



## Religious Democratic Leadership Style of School Principals in Improving Education Quality at Madrasah Aliyah MBS Klaten

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the characteristics of religious democratic leadership, its implementation, and its impact on the quality of education at Muhammadiyah Islamic Senior High School MBS Klaten. This study employed a qualitative method, with data collection techniques including interviews, observations, and documentation involving the principal, teachers, and institutional staff. The data were then analyzed through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification. The results showed that the madrasah principal applied a religious democratic leadership style, which was reflected in openness in deliberation, the involvement of teachers in decision-making, and spiritual exemplary behavior in the form of habitual worship, moral guidance, and the strengthening of religious culture in the madrasah environment. The application of this leadership style has a direct impact on improving teacher professionalism, learning effectiveness, student character development, and the overall quality of the institution. Thus, religious democratic leadership has been proven to contribute significantly to improving the quality of education at MA MBS Klaten.

## 1. Introduction

A leader is an individual who has the ability to influence, direct, and mobilize individuals to achieve common goals. In the context of education, leaders are expected not only to have managerial competence but also emotional, moral, and spiritual intelligence to serve as role models for the entire school community. Effective leaders in an educational environment are those who are able to create a collaborative work atmosphere, inspire subordinates, and optimally develop the potential of all members of the educational institution (Ambarwati et al., 2023).

In the national education system, school principals play a central role as managers, administrators, supervisors, and moral leaders. School principals are responsible for

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mobilizing all components of the school to achieve educational goals, both academic and non-academic (Lazwardi, 2016). The success of madrasahs depends not only on the curriculum and qualified teachers but also on how school principals carry out their leadership responsibilities. In this context, the principal's leadership style is a key determinant that shapes the school's work environment and orientation (Mawardi, 2022). Therefore, the success of schools in improving the quality of education is highly dependent on the effectiveness of the principal's leadership.

High-quality education is the fundamental basis for developing superior and highly competitive human resources. The quality of education is not only determined by infrastructure and facilities but also by the relevance of the curriculum, the competence of educators, and the active participation of students in the learning process. Tilaar (2009) explains that through quality education, skills, character, and knowledge can be developed optimally so that individuals are prepared to face various challenges of the times (Fatimah & Sholahuddin, 2024).

From an Islamic educational perspective, religious democratic leadership is a combination of democratic principles, such as deliberation, participation, and openness, with religious values, such as trustworthiness, honesty, and justice. The principle of deliberation is also an important basis for decision-making in Islamic leadership. Through deliberation, a leader is required to involve the community in the decision-making process, maintain transparency, and prioritize the common interest. This practice not only strengthens the relationship between leaders and the community but also helps achieve fairer and more representative decisions (Rochim et al., 2025). School principals who apply a religious democratic leadership style can build harmonious working relationships, increase teachers' enthusiasm, and strengthen commitment to the advancement of educational institutions (Kurnia & Effendi, 2020). Methods such as MGMP, workshops, counseling, and periodic supervision through PKG and PKB, coupled with reward and punishment programs, can improve teacher professionalism (Mulyana et al., 2023).

Research by Idris (2016) confirms that principals with a democratic leadership style are able to mobilize and harmonize human resources effectively, create a harmonious work environment, and improve educator performance through openness and attention to subordinates. Furthermore, research conducted at Nurul Muslimin Private Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MIS) shows that democratic principals involve teachers and staff in the decision-making process, build solid work networks, and support the achievement of madrasah goals collectively (Maulana Robbi et al., 2022). Other research findings at MA Al-Hikmah Bandar Lampung also reveal that the principal applies a democratic leadership style characterized by accepting input, prioritizing teamwork, and involving subordinates in problem-solving (Raden Intan, 2020).

The quality of education is not only determined by academic achievement but also by the overall learning process, educator competence, effective school management, and the development of a religious and character-building school culture. In the context of MA Muhammadiyah Boarding School (MBS) Klaten, the

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quality of education is not only oriented toward academic achievement but also toward the moral and spiritual development of students. According to the official profile of Madrasah Aliyah MBS Klaten (2025), the school's flagship programs include tahfidz, tafhim, and taf'il Al-Qur'an, Islamic character building, and the development of academic and non-academic achievements. In addition, school principals play a key role in integrating character education into the school curriculum, daily routines, and extracurricular activities (Dewi et al., 2025). The managerial competence and democratic leadership style applied by the principal greatly influence the improvement of madrasah quality through teacher empowerment and the strengthening of a collaborative work culture (Firman et al., 2020).

MA MBS Klaten reveals that the principal implements a religious democratic leadership style, which is reflected in an open attitude toward feedback, active participation of teachers in the decision-making process, and regular spiritual guidance. A weekly madrasah guidance program is also held to improve the discipline and professionalism of the teaching staff. This is reflected in the principal's openness to input, suggestions, and advice from teachers, as well as the willingness to listen carefully for the sake of the institution's progress. Every decision is made through mutual consultation, both in formal meetings and in weekly routine guidance sessions.

This leadership style is implemented through various coaching mechanisms and internal activities. For example, weekly coaching activities include spiritual guidance and madrasah education. During these activities, the principal always emphasizes the importance of honesty, responsibility, struggle, and dedication. These values form the basis for building the work ethic of teachers and educational staff. The value of honesty is demonstrated through punctuality in class and objective assessment of students. The value of responsibility is reflected in the sincere performance of duties, while the values of struggle and dedication are manifested in dedication and sincerity in working selflessly.

Previous studies have shown that democratic leadership styles are effective in creating a harmonious work environment, improving educator performance, and strengthening participation and a sense of responsibility among school community members. However, most of these studies focus on the application of democratic leadership styles in general contexts and have not explored their integration with religious values in pesantren-based madrasah environments. Islamic educational institutions, such as MA Muhammadiyah Boarding School (MBS) Klaten, have their own characteristics that combine formal education with spiritual guidance, thus requiring a leadership approach that is not only democratic but also based on Islamic values.

The implementation of a religious democratic leadership style at MA MBS Klaten has not been fully optimized. If the leadership system is not managed properly, it can cause confusion in the organizational structure and inconsistency in program implementation, which ultimately has a negative impact on the quality of education. Therefore, this study is important to examine in depth how the application of a

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religious democratic leadership style can contribute to improving the quality of education at MA MBS Klaten. This study aims to describe the characteristics of religious democratic leadership, the forms of its application by the principal, and to analyze its influence on improving the quality of education in madrasahs.

## **2. Methodology**

This study uses a qualitative method, which was chosen with the aim of gaining an in-depth understanding of the application of religious democratic leadership styles by school principals and their contribution to improving the quality of education at Madrasah Aliyah MBS Klaten. Qualitative research allows researchers to explore meanings, values, and processes that occur in the field holistically in accordance with the natural context of the research object (Sugiyono, 2018).

The subjects of this study included the principal and teachers at Madrasah Aliyah MBS Klaten who were considered to have relevant information related to the focus of the study. Data collection techniques included observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted directly in the madrasah environment through passive observation, where researchers were present in the field to observe real situations and confirm the contextual descriptions they had as alumni. Face-to-face interviews were conducted to explore informants' views, experiences, and perceptions regarding the implementation of religious democratic leadership styles. Documentation was used to obtain secondary data in the form of archives, institutional profiles, relevant literature such as scientific journals, and other supporting documents.

Data validity was tested using triangulation techniques by combining sources, techniques, and time to ensure the validity of the information obtained. The collected data were then analyzed using the interactive analysis model of Miles and Huberman, which includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification. This analysis process was carried out continuously from the data collection stage until comprehensive and in-depth findings were obtained.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

MA Muhammadiyah Boarding School (MBS) Klaten is one of the Islamic-based educational institutions that integrates formal education with a pesantren system. The school is led by a principal who plays a central role in managing both academic and non-academic activities, including religious development programs. The principal also acts as the main informant in this study, as he holds a strategic position in determining policies, implementing leadership practices, and influencing the overall quality of education in the madrasah. Therefore, data obtained from the principal through interviews serve as the primary source in describing the implementation of religious democratic leadership.

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The research process was conducted through several systematic stages, beginning with the determination of the research focus, followed by the selection of research subjects, and culminating in data collection in the field. The research subjects consisted of the school principal and several teachers at MA MBS Klaten who were deemed to possess relevant information regarding the research focus. Data collection was conducted through observation, interviews, and documentation. Interviews were conducted face-to-face using a semi-structured approach, allowing the researcher to explore the informants' views, experiences, and perceptions in depth regarding the implementation of religious democratic leadership. In addition to the school principal as the primary informant, interviews were also conducted with several teachers to provide supporting data. The interview data were then recorded, transcribed, and systematically analyzed to identify patterns relevant to the research focus.

Table 1. Interview Guidelines

NO	Focus of Questions	Interview Questions
1	Leadership Profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•What leadership style is applied by the principal at MA MBS Klaten?</li> <li>•What are the strengths and weaknesses of the leadership style used?</li> </ul>
2	Leadership Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•What innovations have been implemented by the principal at MA MBS Klaten?</li> <li>•What innovations have been implemented to make the school more competitive?</li> </ul>
3	School Profile	What are the advantages or flagship programs of MA MBS Klaten?
4	Leadership Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•What is the impact of the principal's leadership on the learning environment and school achievements?</li> <li>•How do democratic and religious values influence the improvement of educational quality?</li> </ul>
5	Leadership Challenges	Are there any challenges during the leadership process? If yes, what solutions are provided?
6	Teacher Development	What strategies are used by the principal to develop and improve teacher performance?
7	Leadership Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•What core values underlie the principal's leadership?</li> <li>•How does the principal instill religious values, discipline, and cooperation among school members?</li> </ul>
8	Teacher Development	How does the principal guide teachers to ensure effective and religious-based learning?
9	School Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•How does the principal manage and direct school programs to improve educational quality?</li> <li>•How does the principal ensure that school administration runs effectively and efficiently?</li> </ul>
10	Supervision	How often does the principal conduct supervision, what forms does it take, and how is feedback provided?
11	Motivation Strategy	What efforts are made by the principal to motivate teachers and students?
12	Educational Quality	How does the principal define educational quality and what aspects are prioritized?
13	Educational Strategy	What strategies are used to improve the competitiveness of the madrasah?
14	Teacher Role	What is the role of teachers and staff in maintaining educational quality and how is evaluation carried out?

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15	Educational Outcomes	What concrete results have been achieved in academic, non-academic, and character development?
16	Educational Challenges	What are the biggest challenges in maintaining educational quality and how are they addressed?
17	Reward System	What forms of appreciation are given to teachers and staff?

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### ***Characteristics of Religious Democratic Leadership***

Religious democratic leadership is a leadership model that is not only oriented toward participation in decision-making but also places spiritual values as the main moral foundation. Kartono (2016) defines a democratic leader as a figure who respects the opinions of subordinates, prioritizes cooperation, and encourages member involvement in decision-making. In this context, leaders do not impose their will unilaterally but open space for deliberation so that every policy becomes the result of collective thinking. The leadership of the principal at MA MBS Klaten demonstrates clear characteristics of democratic leadership, where the principal openly accepts suggestions, input, and criticism from teachers and educational staff. This is in line with democratic leadership, which emphasizes active participation, equality, and openness in decision-making (Mawardi, 2022). The principle of shura implemented in meetings, coaching sessions, and internal discussions aligns with the concept of deliberation in QS. Asy-Syura [42]: 38, which mandates that important matters should be decided collectively. Teachers feel valued because their opinions are considered before decisions are made, a pattern that reflects the character of democratic leadership. Leaders who implement joint decision-making can avoid mistakes and help achieve goals effectively and efficiently while ensuring fairness (Rahman et al., 2021).

Hasanah et al. (2024) enrich this understanding by explaining that religious democratic leadership integrates spiritual and objective competencies, applies spiritual collectivity strategies, and mainstreams positive religious values. This perspective shows that leaders not only involve teachers rationally but also foster spiritual awareness in the leadership process. This is evident in the coaching culture at MA MBS Klaten, such as Kamisan coaching, regular spiritual strengthening recitations, and Islamic value-based guidance when teachers commit violations. This continuous coaching indicates that the leadership process extends beyond administrative deliberations to include the moral and spiritual development of the entire madrasah community.

The characteristics mentioned above are also aligned with the perspective of Fahrurrozi et al. (2025), who state that Islamic leadership prioritizes values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, and compassion. At MA MBS Klaten, these values are clearly reflected in the three main principles consistently instilled by the principal: honesty, responsibility, and struggle and dedication. A concrete example of honesty can be seen in teachers' commitment to punctuality and objective student assessment. Responsibility is reflected in the consistent execution of duties without neglecting established obligations. The principal also emphasizes struggle and dedication, highlighting that the teaching profession is not merely a job but a mandate that requires sincerity and long-term commitment.

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Andrei (2023) states that religious leaders with high emotional intelligence can serve as role models, build trust, and foster spiritual values through warm and compassionate relationships. This is reflected in activities such as Baitul Arqom and Family Camp at MBS Klaten. Through outbound programs, discussions on Islamic values, and communal worship, the principal creates emotional and spiritual interactions among teachers, educational staff, and the broader madrasah community. These activities are not merely recreational but serve as leadership strategies to instill values of togetherness and kinship, which are essential elements of religious democratic leadership.

Lailiyah et al. (2021) argue that a leadership model integrating democracy and religiosity can create a productive and meaningful learning environment. This is evident in various quality improvement initiatives at MA MBS Klaten, such as In-House Training (IHT), work meetings (Raker), and periodic curriculum evaluations. IHT provides a platform for teachers to enhance their competencies and discuss innovative learning methods, while Raker serves as a strategic forum for evaluating program achievements and formulating new policies democratically. In this forum, all stakeholders, including teachers, leaders, and even student representatives, are involved in evaluation and program planning, reflecting the participatory nature of democratic leadership. These findings are consistent with the study by Intan et al. (2025), which highlights that improving educational quality involves systematic stages of planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Marjuki et al. (2024) emphasize that democratic leadership in Islamic education fosters discipline through dialogue and awareness rather than coercion. This approach is clearly observed at MBS Klaten, where discipline is cultivated through habit formation and the internalization of *Sapta Jiwa* values, such as monotheism, independence, simplicity, and sincerity. Teachers who violate rules are not immediately punished but are guided through advice based on Islamic values, encouraging compliance rooted in moral awareness rather than fear. In addition, Mumpuni (2024) states that the performance of Islamic education is greatly influenced by the spiritual intelligence of leaders. In the context of MA MBS Klaten, this is reflected in the principal's example in worship, discipline, and integrity. This exemplary leadership influences teachers' motivation and fosters a more professional work culture, as evidenced by improvements in the learning process, the implementation of the *tahfidz* program, and increased student achievements at national and international levels.

The characteristics of religious democratic leadership include at least four major aspects: (1) participatory, which provides space for deliberation and respects opinions; (2) collaborative, which builds cooperation and solidarity among organizational members; (3) moral-spiritual, which integrates Islamic teachings, exemplary values, and ethics; and (4) humanistic-empathic, which emphasizes compassion, respect, and healthy emotional relationships. Thus, religious democratic leadership not only regulates organizational processes but also fosters values, shapes character, and cultivates collective awareness so that all components of education move together toward a shared vision.

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### ***Application of the Religious Democratic Leadership Style***

The application of a religious democratic leadership style at Madrasah Aliyah MBS Klaten is not only reflected in verbal instructions but is also manifested through concrete programs that address managerial, pedagogical, and spiritual aspects of teachers. The principal has successfully created a participatory, disciplined, and Islamic values-oriented work environment through the implementation of various strategies.

#### **a. Deliberation as the Basis for Decision-Making**

The deliberative forum conducted in the form of a Working Meeting (Raker) is one of the most concrete examples of democratic leadership in practice. The Working Meeting serves not only as a space for delivering reports but also as a forum for analyzing learning problems, identifying challenges, and formulating new work programs. In this forum, the principal provides teachers with ample opportunities to express their opinions. Deliberation is a leadership mechanism that enables comprehensive decision-making, as it incorporates perspectives from multiple stakeholders (Nurpadillah et al., 2024). Furthermore, in Islamic educational institutions, deliberation is not only an administrative strategy but also a manifestation of adherence to Qur'anic values.

#### **b. Strengthening Teacher Competence through In-House Training**

The role of the principal in encouraging teachers to improve their professionalism is reflected through In-House Training (IHT). Teachers are not only provided with learning materials but are also encouraged to engage in discussions, share experiences, and design improvements to the learning process. This program demonstrates that the principal understands that improving educational quality cannot be separated from enhancing teachers' competencies. This finding is supported by Basuki et al. (2025), who state that effective principal leadership management in teacher development includes planning, organizing, implementation, evaluation, and follow-up. This view is in line with Imelda's (2024) argument, which explains that improving the quality of education depends on consistent teacher training and the presence of leaders who support the process through structured policies. Furthermore, Mulyana et al. (2023) found that continuous coaching, training, and supervision in educational institutions have been proven to improve teacher performance.

#### **c. Strengthening Religious Values and Togetherness**

Programs such as Family Camp and Baitul Arqom play an important role in building a culture of brotherhood and spirituality among educators. These activities include outbound programs, discussions on Islamic values, communal worship, and teamwork simulations. The principal positions these activities not only as recreational programs but also as a medium for collective character building. As stated by Andrei (2023), religious leaders with high emotional intelligence can serve as role models, build trust, and foster spiritual values through warm and

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meaningful relationships, making communal activities essential for creating a spiritual atmosphere.

d. Application of the Values of Honesty, Responsibility, and Devotion

In every training session, the principal consistently emphasizes three core values: honesty, responsibility, and dedication or devotion. These values are not merely jargon but are used as indicators in teacher evaluations. Even tardiness is considered a violation of honesty and responsibility. This practice is in line with Nurdin's (2023) view that the affirmation of moral values is at the core of Islamic educational leadership, where teachers not only act as educators but also as role models. Furthermore, religious leadership emphasizes moral values, integrity, and exemplary behavior as the foundation of leadership (Rochim et al., 2025). Kurnia and Effendi (2018) state that democratic leadership can increase teachers' work motivation, sense of belonging, and responsibility. This is reinforced by the findings of Trihandayani et al. (2025), which show that work motivation has a very significant influence, with a contribution of 95.8%, where internal motivation emerges as the main factor.

***Analysis of the Application of Religious Democratic Leadership on Improving the Quality of Education at MA MBS Klaten***

The application of religious democratic leadership at MA MBS Klaten has shown a significant impact on improving the quality of education through various interrelated aspects. The principal instills the principles of deliberation, openness, and moral exemplarity in every policy, so that every process taking place in the madrasah is not only instructional but also dialogical and participatory. Within the framework of the educational process, this leadership model encourages teachers to actively participate in program development, evaluation, and the improvement of learning quality. Through regular deliberations, weekly training, and reflective practices in work meetings, each teacher has the opportunity to express ideas and contribute to the decision-making process, which in turn enhances work motivation, professionalism, and more effective classroom management. This is in line with Apiyani's (2025) view, which emphasizes that participatory leadership is the foundation for establishing a culture of quality in the madrasah environment, enabling innovation to grow from collective awareness rather than mere structural directives.

Religious democratic leadership not only has an impact on the educational process but also contributes significantly to students' character building and spirituality. MA MBS Klaten has a strong religious culture, reflected in habitual worship practices such as congregational prayers, halaqah tahfidz, morning and evening dhikr, and consistent sunnah fasting. These practices can be effectively implemented because the principal not only provides direction but also sets a direct example, while ensuring that every teacher shares the same commitment to fostering students' moral character. The integration of religious practices and leadership role modeling aligns with the concept of a Competent Islamic Education System (Mumpuni, 2024), which emphasizes that the quality of Islamic education

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is closely linked to the spiritual intelligence of its leaders. In addition, flagship programs such as 3T (Tahfidz, Tafhim, Taf'il) Al-Qur'an and the boarding system demonstrate the integration of academic and spiritual dimensions. These findings are consistent with research by Firman et al. (2022), which shows that religious democratic leadership significantly improves madrasah quality through enhanced teacher professionalism, the development of a collaborative work culture, and consistent character development.

Improvements in student achievement, ranging from graduates who have memorized 30 juz of the Qur'an to achievements at international and national levels, further demonstrate that religious democratic leadership impacts not only internal management but also learning outcomes. The impact of this leadership is reflected in both the madrasah's processes and the quality of its graduates. MA MBS Klaten graduates demonstrate strong competitiveness, both academically and spiritually. More than 170 alumni have memorized 30 juz, and many have been accepted into state universities, leading private universities, and overseas institutions, particularly in the Middle East.

In addition, student achievements at international, national, and provincial levels indicate that the learning environment at MBS Klaten is both productive and quality-oriented. These achievements support the findings of Lailiyah et al. (2021), who argue that leadership combining democratic values and religiosity creates a meaningful and competitive learning environment. This is further reinforced by Tilaar's (2009) concept that the quality of education is influenced by teacher quality, school culture, institutional management, and a sustainable coaching system.

Religious democratic leadership also faces several field dynamics that need to be considered. Although coaching and quality management systems are well implemented, the principal acknowledges that not all teachers are able to adapt quickly to the established culture of discipline and professionalism. Some educators are still inconsistent in applying expected rules and work ethics, particularly regarding time discipline and task execution. This challenge is not structural but relates to mindset transformation, which requires a continuous process and habituation. Fahri et al. (2022) explain that adaptation to a professional work culture cannot occur uniformly among all teachers, thus requiring continuous coaching, role modeling, and intensive communication between leaders and educators.

In addition, efforts to address these challenges include creating a conducive work environment, providing adequate resources, fostering a collaborative culture, utilizing technology, and conducting regular evaluations (Darmawati et al., 2025). Thus, religious democratic leadership at MA MBS Klaten has proven to create a conducive learning atmosphere, a collaborative work culture, and a strong spiritual educational climate. The integration of Islamic values and modern management practices makes leadership at MBS Klaten effective in improving the overall quality of education.

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#### 4. Conclusion

This study concludes that the principal of MA MBS Klaten applies a significant religious democratic leadership style in improving the quality of education. This leadership is reflected in openness in deliberations, the involvement of teachers in decision-making, and spiritual exemplary behavior manifested through habitual worship, moral guidance, and the strengthening of religious culture. The application of this leadership style enhances teacher professionalism, creates a disciplined and harmonious learning environment, and encourages optimal academic and spiritual achievement among students. The influence of this leadership style can be observed in improved teacher performance, the quality of learning, student character development, and increased public trust in the madrasah. Thus, the religious democratic leadership style has proven to be effective in integrating participatory and spiritual values, resulting in sustainable quality education. For future research, it is recommended that researchers employ quantitative or mixed-method approaches to obtain a more comprehensive and measurable understanding of the influence of religious democratic leadership on the quality of education.

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