

THE PRINCIPAL'S LEADERSHIP IN BUILDING A CULTURE OF EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AT SDIT AL-KAUTSAR MOKUMOKU

Muhamad Iqbal Wibisono ¹, Sutrisno ², Suwadi ³

¹⁻³Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Corresponding author: muhamad171001@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the principal's leadership in building a culture of educational quality at SDIT Al-Kautsar Mukomuko. It employed a descriptive qualitative method, with data collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. The principal and teachers served as research informants. Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, while source and method triangulation was used to establish trustworthiness. The findings show that the principal practices adaptive situational leadership by fostering collaboration among all members of the school community. The implementation strategies include improving the learning process, developing teacher competence, managing supervision, and applying standard operating procedures for educational quality. Supporting factors include the principal's commitment, teacher quality, and parental support, whereas the principal obstacle is limited physical infrastructure. The findings underscore the importance of collaborative leadership and continuous evaluation in institutionalizing a culture of educational quality.

Keywords: Leadership, Quality Culture, Education, School Principal

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a long-term investment that shapes the quality of a nation's human resources. In the context of national education, improving educational quality is a primary priority for producing competent and highly competitive graduates in the global era (Syafarina et al., 2021). Educational quality is measured not only by students' cognitive achievement but also by the learning process, school management, and organizational culture established within the school environment (Hidayat & Machali, 2012). A culture of educational quality therefore

provides an essential foundation for creating a conducive and sustainable learning ecosystem.

A culture of educational quality is a system of values, attitudes, and behaviors oriented toward excellence in every aspect of educational provision. It refers to the shared commitment of the entire school community to consistently improve the quality of educational services through continuous improvement (Fauzi, 2019; Sari et al., 2022). Its implementation requires a paradigm shift from an input orientation to a process-and-output orientation involving the active participation of all education stakeholders. In an integrated Islamic school, a quality culture encompasses not only academic dimensions but also the integration of Islamic values into every educational activity (Fathurrohman, 2016).

Principal leadership plays a central role in establishing and developing a culture of educational quality. Kusumaningrum, Sumarsono, and Gunawan (2020) found that principal leadership contributes significantly to improving instructional quality through teacher development and the cultivation of school culture. As an educational leader, the principal must be able to create a shared vision, establish effective communication, encourage instructional innovation, and develop an objective and continuous evaluation system (Sapitri et al., 2024). The appropriateness of the leadership style determines the effectiveness of quality-improvement programs in schools.

Situational leadership is particularly relevant to education because it can adapt to the needs and characteristics of a school organization. Utami et al. (2025) explain that situational leadership allows principals to adjust their leadership style to teachers' levels of maturity and competence in carrying out their duties. This approach promotes a collaborative and participatory work environment in which every individual assumes responsibility for improving educational quality (Sumarni et al., 2022). Leadership that is adaptive and responsive to organizational dynamics is therefore crucial to successfully transforming a school's quality culture.

Previous studies have examined the relationship between principal leadership and a culture of educational quality from various perspectives. Windasari et al. (2022), in their study of public elementary schools in Jakarta, found that principals' transformational leadership positively influenced quality culture through the mediating role of teachers' work motivation. Meanwhile, Sodikin's (2023) study of secondary schools in West Sumatra showed that principals' instructional leadership contributed to improved student achievement through the development of teacher professionalism. In research conducted at madrasah ibtidaiyah, Mawardi et al. (2023) identified participatory leadership as

effective in building the school community's collective commitment to educational quality.

These studies make important contributions to understanding the dynamics of principal leadership in improving educational quality. However, a research gap remains concerning how principals specifically build a quality culture in integrated Islamic schools, which have the distinctive task of integrating Islamic values with national education standards (Faramisti, 2024). Most previous studies have focused on general schools or conventional madrasahs, whereas leadership in integrated Islamic elementary schools involves the particular complexity of balancing academic competence, Islamic character formation, and the sustainable development of a quality culture. Furthermore, implementation strategies and contextual factors affecting the successful development of such a culture have not been explored in sufficient depth.

On the basis of this research gap, the present study comprehensively examines the principal's leadership in building a culture of educational quality at SDIT Al-Kautsar Mukomuko, Bengkulu. It addresses three main questions: First, what leadership style does the principal employ to build a culture of educational quality at SDIT Al-Kautsar Mukomuko? Second, what strategies does the principal use to implement this culture? Third, what factors support and hinder its development? Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the principal's leadership style, identify strategies for implementing a quality culture, and explore the factors supporting and constraining its development. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to the development of educational leadership concepts in integrated Islamic schools and to provide practical recommendations for principals and education stakeholders seeking to develop a sustainable quality culture.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive design to explore and describe principal leadership in building a culture of educational quality at SDIT Al-Kautsar Mukomuko (Sugiyono, 2014; Moleong, 2021). Informants were selected through purposive sampling and comprised the principal as the key informant and teachers as supporting informants. Data were collected through in-depth interviews guided by semi-structured questions, participant observation of leadership activities and quality-program implementation, and documentation comprising the school's vision and mission statements, work programs, and evaluation reports. Intensive interviews were conducted to obtain detailed information about leadership practices, strategies for implementing a quality culture, and the factors influencing its development at the school.

Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Data condensation involved identifying, classifying, and focusing interview and observation data according to the research questions. The data were then presented in a systematic and logical descriptive narrative to facilitate understanding of the findings. Conclusions were drawn inductively from patterns emerging in the field data. Trustworthiness was established through source triangulation by comparing information from the principal and teachers, method triangulation by corroborating interview findings with observation and documentation, and member checking by asking informants to verify the researchers' interpretations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Principal's Leadership Style in Building a Culture of Educational Quality

The findings show that the principal of SDIT Al-Kautsar Mukomuko applies an adaptive and flexible situational leadership style suited to the context and needs of the school organization. This approach is reflected in the principal's ability to adjust leadership practices to teachers' levels of maturity and competence in performing their professional duties (Gaol & Siburian, 2018). Rather than relying on a single rigid style, the principal combines different approaches according to the situation, ranging from a directive approach for new teachers to delegation for experienced and competent teachers.

The principal has a clear vision of educational quality and communicates it to the entire school community through various forums. The school's vision and mission are formulated through a participatory process involving teachers, education personnel, and the school committee (Utami et al., 2025). They are then communicated intensively through teacher meetings, parent meetings (POMG), and information boards displayed around the school. The involvement of multiple parties in formulating the vision creates a strong sense of ownership and a shared commitment to realizing the school's vision of educational quality.

Communication is central to the principal's leadership practice. The principal establishes open and dialogical two-way communication with teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders (Zulkarnaen et al., 2020). Effective communication enables the principal to listen to aspirations, understand needs, and respond to problems encountered by members of the school community. Such openness creates a healthy organizational climate in which individuals feel valued and motivated to contribute optimally to improving educational quality. The principal also actively communicates the

school's goals and targets in clear and measurable terms, thereby providing firm direction for the implementation of school programs.

Participatory leadership is another defining feature of the principal's approach to building a quality culture. The principal consistently involves teachers, students, and parents in decision-making and school development (Mawardi et al., 2023). Their active participation creates positive organizational dynamics and promotes productive collaboration. The principal also encourages innovation and creativity in instruction and school development by giving teachers room to experiment with teaching methods suited to student characteristics and contemporary developments. Recognizing the achievements of teachers, students, and other members of the school community is an effective motivational strategy for sustaining enthusiasm and dedication to educational improvement.

The principal's strategy for building a quality culture combines strong leadership, intensive teacher collaboration, data-informed evaluation, continuing professional development, meaningful parental involvement, and the creation of a positive learning environment (Sumarni et al., 2022). The principal acts not only as an administrator but also as an instructional leader who actively assists teachers in developing their professional competence. As an innovator, change agent, and manager capable of articulating a clear vision and mission, the principal plays a vital role in directing the school community toward the expected standards of educational quality.

The analysis indicates that the situational leadership practiced by the principal of SDIT Al-Kautsar Mukomuko is effective in building a quality culture because it accommodates teachers' diverse characteristics and creates a conducive work environment (Gaol & Siburian, 2018). Adaptive, communicative, and participatory leadership provides a strong foundation for the school community's collective commitment to improving educational quality. Combining firmness in giving direction with openness to feedback creates an effective balance between a clear organizational structure and space for innovation.

2. Strategies for Implementing a Culture of Educational Quality

SDIT Al-Kautsar Mukomuko implements its culture of educational quality through several comprehensive and structured strategies. The first is improving the learning process through innovation and the development of more effective teaching methods (Syafarina et al., 2021). The principal encourages teachers to diversify instructional methods and strategies, use relevant and up-to-date media, and ensure that the curriculum responds to

contemporary developments. Class outings are one instructional innovation that gives students direct learning experiences outside the classroom, enriching their conceptual understanding and developing their social skills.

The second strategy is the continuous development of teacher competence through training and professional development programs. The school regularly conducts workshops, in-house training, and learning communities to enhance teachers' pedagogical, professional, social, and personal competencies (Sapitri et al., 2024). Learning communities allow teachers to share experiences, discuss instructional problems, and collaboratively develop innovative solutions. Peer coaching further strengthens a culture of collaboration and mutual learning aimed at improving instructional quality. The principal also encourages teachers to participate in professional development through online platforms, including webinars and online training programs that support educational improvement.

The third strategy is structured and continuous supervision. The principal conducts academic supervision through classroom visits to directly observe teachers' instructional practices (Fauziah & Wardani, 2024). Administrative supervision includes reviewing instructional documents such as syllabi, lesson plans (RPP), and Minimum Competency Assessment (AKM) materials. Supervision is conducted at least twice during each academic year using a constructive and developmental approach. The principal discusses the results individually with teachers, provides specific and actionable feedback, and develops improvement plans tailored to each teacher's needs. Supervisory activities are evaluated periodically to ensure their effectiveness and relevance to improving instructional quality.

The fourth strategy is the implementation of clear and measurable standard operating procedures (SOPs) for educational quality. These procedures cover planning, implementation, evaluation, and continuous improvement (Fauzi, 2019). In curriculum development, the school designs a curriculum based on national standards while adapting it to local needs and the characteristics of an integrated Islamic school. Learning is evaluated regularly to measure student competency and identify areas requiring improvement. Resources are managed effectively and efficiently to support high-quality instruction. The SOPs also regulate communication with parents to ensure their involvement in their children's education.

The fifth strategy is strengthening collaboration and effective communication among the principal, teachers, parents, and the school committee. Collaboration with parents and the school committee is developed through open communication, joint activities such as parenting programs,

budget transparency, and meaningful participation in school programs (Windasari et al., 2022). Parents serve not merely as financial supporters but as partners in their children's education. The school holds regular meetings with parents to discuss student development, share information about school programs, and receive their aspirations and feedback. Active parental involvement creates synergy between education at school and at home, thereby supporting students' optimal development.

The school monitors and evaluates educational quality systematically through several stages. First, it establishes clear and measurable quality standards as benchmarks for performance assessment (Hidayat & Machali, 2012). Second, it develops a comprehensive monitoring plan with predetermined schedules and instruments. Third, it conducts observations and objectively collects data from various sources. Fourth, it analyzes quality data to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges. Fifth, it transparently reports the monitoring results to all stakeholders. Sixth, it undertakes improvement measures based on the evaluation findings. Seventh, it engages in continuous reflection and evaluation to ensure consistent improvement.

The analysis of these strategies indicates that SDIT Al-Kautsar Mukomuko has adopted a holistic approach to building a culture of educational quality (Sodikin, 2023). The strategies are not implemented separately; rather, they are integrated into a comprehensive quality-management system. The combination of teacher competence development, learning-process improvement, effective supervision, clear SOPs, and parental involvement creates an educational ecosystem conducive to developing a sustainable quality culture.

3. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Developing a Culture of Educational Quality

The analysis identified several factors supporting the successful implementation of a quality culture at SDIT Al-Kautsar Mukomuko. The foremost is the principal's strong and consistent commitment to improving educational quality (Puspitaningrum et al., 2021). The principal does not merely articulate a rhetorical vision of quality but demonstrates concrete dedication by leading change and continuous improvement. This commitment provides an example and a source of inspiration for teachers and other members of the school community to contribute to quality improvement.

The second supporting factor is the competence and dedication of the teachers. Teachers at SDIT Al-Kautsar Mukomuko possess adequate

competence and strong motivation for continuous self-development (Sapitri et al., 2024). Their awareness of the importance of professionalism and their commitment to improving instructional quality are valuable assets for the school. A positive professional culture—characterized by intensive collaboration, effective communication, mutual support, encouragement of innovation, and regular self-evaluation—creates a conducive environment for quality development. The school provides a comfortable staff room for discussion and the exchange of ideas, holds regular teacher meetings, and encourages collaboration with other schools to broaden teachers' knowledge and experience.

The third supporting factor is the availability of adequate resources, including learning facilities and technology. The school endeavors to provide infrastructure supporting high-quality learning, although limitations remain in several areas (Hidayat & Machali, 2012). The use of technology in instruction and school administration has improved managerial efficiency and effectiveness. The fourth factor is the strong support of parents and the school committee. Parents demonstrate enthusiasm and participate actively in supporting school programs. Collaboration between the school and parents creates positive synergy in educating students.

Conversely, the study identified several obstacles to developing a culture of educational quality. The main obstacle is inadequate infrastructure, particularly classrooms that do not yet meet ideal conditions (Sari et al., 2022). Several classrooms lack ceilings, creating acoustic problems because sounds from adjacent rooms interfere with one another. This condition may reduce instructional effectiveness, as teachers and students are distracted by noise from other classes. The problem demonstrates that the school's physical environment still requires improvement to become more conducive to learning.

The second obstacle is some students' limited awareness of the importance of education. Despite the school's various efforts to increase learning motivation, several students do not yet fully understand the value of education for their future (Syafarina et al., 2021). Variations in student awareness and motivation pose a particular challenge for teachers seeking to provide effective instruction for all students.

The school has developed several strategies to address these obstacles. To overcome infrastructure limitations, it seeks additional resources from the government and other donors by submitting funding proposals (Sumarni et al., 2022). In the short term, the school uses technological aids, including speakers and sound-volume adjustments, to minimize interference between classrooms.

To increase student awareness, it regularly offers motivational programs during morning assemblies and other inspirational activities, inviting role models or successful alumni to share their experiences. The school also encourages parents to become more involved in their children's education through intensive communication and parenting programs. It consistently provides teacher training and continuing professional development to improve teaching quality.

Members of the school community have experienced significant changes since the implementation of the quality culture. Several indicators demonstrate considerable improvement in educational quality (Sodikin, 2023; Melayu & Nellitawati, 2023). Student achievement has improved in national examinations and in academic and non-academic competitions. Students have become more aware of the importance of education and more motivated to learn. Their skills have also developed, particularly twenty-first-century competencies such as technological literacy, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication, which are essential for success in the digital era. Parental involvement in education has also increased substantially, creating a strong partnership between the school and families.

The culture of educational quality at SDIT Al-Kautsar Mukomuko is beginning to become institutionalized, although it still requires continuous reinforcement. The school has a sound quality-management system with clear structures and mechanisms (Fauzi, 2019). Nevertheless, implementation and oversight must be strengthened to ensure consistency and sustainability. Institutionalizing a quality culture requires time and the long-term commitment of the entire school community. Positive responses from teachers, students, and parents indicate that the culture has begun to be internalized in everyday school practices.

A comprehensive analysis of the supporting and inhibiting factors shows that the development of a culture of educational quality at SDIT Al-Kautsar Mukomuko is supported internally by strong leadership, teacher commitment, and an effective management system, and externally by support from parents and the school committee (Puspitaningrum et al., 2021). Although the existing obstacles are significant, they can be addressed through appropriate strategies and creative management of limited resources. Success depends on the school's capacity to optimize the available supporting factors while gradually overcoming constraints through strategic planning and collaboration with various stakeholders.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the principal of SDIT Al-Kautsar Mukomuko employs an adaptive, communicative, and participatory situational leadership style to build a culture of educational quality, involving the entire school community in quality-improvement processes. The implementation strategies comprise improving learning through innovation, continuously developing teacher competence, conducting structured supervision, applying SOPs for educational quality, and strengthening collaboration with parents and the school committee. The principal's commitment, teacher quality, resource availability, and parental support are the main enabling factors. Meanwhile, infrastructure limitations and variations in student awareness are addressed through the use of technology, motivational programs, and partnerships with multiple stakeholders. The findings show substantial improvements in student achievement, awareness of learning, and parental involvement, indicating that a culture of educational quality is beginning to become institutionalized at the school.

This study is limited by its focus on a single school in the specific context of Mukomuko, Bengkulu. The findings therefore cannot be broadly generalized to integrated Islamic schools with different characteristics. Future research should conduct comparative studies across several integrated Islamic elementary schools representing diverse geographical and socioeconomic contexts, develop quantitative instruments to measure the institutionalization of a quality culture more objectively, and longitudinally examine the long-term effects of principal leadership on students' academic achievement and character development.

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