



Unlocking Professionalism: Strategic Principal Management in Islamic Secondary Education

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to analyze the planning, implementation, supervision, and evaluation carried out by the madrasah principal in improving the professionalism of educational personnel, as well as to identify the obstacles encountered in the process. This research employed a qualitative method with a descriptive approach, using observation, interviews, and documentation as data collection techniques. The data were analyzed through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that planning was conducted through clear task distribution, establishment of work standards, and determination of deadlines for administrative tasks. The implementation process was carried out through coaching, guidance, training, intensive communication, and motivation provided to administrative staff and operators. Supervision and evaluation were conducted periodically by monitoring the completion of administrative duties and controlling the timeliness of reporting. The study also found several obstacles, including limited budgets, inadequate technological facilities, and high administrative workloads. The implications of this study indicate that effective managerial practices by school leaders play a significant role in enhancing the professionalism and performance of educational personnel despite existing institutional challenges.

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INTRODUCTION

The management of madrasa principals plays a crucial role in determining the quality and effectiveness of educational services in Islamic educational institutions. In the contemporary educational era, society increasingly demands educational institutions that are not only capable of providing quality learning outcomes but also able to maintain effective administrative and managerial systems (Khofsah, 2025; Rahman, 2026; Shoha, 2026). Administrative staff professionalism becomes an essential element because it directly influences the quality of academic services, curriculum administration, student affairs, and institutional governance. Professional administrative services contribute to institutional effectiveness, accountability, and public trust in educational

institutions. This condition indicates that the success of educational institutions is not solely determined by teachers' competence but also by the managerial capacity of school leaders in developing all human resources comprehensively. Therefore, the madrasa principal's management is important because it serves as the foundation for building professional work systems, strengthening institutional performance, and ensuring that educational goals are achieved effectively and sustainably in accordance with Islamic educational values (Istikomah, 2021).

One of the major problems faced by many Islamic educational institutions today is the limited professionalism of administrative staff in managing educational administration effectively and efficiently. In practice, administrative staff often encounter obstacles related to technical competence, work discipline, technological adaptation, and administrative accuracy (Hefniy & Alwahedi, 2025; Holidi, 2025; Manshur, 2026)(Hikmah & Mudarris, 2026; Kusumawati, 2025; Syafiih, 2025). The rapid development of digital administration systems requires administrative personnel to possess adequate technological literacy and problem-solving skills. However, many institutions still face inadequate training opportunities, limited managerial support, and weak supervision systems that affect staff performance and productivity. In addition, increasing administrative workloads frequently create inefficiencies in completing institutional reporting and data management. These problems can hinder the achievement of educational objectives and reduce the quality of institutional services provided to students and stakeholders. Consequently, strengthening managerial functions such as planning, implementation, supervision, and evaluation becomes a significant necessity to improve the professionalism and effectiveness of administrative staff in Islamic educational institutions (Saihu, 2020; Taufik, 2023).

Field phenomena indicate that administrative management in madrasas still experiences various practical and technical challenges that require serious attention. Preliminary observations revealed that administrative staff and school operators generally possess adequate working experience, enabling administrative activities to operate relatively well. Nevertheless, several obstacles continue to disrupt administrative effectiveness, particularly problems related to digital administration systems such as EMIS and Simpatika applications, which frequently experience technical errors during data input and updating processes. Moreover, the resolution of these technical problems often depends on coordination with external district-level operators, causing delays in administrative reporting and institutional data management. This condition demonstrates that managerial support systems, technical guidance, supervision, and internal problem-solving mechanisms have not been fully optimized. In addition, limited technological facilities and high administrative workloads further complicate the implementation of professional administrative services. These realities highlight the importance of strengthening madrasa principal

management in order to improve administrative professionalism and institutional effectiveness comprehensively (Machfudz, 2022).

Several previous studies have examined the role of madrasa principals in improving the professionalism of educational personnel through various managerial approaches. Research conducted by Arifin and Al-Madani (2024) demonstrated that coaching, supervision, and motivational strategies implemented by madrasa principals positively influence staff discipline and administrative performance. Likewise, Oktavia et al. (2021) found that effective leadership communication, routine supervision, and reward systems significantly contribute to improving the quality of administrative staff performance. Furthermore, Julaekha et al. (2021) emphasized that professionalism can be strengthened through training programs, workshops, and periodic performance evaluations designed to enhance staff competence and productivity (Didi Sartika Ansori Ansori, Halimatus Sya'diyah, 2025; Nurhaida & Asdiqoh, 2026; Tabina & Dora, 2025). These studies collectively indicate that managerial leadership has a strategic role in shaping professional work culture and improving institutional administrative performance. The findings also confirm that effective educational management requires not only leadership authority but also continuous staff development, supervision, and organizational communication to support institutional effectiveness and educational quality improvement.

Despite the growing number of studies on madrasa leadership and staff professionalism, several important gaps remain insufficiently explored. Previous studies generally focus on leadership styles, staff coaching, motivation, and training programs without comprehensively examining how managerial functions are implemented in everyday institutional practices. In particular, limited attention has been given to technical administrative challenges arising from the implementation of digital educational systems such as EMIS and Simpatika, which increasingly influence administrative effectiveness in Islamic educational institutions. Existing research also rarely discusses the dependence of administrative staff on external coordination in resolving technical problems, as well as the impact of limited technological infrastructure on work professionalism (Mustaghfiroh & Mubaroq, 2025; Rawasiyah Rawasiyah, 2025; Solihin & Wijaya, 2024; Sulastri et al., 2025). Consequently, the practical managerial strategies used by madrasa principals to address technical and administrative constraints remain underexplored. This research gap is important because the effectiveness of digital administration systems has become a fundamental aspect of educational governance, accountability, and institutional performance in the modern educational environment (Susanto, 2016).

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the implementation of madrasa principal management in addressing both managerial and technical challenges related to administrative professionalism in Islamic educational

institutions. Unlike previous studies that primarily emphasize leadership motivation and staff development, this study examines managerial functions more comprehensively by integrating planning, implementation, supervision, and evaluation within the context of digital administrative challenges. This research also highlights how madrasa principals strengthen professionalism through technical guidance, communication systems, monitoring mechanisms, and problem-solving strategies in response to institutional administrative difficulties. The study is important because administrative professionalism today is increasingly influenced by technological adaptation, institutional coordination, and managerial responsiveness to digital systems. Therefore, this research contributes to the development of Islamic educational management theory by providing a more contextual understanding of managerial practices in contemporary madrasas while also offering practical recommendations for improving administrative effectiveness and institutional service quality.

Based on the above explanation, this study investigates how madrasa principals implement managerial functions in improving the professionalism of administrative staff and overcoming technical administrative challenges within Islamic educational institutions. This research argues that effective managerial practices involving systematic planning, continuous supervision, intensive communication, technical guidance, and periodic evaluation can significantly strengthen administrative professionalism and institutional effectiveness. The study assumes that administrative professionalism is not solely influenced by individual competence but also by the quality of leadership management and organizational support systems provided by madrasa principals. Therefore, the contribution of this study lies in offering a comprehensive understanding of how managerial leadership can improve administrative performance amid technological and institutional challenges. The findings are expected to provide both theoretical contributions to Islamic educational management studies and practical implications for madrasa leaders in developing more professional, adaptive, and effective administrative systems in the era of digital educational governance.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design to explore and understand comprehensively the management practices of madrasa principals in improving the professionalism of administrative staff. Qualitative research is used to understand social phenomena experienced by research subjects such as behavior, perceptions, motivations, and actions holistically within natural settings through descriptive explanations in the form of words and language (Moleong, 2007). The descriptive qualitative design was selected because this study focuses on examining managerial processes, interactions, supervision patterns, and institutional experiences in depth rather

than measuring variables quantitatively. Through this approach, the researcher was able to obtain contextual and detailed information regarding planning, implementation, supervision, and evaluation conducted by the madrasa principal in improving administrative staff professionalism. In addition, qualitative research allows flexibility in exploring complex educational management realities and understanding the meanings behind participants' experiences and actions within the institutional environment (Rahmadi, 2011).

The research was conducted at MTs Ummul Quraa located in Medan Tembung District, Deli Serdang Regency. This location was selected because the institution represents an Islamic educational institution that actively implements administrative management systems involving administrative staff and school operators in supporting educational services. In addition, the madrasa was considered relevant to the research focus because it faces several practical and technical administrative challenges related to digital systems such as EMIS and Simpatika, which require managerial support and supervision from the madrasa principal. These conditions provide a contextual setting for examining how managerial functions are implemented to improve staff professionalism amid institutional challenges. The participants in this study consisted of the madrasa principal and administrative staff who were directly involved in institutional administrative processes. In qualitative research, participants are referred to as informants because they provide detailed information and direct experiences related to the research problem. The informants were selected purposively based on their knowledge, responsibilities, and involvement in the implementation of administrative management within the institution (Rahmadi, 2011).

The data collection techniques used in this study included observation, interviews, and documentation to obtain comprehensive and in-depth information related to the research focus. Observation was conducted through participatory observation, in which the researcher directly observed and engaged in institutional activities to understand naturally occurring managerial practices and administrative processes. Observation in qualitative research enables researchers to obtain factual and contextual data regarding participants' behavior and interactions within the research setting (Moleong, 2007). Interviews were conducted using semi-structured interview techniques to allow flexibility in exploring participants' experiences, perceptions, and explanations regarding managerial implementation and staff professionalism. Through interviews, the researcher obtained primary data directly from informants concerning planning, supervision, guidance, and evaluation practices carried out by the madrasa principal. In addition, documentation techniques were used to collect supporting written data such as institutional reports, administrative records, organizational documents, and other relevant archives that strengthened the findings obtained

through observation and interviews (Moleong, 2007).

The data analysis process in this study followed the qualitative data analysis model consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Data condensation was carried out by selecting, simplifying, focusing, and organizing raw field data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation in accordance with the research objectives. This process aimed to identify important information and reduce irrelevant data while maintaining the essence of the findings. After data condensation, the researcher conducted data display by systematically presenting information in descriptive narratives to facilitate interpretation, pattern identification, and relationship analysis among the collected data. The final stage involved conclusion drawing and data verification, in which the researcher interpreted findings continuously throughout the research process to ensure consistency and validity of the conclusions. The trustworthiness of the data was maintained through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability techniques, including prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation of sources and methods, member checking, and the use of well-documented field records to ensure that the research findings were trustworthy and accountable (Moleong, 2007).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Planning of the Madrasa Principal in Improving the Professionalism of Administrative Staff

Based on the research findings obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation studies, the planning carried out by the madrasa principal in improving the professionalism of administrative staff at MTs Ummul Quraa has been implemented systematically through the identification of institutional needs, the preparation of annual work programs, and the assignment of duties according to staff competencies. This planning process is outlined in the EDM (Madrasa Self-Evaluation) and subsequently formulated into the ERKAM (Electronic Madrasa Work Plan and Budget). These findings indicate that the madrasa principal initiates strategic efforts in staff development by first identifying the internal needs and priorities of the institution.

This finding is supported by the statement of the madrasa principal, who explained:

“The planning I implement is related to EDM (Madrasa Self-Evaluation) and ERKAM (Electronic Madrasa Work Plan and Budget). EDM is a self-evaluation process where the madrasa principal inputs information related to the madrasa’s needs into the EDM application. From this, we can identify what the

madrassa requires, which is then formulated into ERKAM. ERKAM is an electronic-based work plan and budget designed to meet the madrassa's needs for one fiscal year. All of this is adjusted to the amount of BOS (School Operational Assistance) funds received. If the funds are limited, development is carried out gradually and cannot be implemented drastically at once. In addition, we conduct coordination meetings with teachers and administrative staff, usually at the beginning of the academic year and at the start of each semester, to evaluate performance and improve future shortcomings. From an administrative management perspective, I also monitor administrative staff in completing their tasks" (Madrassa Principal).

In addition to program-based planning, efforts to improve professionalism are also conducted through coordination meetings held at the beginning of the academic year and at the start of each semester, involving both teachers and administrative staff. These meetings function as forums for evaluating previous performance, identifying administrative weaknesses, and determining future work targets. From the perspective of the implementers, an administrative staff member/operator stated:

"The madrassa principal has planned various strategic steps to improve professionalism, especially for administrative staff/operators, such as preparing training schedules, setting clear work targets, and planning periodic evaluations. This planning helps me understand my duties and responsibilities. Task distribution is carried out based on the competencies and experience of each staff member and is adjusted to the needs of school activities, for example in student bookkeeping and operators handling online data" (Administrative Staff).

Based on these findings, a pattern can be identified showing that the madrassa principal at MTs Ummul Quraa implements planning through two main strategies: (1) formulating development needs through internal evaluation, and (2) distributing operational tasks according to staff competencies. This planning approach is not merely administrative in nature but also strategic because it is directly connected to the institution's efforts to improve the professionalism and work effectiveness of administrative staff

These findings are consistent with previous studies indicating that strategic planning conducted by school principals significantly influences the improvement of professional competence among educational personnel. Salni and Hidayat (2024), in the *Jurnal Pendidikan Sang Surya*, found that strategic management planning focused on performance outcomes and competency development is a fundamental component in enhancing professionalism. Similarly, Kusmiati et al. (2022) explained that school principals carry out

planning by designing short-, medium-, and long-term programs based on institutional needs identified through internal data analysis. Such programs are intended to establish a measurable direction for improving the professionalism of educational staff.

Thus, the findings of this study indicate that the madrasa principal's planning in improving the professionalism of administrative staff at MTs Ummul Quraa has been implemented through systematic mechanisms, including needs evaluation, annual program planning based on EDM and ERKAM, as well as technical planning related to task distribution and work target setting. This planning model aligns with educational management theory and previous research findings emphasizing the importance of systematic planning as a foundation for improving the professionalism of administrative staff.

Implementation of the Madrasa Principal in Improving the Professionalism of Administrative Staff

Based on the research findings, the implementation carried out by the madrasa principal in improving the professionalism of administrative staff at MTs Ummul Quraa is conducted through various forms of continuous professional development. These activities include training and capacity building, performance evaluation, assignment of duties and responsibilities, communication and coordination, and the provision of motivation to administrative staff and operators. These findings indicate that the madrasa principal does not merely formulate plans but is also actively involved in implementing programs aimed at improving the professionalism and performance quality of administrative staff.

As stated by the madrasa principal:

“The implementation of madrasa principal management in fostering the professionalism of administrative staff/operators at MTs Ummul Quraa is carried out through several approaches, such as training and development programs to enhance staff skills and knowledge. In addition, regular performance evaluations are conducted to identify strengths and weaknesses. The principal also assigns clear duties and responsibilities to staff, maintains effective communication and coordination, and provides incentives such as stimulant funds to increase work motivation. In this way, the madrasa principal can foster the professionalism of administrative staff/operators and improve the quality of educational services” (Madrasa Principal).

From the implementers' perspective, an administrative staff member/operator stated:

"In its implementation, the madrasa principal always provides clear directions, conducts regular meetings to evaluate work, and offers technical guidance when operational problems arise. There is usually also an operator group used for communication regarding assigned tasks. The principal not only manages task distribution but also guides, motivates, and facilitates staff needs in completing administrative and technical work. Work directions are typically delivered during morning assemblies, followed by weekly discussions through a WhatsApp group, while consistently emphasizing work standards, task deadlines, and providing examples of good work practices" (Administrative Staff).

Furthermore, the implementation process also reflects a strong orientation toward improving the professionalism of administrative staff. This is evident from the existence of training activities, clear task distribution, work coordination, as well as the provision of motivation and rewards, as conveyed by the informants. Therefore, the activities carried out are not solely directed toward task completion but are also oriented toward the continuous improvement of staff competence and work quality.

These findings indicate that the madrasa principal does not merely function as an administrative leader but also actively develops administrative staff through various activities that support competency and performance enhancement. This demonstrates that the implementation process is systematic and sustainable in shaping the professionalism of administrative staff.

These findings are in line with previous studies explaining that madrasa principals improve the professionalism of teachers and administrative staff by optimizing their roles as managers, administrators, supervisors, leaders, innovators, and motivators (Oktavia et al., 2021). The study emphasizes that, as administrators, madrasa principals organize staff duties, provide technical guidance, and supervise task implementation. In addition, Febrianti (2021) explained that madrasa principals play significant roles as administrators, supervisors, leaders, and motivators in improving the professionalism of educators and administrative staff through administrative management, work supervision, effective communication, and routine guidance. In this context, the supervisory role includes evaluating work instruments and monitoring task implementation as part of continuous improvement efforts.

Thus, the implementation carried out by the madrasa principal in this study reflects a pattern consistent with previous research findings, namely

fostering professionalism through managerial functions, work supervision, strengthened communication, and work motivation. The implementation is not limited to structural directives but also includes operational assistance and the consistent reinforcement of administrative work standards. This demonstrates that the professionalism of administrative staff is developed through integrated processes of management, supervision, and guidance within the leadership practices of the madrasa principal.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that the management implemented by the madrasa principal plays a significant role in improving the professionalism of administrative staff at MTs Ummul Quraa. The most important finding of this research is that the professionalism of administrative staff can be strengthened through structured managerial practices involving systematic planning, clear task distribution, continuous coaching, intensive communication, periodic supervision, and consistent evaluation. These managerial practices not only improve the quality of administrative services but also create a more organized, disciplined, and effective work culture within the madrasa environment. In addition, this study demonstrates that the success of administrative professionalism is not solely determined by individual competence or the availability of facilities, but also by the leadership commitment and managerial capability of the madrasa principal in responding adaptively to institutional challenges. The implication of this finding is that educational leadership based on managerial effectiveness and continuous guidance can contribute positively to the improvement of institutional performance and the quality of educational services in Islamic educational institutions.

This study also contributes academically to the development of Islamic educational management studies, particularly regarding the implementation of managerial functions by madrasa principals in improving the professionalism of administrative staff. The strength of this study lies in its comprehensive analysis of planning, implementation, supervision, evaluation, and barriers encountered in administrative management practices, including challenges related to digital administration systems and limited institutional resources. However, this study has several limitations, particularly because it was conducted within a single madrasa context, thereby limiting the generalizability of the findings to other educational institutions with different organizational characteristics. In addition, the study primarily focused on the perspectives of madrasa principals and administrative staff, without involving broader stakeholders such as teachers, students, or parents. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve wider research settings, comparative institutional studies, and broader participant

involvement in order to provide more comprehensive insights into educational management practices and the development of administrative professionalism in Islamic educational institutions.

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