



## Leadership Style of Madrasah Principals in Improving Teacher Performance at MAN Batu Bara

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### ABSTRACT

Education is a strategic foundation for national development, with madrasahs playing a key role in shaping intellectually competent and morally grounded human resources. The success of a madrasah is closely linked to the quality of learning, which is influenced by teacher performance and, in turn, by the leadership of the madrasah principal. This study aims to (1) describe the leadership style of the principal in improving teacher performance at MAN Batu Bara, (2) examine teacher performance in carrying out professional duties, and (3) identify supporting and inhibiting factors in leadership implementation. This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach and was conducted at MAN Batu Bara. Data were collected through observations and in-depth interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis to gain an in-depth understanding of leadership practices and teacher performance. The findings reveal that the principal's leadership combines firmness and openness. Firmness is reflected in discipline enforcement and accountability, while openness is evident in participatory communication and teacher involvement. Teacher performance follows a systematic process, including planning, implementation, assessment, and follow-up activities. Although overall performance has improved, disparities remain in instructional quality, use of technology, and implementation of evaluation practices. Supporting factors include effective leadership, organizational structure, positive work culture, supervision, and institutional support. Inhibiting factors involve limited technological access, workload pressures, time constraints, and uneven professional development. In conclusion, effective leadership in madrasahs requires a balance between authority and participation, supported by adequate resources and continuous teacher development.

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## INTRODUCTION

Education plays a fundamental role in shaping the civilization and competitiveness of a nation. In contemporary contexts, education is increasingly positioned as a dynamic system that must respond to rapid technological, social, and economic transformations. Recent studies emphasize that education systems are required to develop adaptive competencies, digital literacy, and lifelong learning capacities to remain relevant in the 21st century (Zhao & Watterston, 2022; Schleicher, 2023). Furthermore, the quality of education has been shown to significantly influence national resilience and innovation capacity in the global knowledge economy (Reimers, 2022; Amaliah, 2024; Pasaribu, 2023).

Within the Indonesian education system, madrasahs as Islamic-based educational institutions play a distinctive role. They function not only as centers of academic learning but also as institutions for the internalization of religious values and character formation. Recent research highlights that madrasahs face increasing pressure to integrate traditional religious education

with modern pedagogical practices, including digital learning and global competencies (Nilan et al., 2022; Tan, 2023; Nasution, 2024). This dual mandate creates both opportunities and challenges in maintaining educational relevance and quality.

The effectiveness of madrasah education is closely linked to the quality of teaching and learning processes. Contemporary research indicates that teacher effectiveness is shaped not only by pedagogical competence but also by the ability to integrate technology, apply innovative teaching strategies, and engage in continuous professional learning (König et al., 2022; OECD Education Working Papers, 2023; Yaacob, 2024). As such, teachers are expected to function as adaptive professionals who can respond to evolving educational demands.

However, teacher performance is strongly influenced by leadership and organizational conditions. Recent studies confirm that school leadership plays a central role in shaping instructional quality, teacher collaboration, and school improvement processes (Grissom et al., 2021; Gumus et al., 2023). Leadership is increasingly viewed not merely as a positional authority but as a process that influences school culture, professional learning, and innovation. Recent empirical studies have further examined the relationship between leadership and teacher performance. For instance, Gumus et al. (2023) found that effective school leadership significantly enhances teacher collaboration and instructional improvement through professional learning communities. Similarly, Liu et al. (2024) demonstrate that leadership practices that support teacher autonomy and innovation are associated with higher levels of instructional effectiveness.

In addition, recent research on participatory leadership shows that involving teachers in decision-making processes strengthens organizational commitment and improves teaching quality (Torres, 2022). Meanwhile, instructional leadership has been found to play a key role in improving classroom practices through supervision, feedback, and professional support (Bellibas et al., 2024). In the context of Islamic education, recent studies indicate that leadership in madrasahs must navigate complex socio-cultural dynamics while promoting modernization and educational quality (Aziz et al., 2023; Huda et al., 2024). These studies highlight the importance of context-sensitive leadership approaches that align institutional values with contemporary educational demands.

Despite these developments, several gaps remain. First, many studies still adopt quantitative approaches that focus on relationships between variables without examining how leadership is enacted in everyday school practices (Gumus et al., 2023). Second, there is limited research focusing specifically on madrasahs as unique socio-cultural institutions. Third, few studies analyze how leadership influences specific dimensions of teacher performance, such as lesson planning, instructional implementation, and evaluation. Fourth, contextual constraints—such as communication patterns, participation structures, and institutional culture—remain underexplored.

These gaps are particularly evident in the context of MAN Batu Bara. Preliminary observations indicate that teacher performance has not yet reached optimal levels, especially in instructional planning, digital integration, and innovative teaching practices. Communication barriers, limited teacher participation, and insufficient professional development further indicate that leadership practices may not yet be fully effective. These conditions highlight the need for a more context-sensitive analysis of leadership and its role in shaping teacher performance.

Addressing these gaps, this study conceptualizes leadership as a contextual and practice-based process. The novelty of this research lies in three contributions: (1) providing an in-depth qualitative analysis of how transformational and participative leadership are enacted in daily madrasah practices, (2) identifying specific mechanisms linking leadership to teacher performance dimensions, and (3) uncovering contextual supporting and inhibiting factors that influence leadership effectiveness.

## METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the leadership style of the madrasah principal in improving teacher performance at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) Batu Bara. The qualitative approach was selected to enable an in-depth understanding of leadership practices as they naturally occur within the institutional context, including interactions, perceptions, and organizational dynamics (Creswell, 2018; Huberman, 2014).

The participants in this study consisted of 15 individuals who were purposively selected based on their relevance to the research focus. These participants included one madrasah principal, two vice principals, eight teachers, and four students. The principal was chosen as the key informant due to their central role in leadership and decision-making processes within the madrasah. Vice principals were included to provide additional perspectives on the implementation of leadership at the managerial level. Teachers were selected based on their teaching experience of at least three years and their active involvement in instructional and administrative activities, ensuring that they possessed sufficient understanding of the leadership practices being examined. Meanwhile, students were selected using a maximum variation approach to ensure diversity in academic performance. Rather than focusing solely on high-achieving students, this study included students with high, medium, and low levels of achievement in order to obtain a more balanced and comprehensive understanding of how leadership indirectly influences learning experiences

Data collection was conducted over a period of two months, from November to December 2025, to ensure a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of leadership practices and their influence on teacher performance. The extended duration allowed the researcher to observe leadership behaviors across different situations and time points, including routine teaching activities, staff meetings, and supervisory interactions. This prolonged engagement was considered important in qualitative research to capture more stable patterns of behavior and to reduce the risk of observing only temporary or situational phenomena.

**Table 1.** Participant Profile

No	Participant Type	Number	Criteria
1	Principal	1	Key decision maker
2	Vice Principals	2	Managerial role
3	Teachers	8	≥3 years experience
4	Students	4	High–medium–low achievement

Observations were carried out five times during regular school activities, including classroom teaching sessions and staff interactions, with each session lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. The researcher adopted a non-participant observation role, focusing on leadership behaviors such as communication, supervision, and decision-making, as well as indicators of teacher performance such as discipline, classroom management, and instructional practices. Field notes were recorded systematically after each observation session to capture important details and contextual information.

Semi-structured interviews were employed to provide flexibility while maintaining alignment with the research objectives. A total of 15 interviews were conducted, consisting of one interview with the principal lasting approximately 60 minutes, two interviews with vice principals lasting between 45 and 60 minutes each, eight interviews with teachers lasting between 30 and 45 minutes each, and four interviews with students lasting between 20 and 30 minutes each. All interviews were conducted with participants' consent, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the data.

Data saturation was carefully considered throughout the data collection process. Saturation was reached when no new themes, patterns, or insights emerged from subsequent interviews and observations. This condition was identified after the twelfth interview, where responses began to

show clear repetition across several key themes, including leadership practices (e.g., motivational support and supervisory roles), communication patterns (e.g., openness and frequency of interaction between the principal and teachers), and challenges faced by teachers (e.g., limited professional training opportunities, constraints in using digital learning tools, and restricted participation in decision-making processes).

After the interviews were transcribed verbatim, the data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the procedures proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis began with repeated reading of the transcripts and observation notes to gain familiarity with the data. During this stage, the researcher carefully reviewed the participants' statements and field notes to identify meaningful patterns related to leadership style and teacher performance.

The next stage involved open coding, in which important words, phrases, and statements were labeled systematically. Similar codes were then grouped into broader categories based on conceptual similarities. For example, codes related to "motivation," "teacher encouragement," and "appreciation" were categorized under supportive leadership practices, while codes related to "discipline," "instructional preparation," and "classroom management" were grouped under teacher performance indicators.

After the coding and categorization process, the researcher identified and developed major themes that represented recurring patterns across the data. Three main themes emerged from the analysis: (1) leadership style of the principal, (2) teacher performance improvement, and (3) supporting and inhibiting factors in leadership implementation. These themes were continuously reviewed and refined to ensure consistency and alignment with the research objectives.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

#### Leadership Style of the Madrasah Principal

The findings indicate that the leadership style of the principal at MAN Batu Bara tends to reflect a transformational leadership approach combined with participatory elements. The principal not only performs administrative duties but also actively engages in motivating teachers, building a shared vision, and fostering a supportive working environment. Observational data show that the principal frequently communicates institutional goals and encourages teachers to improve their professional practices. This is supported by interview data from teachers. One teacher explained:

*"Our principal often provides motivation, especially during meetings. He not only delivers assignments but also reminds us of our responsibilities as educators. This makes us feel more appreciated and motivated."*

Another teacher highlighted the participatory aspect:

*"We are sometimes involved in developing work programs or madrasah activities. We can offer our opinions, although not all decisions involve us directly."*

From the principal's perspective:

*"I strive to build good communication with the teachers. I want them to feel like part of the team, not just implementers. If the madrasah's vision is mutually understood, the work will be easier."*

These findings suggest that the principal demonstrates key characteristics of transformational leadership, including inspirational motivation and individualized consideration. However, participatory practices are not yet fully consistent, particularly in strategic decision-making processes.

#### Teacher Performance at MAN Batu Bara

The results show that teacher performance at MAN Batu Bara can be categorized as moderate but still developing. In terms of discipline, most teachers demonstrate good attendance and

punctuality, as supported by documentation data. However, variation is observed in instructional quality and innovation.

Classroom observations reveal that some teachers apply interactive and student-centered methods, while others still rely on traditional lecture-based approaches. This indicates differences in pedagogical competence and adaptability. One teacher stated:

*"We strive to teach well, but there are challenges, especially in the use of technology. Not all teachers are accustomed to using digital media, so sometimes we still use the lecture method."*

Another teacher added:

*"I always make lesson plans, but creating innovative learning is still quite difficult due to time constraints and lack of training."*

From the students' perspective:

*"There are teachers who teach in an interesting and easy-to-understand way, but there are also those who just tell you to take notes, which makes it less interesting."*

Document analysis further supports these findings. While most teachers have prepared lesson plans, the quality varies significantly. Some demonstrate alignment with curriculum standards and innovative strategies, while others remain procedural and lack creativity. These results indicate that teacher performance is adequate in basic aspects but requires improvement, particularly in innovation and the integration of digital learning tools.

### 3. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Leadership Implementation

The study identifies both supporting and inhibiting factors that influence the effectiveness of the principal's leadership in improving teacher performance. Supporting factors include positive interpersonal relationships, open communication, and structured coordination through regular meetings and supervision activities. These elements contribute to a conducive working environment and foster collaboration among teachers. A teacher stated:

*"The principal is quite open. If we have any problems, we can directly address them, and they usually provide a solution."*

A vice principal also noted:

*"Coordination is going quite well through regular meetings, so that the madrasah program can be implemented in a more focused manner."*

However, several inhibiting factors were also identified. Limited teacher involvement in strategic decision-making reduces the effectiveness of participatory leadership. Communication gaps and insufficient professional development opportunities also emerged as key challenges. One teacher expressed:

*"Sometimes we are not fully involved in important decisions, so we just implement existing policies."*

Another teacher emphasized:

*"We need more training, especially regarding learning technology, because the demands are now higher."*

From the principal's perspective:

*"The main challenge is limited time and resources. We have to divide our focus between administration and teacher development."*

These findings suggest that although the principal has adopted effective leadership practices, structural limitations and resource constraints still hinder their full impact on teacher performance.

**Table 2.** Thematic Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Supporting Factors	Inhibiting Factors
Open communication	Limited participation
Positive relationships	Lack of training
Regular meetings	Resource constraints
Supervision	Time limitations

The findings of this study reveal a balance between supporting and inhibiting factors that influence the effectiveness of leadership in improving teacher performance. Supporting factors include open communication, which allows teachers to express concerns and receive feedback constructively, as well as positive interpersonal relationships that foster a collaborative and harmonious working environment. In addition, regular meetings and structured supervision contribute to better coordination and clearer implementation of institutional programs. However, several inhibiting factors were also identified. Limited teacher participation in decision-making processes reduces the sense of ownership and engagement, while a lack of training hinders teachers' ability to innovate and adapt to evolving educational demands. Furthermore, resource constraints and time limitations pose significant challenges, restricting both leadership initiatives and teachers' professional development efforts. Together, these findings indicate that while a supportive organizational climate exists, structural and capacity-related constraints continue to limit the overall impact of leadership practices.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study reveal that the leadership style of the madrasah principal at MAN Batu Bara is predominantly transformational with participatory elements, which appears to influence teacher performance. This finding aligns with contemporary studies showing that transformational leadership can enhance teacher motivation, collaboration, and professional engagement through vision-building and supportive relationships (Dong Ng, 2021; Liu & Philip Hallinger, 2023). The principal's efforts in motivating teachers, fostering a shared vision, and maintaining positive interpersonal relationships reflect key dimensions of transformational leadership. However, participatory leadership is not yet fully implemented, particularly in strategic decision-making, indicating that leadership practices remain partially optimized.

These findings are consistent with recent empirical research indicating that transformational leadership may contribute positively to teacher commitment, instructional improvement, and organizational effectiveness (Leithwood et al., 2020; Anit Somech, 2020). In this study, teachers reported increased motivation and a stronger sense of responsibility, suggesting that leadership practices at MAN Batu Bara may have contributed to a supportive organizational climate. However, the limited implementation of participatory leadership differs from findings in other studies where teacher involvement in decision-making is associated with higher engagement and ownership (Somech, 2020). This suggests that the effectiveness of participatory leadership depends on the extent to which it is consistently applied in practice.

From a broader perspective, the findings highlight that leadership should be understood as a contextual and dynamic process, rather than a static set of behaviors. Recent studies emphasize that leadership effectiveness is often shaped by organizational culture, communication patterns, and institutional constraints (Hallinger & Wang, 2020; Liu & Hallinger, 2023). At MAN Batu Bara, while leadership demonstrates strong motivational and relational aspects, its overall impact appears to be influenced by structural limitations, including limited teacher participation, insufficient professional development, and gaps in communication.

In terms of teacher performance, the results indicate that teachers demonstrate adequate discipline and basic instructional practices, but still face challenges in innovation and the integration of digital learning. This finding is consistent with recent studies showing that teacher performance in contemporary education may be related to access to continuous professional development and digital competence (Trust & Whalen, 2020; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Thus, leadership alone is insufficient; it also needs to be supported by systemic conditions that enable teachers to develop professionally and adapt to changing educational demands.

Comparatively, the findings reveal both similarities and differences with other educational contexts. Studies in Islamic education settings indicate that leadership often remains centralized, with limited teacher participation in decision-making (Ismail et al., 2021). In contrast, MAN Batu

Bara shows a transition toward a more collaborative leadership model, although not yet fully participatory. Similarly, research in broader school contexts demonstrates that strong transformational leadership is often associated with higher levels of teacher innovation and instructional quality (Ng, 2021; Liu & Hallinger, 2023). However, at MAN Batu Bara, there remains a gap between leadership intentions and instructional outcomes, particularly in the area of innovative and technology-based teaching practices.

These findings reinforce the argument that leadership effectiveness is influenced not only by leadership style but also by supporting and inhibiting factors within the organization. Supporting factors such as open communication, positive interpersonal relationships, regular meetings, and structured supervision appear to contribute to a conducive working environment. Conversely, inhibiting factors including limited teacher participation, insufficient training opportunities, resource constraints, and time limitations may reduce the effectiveness of leadership practices. This supports recent research emphasizing that leadership impact can be mediated by organizational capacity and resource availability (Leithwood et al., 2020; Hallinger & Wang, 2020).

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted in a single madrasah context, which may limit the transferability of the findings to other institutions with different cultural and organizational characteristics. Second, although data were collected over a two-month period, leadership practices and their effects are dynamic and may require longer-term observation to capture sustained changes. Third, the relatively small number of participants, while appropriate for qualitative research, may not fully represent the diversity of perspectives within the institution. Finally, the study relies on self-reported data, which may be subject to bias, despite efforts to ensure credibility through triangulation and member checking.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the understanding of leadership as a situated and context-dependent practice, extending beyond traditional leadership models that focus solely on style. While transformational leadership provides a useful framework, its effectiveness may depend on how it interacts with organizational systems, teacher capacity, and institutional constraints (Hallinger & Wang, 2020; Liu & Hallinger, 2023). This suggests that future research should adopt a more integrative approach that considers both leadership behavior and contextual dynamics.

Practically, the findings suggest that improving teacher performance in madrasah settings requires not only the adoption of effective leadership styles but also the strengthening of institutional support systems. School leaders should enhance participatory decision-making, expand professional development opportunities, and improve communication structures to create a more inclusive and supportive environment. By addressing both leadership practices and organizational constraints, madrasahs may be better positioned to support teacher development and improve overall educational quality.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This study concludes that the leadership style of the madrasah principal at MAN Batu Bara is predominantly transformational, complemented by participatory elements, and appears to play an important role in shaping teacher performance. The principal's ability to motivate teachers, articulate a shared vision, and foster positive interpersonal relationships appears to have contributed to a supportive organizational climate that encourages responsibility and professional commitment. However, the implementation of participatory leadership remains partial and inconsistent, particularly in strategic decision-making, which may limit its potential to strengthen teacher ownership and engagement.

At the same time, the findings reveal that leadership effectiveness may be influenced by several structural challenges, including limited professional development opportunities, insufficient integration of digital technology in teaching, and communication gaps within the organization. While teachers demonstrate adequate discipline and basic instructional competence, their capacity for innovation and use of digital learning tools remains underdeveloped. This indicates that leadership alone is insufficient to support meaningful improvement in teacher performance without strong institutional support systems.

These findings suggest that improving teacher performance in madrasah contexts requires a more integrated and actionable leadership approach. First, school leaders should institutionalize participatory decision-making mechanisms, such as involving teachers in curriculum planning, program evaluation, and policy discussions, to enhance ownership and commitment. Second, madrasahs should implement structured and continuous professional development programs, particularly focusing on digital pedagogy, innovative teaching strategies, and classroom-based research. Third, principals should strengthen instructional supervision practices by providing regular, feedback-oriented mentoring rather than solely administrative evaluation. Fourth, improving internal communication systems, such as routine reflective meetings and open feedback channels, can help reduce misunderstandings and align organizational goals more effectively. Finally, policymakers and school management should allocate adequate resources and time to support teacher development and reduce administrative burdens that limit instructional innovation.

This study opens several avenues for future research. First, future studies should conduct longitudinal research to examine how leadership practices influence teacher performance over time and whether improvements are sustainable. Second, comparative studies across different madrasah types or regions are needed to explore how contextual variations (e.g., urban vs. rural, public vs. private madrasahs) shape the effectiveness of leadership practices. Such studies would provide a more comprehensive understanding of leadership as a context-dependent process.

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