

School Principal's Leadership Strategy in Improving the Performance of PAI Teachers in the Digital Era: The Role of Learning Media and Motivation in Islamic Religious Teaching

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Abstract

The main focus of this research is on the motivation provided by school principals, the development of teacher competencies through continuous training, and the use of learning facilities and media to support PAI teaching. The research method used is a qualitative approach with a case study design. The data collection technique was carried out through in-depth interviews with school principals and PAI teachers, direct observation of teaching practices, and analysis of documentation related to school policies. The collected data is then analyzed using thematic analysis techniques, which include data reduction, data display, and verification of findings. The results of the study show that the principal at MIS Muhammadiyah Darussalam Waioti has succeeded in creating a positive work environment by providing motivation in the form of formal and informal appreciation, as well as opening constructive communication channels with teachers. In addition, teacher competency development is carried out through continuous training and regular supervision, which focuses on improving pedagogical skills and the use of technology in teaching. The use of learning facilities and media, such as projectors and digital applications, has also been proven to improve the quality of PAI learning. The implications of this study show that school principals who implement transformative leadership strategies can improve the quality of teaching and teacher performance, which in turn contributes to improving the quality of Islamic religious education in schools.

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INTRODUCTION

In the context of education in Indonesia, the role of school principals in improving the quality of education has become an important issue that continues to receive attention (Safi'l & Mardiana, 2024; Fathurrozaq et al., 2025; Utaminingsih et al., 2025). Moreover, in Islamic schools, such as Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Private (MIS) Muhammadiyah Darussalam Waioti, the success of Islamic religious education is highly dependent on the effectiveness of the principal's leadership and the performance of PAI teachers. As an educational leader, school principals are required not only to carry out administrative duties (Karakose et al., 2021; AlAjmi, 2022; Elomaa et al., 2023), but also to play an active role in improving the quality of learning, both in pedagogical aspects and in terms of teacher competency development (Engeness, 2021; Howard et al., 2021; Irasuti & Bachtiar, 2024). In the midst of demands to improve the quality of education, these schools face great challenges in facing limited resources, both in terms of facilities, curriculum, and teacher competence (Crawford et al., 2021; Minkos & Gelbar, 2021; Jaedun et al., 2024). Therefore, it is important to understand more deeply how school principals can contribute to improving the quality of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teaching through the various leadership strategies they implement.

Research related to the role of school principals in improving the quality of education has been carried out in various countries, but in Indonesia, especially at the basic education level, it is still limited. Several studies have shown that transformational principal leadership can have a significant effect on the quality of learning, especially through the approach of providing motivation and developing teacher competencies (Alzoraiki et al., 2023; Pan et al., 2021; Li & Liu, 2022). Related research studies have been carried out several times, including states that school principals who are proactive in providing appreciation and continuous support to teachers can improve their teaching spirit and performance (Yalçinkaya et al., 2021; Muhimmah, 2022; Yulius et al., 2024). In addition, another research also revealed the importance of using adequate learning facilities and media to support more effective teaching (Abumalloh et al., 2021; Lacka et al., 2021; Akram et al., 2021). However, there is still little research that specifically highlights how principals in Islamic schools integrate these strategies to improve PAI teaching, given the particular challenges faced in religious teaching.

This study aims to explore the role of school principals in MIS Muhammadiyah Darussalam Waioti in improving the performance of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers. The main focus of this study is to identify strategies implemented by school principals to increase motivation, develop competencies, and utilize learning facilities and media in PAI teaching. The formulation of the problems that will be answered in this study is: (1) How does the principal provide motivation to improve the performance of PAI teachers at MIS Muhammadiyah Darussalam Waioti?

(2) What are the strategies used by school principals in developing the competencies of PAI teachers? (3) How do school principals utilize learning facilities and media in supporting the PAI learning process? This research is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the role of school leadership in improving the quality of teaching in the field of Islam. This study assumes that the strategies implemented by the principal at MIS Muhammadiyah Darussalam Waioti have a positive impact on improving the performance of PAI teachers, especially in terms of motivation, competency development, and utilization of learning facilities.

Based on the existing literature, it can be assumed that school principals who actively provide support, both in the form of formal and informal appreciation, will succeed in increasing teachers' enthusiasm and dedication in teaching. In addition, competency development through continuous training and effective supervision is expected to improve the pedagogical ability of PAI teachers. The provisional answer that can be drawn from this study is that the combination of strong motivation, continuous competency development, and the use of relevant learning media can create an environment that supports and improves the quality of PAI learning in the school. These findings are expected to contribute to the development of educational leadership theory, especially in Islamic schools.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research design with a case study approach to analyze the role of school principals in improving the performance of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers at MIS Muhammadiyah Darussalam Waioti. The unit of analysis in this study is the principal and PAI teachers involved in the learning process at the school. The focus of this research is to explore and understand the strategies applied by school principals in providing motivation, competency development, and the use of learning facilities and media to improve the quality of PAI teaching. This study uses a case study approach because it aims to delve deeper into the phenomena that occur in one location in detail and contextual. Through this approach, the research not only seeks general findings, but also understands more specific nuances of the dynamics of educational leadership that occur in the school (Gurr et al., 2021; Constantinides, 2021; Evans, 2022).

The main source of information in this study is the principal and teacher of PAI at MIS Muhammadiyah Darussalam Waioti. The respondents involved consisted of three groups, namely the school principal, five PAI teachers who have more than five years of teaching experience, and two PAI teachers with less than five years of teaching experience. The selection of respondents was carried out purposively, taking into account their experience in the teaching process and interaction with the principal.

Data is also obtained from administrative records and archives of relevant school activities. These respondents were chosen because they have relevant information about the management of Islamic religious education in schools, both from an administrative and pedagogical perspective. In this study, in-depth interviews are used as the main technique to explore the perspectives of resource persons, in addition to direct observation and documentation of school activities related to PAI learning.

Data collection in this study was carried out through three main techniques: interviews, observations, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted with PAI principals and teachers to explore information related to motivation, competency development, and the use of learning media in PAI teaching. Observations are carried out in classrooms and school environments to observe the interaction between principals and teachers, as well as the implementation of learning methods that have been learned in training. Documentation includes archives of school activities such as performance evaluation meetings and training reports. The collected data was then analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques consisting of three stages: data reduction (selection and simplification of information), data display (presentation of data in the form of tables and narratives), and data verification (checking the validity of findings through data triangulation). Through this process, this research can provide an in-depth understanding of the role of school principals in improving the quality of PAI teaching (White et al., 2021; Arbelaez et al., 2024; Radez et al., 2021).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Principal's Strategy in Developing PAI Teacher Competencies

This study reveals that the principal at MIS Muhammadiyah Darussalam Waioti implements a structured strategy to develop the competence of PAI teachers. This strategy is focused on the implementation of a continuous training program, which is designed to improve teachers' pedagogical and professional abilities in supporting Islamic religious learning. Observations show that the training covers various important themes, such as mastery of educational technology, innovative learning methods, and an integrative approach to building students' character. The principal actively initiates teacher participation in external training such as seminars, workshops, and subject teacher deliberations (MGMP). With a focus on teacher competency development, school principals create an educational environment that supports the quality of learning. These results are relevant to the context of research that highlights the role of school leadership in improving the quality of teaching in the field of religion, especially in the face of evolving curriculum challenges.

Through observation of the training program, it was found that the principal not only provides opportunities for teachers to participate in formal training, but also supports the implementation of training results through regular supervision and mentoring. Supervision is carried out every three months to ensure that teachers apply the learning methods that have been learned. For example, teachers are given training on the use of technological devices such as projectors and digital learning applications to deliver material more effectively. During mentoring, the principal provides constructive feedback to teachers regarding lesson planning, evaluation methods, and classroom management. The observed teachers showed an increase in their ability to develop learning plans that were more creative and relevant to the needs of students. With this strategy, the principal ensures that teachers not only gain new knowledge but are also able to implement it effectively in the classroom.

Leadership Strategies in Education

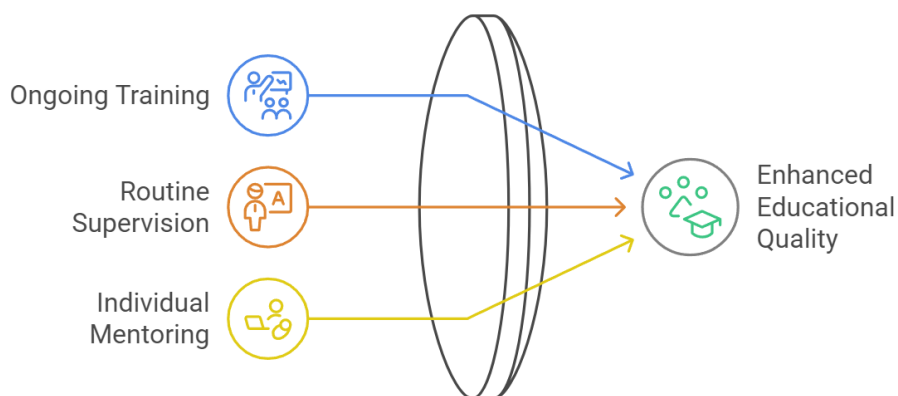


Figure 1. Leadership Strategies in MIS Muhammadiyah Darussalam Waioti

The results of the observation show that the strategy of the principal at MIS Muhammadiyah Darussalam Waioti includes continuous training, routine supervision, and individual mentoring. The focus of this strategy is to improve the pedagogical competence of teachers through formal training and implementation support in the field. The principal also ensures that each teacher gets the opportunity to improve their skills in delivering material in a creative and relevant manner. This strategy has been proven to improve the quality of PAI learning in the school. The principal's strategies found in this study are in line with professional education theories that emphasize the importance of continuous training and supervision for teacher development.

The principal plays the role of transformational leader who drives innovation in education. By providing training and implementation support, principals ensure that PAI teachers are not only skilled in delivering material, but also able to create learning that is relevant to the needs of students and the challenges of modern education. These findings confirm that visionary leadership can create a positive impact on the overall quality of education.

The Use of Learning Facilities and Media in Improving the Quality of PAI Education

The results of the study show that the principal at MIS Muhammadiyah Darussalam Waitoti pays great attention to the provision of learning facilities and media to support the teaching process of PAI. Facilities such as projectors, computers, and other technological devices have been provided to support the delivery of more engaging and interactive materials. In addition, there are various teaching materials such as reference books, visual aids, and digital applications that are relevant to the curriculum. This learning media is designed so that students can understand Islamic religious values more deeply through a visual and interactive approach. The principal strives to ensure that these facilities are used optimally to support the success of the learning process. This focus not only reflects the principal's commitment to improving educational facilities, but also illustrates his efforts in creating a conducive learning environment for teachers and students to develop their potential to the fullest.

The use of learning facilities and media in this school has a significant impact on the teaching and learning process. PAI teachers use projectors to display educational videos related to religious materials, such as explanations of stories in the Qur'an or the application of Islamic values in daily life. In addition, digital learning applications are used to make students more engaged in learning through interactive simulations and visualization of abstract concepts. Teachers report that the use of this media increases students' attention during the learning process, as the material presented becomes more engaging and easy to understand. Not only that, but principals also ensure that teachers have access to online learning portals that help them develop richer and more in-depth lesson plans. With adequate facilities, students not only learn passively, but also actively ask questions, discuss, and understand religious concepts better.

The learning facilities and media provided by the principal play a key role in improving the quality of PAI teaching. Support in the form of technological devices such as projectors and digital applications, coupled with relevant teaching materials, has created a more dynamic and engaging learning atmosphere. Students become more involved in the learning process because the material is delivered in an innovative and easy-to-understand way. PAI teachers also feel helped in conveying complex material through the visual aids and technology provided.

With this step, the principal ensures that Islamic religious education is not only taught textually, but also through practical and enjoyable learning experiences. These findings are in line with constructivist learning theory which emphasizes the importance of using technological aids to create meaningful learning experiences. The principal has demonstrated innovative leadership by ensuring that relevant learning facilities and media are available to support the teaching process. This approach helps teachers create a more interactive classroom atmosphere, support students in understanding the material better, and prepare them to face the challenges of modern education. This step also shows that technology can be an effective tool to improve the quality of Islamic religious education, in line with the demands of the national curriculum and the needs of the 21st century society. The principal's efforts not only improve the quality of learning, but also create an image of the school as an adaptive and progressive educational institution.

Motivation of School Principals in Improving the Performance of PAI Teachers

The results of the study show that the motivation given by the principal at MIS Muhammadiyah Darussalam Waioti has a significant impact on improving the performance of PAI teachers. The principal actively gives formal and informal appreciation to teachers to create a positive and supportive work environment. This motivation is given in various forms, including formal awards such as certificates of achievement, as well as verbal recognition of teachers' dedication to teaching. In addition, open communication between principals and teachers allows teachers to feel valued and supported emotionally and professionally. Teachers feel that this motivation has increased their enthusiasm to continue learning and innovate in teaching. This approach shows that school principals not only lead from an administrative side, but also play an important role in improving teachers' psychological well-being, which in turn improves the quality of learning in the classroom.

From interviews with PAI teachers, it was revealed that the motivation of the principal is manifested through various forms of awards and support. One of the teachers stated, *"The principal always appreciates our hard work, such as giving certificates of appreciation at school events"* (I_G1_2023). Another teacher added, *"He often motivates us in regular meetings by appreciating our achievements, even if it is a small thing. It makes us feel appreciated"* (I_G2_2023). In addition, a teacher also revealed, *"When I faced difficulties in delivering the material, the principal gave me advice and support, which really helped me improve my teaching methods"* (I_G3_2023). The principal also initiates regular meetings to evaluate the performance of teachers collectively, allowing teachers to share experiences and find solutions together.

This strategy creates a work environment that supports collaboration and innovation, so teachers feel supported to continue to improve the quality of their teaching. The following table summarizes the thematic analysis of the research results regarding the motivation of school principals.

Table 2. Thematic Analysis

Theme	Description of Findings	Impact
Motivation of the Principal	The motivation provided by the principal plays a big role in improving the performance of PAI teachers, creating a positive and supportive work environment.	Improvement of teacher performance, enthusiasm, and innovation in teaching.
Formal Appreciation	The principal gave an award in the form of a certificate of achievement at the school event to appreciate the teacher's performance.	Teachers feel formally valued, increasing a sense of belonging and dedication.
Informal Appreciation	Verbal recognition of the teacher's hard work is given in regular meetings, increasing enthusiasm and a sense of appreciation.	Increasing the morale and motivation of teachers through small recognition.
Open Communication	The principal opens up communication that allows teachers to feel emotionally and professionally supported.	Increasing teachers' confidence through emotional and professional support.
Teacher Performance Evaluation	Regular meetings are held to evaluate teacher performance constructively and provide feedback.	Improving the quality of teaching through constructive feedback.
Collaboration and Support	The principal creates a collaborative atmosphere where teachers can share experiences and find solutions together.	Improving innovation and collective solutions to teaching challenges

From table 2. The motivation given by the principal at MIS Muhammadiyah Darussalam Waioti played a big role in improving the performance of PAI teachers. Formal appreciation, such as certificates of appreciation, as well as verbal recognition, creates a positive and supportive work environment. Teachers feel emotionally and professionally supported through open communication and constructive evaluation. The results of the interviews showed that this approach increased teachers' enthusiasm to continue learning and innovate in the learning process, creating a positive impact on the quality of teaching in the classroom.

These findings are in line with Herzberg's theory of motivation, which emphasizes the importance of reward and recognition in improving individual performance. Principals demonstrate transformative leadership by providing motivation that is not only results-oriented but also on the emotional well-being of teachers. Motivated teachers are more likely to be innovative and dedicated in teaching, which ultimately improves student learning outcomes. This strategy reflects the importance of good interpersonal relationships between principals and teachers in creating a productive educational environment. By providing ongoing support, the principal ensures that PAI teachers can face the challenges of teaching with a high sense of confidence and a passion for continuous improvement.

Discussion

The results of this study show that the motivation given by the principal at MIS Muhammadiyah Darussalam Waioti plays a significant role in improving the performance of PAI teachers. By providing formal and informal awards, as well as creating open communication, principals create a positive work environment that directly impacts the quality of teaching. The main implication of these findings is that the motivation that principals provide not only leads to an increase in teacher morale but also affects their ability to continuously innovate in teaching. This motivation can be seen as a determining factor in creating a work atmosphere that supports the professional development of teachers. Thus, this principal approach can be adopted as an effective model of educational leadership to improve the quality of teaching in a variety of other educational contexts.

These findings underscore the importance of a motivational approach in school leadership. Positive relationships between principals and teachers, which are realized through formal and informal appreciation, play a role in increasing teachers' confidence and encouraging them to continue learning and innovating. This is in line with Thant & Chang, (2021) which emphasizes two main factors in work motivation: motivator factors and hygiene factors. Principals, through awards and open communication, not only increase teacher satisfaction but also motivate them to achieve higher professional standards. Furthermore, the results of this study support the view that collaborative and in-depth motivation can improve the quality of teaching, which in turn has an impact on student learning outcomes.

The results of this study also show that the principal's strategy in developing teacher competence through continuous training and mentoring has a major impact on improving the quality of PAI teaching. Formal training that includes the use of educational technology and innovative learning methods provides teachers with the practical skills necessary to face the challenges of classroom teaching. The main implication of these findings is that continuous training strategies and structured supervision can help teachers to not only acquire new knowledge but also implement it effectively in daily learning. This shows that teacher competency development does not only depend on one-time training, but requires continuous support in order to achieve optimal results in the context of education. These findings are in line with previous research that emphasizes the importance of continuous training in the development of teachers' professional competencies (Lohmann et al., 2021; Sancar et al., 2021; Mlambo et al., 2021).

By participating in training that focuses on pedagogical and technological aspects, and accompanied by structured supervision and mentoring, teachers at MIS Muhammadiyah Darussalam Waioti can improve the quality of their teaching. This reinforces the argument that transformational principal leadership, which supports teachers' professional development, plays an important role in improving the quality of education. This study also shows that routine supervision not only functions as a control tool, but also as a means to provide constructive feedback that helps teachers in planning and implementing better teaching.

Findings regarding the use of learning facilities and media at MIS Muhammadiyah Darussalam Waioti show that technological facilities such as projectors, computers, and digital applications play an important role in improving the quality of teaching. The main implication of these results is that the use of technology in Islamic religious teaching not only increases students' interest, but also makes learning more effective and engaging. Interactive learning media allows students to understand complex material in an easier and more enjoyable way. This facility also creates a more dynamic learning environment and supports collaboration between teachers and students. By providing access to relevant technology and learning resources, school principals show the importance of adapting educational facilities to the needs of the curriculum and the times.

These findings support the theory of constructivism which states that effective learning occurs when students actively participate in the learning process, with the support of adequate tools (Constantinides, 2021). The use of technology in Islamic religious learning not only facilitates the understanding of the material but also allows students to develop digital skills that are important in the modern era. Thus, the principal at MIS Muhammadiyah Darussalam Waioti has shown that the use of relevant learning facilities and media can create a more meaningful learning experience and in accordance with the needs of the 21st century educational curriculum. This also underscores the importance of adapting technology in education to create a learning atmosphere that is more interactive and in accordance with the demands of the times.

CONCLUSION

This study discusses the leadership role of school principals in improving the performance of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in the digital era, with a focus on motivation, competency development, and the use of learning media. The results of the study show that the motivation strategies provided by school principals, both formal and informal, succeed in creating a positive work environment, increasing teacher enthusiasm and innovation. In addition, competency development through continuous training and regular supervision has improved the pedagogical abilities of PAI teachers. The use of digital learning media has also been proven to improve the quality of learning. These findings

underscore the importance of transformational leadership of school principals in creating an atmosphere that supports teachers' professional development and improves the quality of education. This research contributes to the development of educational leadership theory, as well as provides practical insights on how school principals can optimize leadership strategies to improve teacher performance, which can be applied to other schools in Indonesia.

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