

Research Article

The Principal's Leadership Strategy in Improving the Quality of Learning at MTs Darul Falah Sumbergempol Tulungagung

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Abstract. This study is motivated by the leadership of the principal at MTs Darul Falah Sumbergempol Tulungagung, who involves all school personnel in school activities. Although the principal's tenure is relatively new, the principal has been able to implement continuous changes to advance the institution and improve the quality and services of the school. The research employed a qualitative approach. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The data analysis techniques included (1) data reduction, (2) data display, and (3) conclusion drawing/verification. The results of this study indicate that: (1) The principal's strategy in mobilizing subordinates to improve the quality of learning at MTs Darul Falah Sumbergempol Tulungagung is carried out by ensuring that teachers perform their duties professionally, participating directly in the preparation of lesson plans (RPP), selecting competent teachers to guide students in self-development activities, providing explanations and motivation to subordinates regarding the implementation of tasks in the *madrasah*, and giving instructions to enhance staff capabilities by forming well-organized teamwork. (2) The principal's strategy in influencing subordinates to improve the quality of learning is implemented by enhancing personnel performance, providing rewards to subordinates, setting a good example, showing concern and attention, improving welfare, motivating subordinates, and supporting as well as appreciating their achievements. (3) The principal's strategy in encouraging improvements in the quality of learning is carried out by inviting subordinates to enhance teachers' competencies, motivating teachers to be productive and innovative, coordinating the outcomes of teachers' work, consistently evaluating teachers' activities, conducting official meetings, providing motivation during these meetings, and setting an example by arriving at school earlier than others.

Keywords: Leadership Strategy; Learning Quality; Madrasah Principal; Qualitative Research; Teacher Performance.

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1. INTRODUCTION

One of the main challenges currently faced by Indonesia is the effort to achieve one of the fundamental goals of education, namely producing human resources with high quality in line with policies in the field of education. One way to improve human resources is through education, as the enhancement of human resource quality has a reciprocal relationship with the development of the education sector (Gusman, 2014). Education serves as a means of improving human resources (HR) that cannot be separated from human life, as it contributes to the realization of an intellectually advanced nation and produces individuals who are skilled in their respective fields (Kurniawati, 2019).

Human resources play a crucial role in an organization, enabling it to carry out activities effectively in order to achieve its objectives (Purwanto, 2025). The empowerment of human resources is important to be implemented through the leadership of the school principal, as it is a key factor in determining efforts to improve the quality of education (Sulistiyani, 2009). The school principal holds a highly strategic role as an educator, school manager, administrator, and supervisor of the educational institution under their leadership. The success of efforts to improve the quality of education in an educational institution is not determined solely by the quality of teachers' human resources, but also by the leadership style of the school principal (Indrafachrudi, 2006). This can be observed through the pattern of working relationships among the principal, teachers, staff, and

students that function effectively, thereby creating a comfortable and supportive working environment.

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), coordinated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) based in Paris, France, reported that the quality of education in Indonesia ranked 69th out of 76 participating countries. This result indicates that Indonesia was positioned among the bottom eight countries, demonstrating that the quality of education in Indonesia remains significantly lower compared to neighboring countries such as Singapore and Malaysia. Therefore, educational institutions are required to effectively implement school management functions in order to address these challenges. One of the essential functions of school management is the presence of effective leadership from the school principal (Octavia & Savira, 2016). In addition to the PISA assessment, the World Economic Forum (WEF) reported that Indonesia ranked 74th out of 144 countries in terms of global competitiveness for the 2014–2015 period. According to the WEF, one of the factors contributing to Indonesia's low international competitiveness is the teacher component. The low level of teacher professionalism in Indonesia can be observed from the limited qualifications of teachers to effectively carry out teaching activities in the classroom (Asmani, 2015).

Leadership functions to influence a group in order to achieve specific objectives (Daryanto, 2011). In general, leadership is a process of influencing followers in relation to certain situations, determining group goals, managing activities to accomplish these objectives, and seeking support as well as cooperation from individuals outside the organization (Setiawan & Muhith, 2013).

The *madrasah* principal serves as the driving force for school resources, particularly teachers and administrative staff. The principal's role is highly significant in the process of achieving educational objectives; therefore, the success or failure of *madrasah* activities is largely determined by the quality of the principal. All available resources must be utilized effectively. Educational personnel need to be mobilized toward a positive, motivating, and productive working environment. Educational staff constitute an input that has a substantial influence on the learning process. Likewise, the organization of physical facilities and administrative management needs to be properly maintained in order to foster discipline and a high learning spirit among students. All of these aspects require the implementation of effective educational leadership by a *madrasah* principal.

The principal of MTs Darul Falah Sumbergempol Tulungagung involves all school personnel in school activities. Although the principal's tenure is relatively recent, the principal has been able to implement continuous changes aimed at advancing the institution and improving the quality and services of the school.

The quality of learning is considered high when it successfully transforms students' attitudes, behaviors, and skills in accordance with educational objectives. The quality of education as a system depends on the quality of the components that form the system, as well as the learning processes that occur until they produce outcomes. High-quality learning refers to effective learning, which essentially relates to the teacher's ability to manage the learning process in the classroom. The learning process conducted by the teacher will significantly determine the quality of the learning outcomes achieved by students.

Based on an interview with the *madrasah* principal at MTs Darul Falah Sumbergempol Tulungagung, it was found that the management of educational facilities and infrastructure is still inadequate, including chairs, classrooms, the school yard, and parking areas. These facilities and infrastructures serve as supporting elements for the teaching and learning process. Therefore, new strategies from the *madrasah* principal are required to improve the quality of learning within the institution. The utilization of facilities and infrastructure, as well as the organization of the *madrasah* environment, significantly affects the comfort of all members of the school community. This condition can also influence students' performance and learning achievements, as the creation of a comfortable learning atmosphere in the *madrasah* can produce positive outcomes. The researcher selected MTs Darul Falah Sumbergempol Tulungagung as the research site because the institution is considered a well-developed educational institution. In addition, in terms of quality, MTs Darul Falah Sumbergempol Tulungagung is regarded as one of the leading educational institutions in Trenggalek Regency.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research method falls into the category of field research. Field research is conducted to identify where the events that constitute the object of the study take place, thereby obtaining direct and up-to-date information regarding the issues being examined, while also serving as a means of cross-checking existing sources (Fitri & Haryanti, 2020). In terms of the nature of the data, this study is classified as qualitative research, which aims to understand phenomena experienced by research subjects, such as behavior, perceptions, motivations, and actions holistically, and to describe them in the form of words and language within a particular natural context by utilizing various naturalistic methods (Moleong, 2013).

A case study also seeks to describe a particular setting, object, or event in depth (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). This view is supported by Yin (2002), who states that a case study is a strategy chosen to answer “how” and “why” questions, particularly when the research focuses on examining contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts. In this study, the case study approach is also employed. The case study method was selected to obtain accurate data regarding the leadership strategies of the *madrasah* principal in improving the quality of learning. This case study is based on a research location that possesses characteristics relevant to the focus of the study. By applying this case study design, it is expected that the information and data obtained will reflect various experiences related to the topic discussed in the research focus. From this site, key insights can then be drawn regarding the leadership strategies of the *madrasah* principal in improving the quality of learning at MTs Darul Falah Sumbergempol Tulungagung.

Participant observation. In this technique, the researcher conducted systematic observations and recordings of phenomena occurring at MTs Darul Falah Sumbergempol Tulungagung. The observation technique employed in this research was participant observation. The purpose of conducting participant observation was to observe events as they naturally occurred in the field. In this approach, the researcher was directly involved and interacted with the activities carried out by the research subjects while systematically collecting the required data. In-depth interviews. The interview method was used as a guideline for conducting the research. In this case, the researcher employed in-depth interviews to explore detailed information regarding the leadership strategies of the *madrasah* principal in improving the quality of learning at MTs Darul Falah Sumbergempol Tulungagung. Documentation. The documents referred to in this study include photographs, *madrasah* documents, interview transcripts, and documents related to the history of the *madrasah* and its development. All of these documents were collected and analyzed to complement the research data. In this process, the researcher also took photographs related to the research topic.

Data analysis is the process of systematically searching for and organizing data obtained from interviews, field notes, and other materials so that the information can be easily communicated to others (Haryanti, 2019). Data analysis involves the systematic process of examining and organizing interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials collected by the researcher. The analysis process continues with reviewing the data, organizing it, dividing it into manageable units, synthesizing it, identifying patterns, and determining what is meaningful and relevant to the research, which is then reported systematically. Since this research employs a case study design, the data analysis is conducted in three stages: (1) data condensation, (2) data display, and (3) verification and conclusion drawing (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

3. RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The *madrasah* principal's strategy in mobilizing subordinates to improve the quality of learning at MTs Darul Falah Sumbergempol Tulungagung, Trenggalek

The *madrasah* principal's strategy in mobilizing subordinates to improve the quality of learning at MTs Darul Falah Sumbergempol Tulungagung is implemented by ensuring that teachers carry out their duties professionally, including directly participating in the preparation of lesson plans (RPP). The principal also selects competent teachers to guide students in self-development activities, provides explanations and motivation to subordinates regarding the implementation of their duties within the *madrasah*, and gives instructions to enhance staff capabilities by establishing well-organized teamwork.

The findings of this study are consistent with Rohani and Ahmadi (1991), who argue that leadership is the art or ability to coordinate and mobilize individuals or groups toward the achievement of expected goals. A leader must be capable of serving as a foundation in directing, guiding, mobilizing, and coordinating the various potentials within an organization, while also being able to inspire the enthusiasm of subordinates to achieve organizational objectives. Meanwhile, Ki Hajar Dewantoro formulated three principles of leadership behavior: (1) *Ing ngarso sung tulodo*, which means that when a leader is in front, they provide an example; (2) *Ing madyo mangun karso*, which means that when a leader is among the members, they build determination and motivation (Jawwad, 2004); and (3) *Tut wuri bandayani*, which means that when a leader is behind, they act as a driving and motivating force.

The *madrasah* principal sets an example by actively involving himself in initiating and driving such changes. This approach encourages teachers and students to become more capable and motivated when asked to engage in new initiatives. An innovative principal is able to motivate teachers effectively through various supportive actions, including the following:

- 1) Participating directly in the preparation of lesson plans (RPP) and learning syllabi, while supporting teachers through positive expressions such as “You can certainly accomplish this.”
- 2) Providing recognition to teachers who have made significant efforts in developing innovative learning materials, for example by offering praise such as “Your work is truly outstanding.”
- 3) Appreciating teachers’ achievements by giving appropriate praise and rewards, offering constructive suggestions while avoiding harsh or excessive criticism.
- 4) Providing guidance on how to apply relevant and effective teaching methods.
- 5) Pointing out mistakes using polite and respectful language, for instance by stating that the effort made is already good but still requires some adjustments.
- 6) Providing opportunities for teachers to share their problems and discuss the issues that arise, both individually and collectively.
- 7) Inviting teachers who may have violated certain rules to the office for a face-to-face discussion in a respectful and family-like atmosphere.
- 8) Providing all facilities required by teachers to support their professional activities (Maya, 2012).

The *madrasah* principal’s strategy in influencing subordinates to improve the quality of learning at MTs Darul Falah Sumbergempol Tulungagung, Trenggalek

The *madrasah* principal’s strategy in influencing subordinates to improve the quality of learning at MTs Darul Falah Sumbergempol Tulungagung is implemented by enhancing the performance of personnel, providing rewards to subordinates, setting a good example, and demonstrating care and attention. The principal also promotes staff welfare, provides positive role models, motivates subordinates, and offers support and appreciation for the achievements accomplished by staff members.

The findings of this study are consistent with Thoha (1999), who states that leadership is an activity aimed at influencing individuals so that they are willing to be directed toward achieving institutional goals. This view is reinforced by Daryanto (2011), who argues that a *madrasah* principal must be able to influence all members of the *madrasah* community through positive approaches in order to achieve educational objectives within the institution. An organization needs to understand what type of leadership exists and is currently being practiced, as well as how subordinates respond to that leadership style. Leadership types represent behavioral norms used by an individual when influencing others; therefore, a leader’s style of leadership can significantly affect the behavior of others (Nur, 2015). Similarly, employee discipline among subordinates can also be influenced by the attitudes and actions of their superiors or leaders. As expressed by Fiedler, as cited by Nur Efendi, the relationship between leaders and members is partly determined by the leadership style and behavior demonstrated by the leader.

Leadership type refers to a distinctive pattern of behavior demonstrated by a leader when influencing subordinates. The choices made by the leader regarding what actions to take and the manner in which the leader influences members of the group shape the leadership type. However, determining which leadership type is the most effective is not an easy task.

The types of leadership include authoritarian, democratic, and laissez-faire. From these three basic leadership types, other forms of leadership may emerge, such as instructive, consultative, participatory, and delegative leadership. An authoritarian leader is one who makes decisions independently because authority is centralized in a single individual. In this type of leadership, decisions are often imposed through the use of rewards or the threat of punishment. The leader may simply issue orders, provide praise, or demand loyalty from subordinates. Such a system may sometimes cause subordinates to feel pressured, fearful, and compelled to appear as though they are involved in the decision-making process. In reality, however, they merely carry out what is desired by the leader.

The *madrasah* principal's strategy in encouraging the improvement of learning quality at MTs Darul Falah Sumbergempol Tulungagung, Trenggalek

The *madrasah* principal is able to encourage improvements in the quality of learning at MTs Darul Falah Sumbergempol Tulungagung by inviting subordinates to enhance teachers' competencies, motivating teachers to be productive and creative, coordinating the outcomes of their work, consistently evaluating teachers' activities, conducting official meetings, providing motivation to teachers during these meetings, and setting an example by arriving at school earlier than others.

The findings of this study are consistent with Daryanto (2011), who states that in encouraging subordinates, a *madrasah* principal must be able to invite and motivate them to achieve common goals. The principal should encourage subordinates to pursue positive change and improvement; therefore, transformational leadership is required. In simple terms, transformational leadership can be understood as a process of changing and transforming individuals so that they are willing to develop and improve themselves, involving motivation, the fulfillment of needs, and recognition of subordinates.

Transformational leadership, according to Burns as cited by Yukl (1998), is defined as "a process where leaders and followers engage in a mutual process of raising one another to higher levels of morality and motivation." According to Burns, transformational leadership is a process in which leaders and their followers mutually enhance and develop each other's levels of morality and motivation.

Transformational leadership, according to Terry as cited by Kartono (2008), is the activity of influencing people so that they are willing to strive to achieve group objectives. It involves influencing individuals to work together in order to accomplish the goals they desire. The essence of transformational leadership is the ability to transform potential into real energy and to convert institutional potential into energy that improves the quality of learning processes and outcomes. Thus, the leadership of a school principal can be defined as the style applied in influencing subordinates, including teachers, administrative staff, students, and parents. Transformational leadership seeks to satisfy the needs of followers and involves the whole person. The relationship between leaders and followers is mutually inspiring and uplifting. A transformational leader attempts to broaden the interests of subordinates and foster acceptance of the group's mission. Such a leader takes time to understand the people who work with them, what they need to know in order to perform effectively, and the extent to which they can be challenged and supported. Transformational leaders also seek new directions that can be pursued and evaluate opportunities when taking risks, while avoiding support for the status quo.

The ability to transform various school resources is essential within the framework of school leadership managed through School-Based Management (SBM). The term transformational is derived from the word to transform, which means to transform or change something into another form. For example, it involves transforming vision into reality, heat into energy, potential into actuality, and latent conditions into manifest outcomes. It is referred to as transformational because it contains characteristics that enable the conversion of something into a different form, such as transforming potential energy into actual energy or achievement motivation into real achievement (Danim, 2012).

Transformational leadership is the ability of a leader to work with and/or through others in order to optimally transform organizational resources to achieve meaningful objectives in accordance with predetermined targets. The resources referred to may include human resources, facilities, financial resources, and external organizational factors. In the context of educational institutions, human resources may include leaders, staff, subordinates, experts, teachers, lecturers, trainers, researchers, and other related personnel.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research and discussion above, it can be concluded that the *madrasah* principal's strategy in mobilizing subordinates to improve the quality of learning at MTs Darul Falah Sumbergempol Tulungagung is implemented by ensuring that teachers perform their duties professionally, including directly participating in the preparation of lesson plans (RPP). The principal also selects competent teachers to guide students in self-development activities, provides explanations and motivation to subordinates regarding how to carry out their duties in the *madrasah*, and gives instructions to enhance staff capabilities by establishing well-organized teamwork. The *madrasah* principal's strategy in influencing subordinates to improve the quality of learning is carried out by enhancing personnel performance, providing rewards to subordinates, setting a good example, showing care and attention, improving staff welfare, motivating subordinates, and supporting as well as appreciating the achievements accomplished by staff members. The *madrasah* principal's strategy in encouraging the improvement of learning quality is implemented by inviting subordinates to enhance teachers' competencies, motivating teachers to be productive and innovative, coordinating the outcomes of teachers' work, consistently evaluating teachers' activities, conducting official meetings, providing motivation to teachers during these meetings, and setting an example by arriving at school earlier than others.

Based on the research findings presented by the researcher, this study theoretically contributes to the development of Rohani and Ahmadi's theory, which states that leadership is the ability to mobilize individuals or groups toward achieving expected goals. In this context, the *madrasah* principal's strategy in mobilizing subordinates to improve the quality of learning is carried out by selecting competent teachers to provide guidance, encouraging participation in training, and providing motivation in order to establish well-organized teamwork. Meanwhile, the *madrasah* principal's strategy in influencing subordinates to improve the quality of learning develops Maya's theory, which states that leadership is an activity aimed at influencing individuals so that they are willing to be directed toward achieving institutional goals. At MTs Darul Falah Sumbergempol Tulungagung, the principal influences subordinates by providing rewards to high-performing teachers and offering greater attention so that subordinates become more motivated in carrying out their duties. Furthermore, the *madrasah* principal's strategy in encouraging improvements in the quality of learning develops Daryanto's theory, which states that a *madrasah* principal should encourage subordinates to pursue positive change; therefore, transformational leadership is required. As implemented by the *madrasah* principal, this encouragement is carried out by inviting subordinates to enhance their competencies through productive work, evaluating learning activities, and ensuring that improvements in the quality of learning can be achieved optimally.

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