of the principal is particularly decisive in determining instructional quality. A leader endowed with a clear vision and an inspiring leadership orientation is capable of mobilizing teachers and staff toward the collective realization of predetermined educational objectives (Palah et al., 2022; Maisyaroh et al., 2024). Effective principal leadership also fosters a conducive organizational climate in which all stakeholders feel actively engaged in the continuous improvement of educational standards. As emphasized by Fadillah (2024), supportive leadership significantly contributes to strengthening collaborative efforts in enhancing learning quality.

The contemporary educational paradigm, which grants greater institutional autonomy to madrasahs, requires principals to strengthen their managerial competencies across various domains. This autonomy demands alignment between institutional programs and the established vision and mission of the madrasah. Strategic planning, as conceptualized by Nasution (2023) provides organizational direction by clarifying priorities and guiding decision-making processes through rational and systematic analysis. Effective implementation of strategic planning facilitates optimal resource utilization, continuous monitoring, and periodic evaluation of educational performance.

However, empirical realities reveal persistent disparities in learning quality among madrasahs, particularly in Rambutan District. While certain institutions demonstrate notable academic progress, others continue to face structural challenges, including limited facilities, diminished teacher motivation, and weak execution of strategic programs. Such variations reflect uneven effectiveness in principal leadership and strategic planning implementation across institutions (Al-Zaskhia, 2024). In response to this phenomenon, the present study seeks to examine more comprehensively how principal leadership and strategic planning implementation contribute to improving students' learning quality at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah (MI) level in Rambutan District. Employing a qualitative approach, this research aims to explore processes, strategies, and challenges from the perspectives of educational stakeholders themselves.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### ***2.1 Principal Leadership***

#### *Concept of Leadership*

Etymologically, the term "leadership" derives from the word "leader," signifying the act of guiding, directing, influencing, and initiating action. Leadership encompasses the capacity to inspire others, set direction, and mobilize collective efforts toward shared objectives. Effective leadership enables subordinates to perform at optimal levels, thereby facilitating the efficient and successful attainment of organizational goals (Ningsih, 2024). Leadership is inherently dynamic and adaptive. As noted by Nofrialdi et al. (2023), leaders must continuously respond to evolving environmental conditions and organizational dynamics. Thus, leadership transcends positional authority; it represents an ongoing process of influence, exemplification, and adaptability in pursuit of collective achievement.

#### *The Principal as Educational Leader*

The madrasah principal occupies a pivotal role as both educational leader and institutional manager. According to Wibowo (2020), the principal functions as a central controller within the institution, influencing teachers and staff both directly and indirectly to enhance educational quality. The term “principal,” as elaborated by (López-Morales et al., 2023) denotes the head of an educational institution responsible for managing teaching and learning processes. Similarly, Latifah (2022) emphasizes the principal’s role as a role model whose conduct and decisions shape institutional culture. The success of a school is therefore closely intertwined with the effectiveness of its principal’s leadership.

### *Types and Styles of Leadership*

Leadership type refers to the broader pattern of a leader’s approach, while leadership style pertains to the specific behaviors employed to influence subordinates (Rahayu et al., 2022). According to Paul Hersey and Kenneth Blanchard, leadership style is influenced by value systems, trust in subordinates, leadership tendencies, and situational security. These factors collectively shape how leaders adapt their behavior in diverse organizational contexts.

### *Functions of Principal Leadership*

Drawing upon the framework proposed by (Vargas et al., 2020) leadership encompasses five principal operational functions:

- 1) Instructive Function – A directive, one-way communication process in which the leader specifies tasks, procedures, timelines, and locations to ensure effective execution.
- 2) Consultative Function – A reciprocal process in which leaders solicit feedback and input before and during decision implementation to enhance decision quality.
- 3) Participative Function – Often associated with democratic leadership, this function involves active subordinate participation in decision-making and program execution, fostering shared ownership.
- 4) Delegation Function – The transfer of authority and responsibility to subordinates while maintaining overall accountability, thereby promoting efficiency and professional growth.
- 5) Control Function – Encompassing supervision, coordination, guidance, and monitoring to ensure that organizational objectives are achieved optimally (Jaya et al., 2025)

Collectively, these functions underscore the multidimensional responsibilities of principals in educational leadership.

### *Implementation of Strategic Planning*

Strategic planning constitutes a systematic process for defining long-term objectives and determining appropriate strategies for their achievement. As articulated by John M. Bryson, strategic planning provides structured guidance for organizational direction and priority setting. Effective implementation requires strong stakeholder commitment. The principal plays a central role in empowering teachers, staff, parents, and school committees to collaborate in executing strategic initiatives. As highlighted by Hanafi and Hartati (2024), participatory engagement strengthens collective responsibility and fosters a positive learning environment.

## **2.2 Quality of Students’ Learning Outcomes**

According to Ministry of National Education the quality of learning outcomes extends beyond academic performance to encompass character formation and skill development. This quality is shaped by internal factors such as student motivation and external factors, including teacher competence, school leadership, instructional strategies, facility availability, and family support (Bintang, Pertiwi, & Azainil, 2024; Husna et al., 2024).

Improving learning quality therefore requires integrated efforts aimed at enhancing instructional delivery, strengthening infrastructure, and promoting active family involvement.

### **2.3 Previous Relevant Studies**

Prior studies underscore the strategic significance of principal leadership in achieving educational excellence. Simatupang and Arneti (2024) emphasize the necessity of well-prepared and effectively implemented strategic plans that incorporate program execution and evaluation mechanisms. Similarly, Hapiipi et al. (2024) assert that effective school leadership, coupled with systematic strategic planning, exerts a substantial influence on the enhancement of students' learning outcomes. Building upon these findings, the present study seeks to expand scholarly understanding of how leadership and strategic planning synergistically contribute to sustained educational quality improvement.

## **3. METHOD**

This study adopted a qualitative approach employing a descriptive research design. Such an approach was deliberately selected to facilitate a comprehensive and in-depth exploration of the dynamics of principal leadership and the enactment of strategic planning within the authentic and contextual setting of the madrasah (Kemenparekraf, 2021)

The research was conducted at MI Mardhatillah Tanjung Marbu, situated in Rambutan District, Banyuasin Regency. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, systematic classroom observations, and analysis of relevant documentation. The analytical process proceeded through sequential stages comprising data reduction, data display, and the formulation of conclusions (Adams et al., 2022;Purnamaningwulan, 2024). To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, data validity was reinforced through source triangulation and temporal triangulation.

## **4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### *Research*

### **4.1 The Role of Principal Leadership in Enhancing Learning Outcomes**

Findings derived from interviews and systematic observations conducted at MI Mardhatillah Tanjung Marbu, Rambutan District, indicate that the principal assumes a highly central and influential role in cultivating an effective learning environment (Subagyo et al., 2020). The leadership dimensions identified encompass the following:

- **Visionary Leadership:** The principal demonstrates the capacity to articulate a coherent and future-oriented vision and mission for the madrasah, while mobilizing all stakeholders toward the attainment of clearly defined educational quality targets.
- **Motivator and Role Model:** The principal consistently provides motivational reinforcement to both teachers and students and exemplifies discipline, professionalism, and a sustained commitment to instructional excellence.
- **Coordinator and Innovator:** The principal actively encourages pedagogical innovation, supports the adoption of diverse instructional strategies, and facilitates access to relevant professional development initiatives.
- **Strategic Decision Maker:** The principal is directly engaged in critical decision-making processes, particularly in relation to task allocation, resource optimization, and the evaluation of learning outcomes.

Empirical evidence further suggests that madrasahs led by principals who employ participative and communicative leadership approaches tend to demonstrate superior student

achievement compared to institutions characterized by authoritarian or passive leadership models.

#### ***4.2 Implementation of Strategic Planning in the Madrasah***

The findings reveal that the implementation of strategic planning within madrasahs in Rambutan District generally proceeds through several structured phases:

1. Initial Situational Analysis – Conducted through annual work meetings, comprehensive program evaluations, and systematic assessments of academic performance.
2. Formulation of a Strategic Plan (Renstra) – Encompassing the articulation of institutional vision, mission, objectives, and measurable performance indicators.
3. Execution of Priority Programs – Including initiatives aimed at enhancing teacher competence, improving learning facilities and infrastructure, and strengthening student academic support mechanisms.
4. Evaluation and Follow-up – Undertaken through periodic coordination meetings, performance reporting, and structured academic supervision.

Despite these procedural frameworks, implementation remains uneven across institutions. Several madrasahs continue to encounter structural and operational constraints, such as limited financial resources, insufficient teacher involvement in planning processes, and suboptimal monitoring and evaluation systems (Musfidah et al., 2023)

#### ***4.3 The Impact of Leadership and Strategic Planning on Learning Outcomes***

Triangulated data analysis confirms the existence of a functional and mutually reinforcing relationship between principal leadership, strategic planning implementation, and the quality of student learning outcomes. Madrasahs characterized by proactive instructional monitoring and clearly articulated strategic frameworks demonstrate measurable improvements in average examination scores, student discipline, and teacher attendance rates (Keeley et al., 2019). Moreover, complementary non-academic variables including teacher motivation, parental engagement, and a collaborative organizational climate were found to strengthen the correlation between leadership practices and enhanced learning outcomes.

### **Discussion**

The findings substantiate theoretical perspectives that position principal leadership as a pivotal determinant in educational quality management. As articulated by Mulyasa (2022), principals who function as instructional leaders are capable of fostering a constructive learning climate while motivating teachers to pursue pedagogical innovation (Marmoah, 2019). The participative leadership style observed among principals in Rambutan District reflects the practical application of transformational leadership principles, wherein bidirectional communication and teacher involvement in decision-making processes cultivate a heightened sense of institutional ownership. This observation aligns with transformational leadership theory, which underscores emotional engagement and inspirational influence as catalysts for organizational advancement (Roja & Salim, 2023).

Furthermore, the structured and systematic execution of strategic planning contributes significantly to the enhancement of instructional quality by ensuring program alignment, efficient resource allocation, and continuous performance monitoring. Consistent with the perspective of Wahjosumidjo (2021), strategic planning functions as an integrative mechanism that bridges long-term institutional aspirations with operational educational practices. Nevertheless, the study also reveals that the effectiveness of strategic planning is contingent upon collective commitment. In the absence of sustained engagement from

teachers and educational staff, strategic plans risk devolving into mere administrative formalities rather than serving as dynamic instruments for institutional improvement (Widiastuti, 2020).

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that principal leadership, in conjunction with the systematic implementation of strategic planning, constitutes a fundamental determinant in enhancing the quality of learning outcomes at Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah (MI) Mardhatillah Tanjung Marbu, Rambutan District. A principal who exhibits visionary insight, participatory governance, and motivational capacity has been shown to cultivate a constructive organizational climate while simultaneously fostering pedagogical innovation among teachers. Concurrently, strategically formulated and consistently executed planning mechanisms enable the institution to administer educational programs with greater efficacy, strengthen teacher professional competence, and maximize the utilization of institutional resources. The synergistic integration of robust leadership and comprehensive strategic planning has consequently generated measurable and substantive improvements in students' academic achievement as well as their non-academic development.

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