

## Madrasah Principal Leadership in Developing Teacher Careers at MIN 1 Labuhan Batu

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyse the role of madrasah principal leadership in fostering teacher career development at MIN 1 Labuhanbatu. The background of the study highlights the persistent challenges faced by madrasah teachers in achieving the expected qualifications and professional competencies, often hindered by the lack of strategic and effective leadership. This research adopts a qualitative phenomenological case study approach, involving one madrasah principal and three teachers as participants. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and document analysis, and were analysed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model of qualitative data analysis. The findings reveal that a firm yet transparent leadership style, characterised by inclusive decision-making and consistent motivation from the principal, plays a significant role in creating a positive and supportive work climate. Such leadership enhances teacher engagement, commitment, and continuous professional growth. The study concludes that effective leadership in Islamic schools is a critical factor in improving educational quality through the sustainable development of teacher careers.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Leadership by the head of a madrasah plays a crucial role in creating an effective educational environment and enhancing teacher professionalism [1], [2]. Globally, effective educational leadership has been shown to impact both teacher performance and student [3] significantly [3], [4], [5]. Research indicates that successful schools are led by individuals who can develop a clear vision and measurable strategies that support continuous teacher growth [6], [7], [8].

Transformational leadership, in particular, contributes substantially to teacher motivation and student outcomes. Effective school leaders not only manage administrative

tasks but also actively engage in instructional leadership, curriculum development, and classroom practices [9], [10], [11]. These leaders create cultures that prioritise professional learning and foster environments conducive to career advancement.

In developed countries, teacher career development is a national educational priority. Structured, continuous professional development programs are key components of educational policy in countries such as Finland and Singapore. In Australia, the “Principal Leadership for Teacher Growth” program led to a 156% increase in teacher participation in professional development. Similarly, Malaysia’s “Teacher Career Advancement Initiative” resulted in an 89% improvement in teacher qualification levels over two years. [12][13], [14].

However, in Indonesia—particularly within the madrasah system—significant gaps persist. The Ministry of Religious Affairs reported that many madrasah teachers have yet to meet the expected qualifications and competencies. This issue is exacerbated by a lack of effective leadership strategies for supporting teacher career development.[15], [16], [17].

Studies in the Indonesian context reveal that many madrasah principals are still preoccupied with administrative duties and do not provide sufficient support for teacher professionalism. As a result, the quality of learning and student achievement often stagnates. Muhammadi et al. [18], [19], [20] found that most madrasahs lack structured, sustainable career development programs for teachers.

Additional challenges include limited access to quality professional development programs—especially in remote areas—insufficient funding and infrastructure, and disparities in policy implementation between urban and rural madrasahs. A 2023 Ministry of Religion survey indicated that 55% of madrasah teachers experience stagnation in career development. Research by Rahmat & Aziz identified several contributing factors: the absence of structured professional development programs, limited promotion opportunities, and minimal leadership support [21].

Although previous studies have explored the impact of school leadership on teacher performance and professionalism, they have largely focused on general education settings. Few have examined leadership in madrasahs, which possess unique cultural, religious, and managerial dynamics.

This study addresses that gap by explicitly examining Islamic school leadership using Colquitt’s model—a framework rarely applied in the Indonesian madrasah context. The research explores how the leadership style, influence, and behavioural attributes of madrasah heads shape teacher motivation, job satisfaction, and long-term career commitment.

Furthermore, this study contributes novelty by integrating psychological variables, such as motivation, trust, stress, and fairness, as part of the mechanism linking leadership behaviours to organisational outcomes. While prior research tends to emphasise administrative roles, this study offers a structured, holistic analysis of leadership impacts using the Colquitt framework, specifically applied to MIN 5 Labuhanbatu, a madrasah grounded in Islamic values and facing distinct professional development challenges.

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## 2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological case study design to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of participants at MIN 1 Labuhanbatu, with a specific focus on how the leadership of the madrasah principal supports teacher professional development. The phenomenological approach enabled the researcher to capture the essence of these experiences through in-depth exploration, allowing the voices of the participants to guide the understanding of the phenomenon [22], [23].

The primary participants consisted of the madrasah principal and three teachers selected based on specific criteria. Initial contact was made with the madrasah principal via WhatsApp due to an existing professional acquaintance. Subsequently, the principal assisted the researcher in identifying three teachers who met the following inclusion criteria:

- a. Status as civil servants or PPPK (government-contracted teachers)
- b. Lack of formal teacher certification, and
- c. Fewer than five years of teaching experience.

A total of four participants were involved in the study, and their demographic information is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

No.	Initials	Gender	Position
1	BN	Male	Madrasah Principal
2	LH	Female	Teacher
3	EA	Female	Teacher
4	SF	Female	Teacher

To protect participants' privacy, pseudonyms were used in place of real names. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided verbal and written informed consent. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the institutional research ethics committee.

### Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through three primary methods: observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, as suggested by Creswell [24]. These triangulated methods ensured a rich and comprehensive data set.

- **Observation:** The researcher conducted direct observations within the school environment over one full school day. The madrasah principal was observed performing routine activities without the researcher's interference. Activities were documented at 15-minute intervals using structured field notes to capture leadership behaviours, decision-making processes, and interactions with teachers and staff.
- **Interviews:** The madrasah principal participated in a 60-minute semi-structured interview held in their office, which was audio-recorded with consent. Following this, three individual face-to-face interviews were conducted with the selected teachers over

four days, each lasting approximately 35–45 minutes. A pre-developed protocol was recorded and guided all interviews, and later transcribed for analysis.

- **Document Analysis:** Relevant documents, including lesson plans, professional development reports, and school improvement plans, were also examined to contextualise observational and interview data.

### Data Analysis

Data were analysed using the Miles and Huberman model [25], which includes three iterative phases: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

- **Data Reduction:** Raw data from interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were reviewed and coded to identify recurring patterns and themes related to leadership strategies and professional development practices.
- **Data Display:** Coded data were organised into thematic matrices and charts to facilitate pattern recognition and category refinement. Key leadership behaviours and support mechanisms were mapped against teacher development outcomes.
- **Conclusion Drawing and Verification:** Emerging themes were constantly compared across data sources to ensure consistency and validity. Verification was strengthened through **triangulation**—combining data from different participants, methods, and timeframes—to reduce researcher bias and enhance the credibility of findings.

To ensure trustworthiness, this study followed Lincoln and Guba’s criteria, particularly emphasising credibility (through triangulation), dependability (through audit trails), confirmability, and transferability.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. Results

Based on the qualitative analysis conducted at MIN 1 Labuhanbatu, three core themes emerged regarding the madrasah principal’s role in supporting teacher professional development: (1) Leadership Style that Supports Career Development, (2) Teacher Participation in Decision-Making, and (3) Motivation and Support as Strategic Tools.

1. **Transformational Leadership to Support Teacher Career Development.** The madrasah principal’s leadership style reflects characteristics of transformational leadership, marked by openness, appreciation, and empowerment. Interview and observational data consistently showed that the principal applies a “firm yet open” approach—balancing structure with inclusivity. Teachers reported feeling encouraged and supported in pursuing professional development goals.

"The leadership style I typically employ is firm yet open leadership, always motivating my students and being receptive to all input from my teachers." (Principal Interview, July 10, 2025)

"The principal leads firmly, is present, and is open." (Teacher Interview I, July 11, 2025)

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Such responses illustrate idealised influence and inspirational motivation, two key dimensions of transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1994). The principal does not merely direct but actively engages teachers in a supportive environment that fosters self-confidence and initiative. This was evidenced in observations where the principal attended teaching team meetings, delivered feedback constructively, and participated in informal staffroom discussions. A sense of mutual respect and psychological safety was evident.

Furthermore, when analysed through Colquitt's organisational justice framework (2001), the principal's behaviour demonstrates interactional and procedural justice, teachers perceive fairness in how decisions are made and communicated, which builds trust and enhances their motivation to develop professionally.

2. **Teacher Participation in Decision-Making as Empowerment.** Teacher participation in institutional decisions was found to be a deliberate strategy by the principal to empower staff. Teachers were not passive recipients of policy but were actively involved in shaping madrasah rules, instructional programs, and extracurricular activities. During observations of school meetings, teachers were seen sharing suggestions, while the principal took notes and offered constructive follow-ups.

"I definitely involve every teacher and all members of the madrasa community in determining the rules and customs to be implemented..." (Principal Interview, July 10, 2025)

This inclusive environment fosters a sense of ownership, encourages organisational citizenship behaviour, and directly relates to Colquitt's dimensions of distributive and procedural justice, whereby outcomes and decision processes are perceived as equitable and participatory. Teachers confirmed that they had agency in influencing institutional practices:

"Yes, ma'am, I am also often involved in school decision-making." (Teacher Interview II, July 11, 2025)

Scholarly work supports the notion that empowerment and inclusion in decision-making are pivotal for sustained career growth (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). By involving teachers in governance, the principal builds collective efficacy and increases motivation, which are key components in teacher retention and growth.

3. **Motivation and Support as Drivers of Professional Growth.** The final theme underscores the role of motivational leadership in creating a positive and developmental professional climate. The principal was consistently described as a mentor who motivates not through hierarchical pressure but by recognition, encouragement, and proximity.
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"My habit of encouraging teachers is to offer appreciation and support. I always motivate them, build good communication, and create a friendly work environment."  
(Principal Interview, July 10, 2025)

"The principal always supports us and motivates us." (Teacher Interview III, July 11, 2025)

This aligns with Colquitt's interactional justice, wherein teachers feel respected, heard, and emotionally supported. It also reflects individualised consideration in transformational leadership theory, addressing each teacher's needs and potential.

Observational data further confirmed this dynamic. The principal was seen conducting classroom visits and providing feedback without judgment, using informal settings like the staffroom to engage teachers in non-threatening conversations. Such acts contribute to a culture of psychological safety, critical for growth and innovation [26].

Importantly, symbolic gestures such as public praise or special assignments not only validate teachers' efforts but also reinforce a culture of trust and collaboration. These practices resonate with findings from Tendeas et al. [27], who emphasised the correlation between school leadership support and increased teacher motivation and performance.

### 3.2. Discussion

The management and development of teacher professionalism within the madrasah environment present unique dynamics shaped by the interplay between religious values, leadership patterns, and institutional constraints. At MIN 1 Labuhanbatu, leadership is not merely an administrative function but a transformative force that deeply influences the trajectory of teachers' professional growth. This study has uncovered the central role of the madrasah head in creating a professional culture, particularly through the application of leadership that emphasises interpersonal respect, trust-building, and contextual mentorship. These practices align with Colquitt's organisational justice framework, especially in the domains of interpersonal and procedural justice, where fairness in relationships and decision-making processes enhances teacher motivation and engagement.

The principal at MIN 1 Labuhanbatu demonstrated proactive leadership by establishing informal support systems for new teachers, promoting peer reflection, and facilitating collaborative teaching strategies. These practices have contributed to a culture of mutual learning despite the institution's limitations, such as restricted access to certified training programs and uneven teacher certification levels. This finding resonates with Suyatno et al. [25], who emphasise that transformational leadership in Islamic schools supports not only instructional quality but also the internalisation of character values in pedagogy. Their research highlighted that when principals model strong ethical leadership rooted in religious principles, teachers are more inclined to follow suit in both character formation and teaching innovation.

Furthermore, the current study confirms the insights of Marzuki and Wahyudi, who noted that madrasah principals who engage in direct coaching, collaborative supervision, and regular dialogue with teachers foster stronger professional identities among their staff. In the case of MIN 1 Labuhanbatu, the principal's regular involvement in instructional

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planning and post-teaching feedback sessions helped reinforce a growth-oriented mindset among novice educators. Teachers felt their professional contributions were recognised and appreciated, which, according to Colquitt's theory, enhances their sense of procedural and distributive justice, essential in promoting intrinsic motivation.[26]

However, challenges persist. Not all teachers at MIN 1 Labuhanbatu have access to certified training, and many face the dual pressure of teaching multiple subjects while managing administrative duties. This reflects the broader systemic issues described by Fitriah and Ismail, who found that bureaucratic rigidities and limited policy support for madrasahs impede the institutionalisation of teacher professional development. These limitations require school leaders to innovate within their local capacities—what this study refers to as contextualised leadership, where principals adapt strategies that suit their school's religious culture, community expectations, and resource availability [20].

What makes this study distinct is its application of Colquitt's organisational justice model, a framework rarely applied in the Indonesian Islamic education context. By highlighting how fairness perceptions, leader empathy, and participatory decision-making contribute to the sustainability of teacher development practices, this research offers a novel lens for analysing madrasah leadership. The principal's role in shaping the ethical and emotional climate of the madrasah emerges as a decisive factor, particularly in fostering teacher resilience and commitment in under-resourced settings.

In conclusion, the leadership of madrasah heads, when grounded in fairness, relational trust, and contextual understanding, becomes a catalyst for continuous professional development. This study not only affirms previous findings but also expands the discourse by emphasising justice-oriented leadership as a foundation for teacher empowerment in faith-based educational institutions. Such insights can serve as a practical model for policy formulation, training design, and the development of leadership competencies in other madrasahs across Indonesia.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that effective and justice-oriented leadership by the head of the madrasah is instrumental in shaping the trajectory of teacher professional development at MIN 1 Labuhanbatu. The combination of a firm yet inclusive leadership style, transparent communication, and active teacher participation in decision-making processes has cultivated a collegial and motivating work environment. Such conditions not only elevate teacher commitment but also facilitate continuous improvement in pedagogical competence. The leadership observed demonstrates characteristics aligned with Colquitt's model of organisational justice, where perceived fairness and relational respect significantly enhance teacher morale and growth.

However, this study is not without limitations. Its findings are based on a single case study, which limits the generalizability of the conclusions across diverse madrasah contexts in Indonesia. Additionally, the sample size—restricted to one institution—means that variations in leadership style and school culture elsewhere remain unexplored. Future research should consider comparative studies across multiple madrasahs to assess how

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different leadership models operate under varying institutional constraints and socio-religious environments.

Based on the findings, this study recommends the following:

- a. **Institutionalise Leadership Training:** Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag) and local educational authorities should develop structured leadership programs for madrasah principals, emphasising organisational justice, emotional intelligence, and participatory governance.
- b. **Peer Learning Networks:** Establishing inter-madrasah forums can allow school leaders to share best practices, reflect on challenges, and co-develop solutions for teacher development.
- c. **Policy Support for Teacher Development:** Strengthening access to certified professional training and reducing administrative overload can further support teachers' growth and performance.

In sum, sustainable teacher development in Islamic schools depends not only on institutional resources but fundamentally on ethical, inclusive, and context-sensitive leadership.

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