



Principals' Role in the Application of Reward and Punishment Systems for Promoting Student Discipline in Pesantren-Based Schools

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to examine the role of the principal in building student discipline through the reward-and-punishment approach in Islamic boarding schools. This study uses a qualitative approach of the phenomenological type, where researchers use interviews, observations and documentation. Data analysis is done through data reduction, presentation, and conclusion. The study results indicate that the principal not only carries out administrative functions but is also actively involved in students' transformative academic and character development. As an Instructional Leader, the principal fosters learning, provides supervision and builds a coaching system that integrates academics and discipline. In the role of Role Model, the principal's exemplary attitude, discipline, and spirituality have proven effective in forming a positive culture collectively. As a Manager and Policy Maker, the principal designs a systematic reward and punishment policy based on Islamic boarding school values and is dialogical. Meanwhile, the role of a Motivator is carried out through a personal, affirmative, and inspirational approach that builds the spirit of teachers and students. The discussion results show that these four roles strengthen each other and contribute to forming an educational and sustainable disciplinary climate. This study provides implications regarding the importance of contextual, participatory, and humanistic principal leadership in managing value-based schools.

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INTRODUCTION

In social life, education has a central role as a foundation for the character formation of the younger generation (Suyato et al., 2024; Szymkowiak et al., 2021). One of the central values that need to be instilled from an early age is discipline (Suri & Chandra, 2021; Zulela et al., 2022). Discipline is an important prerequisite for forming responsible, rule-abiding, and ethically positioned human beings in various social situations (Silalahi et al., 2023). The challenges in fostering discipline are increasing in this era of globalization, where external

influences such as social media and instant culture are powerful (Sari et al., 2025). As formal educational institutions, schools have a great responsibility to develop disciplinary values (Rosita et al., 2022; Ambarwati et al., 2023). In this context, reward and punishment are two approaches that are still relevant and strategic. This study is important because it offers a managerial approach to the principal who plays a role in forming a culture of discipline through an appropriate reward and punishment system so that it can contribute to the formation of the character of the nation's generation.

Society faces a significant challenge in educating children to become disciplined and responsible individuals (Harefa et al., 2024; Iksal et al., 2024). Few students show deviant behaviour such as truancy, being late, not doing assignments, and even engaging in acts of violence or bullying (Kaluma, 2023; Fatwa et al., 2024). This indicates a lack of success in forming a consistent and effective culture of discipline in the educational environment. One of the causes is the weak discipline management system in schools, especially regarding the application of rewards and punishments. If managed properly, these two approaches can shape student behaviour in a more orderly and responsible way. This problem is even more complex in a pesantren-based school environment with stricter rules and high religious values. Therefore, a strong leadership model is needed from the principal to manage the reward and punishment strategy to align with the values of the pesantren.

Based on initial observations at SMP Nurul Jadid, which is based on the Pesantren as the site of this research, there was an inconsistency in the application of rewards and punishments. Some principals still consider this approach an administrative formality without a mature strategy. On the other hand, students feel they do not get justice because the punishments and rewards given are subjective or not based on clear criteria. For example, awards are only given to students who excel academically, while good behaviour and other contributions are often overlooked. Likewise, the sanctions applied are often not educational and cause trauma. This phenomenon shows the need for the role of the principal as a strategic leader in building a reward and punishment system that is fair, measurable, and oriented towards character building. The principal must create an educational environment, not punish unthinkingly, and give rewards proportionally to form a positive culture of discipline.

Various previous studies have discussed the effectiveness of rewards and punishments in shaping student behaviour. Research by Lathifa et al. (2024) shows consistent rewards significantly increase student learning motivation. Meanwhile, a study by Obadire and Sinthumule (2021) found that educational

punishment can improve student behaviour in the long term. However, most of these studies focus more on the technical aspects of implementing rewards and punishments by teachers rather than on the principal's leadership as a policy director. This shows that studies on the role of the principal in designing and implementing a strategic reward and punishment system have not been widely conducted. The principal plays an important role in creating a climate of discipline through visionary and participatory leadership.

In addition, most studies are still limited to public schools; not many have focused on the context of Islamic boarding school-based schools. Islamic boarding schools have unique characteristics, such as rules based on Islamic values, an integrated learning system, and a dormitory pattern that makes disciplinary challenges different. In an environment like this, rewards and punishments cannot be applied rigidly but must be adjusted to the spiritual and cultural values of the Islamic boarding school.

This gap indicates an important research gap to be filled: how principals in Islamic boarding schools play a strategic role in managing rewards and punishments to remain effective, educational, and by the values adopted. Therefore, this study is important to fill this gap while providing practical contributions to the development of educational management in Islamic boarding schools.

This study offers novelty in two main aspects. First, it focuses on the principal's leadership, not just teachers, in implementing rewards and punishments as part of a managerial strategy. Second, the context of this study is Islamic boarding school-based schools that have their own religious and cultural nuances, which are different from public schools. These two things make this study academically relevant and provide practical contributions for principals who want to improve student discipline through a holistic approach to institutional values. The approach used in this study will emphasize the importance of alignment between reward and punishment policies and the vision and mission of Islamic boarding schools, as well as how principals can inspire teachers and students to make discipline a part of the school culture, not just an obligation.

Based on this background, the main problem to be studied is: "What is the role of the principal in implementing rewards and punishments to build student discipline at SMP Nurul Jadid, Probolinggo?". This question will be answered through an in-depth qualitative approach to the principal's leadership practices. This study believes that the principal acts not only as an administrative manager but also as a change leader who can create a disciplined, fair, and inspiring school

climate. This study will examine how the principal sets policies, supervises, and builds cooperation with teachers and dormitory guardians in managing the reward and punishment system. Thus, this study answers academic needs and contributes to educational management practices, especially in Islamic boarding school-based institutions.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological type (Alhazmi et al., 2022; Hossain et al., 2024). The phenomenological approach was chosen because it aims to understand the meaning of the research subject's experience in-depth, primarily how the principal interprets and applies rewards and punishments in the context of student discipline in the Islamic boarding school environment. Through this approach, the researcher explores the perceptions, strategies, and values that underlie the actions of the principal, teachers, and students related to disciplinary policies. This type of research is appropriate because phenomenology allows researchers to enter the world of informant experience without intervening but rather to explore the meaning behind their actions. Thus, this study is expected to provide a more complete and contextual understanding of leadership practices in applying rewards and punishments in Islamic boarding schools with distinctive religious and socio-cultural characteristics.

The location of this research is SMP Nurul Jadid, Probolinggo, one of the formal educational institutions under the auspices of the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School. This school has an integrated education system between the national curriculum and Islamic boarding school values so that disciplinary practices are emphasized from an academic perspective and spiritual and moral ones. The selection of this location was based on several considerations, including a strong system of discipline, the implementation of rewards and punishments that have been running, and the active role of the principal in forming a culture of discipline. The school environment integrated with the dormitory also provides its complexity in managing student discipline, making it a relevant and rich place to be explored through a phenomenological approach.

In the data collection process, the researcher used several main techniques: in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with the principal, vice principal for student affairs, teachers, dormitory guardians, and students. The aim was to explore their perceptions regarding the implementation of rewards and punishments and their impact on student discipline. The participatory observation was conducted by participating

in various school and dormitory activities, especially those related to fostering student behaviour, to see firsthand the implementation of rewards and punishments in the field. In addition, documentation such as the discipline book, violation records, student awards, and the principal's decree were reviewed to complement the data from interviews and observations. Combining these three techniques will provide rich, in-depth, and comprehensive data.

Data analysis in this study follows the Miles and Huberman model, which includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion (Asipi et al., 2022). Data reduction is carried out by sorting and simplifying data from interviews, observations, and documentation that have been collected. The data is then categorized according to themes relevant to the study's focus, such as the role of the principal, forms of rewards, types of punishments, and their impact on discipline. After that, the data is presented as descriptive narratives, tables, or matrices to facilitate reading the relationships between thematic categories. Finally, the researcher interprets the meaning and draws conclusions gradually based on a deep understanding of the data that has been analyzed. This process is carried out iteratively and reflectively to ensure consistency and validity of the findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Instructional Leader

The role of instructional leader in the context of the SMP Nurul Jadid is defined as the principal's ability to direct, foster, and develop the learning process. This includes planning academic activities, supervising learning, motivating teachers and students, and implementing rewards and punishments to develop student character and discipline. In its operation, this role is not only administrative but also transformative, where the principal functions as the main director in creating a disciplined, structured, and religious learning culture. This definition was born from the reality in the field where the principal not only acts as a manager but also as an instructional leader who directly influences learning practices and the formation of student attitudes.

One informant, the Vice Principal for Student Affairs, said, "The Principal always emphasizes the importance of discipline in learning activities. We teachers are asked to provide rewards every time a student shows progress, even if it is small, and he also gave direction that punishment must be educational, not punitive." This statement shows that the principal at SMP Nurul Jadid has complete control in forming a disciplinary climate through an instructional approach. The researcher interpreted that the rewards and punishments

implemented were part of an instructional leadership strategy to build students' internal awareness of positive values, not just obeying the rules for fear of sanctions.

Another informant, a senior teacher, added, "He actively enters the classroom randomly, observes the learning process, and even provides motivation to students who experience a decline in learning enthusiasm. Not only are students given attention, teachers are also often given appreciation for their efforts in developing learning models." The researcher assessed that these activities reflect a participatory and supportive instructional leadership style. The principal makes policies from behind a desk and is actively involved in the field, interacting directly with teachers and students. This action strengthens an appreciative culture and reduces the distance between school management and students, so rewards and punishments become a coaching instrument that feels fair and constructive.

The results of the researcher's observations support these findings. During the morning assembly, the principal gave symbolic awards in open praise to orderly students and teachers who were the first to arrive. At the same time, students who violated the rules were greeted directly by the principal, asked to explain their reasons, and given light tasks as a form of educational punishment. Researchers observed that this approach fostered emotional closeness between the principal and students and created a collective awareness that discipline is part of the learning process, not just the fulfilment of formal rules. This observation confirms that the practice of reward and punishment is carried out in a measured, educational manner and under the direct control of the principal as an instructional leader.

From the series of findings above, the researcher concluded that the principal at SMP Nurul Jadid carries out the role of instructional leader by forming a coaching system that integrates academics and character. Rewards foster a spirit of learning and positive behaviour, while punishment is applied in an educational corridor to not cause traumatic effects. The principal instructs and provides real examples through active involvement in school activities, including supervision of learning and direct interaction with students.

The pattern shows that the principal's role as an instructional leader directly impacts the consistency of reward and punishment implementation. The principal becomes the centre of control for values and a culture of discipline that is brought to life through role models, open communication, and direct intervention in the teaching and learning process. This strategy shows that instructional leadership not only strengthens academic performance but also forms discipline systemically embedded in the culture of Islamic boarding schools.

Role Model

In this study, a role model is defined as the role of the principal in attitudes, behaviours, and policies that reflect the values of discipline, responsibility, and high integrity—the principal functions as the main role model for teachers, students, and all school community members. The exemplary behaviour shown is not limited to formal aspects such as time discipline or compliance with rules but also includes a humble attitude, fairness in decision-making, and consistency between words and actions. At SMP Nurul Jadid, the role of the principal as a role model becomes a moral and spiritual foundation in forming a culture of discipline deeply rooted in the values of Islamic boarding schools.

Table 1. Role Model

Interview Excerpt	Indicators	Informant
"He is always there before the teachers arrive. Sometimes he has been walking around the dormitory since dawn."	Exemplary in time discipline	Senior teacher
"We as teachers are embarrassed if we arrive late, because the Principal is always on time."	Influence of exemplary on teachers	Young teacher
"Students who see him enter the mosque early, also come earlier."	Exemplary in spiritual aspects	Hostel guardian
"He never gets angry, but is firm. That makes us feel appreciated but still obedient."	Exemplary in leadership attitudes	Grade VIII students
"If there are students who break the rules, he doesn't punish them straight away, but talks to them first."	Exemplary in conflict resolution	BK teacher

Table 1 shows that the role of the principal as a role model is reflected in various dimensions, ranging from time discipline, spirituality, and authoritative yet humane leadership to exemplary behaviour in dealing with conflicts. Information from senior and young teachers revealed that the principal's consistency in being on time influenced students' attitudes and formed a culture of discipline among teachers. Teachers automatically feel compelled to adjust their behaviour when the prominent leader shows high responsibility on time. This creates a professional and harmonious work environment. Meanwhile, data from dormitory guardians and students confirmed that spiritual exemplary behaviour is also an important aspect in forming student discipline. The principal coming to the mosque early is a positive stimulus for students to do the same.

On the other hand, the principal's approach to resolving disciplinary problems is not repressive but somewhat educative. This shows that exemplary behaviour is seen in what the principal does and how he makes decisions in difficult situations. A firm yet humane approach is a unique attraction that fosters

respect and obedience, not because of fear but because of admiration and trust.

The researcher's observations showed that the principal was always present in the teacher's room and the dormitory area before the activity hours began. On several occasions, the researcher witnessed how the principal greeted students in a friendly manner but maintained his authority. During the morning assembly, the principal did not hesitate to stand with the teachers in the back row to ensure the order of the assembly. When a student was late, the principal did not immediately reprimand him in public but approached him personally and gave wise advice. This pattern shows that the principal prioritizes a personal and highly ethical approach, which also shows consistency between words and actions.

Based on the data above, the principal of SMP, Nurul Jadid, plays the role of a role model thoroughly and systematically. The exemplary behaviour shown is not symbolic but is internalized in everyday life. This encourages the formation of a culture of discipline that does not rely on coercion but rather arises from a collective consciousness formed by the real example of the school leader. This exemplary behaviour flows from top to bottom, influencing teachers, staff, and students to implement the values of discipline.

The pattern shows that when the principal consistently plays the role of a role model, discipline in the school does not need to be built with a coercive approach. Exemplary behaviour regarding time, attitude, and spiritual values creates a harmonious and dignified educational ecosystem. Thus, rewards and punishments are no longer the primary tool but rather a complement to the habituation process instilled through exemplary leadership.

Managers and Policy Makers

In this study, the role of the principal as a manager and policymaker is interpreted as the principal's ability to design, implement, and evaluate school policies, especially those related to student discipline, through a reward-and-punishment approach. The principal manages administrative aspects and strategically decides to strengthen school culture and rules and develop student character. At SMP Nurul Jadid, school policies are systematically formulated by involving Islamic boarding school values as the primary foundation. The principal ensures the system runs effectively and aligns with the school's vision and mission.

An informant, the Vice Principal for Curriculum, stated, "The Principal is very structured in making rules. For example, there is a book of rules that is distributed to students when they first enter, and all teachers participate in socializing it. Even rewards such as 'exemplary students' are made based on measurable indicators, not just pointing." The researcher interpreted that the

principal had carried out managerial functions systematically by strengthening the documentation system and dividing roles for all school residents. Rewards are not just given as symbolic awards but as part of a positive behavioural reinforcement mechanism based on written rules.

Another informant, a guidance and counselling teacher, said, “Every month there is a special meeting to discuss student violations and what should be done. The principal leads it directly, and he always emphasizes that punishment should educate, not make students depressed. So, we are advised to give social tasks, not physical or emotional punishment.” From this statement, it can be seen that the principal makes policies and ensures that their implementation is in accordance with educational principles. The researcher assessed that this approach shows the principal's character as a manager who is not authoritarian but collaborative and responsive to dynamics in the field.



Figure 1. Flow of reward and punishment policy

The results of the researcher's observations strengthen this finding. When attending weekly school meetings, the researcher noted that the principal always included discussions related to the development of student discipline. He also directly led the compilation of the list of students who were entitled to receive rewards and discussed the types of punishments given personally to problematic students. In addition, it was seen that the policies set by the principal were not entirely top-down but rather through a dialogic forum and based on field reports from teachers, homeroom teachers, and dormitory guardians. This observation shows that the principal has strong control but remains open to input from his team.

From all the data obtained, the principal at SMP, Nurul Jadid, carries out his role as a manager and policymaker in a professional and structured manner. Rewards and punishments are not implemented spontaneously or emotionally but through a clear, measurable, and periodically monitored policy system. The principal takes a central position in this process but still prioritizes educational and dialogic principles and is based on Islamic boarding school values.

The pattern of the data above shows that the disciplinary policy at SMP Nurul Jadid was born from planned, collaborative, and accountable leadership. The principal acts as a strategic manager who not only sets rules but also designs a system that supports the sustainability of rewards and punishments. Through a systematic and open policy cycle, a culture of discipline is formed not through

coercion but through understanding, involvement, and role models that are consciously designed by school management.

Motivator

In this study, the role of the principal as a motivator is defined as the ability to raise enthusiasm, provide psychological encouragement, and inspire teachers and students to have a strong commitment to learning goals and discipline. The principal at SMP, Nurul Jadid, carries out this role by giving verbal rewards, holding reflective forums, and showing empathy when dealing with student and teacher difficulties. The motivation that is built is not artificial but is instilled through a personal, religious, and contextual approach by the values of the Islamic boarding school that emphasize sincerity and moral responsibility.

An informant, a subject teacher, said, "The principal often takes the time to be present in class just to encourage students who look tired or lack enthusiasm. He also appreciates our efforts, even in small things like designing learning media." The researcher interpreted this to mean that the principal fully understands the importance of psychological encouragement in improving student and teacher performance. The motivation given is not general and abstract but explicitly delivered and contextually so that it can touch the emotional aspects of the individual.

One student stated, "When I got bad grades, I was afraid of being scolded, but it turned out that the principal said, 'You can do better, I believe you.' That made me excited again." This statement shows that the principal uses a motivational approach based on positive affirmations. Instead of putting pressure, the principal positions himself as a supporter who encourages students' potential. The researcher assessed that this attitude creates a healthy and humanistic learning climate, where rewards and punishments are not the only tools for forming discipline but are complemented by personal motivation that fosters students' self-awareness.

The results of the observation showed that the principal actively interacted with students on various informal occasions, such as during breaks, after congregational prayers, or in student discussion forums. In several meetings, the researcher witnessed the principal telling inspiring stories about Islamic figures or successful alums with a light but memorable language style. Not infrequently, the principal mentioned the names of students or teachers personally in the praise or motivation he delivered, which shows that the approach he used was individual and caring.

The data shows that the principal actively and personally motivates the school community's emotional aspects. He does not rely on formal motivation

through speeches or large meetings alone but emphasizes daily communication that builds psychological connections. In the context of reward and punishment, the motivation given by the principal becomes a counterweight that softens the impact of punishment and strengthens the meaning of reward.

The pattern seen from the data indicates that the role of Motivator by the principal creates a supportive, positive learning environment and builds student and teacher confidence. A personalized and consistently carried out motivational approach strengthens the effectiveness of the discipline development strategy. This confirms that the principal's motivational leadership not only improves behaviour but also instils internal values that support the formation of sustainable discipline in the pesantren-based school environment.

Discussion

The study results on the principal's role as an instructional leader, role model, manager, policy maker, and motivator show strong consistency with the existing literature. As an Instructional Leader, the principal is proven to play an active role in improving the quality of learning through academic supervision and teacher professional development. This aligns with the view of Permatasari et al. (2023) and Ferdinan et al. (2024), who emphasized that the principal must be a director of learning with a focus on academic goals and improving the quality of teaching. However, this study also found that in practice, some principals face constraints in time allocation and high administrative burdens, which make this function less than optimal - a finding that is slightly different from the theoretical assumptions that tend to be ideal.

In the role of a Role Model, the principal in this study demonstrated an attitude of integrity, discipline, and openness, which positively influenced teachers' work ethic. This finding is in line with the transformational leadership theory of Khan et al. (2022) and Meuser et al. (2022), which states that leaders who are role models will motivate their followers to go beyond personal interests for organizational goals. However, some respondents stated that not all principals could demonstrate behavioural consistency, especially in the face of external pressures such as administrative demands or interventions from outside the school. This is a striking difference from the expectations of the literature that tends to idealize this role.

As Managers and Policy Makers, principals have an important role in managing resources, making internal policies, and ensuring the operational efficiency of schools (Nurhalimah et al., 2024; Nasution et al., 2024). The educational management literature supports this finding by emphasizing that principals function as strategic decision-makers. This study strengthens this idea but also shows that principals often face budget constraints and policies from

above that limit innovation. This highlights the difference between the idealism of theory and the reality in the field, where principals must be policymakers and implementers of external policies that are not always in sync with the local needs of the school.

In the role of Motivator, the results of the study show that principals have succeeded in creating a supportive work environment, providing rewards, and encouraging collaboration between teachers. This aligns with the literature from Susanto et al. (2023) and Latham (2023), which emphasizes the importance of motivation in creating high performance. However, the results of the study also revealed that the effectiveness of motivation is highly dependent on the communication style and interpersonal relationships of the principal. This means that motivation is not only about the reward system but also the social skills of the principal, which have not been fully emphasized in classical motivation theory.

The theoretical implication of this finding is the need for adjustments in the approach to educational leadership theory that is more contextual, especially in understanding the dynamics of the role of the principal in the field. Meanwhile, in practice, these results encourage the need for more comprehensive leadership training for principals, which emphasizes managerial and academic aspects, character building, interpersonal communication, and adaptation to policies. That way, principals can carry out their roles in a more balanced and effective manner amidst the complexity of the current education system.

CONCLUSION

This study's conclusion shows that the principal's role as an Instructional Leader, Role Model, Manager, Policy Maker, and Motivator significantly influences the quality of school management and climate. This study confirms that principal leadership depends not only on managerial skills but also on the quality of interpersonal relationships, personal integrity, and the ability to adapt to contextual challenges. These findings underline the importance of holistic and contextual leadership in education, where principals must be able to balance technical, social, and moral tasks.

The main strength of this study is its contribution to developing educational management science, especially in integrating various principal leadership roles into one conceptual framework. By comparing empirical findings with existing literature, this study enriches the scientific discourse on educational leadership that reflects the realities in the field. However, the study's limitations related to the region's scope and the number of participants need to be acknowledged, which opens up opportunities for further research with a mixed approach or cross-regional comparative studies. Future research should

further explore external factors that influence the effectiveness of principal leadership and effective training strategies in preparing principals to face the ever-growing demands of education.

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