

## Principal Leadership Strategy in Improving the Performance of Muhammadiyah Elementary School Teachers

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### Abstract

Teacher performance is a crucial factor in achieving effective educational management. One of the principal's primary roles is to build teacher performance through appropriate leadership strategies. This study aims to analyze the principal's leadership strategies in improving teacher performance at Muhammadiyah Elementary School in the Colombo Complex. The study employed a qualitative case study approach, with data collection techniques including in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation. Research informants included the principal, vice principal, and teachers. Data analysis was conducted through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results indicate that the principal's leadership strategy in improving teacher performance is carried out through humanistic-based transformational leadership that prioritizes role models, empathetic communication, and teacher empowerment. This strategy is realized through measurable instructional development planning, professional training, and strengthening teacher learning communities. In addition, the principal provides collaborative and reflective academic supervision to provide constructive feedback to teachers. These efforts are supported by strengthening organizational culture and internal discipline built on a foundation of togetherness. Overall, this leadership strategy has proven effective in improving teacher professionalism and creating a positive and sustainable school work culture.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The contribution of teacher performance is crucial to improving the quality of education, as teachers are the ones who interact directly with students. Teachers play a role not only as transmitters of knowledge but also as guides, role models, and drivers of change, determining student success in various aspects. High-performing teachers go beyond simply teaching; they are also able to foster an interactive classroom atmosphere and ensure that every process supports student development (Sakinah, 2025).

Teacher quality and performance do not emerge automatically. The quality of a teacher's work does not stand alone; it is influenced by various factors, with the principal's managerial and leadership styles playing a crucial role. As an educational leader, the principal has a strategic role in mobilizing the school's full potential toward its predetermined goals. Effective principal management can create a productive work climate, build teacher motivation, and optimally direct all school resources. According to Rehan & Pramono (2024), participatory leadership has a significant impact on building a solid work community and improving the performance of each individual. In other words, the principal is the primary driving force in achieving educational quality at the elementary school level.

Ideally, the principal serves as an instructional, managerial, and transformational leader. As an instructional leader, the principal holds full control over the educational management cycle, from plan formulation and program implementation to comprehensive performance audits. He or she must be able to provide academic supervision, guide teachers in developing learning methods, and ensure that each learning process meets established standards. As a managerial leader, the principal is able to effectively manage school facilities, infrastructure, human resources, and administration. As a transformational leader, the principal acts as an agent of change, fostering enthusiasm, inspiration, and new values for all school members (Ali & Susilawati, 2025).

However, this idealism remains a significant obstacle in various Indonesian primary education institutions, including religious-based private schools. In general, these elementary schools possess strengths in values, an Islamic work culture, and a spirit of *da'wah* (Islamic outreach). However, in terms of management and human resource development, some schools still face limitations in terms of facilities, funding, and the professionalism of their teaching staff. Research (Sholeh, 2023) shows that with measurable development management support, schools can develop superior human resources and provide relevant educational services.

The reality on the ground also demonstrates a lack of innovation in teaching and teacher performance evaluation. As leaders, principals have attempted to provide mentoring and supervision, but their approaches remain routine and administrative. No leadership strategy systematically encourages teacher competency development through training, reflection, or professional collaboration. Yet, according to Pratiwi et al. (2021), a leadership style that prioritizes collaboration and ongoing development has a positive impact on elementary school teacher motivation and performance.

Low teacher performance directly impacts the quality of education in schools. Teachers with low performance tend to be less creative in designing lessons, less disciplined in carrying out their duties, and less responsible for student learning outcomes (Pramesti et al., 2023). This will have implications for declining student achievement and weakening the school's image in the eyes of the public. In the long term, schools with stagnant teacher performance will struggle to compete with other schools that are more adaptive to changing times. Therefore, a principal leadership strategy is needed that can provide solutions to these problems.

Principals need to foster a positive work culture, strengthen communication between school members, and foster intrinsic motivation among teachers so they feel valued and committed to their profession. Khana et al. (2023), Vienty & Ajepri (2022), and Ar & Usman (2021) noted that principals who practice communication-based leadership strategies are able to improve teacher performance compared to principals who rely solely on traditional instructional approaches. Therefore, empowerment-oriented leadership is key to success in improving educational quality.

Referring to this phenomenon, this research is crucial to identify contextual leadership strategies for principals within the school environment. Contextual leadership is necessary so that principals can align their leadership style with the characteristics, culture, and resources available (Widiastuti, 2024). Previous research has focused primarily on public schools or large schools with abundant resources, while research on small private schools with religious backgrounds is relatively limited.

The researcher also has a personal interest in this topic because he sees the importance of the principal's role in building an adaptive and high-quality educational ecosystem. The principal not only manages administrative aspects but also acts as a learning leader (*instructional leader*), which helps determine the direction, culture, and performance of

teachers in schools (Adam et al., 2021). Based on academic experience and field observations, researchers found that many elementary schools, particularly private schools, have great potential but are not optimally tapped due to weak leadership strategies. This aligns with findings that school effectiveness is influenced by the principal's leadership style in directing educators and creating a collaborative work environment (Rahmalia, 2024).

This study seeks to provide an in-depth description of principal leadership and teacher performance in a real-world context. This approach allows researchers to understand the processes, interactions, and meanings behind leadership practices. Based on this focus, the research problem is focused on how principal leadership strategies at Muhammadiyah Elementary Schools improve teacher performance. Therefore, this study is expected to provide a picture of effective leadership and be key to improving teacher professionalism, particularly in small elementary schools with limited resources but rich in values and a spirit of service.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study applies a qualitative method with a case study design to comprehensively explore the principal's managerial strategies in optimizing teacher productivity. This approach was chosen based on its ability to deeply analyze leadership phenomena, including the processes, essence, and dynamics that occur in the natural context of the school environment (Creswell, 2014). The study was conducted in the even semester of the 2024/2025 academic year at Muhammadiyah Elementary School in the Colombo Complex. The research location was chosen because the school implements leadership strategies oriented towards developing teacher performance and school work culture. The research targets included the principal, vice principal, and teachers. Subjects were determined using a purposive sampling technique, selecting informants who have direct involvement and an in-depth understanding of leadership implementation and improving teacher performance.

The research was conducted through several stages, namely: (1) determining the focus and compiling research instruments, (2) collecting data through interviews, observations, and documentation, (3) analyzing data continuously throughout the research process, and (4) drawing conclusions based on the results of verified data analysis. Data collection was conducted using two main instruments. First, in-depth interviews with a semi-structured format were applied to explore the narratives of school principals and teachers regarding policies and strategic steps in motivating performance. Second, observations were conducted by directly engaging in managerial interactions, the implementation of academic supervision, and the communication patterns of school principals in the field. This aims to enable researchers to understand the real dynamics that drive improved performance of teaching staff in schools.

The data analysis process in this study used the interactive model of Miles & Huberman (2014), which includes three phases. First, data reduction is carried out by selecting and filtering raw information to ensure only relevant data is retained in certain categories. Next, in the data presentation stage, the organized information is systematically arranged into descriptive narratives or charts to clarify patterns and relationships between phenomena. The final stage is drawing conclusions and verification, where the researcher formulates the essence of the findings based on the patterns formed, while continuously testing their validity to ensure the credibility of the research results. The analysis process is supported by ATLAS.ti software through coding and network analysis stages to systematically map the patterns of school principal leadership strategies. Data validity tests are used to ensure that the data obtained correspond to the actual conditions at the research location. Data validity is maintained through source and technique triangulation, namely,

comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation, so that the credibility and reliability of the research findings can be guaranteed.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Research Results

The results of the field data analysis identified four main themes and codes that describe the principal's leadership strategy. These themes are transformational-humanistic leadership, instructional development planning, reflective academic supervision, strengthening organizational culture, and internal discipline. These four themes do not stand alone, but rather form a continuous cycle of leadership strategy management. The cycle begins with the formulation of a leadership approach oriented toward human relations and exemplary behavior, followed by the planning of a systematic teacher development program. The principal then conducts monitoring through reflective and collaborative academic supervision. The final stage of the cycle involves further action in the form of strengthening organizational culture and enforcing work discipline that supports the continued improvement of teacher performance. This cycle confirms that the principal's leadership does not begin solely administratively, but rather with the formulation of a leadership strategy oriented toward teacher performance development. A more detailed explanation of the relationships between these themes and findings can be seen in Figure 1 below:

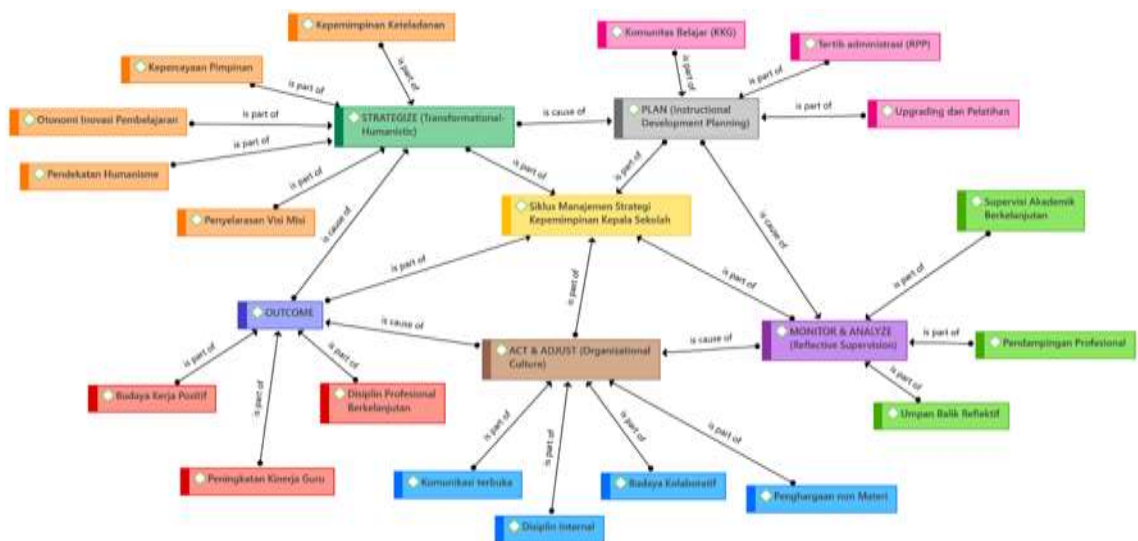


Figure 1. Principal Leadership Strategy Management Cycle

#### Transformational-Humanistic Leadership

The initial stage of this cycle identified that the dominant leadership strategy was humanistic-based transformational leadership. This strategy is demonstrated through exemplary leadership, a humanistic approach, alignment of vision and mission, trust in leadership, and granting autonomy to teachers for learning innovation. In daily practice, the principal positions himself as a role model for teachers. This exemplary behavior is evident in the principal's discipline, responsibility, and commitment to carrying out his duties and obligations as an educational leader. The principal also strives to build open communication and respect the conditions and needs of each teacher. In an interview, the principal revealed that:

1443 | Principal Leadership Strategy in Improving the Performance of Muhammadiyah Elementary School Teachers (Nita Listiyani)

"We are implementing more towards humanism... We have to understand the conditions of the teachers... We are implementing more towards the role models that we set."

The principal's statement indicates that he strives to build leadership relationships that are not authoritative, but rather emphasize an approach that values human aspects. This approach makes teachers feel valued as individuals and as professionals in the field of education.

Furthermore, the principal also empowers teachers to develop creativity in learning. Teachers are given the freedom to experiment with various methods, media, and learning strategies that they deem appropriate to the characteristics of their students. This space for innovation encourages teachers to be more active in developing their professional competencies.

These findings show that leadership that emphasizes exemplary behavior and a humanistic approach is able to build a conducive work atmosphere and increase teachers' work motivation.

### **Instructional Development Planning**

The second theme identified in this study is instructional development planning. This stage is a crucial process in the principal's leadership strategy because it serves as the foundation for implementing programs to improve the quality of learning. During the planning stage, the principal, along with the school management team, aligns the school's vision and mission with the instructional development program. This program includes strengthening the teacher learning community (KKG), enforcing orderly learning administration, and conducting professional training for teachers.

The vice principal for curriculum explained that the teacher development program was designed systematically through various trainings that were relevant to the learning needs at the school.

"The school's strategy is to align the curriculum with the school's vision and mission, and to improve teacher professionalism by conducting training programs such as implementing the Independent Curriculum (IKM), deep learning, coding, and creating learning media."

In addition to formal training, schools also foster a culture of collaborative learning through teacher-to-teacher sharing forums. These forums provide a space for teachers to exchange experiences, discuss learning strategies, and find solutions to various challenges encountered in the learning process.

Teachers also felt the impact of the development program, as conveyed in the following interview:

"The school provides ample space for teachers to innovate... Teachers are also supported through constructive supervision and facilitated in training and forums for sharing good practices."

These findings indicate that teacher professional capacity development is carried out in a structured and sustainable manner according to teacher needs.

### **Reflective Academic Supervision**

The third theme identified in this study is reflective and collaborative academic supervision. Academic supervision is conducted not only as a form of oversight but also as a means of professional development for teachers. Based on interviews and observations, supervision is conducted through various activities, such as planned

classroom supervision, informal discussions, routine coordination, and providing feedback on teacher learning practices.

The principal explained that supervision was not intended to judge or find fault with teachers, but to help teachers reflect on their teaching practices.

"Supervision isn't just about assessing, but also about reflecting on the teachers. Usually, I'm in the staff room discussing the challenges they're facing with my colleagues."

Teachers also stated that the supervision system implemented helped them understand the strengths and weaknesses in learning.

"The supervision system is implemented in a planned manner, while feedback is provided through discussions, thus helping teachers identify their strengths and weaknesses."

Academic supervision in this study shows a dialogical and collaborative approach between the principal and teachers.

### **Strengthening Organizational Culture and Internal Discipline**

The fourth theme of this research is strengthening organizational culture and internal discipline as a follow-up to the principal's monitoring and evaluation process. The results show that the principal strives to build a positive organizational culture through open communication, collaboration between teachers, and collaborative activities that strengthen social relationships within the school.

The vice principal for curriculum explained that the school's work culture is characterized by a spirit of collaboration among teachers. The next stage in the leadership strategy cycle is strengthening the organizational culture and internal discipline as a follow-up to the results of monitoring and evaluation. The vice principal for curriculum explained:

"The teachers' enthusiasm is reflected in their collaborative and familial work culture. Teachers share experiences and discuss learning."

In addition to fostering a positive work culture, principals also reward teachers for their outstanding performance. These rewards aren't always material, but can also include recognition at school forums or opportunities to participate in flagship programs.

As a form of appreciation for teacher performance, schools also provide non-material rewards. One teacher said:

"Awards in the form of appreciation in school forums or being allowed to be involved in superior programs as a form of motivation."

On the other hand, the principal also enforces work discipline related to punctuality, responsibility for learning administration, and commitment to teaching duties. This discipline is enforced proportionally while still considering a coaching approach.

These findings indicate that strengthening organizational culture and internal discipline is an important part of maintaining consistent teacher performance in schools.

## **3.2. Discussion**

The research results show that the principal's leadership strategy in improving teacher performance at Muhammadiyah Elementary School, Colombo Complex, occurs through a reflective and sustainable leadership cycle. This cycle begins with the establishment of a humanistic leadership approach, followed by instructional development planning, reflective academic supervision, and strengthening organizational culture as a follow-up to the evaluation results.

This cycle model shows that the principal's leadership not only functions as a school administration manager, but also as a learning leader who has a strategic role in improving the quality of teacher performance.

### **Transformational-Humanistic Leadership**

Findings regarding the humanistic approach implemented by school principals demonstrate characteristics of transformational leadership. Bass stated that transformational leadership emphasizes individualized attention to organizational members and the leader's ability to inspire and motivate subordinates (Harsoyo, 2022).

The humanistic approach adopted by the principal also demonstrates a concern for the emotional and professional needs of teachers. Teachers are viewed not merely as administrative task performers, but as individuals with growth potential.

The exemplary behavior demonstrated by the principal also aligns with the findings of Fardiatama and Prayitno (2025), who stated that exemplary leadership is an effective strategy for improving teacher discipline and work ethic. Furthermore, a humanistic approach that emphasizes harmonious interpersonal relationships has been shown to increase organizational commitment and teacher work motivation. This aligns with research by Fitri (2025), who stated that transformational leadership, characterized by exemplary behavior, motivation, and a clear vision, can improve teacher performance.

The exemplary leadership and humanistic approach are evident in improved teacher performance, both in terms of professionalism and work attitude. Teachers become more disciplined in carrying out their duties, more open to supervision and mentoring, and more creative in their teaching. Furthermore, a good working relationship between the principal and teachers strengthens organizational commitment. These findings reinforce the view that human-relations-oriented leadership influences teacher performance (Mahri, 2014).

In this regard, it can be confirmed that the principal's leadership strategy through exemplary behavior and a humanistic approach is a factor in improving teacher performance at Muhammadiyah Elementary Schools. Leadership that positions the principal as a humanistic role model not only encourages improved teacher performance but also fosters a positive and sustainable school culture.

### **Instructional Development Planning**

Research findings indicate that principals fulfill their role as instructional leaders through structured teacher professional development program planning. This planning includes professional training, strengthening teacher learning communities, and aligning the curriculum with the school's vision and mission.

Teacher professional capacity development at Muhammadiyah Elementary School, Colombo Complex, is carried out in a structured and sustainable manner. Structured planning provides a strong foundation for the school organization to be ready to optimally support teacher professional development. Other research suggests that planning strategies that reflect a holistic and structured approach can be used to improve teacher performance (Rosanti, 2025).

Structured professional capacity development planning also reflects the principal's role as an instructional leader, who is responsible for ensuring that all teacher development programs align to improve the quality of learning. According to Santosa et al. (2025), an instructionally oriented principal leadership strategy

effectively improves teacher performance, the quality of learning, and ensures the sustainability of education.

Thus, the planning stage of a principal's leadership strategy serves as a bridge between the leadership vision and the implementation of teacher professional development. Structured, needs-based planning allows for consistent improvement in teacher professional capacity and directly impacts teacher performance in schools.

### **Reflective Academic Supervision**

The academic supervision found in this study demonstrates a collaborative and reflective approach. Supervision is conducted not only to evaluate teacher performance but also to help teachers reflect on their learning practices.

Collaborative academic supervision is demonstrated through the active involvement of teachers in the monitoring and evaluation of learning. Principals position themselves not as authoritative supervisors, but rather as dialogue partners with teachers in reflecting on learning practices. This finding aligns with the view that academic supervision is the principal's responsibility to develop teachers through the supervisory function. Teachers who have a positive view of teaching supervision tend to excel, as supervision involves coaching towards teaching improvement (Wulandari, 2025).

In addition to being collaborative, academic supervision in this study was also reflective. The principal offered constructive feedback and motivated teachers to reflect on strengths and weaknesses in the learning process. Through collaborative reflection, teachers gained the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of learning practices and design relevant improvements. Academic supervision needs to be implemented reflectively and collaboratively, and directed towards supporting the continuous improvement of teachers' professional capacity (Manurung, 2020).

The systematic monitoring and analysis process also enables principals to more accurately identify teacher development needs. Data from supervision, coordination, and reflection are used as a basis for leadership decision-making, both for improving learning and adjusting teacher professional development programs. This demonstrates that the monitor and analyze phase is not merely administrative in nature, but serves as a means of organizational learning within the school environment. This is in line with Surtiati & Sunarya (2025), who stated that teachers interpret supervision as a collaborative and reflective process, aimed at improving the quality of learning and teacher professionalism. In this regard, supervision is not viewed solely as an administrative requirement, but rather as part of ongoing teacher self-development efforts.

Thus, collaborative and reflective academic supervision at this stage becomes an effective leadership strategy for improving teacher performance. Dialogic, ongoing, and reflection-based supervision can motivate teachers to continuously implement improvements and professional development, demonstrating a progressive correlation to the existence of learning and overall teacher performance.

### **Strengthening Organizational Culture and Internal Discipline**

The strengthening of organizational culture by the principal demonstrates the leader's role as an agent of change within the educational organization. A positive organizational culture can foster a collaborative, professional, and quality-oriented work environment.

School organizational culture is shaped through values consistently instilled by the principal, such as responsibility, cooperation, commitment to quality, and role modelling. The principal serves as an agent of change, instilling these values through concrete actions, fair policies, and open communication. This finding aligns with the view that leaders are capable of motivating staff to actively participate in the change process, building an innovative work culture, and stimulating creative thinking (Margana et al., 2024). In this context, organizational culture serves as a strategic instrument for the sustainable internalization of teacher performance standards.

In addition to organizational culture, enforcing internal discipline is also a crucial part of this stage. Discipline is not intended to pressure teachers, but rather to build their professional awareness. The principal adjusts his or her guidance based on existing performance records, such as punctuality, responsibility for administrative matters, and discipline in carrying out daily teaching duties. This statement aligns with leadership principles that emphasize a balance between firmness and coaching, so that discipline becomes part of the work culture, not just a formal obligation (Sutrisno, 2019).

The act & adjust stage also reflects the principal's adaptive ability to respond to school dynamics. Policy adjustments, strengthening internal regulations, and providing proportional rewards and sanctions are carried out as a follow-up to the results of teacher performance supervision and evaluation. Therefore, in addition to serving as a decision-maker, the principal is required to be a reflective leader capable of adapting his or her leadership strategy to the dynamics and real needs of the school environment. This aligns with the concept of adaptive leadership, which emphasizes the importance of leader flexibility and responsiveness in improving organizational performance (Northouse, 2016).

By strengthening organizational culture and internal discipline during the act and adjust phase, principals are able to create an orderly, professional, and quality-oriented work environment. This environment encourages teachers to work consistently, responsibly, and with a strong commitment to improving the quality of learning. Therefore, this monitoring phase concludes the leadership strategy, ensuring a tangible and sustainable impact on improving teacher performance.

Overall, this discussion demonstrates that the principal's leadership strategy for improving teacher performance at Muhammadiyah Elementary Schools is reflective and sustainable. The interplay between leadership strategy formulation, program planning, reflective monitoring, and adaptive actions and adjustments is key to successfully improving teacher performance. These findings reinforce the view that principals play a strategic role as instructional leaders, managers, and professional mentors of educators, serving as key instruments in strengthening the pillars of educational quality and learning effectiveness in elementary schools.

Theoretically, this research enriches the study of educational management by offering a reflective cycle-based model of principal leadership. This model integrates management functions (planning, implementation, and supervision) with transformational and instructional leadership approaches. These findings reinforce the theory that effective educational leadership must be adaptive, collaborative, and oriented toward human resource development, particularly teachers as the primary actors in learning.

Practically, the output of this research provides a tangible contribution as a guide for school principals in evaluating, developing, and implementing leadership strategies focused on improving teacher performance. Schools can adopt this model

as a leadership framework that emphasizes a balance between program planning, teacher empowerment, flexible implementation, and coaching supervision. Furthermore, this model can be used by school supervisors and education offices as a basis for developing policies to improve teacher quality.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that improving teacher performance at Muhammadiyah Elementary Schools (SD Muhammadiyah) utilizes a leadership strategy that combines professionalism and humanity. The principal serves not only as a manager but also as a role model and partner for teachers through a transformational-humanistic approach. This strategy has proven effective in building teacher trust and internal motivation. Several key factors contributing to this improved performance include measurable teacher development program planning, inclusive academic supervision through reflective discussions, and strengthening a family-like school culture. Discipline within the school environment is successfully instilled not through coercion, but through fostering a sense of professional responsibility. Overall, the combination of careful planning and empathetic communication creates a positive work environment, ultimately encouraging teachers to consistently deliver the best quality teaching to students. Therefore, this study confirms that strategic and sustainable principal leadership plays a crucial role in improving teacher performance, particularly in private elementary schools with limited resources.

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