

## **THE IDEAL LEADERSHIP MODEL FOR SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN OPTIMIZING STUDENT DEVELOPMENT IN ELEMENTARY MADRASAHS**

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**Abstract:** This study aims to formulate an ideal model of school principal leadership for optimizing student development at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, with the research conducted at MI Unggulan Al Falah in Banjarbaru. The background of this study stems from the importance of the school principal's role as the primary driving force in creating a learning environment capable of fostering students' holistic development, encompassing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. The research approach used is qualitative, specifically a case study. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation, then analyzed using thematic analysis techniques through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results indicate that the ideal principal leadership model is an integration of transformational, instructional, and spiritual leadership. An effective principal is capable of building a school culture that is collaborative, religious, and oriented toward the optimal development of students' potential. This leadership focuses not only on administrative aspects but also on the professional development of teachers and the strengthening of students' character. These findings affirm that the quality of a principal's leadership which is adaptive, visionary, and values-based makes a significant contribution to the optimization of student development in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah.

**Keywords:** Elementary Madrasah, Leadership Models, Principal Leadership, Student Development.

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk merumuskan model kepemimpinan kepala sekolah yang ideal dalam mengoptimalkan perkembangan siswa di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, dengan lokasi penelitian di MI Unggulan Al Falah Banjarbaru. Latar belakang penelitian ini berangkat dari pentingnya peran kepala sekolah sebagai penggerak utama dalam menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang mampu mendorong perkembangan siswa secara menyeluruh, mencakup aspek kognitif, afektif, dan psikomotorik. Pendekatan penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan jenis studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan teknik analisis tematik melalui tahapan reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa model kepemimpinan kepala sekolah yang ideal merupakan integrasi antara kepemimpinan transformasional, instruksional, dan spiritual. Kepala sekolah yang efektif mampu membangun budaya sekolah yang kolaboratif, religius, dan berorientasi pada pengembangan potensi siswa secara optimal. Kepemimpinan ini tidak hanya berfokus pada aspek administratif, tetapi juga pada pembinaan profesional guru dan penguatan karakter siswa. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa kualitas kepemimpinan kepala sekolah yang adaptif, visioner, dan berbasis nilai memiliki kontribusi signifikan terhadap optimalisasi perkembangan siswa di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah.

**Kata Kunci:** Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, Model Kepemimpinan, Perkembangan Siswa.

## **Introduction**

Principal leadership is a strategic factor in determining the quality of educational processes and outcomes in elementary schools, including Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. Principals serve not only as administrators but also as instructional leaders responsible for guiding, nurturing, and developing all aspects of the school. Recent research indicates that school principal leadership makes a significant contribution to improving the quality of learning, teacher motivation, and student learning outcomes.<sup>1</sup> The reality on the ground reveals

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<sup>1</sup> Anggara, R., & Abdillah, A., "Educational Leadership and School Improvement in Indonesia," *Cakrawala Pendidikan*, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, 2023, h. 415-427.

various challenges, such as the continued dominance of an administrative approach in leadership, the weak reinforcement of school culture, and the principal's role in integrating spiritual values with learning practices not yet being fully optimized. This situation results in students' development not being maximized holistically, whether in cognitive, affective, or psychomotor aspects. Furthermore, the challenges of 21st-century education require school principals to be able to develop adaptive, collaborative, and data-driven leadership to improve the quality of education.<sup>2</sup>

A number of previous studies have examined school principal leadership from various perspectives. Research by Anggara and Abdillah (2023) emphasizes that educational leadership influences school quality improvement by strengthening management systems and organizational culture. Another study by Hakim, Rahmawati, and Lestari (2023) indicates that instructional leadership has a significant relationship with improvements in student academic achievement. Meanwhile, a study by Hallinger (2023) confirms that leadership learning is key to driving continuous school improvement.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, most of these studies still focus on a single dimension of leadership in isolation, such as transformational or instructional leadership alone. Few studies have examined an integrated model of school principal leadership by combining transformational, instructional, and spiritual dimensions in a contextual manner, particularly within Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. Furthermore, research that specifically links the principal's leadership model to the holistic optimization of student development remains limited. This constitutes a gap in current educational leadership studies.

Based on this gap, this study offers a novel approach in the form of an integrative and contextual leadership model for school principals in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, specifically at the Al Falah Banjarbaru Model Elementary School. This model is designed by integrating transformational, instructional, and spiritual leadership into a single, mutually complementary framework to optimally support student development. Thus, the objective of this study is to formulate and describe an ideal principal leadership model for optimizing

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<sup>2</sup> Dewi, R. K., Harjito, H., & Nurkolis, N., "The Role of the School Principal as a Manager in Instilling Character Education," *Jurnal Edukasi: Sains, Ekonomi dan Teknologi*, 2025, h. 23-38.

<sup>3</sup> Hallinger, P., "Leadership Learning and School Improvement," *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, SAGE Publications, 2023, h. 415-432.

student development in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. This study is expected to provide a theoretical contribution to the development of Islamic educational leadership studies, as well as a practical contribution for principals in improving the quality of education at the elementary level.

### **Research Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design. This approach was chosen because the research focuses on gaining an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of school principal leadership in a real-world context and how such practices contribute to student development at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. The qualitative approach allows researchers to comprehensively explore the meanings, patterns, and dynamics occurring within a natural setting.<sup>4</sup> The case study research design is used to intensively explore the model of school principal leadership implemented in a specific educational institution. Case studies provide space to understand phenomena contextually and holistically, thereby enabling the production of in-depth descriptions of ongoing leadership practices.<sup>5</sup>

Data collection techniques in this study include in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with school principals, teachers, and educational staff to obtain information regarding leadership practices and their impact on student development. Observations were conducted to directly observe interactions and activities within the school environment, while documentation was used to supplement data in the form of archives, work programs, and other supporting documents.<sup>6</sup> This study was conducted at MI Unggulan Al Falah Banjarbaru as the research site, given that the madrasah possesses leadership characteristics relevant to the research focus. The study was carried out from 2024 to 2025, enabling the researcher to obtain up-to-date and contextual data regarding the principal's leadership practices.

Data analysis was performed using thematic analysis techniques, which encompass three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing

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<sup>4</sup> Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D., *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, SAGE Publications, 2023, h. 179-183.

<sup>5</sup> Yin, R. K., *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*, SAGE Publications, 2024, h. 45-50.

<sup>6</sup> Flick, U., *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, SAGE Publications, 2024, h. 215-230.

conclusions. Data reduction involved sorting and simplifying relevant data; data presentation was conducted in the form of descriptive narratives and conclusions were drawn gradually by considering patterns and relationships among the data. To ensure data validity, this study employed source and method triangulation.

## **Results and Discussion**

This section presents the main findings of a study focusing on the leadership model of the principal in optimizing student development at MI Unggulan Al Falah in Banjarbaru. The findings presented highlight the leadership patterns observed in the field and their connection to contemporary educational leadership theory, thereby offering conceptual and practical contributions to the development of Islamic education.

### **The Integration of Transformational, Instructional, and Spiritual Leadership**

Research findings indicate that the principal at MI Unggulan Al Falah Banjarbaru implements an integrative leadership model by combining three main dimensions: transformational, instructional, and spiritual leadership. This integration is not partial but is systematically interwoven into daily leadership practices. In the transformational dimension, the principal serves as a motivator and inspirer capable of building a shared vision and fostering teachers' commitment to improving the quality of learning. This is reflected in the principal's efforts to set an example, foster open communication, and create a work environment conducive to educational innovation.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, in the instructional dimension, the principal demonstrates active involvement in the learning process through academic supervision, teacher coaching, and the strengthening of lesson planning. The principal functions not only as a supervisor but also as a facilitator who assists teachers in improving their pedagogical competencies.<sup>8</sup> This practice is evident in learning evaluations, professional discussions, and guidance in the development of teaching materials oriented toward student needs.

In the spiritual dimension, the principal integrates Islamic values into leadership by fostering a religious culture within the school environment. These

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<sup>7</sup> Hallinger, P., *“Leadership Learning and School Improvement,”* Educational Management Administration & Leadership, SAGE Publications, 2023, h. 415-432.

<sup>8</sup> Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D., *“Seven Strong Claims about Successful School Leadership Revisited,”* School Leadership & Management, Routledge, 2024, h. 1-20.

values are realized through the practice of worship, character building, and the internalization of ethics in daily interactions. This spiritual dimension serves as a normative foundation that reinforces the other two dimensions, ensuring that leadership is not solely focused on academic achievement but also on the development of students' character.<sup>9</sup> The integration of these three dimensions produces an adaptive and contextual leadership style, in which the principal is able to adjust their leadership approach according to the needs of the situation and the characteristics of the school community. These findings indicate that the effectiveness of a principal's leadership does not lie in a single specific style, but rather in the ability to synergistically combine various approaches to optimally achieve educational goals.

### **Strengthening School Culture Through Collaboration and Islamic Values**

Research findings indicate that the strengthening of school culture at MI Unggulan Al Falah Banjarbaru is built through a collaborative approach involving the entire school community, with Islamic values as its primary foundation. The principal plays an active role in creating participatory spaces for teachers, school staff, and students to engage in various school programs. This collaboration is reflected in program planning, the implementation of learning, and evaluations conducted collectively.<sup>10</sup> This model not only strengthens relationships among school community members but also fosters a sense of ownership regarding the institution's vision and mission.

Islamic values are systematically internalized within the school culture through the regular practice of religious activities, such as routine worship, character development, and the application of Islamic ethics in daily interactions. This religious culture is not merely symbolic but is integrated into the learning process and school life. The principal serves as a role model in implementing these values, thereby fostering an educational environment that supports not only academic aspects but also the strengthening of students' character.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ralebese, M., Mncube, V., & Madikizela-Madiya, N., *Transformational Leadership and School Improvement*, Educational Management Administration & Leadership, SAGE Publications, 2024, h. 1-15.

<sup>10</sup> Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D., *Seven Strong Claims about Successful School Leadership Revisited*, School Leadership & Management, Routledge, 2024, h. 1-20.

<sup>11</sup> Hallinger, P., *Leadership Learning and School Improvement*, Educational Management Administration & Leadership, SAGE Publications, 2023, h. 415-432.

Strengthening a school culture based on cooperation and Islamic values also contributes to creating a conducive, harmonious school environment focused on the holistic development of students' potential. Such an environment encourages students to develop not only cognitively but also in terms of attitudes and social behavior that align with Islamic values.<sup>12</sup> These findings indicate that a strong school culture is a key factor in supporting the effectiveness of the principal's leadership as well as the success of the educational process.

### **Optimizing Holistic Student Development**

Research findings indicate that the leadership of the principal at MI Unggulan Al Falah Banjarbaru significantly contributes to the optimization of holistic student development, which encompasses cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. In the cognitive aspect, there is an improvement in students' academic achievement supported by systematic lesson planning, strengthened academic supervision, and the principal's support for learning innovations implemented by teachers.<sup>13</sup> This demonstrates that learning-oriented leadership can measurably enhance the quality of students' learning outcomes.

In the affective aspect, student development is marked by the formation of disciplined attitudes, a sense of responsibility, and behaviors that reflect Islamic values. The principal plays a role in building a conducive school culture through the instillation of religious values and the strengthening of character education.<sup>14</sup> Such a school environment encourages students to internalize these values in their daily lives, both inside and outside of school. In terms of psychomotor development, students demonstrate progress in practical and social skills, such as the ability to collaborate, communicate, and actively participate in school activities. Programs designed to integrate academic and non-academic activities provide students with opportunities to fully develop

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<sup>12</sup> Ralebese, M., Mncube, V., & Madikizela-Madiya, N., *Transformational Leadership and School Improvement*, Educational Management Administration & Leadership, SAGE Publications, 2024, h. 1-15.

<sup>13</sup> Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D., *Seven Strong Claims about Successful School Leadership Revisited*, School Leadership & Management, Routledge, 2024, h. 1-20.

<sup>14</sup> Hallinger, P., *Leadership Learning and School Improvement*, Educational Management Administration & Leadership, SAGE Publications, 2023, h. 415-432.

their potential.<sup>15</sup> The principal's role in supporting extracurricular activities and fostering students' talents is a key factor in achieving this aspect. Overall, these findings indicate that the optimization of student development depends not only on the learning process in the classroom but also on the leadership of the principal, who is capable of comprehensively integrating various aspects of education. Effective leadership creates a learning environment that balances academic achievement, character building, and the development of students' skills.

### **The Integration of Leadership as an Adaptive Model in Islamic Elementary Education**

Research findings indicate that the integration of transformational, instructional, and spiritual leadership constitutes a relevant adaptive model in the context of Islamic elementary education, particularly in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. This model reflects the principal's ability to adapt leadership approaches to the needs of the situation, the characteristics of teachers, and the dynamics of student development. Leadership is no longer understood as a rigid, singular approach but rather as a combination of flexible and contextual strategies for achieving educational goals.<sup>16</sup> From the perspective of educational leadership theory, these research findings align with the view that effective leadership is leadership capable of integrating various styles according to organizational demands. Hallinger (2023) emphasizes that leadership learning is key to improving school effectiveness through a process of continuous adaptation and reflection.<sup>17</sup> However, this study expands that framework by adding a spiritual dimension as a core component of Islamic educational leadership, resulting in a more comprehensive and contextual model.

This integration of leadership also reflects modifications to transformational and instructional leadership theories, which have long been widely used in the context of general education. In the context of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, the spiritual dimension is not merely a complement but serves as the primary foundation guiding leadership practices. This reinforces the argument

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<sup>15</sup> Ralebese, M., Mncube, V., & Madikizela-Madiya, N., *Transformational Leadership and School Improvement*, Educational Management Administration & Leadership, SAGE Publications, 2024, h. 1-15.

<sup>16</sup> Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D., *Seven Strong Claims about Successful School Leadership Revisited*, School Leadership & Management, Routledge, 2024, h. 1-20.

<sup>17</sup> Hallinger, P., *Leadership Learning and School Improvement*, Educational Management Administration & Leadership, SAGE Publications, 2023, h. 415-432.

that leadership in Islamic education must be grounded in religious values that are internalized in every policy and action of the school principal.<sup>18</sup> The implications of these findings are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of a value-based integrative leadership model in Islamic education, which combines transformational, instructional, and spiritual aspects within a single conceptual framework. Practically, this model can serve as a reference for school principals in developing leadership that is adaptive, responsive, and oriented toward the holistic development of students. Thus, the leadership of school principals functions not only as managers of the institution but also as agents of change capable of addressing educational challenges in a sustainable manner.

### **School Culture as a Mediator of Leadership on Student Development**

Research findings indicate that school culture serves as a mediating variable that bridges the influence of the principal's leadership on student development. The principal's leadership does not directly impact student achievement, but rather through the process of internalizing values, norms, and habits formed within the school culture. In this context, the principal functions as a cultural architect who designs, directs, and ensures that the values embraced by the school are consistently implemented by the entire school community.<sup>19</sup> Theoretically, these findings align with the concept of transformational leadership, which emphasizes the importance of fostering organizational culture as a key factor in enhancing school effectiveness. Ralebese, Mncube, and Madikizela-Madiya (2024) state that transformational leadership contributes to improved school performance through the strengthening of a positive and collaborative organizational culture.<sup>20</sup> In the context of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, school culture encompasses not only professional and social aspects but also the religious dimension that is a hallmark of Islamic education.

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<sup>18</sup> Ralebese, M., Mncube, V., & Madikizela-Madiya, N., *Transformational Leadership and School Improvement*, Educational Management Administration & Leadership, SAGE Publications, 2024, h. 1-15.

<sup>19</sup> Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D., *Seven Strong Claims about Successful School Leadership Revisited*, School Leadership & Management, Routledge, 2024, h. 1-20.

<sup>20</sup> Ralebese, M., Mncube, V., & Madikizela-Madiya, N., *Transformational Leadership and School Improvement*, Educational Management Administration & Leadership, SAGE Publications, 2024, h. 1-15.

This study demonstrates that a school culture grounded in Islamic values plays a strategic role in fostering students' holistic development. Values such as discipline, responsibility, honesty, and religiosity are not only taught formally but also internalized through daily practices within the school environment. Hallinger (2023) asserts that effective leadership can create a learning environment that supports student development through the reinforcement of a sustainable school culture.<sup>21</sup> The implications of these findings suggest that efforts to improve educational quality are insufficient if they focus solely on enhancing individual competencies; they must also prioritize strengthening school culture as a supportive system. Theoretically, this study reinforces the role of school culture as a mediating variable in the relationship between leadership and educational outcomes. Practically, school principals need to develop leadership strategies oriented toward fostering a positive, collaborative, and values-based school culture, thereby promoting optimal student development.

### **The Impact of Leadership on Students' Holistic Development**

Research findings indicate that school principals' leadership has a significant impact on students' holistic development, encompassing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. Effective leadership not only influences academic achievement but also contributes to character building and the development of students' social skills.<sup>22</sup> In this context, the principal serves as a policy guide and a driver of school culture capable of creating a learning environment that supports students' comprehensive development. Theoretically, these findings align with the views of Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2024), who state that school leadership makes an indirect contribution to student learning outcomes through improvements in the quality of instruction and the learning environment.<sup>23</sup> This study reinforces these findings by demonstrating that integrative leadership which combines transformational, instructional, and spiritual dimensions can extend the impact of leadership not only to academic aspects but also to students' affective and psychomotor

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<sup>21</sup> Hallinger, P., *"Leadership Learning and School Improvement,"* Educational Management Administration & Leadership, SAGE Publications, 2023, h. 415-432.

<sup>22</sup> Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D., *"Seven Strong Claims about Successful School Leadership Revisited,"* School Leadership & Management, Routledge, 2024, h. 1-20.

<sup>23</sup> Ralebese, M., Mncube, V., & Madikizela-Madiya, N., *"Transformational Leadership and School Improvement,"* Educational Management Administration & Leadership, SAGE Publications, 2024, h. 1-15.

development.

The implications of leadership for students' holistic development are also evident in its ability to establish an educational system that balances academic learning with character development. Hallinger (2023) asserts that instructional leadership plays a crucial role in improving the quality of the learning process, while this study adds that the spiritual dimension serves as a reinforcing factor in shaping students' character within the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah environment.<sup>24</sup> Practically, these findings imply that school principals need to develop a leadership approach that is not only oriented toward administrative management but also toward teacher development, strengthening school culture, and developing programs that support students' potential comprehensively. Theoretically, this study contributes to expanding the concept of educational leadership by emphasizing the importance of integrating values to support students' holistic development, so that leadership is understood not merely as a managerial tool but as a strategic instrument in comprehensively shaping the quality of education.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the results of a study conducted at MI Unggulan Al Falah in Banjarbaru, it can be concluded that school leadership that integrates transformational, instructional, and spiritual dimensions plays a strategic role in improving the overall quality of education. Such leadership has proven capable of fostering a collaborative school culture rooted in Islamic values, which subsequently serves as a mediator in linking leadership practices with student development. With a conducive school culture in place, interactions among school community members become more effective in supporting the learning process and character development.

This study indicates that holistic student development encompassing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects is significantly influenced by an adaptive and contextual leadership model. Leadership that focuses not only on administrative aspects but also on strengthening learning and spiritual values is capable of creating an educational environment that balances academic achievement with character development. Therefore, this study affirms that integrated leadership is an effective approach to addressing the challenges of

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<sup>24</sup> Hallinger, P., *"Leadership Learning and School Improvement,"* Educational Management Administration & Leadership, SAGE Publications, 2023, h. 415-432.

Islamic elementary education, while also contributing to the development of a more comprehensive and practical theory of educational leadership.

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