

Principal Strategies to Improve Teacher Performance: A Case Study in Islamic Elementary School

Desi Wulandari, Bambang Budi Wiyono, Sunarni, Ali Imron

Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia

e-mail: desi.wulandari.2301328@students.um.ac.id, bambang.budi.fip@um.ac.id,
sunarni.fip@um.ac.id, ali.imron.fip@um.ac.id


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ABSTRACT. This study investigates the strategies employed by the principal of Islamic Elementary School Anak Saleh Malang, to improve teacher competence and their subsequent impact on educational outcomes. A case study design and a descriptive qualitative methodology were used, and semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and non-participant observations were used to gather data. The findings indicate that the principal employs a humanistic and familial leadership model, emphasizes individual motivation, mandates regular professional development, conducts systematic performance reviews, and encourages deliberate teaching strategies. These strategies have had a direct influence on improved student achievement as well as greater teacher professionalism. The study emphasizes how crucial leadership techniques based on organized development, motivation, and a reflective culture are to improving academic achievement. It suggests that to achieve long-term educational achievement, principals must foster professional development through efforts in strategic, consistent, and compassionate leadership.

Keywords: *Principal strategies, Teacher performance, Islamic elementary school*

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership strategy is an approach that contains elements of influence, where its implementation in an organization creates cooperation and realizes the vision and mission to achieve common goals (Fathasena et al., 2024; Siagian, 2018; Adebanye Olusola et al., 2022; Bakhshandeh, 2023; Tauwi et al., 2024). In educational organizations, the principal strategic leader is central in directing policies to improve overall school effectiveness. Through the planned strategy, the principal ensures that the learning process runs well and creates a conducive work environment for teachers to optimize their potential (Nopriksa et al., 2020). Principals face unique challenges in private Islamic elementary schools, such as Islamic Elementary School Anak Saleh Malang. These include increasing competition among private schools and demands for high educational standards. Therefore, leadership strategies are even more crucial to ensure teacher performance and quality of education.

An effectively designed principal strategy can have a significant impact on improving teacher performance. The relationship between the principal and teacher performance is very close because the principal acts not only as a manager but also as a motivator who encourages teachers to work more competently and be responsible for their work results (Penlington et al., 2008; Gunawan et al., 2024; Khumalo, 2015; Sebastian et al., 2016; Rahmawati & Supriyanto, 2020; Xinyu, 2023). The

principal must be a good communicator to inspire and motivate staff members. According to earlier research, good principal leadership significantly impacts student involvement and raises academic achievement (Faizah, Burhanuddin, & Sumarsono, 2024).

Still, not much research has been done on the local application of leadership techniques, especially in Islamic private elementary schools like Islamic Elementary School Anak Saleh Malang. Research on the local implementation of leadership strategies is still lacking, particularly in Islamic private elementary schools such as Islamic Elementary School Anak Saleh Malang. This discrepancy highlights the need to investigate leadership practices and their impact on educational quality and teacher efficacy. The main problem in this study is the lack of understanding of how school principals design and implement leadership strategies to improve teacher performance and support quality education, especially in private Islamic elementary schools. While previous research has focused on the role of principals in general, few studies have comprehensively examined the integration of leadership strategies with systematic teacher development programs and their measurable impact on education quality in the context of private Islamic schools. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the leadership strategies used by the principal of Islamic Elementary School Anak Saleh Malang, to improve teacher performance and achieve optimal education quality. Academically, this study enriches the literature on educational leadership by offering empirical evidence of effective leadership strategies in private Islamic educational institutions. It offers a model similar to the one schools can adopt or adapt to enhance teacher performance and education quality.

In this case, effective and efficient teacher performance enables the achievement of educational organization goals through optimal utilization of resources. Therefore, improving teacher performance will help achieve quality education (Schacter & Thum, 2004; Mincu, 2015; Abrori, 2020; Cai, 2023; Ekhsan, 2019; Elisnawati et al., 2023). The principal must ensure that every policy supports a quality learning process. On the other hand, in the context of private schools, the principal's leadership strategy becomes increasingly crucial because private schools are often expected to have higher standards than public schools (Escala et al., 2024). Quality education in private schools not only provides benefits for students but also increases the competitiveness of the school itself (Indriani, 2019; Karsono et al., 2021; Mahmud et al., 2022; Thohirin & Faizan, 2023; Yohanes, 2016).

To achieve the expected quality of education, the principal must work closely with teachers as strategic partners in implementing learning (Arifin, Juharyanto, Mustiningsih, & Taufiq, 2018; Herawan, 2017). The role of the principal includes providing motivation and coaching so that teachers can carry out their duties well. This process includes the stages of formulating and implementing strategies, where the principal must be able to analyze school needs through an internal and external environmental analysis approach. For example, by establishing a clear vision and mission, the principal can create a structured direction to achieve educational goals. Furthermore, the implementation of the strategy must be carried out through the development of systematic programs to support the creation of creative, innovative, and high-achieving students (Hafid & Barnoto, 2022; Saputro & Darim, 2022).

The principal also conducts a SWOT analysis as part of the plan stages to understand the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. With this information, the principal may develop relevant and strategic policies and implement them in a systematic manner. Periodically, strategy reviews are also conducted to ensure the intended objectives can be met. This assessment is also crucial for identifying potential roadblocks or difficulties to find suitable solutions to overcome those (Munandar et al., 2023). Improving teacher performance through this strategy involves implementing activities and management functions such as planning, organizing, implementing, and controlling (Daheri et al., 2022; Nurjannah et al., 2021; Wahidah, 2017). Teachers are important assets in education because they are directly responsible for learning (Hartono et al., 2022; Aprilianto

et al., 2021; Sutrisno & Nasucha, 2022). Their role is not only limited to teaching but also includes managerial aspects such as planning and professional development.

Therefore, improving teacher performance must support the achievement of maximum educational outcomes. According to Muspawi (2021), there are five main aspects in assessing teacher performance: teaching methodology, classroom management, mastery of material, interpersonal relationships, and professional development. By paying attention to these aspects, the principal can ensure that teacher performance aligns with the school's vision and mission and implement effective strategies to achieve teacher performance so that the next education can be achieved optimally.

METHOD

Both a qualitative and case study methodology are used in this investigation. Examining how the principal's leadership style affects teacher effectiveness and how that affects educational quality is the main objective. In order to capture the richness and depth of human behavior and relationships, the qualitative approach places more emphasis on comprehending the meaning of a phenomenon than extrapolating findings (Sugiyono, 2013).

Research Design

The research design employed is a case study, which allows for an in-depth exploration of the principal's strategy at Islamic Elementary School Anak Saleh Malang. The dynamics unique to the school and the ways in which the principal's leadership affects teacher effectiveness and academic results are shown by this kind of research. The case study approach allows the researcher to investigate the phenomenon in its real environment and obtain a comprehensive understanding of it by utilizing a range of data sources. The study was conducted at Islamic Elementary School Anak Saleh Malang, a private Islamic elementary school in Malang, Indonesia. The participants in this study include the school principal and a selection of teachers. The teachers were selected using non-probability sampling, specifically purposive sampling, to ensure that those chosen had relevant experience with the study's focus on leadership strategies and teacher performance. The sample size for teachers was some teachers chosen to represent various teaching roles and experiences within the school.

Research Setting

The study was conducted at Islamic Elementary School Anak Saleh Malang, a private Islamic elementary school in Malang, Indonesia. Participants included the school principal and a purposively selected group of teachers, chosen based on their relevant experience regarding the study's focus on leadership strategies and teacher performance. Purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling method, was used to guarantee that teachers with a range of teaching responsibilities and experience levels were included in the study.

Data Collection

Data were collected using three main techniques: in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis. The principal of the school and a few chosen teachers participated in semi-structured interviews that allowed for both guided and open-ended answers to learn more about their opinions of leadership techniques and how they affect teacher effectiveness. Observations were carried out in classrooms and other school settings to capture real-time interactions between the principal and teachers and the practical implementation of leadership strategies. Document analysis was also done on pertinent school papers, such as the vision and mission statement, strategic plans, and teacher performance reviews, to supplement and enhance the information gathered from interviews and observations.

Data Analysis

The Miles and Huberman methodology, which consists of three essential steps—data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing—was used to analyze the data. The collected information was carefully sifted during data reduction to focus on data relevant to the research questions. The data was categorized and arranged into themes during the data presentation phase to make comprehending the principal's leadership techniques and how they affect teacher performance easier. Judgments were finally made based on the interpreted data to assess how well the tactics improved teacher performance and the general quality of education. Findings from observations, interviews, and document analysis were cross-checked as part of the data triangulation process to guarantee the study's validity and consistency. To increase the correctness and dependability of the research findings, member checks were also conducted by presenting them to the participants for confirmation.

Research Procedure

There were four stages to the study process: planning, gathering data, analyzing it, and reporting the findings. Research questions, interview guidelines, and a review of pertinent literature were all created during the preparation stage. Information was gathered via observations, interviews, and document analysis as part of the data collection process. The Miles and Huberman approach was then used to examine the data to find new themes and patterns in leadership techniques. Ultimately, the reporting phase thoroughly understood the principal's leadership techniques and their effects on teacher performance by presenting the findings through in-depth descriptions and analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

In this section, the researcher describes the main findings from the interviews related to the principal's strategies, the steps for implementing them, and the obstacles faced in efforts to improve teacher performance in order to achieve quality education. Based on interviews with three informants regarding the principal's strategies for improving teacher performance at Islamic Elementary School Anak Saleh Malang, the results are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Principal's Strategy in Improving Teacher Performance to Achieve Quality Education

Information Source	Position	Interview Results
Informan 1	Headmaster	I implement a humanistic-based strategy or family approach to improve teacher performance and achieve quality education, which is not very different from other institutions in Malang. To support improving teacher performance, I always build close relationships with all educators, both new teachers and those who have served at this school for a long time. In addition, I require all teachers to follow programs or training that are tailored to their individual needs in order to develop their competencies optimally; for example, there are several teachers who follow certification programs to become professional teachers who will later improve the quality of their performance during the learning process. In conclusion, with this humanistic strategy, I respect every teacher and pay attention to their needs. So, I always convey, control and facilitate all teachers in every program or training that exists.
Informan 2	Teacher	The humanist or family strategy implemented by the principal of Islamic Elementary School Anak Saleh Malang is very appropriate because he always provides information related to what is needed by each teacher in improving the quality of teaching, which has a positive impact on teacher performance at this elementary school, what I mean is this, when he provides information related to the teacher performance improvement program, he first asks what is needed such as observing our needs as teachers, what are the obstacles, so that from there he can find out and map the needs of each teacher to improve our performance as teachers, besides that, he also provides direction and facilitates us as teachers, and conducts joint evaluations so that it is known that there is

Informan 3	Teacher	significant development from before and after participating in the program or training that we have participated in. The principal applied a humanist strategy in his leadership, which was appropriate because looking at one aspect, namely culture, we at Islamic Elementary School Anak Saleh Malang have a religious background that follows <i>Nabdhbatul Ulama</i> (NU), <i>Muhammadiyah</i> and many others; from that diversity, he does not discriminate in providing an approach to us as teachers, he always meets our needs without ignoring our culture, besides that through this humanist strategy we also feel the welfare that is no different.
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Source: Primary data based on respondents' answers, (2024)

The results of interviews with three respondents regarding the steps for implementing strategies to improve teacher performance to achieve quality at Islamic Elementary School Anak Saleh Malang obtained answers as in Table 2.

Table 2. Steps for implementing the principal's strategy in improving teacher performance to achieve quality education

Information Source	Position	Interview Results
Informan 1	Headmaster	The steps of implementing the strategy that I do in improving teacher performance to achieve quality education are, of course, by analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of teachers. In today's era, it is often called a SWOT analysis because, as we know, there are a lot of teachers at Islamic Elementary School Anak Saleh Malang, and they have different abilities as well as weaknesses or shortcomings. So it is essential to do an analysis first before implementing strategic steps to improve teacher performance; after knowing the weaknesses, strengths, opportunities and threats, I set clear goals such as teacher performance standards and professional goals to create a sense of belonging in this school, then provide various training according to what is needed by teachers, not only that, then provide feedback and assistance because that way a positive Work Environment will be created, encourage cooperation between teachers, provide recognition for achievements, and handle challenges such as heavy workloads.
Informan 2	Teacher	The steps taken by the principal are first to map the competencies and needs of each teacher and then provide several programs or training that are relevant to what we need as teachers to improve our performance; in addition, the principal also often helps in determining the program and adjusting it to our schedule so that we can follow the program calmly without having to clash with the teaching schedule. It does not stop there; the principal also provides feedback or evaluations every semester to determine how we are developing as teachers in the following programs that improve our performance.
Informan 3	Teacher	The principal has implemented very organized and encouraging measures to raise teacher performance. The principal always begins by using observations and conversations to determine each teacher's potential, shortcomings, and strengths. We feel appreciated since our special skills and difficulties are acknowledged. After that, the principal designs and offers development programs, such as workshops, training sessions, or mentoring, that are tailored to meet our needs and improve our teaching skills. One thing that we found very helpful was that the principal made sure that these programs were flexible and well-coordinated with our teaching schedules so that we could participate without feeling overwhelmed. We were also able to evaluate our progress and pinpoint areas that needed development because the principal kept in touch with us regularly and gave us helpful criticism. The instructors' excitement and sense of cooperation were enhanced by this strategy, which also promoted professional growth.

Source: Primary data based on respondents' answers, (2024)

Based on Table 2, it is clear that the principal implements several steps in the strategy to improve teacher performance. The first step is to build a strong character, followed by efforts to improve teacher performance and ensure effective communication between educators. This was

corroborated by other sources, who said that the principal often hosts seminars and classes within and outside the school setting. Since the principal is a key leader in optimizing teacher performance, the right plan must be implemented in line with the school's needs.

The main aspects of the strategy implemented by the principal to improve teacher performance and achieve quality education at Islamic Elementary School Anak Saleh Malang are the various challenges in its implementation, which are summarized in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Constraints in the Implementation of Principal Strategies in Improving Teacher Performance to Achieve Educational Quality

Information Source	Position	Interview Results
Informan 1	Headmaster	As a principal, I understand that there will always be challenges and barriers when putting a humanist strategy to improve teacher performance into practice to achieve high-quality education. This is because we manage objects and humans, and people have different ideas about the school's vision and mission. For instance, if the school's vision and mission are this but what is done differs from it, that is one of the challenges in putting the strategy into practice. Remembering instructors who are headed in the wrong direction or who stray from Islamic Elementary School Anak Saleh Malang School's vision and goal to overcome these challenges is necessary. In addition, obstacles or challenges from outside are usually many offers from outside, such as offers to become civil servants, which are very tempting for young teachers. My strategy for overcoming these challenges is to remind ourselves that since attending Islamic Elementary School Anak Saleh Malang, we must adhere to the piety that permeates our institution and have unambiguous instruction, not to be duped by the numerous offers.
Informan 2	Teacher	As a teacher who has been teaching at this school for quite a long time, I believe that the humanist strategy implemented by the principal is perfect for building a more harmonious relationship between teachers and leaders. However, there are indeed challenges in its implementation. One of the internal obstacles is that not all fellow teachers have the same awareness of the importance of the school's vision and mission, so sometimes, there are differences in how to carry out tasks. In addition, communication between teachers also needs to be improved to be more consistent with the guidelines set by the school.
Informan 3	Teacher	As a young teacher in this school, I believe the principal's humanist strategy allows us to develop and contribute personally. However, the obstacle is that it is sometimes difficult to understand and implement the school's vision and mission in daily activities, especially when teaching and administrative tasks are so dense. In addition, there are still teachers who have views or ways of working that do not follow school guidelines, so collaboration is less than optimal.

Source: Primary data based on respondents' answers, (2024)

Discussion

Based on the interview results, it was found that Islamic Elementary School Anak Saleh Malang, uses a humanistic-based strategy to improve teacher performance. This strategy involves several key components, namely, the application of a family-oriented approach (humanistic leadership), mandatory teacher training, and the use of SWOT analysis, effective communication and internal motivation. These findings support the research objective, which is to identify the principal's strategy for improving the quality of education through enhancing teacher performance.

The principal's approach is more in line with a humanistic leadership style, which prioritizes respect for human values, the growth of cordial interpersonal connections, and the development of each person's potential inside the company (Arifin, 2018). Previous research by Nguyen et al. (2021) in the *Leadership & Organization Development Journal* found that humanistic leadership can enhance teacher job satisfaction and productivity, as teachers feel valued and emotionally supported. The emphasis on a family-oriented approach is also in line with findings from Purwanto et al. (2020), who asserted that leadership based on empathy and concern for teacher welfare

positively impacts the improvement of professionalism and work motivation. Conversely, studies like that by Yin et al. (2019) showed that an overly humanistic approach without firm control can lead to a decline in work discipline. This highlights the need for humanistic strategies to be balanced with professional supervision.

SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) in evaluating teacher competencies is a crucial strategic step. This finding aligns with the research of Al-Shammari and Al-Sheikh (2021), who revealed that SWOT analysis in educational contexts helps schools identify internal strengths and external threats to facilitate more focused teacher development. The SWOT analysis applied by the principal serves to determine relevant training for each teacher according to their individual needs. This is consistent with strategic human resource management (Wright & McMahan, 2011), which emphasizes the importance of a needs-based approach to human resource development. However, research by Ahmad et al. (2022) mentioned that in some cases, using SWOT analysis that is not integrated into the school's long-term plan may lead to unclear priorities in teacher competency development. Therefore, well-organized strategic planning needs to come after the SWOT analysis.

Mandatory training, including English language instruction, is one important tactic to improve teacher competency. This result is in line with Zhang and Liu's (2021) research, which found that continuous training enhances student learning outcomes and benefits teachers' self-efficacy. English language training, in particular, has become highly relevant in the era of globalization. According to research by Cheng & Wang (2020) in *TESOL Quarterly*, primary school teachers' English proficiency is closely linked to students' preparedness for global challenges. However, Gurung et al. (2019) warned that instructors may face administrative responsibilities without a major change in their teaching approaches if they get training that is not in accordance with their actual needs. This highlights the need of doing a requirements analysis prior to selecting the type of training that will be provided. Effective communication between the principal and instructors aids in implementing this method. According to a study by Manik and Syafrina (2021), trust between administrators and teachers is fostered by open and dialogical communication, which in turn improves teacher performance.

In addition, the strategy also considers motivational aspects. Herzberg's motivation theory (1959) shows that motivational factors (such as recognition, achievement, and responsibility) significantly improve employee performance, including that of teachers. The principle of applying a humanistic approach is understanding the importance of providing intrinsic motivation, not merely external control. However, another study by Rashid and Mansor (2020) indicated that without tangible incentives or formal rewards, intrinsic motivation alone might not be sufficient to drive sustainable changes in teacher behaviour.

This strategy does not stop at training and communication but continues with mobilization (engaging all staff) and continuous supervision. This reflects the application of educational strategic management principles proposed by Bush and Glover (2014), which state that the success of a strategy greatly depends on practical implementation and systematic supervision. While many studies support the effectiveness of humanistic strategies in improving teacher performance, there are also contrasting findings. For instance, Chen et al. (2022) discovered that in schools with significant demands on academic performance, result-based leadership outperformed humanistic leadership. Additionally, a study by Raziq and Maulabakhsh (2015) noted that structural factors such as compensation and job security had a greater impact than human relations approaches. This suggests that humanistic strategies must be combined with result-oriented managerial approaches in specific contexts to achieve optimal effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

According to this study, the principal's implementation of a humanist/family-oriented leadership style, bolstered by required training (including English language instruction), organized supervision, SWOT analysis, and effective communication techniques, is essential for raising teacher effectiveness and the standard of education. The novelty of the findings lies in integrating humanistic leadership with systematic strategic planning tools (SWOT analysis) at the school level, which has rarely been explained together in previous leadership studies. Theoretically, this research confirms and expands the school leadership theory by demonstrating that personalized, strategic leadership actions foster teacher innovation and organizational effectiveness. School leaders are encouraged to adopt a combination of emotional intelligence approaches and analytical planning to optimize teacher development and student outcomes. At the same time, policymakers should consider providing structured leadership development programs. Future researchers should explore these leadership strategies through quantitative or mixed-method studies to validate and deepen understanding across diverse educational contexts. A limitation of this study is its qualitative scope within a specific educational setting, which may affect the generalizability of the results.

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