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Madrasah Principals' Educational Management Strategies In Improving Graduate Quality

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the strategies employed by madrasah principals in managing educational programs and enhancing the quality of graduates in Madrasah Diniyah Takmiliah Awaliyah (MDTA). The research addresses the limited scholarly attention given to leadership practices in non-formal Islamic educational institutions, particularly regarding how principals manage educational programs to meet community expectations and improve graduate outcomes. This study aims to analyze the managerial strategies implemented by madrasah principals and to identify leadership characteristics that contribute to educational quality improvement. The study applied a qualitative research approach through observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation conducted at MDTA Uswatun Hasanah Harjamukti and MDTA Darul Fikr Lemahwungkuk from February 5 to 15, 2025. Data were analyzed descriptively to interpret leadership practices and educational management strategies implemented in both institutions. The findings reveal that graduate quality improvement is influenced by several managerial strategies, including curriculum development, student-centered learning activities, the application of appropriate teaching methods, teacher qualification standards, competency development programs, evaluation systems, and institutional collaboration. The study also identifies the IKLAS leadership framework, Innovative, Creative, Evaluative, Accommodative, and Selective, as a contextual leadership model that strengthens the effectiveness of educational program management in MDTA institutions. This study contributes to the development of leadership studies in non-formal Islamic education by offering a practicum.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian National Education System recognizes three educational pathways formal, non-formal, and informal education, as regulated in Law Number 20 of 2003

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concerning the National Education System. Within this framework, non-formal education functions as a complementary and supplementary educational pathway that addresses community-based educational needs outside formal schooling institutions. One important form of non-formal Islamic education in Indonesia is the Madrasah Diniyah Takmiliah Awaliyah (MDTA), which is legally regulated by Government Regulation Number 55 of 2007 on Religious Education and Religious Affairs. MDTA institutions have historically played a significant role in strengthening Islamic values, Qur'anic literacy, worship practices, and the development of moral character in Muslim children in local communities [1], [2].

In recent years, MDTA institutions have experienced considerable transformation due to increasing regulatory and societal demands. MDTA is no longer viewed merely as a traditional religious learning forum but has gradually developed into a more organized educational institution that is expected to implement structured curricula, measurable learning systems, institutional administration, and graduate quality standards [3]. These developments indicate that MDTA institutions must adapt to modern educational management practices while maintaining their religious and community-based characteristics.

However, the increasing institutional demands on MDTA are not always matched by adequate managerial capacity, financial support, or educational resources. In many cases, MDTA institutions continue to experience limitations in funding, infrastructure, teacher competency development, and educational program management [4], [5]. These conditions may affect the quality of graduates produced by MDTA institutions, particularly in their ability to respond to contemporary social and educational challenges. Consequently, improving graduate quality has become one of the central issues in the sustainability and credibility of MDTA education.

In educational management theory, leadership is widely recognized as one of the most influential factors in determining institutional effectiveness and educational quality. Educational leadership is not limited to administrative authority but also involves the ability to formulate vision, manage educational programs, mobilize human resources, and create adaptive learning environments that support institutional goals [6]. In the context of non-formal Islamic education, the role of the madrasah principal is particularly important, as principals must manage institutions that often operate with limited resources while simultaneously meeting community expectations for religious and moral education [7], [8].

The relationship between leadership and graduate quality can be understood through educational management perspectives, which emphasize that effective program planning, implementation, supervision, and evaluation contribute significantly to learning outcomes and institutional performance [9]. Graduate quality in MDTA education does not solely refer to academic achievement but also includes students' religious competence, moral behavior, social attitudes, and Qur'anic literacy. Therefore, improving graduate quality requires leadership practices that are adaptive, contextual, and responsive to community needs.

Several previous studies have examined the influence of educational leadership on institutional quality improvement. Research conducted by Sugandi and Sauri emphasized the importance of managerial leadership in improving teacher performance within madrasah

institutions [10]. Dewi et al. highlighted the role of visionary leadership in strengthening educational quality through institutional management strategies [11]. Other studies have also discussed transformational leadership, supervision, and teacher competency development in Islamic educational institutions [[12]. Nevertheless, most previous studies primarily focus on formal Islamic educational institutions such as Madrasah Aliyah and Madrasah Tsanawiyah. Research specifically examining how MDTA principals manage educational programs to improve graduate quality in non-formal Islamic education settings remains relatively limited.

This study identifies two important research gaps. First, previous studies have not sufficiently explored the managerial strategies implemented by MDTA principals in improving graduate quality within the unique characteristics of non-formal Islamic education. Second, there is still limited discussion of contextual leadership models emerging from practical experience in MDTA institutions. Therefore, this study seeks to analyze how madrasah principals design, organize, implement, and evaluate educational programs to improve the quality of graduates. In addition, this study introduces the IKLAS leadership framework, Innovative, Creative, Evaluative, Accommodative, and Selective, as a contextual leadership approach developed from empirical findings in MDTA institutions. Based on these considerations, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) How do madrasah principals manage educational programs to improve the quality of MDTA graduates? (2) What managerial strategies are implemented to support graduate quality improvement? (3) How does the IKLAS leadership framework contribute to the effectiveness of educational program management in MDTA institutions?

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the managerial role of madrasah principals in improving graduate quality through educational program management practices in MDTA institutions. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to the development of educational leadership studies in non-formal Islamic education and practically to provide insights for strengthening educational management practices in MDTA institutions and similar community-based Islamic educational organizations.

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore how madrasah principals manage educational programs in improving the quality of MDTA graduates. A qualitative design was considered appropriate because the study focused on understanding leadership practices, managerial strategies, and institutional experiences within their natural educational settings. Through this approach, the researcher examined in depth the perspectives, actions, and decision-making processes of madrasah principals.

The research was conducted at two non-formal Islamic educational institutions: MDTA Uswatun Hasanah Harjamukti and MDTA Darul Fikr Lemahwungkuk. These institutions were purposively selected based on several considerations. First, both institutions demonstrated active participation and consistent achievement in religious and Qur'anic educational activities at district and municipal levels, particularly in Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an (MTQ) competitions. Second, both MDTA institutions were recognized by local communities for maintaining educational continuity and graduate competency despite

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limited institutional resources. Third, the two institutions represented different managerial orientations in defining and measuring graduate quality, which provided richer comparative insights for the study.

The participants in this study consisted of two madrasah principals who directly managed educational programs in their respective institutions. Participants were selected purposively because they possessed central authority and practical experience in planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating educational programs. Additional supporting information was obtained from institutional documents and field observations on learning activities, curriculum implementation, and educational evaluation practices.

Data collection was conducted from February 2 to February 15, 2025. Although the research duration was relatively limited, data saturation was achieved through intensive interviews, repeated observations, document cross-checking, and continuous comparison of findings between both institutions. Similar patterns emerged across leadership strategies, graduate quality standards, and educational management practices, indicating sufficient depth and consistency for qualitative interpretation.

The study employed several data collection techniques, namely observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to examine the implementation of educational programs and leadership practices within the natural institutional environment. Semi-structured interviews were used to allow participants to explain their experiences and managerial strategies in a flexible yet focused manner. The interview protocol was developed based on educational leadership and educational management theories, particularly concerning program planning, curriculum management, teacher development, evaluation systems, and institutional collaboration. Documentation techniques were used to examine institutional records, curriculum documents, evaluation reports, and other supporting materials relevant to graduate quality improvement.

To ensure data credibility and trustworthiness, triangulation techniques were applied by comparing findings obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation. Member checking was also conducted during the interview process to confirm the accuracy of participants' statements and interpretations. In addition, the researcher continuously reviewed field findings to minimize subjective bias during interpretation.

The data analysis process was conducted using a thematic analysis approach. Initially, the collected data were transcribed, organized, and coded according to recurring patterns and themes related to leadership practices and educational program management. Open coding was first applied to identify significant statements and field findings. The codes were subsequently categorized into broader themes, such as curriculum development, learning management, teacher competency improvement, evaluation systems, and institutional collaboration. The interpretation process was conducted descriptively and analytically by connecting empirical findings with educational leadership and educational management frameworks discussed in previous studies.

Ethical considerations were also taken into account throughout the research process. Prior to data collection, the researcher obtained permission from both institutions to conduct the study. Participants were informed of the research objectives and voluntarily agreed to participate in interviews and observations. Confidentiality and privacy were maintained by

using research data solely for academic purposes and ensuring that participants' responses were interpreted responsibly and objectively.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

3.1.1. The Role of Madrasah Principals in Improving Graduate Quality

The findings demonstrate that madrasah principals play a central role in determining the direction of educational programs and defining the standards of graduate quality within MDTA institutions. The data from interviews indicate that graduate quality is not defined solely in academic terms but also encompasses religious competence, behavioral formation, and social acceptance within the community.

Both institutions showed different emphases in defining graduate quality. Nasuka Faqih, the principal of MDTA Uswatun Hasanah, emphasized the importance of community trust and parental expectations in measuring educational success. According to him:

“Graduate quality can be seen from how far students are able to practice religious values in daily life and fulfill the expectations of parents and society. Parents usually expect children to be able to pray properly, read the Qur’an fluently, and demonstrate good manners.”

This statement indicates that graduate quality in MDTA Uswatun Hasanah is closely associated with students' social and religious behavior after completing the educational process. Educational outcomes are therefore viewed not merely as institutional achievements but as forms of social accountability toward the community.

Meanwhile, Muhamad Badri, principal of MDTA Darul Fikr, emphasized educational completion and competency attainment as the primary indicators of graduate quality. He stated:

“A quality graduate is a student who successfully completes the learning stages and achieves the competency targets that have been determined by the institution, especially in Qur’anic reading, worship practices, and basic Islamic understanding.”

Table 1. Principals' Perspectives on Graduate Quality

Name of Principal	Institution	Orientation of Graduate Quality
Nasuka Faqih	MDTA Uswatun Hasanah	Social acceptance and parental expectations
Muhamad Badri	MDTA Darul Fikr	Learning completion and competency achievement

The field findings also indicate that the concept of graduate quality in both institutions is operationalized through several observable indicators, including:

1. students' ability to read and memorize the Qur'an,
2. mastery of daily worship practices,
3. demonstration of moral behavior in social interactions,
4. participation in religious activities and competitions,
5. completion of institutional learning targets.

These indicators were consistently mentioned during interviews and observations, suggesting that graduate quality within MDTA institutions is interpreted as a combination of cognitive, religious, behavioral, and practical competencies.

3.1.2. Standards and Criteria of Graduate Quality

The findings show that both institutions implement relatively structured standards in determining graduate competencies. Although each institution applies different managerial orientations, both establish graduate standards based on core Islamic educational competencies considered important by the surrounding community.

Based on document analysis and interview findings, graduate quality standards in both institutions are categorized into four main areas: aqidah, ibadah, akhlak, and Al-Qur'an competencies.

Table 2. Graduate Quality Standards

Field	MDTA Darul Fikr	MDTA Uswatun Hasanah
Aqidah	Memorization of pillars of faith and Islam; Asmaul Husna	Memorization of pillars of faith and Islam; Asmaul Husna
Ibadah	Mastery of prayer recitations and movements	Mastery of prayer recitations and movements
Akhlak	Polite speech, helpfulness, obedience to parents	Honesty, humility, politeness
Al-Qur'an	Completion of Juz Amma and Qur'an, tahsin, tilawah, literacy skills	Memorization of Juz Amma, Qur'an completion, tahsin, tilawah, literacy skills

Observational findings further demonstrate that these standards are integrated into daily learning activities and routine educational practices. Students are regularly involved in Qur'anic recitation sessions, practical worship activities, memorization programs, and moral habituation activities conducted both inside and outside the classroom. One teacher at MDTA Uswatun Hasanah, explained:

"The most important thing is not only that students memorize lessons, but that they become accustomed to practicing religious values in everyday life."

Similarly, observations conducted during learning activities at MDTA Darul Fikr showed that teachers continuously monitored students' worship practices, reading ability, and classroom discipline as part of graduate competency assessment. The findings also reveal that graduate standards are strongly influenced by community expectations surrounding the institutions. Parents generally expect MDTA graduates to possess basic religious competencies and positive moral behavior. As a result, educational programs are designed not only to achieve academic targets but also to strengthen students' religious character and daily practices.

3.1.3. Educational Program Management Strategies

The findings indicate that madrasah principals implement several managerial strategies to improve the quality of graduates. These strategies are carried out systematically through curriculum management, learning development, teacher competency strengthening, evaluation practices, and institutional collaboration.

1. Curriculum Development

Both principals adapted the curriculum according to institutional needs and community expectations. Additional learning materials related to Qur'anic recitation, worship practices, memorization, and religious traditions were integrated into the formal learning structure. Nasuka Faqih explained: *"We do not only follow the standard curriculum. We also add learning activities that are needed by the community, especially those related to worship practice and Qur'anic literacy."* Field observations confirmed that curriculum adaptation was implemented through additional memorization sessions, practical guidance on worship, and tilawah training activities conducted outside regular classroom hours.

2. Development of Learning Activities

The findings show that learning activities were designed to encourage active student participation. Teachers served not only as instructors but also as facilitators, guiding students through practical, participatory learning experiences. Common learning activities included group recitation, direct worship practice, question-and-answer sessions, and repetitive habituation activities. Students were actively involved in demonstrating prayer movements, Qur'anic reading, and memorization practices during classroom instruction.

3. Selection of Learning Methods

Both institutions applied various learning methods adjusted to subject characteristics and students' abilities. The methods identified during the research included sorogan, memorization, active learning (CBSA), practice-based learning, and habituation approaches. Muhamad Badri stated, *"Religious learning cannot rely only on theory. Students must repeatedly practice worship activities so they become habits in everyday life."* The findings indicate that practical, repetitive learning methods were effective in strengthening students' religious competence and behavioral development.

4. Teacher Qualification and Competency Development

The recruitment of teachers in both institutions prioritized individuals with Islamic educational backgrounds, particularly graduates from pesantren and madrasah aliyah institutions. Principals considered religious competence and teaching experience important criteria in maintaining educational quality. In addition, teacher competency improvement was continuously conducted through participation in training programs, workshops, and internal evaluations. One principal explained: *"Teachers must continue learning because educational challenges and students' needs continue to develop."*

5. Evaluation and Institutional Collaboration

Evaluation activities were conducted through both formal and informal mechanisms. Formal evaluations included semester examinations and competency assessments, while informal evaluations included practical worship tests, monitoring of Qur'anic recitation, and internal competitions. The findings also reveal that both institutions actively developed collaboration with parents, religious leaders, and community organizations to support educational activities. This collaboration strengthened institutional trust and supported the implementation of educational programs. Across these managerial practices, the researcher identified five recurring leadership characteristics demonstrated

by the principals: Innovative, Creative, Evaluative, Accommodative, and Selective. These characteristics subsequently formed the IKLAS leadership framework identified in this study.

3.2. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the role of madrasah principals in MDTA institutions extends beyond administrative responsibilities and functions as a strategic mechanism for maintaining institutional sustainability and graduate quality. In the context of non-formal Islamic education, principals are not only responsible for managing educational programs but also for balancing religious values, community expectations, institutional limitations, and educational effectiveness simultaneously. This condition distinguishes MDTA leadership from leadership practices commonly found in formal educational institutions [13].

The effectiveness of the managerial strategies identified in this study appears to be strongly influenced by the contextual characteristics of MDTA institutions themselves. Unlike formal schools, which generally have clearer bureaucratic systems and more stable funding structures, MDTA institutions largely depend on community participation, limited institutional resources, and local trust networks. Consequently, principals are required to adopt adaptive and flexible leadership practices in order to sustain educational quality under constrained conditions. This finding strengthens previous arguments that leadership effectiveness in Islamic educational institutions is highly contextual and cannot be fully separated from social and cultural environments [14], [15]

The study also reveals that graduate quality within MDTA institutions is interpreted in a multidimensional manner. Graduate quality is not merely associated with academic achievement or curriculum completion but also includes students' religious competence, moral conduct, social behavior, and practical religious skills [16]. This broader understanding reflects the distinctive orientation of Islamic non-formal education, in which educational success is closely linked to character formation and religious practice in everyday life. Therefore, the findings suggest that measuring graduate quality in MDTA contexts requires broader indicators than conventional academic assessment alone.

The differences in perspectives between the two principals further indicate that institutional priorities and leadership orientation shape educational quality in MDTA institutions. One institution emphasized community acceptance and parental trust, while the other prioritized competency completion and learning achievement. Rather than representing contradictory approaches, these orientations demonstrate that graduate quality in non-formal Islamic education involves both social legitimacy and instructional effectiveness. This finding supports educational management perspectives which argue that institutional quality is constructed through the interaction between internal educational performance and external stakeholder expectations [17], [18]

The effectiveness of the identified managerial strategies can also be understood through their practical relevance to students' daily religious experiences. Curriculum adaptation, practical worship activities, Qur'anic literacy programs, habituation methods, and teacher competency development were effective because they directly addressed the

religious and moral expectations of the surrounding community. In this context, educational programs become meaningful not only because they fulfill institutional objectives but also because they maintain social relevance within Muslim community life [19]. This explains why community involvement and parental trust emerged as important supporting factors in sustaining educational quality within both institutions.

However, the findings also reveal several structural limitations affecting the sustainability of educational management practices in MDTA institutions. Limited financial support remains one of the most significant challenges faced by both institutions. Educational programs, teacher development activities, and facility improvements often rely heavily on community participation and institutional self-management [20]. This condition potentially limits long-term program sustainability, particularly in implementing continuous teacher training, curriculum innovation, and educational technology integration.

In addition, the managerial workload carried by madrasah principals appears relatively extensive. Principals are expected to simultaneously function as educational leaders, curriculum managers, institutional administrators, community mediators, and quality controllers [21]. Under conditions of limited institutional support, these multiple responsibilities may affect the consistency and effectiveness of leadership implementation. Therefore, while the identified strategies contribute positively to graduate quality, their sustainability remains closely connected to broader policy support and institutional strengthening efforts [22], [23]

One of the most important findings of this study is the emergence of the IKLAS leadership framework, comprising the leadership characteristics of Innovative, Creative, Evaluative, Accommodative, and Selective. Unlike established leadership theories that are generally developed within formal organizational contexts, the IKLAS framework emerged directly from empirical practices observed in MDTA institutions [24]. In this sense, IKLAS can be understood as a contextual leadership model specifically rooted in the realities of non-formal Islamic educational management.

Conceptually, the IKLAS framework shares several similarities with transformational leadership theory, particularly in its emphasis on innovation, adaptability, motivation, and institutional improvement. Transformational leadership emphasizes the leader's ability to inspire change, encourage organizational development, and create collective commitment toward institutional goals [25], [26]. Similarly, the Innovative and Creative dimensions within IKLAS encourage principals to develop educational programs and respond adaptively to institutional challenges continuously.

Nevertheless, IKLAS differs from transformational leadership in several important aspects. First, IKLAS places greater emphasis on accommodative and selective leadership practices, reflecting the need to balance institutional limitations with community expectations in MDTA settings. Second, IKLAS is more closely rooted in practical educational survival strategies within resource-constrained Islamic educational institutions than in broader organizational transformation agendas. Third, the framework integrates religious-social considerations into managerial decision-making processes, which are less explicitly emphasized in conventional leadership models [27], [28]

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The evaluative dimension of IKLAS also reflects the importance of continuous reflection and program adjustment within non-formal education environments. Since MDTA institutions operate in highly dynamic community contexts, principals must regularly assess whether educational programs remain relevant to students' needs and societal expectations. Meanwhile, the accommodative aspect underscores the importance of maintaining collaborative relationships with teachers, parents, religious leaders, and local communities as essential to institutional sustainability.

These findings contribute to the broader literature on Islamic educational leadership by demonstrating that effective leadership in non-formal Islamic education cannot rely solely on formal managerial competence. Instead, leadership effectiveness is also shaped by contextual adaptability, social legitimacy, community responsiveness, and the ability to sustain educational quality under limited institutional conditions. Therefore, this study positions the IKLAS framework as a contextual contribution to educational leadership discourse, particularly within community-based Islamic educational institutions.

4. CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the role of madrasah principals is a key factor in improving the quality of MDTA graduates through effective educational program management. Graduate quality in MDTA institutions is not only reflected in academic achievement but also in religious competence, moral behavior, Qur'anic literacy, and students' social acceptance within the community. The findings show that adaptive curriculum management, practical learning activities, teacher competency development, evaluation systems, and institutional collaboration contribute significantly to educational quality improvement.

This study also introduces the IKLAS leadership framework, Innovative, Creative, Evaluative, Accommodative, and Selective, as a contextual leadership model that reflects the realities of leadership practices in non-formal Islamic educational institutions. The framework strengthens existing educational leadership perspectives by emphasizing adaptive, community-oriented leadership in resource-limited educational environments.

The findings imply that improving MDTA educational quality requires stronger institutional and policy support, particularly in funding, teacher development, and educational management. However, this study is limited to two MDTA institutions within a relatively short research period, so the findings cannot fully represent broader non-formal Islamic educational contexts.

Future research is recommended to involve wider institutional settings and more diverse participants to deepen the understanding of leadership effectiveness in non-formal Islamic education. Overall, this study contributes both theoretically and practically to the development of educational leadership studies and provides insights for improving the sustainability and quality of MDTA education.

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