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Principal Leadership Strategies for Enhancing Teacher Performance in Islamic Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe and analyze the leadership practices of the madrasah principal in enhancing teacher performance. The background of this research is related to the critical role of the principal as a strategic leader in developing the quality of human resources, particularly teachers, who are the primary agents in the learning process. The generally low teacher performance in several educational institutions highlights the need for a transformative and supportive leadership approach. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method, utilizing data collection techniques that include in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. The research subjects include the principal, teachers, students, and parents, selected purposively. The findings show that the principal applies a transformational leadership model through academic supervision, continuous monitoring, and the reinforcement of discipline and work ethic. Supervision is conducted in a humanistic and dialogical manner, directly contributing to the improvement of teachers' pedagogical competence. Monitoring serves as a development tool and a systematic performance mapping instrument. Additionally, the principal's exemplary conduct promotes discipline and collective responsibility. The improvement in teacher performance has a positive impact on the quality of learning and stakeholder satisfaction, including that of students and parents.

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership is both an art and a science of influencing and motivating others to achieve shared goals (Agus et al., 2024), (Aulia et al., 2024). An effective leader not only possesses a clear vision but also has the ability to inspire and guide team members toward realizing that vision. Leadership involves a variety of skills, including communication, decision-making, and empathy (Hastasari et al., 2022). A good leader listens to and understands the

needs and aspirations of team members, offering direction and support necessary for collective success. Leaders also act as role models, demonstrating integrity, commitment, and dedication in all aspects of their duties. Within organizational contexts, strong and visionary leadership can drive positive change, foster a collaborative work culture, and enhance overall performance (Pratiwi, 2023), (Gross, 2023). More broadly, effective leadership can play a key role in addressing social, economic, and political challenges, shaping a better future for communities and society at large.

Teacher performance is a crucial element that reflects the effectiveness and quality of teaching in an educational institution. Leadership plays a vital role in shaping and maintaining teacher performance, particularly within institutions committed to enhancing both academic achievement and students' character development. At MTs Ihyauddiniyah Gading, leadership significantly contributes to establishing and sustaining optimal teacher performance. The school leadership applies professionalism and ethical values across all aspects of school life from curriculum to extracurricular activities and daily interactions among teachers, students, and staff.

With an inspirational and transformative leadership approach, the principal actively encourages the development of pedagogical competence and behavior aligned with quality educational values (Hairunisa, 2023). Additionally, the school leader fosters a conducive environment for professional development through regular training, educational workshops, and the cultivation of a professional work ethic. Leadership at MTs Ihyauddiniyah not only enhances instructional quality but also strengthens professional bonds and collaboration among all school community members.

The implementation of religious values at MTs Ihyauddiniyah is supported by specifically designed programs and activities that aim to instill and reinforce spiritual culture among students and staff. Each school day begins with collective prayer and the recitation of Qur'anic verses, which not only strengthen faith but also establish positive habits rooted in Islamic principles. The school regularly organizes religious gatherings (majelis taklim), Qur'an memorization competitions, and faith-based social events involving the entire school community. The principal and teachers serve as moral exemplars, embodying integrity, humility, and diligence. They encourage students to internalize these values in their daily lives. Through a holistic approach that encompasses all aspects of school life, MTs Ihyauddiniyah has successfully built an environment that is both academically excellent and deeply religious, preparing students to be virtuous individuals who contribute positively to society.

Leadership in enhancing teacher performance at MTs Ihyauddiniyah is vital, as it plays a central role in embedding Islamic spiritual and religious values throughout school life. Effective leadership fosters a character-building environment, aligning with the core objectives of Islamic education. First, the principal serves as a role model, demonstrating behavior consistent with Islamic teachings. Through daily actions and decisions, school leaders help students and staff internalize religious values, including honesty, justice, humility, and responsibility (Lyngsøe, 2024). Second, school leadership plays a role in designing and implementing programs that cultivate a religious culture. Initiatives such as regular recitations, communal prayers, and religious outreach activities deepen the religious understanding among students and staff. Leaders ensure that both curriculum and extracurricular activities align with Islamic values, thereby integrating spirituality into all educational processes. Third, strong leaders foster solidarity and a sense of community. Through inclusive and participatory leadership, they mobilize collective support to realize the school's vision and mission, promoting a harmonious and motivating environment. Effective leadership also navigates challenges and removes obstacles to religious culture building by identifying problems, offering creative solutions, and taking decisive actions to ensure that religious values remain central to the school's organizational identity.

Prior studies, such as by Agu et al. (2024), show that school principals play an instrumental role in cultivating students' religious culture in exemplary madrasahs. Six values were emphasized: religiosity, discipline, responsibility, honesty, independence, and empathy (Rohaeni et al., 2021; Tajudin & Aprilianto, 2020; Umar et al., 2021). However, there are challenges: (a) internal barriers—such as limited communication between the school and parents; and (b) external barriers—such as environmental influences and lack of parental involvement, which expose students to potentially harmful social contexts. The development of religious culture in schools is supported by both normative-religious and constitutional foundations, making it an obligation for educational institutions (Barnes, 2014; Nord, 1995). Therefore, implementing religious values across all levels of education is not only appropriate but necessary (Baidhawy, 2013; Cramton, 1978). Madrasah principals adopt a range of strategies—habituation, role modeling, and partnerships to strengthen religious culture.

Furthermore, Bolotio et al. (2022) found that the personal competencies of madrasah leaders include moral character, leadership integrity, openness, emotional regulation, and a genuine calling to leadership. These traits were observed in day-to-day tasks, where the principal displayed wisdom, a democratic attitude, and exemplary behavior toward subordinates. Prior

research confirms the crucial role of leadership in shaping a school's religious culture. This study advances those findings by exploring how leadership specifically influences the religious performance of teachers, highlighting both positive and negative impacts within a more dynamic and specific context.

This study offers a novel contribution by focusing on the principal's role in enhancing teachers' religious performance in Islamic educational institutions. It provides a holistic approach to leadership in religious organizations, integrating spiritual and ethical values with modern management principles and contemporary leadership theories. Unlike earlier studies that emphasized leadership's general influence on organizational culture, this research specifically investigates the impact and mechanisms of religiously grounded leadership on teacher performance. The distinctiveness of this research lies in its examination of practical leadership strategies implemented Ihyauddiniyah to build and sustain a religious organizational culture. The study also explores the integration of modern leadership theories such as transformational, spiritual, and ethical leadership—with Islamic values. This research seeks to identify effective leadership practices for integrating religious values into the school culture and to analyze the leadership's role in shaping and sustaining this culture. By doing so, it contributes practical insights and a theoretical model for effective leadership in Islamic education.

RESEARCH METHOD

The approach and research type employed in this study is a descriptive qualitative approach with a multi-site design (Abdussamad, 2021). The descriptive qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to deeply explore and understand the complex and contextual phenomena at MTs Ihyauddiniyah. The multi-site study design was utilized to comprehensively focus on the educational institution, namely MTs Ihyauddiniyah, in order to explore the practices, challenges, and strategies implemented within its unique context. This study is expected to provide in-depth insights into the internal dynamics of the madrasah as well as make a significant contribution to the development of education at the madrasah ibtidaiyah level.

The research location was conducted at MTs Ihyauddiniyah, situated in Duren Village, Gading District, Probolinggo Regency. The study required data as the primary material to answer the research questions. Data sources, which are the subjects serving as the main data providers, were collected and processed to produce a comprehensive discussion (El Hasbi, et al, 2023).

Data collection at MTs Ihyauddiniyah employed several techniques, including interviews, observations, and documentation. The interview technique involved direct conversations with relevant parties such as teachers,

the principal, and students to obtain in-depth information about educational practices and school management. Observations were conducted by directly monitoring teaching and learning activities, interactions between teachers and students, as well as the overall school environment.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Improving Teacher Performance through Supervision and Monitoring

One of the key strategies employed to enhance teacher performance at MTs Ihyauddiniyah is the implementation of structured and consistent supervision and monitoring. The principal of MTs Ihyauddiniyah Gading implements a participative and humanistic leadership style to enhance teacher performance. This approach is reflected in the principal's active involvement in guiding, motivating, and accompanying teachers in carrying out their duties. Discussions with several teachers, such as Ustadzah (SA) and Ustadz AR, revealed that the principal is not merely present as a supervisor but also as a partner in resolving teaching challenges and improving instructional quality. "We are not afraid of supervision because the principal always guides us rather than looks for mistakes," expressed Ustadz AR. The teachers feel that this approach fosters a sense of security and confidence in their work. This leadership style also strengthens emotional bonds among the school community and creates a collaborative work climate. The approach used is not solely directive but based on consistent dialogue and mentorship. Therefore, teacher performance improves not only administratively but also professionally and in commitment to educational quality. This forms a strong foundation for comprehensive and sustainable supervisory practices and the reinforcement of work ethic.

Academic supervision at MTs Ihyauddiniyah Gading is conducted with careful planning and a communicative approach rather than arbitrarily. The principal directly observes teaching activities and follows up with constructive feedback. Teachers appreciate this process as it is supportive rather than pressuring, encouraging quality improvement. In an interview, Ustadzah Nurul stated, "After being supervised, I learned how to improve my explanation of the material and manage time better." Besides teachers, students also feel the impact of this supervision. An eighth-grade student, RA, admitted that learning has become easier to understand and classroom atmosphere more enjoyable. This indicates that the effect of supervision is felt not only by teachers but also by learners.

Strengthening Teacher Discipline and Work Ethic

The monitoring focuses on teacher attendance, completeness of learning administration, and teacher involvement in school activities. From a limited group discussion, teachers stated that this monitoring system makes them more disciplined and focused. "Because I know I will be monitored, I become more organized in preparing lesson plans and timely correcting student assignments," said Ustadzah LK. Monitoring is not only focused on recording performance but also serves as a moment for dialogue about the challenges teachers face in teaching. Meanwhile, some students reported that teachers are more consistent in attending classes and providing clear assignments. Parents also expressed satisfaction with teacher discipline. AR, a parent, said, "We see changes; now teachers are more attentive and orderly. My child is more enthusiastic about learning." This coaching-based monitoring system makes the work system more accountable and transformative.

Strengthening teacher discipline at MTs Ihyauddiniyah Gading is built on the principal's exemplary leadership and collective habits practiced consistently. The principal is always the first to arrive at the school and actively oversees activities from the morning. In group discussions, teachers stated that this exemplary behavior motivates them. "If the principal is never late, how can we be relaxed?" said one teacher. Moreover, rules regarding attendance, teaching schedules, and lesson reporting are developed collaboratively, making teachers feel jointly responsible. Discipline is also enforced through a reward and coaching system. Teachers who arrive on time and are active receive appreciation in monthly meetings, while those neglecting their duties are called for personal consultation. This approach's impact is felt by students as well. Fadli, a ninth-grade student, acknowledged that teachers are now more consistent and less likely to leave class early. This builds student trust and improves learning effectiveness. Discipline cultivated through role modeling and internal regulations proves more effective than relying solely on written rules. Discipline grows intrinsically, not from external pressure. This shows that effective leadership starts from consistent real behavior, not just verbal instructions.

Teacher work ethic at MTs Ihyauddiniyah Gading does not emerge spontaneously but is shaped by a supportive work environment and inspiring leadership. The principal provides space for teachers to develop, experiment with teaching methods, and manage programs independently. In interviews, teachers expressed feeling valued and trusted, which encourages responsibility and initiative. "We are given freedom to develop teaching media, which makes us more creative," said Ustadzah RF. The principal regularly holds evaluation meetings, allowing teachers to share obstacles and successes. This builds

collective spirit and reduces work stress. Parents also notice the impact. MJ, a parent, said, "I see my child enjoys school now because the teachers are caring and cheerful." This positive work environment strengthens teachers' work ethic, making them more enthusiastic, proactive, and loyal to the institution. A strong work ethic ultimately becomes the main foundation for improving education quality and shaping an excellent school work culture.

implementation of systematic supervision and consistent strengthening of teacher work ethic has yielded tangible impacts on the quality of learning at MTs Ihyauddiniyah Gading. Teachers become more disciplined in preparing teaching devices, active in teaching processes, and responsive to student needs. Students in focused group discussions stated they are more enthusiastic about lessons because teachers appear more serious and enjoyable. "Now lessons aren't boring; teachers provide many examples and questionand-answer sessions," said Salsa, a seventh-grade student. Meanwhile, some parents also reported improvements in their children's academic scores. The principal has successfully created a system that encourages teachers to continually develop and improve themselves. Supervision and monitoring accompanied by dialogue and mentoring make teachers feel supported rather than pressured. On the other hand, the increasing teacher work ethic also forms a progressive academic culture. The combination of supportive leadership and a sustainable development system makes MTs Ihyauddiniyah Gading an institution that continuously grows in quality and becomes a positive reference in the surrounding community.

Monitoring conducted by the principal is a continuation of supervision but with a more systematic and sustainable character. Based on performance management theory, monitoring is an essential part of managing employee performance aimed at measuring, accompanying, and improving employee performance. The principal at MTs Ihyauddiniyah Gading utilizes monitoring not only to assess teachers administratively, such as attendance and reporting, but also as a tool to map potentials and challenges in daily teacher tasks. The monitoring process is accompanied by intensive mentoring, especially for teachers who have not met targets or face technical difficulties.

Teacher discipline becomes a primary focus of the principal in maintaining the quality of education at MTs Ihyauddiniyah Gading. Motivational theory states that consistent leadership behavior and exemplary role modeling act as motivators fostering positive work attitudes. The principal consistently arrives early, greets teachers, and directly reviews learning readiness. This role modeling exerts a strong moral influence on teachers. In discussions, teachers reported feeling motivated to be more disciplined because they would feel ashamed not to show professionalism like the principal.

Moreover, the principal not only serves as a role model but also formulates discipline rules with the teaching council. These rules are not rigid but mutually agreed upon and executed with collective spirit. The impact is seen in improved attendance, punctuality, and teaching preparedness. Thus, a discipline strengthening approach based on role modeling proves more effective than solely relying on written regulations. Discipline grows from within, not due to external pressure. This shows that effective leadership begins with consistent real behavior, not just verbal instructions.

Teacher work ethic at MTs Ihyauddiniyah Gading increases along with the principal's active role in creating a supportive work environment. Learning organization theory states that an effective educational organization encourages all members to become active learners. The principal provides space for teachers to innovate, share best practices, and participate in decision-making. Teachers are also encouraged to attend training and seminars to broaden their insights. In discussions, teachers stated they feel valued and supported, generating enthusiasm to work better and commit to their professional responsibilities.

Research findings show that integrating supervision and teacher discipline directly impacts learning quality improvement. This aligns with educational quality management theory, which emphasizes that school effectiveness depends on the integration of leadership, work culture, and teacher performance. The principal integrates academic supervision and monitoring into a structured and directed teacher development system. Teachers become better prepared to teach, more orderly in administration, and more attentive to student learning outcomes. Students show positive responses, as seen from their enthusiasm in class and improved academic scores.

Humanistic and participative supervision has proven effective in improving teacher competence, both pedagogically and professionally. The principal positions teachers as partners in improving learning quality rather than merely evaluation subjects. This aligns with Carl Rogers' humanistic supervision approach, emphasizing empathy, unconditional positive regard, and open communication in guidance processes. The principal not only assesses teacher performance but also understands their backgrounds, challenges, and teaching needs. Teachers who feel heard and valued are more receptive to feedback and motivated to improve themselves. Therefore, a supervision approach grounded in humanistic values effectively builds healthy working relationships, develops teacher competencies, and creates a positive learning atmosphere in the madrasah.

Positive changes in teacher performance are influenced not only by principal interventions but also by involvement of other stakeholders such as students and parents. Stakeholder-based leadership theory posits that educational leadership quality can be measured by responsiveness to the needs and expectations of involved parties. At MTs Ihyauddiniyah Gading, the principal actively communicates with parents and involves them in evaluating madrasah activities. Parents state that teachers are now more attentive and professional, which motivates them to better support their children's learning at home. Students also express that classroom learning is more enjoyable and interactive. This indicates that successful teacher management creates a domino effect on stakeholder satisfaction and involvement.

Based on the above findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the improvement of teacher performance at MTs Ihyauddiniyah Gading Probolinggo results from the principal's leadership combining transformational approach, participative supervision, work culture strengthening, and social involvement. Contemporary educational leadership must go beyond administrative functions to foster, motivate, and empower teachers as the spearhead of educational transformation. With such leadership models, madrasahs do not merely fulfill formal functions but also become spaces for sustainable professional and character development for teachers and students.

Discussion

At MTs Ihyauddiniyah Gading, the approach to supervision is far from being a mere evaluative tool; it is a formative process designed to support teacher development. The principal employs a participative and humanistic leadership style, actively guiding, motivating, and supporting teachers in their roles. Teachers do not view the principal as merely an authority figure conducting oversight, but as a partner in solving teaching challenges and improving instructional quality. This approach encourages teachers to feel secure and confident in their work, fostering a collaborative work environment where emotional bonds are strengthened among the school community (Gerber et al., 2021). Supervision is carried out through regular and structured observations, followed by constructive feedback. The process is designed not as a formality but as an opportunity for growth. Teachers appreciate this method, feeling that it helps them improve their pedagogical skills. The principal focuses on providing practical feedback rather than judgmental remarks, which aligns with clinical supervision theory that emphasizes reciprocal relationships between supervisors and teachers. This form of reflective supervision results in improved classroom management, increased student engagement, and more varied teaching methods (Junita et al., 2023).

Monitoring, which is integrated with the supervision process, also plays a significant role at MTs Ihyauddiniyah Gading. It is not simply a tool for controlling performance but serves as a mechanism for mapping out the strengths and challenges of teachers. This system allows for targeted feedback, enabling the principal and the management team to design data-driven development strategies. Teachers feel supported in this process, which boosts their professional growth. As a result, teacher performance improves, and the quality of education becomes more measurable and sustainable (Suhermanto, 2023).

The supportive atmosphere created within the madrasah contributes significantly to building a strong work ethic among teachers. The principal leads by example, consistently arriving early and actively overseeing the day's activities. This behavior motivates teachers to be punctual and professional in their work. The principal's leadership not only sets high standards but also ensures that discipline is maintained through a reward and coaching system. Teachers who adhere to the rules are recognized and appreciated, while those who fall short are given personal guidance (Mujiburrahman et al., 2022).

Parents have also noticed improvements in teacher discipline and their involvement in students' development. This feedback suggests that the increased performance of teachers, as a result of effective supervision and the strengthening of their work ethic, has a direct impact on learning quality. Positive relationships between teachers, students, and parents are key elements of successful education management. Teachers themselves have expressed that this approach to supervision makes them feel more motivated and less burdened. Supervisory processes are viewed not as an imposition but as an opportunity for professional growth, further supported by social encouragement from the school environment (Arisah et al., 2024).

Research from this study highlights the need for leadership training based on values and further strengthening of humanistic supervision systems. It emphasizes the importance of fostering a collaborative work culture within madrasahs. By doing so, the madrasah can create a supportive environment where teachers are continuously empowered to enhance their professional capabilities (Bamkin, 2024). The integration of supervision, monitoring, and a strong work ethic not only benefits teachers but also enhances the overall quality of education, fostering a positive, sustainable impact on the entire educational community (Lyngsøe, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The principal of MTs Ihyauddiniyah Gading applies a participative and humanistic leadership style to improve teacher performance. This is reflected in the principal's active involvement in mentoring, motivating, and assisting teachers in their duties. Teachers perceive the principal not only as a supervisor but also as a partner in resolving teaching challenges. This approach fosters a safe and trusting work environment, strengthening emotional bonds and collaborative climate within the school community. Consequently, teacher performance improves professionally and administratively, supported by consistent supervision and work ethic reinforcement.

Academic supervision at MTs Ihyauddiniyah Gading is planned and communicative, involving direct classroom observation and constructive feedback. Teachers appreciate this supportive process, which helps them improve teaching methods and time management. Students also benefit from more understandable lessons and engaging classroom atmospheres. Supervision is documented systematically through observation journals and evaluation forms, allowing differentiated support. This reflective and developmental supervision strategy encourages teachers to be more innovative and responsible, highlighting its role as a professional growth tool rather than mere control.

Monitoring is collaboratively conducted by the principal and management team, focusing on attendance, administrative completeness, and teacher participation in school activities. Teachers report increased discipline and accountability, motivated by the knowledge that their work is monitored. Parents and students also note improvements in teacher consistency and classroom engagement. Discipline is reinforced through role modeling, collective agreements on rules, and a reward system, which cultivates intrinsic motivation rather than external pressure. This holistic approach enhances teacher professionalism and creates a positive impact on student learning outcomes.

A supportive work environment and inspiring leadership foster a strong teacher work ethic at MTs Ihyauddiniyah Gading. The principal encourages innovation, autonomy, and continuous professional development, which teachers value highly. Regular evaluation meetings promote shared experiences and reduce work stress, strengthening collegial spirit. Parents observe their children's increased enthusiasm for school, correlating with teachers' positive attitudes. Integrating supervision, monitoring, discipline, and work ethic strengthens educational quality and school culture. This comprehensive leadership approach not only enhances teacher performance but also nurtures a sustainable, collaborative, and progressive learning community.

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