



Leadership Strategies in Islamic High Schools to Improve Quality and Ensure the School's Survival

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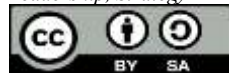
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ABSTRAK

Kemajuan dan keberlangsungan lembaga pendidikan tidak dapat dipisahkan dari peran pemimpin dalam memotivasi seluruh anggota sekolah untuk mencapai tujuan bersama, yaitu meningkatkan kualitas dan mutu pendidikan serta sumber daya di dalamnya. Untuk mencapai hal tersebut, dibutuhkan seorang pemimpin yang mampu menciptakan strategi kepemimpinan yang efektif bagi sekolahnya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi kepala sekolah dalam meningkatkan kualitas dan menjaga keberlangsungan sekolah. Tinjauan literatur naratif digunakan sebagai metode pengumpulan data dalam penelitian ini. Berdasarkan tinjauan literatur yang telah dilakukan, disimpulkan bahwa kepala sekolah hendaknya memiliki keterampilan manajerial yang baik dan dapat menjadi panutan bagi seluruh anggota sekolah. Pemenuhan dan perhatian terhadap kebutuhan anggota sekolah merupakan poin penting dalam upaya kepala sekolah untuk meningkatkan kualitas sekolah.

ABSTRACT

The progress and existence of an educational institution cannot be separated from the role of leaders in motivating all school members to achieve common goals, namely improving the quality and quality of education and the resources within it. To achieve this, a leader is needed who can create an effective leadership strategy for his school. This study aims to analyze the principal's strategy in improving the quality and maintaining the existence of the school. Narrative literature review is used as a method of data collection in this study. Based on the literature review that has been conducted, it was concluded that the principal should have good managerial skills and can be a role model for all school members. Fulfillment and attention to the needs of school members are important points in the principal's efforts to improve school quality

1. INTRODUCTION

Education plays a vital role in shaping the lives of a society, a nation, and a country. One indicator of a developed nation can be seen in the quality of its education (Khairiah, 2022). When educational institutions fail to prioritize quality, they fall behind their peers and are left behind by the times, ultimately leading to high rates of student unemployment (Kurniady et al., 2018) and a decline in educational quality. Quality education produces a quality generation, which in turn drives a nation's progress and development (Dandy et al., 2021).

Mansir & Karim (2020) note that one of the issues frequently encountered in Islamic educational institutions is a concern regarding their survival, stemming from competition among Islamic educational institutions themselves (Islamic schools) as well as with general educational institutions (regular schools). Additionally, Hadi in (Khairiah & Sirajuddin, 2019) also states that issues related to educational quality can stem from inadequate management of human resource performance. In line with the previous statement, Fitriyah & Santosa (2020) also assert that the most significant factor in the process of improving

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educational quality within an educational institution is leadership. Leaders must be able to keep up with technological developments and possess the skills to influence, encourage, guide, direct, and motivate others regarding the implementation and development of educational quality in the 4.0 era. Mulyasa also states that the school principal or a leader plays the most crucial role in determining the direction and quality of education within an educational institution (Mulyasa in Muafiah et al., 2023).

This indicates that the quality of a school is significantly influenced by how well its members or school community can work together to achieve desired goals under the guidance of a leader. A leader has been shown to have a significant influence in determining strategies to ensure the survival of educational institutions (Purnomo et al., 2020) and in setting a good example for members in accordance with established principles (Novebri & Oktarina, 2021).

Based on previous studies, it is known that the role of leaders is crucial in improving the quality of education at an educational institution. Leadership effectiveness can be seen in an institution's or organization's success in achieving predetermined goals (in the context of a school, for example, student achievement) (Sari, 2012). One Islamic-based school in Surabaya, SMA Al-Hikmah, is known as a religious school with numerous achievements, strong competitiveness, and high student engagement. Based on achievement data from the official website of SMA Al-Hikmah Surabaya for the years 2016–2019, the achievements obtained span academic, arts, and sports fields, with a total of 2,155 achievements recorded (SMA Al-Hikmah, 2019). Additionally, according to a report from Unair News, it was stated that alumni of Al-Hikmah High School in Surabaya are frequently admitted as students at Airlangga University (Anandita, 2017).

Furthermore, based on data obtained from the school's website, the distribution of alumni placements in higher education institutions for the 2020–2021 academic year at Al-Hikmah High School was as follows: 136 students (71%) were admitted to public universities, 52 students (27%) were admitted to private universities, 4 students (2%) were admitted to universities abroad, and 7 students were accepted through civil service selection processes. The following year saw an increase, with 194 students (75%) admitted to public universities across Indonesia, with the highest numbers at Unair (84), ITS (49), UB (21), UGM (3), and the remainder distributed among other leading public universities. Additionally, 44 students (17%) were admitted to private universities, 4 students (2%) were admitted abroad, and 1 student was admitted to the Police Academy (1%). The Chair of the Unair Admissions Committee stated that this achievement was not something that could be attained overnight. Various parties played a role, including students, teachers, and the principal, leading to Al-Hikmah High School receiving various awards and achievements (SMA Al-Hikmah, 2022).

The number of achievements attained is also proportional to the number of students enrolled. According to the latest 2024/2025 Basic Data from the Ministry of Education and Culture, the total number of students is 657 (313 boys and 344 girls). This figure represents an increase from the 649 students enrolled in the previous academic year. This aligns with a statement by the Head of Madrasah Education at the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag), as reported by Metro TV News, stating that there has been an increase in the number of students enrolling in Islamic schools (Madrasah) (Amaluddin, 2023). On the other hand, many other Islamic schools have received little attention from the public due to a lack of promotion by the schools themselves. According to a report on the Metro TV News website, it was stated that during the 2023/2024 school year, at the junior high school (SMP) level, SMP Islam Jiwa Nala Surabaya admitted only one student out of a total capacity of 60 students. The principal stated that this occurred due to the zoning system, which led students to prefer public schools over private schools. He also stated that he had made various efforts to recruit students, but did not specify what specific measures the principal had taken

(Amaluddin, 2023). In fact, the zoning system is intended to ensure equitable access to educational services and minimize exclusivity in schools (Kemendikbud, 2018).

When a leader (school principal) is unable to manage, motivate, and engage members to achieve educational goals, and fails to capitalize on available opportunities while relying solely on a routine leadership style, the quality of education will not improve. When leaders possess the appropriate competencies, they tend to continuously strive to improve the educational organization within their schools, which ultimately has a positive impact on enhancing the quality of the school and its students (Ningsih et al., 2020). This indicates that to improve the quality and standards of a school, including the individuals within it (teachers and students), effective leadership strategies are required. This study aims to identify the strategies employed by principals at Islamic Senior High Schools (SMA) to improve quality and sustain the school's existence.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a narrative literature review as its research method. A narrative literature review is a method of literature identification that seeks to synthesize previous studies on the same topic based on predetermined research criteria. Through a narrative literature review, researchers and readers can gain a broad understanding of the findings and differences among articles on a specific topic, as this method provides the necessary bridge between a wide variety of articles on a particular topic (Baumeister & Leary, 1997). Articles were searched for and collected using Google Scholar with the keywords "leadership management in Islamic educational institutions," "effective leadership strategies in Islamic high schools," and "leadership strategies in Islamic high schools to improve graduate quality." The researcher established the following inclusion criteria: articles in English and Indonesian, published between 2014 and 2024, and discussing management and leadership in Islamic-based high schools in Indonesia. The exclusion criteria for this study are articles written in languages other than Indonesian and English, published before 2014, and those that do not discuss management and leadership in Islamic-based high schools in Indonesia.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the search conducted, six relevant articles were identified that discuss leadership strategies and roles in improving school quality. Leadership is not merely about running the organizational machinery in accordance with one's duties and responsibilities, but rather leadership that embodies characteristics aligned with current conditions and the evolving times. In Islamic educational institutions, the vision and mission are oriented toward the advancement of knowledge and the production of graduates who possess Islamic beliefs or religious values relevant to current global needs (Thohri, 2022). A study by Adams et al. (2020) indicates that school leaders must possess the skills to address both present and future challenges. Leaders, whether religious scholars or school principals—particularly within the context of Islamic schools—must prioritize teachers' competency needs to conduct effective learning activities and produce positive outcomes to enhance the quality of the Islamic school itself (Hanafi et al., 2021).

The quality of education can be gauged by the quality of the school's graduates. A study by Mudatsir et al. (2021) indicates that improvements in graduate quality can be influenced by the principal's role, specifically by implementing the school's vision and mission through flagship programs that support the achievement of the foundation's or institution's goals. The principal also plays a role in encouraging students and teachers, motivating quality improvement through continuing education, setting a good example, and applying and disseminating positive values such as honesty. The transformational leadership style implemented at SMA Islam Athirah 1 Kajaolalido Makassar has successfully fostered

awareness, creativity, and a strong work ethic among teachers, thereby driving the achievement of commendable academic and non-academic accomplishments that ultimately enhance the school's quality.

Transformational leadership is also practiced at Al-Kamal Islamic High School in Rembang, combined with participatory leadership. The implementation of transformational and participatory leadership at Al-Kamal Islamic High School is evident in the principal's efforts to motivate and inspire teachers and students to achieve their best performance. The principal, as a motivator and innovator, strives to create a conducive and enthusiastic work environment. The principal also involves teachers in decision-making and in fostering an open and transparent work environment. The principal maintains good communication, values teachers' opinions, and encourages them to collaborate in improving educational quality and work discipline (Abidin et al., 2023). Furthermore, the implementation of School-Based Management (SBM) by school principals has also been shown to improve school quality by raising students' national exam scores. The principal of SMA Islam Al-Ulum in Medan stated that by implementing SBM at his school, the number of graduates admitted to the top public universities in Sumatra and Java has increased (Lubis, 2015).

Ariani's study indicates that in leading Islamic educational institutions, particularly at the high school and vocational school levels, leaders must possess the ability to build strong and extensive networks or relationships with the surrounding community (Ariani, 2023). This is expected so that Islamic educational institutions are not eroded by competition from regular schools and other international schools, as indicated by a study (Mansir & Karim, 2020) stating that one of the challenges facing Islamic educational institutions is their existence and competition with general or regular educational institutions. By having a broad and strong network, particularly with certain stakeholders, promotional efforts will be easier to carry out, thereby ensuring the school's survival and enabling its growth.

Furthermore, according to a study (Tamrin & Falah, 2023), one effective leadership strategy is to adopt a democratic leadership style that emphasizes the principle of flexibility—particularly when facing challenges—and encourages collective participation among the school community, as implemented by the principal at SMAIT Misykat Al-Anwar in Jombang. The characteristics of this leadership style include valuing subordinates or members as individuals with inherent worth, striving to align organizational goals with their personal needs, being open to feedback, criticism, and opinions from subordinates, and consistently committing to enhancing skills—not only their own but also those of their subordinates. The supervisory approach implemented at SMAIT Misykat Al-Anwar Jombang is also conducted regularly to ensure the quality of teachers at the school is well-maintained and is expected to continue improving. These evaluations and assessments cover mastery of the subjects taught (content), behavior, and the social skills of teachers at the school. This supervision is a form of oversight focused on academic issues. It serves as a leadership strategy employed by the principal to enhance teacher performance at SMAIT Misykat Al-Anwar Jombang (Tamrin & Falah, 2023).

Similar findings were reported in the study by Sandiana et al. (2023), which showed that the democratic leadership implemented at Al-Ma'arif Pandan Indah High School was able to boost the morale of teachers, administrative staff, and students. The strategies implemented to improve teacher performance in order to enhance school quality included supervision in the form of monitoring and observing teachers' behavior and teaching competencies; developing teacher competencies through MGMP programs, training, and workshops; developing teaching media and learning resources; conducting regular teacher performance evaluations; and digitalization, including the development of e-learning. The strategies implemented proved successful in improving the quality of education at Al-Ma'arif Pandan Indah Islamic High School.

In addition to democratic leadership, which has been proven to improve the quality of education and teacher performance in schools, instructional leadership—such as that practiced at SMAIT Al-Auliya in Balikpapan (Juniar et al., 2024)—can also enhance the quality of education. Instructional leadership focuses on managing and improving the learning process in schools. Characteristics of an instructional leader include providing a clear vision, motivating staff or subordinates, and fostering an inclusive learning environment. Based on the case study conducted by Juniar dkk. (2024), the school principal provided full support and consistently monitored all processes occurring within the school. The school supported curriculum development by involving teachers in its implementation. Teachers also noted that the principal is an individual with strong communication skills, consistently monitors the progress of learning and school dynamics, and strives to facilitate the development of both students and teachers. One of the development initiatives implemented includes providing workshops or training for teachers and organizing English Day events; however, the implementation of English Day has not yet reached its full potential.

As a religious school, the principal also strives to integrate religious values with modern managerial practices, such as data-driven supervision, teacher professional development, and the use of educational technology. This model combines exemplary leadership, servant leadership, and spirituality to strengthen the school culture, enhance the moral commitment of the school community, and foster students' character in accordance with religious values. In line with the principal of SMA IT Al-Auliya Balikpapan, a study (Basuki et al., 2025) at SMA Islam Al -Azhar BSD indicates that one of the efforts to improve the quality of education and graduates begins with strengthening teachers' professional competencies through continuous pedagogical training and systematic academic supervision. Supervision is understood as a tool for professional development, not merely an administrative activity, so that it can improve teacher performance and the overall quality of learning.

Most of the schools mentioned earlier are well-known in their respective regions. The recognition of an educational institution is closely tied to its promotional efforts and the outcomes it produces, such as the achievements and distribution of its outstanding graduates. This is also closely tied to the role of adaptive and innovative leaders (school principals) who can maintain the institution's existence and competence amidst high public expectations and in improving school quality (Basuki et al., 2025). Mansir (2020) states that a leader in an educational institution must possess adequate competencies and specialized knowledge regarding educational management. The competencies and quality of a leader in guiding an educational institution will influence the quality of education received by students enrolled in that institution (Ningsih et al., 2020).

A leader's openness to constructive criticism from the school community encourages teachers and other members of the school community to contribute new ideas for the school's development. This is done so that every member of the school community feels confident in expressing their opinions. School development is not solely the leader's responsibility. All school community members should play a role in achieving the desired goals (Mudatsir et al., 2021). This aligns with the research by Novebri & Oktarina (2021), which states that within the school environment, the principal plays a role in helping the school community improve the quality of education and foster the religious character of school members. An effective principal not only serves as a successful teacher whom others can emulate but also as a respected leader due to their leadership attitude and exemplary behavior (Novebri & Oktarina, 2021).

The principal plays a central role as the primary driving force and policy-maker in the school. Their role significantly influences the achievement of educational goals and the overall success of the school. Principals must continually strive to enhance the effectiveness of their leadership to achieve established goals. The success of an educational institution

depends heavily on the quality of the principal's leadership. As a leader, the principal must be able to guide the institution toward its established goals. Leaders also need the ability to anticipate change and prepare for the future in the context of increasingly complex globalization. Furthermore, the principal is responsible for the smooth operation and success of school management, both formally to the authorities and informally to the community that entrusts the education of their children to the relevant educational institution (Rosya, 2018).

4. CONCLUSION

To improve school quality and ensure its continued existence, the principal, as a leader, must possess a range of competencies related to effective management and serve as a good role model for the entire school community. Integrating multiple leadership styles can create a synergy between contextual leadership and Islamic values, driving positive organizational change. Principals should also always pay attention to the needs of teachers and students to ensure effective learning, such as providing workshops and training for teachers, as well as striving to provide adequate learning facilities for students. These efforts are necessary to support development aimed at improving the quality of teachers and students, which will ultimately lead to positive outcomes in the form of improved school quality.

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