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Madrasah Principal Leadership Strategy as a Motor for Developing Teacher Professionalism

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ABSTRACT

Education as the foundation of national development heavily relies on the quality of professional teachers who continuously develop their competencies, especially in facing the challenges of dynamic curricula and the digital era. Meanwhile, madrasahs, with their unique integration of religious values and general knowledge, require visionary leadership from headmasters to create a conducive work environment that fosters the sustainable improvement of teacher professionalism. This study employs a qualitative method with a literature review approach. The findings reveal that the role of the headmaster as an instructional leader is crucial in enhancing teacher competencies by motivating and facilitating professional development tailored to the teachers' actual needs. Headmasters must also implement leadership strategies that cultivate a supportive, inclusive, and conducive work environment, encouraging teachers to engage in continuous learning and collaboration to improve teaching quality. However, in practice, headmasters face various challenges such as administrative burdens, limited resources, and resistance from teachers that hinder the effectiveness of their roles. Therefore, capacity building in leadership, resource support, and synergy with stakeholders are essential to enable headmasters to optimally and sustainably drive the development of teacher professionalism, ultimately positively impacting the quality of education in madrasahs.

1. Introduction

Education is the primary foundation for a nation's development. High-quality national education is key to creating competent human resources ready to face global challenges (Fadhli, 2020). Therefore, continuously improving the quality of education has become a key agenda championed by governments in various countries, including Indonesia (Sayuti, 2022). The focus is not only on curriculum and infrastructure; the quality of education is also determined by the human resources who manage it. Teachers play a central role in education as they are the

spearheads of the learning process (Amalia, 2019). Teacher competence and professionalism directly impact student learning outcomes. In other words, educational success is highly dependent on teacher quality (Adilah & Suryana, 2021). Therefore, efforts to improve the quality of education must begin with developing the capacity of teachers as the primary implementers of teaching and learning activities. As time goes by, the challenges facing education are increasingly complex. Dynamic curriculum changes, advances in digital technology, and the need for 21st-century competencies require teachers to continuously learn and improve their professionalism (Muttaqin, 2017). Continuous Professional Development (PPB) is a necessity so that teachers are not only technically competent, but also able to adapt and innovate according to current developments.

Madrasas, as Islamic-based educational institutions, have unique characteristics that distinguish them from public schools (Hakiemah & Sudirman, 2020; Susilawati, 2012). In addition to imparting general knowledge, madrasas also play a role in instilling religious values and character in students (Ari Susetiyo & Sutrisno, 2022). This makes the role of teachers in madrasas increasingly complex, as they must be able to integrate these two aspects into the learning process. In practice, madrasas often face various challenges that impact teacher professionalism (Sudarmanto, 2019). Limited resources, both in terms of facilities and access to training, remain a major obstacle in many madrasas, especially those in remote areas (Gusman, 2022). Furthermore, the disparity in teacher quality between madrasas is quite striking, impacting the imbalance in education quality at the national level. These challenges further emphasize the importance of leadership in madrasas. As institutional leaders, madrasah principals have a significant responsibility to create a conducive work environment and support the development of teacher professionalism (Sudarmanto, 2019). Effective leadership can be a catalyst for positive change in improving the quality of education in madrasahs. However, it is not uncommon for madrasah principals to merely carry out routine administrative and managerial functions without emphasizing their strategic role as learning leaders (Nurlena, 2020). In fact, madrasah principals should play an active role as driving forces, facilitating and overseeing ongoing teacher competency development programs.

Strong and visionary leadership from a madrasah principal can motivate teachers to continuously improve their quality through training, self-development, and learning innovation (Umayah, 2015). Thus, a madrasah principal is not only an administrative manager but also an instructional leader who inspires and motivates teachers in carrying out their duties. Unfortunately, the reality on the ground often shows that madrasah principals pay little attention to this transformative function. Many teacher professional development programs are merely ceremonial, unsustainable, and less relevant to teacher needs and the learning context in madrasahs. This condition leads to stagnation in improving teacher competency. When teacher professional development is not effective, the quality of learning in madrasahs will also be affected (Fadhli, 2019). As a result, the quality of madrasah graduates is less than optimal and has the potential to reduce the competitiveness of religion-based education in Indonesia. This clearly demonstrates the crucial role

of the madrasah principal as a driving force in teacher professional development (Abdullah et al., 2023). Madrasah principals must be able to integrate managerial functions with transformative learning leadership to create sustainable positive change. Effective leadership will also help create a supportive and conducive organizational climate for teachers to continue learning and developing (Elyati et al., 2022). A positive work environment will increase teacher motivation and performance, which ultimately has a direct impact on improving the quality of education in madrasahs.

The urgency of this research lies in the need to better understand the leadership styles, strategies, and practices of madrasah principals that are effective in promoting teacher professionalism. This research is expected to identify factors that support and hinder the role of madrasah principals as drivers of change. With a deeper understanding, the research results can serve as a basis for formulating an appropriate and transformative leadership model appropriate to the context of madrasahs in Indonesia. This model can serve as a guide for madrasah principals in optimizing their role to improve teacher quality. Furthermore, this research also aims to provide strategic recommendations for stakeholders, such as education offices and training institutions, in designing development programs that are more effective and relevant to the needs of madrasahs. Thus, improving teacher professionalism in madrasahs can be carried out more systematically and sustainably, thereby meeting the challenges of 21st-century education (Maranting, 2020). This will contribute significantly to improving the overall quality of national education. Based on the descriptions above, this research is interesting and important. It aims to describe the leadership strategies of madrasah principals as a driving force for teacher professionalism.

2. Methodology

The method used in this research is a qualitative approach with a literature review (Sugiyono, 2024). A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore in-depth the phenomenon of madrasah principal leadership in the context of improving teacher professionalism. Through this method, researchers can understand the meaning, patterns, and dynamics that occur without being limited by numbers or statistical data, thus providing a comprehensive picture of the role and influence of leadership in the context of madrasah education.

Literature review was the primary focus of data collection, conducted through a review of relevant literature, including books, scientific journals, articles, and official documents related to leadership theory, teacher professional development, and the characteristics of madrasah education. This method relies on published written sources to build a theoretical foundation and strengthen the analysis (Adlini et al., 2022). This approach is highly effective for understanding basic concepts and recent developments related to the research problem. Furthermore, the qualitative method, including literature review, allows researchers to synthesize and critically interpret various existing sources (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006). Thus, the research results are not only descriptive but also analytical, helping to formulate effective

madrasah principal leadership strategies to improve teacher professionalism. This approach also supports the research in providing practical recommendations based on in-depth theoretical studies relevant to the madrasah context in Indonesia.

3. Result and Discussion

Madrasah Principal Leadership Strategy in Developing Teacher Competence

The madrasah principal plays a crucial role as a learning leader in improving teacher competency. As a central figure in madrasah management, the madrasah principal is not only responsible for school administration and management but also for directing and guiding teachers in the learning process (Maranting, 2020). This role is crucial because the madrasah principal can be a driving force that encourages improvements in the quality of education through enhancing teacher professionalism. As a learning leader, the madrasah principal is responsible for designing competency development programs tailored to the needs of teachers and students (Suwartini, 2017). These programs include training, workshops, mentoring, and evaluations designed to enable teachers to master the latest teaching methods and educational technology that support the teaching and learning process (Adilah & Suryana, 2021). The madrasah principal must ensure that all these programs run effectively and sustainably.

Continuously developing teacher competency will positively impact the quality of learning in madrasahs. According to Supoyo, madrasah principals need to regularly monitor and evaluate the implementation of these development programs. This way, madrasah principals can determine the extent of teacher competency improvement and make improvements if necessary (Supoyo, 2021). This process requires the madrasah principal to be actively involved and maintain good communication with teachers. The madrasah principal must also serve as an example or role model for teachers in terms of professionalism and enthusiasm for learning. The madrasah principal's attitudes and behavior that demonstrate a commitment to improving the quality of learning will motivate teachers to follow suit (Rahmad, 2016). This creates a positive and productive school culture that focuses on self-development and continuous competency improvement. Furthermore, madrasah principals need to understand the characteristics and needs of teachers to provide appropriate support. Each teacher has different potential and challenges, so the approach used must be tailored (Ikbal, 2018). Madrasah principals must be able to build good relationships and mutual trust with teachers to create a harmonious working atmosphere that supports the learning process.

The role of the madrasah principal as a learning leader also includes facilitating innovation in the learning process (PMA 58 Tahun 2017 Tentang Kepala Madrasah, 2017). Madrasah principals need to encourage teachers to use creative teaching methods and increasingly advanced digital technologies. This encouragement will enrich students' learning experiences and improve the overall quality of learning. Madrasah principals must actively explore various relevant learning and training resources for teachers, whether from educational institutions, the government, or

other sources. By accessing these opportunities, teachers can gain new insights and skills that align with the needs of the madrasah and curriculum developments. Madrasah principals act as a liaison between teachers and external resources that can enhance their professional capacity. Improving teacher competency also means paying attention to the development of soft skills, such as communication skills, classroom management, and time management. Madrasah principals need to integrate training that focuses not only on the technical aspects of learning but also on social and emotional skills that support teaching effectiveness (Mahasina & Sa'diyah, 2024). This way, teachers will be better prepared to face various challenges in learning.

The supervisory function carried out by the madrasah principal is also crucial in improving teacher competence. Professional and constructive supervision helps teachers understand their strengths and areas for improvement. The madrasah principal must provide constructive feedback and motivate teachers to continue learning and improve the quality of their teaching (Nurlena, 2020). Furthermore, the madrasah principal can facilitate the formation of teacher working groups or learning communities that allow teachers to share experiences and knowledge. These groups serve as an important medium for fostering collaboration and collective professional development. Through this interaction, teachers not only develop individually but also strengthen their professional networks. The madrasah principal needs to develop a reward and appreciation system for teachers who demonstrate increased competence and good performance (Fauzi & Hanif, 2024). This reward can take the form of formal or informal recognition that motivates teachers to continue achieving. Appropriate appreciation will boost teacher morale and loyalty to the madrasah.

In facing curriculum changes and the demands of the times, madrasah principals must be responsive and adaptive. They need to update their leadership strategies to adapt to the ever-evolving needs of teacher professional development. This dynamic leadership will ensure that teachers are always ready to face changes and new challenges in education (Muharnis & Fadriati, 2023). Madrasah principals are also responsible for building effective communication between teachers and other parties, such as parents, the education office, and the surrounding community (Pane, 2019). This communication is crucial for obtaining the support and resources needed for teacher competency development programs. With broad support, teacher professional development programs can run more smoothly and have an impact. As learning leaders, madrasah principals must have a clear vision and mission related to improving the quality of education and teacher professionalism. This vision serves as the foundation for formulating policies and strategies implemented at the madrasah. Madrasah principals with a strong vision will be able to mobilize the entire academic community towards a common goal. Madrasah principals must also develop their abilities as learning leaders through training and self-development (Fadhli, 2019). With a professional and competent madrasah principal, the positive influence on teachers will be greater. Quality leadership is a crucial foundation for creating positive change in madrasahs.

The use of information technology is an important part of developing teacher professionalism (Putra, 2023). Madrasah principals must be able to encourage teachers to use technology as a learning and self-development tool (Abdullah Ramli, 2017). Effective use of technology will broaden teachers' horizons and increase creativity in teaching. Madrasah principals must also pay attention to teacher well-being as part of efforts to improve professionalism. Teachers who are physically and mentally healthy will be more productive and motivated in carrying out their duties. Therefore, madrasah principals need to create a healthy work environment and support a balance between work and personal life for teachers. Collaboration between madrasah principals and teachers in designing professional development programs must be built in a participatory manner. Teacher involvement in the planning process will increase their sense of ownership and commitment to the program. This inclusive leadership encourages innovation and sustainability in teacher competency development.

The head of the madrasah, as the leader of learning, plays a central role in creating a strong learning culture in the madrasah. With visionary, communicative, and supportive leadership, teachers can continue to develop and provide the best educational services for students. This will ultimately improve the overall quality of madrasah education. Through this strategic role, the madrasah principal can ensure that teacher professional development is not just a formality, but a meaningful and continuous process. With a committed and active madrasah principal, the madrasah will be able to produce graduates who are not only academically intelligent, but also have strong character and faith.

Leadership Strategy of Madrasah Principals in Creating a Work Environment that Supports the Development of Teacher Professionalism

Madrasah principals play a crucial role in creating a conducive work environment for teacher professional development. This supportive work environment includes an atmosphere that provides motivation, a sense of security, and opportunities for teachers to develop professionally. As leaders, madrasah principals must be able to build a positive organizational climate where teachers feel valued and supported in their efforts to improve their competencies (Azizah & Apdila, 2021). This environment provides the foundation for teachers to innovate and contribute optimally to learning. One effective strategy is to build open and respectful communication between madrasah principals and teachers. Through good communication, madrasah principals can understand the needs and challenges faced by teachers in the learning process. Furthermore, effective communication enables strong collaboration between teachers, allowing them to share experiences and effective learning strategies (Das & Halik, 2021). This collaboration is a key driver in building teacher professionalism collectively. Madrasah principals also need to develop a support system that includes providing training facilities, sufficient time for self-development, and access to adequate learning resources. With this support, teachers not only gain new knowledge but also feel motivated to continue learning and improve their performance (Jannati et al., 2023). The principal acts as a facilitator, ensuring all necessary resources are available and optimally accessible to teachers.

Furthermore, madrasah principals can adopt a participatory and transformational leadership style (Rofiq, 2019). This style allows teachers to feel involved in decision-making related to their own professional development (Handayani et al., 2023). Participatory leadership creates space for teachers to provide input and new ideas, making development programs more relevant and aligned with real needs in the field. This transformation creates a collective spirit and a sense of shared responsibility for the quality of education. Rewarding and recognizing teacher achievements is also an important strategy in creating a work environment that supports professionalism. Madrasah principals can provide appreciation in the form of formal awards, recognition at staff meetings, or other incentives that motivate teachers to continuously improve the quality of learning. This sense of appreciation strengthens teachers' enthusiasm for innovation and greater contributions to the madrasah.

Furthermore, madrasah principals must be sensitive to teachers' well-being needs, including psychological and emotional aspects. A supportive work environment must balance work demands with teachers' personal needs to prevent burnout or excessive stress (Adilah & Suryana, 2021). Madrasah principals can implement well-being programs such as counseling, recreational activities, or mental health coaching to help maintain teacher motivation and enthusiasm. Empowering teachers in academic decision-making is also an effective strategy for building a supportive work environment (Fachruddin, 2018). Madrasah principals can involve teachers in curriculum development, learning activity planning, and evaluation of learning outcomes. This involvement fosters a greater sense of ownership and responsibility for the quality of learning, while also enhancing teacher professionalism intrinsically. Effective madrasah principals also employ coaching and mentoring approaches for teachers, especially those who are new or experiencing difficulties in teaching. This approach helps teachers overcome personal and professional challenges and encourages faster and more sustainable competency development (Adilah & Suryana, 2021). Consistent coaching strengthens the relationship between the principal and teachers, building trust and a sense of support.

In facing external challenges, such as changes in education policy and technology, madrasah principals need to proactively engage teachers in collaborative adaptation. This visionary leadership helps teachers feel prepared for change and capitalize on opportunities to improve their competencies. Madrasah principals become drivers of change, building the madrasah's readiness and competitiveness (Elvi Rahmi et al., 2023). Madrasah principals also need to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of their strategies in creating a work environment that supports professionalism. Through these evaluations, madrasah principals can identify strengths and weaknesses and adjust strategies for optimal results. Continuous evaluation ensures the work environment remains responsive to teacher needs and educational developments (Komalasari et al., 2021).

The above description can serve as a strategy for madrasah principals to promote teacher competency and improve the quality of education at their madrasahs. A madrasah principal's leadership, capable of creating a work environment that

supports teacher professional development, is key to successfully improving the quality of education at madrasahs. A positive, communicative, and supportive environment will encourage teachers to continue learning, innovating, and providing the best possible teaching for students. As facilitators and motivators, the madrasah principal plays a central role in achieving this goal sustainably.

Challenges and Obstacles for Madrasah Principals as Driving Forces for Teacher Professional Development

The challenges and obstacles faced by madrasah principals in carrying out their role as driving forces for teacher professional development are complex and diverse (Maranting, 2020). One major challenge is the enormous administrative burden, which often consumes madrasah principals' time and energy, thus limiting their instructional leadership function. Many madrasah principals are caught up in administrative routines and document management, thus reducing their focus on teacher competency development, which should be a top priority (Mukhtaruddin, 2009). This results in suboptimal efforts to improve teacher professionalism. In addition to the administrative burden, limited resources are a significant obstacle to promoting teacher professional development. Madrasahs, especially in remote areas or with limited budgets, often lack supporting facilities, access to training, and adequate teaching materials. Madrasah principals must be able to manage existing resources efficiently, but budget constraints and external support often hinder strategic steps. This situation directly impacts teachers' opportunities for self-development. Another challenge is resistance or lack of motivation from some teachers themselves. Not all teachers show high enthusiasm for participating in training or professional development programs. Factors such as heavy workloads, boredom, or a mismatch between training and teachers' actual needs are the main causes (Asyari, 2020). Madrasah principals need specific strategies to overcome this passive attitude, such as motivating teachers through rewards or creating relevant and applicable training programs.

The mismatch between the curriculum and development programs offered also poses a barrier. Often, the training provided is general and not tailored to the madrasah context or the specific needs of teachers there (Adam & Wahdiah, 2023; Muharnis & Fadriati, 2023). Madrasah principals must be able to adapt or even modify programs to make them more relevant, but limited capacity and resources make this difficult. Consequently, teacher professional development becomes less effective and does not significantly impact the quality of learning. Internal communication issues in madrasahs also often hinder efforts to improve professionalism. If madrasah principals fail to establish open and effective communication with teachers, coordination and synergy in implementing professional development programs will be disrupted. Poor communication can lead to misunderstandings, conflict, and a lack of teacher engagement in various competency-building activities. External pressures from madrasahs, such as changing government policies and increasingly complex administrative demands, also add to the burden on madrasah principals. Madrasah principals must be able to balance external demands with the madrasah's internal needs in developing teacher professionalism. Often the mismatch between policies and real conditions in

madrasas causes madrasa heads to have difficulty implementing effective strategies.

Technological challenges are equally significant (Selawati, 2022). In the digital era, madrasah principals are required to encourage teachers to become technology-savvy and utilize various digital devices in their learning. However, not all madrasah principals possess adequate technological skills, let alone the teachers they lead. Lack of training and access to technology severely limits technology-based professional development (Hakim, 2020). Cultural and traditional barriers also frequently arise in madrasahs, especially those located in environments with conservative values. Changes and innovations initiated by madrasah principals to improve teacher professionalism are sometimes met with resistance because they are perceived as contradictory to local customs or norms (Mukhtaruddin, 2009). Madrasah principals must be adept at adapting their approaches and building understanding so that innovations are accepted without generating strong resistance. Difficulties in building intrinsic motivation in teachers are also a barrier that must be overcome. Madrasah principals must be able to find ways to foster a spirit of learning and development within teachers, rather than relying solely on external incentives. High intrinsic motivation is key to the success of sustainable professional development programs. High teacher workloads also contribute to low participation in professional development (Nizar, 2022). Many teachers are faced with demanding teaching hours, administrative duties, and other school activities, leaving them with limited time and energy for training or personal development. School principals must be able to manage this workload to ensure teachers have sufficient time for competency development (Prema Swandewi et al., 2024).

The uneven quality of teachers in madrasas is also a challenge faced by madrasa principals (Das & Halik, 2021; Gusman, 2022; Mulyani, 2019). Some teachers already possess high competency, while others still require intensive guidance (Muttaqin, 2017). Madrasa principals must be able to adapt development programs to be relevant and effective for various levels of teacher competency. Uncertainty in the tenure of madrasa principals can also be a barrier. Madrasa principals whose tenure is short or frequently changed tend to lack focus on long-term development (Sunengsih et al., 2021). Leadership stability is crucial to ensure consistent and sustainable teacher professionalism programs. Another challenge is the imbalance between managerial duties and instructional leadership. Madrasa principals are often faced with administrative, financial, and other time-consuming tasks, leaving them less able to focus directly on leading teacher competency development (Nurlena, 2020). This requires effective division of tasks and delegation so that madrasah principals can optimally carry out their instructional leadership functions. A lack of innovation in professional development methods also poses a barrier. Madrasah principals need to promote creative and contemporary programs, such as technology-based learning, interactive workshops, or personalized coaching (Suardi et al., 2022). Monotonous and unengaging programs can discourage teachers from participating.

Finally, obstacles related to unequal access to information and technology also pose a challenge. In some madrasas, especially those in remote areas, access to the latest

information and educational technology remains very limited (Munir, 2022). Madrasa principals must be creative in finding solutions to ensure teachers continue to receive appropriate development opportunities. The challenges and obstacles faced by madrasa principals are complex and require a holistic approach and support from various parties. For madrasa principals to effectively fulfill their role as driving forces for teacher professional development, increased leadership capacity, resource support, and close collaboration between madrasa principals, teachers, the government, and the community are needed. This way, efforts to improve the quality of education in madrasas can be sustainable and have a tangible positive impact.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results and discussion above, it can be concluded that the role of the madrasah principal as a learning leader is crucial in improving teacher competency. By actively facilitating and directing the professional development process, the madrasah principal can motivate teachers to continue learning and developing their skills. Effective instructional leadership ensures that training and development programs are tailored to teachers' actual needs, significantly improving the quality of learning in the madrasah. The leadership strategy of madrasah principals in creating a work environment that supports teacher professional development is also a determining factor in success. A conducive, inclusive, and supportive environment can increase teacher enthusiasm and engagement in various competency development activities. Madrasah principals who are able to build good communication, provide rewards, and facilitate collaboration between teachers can create a positive work climate that supports sustainable professional growth. However, in carrying out this role, madrasah principals face various complex challenges and obstacles, such as heavy administrative burdens, limited resources, resistance from teachers, and external and internal pressures that affect leadership effectiveness. Therefore, increased leadership capacity, resource support, and synergy with various stakeholders are needed so that madrasah principals can carry out their roles optimally. In this way, teacher professional development in madrasahs can be realized effectively and sustainably, contributing to improving the overall quality of education.

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