

**Transformational Leadership in Education:
Improving Work Ethic and Professional Commitment of Teachers**

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Abstract

Effective school leadership shapes teachers' work ethics and overall performance. In the context of MTs Darul Hikam Bandung, understanding how principal leadership influences teacher motivation and commitment is essential. Although transformational leadership has been recognized for fostering a positive school climate, challenges such as declining teacher engagement and productivity persist. This study explores the principal's leadership strategies for improving teachers' work ethics and enhancing their commitment to teaching. It examines the impact of transformational leadership on teacher motivation and job satisfaction. A qualitative research approach was employed, utilizing in-depth interviews with principals, teachers, administrative staff, and classroom observations. Thematic analysis was applied to identify leadership practices and their effects on teacher motivation and professional commitment. The findings revealed that the principal adopted a transformational leadership style, emphasizing role modelling, effective communication, and continuous professional development. Teachers reported increased motivation and a greater sense of value due to the principal's support and responsiveness. Key strategies included regular training sessions, collaborative decision-making, and fostering a supportive work environment to help teachers overcome instructional challenges. The results demonstrated that transformational leadership positively influenced teachers' commitment and job satisfaction. Transformational leadership significantly enhances teachers' work ethics by fostering interpersonal relationships, promoting professional development, and ensuring clear communication. This study provides valuable insights for educational stakeholders to strengthen teacher engagement and improve school effectiveness. Further research is recommended to validate these findings in diverse educational settings.

Keywords: School leadership, transformational leadership, teachers' work ethic

INTRODUCTION

Educational leadership plays a crucial role in shaping school performance and teacher work ethics. Effective school principals are responsible not only for administrative tasks but also for fostering a positive work environment that enhances teacher motivation and commitment (Dawam, Bastian, & Heri, 2022). In the Indonesian educational context, particularly at MTs Darul Hikam Bandung, the influence of principal leadership on teachers' work ethics is a critical area of study. Research has shown that transformational leadership can create a conducive learning environment, boost teacher morale, and improve overall school effectiveness (Amzat, 2022; Fauzi & Mulyanto, 2023; Thahir et al., 2021). The declining teacher engagement and productivity trend in various educational institutions highlights the urgency to address this issue through effective leadership strategies (Wahyuni & Maunah, 2021).

The phenomenon of teacher disengagement does not stand alone but reflects wider systemic challenges within the educational framework. Research shows that principals who adopt transformational and distributed leadership styles can significantly influence teacher morale and commitment, thereby improving educational outcomes. Statistics on teacher turnover and dissatisfaction in Indonesia further underscore the need for effective principal management to foster a supportive environment and nurture teacher work ethic. This study examines the complex dynamics between principal leadership and teacher work ethic, providing insights that can inform education management policy and practice.

While existing literature extensively discusses the relationship between school leadership and teacher performance, there remains a notable gap in understanding how specific leadership strategies influence teachers' work ethics in a particular institutional and cultural context such as that of MTs Darul Hikam Bandung. Most studies in this field rely on quantitative methodologies, focusing on statistical correlations between leadership styles and teacher performance metrics. However, few studies employ qualitative methods to capture the lived experiences of teachers and principals in a localized educational setting (Ridwan, 2021). Additionally, while previous research highlights the effectiveness of transformational leadership, it often overlooks how contextual factors such as institutional policies, cultural norms, and leadership dynamics shape teacher engagement (Petersen, 2022). By synthesizing existing theories and empirical findings, this study will better understand how effective principal management can improve teachers' work ethic, ultimately improving educational outcomes.

This study aims to bridge this research gap by conducting a qualitative analysis of principal leadership at MTs Darul Hikam Bandung, focusing on how leadership strategies influence teachers' work ethics. By employing in-depth interviews and classroom observations, this research will capture the first-hand experiences of principals, teachers, and administrative staff. The findings will contribute to the broader discourse on educational leadership by offering contextual insights that can inform leadership training programs and school management policies in Indonesia. Additionally, by synthesizing existing theories such as Goal Path Theory (Geh, 2024; Mustapid, Syafaruddin, & Wijaya, 2021). This study seeks to contribute to this discourse by providing a qualitative analysis of the practices employed by principals at MTs Darul Hikam Bandung to improve teachers' work ethics.

Despite the abundance of literature addressing principal leadership and teacher performance, there is still a notable gap in qualitative research exploring principals' and teachers' specific practices and experiences in the Indonesian context. While existing

research has demonstrated the importance of effective leadership in improving teachers' work ethic, there is still a lack of in-depth qualitative analyses that can capture the nuances of this relationship in a specific cultural and institutional context, such as MTs Darul Hikam Bandung. This gap is critical, as it limits understanding of how contextual factors influence principal management and teacher performance dynamics.

In addition, most existing research tends to focus on quantitative measures of leadership effectiveness and often ignores qualitative aspects that contribute to a deeper understanding of educational leadership. For example, while research can measure the impact of leadership styles on teacher performance, it often fails to explore the lived experiences of teachers and principals, which are critical to understanding the complexity of the educational environment. This study aims to fill this gap by providing a descriptive qualitative analysis of the practices employed by principals at MTs Darul Hikam Bandung to improve teachers' work ethic and contribute to the wider discourse on educational leadership in Indonesia. The development of human resource potential is a continuous process that covers various aspects of life, especially through education. Education aims to recognize the evolution of change (Pramesty, 2022). Every individual is beneficial and can develop their abilities in the world of work. With the existence of the National Education System, the government will be able to manage it well and with a positive work ethic or spirit. However, in reality, realizing work ethic in an educational environment is more difficult than expected.

Various developments in the field of education force organizations, both private and government, to innovate to meet the demands of globalization and make policies that align with environmental changes. To achieve school program goals, an organization must make effective rules to deal with changes, such as learning problems and a lack of work ethic among teachers, staff, and students (Anwar & Umam, 2020). The management of madrasah principals will greatly influence the effectiveness of this learning process. The leadership of madrasah principals is proven to impact the implementation of change, maintenance, and student learning outcomes (Supartilah & Pardimin, 2021). The management of madrasah principals is an important strategic factor in improving the quality and progress of the madrasah they lead. An effective madrasah will be achieved if the madrasah head can plan, organize, mobilize, and supervise all the resources in the madrasah. These include human resources, leadership, policies, operational costs, facilities and infrastructure, reward systems, punishment, and organizational culture (Fatimah, 2023; Mustapid et al., 2021; Ulfah & Anwar, 2024). The madrasah head is a madrasah leader responsible for optimizing educational resources to achieve the desired results while ensuring that the vision and mission of the madrasah are implemented.

Therefore, a leader or madrasah head is needed to develop madrasah resources. As a manager in madrasah, the madrasah head has great duties and responsibilities in decision-making. Various studies have shown that in an atmosphere of rapid environmental change, one of the things that causes madrasah achievement and the quality of graduates to decline is the leadership of less successful madrasah principals. As a leader in madrasah, the madrasah principal has a strategic role in improving the quality of learning, which will ultimately improve the quality of graduates who can show their strength and competitiveness in global competition. In carrying out their main duties and functions, madrasah principals must have the ability to improve their work ethic or work enthusiasm.

In framing this research, several critical questions arise: How do principals at MTs Darul Hikam Bandung apply their leadership style to foster a positive work ethic among

teachers? What strategies do they employ to overcome educators' challenges in this context? In addition, how do the teachers perceive the impact of the principal's leadership on their professional commitment and performance? These questions will guide a qualitative exploration of the relationship between principals' management and teachers' work ethic, aiming to uncover transformative practices that can be replicated in similar educational settings. The objectives of this research are closely linked to the broader principles of effective educational leadership and management. By focusing on the role of school principals in improving teachers' work ethic, this research aligns with the principle that effective leadership is essential for creating a positive school climate. The literature consistently supports the idea that principals who engage in transformational leadership practices can significantly influence teacher motivation and performance (Budiman & Ganap, 2024). This principle underscores the importance of leadership in shaping educational outcomes and highlights the need for principals to adopt strategies that empower teachers and encourage collaboration.

In addition, this research objective emphasizes the need for principals to develop strong managerial competencies that can facilitate effective school management. This aligns with the principle that effective educational leadership requires balancing instructional and administrative responsibilities (Ahadiat, Rusmana, Defauzi, Rostini, & Mastiani, 2024). By exploring the specific practices undertaken by principals at MTs Darul Hikam Bandung, this study aims to provide insights that can inform the development of effective leadership training programs and policies. The principle of continuous improvement in educational leadership is at the core of this study, as it seeks to identify best practices that can improve teachers' work ethic and ultimately improve student learning outcomes.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design with a descriptive approach to explore how principal management influences teachers' work ethics at MTs Darul Hikam Bandung. The research focuses on the relationship between leadership style, communication, and teacher professional development, examining how these elements shape teachers' motivation and commitment. This institution was selected due to its ongoing challenges in improving teacher work ethics, making it a relevant case for understanding the impact of effective school leadership in the Indonesian madrasah context.

This study's participants include principals, teachers, and administrative staff at MTs Darul Hikam Bandung, who were selected through purposive sampling to ensure their direct involvement in school management and teaching practices. Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews and direct observation. Interviews were conducted using a structured interview guide to ensure comprehensive discussions on school leadership and teacher work ethics. Observations were done using observation sheets, documenting real-time interactions, leadership practices, and school dynamics.

A thematic approach, including data reduction, categorisation, and interpretation, was applied for data analysis to identify patterns and relationships between principal management and teacher work ethics. The validity and reliability of the findings were ensured through triangulation, comparing interview data, observational records, and secondary literature. By integrating these methods, this study aims to contextualise how effective school leadership fosters a positive work ethic among teachers.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Principal's Leadership Style in Fostering Positive Work Ethic

The principal's leadership style is very important in fostering a positive work ethic among teachers. Based on the interview results, the Principal of MTs, Darul Hikam Bandung, stated that his leadership style tends to be transformational, focusing on inspiring and building commitment among teachers.

He said:

"...I believe that to foster a positive work ethic among teachers, it is important for me to be a role model. I always endeavor to demonstrate my dedication and commitment to education. This dedication is reflected in various aspects, such as discipline in carrying out tasks, openness in communication, and consistency in supporting teachers and staff. By setting an example regarding hard work and integrity, I hope to create a work culture that encourages teachers to strive to improve their teaching quality."

The interview excerpt above shows that the principal takes an approach implemented through leadership by example, where the principal shows high dedication in various aspects of school management and interactions with teachers. Research shows that principals who implement a transformational leadership style can inspire and motivate teachers to improve their performance Sunardi et al., (2019). This leadership style focuses on achieving academic goals and develops strong interpersonal relationships between principals and teachers. By creating a supportive work environment, principals can encourage teachers to be more committed to their duties, improving their work ethic.

The principal of MTs, Darul Hikam Bandung, stated that effective leadership must start with good role models and communication.

"... I need to be a role model to foster a positive work ethic among teachers. I always endeavor to demonstrate my dedication and commitment to education and maintain open communication with teachers so that they feel heard and valued."

Based on the interview above, the principal's active involvement in various school activities, such as classroom supervision and regular discussions with teachers, can increase their motivation to carry out their duties. The principal also emphasized the importance of conveying the school's vision and mission clearly and inspiringly so that teachers feel they have an important role in achieving educational goals. Principals who communicate well can convey the school's vision and mission so that teachers feel involved and have a role in achieving these goals (Fancourt & Guilfoyle, 2021). Research by Kasrah et al., (2023) shows that good interpersonal communication contributes to teachers' job satisfaction, directly affecting their work ethic. Teachers who feel heard and valued tend to show greater commitment to their work.

Principals who demonstrate ethical leadership also significantly impact teachers' work ethic. This leadership style involves integrity, fairness, and transparency in decision-making (Asbari et al., 2020). When teachers see their principals acting with high ethics, they emulate such behavior. Research by Ede et al. (2021) shows that ethical leadership contributes to the establishment of a positive work culture where teachers feel safe to innovate and collaborate without fear of negative consequences.

Specific Strategies to Address Educators' Challenges

The challenges educators face in inclusive education contexts are often complex and diverse. One specific strategy that can be applied is the development of strong relationships between teachers and students. The principal of MTs, Darul Hikam Bandung, revealed that the challenges in inclusive education require a comprehensive approach based on strong interpersonal relationships.

"We realize that each student has different needs, so it is important for teachers to build close relationships with students in order to understand their needs more deeply. By creating a good relationship, teachers can provide the right support and help students feel welcome in the school environment. Continuous training for teachers is needed to have a broader understanding of pedagogical approaches appropriate for inclusive environments."

Based on the interviews above, inclusive education has diverse challenges, including learning needs, emotional support, and adaptation of teaching strategies. One effective strategy to deal with these challenges is the development of strong relationships between teachers and students. When teachers can understand students' individual needs through good communication and an empathic approach, they can create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. Positive relationships also increase students' self-confidence and motivation to participate in learning actively. Therefore, this strategy impacts students' academic success and their emotional well-being in the school environment.

According to Kennedy & Haydon (2020), building high-quality relationships between students and teachers can reduce the incidence of negative behaviors and increase student engagement in the learning process. When students feel connected to their teachers, they are more likely to participate in class and actively demonstrate a positive work ethic. Therefore, investing time in building these relationships is crucial to creating a supportive learning environment.

Collaborative strategies have also been shown to be effective in addressing the challenges educators face. Research by (Ismail, 2022) showed that research learning communities (RLCs) can empower teachers to engage in research and evidence-based practice. In this context, teachers are not only recipients of information but also active contributors in developing better teaching strategies. By sharing experiences and knowledge, educators can support each other in dealing with challenges that arise in the classroom, especially in the context of inclusive education.

Another strategy is to conduct continuous training and professional development for educators. The principal of MTs, Darul Hikam Bandung, explained some strategies used to overcome educators' challenges in the learning process.

"We hold regular training sessions and workshops to improve teachers' skills; I emphasize that continuous professional development is very important in helping teachers face various challenges in the classroom, such as differences in student learning styles, limited resources, and curriculum changes. In addition, the principal also endeavors to create a collaborative working environment where teachers can share experiences and effective learning strategies."

The interview excerpt above states that education is a dynamic and constantly evolving field, so teachers' professional development is key in facing complex learning challenges. Regular training and workshops not only improve teachers' pedagogical skills

but also strengthen their confidence in managing diverse situations in the classroom. In addition, continuous professional development enables teachers to stay relevant to the latest developments in education, including the application of technology and innovative learning methods. According to Ismail (2021), training focusing on evidence-based practices is essential to improving teachers' understanding of students with special education needs. By providing teachers with opportunities to learn and practice new strategies, they will be better equipped to deal with the challenges of teaching students with special needs. This training can also include effective behavior management techniques, which can assist teachers in creating a more positive learning environment.

The importance of support from parents and community support cannot be overlooked either. Emphasizes that collaboration between schools and parents can improve inclusion in education. Teachers can gain valuable insights into students' needs and expectations by involving parents in the education process. In addition, support from the community can help create a more inclusive and supportive environment for all students. Therefore, building strong partnerships between schools, parents, and communities is a key strategy for overcoming the challenges educators face in the context of inclusive education.

Teachers' Perceptions of the Impact of Principal Leadership

Teachers' perceptions of the principal's leadership have significant implications for their performance and motivation in teaching. MTs Darul Hikam teachers expressed positive perceptions of the principal's leadership, which they perceived as having a significant impact on their motivation and morale.

"....The principal's leadership is very influential on our enthusiasm for teaching. When the principal shows good leadership and is responsive to teachers' needs, we feel more valued and motivated to work harder. We feel that the principal cares about us and always supports us in improving our skills and professional development."

From the interviews above, effective principal leadership is important in building teachers' motivation and work ethic. Responsive and supportive leadership positively impacts the working atmosphere at school. When principals understand teachers' needs and provide adequate support, they will feel valued and more enthusiastic about completing their tasks. One important aspect of leadership teachers express is open communication and harmonious relationships between principals and educators.

Research by Sunardi et al., (2019) showed that teachers who are satisfied with the principal's leadership tend to have higher levels of job satisfaction. This is due to the principal's ability to create a supportive work environment where teachers feel valued and their contributions are recognized. When principals apply an inclusive and participatory leadership style, teachers feel more involved in decision-making, increasing their commitment to their duties and responsibilities at school. Principals who communicate well and are transparent in decision-making also get positive teacher responses. Putriani & Hudaidah (2021) noted that effective communication between principals and teachers can reduce dissatisfaction and improve work ethic. Teachers with open communication channels with their principals tend to be more motivated and energized to carry out their duties. Good leadership involves not only making the right decisions but also the ability to listen and respond to teachers' needs and inputs.

Teachers' perceptions of the principal's leadership are also influenced by the support provided by the principal in professional development. Research by Febriati et al., (2019) shows that teachers who get support through training and skills development feel more valued and eager to improve their performance. When principals invest in teachers' professional development, this improves their competence and strengthens their self-confidence and commitment to their work. Thus, principals' support in professional development is one of the key factors in shaping teachers' positive perceptions of their leadership. The impact of principals' leadership on teachers' work ethic can also be seen in how principals handle problems and challenges that arise in schools.

Discussion

The principal's leadership style plays an important role in shaping a positive work ethic among teachers. Research shows that principals who apply a transformational leadership style can increase teachers' motivation and commitment to their work (Fitriyah & Santosa, 2020; Octavia & Savira, 2023). This leadership style focuses on achieving academic goals and developing strong interpersonal relationships between principals and teachers. By creating a supportive work environment, principals can encourage teachers to be more committed to their duties, improving their work ethic. This aligns with (Sunardi et al., 2019) which show that teachers' job satisfaction is positively related to the effectiveness of education management. Effective communication is also a key factor in building a positive work ethic. Principals who can communicate well can convey the vision and mission of the school clearly so that teachers feel involved and have a role in achieving these goals (Sugiarto, 2024) Research by Adzkiya (2021) emphasizes the importance of communication in creating a positive work climate, directly impacting teacher satisfaction and motivation. Teachers who feel heard and valued tend to show greater commitment to their work. Therefore, principals must develop good communication skills to create constructive teacher relationships.

Collaborative strategies have proven effective in improving educator performance in complex challenges. Research shows that research learning communities (RLCs) can empower teachers to engage in research and evidence-based practice. By sharing experiences and knowledge, educators can support each other in dealing with challenges that arise in the classroom, especially in the context of inclusive education. Findings that peer support can improve teachers' job satisfaction and performance. Continuous training and professional development are also important strategies for addressing educators' challenges. According to Ismail (2022), support in the form of training and skills development can improve teachers' competence and strengthen their confidence. When teachers feel supported in their professional development, they are more likely to improve their work ethic and performance in the classroom. Therefore, principals must ensure teachers access relevant and quality training.

Teachers' perceptions of the principal's leadership strongly influence their performance and motivation in teaching. Research shows that teachers who are satisfied with the principal's leadership tend to have higher levels of job satisfaction. This is due to the principal's ability to create a supportive work environment where teachers feel valued and their contributions are recognized. When principals apply an inclusive and participatory leadership style, teachers feel more involved in decision-making, increasing their commitment to their duties and responsibilities at school.

Principals' support in professional development also contributes to teachers' positive perceptions of their leadership. Research shows that teachers who receive support

through training and skills development feel more valued and eager to improve their performance. When principals invest in teachers' professional development, this improves their competence and strengthens their confidence and commitment to their work. Thus, principals' support in professional development is one of the key factors in shaping teachers' positive perceptions of their leadership.

CONCLUSION

The results showed that principals' transformational and participatory leadership styles significantly contributed to improving positive work ethics among teachers. Principals who can build strong interpersonal relationships and communicate effectively with teachers can increase their motivation and commitment to work. In addition, specific strategies implemented by principals in addressing educators' challenges, such as developing learning communities and supporting professional development, proved effective in improving teachers' performance. Teachers' perceptions of the impact of principals' leadership also show that training and skills development support are essential to creating a positive and supportive work environment. Transformational and participatory leadership theories provide a strong framework for understanding how principals can influence teachers' work ethics. Previous research suggests that effective leadership focuses on achieving academic goals and developing positive relationships between principals and teachers. While this study provides valuable insights into the impact of principals' leadership on teachers' work ethic, some limitations must be noted. Firstly, this study was only conducted in one school, MTs Darul Hikam Bandung, so the results may not be generalizable to other school contexts in Indonesia. In addition, the data obtained is subjective, depending on individual teachers' perceptions, which various external factors can influence. These limitations suggest the need for further research covering a range of schools with different backgrounds to gain a more comprehensive picture of the relationship between principals' leadership and teachers' work ethic across different educational contexts.

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