

The Leadership of The School Principal in Improving Educational Quality at SMK Muhammadiyah 14 Siabu Mandailing Natal

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Abstract: The madrasa principal is a key element in the education system who plays a strategic role in improving the quality of education. In accordance with regulatory provisions, the principal is responsible for the implementation of educational activities, school administration, the development of educational personnel, as well as the management of facilities and infrastructure. Therefore, the principal is required to possess competencies as an educator, manager, administrator, supervisor, leader, innovator, motivator, and entrepreneur in order to effectively manage the institution. The quality of education itself serves as an indicator of institutional success, which is highly influenced by the quality of management. This study aims to examine the urgency of the principal's leadership in improving educational quality, analyze the strategies implemented, and identify the leadership style applied. The research employs a descriptive qualitative approach, with data collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis is conducted through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that the principal implements various strategies oriented toward improving educational quality through input, process, and output aspects. Furthermore, the leadership style applied tends to be democratic, as indicated by the involvement of various stakeholders in the decision-making process.

Keywords: Leadership, Madrasa Principal, Educational Quality

Abstrak: Kepala madrasah merupakan elemen penting dalam sistem pendidikan yang berperan strategis dalam peningkatan mutu pendidikan. Sesuai dengan ketentuan perundang-undangan, kepala madrasah bertanggung jawab atas penyelenggaraan pendidikan, administrasi, pembinaan tenaga kependidikan, serta pengelolaan sarana dan prasarana. Oleh karena itu, kepala madrasah dituntut memiliki kompetensi sebagai educator, manajer, administrator, supervisor, pemimpin, inovator, motivator, dan entrepreneur agar mampu mengelola lembaga secara efektif. Mutu pendidikan sendiri menjadi indikator keberhasilan lembaga yang sangat dipengaruhi oleh kualitas manajemen. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji urgensi kepemimpinan kepala madrasah dalam meningkatkan mutu pendidikan, menganalisis strategi yang diterapkan, serta mengidentifikasi tipe kepemimpinan yang digunakan. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Analisis data dilakukan melalui tahapan reduksi, penyajian, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepala madrasah menerapkan berbagai strategi yang berorientasi pada peningkatan mutu pendidikan melalui aspek input, proses, dan output. Selain itu, tipe kepemimpinan yang diterapkan cenderung demokratis, yang ditandai dengan keterlibatan berbagai pihak dalam pengambilan kebijakan.

Kata Kunci: Kepemimpinan, Kepala Madrasah, Mutu Pendidikan

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INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the key factors in determining the progress of a nation. Through education, the quality of human resources can be developed to meet the challenges of an ever-evolving era (Sanga & Wangdra, 2023). In today's era of globalization, education is not only expected to produce individuals who are intellectually competent but also those who possess character, morality, and skills relevant to societal needs (Herlina et al., 2024).

In the context of national education, educational institutions bear a significant responsibility in shaping a qualified generation (Azfa Nabil Shafi et al., 2024). Schools function not only as places for knowledge transfer but also as environments for developing students' personalities. Therefore, the quality of education is a crucial aspect that must be prioritized by every educational institution (Dianovi et al., 2022).

Improving the quality of education is an unavoidable necessity. Educational quality serves as a benchmark for measuring the success of an institution in achieving its educational goals (Sy, 2022). This quality is not only reflected in students' learning outcomes but also encompasses the entire educational process, including planning, implementation, and evaluation of learning.

In efforts to enhance educational quality, various factors play a role, both internal and external. One of the most decisive internal factors is the leadership of the school principal (Zulfahmi et al., 2025). The principal plays a central role in managing and directing all components of education to ensure effectiveness and efficiency (Jannah & Wahyuningsih, 2024).

The school principal is the highest leader at the educational unit level who is responsible for all activities carried out within the school. These responsibilities include organizing educational programs, managing administration, developing teaching and educational staff, and managing facilities and infrastructure. Thus, the principal holds a strategic role in determining the direction and policies of education within the school (Chasbullah & Rindaningsih, 2024).

A principal is required to possess adequate competencies, including the ability to function as an educator, manager, administrator, supervisor, leader, innovator, motivator, and entrepreneur (Herlina, 2023). These competencies are essential to ensure that the principal can perform their duties and functions optimally in managing the educational institution (Munawir Pohan, 2018).

Effective principal leadership can create a conducive working environment, improve teacher performance, and encourage innovation in teaching and learning processes. Conversely, ineffective leadership may result in poor educational quality, weak school management, and declining public trust in educational institutions (Kempa et al., 2025).

Educational quality essentially reflects the success of school management. Schools with effective management tend to produce high-quality outputs (Wahdini Siregar et al., 2025). Therefore, the leadership of the principal, as part of educational management, plays a crucial role in improving educational quality (Adinda Julia Putri & Makmur Syukri, 2024).

In practice, not all schools are able to achieve the expected level of educational quality. This is due to various factors, such as limited resources, lack of innovation, and weak

leadership. These conditions present challenges for educational institutions to continuously improve and develop (Zahra Lahitania & M. Imamul Muttaqin, 2024).

However, some schools have demonstrated significant progress in improving educational quality. One such example is SMK Muhammadiyah 14 Siabu, Mandailing Natal Regency, which has shown improvement in various aspects of education.

This progress can be observed in the increasing number of students each year, as well as improvements in the quality of the learning process (Krajewska, 2022). In addition, the school has demonstrated enhanced academic and non-academic student achievements, which serve as indicators of educational success (Kurniadiningsih & Miftahuddin, 2025).

These achievements are undoubtedly influenced by the leadership of the school principal in managing and developing the institution. The principal is presumed to implement effective strategies in improving the quality of education within the school (Fatimah Azzahra Lubis & Makmur Syukri, 2025). The strategies implemented may include the development of flagship programs, enhancement of teacher competencies, integration of technology in learning, and strengthening relationships with the community. These strategies play an important role in supporting the improvement of educational quality (Akbar, 2024).

In addition to strategies, the leadership style of the principal also determines the success of educational management. Democratic and participatory leadership is believed to create a harmonious working environment and increase the involvement of all school stakeholders (Nisa Utami et al., 2023).

Based on the above explanation, it can be concluded that the leadership of the school principal plays a vital role in improving educational quality. Therefore, further research is needed to examine how principal leadership contributes to improving educational quality, the strategies implemented, and the leadership style applied at SMK Muhammadiyah 14 Siabu, Mandailing Natal Regency.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. This approach is chosen because the researcher aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of school principal leadership in improving educational quality based on naturally occurring conditions in the field (Pujiyati, 2020). The descriptive qualitative method enables the researcher to systematically, factually, and accurately describe the phenomena in accordance with the data obtained (Furidha, 2024). The study was conducted at SMK Muhammadiyah 14 Siabu, Mandailing Natal Regency. The selection of this site is based on the consideration that the school has demonstrated significant progress in improving educational quality, making it an interesting case to examine, particularly in relation to the leadership of the school principal (Amelia & Siahaan, 2025).

The subjects of this study include the school principal, teachers, and educational staff who are directly involved in the educational process. Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, based on specific considerations to ensure that they could provide relevant information aligned with the research focus. The data collection techniques used in this study include observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to directly examine activities and conditions within the school environment. In-depth interviews were carried out to obtain detailed information regarding the leadership of the school principal. Meanwhile, documentation was used to

support the data through records, reports, and other relevant documents (Ahmad Rifai Siregar et al., 2024).

Data analysis was carried out through several stages, namely data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved selecting and simplifying data relevant to the research focus. Data display was presented in narrative form to facilitate understanding, while conclusions were drawn after a comprehensive analysis of all collected data (Edwards, 2016). To ensure the validity of the data, this study employed triangulation techniques, by comparing data obtained from various sources and methods. Thus, the findings are expected to achieve a high level of validity and reliability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the research conducted at SMK Muhammadiyah 14 Siabu, Mandailing Natal Regency, various findings were obtained related to the leadership of the school principal in improving educational quality. This study was carried out through observation, interviews, and documentation, so that the data obtained reflect the actual conditions in the field.

1. The Role of the School Principal in Influencing Teachers and Educational Staff

Based on the findings of the research conducted at SMK Muhammadiyah 14 Siabu, Mandailing Natal Regency, it was found that the school principal plays a very significant role in influencing teachers and educational staff. The influence exercised is not authoritarian or coercive in nature; rather, it relies on a persuasive approach that emphasizes effective interpersonal communication. The principal tends to build harmonious relationships with all members of the school community through open interactions characterized by a sense of collegiality and mutual respect.

In daily practice, the principal is actively engaged in direct interaction with teachers, both in formal settings such as meetings and in informal communication within the school environment. This pattern of communication fosters a comfortable and flexible working atmosphere. Teachers feel valued, listened to, and involved in various school activities. As a result, their work motivation and institutional loyalty tend to increase.

Furthermore, the principal demonstrates exemplary behavior in terms of discipline, responsibility, and commitment to duties. This role modeling becomes an important factor that indirectly shapes the attitudes and behaviors of teachers and educational staff. Teachers tend to emulate the positive conduct demonstrated by the principal, thereby contributing to the development of a constructive and professional work culture within the school. Thus, it can be concluded that the principal's role in influencing subordinates is carried out effectively through a humanistic approach and exemplary leadership.

2. The Role of the School Principal in Directing School Activities

In the aspect of direction, the school principal plays a crucial role in determining policy directions as well as the implementation of various school programs. Based on the research findings, all activities carried out at SMK Muhammadiyah 14 Siabu are consistently aligned with the school's established vision and mission. This indicates that the principal not only acts as a decision-maker but also as a key figure who ensures that all activities are conducted in accordance with the intended educational goals.

The principal consistently provides guidance to teachers and educational staff through regular coordination meetings. In these forums, the principal does not merely give instructions but also offers comprehensive explanations regarding the background, objectives, and significance of each program to be implemented. As a result, all members of the school community share a common understanding of the policy direction, thereby minimizing potential misunderstandings during program execution.

In addition to formal meetings, direction is also delivered through more flexible, direct communication. The principal often provides personal guidance to teachers and staff regarding the implementation of their duties. This approach enhances the effectiveness of direction, as each individual gains a clearer understanding of their roles and responsibilities according to their respective duties.

Furthermore, the principal conducts continuous supervision of all implemented programs. When obstacles or challenges arise in practice, the principal promptly evaluates the situation and provides appropriate solutions. This demonstrates a strong sense of responsibility and commitment to ensuring that all activities are carried out as planned.

Overall, the direction provided by the principal is systematic, well-structured, and continuous. This has a positive impact on the effectiveness of program implementation and the overall performance of the school organization. Therefore, it can be concluded that the principal's role in directing school activities has been carried out effectively and contributes significantly to achieving educational objectives.

3. The Role of the School Principal in Motivating Teachers and Staff

Motivation is a crucial factor in improving the performance of teachers and educational staff within a school. Based on the research findings, the principal of SMK Muhammadiyah 14 Siabu demonstrates an effective role in fostering and maintaining the work motivation of subordinates. The motivational efforts provided are not limited to material aspects but also address psychological and emotional dimensions, resulting in a more meaningful and lasting impact on teachers and staff.

In practice, the principal actively provides recognition to teachers who demonstrate strong performance. This recognition may take the form of direct praise or formal acknowledgment during meetings. Such appreciation has a positive effect, as teachers feel that their efforts and dedication are valued. This sense of recognition encourages them to maintain and even improve their performance.

In addition to providing appreciation, the principal also offers moral support to teachers who encounter challenges in carrying out their duties. This support is reflected through empathetic communication and genuine concern for the difficulties faced by teachers. As a result, teachers feel supported and are more motivated to overcome obstacles in their work.

Furthermore, the principal provides opportunities for teachers to enhance their professional competencies through various activities such as training sessions, seminars, and workshops. This indicates that the principal not only focuses on work outcomes but also prioritizes the continuous development of human resources. These opportunities serve as an important form of motivation for teachers to keep learning and improving their skills.

The continuous motivation provided by the principal contributes to increased self-confidence among teachers in performing their duties. Teachers become more active,

creative, and enthusiastic in the teaching and learning process. This condition positively influences the overall quality of education delivered by the school.

Thus, it can be concluded that the principal's role in motivating teachers and staff is effectively carried out and significantly contributes to improving their performance. The approach employed goes beyond formal measures and incorporates humanistic values, thereby creating a more productive and harmonious working environment.

4. The Role of the School Principal in Guiding and Supervising Teachers

Guidance and supervision are essential components in improving the quality of the teaching and learning process in schools. Based on the research findings, the principal of SMK Muhammadiyah 14 Siabu demonstrates active involvement in guiding teachers through supervision activities that are carried out in a planned and continuous manner. These activities are not merely administrative routines but are genuinely aimed at understanding the real conditions of classroom instruction.

In practice, the principal conducts direct classroom visits to observe teaching and learning activities. Through these observations, the principal gains a clear understanding of how teachers deliver material, manage the classroom, and interact with students. This process provides valuable insights into the overall effectiveness of instructional practices.

From the supervision activities, the principal is able to identify both the strengths and weaknesses of teachers in their instructional approaches. The information obtained is then used as a basis for reflection and evaluation to improve any existing shortcomings. Thus, supervision serves not only as a monitoring tool but also as a means of professional development for teachers.

In addition to observation, the principal provides guidance and direction regarding the use of more effective and innovative teaching methods. Teachers are encouraged to adopt a variety of instructional strategies to create a more engaging and interactive classroom environment. This approach aims to increase student participation and enhance learning outcomes.

The guidance provided is not limited to academic aspects but also emphasizes the development of professional attitudes, such as discipline, responsibility, and commitment to duties. The principal strives to instill these values so that teachers are not only competent in teaching but also demonstrate strong professional ethics.

With continuous guidance and supervision, there has been a noticeable improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers have become more creative, innovative, and confident in delivering lessons. This indicates that the principal's role in guiding and supervising teachers is effectively implemented and contributes significantly to improving the overall quality of education in the school.

5. The Principal's Strategies in Improving Educational Quality

Based on the research findings, the principal of SMK Muhammadiyah 14 Siabu implements various strategic efforts that are systematically designed to enhance educational quality. These strategies are not carried out randomly, but are carefully planned by considering the actual conditions of the school, its available resources, and the needs of the students. This approach reflects a well-structured planning process aimed at achieving better educational outcomes.

One of the primary strategies developed is the establishment and implementation of flagship programs. These programs are designed to strengthen the school's competitiveness while providing added value for students. Through such initiatives, the school seeks to build a distinct identity and attract greater trust and interest from the community.

In addition, the principal places strong emphasis on improving the quality of classroom instruction. Teachers are encouraged to move beyond traditional teaching methods and adopt more innovative and varied instructional approaches. This effort aims to create a more engaging learning environment, thereby increasing students' interest and active participation in the learning process.

The integration of technology into teaching and learning activities also forms a key part of the strategy. The use of technological tools such as computers and other instructional media helps teachers deliver content more effectively. This initiative also reflects the school's effort to adapt to the demands of an increasingly digital era.

Furthermore, enhancing teacher competence is another important focus. The principal provides opportunities for teachers to participate in professional development activities, including training sessions, seminars, and workshops. These initiatives are intended to broaden teachers' knowledge and improve their instructional skills.

Another significant strategy involves fostering strong relationships with the community. The principal actively engages with parents and the surrounding community to build trust and support for the school. Community involvement plays a crucial role in ensuring the success of educational programs.

Overall, the strategies implemented by the principal demonstrate a comprehensive and sustainable approach. The combination of program development, improvement of teaching quality, integration of technology, enhancement of teacher competence, and community engagement has contributed positively to the improvement of educational quality at SMK Muhammadiyah 14 Siabu.

Based on the results of the research conducted, the leadership of the madrasah principal plays a very strategic role in improving the quality of education in the madrasah. The madrasah principal is not only seen as an administrator who manages school administrative activities, but also as an educational leader who is responsible for directing all madrasah resources so that educational goals can be achieved optimally. This is in line with the opinion of (Ahmad Sibaweh, 2024), who states that the school principal is the main driving force in improving the quality of education through managerial, supervisory, entrepreneurial, and social competencies they possess. In this context, the madrasah principal is required to be able to plan well-directed educational programs, organize all school components effectively, and conduct continuous supervision of the entire learning process.

Furthermore, according to (Angga & Iskandar, 2022), the school principal is a formal leader who has full responsibility for directing, influencing, and mobilizing all school members to work together in achieving educational goals. This leadership role is very important because the success of an educational institution is largely determined by the principal's ability to manage people, resources, and the educational environment harmoniously.

Furthermore, the transformational leadership theory proposed by (Roni Harsoyo, 2022) also emphasizes that an effective leader is one who is able to provide inspiration,

motivation, and positive change for their subordinates through a clear vision and exemplary behavior. In the context of a madrasah, a madrasah principal who applies a transformational leadership style will be able to enhance teachers' work enthusiasm, improve the professionalism of educational staff, and create a positive work culture within the madrasah environment.

Furthermore, the concept of educational quality also serves as an important foundation in this discussion. According to the Ministry of National Education (Agus Santoso et al., 2020), educational quality encompasses input, process, and output in education, which are interrelated and determine the overall quality of educational outcomes. Therefore, improving educational quality does not only focus on students' learning outcomes, but also on the learning process that takes place in the classroom, the quality of teachers, as well as the availability of educational facilities and infrastructure. In this regard, the madrasah principal plays an important role in ensuring that all these components function in a balanced and sustainable manner. (Hidayat Sutisna et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION.

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the leadership of the principal at SMK Muhammadiyah 14 Siabu, Mandailing Natal Regency, plays a highly important and strategic role in improving educational quality. The principal not only performs administrative and managerial functions but also acts as a central figure in influencing, directing, motivating, guiding, and supervising all components of the school. This comprehensive role contributes significantly to creating a conducive educational environment and achieving institutional goals.

The findings indicate that the principal is able to influence teachers and educational staff through a persuasive and humanistic approach rather than an authoritarian one. Through open communication, harmonious relationships, and mutual respect, the principal successfully fosters a positive work culture. This, in turn, enhances teachers' motivation, loyalty, and commitment to the institution.

Furthermore, the principal demonstrates strong capability in directing school activities to align with the established vision and mission. Through systematic planning, regular coordination, and continuous supervision, all school programs are implemented effectively and in a well-organized manner. As a result, educational activities are carried out optimally.

In terms of motivation, the principal plays an active role in encouraging teachers and staff by providing recognition, moral support, and opportunities for professional development. These efforts contribute to increased self-confidence, work enthusiasm, and creativity among teachers in conducting the teaching and learning process.

Moreover, the principal consistently carries out guidance and supervision of teachers. This allows for ongoing evaluation of the teaching process, enabling continuous improvement. Consequently, the quality of learning in the school shows significant progress.

The strategies implemented by the principal, such as developing flagship programs, integrating technology, enhancing teacher competencies, and strengthening relationships with the community, have proven to be effective in improving educational quality. These strategies reflect a comprehensive and sustainable approach to school management.

Overall, the principal's leadership at SMK Muhammadiyah 14 Siabu tends to be democratic and participatory, as evidenced by the involvement of teachers and educational

staff in decision-making processes. This leadership style creates a harmonious working environment and strengthens collaboration among all school components. Therefore, principal leadership is a key factor in achieving and maintaining high-quality education.

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