Principal's Leadership Role in Developing Education Quality Culture

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Abstract: This study examines the role of principal leadership in fostering a culture of quality education at SMP IT Mutiara. This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the transformational leadership strategies implemented by the principal in building a conducive learning environment through data collection methods such as observation, interviews, and notes. The findings of the study indicate that the principal plays a strategic role in shaping a culture of quality education through various integrated strategies, including mentoring and developing teacher professionalism, and encouraging active participation from all school members. Despite facing challenges such as rejection from senior teachers towards new teaching methods, budget constraints, and the balance between academic achievement and Islamic character development, the principal overcomes these obstacles through his visionary, communicative, and focused leadership. The positive impact of developing a culture of quality education can be seen from the increasing quality of graduates accepted at the selected school, the increasing professionalism of teachers, and the high achievement of students in both academic and non-academic fields. This study confirms that the leadership of the principal is not merely administrative, but is a driving force for educational transformation that drives all departments in the school to provide the best educational services.

Keyword: Transformational Leadership; Quality Culture

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengkaji peran kepemimpinan kepala sekolah dalam menumbuhkan budaya mutu pendidikan di SMP IT Mutiara. Penelitian ini mengadopsi pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif untuk mengeksplorasi strategi kepemimpinan transformasional yang diterapkan oleh kepala sekolah dalam membangun lingkungan belajar yang kondusif melalui metode pengumpulan data seperti observasi, wawancara, dan catatan. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepala sekolah memainkan peran strategis dalam membentuk budaya pendidikan bermutu melalui berbagai strategi terpadu, termasuk pendampingan dan pengembangan profesionalisme guru serta mendorong partisipasi aktif dari seluruh anggota sekolah. Meskipun menghadapi tantangan seperti penolakan dari guru senior terhadap metode pengajaran baru, keterbatasan anggaran, dan keseimbangan antara prestasi akademik dengan pengembangan karakter Islam, kepala sekolah mengatasi kendala tersebut melalui kepemimpinannya yang visioner, komunikatif, dan terfokus. Dampak positif dari pengembangan budaya pendidikan bermutu dapat terlihat dari meningkatnya mutu lulusan yang diterima di sekolah

pilihan, meningkatnya profesionalisme guru, serta tingginya prestasi siswa di bidang akademik maupun nonakademik. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa kepemimpinan kepala sekolah bukan hanya sekedar administratif, tetapi merupakan motor penggerak transformasi pendidikan yang menggerakkan seluruh departemen di sekolah untuk memberikan layanan pendidikan terbaik.

Kata kunci : Kepemimpinan Transformasional; Budaya Mutu

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Introduction

One of the key elements in a quality education system is the leadership of the principal, who does not merely act as an administrator but as an agent of change who can transform the educational environment as a whole (Suhardin, 2024; Sunardi et al., 2025). An effective leader is a leader who organizes his organizational institutions in a very structured manner, and has very good, friendly relationships, mutual trust, mutual respect, and is always warm with his subordinates. This means that leaders must be able to create an atmosphere full of kinship with subordinates (Siahaan, Akmalia, Ray, et al., 2023; Sunardi et al., 2025).

A leader is essentially someone who can influence the behavior of others in their work by using power (Ismawiyah et al., 2024) . Leadership development is an effort to improve leadership skills to a higher level (Munajat, 2012). Mulyasa defines the principal as an educational leader at the educational unit level who must have a strong leadership foundation." (Mulyasa, 2012). The principal's leadership will also influence the implementation of the educational process, especially in terms of teacher development in carrying out their duties to achieve educational goals (Said, 2018).

Through quality education, a country can produce quality human resources that can compete in the global era (Sembiring et al., 2022). In this context, schools as formal educational institutions have a very strategic role in developing and improving the quality of education (Umroniyah, 2020) (Azizah et al., 2025). This is in line with the opinion of Peters and Austin, who stated that what determines quality in an institution is leadership (Sallis, 2011). Quality is an important part, because quality shows the superiority of a product when compared to other products (Siahaan, Akmalia, Amelia, et al., 2023). The principal as a leader is required to be able to translate the values of quality culture into the internal and external environment, especially for its members on a massive scale so that all academicians can comprehensively understand the meaning and existence of quality culture (Muttaqin, 2023). Many factors cause the quality of educational

institutions in Indonesia to vary, the causes of the low quality of education in Indonesia are caused by several factors, including; minimal guidance for teachers, the number of unprofessional teachers is too crowded in schools, the learning process in schools is no more than just taking notes, memorizing and remembering (Soedijarto, 2008).

The success of a school in achieving quality education goals cannot be separated from the role of a principal as an educational leader (Wati et al., 2024). Regarding transformational leadership in Educational Leadership, it emphasizes that effective leadership is not just about structural change, but about how leaders can create meaning, build trust, and encourage the commitment of school residents to a shared vision (Juariah, 2024). Management of educational resources has a large and significant role in improving the quality of educational services (Rafsanjani et al., 2023; Hakim et al., 2025).

The leadership of the principal is a key factor in creating and developing a culture of educational quality in schools (Muhsin et al., 2023). The principal not only acts as a manager who manages various school resources, but also as a leader who can inspire, motivate, and direct all school residents to commit to improving the quality of education (Adilla et al., 2023). Without effective leadership from the principal, efforts to develop a culture of educational quality will be difficult to achieve. The concept of a culture of educational quality has become a major focus in the development of contemporary educational institutions.

According to the Minister of Education and Culture Regulation Number 6 of 2018 concerning Education Quality Assurance, every educational unit is required to continuously carry out systematic and comprehensive quality improvements (Wulogening et al., 2020). This indicates that the principal has a great responsibility in creating, developing, and maintaining a culture of quality in their school environment. School culture includes values, behaviors, traditions, daily policies, and symbols applied in schools (Herman, 2015). According to Husaini Usman, quoted in (Riyanta, 2016), quality is conformity to market needs, how far a product has met the requirements that have been set. Quality in the field of education includes input, process, output, and outcome. Input is declared quality if it is ready to process. The education process is quality if it can create an atmosphere of PAIKEM (Active, Innovative, Creative, Effective, and Enjoyable Learning). Output is declared quality if students' academic and non-academic learning outcomes are high. The outcome is declared quality if graduates are absorbed in the world of work.

Several recent studies provide empirical evidence of the importance of leadership in developing a culture of quality. Such as the study (Syukron, 2022) entitled Implementation of ISO 21001: 2018 Clauses as an Effort to Strengthen the

Management of Quality Culture in Islamic Religious Higher Education, explaining that the culture of quality carried out is a top priority in academic services through the availability of clear guidelines and instruments. This is in line with Pane, (2022). The quality of education is a challenge in the world of educators, which includes improvements in learning practices. Advancing the learning process means optimizing all kinds of components related to the process. In addition, according to Adu, (2017) entitled Improving the Quality of Madrasahs Through Strengthening Community Participation, one of the concrete efforts to boost the quality of education is by strengthening community participation, by accommodating views, aspirations, and exploring the potential of the community to ensure democratization, transparency, and accountability.

SMP IT Mutiara, as one of the Integrated Islamic junior high schools, has shown its commitment to developing quality education. This school not only focuses on academic achievement, but also on the formation of Islamic character and the development of students' potential as a whole. However, to develop a culture of quality education, this school still faces various challenges and obstacles that need to be overcome. Based on initial observations, several problems were found related to the development of a culture of quality at SMP IT Mutiara. First, there are still teachers who do not fully understand and apply the established learning quality standards. Second, the school's internal quality assurance system has not been running optimally. Third, participation and support from all school residents in developing a culture of quality still need to be improved. From the three backgrounds above, SMP IT Mutiara is the focus of an interesting study entitled The Role of Principal Leadership in Developing a Culture of Quality Education at SMP IT Mutiara. As an integrated Islamic-based educational institution, this school is unique in implementing the concept of a culture of quality that integrates academic and spiritual values. A preliminary study conducted by the researcher revealed that there were systematic efforts in developing a culture of quality, but still requires an in-depth exploration of the leadership strategies applied.

Methods

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, which aims to explore in depth the role of principal leadership in developing a culture of educational quality. Qualitative research is research that aims to understand social reality, namely seeing the world as it is, not the world as it should be, so a qualitative researcher must be someone who has an open mind (M. Sobry & Prosmala Hadisaputra, 2020). The qualitative method was chosen because this study intends to understand the phenomenon of leadership and quality culture through an in-

depth and contextual perspective. This research was conducted at SMP IT Mutiara, with the main focus on understanding the principal as the subject of the study. In addition, here the researcher uses the method in collecting data used in this study, namely observation, interviews, and documentation.

In this research activity, the researcher conducted interviews with the principal, teachers, and 5 students. The data obtained in the form of interview results will be processed by collecting all the ideas of the informants, then analyzing problems related to the research topic, and then taking solutions and conclusions related to the problems in order to get improvements for the future.

Results And Discussions
Results

Based on the results of research conducted at SMP IT Mutiara using the observation, interview, and documentation methods, several findings were directly found by researchers, were various important aspects related to the principal's efforts in building and improving the quality of education at the institution. One of the main findings is the principal's ability to create a conducive and productive learning environment. Through effective communication and a family approach, the principal succeeded in building a spirit of collaboration among teachers, staff, and students. They do not just carry out their duties, but truly understand the school's vision and mission to produce quality graduates.

Based on the research that has been conducted, the researcher also found results in the form of the role of the principal in managerial leadership in his contribution to developing a culture of quality education at SMP IT Mutiara. This can be seen based on information obtained from statements from sources, namely, teachers and students who had been interviewed previously. Teachers at SMP IT Mutiara revealed that the entire process, starting from administration to teaching and learning activities at the school, went well because the principal had sufficient insight into efforts to develop the culture at the school.

In addition, the teacher also revealed that in leading this school, the principal was quite disciplined and also helped educators and teaching staff to develop their abilities both in academic and non-academic fields. In addition to having an impact on teachers, it turns out that the role of the principal's leadership in efforts to develop the quality of education was also felt by students at SMP IT Mutiara. Several students expressed that the principal, in efforts to develop a culture of quality education, had a large contribution. This can be seen through the support given by the principal in activities carried out related to culture. For example, students who want to take part in a cultural competition, the principal also plays a

role in providing moral and material support to students who take part in the competition.

The achievement of a culture of quality education at SMP IT Mutiara cannot be separated from the professionalism given by the principal, teachers and other educational staff in carrying out their duties, so that there is no decline in quality. The decline in the quality of education is a big gamble for the success of national education development. The deterioration of the quality of national education is an important and difficult task for educational organizations. Educational organizations must function optimally according to the needs of national education development. The success of educational organizations in realizing the vision and mission of educational services is highly dependent on strengthening the resources of the educational organization itself.

The results of the study also show that the principal has a very strategic role in shaping a culture of quality education. The leadership applied is not merely administrative, but rather a transformational approach that is able to inspire all school residents to continue to develop and provide the best educational services.

From the results of observations and interviews conducted, there are efforts by the Principal of SMP IT Mutiara to develop a culture of quality through several comprehensive strategies. Where the principal consistently provides coaching and development of teacher professionalism. As stated by the Principal of SMP IT Mutiara, Mr. Suzatmiko Wijaya, M.Pd, namely by routinely holding teacher training. So that teachers are not only in their comfort zone, always update their knowledge and teaching methods. Such as inviting instructors to share the latest teaching methods, or the principal sending teachers to workshops. In addition, involving teachers to participate in the Teacher Mover Program. The goal is for them to have new ways to make students more enthusiastic about learning. As a result, teachers become more competent and have a spirit of innovation in the learning process. To be able to carry out their duties professionally, a principal and a teacher are required to understand and have adequate skills in developing schools both in terms of management and in improving the school's quality culture, as indicated in the principal's competency standards.

Discussions

This study reveals that the role of leadership in developing a culture of quality education is very important to be implemented in schools. The role of a leader is a determining factor in the success of an organization. As a leader in a school, the Principal is required to be able to create a quality school, especially in today's dynamic era, and changes must be responded to quickly to keep up with the times and the demands of education stakeholders to create the best graduates (Upe et al., 2021; Rofiq et al., 2025).

Leadership in Islam, or what is called imamism or caliphate, is a very basic and complex concept in Islamic teachings. In Islam, leadership is seen not only as a position of power, but also as a relationship of trust where a person must be responsible not only to society, but especially to Allah SWT. In the Qur'an, Allah SWT provides many instructions regarding guidance. One of the most basic verses about leadership is in verse 30 of the Al-Baqarah chapter:

وَاِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلٰۤىِٕكَةِ اِنِّيْ جَاعِلٌ فِى الْاَرْضِ خَلِيْفَةًۗ قَالُوْٓا اَتَجْعَلُ فِيْهَا مَنْ يُّفْسِدُ فِيْهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَاۤءَۚ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَۗ قَالَ اِنِّيْٓ اَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُوْنَ ٣٠

Meaning: "Remember when your Lord said to the Angels: "Indeed, I want to make a caliph on the face of the earth." They said: "Why do you want to make (the caliph) on the earth someone who will cause damage to it and shed blood, even though we always praise You and purify You?" God said, "Indeed, I know what you do not know." (QS. AL-Baqarah 30).

The purpose of this verse is to create humans as caliphs on earth. This verse also emphasizes that all people not only have leadership potential but also a great responsibility to improve welfare and ensure justice for the planet. The concept of leadership in Islam cannot be separated from moral and spiritual values. A Muslim leader must have the main characteristics of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. The Prophet SAW is the best example for mankind. The leadership characteristics of the Prophet that are worth emulating include siddiq (honesty), amanah (trustworthiness), tablai (intermediary), and fatana (intelligence).

In carrying out what is called developing a culture of quality education, there must be challenges that are experienced. the challenges faced in developing a culture of quality are not few. In line with (Mahlan et al., 2025)With visionary, communicative, and dedicated leadership, the principal can overcome various obstacles. As felt by the principal of SMP IT Mutiara where when asked about the challenges faced, Mr. Suzatmiko mentioned several obstacles: "First, resistance from several senior teachers who are reluctant to switch from conventional teaching methods to new technology-based approaches. Second, budget limitations as a private school require us to be creative in managing finances so that quality programs continue to run without burdening parents of students. Third, we need to balance the focus between academic achievement and the formation of Islamic character according to the school's vision. Another challenge is maintaining consistency and the enthusiasm of the school community, which sometimes experiences ups and downs, as well as aligning the various expectations from parents, foundations, and the government, which have different emphases in education."

In addition, the most obvious challenge is due to differences in teacher abilities, where there are teachers who easily understand the material given when conducting workshops or teacher movement programs so that they can immediately apply new ideas, but there are also teachers who are a little slow in applying their new ideas (Umam & Hasan, 2025). In line with Mohammady, (2018), in addition, the tough challenge is regarding funds, not to mention limited facilities, but that does not mean that it is impossible to develop a culture of educational quality.

According to research Sutikno et al., (2022), the role of leaders in improving the culture of educational quality can contribute to students towards the best graduates so that they can graduate according to the next school they want. With the role of developing a culture of educational quality carried out by the Principal of SMP IT Mutiara, it has a very positive impact marked by increasingly good student exam scores, so that many graduates from SMP IT Mutiara are accepted at several favorite schools. However, it is not only about grades, but students also become more confident and creative. In addition to students who feel the positive impact of developing a culture of educational quality, teachers are also increasingly professional.

Learning methods used by teachers, such as the method of delivering learning content, are a variable component of the method for implementing the learning process (Baroroh & Rahmawati, 2020; Hasan, 2024). There are at least two functions of this method, namely delivering learning content to the learner and providing work information or materials needed by students to deliver for work (such as practice tests). At least, there are five ways to classify media to prescribe delivery methods. Not only in teaching but also happy in developing themselves, so that several teachers have been certified thanks to the development of a culture of quality education. In terms of achievement, the results are very impressive. Students of SMP IT Mutiara not only excel in academics but also various non-academic competitions. They have high self-confidence, creativity, and a spirit of achievement. This proves that the culture of quality that is developed has a positive impact.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the research that has been conducted, it is concluded that the principal of SMP IT Mutiara plays a major role in forming a quality education culture with strategies that support the development of teacher professionalism and all school residents. The strategy is to provide socialization to teachers from senior to junior to be able to adapt to the learning model to the technology era. In addition, the principal also facilitates teachers to be able to learn

and get training to improve the quality of education teaching in schools. The role of the principal in helping teachers to improve their performance will have a positive impact on the school. This is also what is expected to be a consideration for other schools so that they can be used as a reference in overcoming the same problems as the research. Therefore, the role of the principal is very helpful in the development of quality in school institutions. The researcher hopes that this research can be a benchmark for future researchers and can provide contributions in the form of newer research findings.

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