

Leadership Strategies of the Principal in Improving Teacher Professionalism at MI Ma'arif 1 Gesing

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ABSTRACT

Schools as educational institutions aim to prepare students for future life by developing their full potential through effective teaching and learning processes supported by adequate facilities, a conducive environment, and well-structured lesson planning. The implementation of instructional planning is influenced by several factors, particularly teacher performance as a central component of the educational process. This study aims to examine teacher performance, analyze the principal's strategies in enhancing teacher professionalism, and identify the challenges in improving teacher professionalism at MI Ma'arif 1 Gesing. The research employs a descriptive qualitative approach, utilizing in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis as data collection techniques. The findings indicate that teacher professionalism is demonstrated through academic qualifications and certification status, as most teachers hold undergraduate degrees and teach in accordance with their areas of expertise, experience, and competencies. Furthermore, the institution implements the Ministry of Religious Affairs' curriculum, along with additional extracurricular programs. The primary challenge in enhancing teacher professionalism is addressing the rapid impact of globalization, which requires teachers to preserve and strengthen Islamic values while adapting to contemporary educational developments.

Keywords: globalization, principal leadership, teacher performance, teacher professionalism, teaching and learning process



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INTRODUCTION

Education plays a fundamental role in shaping human civilization and preparing individuals to face future challenges (Nur & Tamam, 2024). Schools, as formal educational institutions, are entrusted with the responsibility of developing students' intellectual capacity, moral character, and social competence. The effectiveness of schooling is closely linked to the quality of the teaching and learning process, which is influenced by infrastructure, curriculum implementation, institutional climate, and instructional planning. However, among these determinants, teacher performance remains the most decisive school-based factor affecting student achievement and educational quality (Susanti & Abidin, 2024). Consequently, strengthening teacher professionalism has become a central priority in contemporary educational reform.

Teacher professionalism extends beyond mastery of subject matter. It encompasses pedagogical competence, classroom management, assessment literacy, reflective practice, ethical commitment,

and continuous professional development. Shulman (1987) highlights pedagogical content knowledge as a defining feature of professional teachers. In the current era of globalization and rapid technological advancement, teachers are required to continuously adapt, innovate, and integrate new knowledge into their instructional practices. This professional growth is closely associated with leadership practices that provide structural and motivational support within educational institutions.

Recent scholarship emphasizes the critical role of instructional leadership in enhancing teacher professionalism. Empirical findings indicate that principals who actively supervise instruction, set academic goals, and facilitate professional learning significantly contribute to improved teacher competence and instructional quality (Anggraeni & Ahmad, 2024; Budiman et al., 2024). Moreover, instructional leadership has been found to influence teacher performance indirectly through the mediation of teacher self-efficacy, reinforcing the psychological dimension of professional growth (Rizkie, 2022). These findings strengthen earlier theoretical assertions that instructional leadership is a key driver of school effectiveness.

In addition to instructional leadership, transformational leadership has gained substantial attention in recent research. Transformational leadership fosters professional growth through inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized support. Studies demonstrate that transformational leadership positively influences teacher performance and strengthens collaborative learning communities (Putro et al., 2024). Furthermore, transformational leadership frameworks have been shown to enhance teacher commitment, innovation, and overall instructional effectiveness. This leadership approach is particularly relevant in dynamic educational environments where adaptability and shared vision are essential.

Contemporary research also suggests that integrating instructional and transformational leadership models yields more comprehensive impacts on teacher professionalism. An integrated leadership framework combining both approaches has been empirically validated to improve instructional quality and organizational effectiveness (Andriadi & Sulistiyo, 2024; Shava & Heystek, 2021). Similarly, revisiting leadership theories, Papadakis et al. (2024) highlight the interconnected effects of instructional, transformational, and distributed leadership in fostering sustainable school improvement. These studies indicate that leadership is multidimensional and requires both managerial precision and inspirational capacity.

Beyond principal leadership, teacher leadership and self-efficacy are also recognized as significant contributors to professional development. A systematic review by Luo et al. (2024) confirms that teacher leadership strengthens professional competence and enhances collaborative culture within schools. Self-efficacy, as a psychological construct, mediates the relationship between leadership practices and teacher performance, thereby reinforcing the importance of supportive leadership environments. These findings underscore that professional growth is not solely an individual endeavor but a systemic process shaped by organizational leadership and culture.

Despite the growing body of literature, important research gaps remain. Most empirical studies concentrate on general public school settings, while limited attention has been given to Islamic elementary schools (*madrasah ibtidaiyah*), where leadership must integrate professional standards with religious values. Additionally, many studies employ quantitative designs to measure statistical relationships between leadership styles and teacher performance, leaving a need for qualitative exploration of how leadership strategies are enacted in daily school practices. Moreover, limited research addresses how principals in faith-based institutions respond to globalization pressures while maintaining religious identity and values.

Within this context, MI Ma'arif 1 Gesing provides a relevant setting for investigating leadership strategies aimed at enhancing teacher professionalism. As an Islamic elementary school committed to religious excellence and character education, it integrates congregational prayers, Qur'anic recitation, and character-building programs into its institutional culture. Such characteristics require leadership practices that simultaneously promote pedagogical excellence and the internalization of Islamic values.

Therefore, this study seeks to analyze the strategies employed by the principal in enhancing teacher professionalism within this Islamic educational framework. By adopting a qualitative approach, this research contributes to the existing leadership literature by extending instructional and transformational leadership perspectives into the context of faith-based elementary education. The

findings are expected to enrich theoretical discourse and provide practical implications for strengthening teacher professionalism in madrasah settings amid the challenges of globalization and educational transformation.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the strategies implemented by the madrasah principal in enhancing teacher professionalism. A qualitative approach was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations within their natural setting (Creswell, 2018). Qualitative research prioritizes contextual meaning and seeks to construct explanations grounded in participants' perspectives rather than relying on statistical generalization. This study specifically adopted a descriptive qualitative approach to systematically examine leadership practices and their influence on teacher professional development at the institutional level.

The research was conducted at MI Ma'arif 1 Gesing. The selection of this site was based on its strong institutional vision emphasizing religious excellence and teacher development. Research participants were selected purposively based on their relevance to the research focus. The participants included the madrasah principal as the key informant, teachers, and relevant stakeholders within the institution. These participants were considered capable of providing rich and meaningful information regarding leadership strategies and professional development practices.

Data were collected through three primary techniques: in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. (1) In-depth Interviews. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with the principal and teachers to explore leadership strategies, professional development efforts, and challenges faced in improving teacher professionalism. The interviews allowed participants to elaborate on their experiences and provided flexibility for probing emerging themes. (2) Observation. Participant observation was carried out systematically and intentionally to capture real-time leadership practices, teacher interactions, professional development activities, and the integration of religious values in daily school routines. Observations focused on identifying patterns of supervision, collaboration, discipline, and instructional practices. (3) Documentation. Documentary analysis was conducted to complement interview and observational data. Documents included school profiles, policy documents, training records, supervision reports, curriculum implementation guidelines, and other relevant institutional archives. This method strengthened the contextual understanding of leadership practices and professional development programs.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles et al. (2014), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. (1) Data Condensation (Reduction). The collected data were organized, simplified, and categorized to identify meaningful units related to leadership strategies and teacher professionalism. Coding procedures were applied to group similar patterns and emerging themes. (2) Data Display. The categorized data were systematically presented in narrative and thematic forms to facilitate interpretation. Organized data displays enabled the researcher to identify relationships between leadership practices and professional development outcomes. (3) Conclusion Drawing and Verification. Conclusions were drawn continuously throughout the research process and verified through repeated examination of field notes, interview transcripts, and documentation. Verification involved checking consistency, identifying patterns, and comparing findings across different data sources.

Data analysis was conducted in two stages: (1) during fieldwork, where preliminary interpretations were developed alongside data collection, and (2) after data collection, where comprehensive thematic analysis was finalized using a descriptive non-statistical approach.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the field data collection, several significant findings were identified regarding the principal's strategies in enhancing teacher professionalism at MI Ma'arif 1 Gesing. These findings are categorized into three major themes: (1) leadership strategies in improving teacher professionalism, (2) the principal's supervisory and developmental commitment, and (3) supporting and inhibiting factors influencing professional development.

A. Principal's Strategies in Enhancing Teacher Professionalism

The first finding indicates that the principal's strategies in enhancing teacher professionalism are grounded in a comprehensive understanding of instructional leadership. Teachers are widely acknowledged in educational literature as the most influential school-based factor affecting student achievement (Ventista & Brown, 2023). Therefore, improving teacher professionalism becomes a strategic priority for school leaders. In this context, the principal at MI Ma'arif 1 Gesing positions professional development not merely as a complementary activity, but as a core institutional agenda. This orientation aligns with the concept of instructional leadership proposed by Liu & Hallinger (2018), which emphasizes the principal's role in focusing school activities on teaching and learning improvement. By prioritizing teacher competence development, the principal demonstrates alignment with contemporary leadership paradigms that center on academic excellence.

The multifaceted leadership roles the principal performs, as educator, leader, organizer, innovator, manager, motivator, and supervisor, reflect the transformational leadership framework articulated (Cahyono, 2024). Transformational leaders inspire, intellectually stimulate, and provide individualized consideration to their subordinates. Leadership significantly influences teacher commitment and instructional improvement (Andriadi & Sulistiyo, 2024; Nellitawati et al., 2024). The principal's approach to empowering teachers while maintaining academic oversight suggests integrating transformational and instructional leadership models, which research has shown to be highly effective in improving school performance (Day et al., 2016). One of the most prominent strategies identified is the intensification of regular school meetings as evaluative and reflective forums. From an organizational theory perspective, meetings function as formal communication structures that facilitate coordination and shared decision-making (Hoy & Miskel, 2012). In professional learning community (PLC) theory, collaborative dialogue among teachers is considered a critical mechanism for instructional improvement (Stoll et al., 2006). The regular meetings at the madrasah serve not only administrative purposes but also provide a structured environment for reflective practice, peer learning, and collective problem-solving, thereby reinforcing a culture of continuous improvement.

Participatory decision-making during meetings reflects democratic leadership principles. According to Bush (2020), participative leadership enhances organizational commitment by involving members in decision processes that affect their professional responsibilities. Teacher participation in decision-making positively influences job satisfaction and professional engagement. The openness of the meeting forum at MI Ma'arif 1 Gesing encourages teachers to articulate pedagogical concerns, share instructional innovations, and collectively evaluate learning outcomes, thereby fostering professional accountability and shared responsibility. In addition, structured meetings contribute to institutional alignment between vision, mission, and instructional practices. Effective principals consistently communicate school goals and monitor instructional programs to ensure coherence. By utilizing meetings to evaluate teaching and learning activities, student achievement, and discipline policies, the principal strengthens goal alignment within the institution. This systematic alignment supports the argument of Tan et al. (2024) that leadership practices directly related to teaching and learning have the greatest impact on student outcomes.

Another strategic effort involves optimizing the "guru piket" system to ensure instructional continuity. From a management control perspective, effective supervision mechanisms are essential to maintaining organizational performance. The duty teacher system functions as an operational control instrument that prevents instructional disruption due to teacher absence. Research on school effectiveness underscores that maximizing instructional time significantly contributes to academic achievement. Therefore, the systematic coordination of substitute teaching arrangements reflects a proactive managerial approach aimed at protecting learning time and maintaining academic stability. The teacher mechanism also reflects elements of distributed leadership. Leadership functions in schools are not solely concentrated in one individual but distributed across organizational members. By delegating operational responsibilities to duty teachers while maintaining oversight, the principal fosters shared leadership practices. The distributed leadership enhances organizational capacity and collective responsibility. In this case, the duty teacher system supports collaborative accountability, ensuring that instructional processes remain uninterrupted.

Furthermore, the principal actively facilitates teacher participation in workshops, training programs, and professional seminars at multiple administrative levels. The professional development literature consistently emphasizes that sustained, relevant training improves teacher competence and classroom practice (Ventista & Brown, 2023). Effective professional development leads to changes in teachers' beliefs and instructional behaviors, ultimately influencing student learning outcomes. By sending teachers to workshops and training sessions, the principal demonstrates a commitment to capacity-building and lifelong learning principles. Workshops, as collaborative learning environments, align with adult learning theory, which posits that adult learners benefit from problem-centered and experiential learning activities. Educational workshops emphasize collective problem-solving and practical skill enhancement. Such activities enable teachers to reflect on classroom challenges, exchange best practices, and adopt innovative instructional strategies. Empirical studies indicate that professional development programs characterized by collaboration and active learning significantly improve pedagogical quality (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

B. Supervisory and Developmental Commitment of the Principal

The second finding highlights the principal's strong commitment to teacher professional development through systematic supervision and empowerment practices at MI Ma'arif 1 Gesing. In contemporary educational leadership theory, supervision is no longer understood as inspection or fault-finding, but rather as instructional support aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning. Instructional supervision is defined as a developmental process designed to enhance teachers' professional capacity through collaborative dialogue, reflective practice, and constructive feedback (Glickman et al., 2017). Effective supervision is grounded in professional and moral authority rather than bureaucratic control, emphasizing growth over compliance. The principal's structured oversight combined with empowerment strategies reflects this modern supervisory paradigm, where supervision functions as professional assistance rather than authoritarian control.

The principal's approach is also consistent with instructional leadership theory, which positions monitoring teaching and learning processes as a central leadership responsibility. Leadership practices that directly focus on teacher development and instructional improvement have been found to produce the strongest impact on student outcomes. By ensuring that delegated responsibilities are aligned with institutional goals and systematically monitored, the principal demonstrates active involvement in maintaining academic quality. Monitoring activities serve as mechanisms for maintaining instructional coherence, identifying performance gaps, and initiating timely improvements, thereby reinforcing accountability and instructional consistency (Liu & Hallinger, 2018).

Moreover, the supervision model applied reflects characteristics of clinical supervision and instructional coaching. Clinical supervision emphasizes a cyclical process involving planning, classroom observation, data analysis, and feedback conferences aimed at improving instructional performance (Kusumawati, 2020). Similarly, instructional coaching promotes partnership-based dialogue that fosters teacher reflection and professional autonomy. When teachers perceive supervision as supportive rather than evaluative or punitive, they demonstrate higher motivation, openness to feedback, and willingness to innovate in classroom practice. Thus, the principal's mentoring-oriented supervision contributes positively to teacher professional growth.

The collegial relationship cultivated between the principal and teachers further reflects transformational leadership principles. Transformational leaders build trust, inspire professional commitment, and stimulate intellectual engagement among followers. School leaders who foster trust-based relationships significantly enhance teacher commitment and collective efficacy (Leithwood et al., 2020). Trust within schools has been identified as a core resource for sustainable improvement and professional collaboration. By positioning himself as both supervisor and professional partner, the principal strengthens relational trust, openness, and collaborative problem-solving within the institution.

Finally, the integration of supervision and empowerment aligns with adult learning theory, which emphasizes autonomy, reflection, and experiential learning as essential elements of professional development. Sustained, feedback-rich professional support systems significantly improve teaching effectiveness and instructional quality (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Therefore, the supervisory and

developmental commitment demonstrated by the principal represents a balanced leadership model that integrates accountability, mentorship, and empowerment within a professional learning framework. This integrated approach reinforces teacher professionalism while sustaining institutional improvement.

C. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

The third finding identifies several supporting and inhibiting factors that influence the effectiveness of teacher professional development strategies at MI Ma'arif 1 Gesing. The most significant supporting factor is teachers' awareness and internal commitment to professional growth. Professionalism is not merely the result of structural policies or administrative directives; rather, it emerges from intrinsic motivation, reflective practice, and a sustained commitment to self-improvement. Self-Determination Theory explains that intrinsic motivation, driven by autonomy, competence, and relatedness, plays a crucial role in enhancing professional engagement and performance (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In the educational context, teachers who demonstrate high professional awareness tend to show stronger instructional commitment, greater adaptability, and continuous pedagogical improvement. Thus, leadership strategies become more effective when teachers possess an internalized sense of professional responsibility.

Teacher self-efficacy is another critical internal factor supporting professional development. Teachers who believe in their instructional capabilities are more willing to adopt innovative strategies, manage classroom challenges effectively, and persist in improving learning outcomes. Empirical research demonstrates that teacher self-efficacy significantly correlates with instructional quality and student achievement (Safura & Helmanda, 2022). Moreover, professional identity development contributes to long-term commitment to the teaching profession. When teachers perceive themselves as competent professionals responsible for student success, leadership initiatives such as supervision, training, and collaborative meetings are more likely to yield meaningful results. Therefore, internal motivational factors serve as catalytic conditions that amplify the impact of institutional leadership strategies.

Conversely, institutional constraints such as limited funding and inadequate facilities represent significant inhibiting factors. Educational effectiveness research emphasizes that resource availability influences the implementation of school improvement programs. Financial limitations restrict access to professional training, reduce opportunities for external collaboration, and limit the procurement of instructional materials. In addition, infrastructure deficiencies, such as inadequate classrooms, limited technological resources, and insufficient meeting facilities, can reduce instructional efficiency and professional collaboration (Firdaus et al., 2023). School capacity theory further explains that organizational improvement depends on the availability of financial, human, and physical capital. Without adequate resources, even well-designed leadership strategies may not reach optimal effectiveness.

Facilities and infrastructure function as enabling conditions that support leadership implementation and teacher professionalism. Effective schools typically demonstrate alignment among leadership vision, teacher capacity, and the organization. When resources are insufficient, achieving institutional goals may be difficult despite strong leadership commitment. Therefore, institutional capacity building, strategic resource allocation, and partnership development become essential to sustain professional development initiatives. Resource optimization, through collaboration with stakeholders, community engagement, and efficient budget management, can mitigate structural limitations and strengthen the long-term sustainability of teacher professional development programs (Leithwood et al., 2020)

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that teacher professionalism at MI Ma'arif 1 Gesing is generally reflected in adequate academic qualifications: most teachers hold undergraduate degrees, several have obtained professional certification, and they teach in accordance with their academic specialization. The implementation of the Ministry of Religious Affairs curriculum, enriched with distinctive programs such as Qur'an Hadith, Aqidah Akhlak, Fiqh, Islamic Cultural History, Ke-NU-an studies, and Tahfidzul Qur'an,

strengthens teachers' pedagogical and moral responsibilities within an Islamic educational framework. However, efforts to enhance professionalism face multiple challenges, including the rapid dynamics of globalization that demand adaptability in science and technology while maintaining Islamic moral values; disparities in human resource capacity; limited financial resources that affect teacher welfare and training access; inadequate facilities and infrastructure; and varying levels of teacher motivation and commitment. These factors indicate that teacher professionalism is influenced not only by leadership strategies but also by intrinsic motivation and institutional capacity.

It is recommended that the madrasah strengthen sustainable professional development programs through structured supervision, continuous training, and mentoring systems that enhance both pedagogical competence and moral leadership. Institutional capacity building should be prioritized through strategic budgeting, partnership development, and gradual improvement of facilities and infrastructure. In addition, efforts to enhance teacher motivation, such as recognition systems, career development pathways, and improvements in welfare, are essential to fostering long-term professional commitment. An integrated approach that combines strong leadership, teacher self-awareness, adequate resources, and adaptive responses to global educational change will be crucial in sustaining and advancing teacher professionalism.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors confirm that they have no conflicts of interest related to the publication of this study. They have no financial, personal, or professional interests that could be perceived as influencing the research outcomes or interpretations presented in this publication.

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