

The Role of the Madrasah Principal in Improving the Quality of Graduates at NU Banat Madrasah Aliyah, Kudus Regency

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Abstract

This study examines the role of the madrasah principal in enhancing the quality of graduates at NU Banat Madrasah Aliyah, Kudus Regency. The research is motivated by the urgent need to improve graduate outcomes as part of a complex and continuous educational process. Specifically, the study aims to describe the principal's role as a leader, manager, and innovator in strengthening graduate quality. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using the stages of data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal three main roles of the principal. First, as a leader, the principal demonstrates discipline, active supervision of teachers and students, and continuous professional guidance through training and two-way communication. Second, as a manager, the principal designs comprehensive program planning, assigns tasks according to teacher competence, and manages administration, student affairs, infrastructure, and finances professionally, including the implementation of the ISO 9001:2015 quality system. Third, as an innovator, the principal initiates contemporary learning programs such as Integrated Tahfidz, Muhadasah, Conversation Class, project-based learning, and digital learning. These roles synergistically foster graduates who excel academically, spiritually, in character, life skills, and technological competence. This study contributes to the discourse on educational leadership by highlighting the strategic role of madrasah principals in improving graduate quality within Islamic educational institutions.

Keywords



The Role of the Head of Madrasah, Leader, Manager, Innovator, Quality of Graduates

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership plays a pivotal role in directing organizational activities towards achieving common goals. Without effective leadership, the performance of an institution is likely to stagnate. In the context of Islamic education, the principal of a Madrasah Aliyah functions as the highest

leader who bears a great responsibility in ensuring institutional success. The effectiveness of a madrasah is largely determined by the leadership of its principal, who acts as a policymaker, motivator, and driving force for educational improvement.¹ In line with Islamic values, an ideal leader should embody the principles of *sidiq* (truthfulness), *amanah* (trustworthiness), *tabligh* (conveyance), and *fatonah* (wisdom).²

Entering the 21st century, educational institutions face increasingly complex challenges, particularly in preparing graduates who are able to compete in the era of globalization.³ This demands the development of qualified human resources who are not only academically competent but also morally grounded, creative, independent, and socially responsible. The Indonesian National Education System Law (Law No. 20 of 2003) underscores this by mandating that education must develop learners' potential so that they become faithful, knowledgeable, skilled, and responsible citizens.⁴ Accordingly, the role of madrasah principals is crucial in ensuring that graduates meet these national standards while also adapting to contemporary challenges.⁵

Graduate quality is a central issue in educational discourse because it directly reflects the effectiveness of an institution in producing capable human resources.⁶ As leaders of educational institutions, madrasah principals are expected to maximize students' potential through effective management, guidance, and innovative learning programs.⁷ In this regard, principals must not only supervise and manage but also introduce innovations that can enhance academic and non-academic achievements.⁸

This study was conducted at NU Banat Madrasah Aliyah in Kudus Regency, an institution recognized for its strong graduate outcomes and diverse achievements. The madrasah has consistently produced graduates who are accepted into leading state universities and has established itself as a research-based madrasah, a robotics madrasah, and a tahfiz madrasah. Its students actively participate in and achieve success in various academic and extracurricular fields,

¹ Mulyasa, *Manajemen dan Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah* (Jakarta: Bumi Aksara, 2017), hlm. 25.

² Abuddin Nata, *Manajemen Pendidikan: Mengatasi Kelemahan Pendidikan Islam di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Kencana, 2019), hlm. 112.

³ Philip Hallinger, "Leading Educational Change: Reflections on the Practice of Instructional and Transformational Leadership," *Cambridge Journal of Education* 33, no. 3 (2003): 329–352.

⁴ Undang-Undang Nomor 20 Tahun 2003 tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional.

⁵ Bush, Tony, *Theories of Educational Leadership and Management*, 5th ed. (London: Sage Publications, 2018), hlm. 43.

⁶ Suyanto & Asep Jihad, *Menjadi Guru Profesional: Strategi Meningkatkan Kualitas Guru di Era Global* (Jakarta: Erlangga, 2013), hlm. 56.

⁷ Wahjosumidjo, *Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah: Tinjauan Teoritik dan Permasalahannya* (Jakarta: PT Raja Grafindo Persada, 2011), hlm. 98.

⁸ Alma Buchari, *Manajemen Pendidikan* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2018), hlm. 144

such as the 3-Language Speech Contest (Arabic, English, Indonesian), Qur'anic recitation competitions (MTQ), martial arts, and traditional arts such as *hadrah* and *rebana*. These achievements are supported by the leadership of the madrasah principal, who has implemented flagship programs tailored to each grade level, such as *Muhadasah* (Arabic speaking skills), English conversation classes, project-based learning, and digital learning initiatives.⁹

Despite the central role of madrasah principals, few studies have comprehensively examined how their leadership, management, and innovative practices directly contribute to the quality of graduates in Islamic educational institutions.¹⁰ Therefore, this study aims to analyze the role of the madrasah principal as a leader, manager, and innovator in improving the quality of graduates at NU Banat Madrasah Aliyah, Kudus Regency.

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. A case study was chosen because it allows researchers to obtain descriptive data in the form of written and spoken words, as well as observable behavior, from individuals in a natural setting.¹¹ A case study also provides an intensive, detailed, and in-depth analysis of specific phenomena within a bounded system, which in this study is the leadership of the madrasah principal at NU Banat Madrasah Aliyah, Kudus Regency.¹²

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument. The researcher's role is central and complex, as he functions simultaneously as the planner, data collector, analyst, interpreter, and reporter of findings.¹³ Supporting instruments, such as interview guides, observation sheets, and documentation checklists, were also employed to facilitate the data collection process.

Data collection techniques included observation of school activities, in-depth interviews with the principal, teachers, and students, and documentation of institutional archives and program records.¹⁴ The data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification.¹⁵ To ensure data

⁹ Dokumentasi MA NU Banat Kudus, "Profil Madrasah," diakses Januari 2025.

¹⁰ Sahertian, Piet A., *Konsep Dasar & Teknik Supervisi Pendidikan* (Jakarta: Rineka Cipta, 2010), hlm. 67.

¹¹ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2018), hlm. 41

¹² Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*, 6th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2018), hlm. 18.

¹³ Lexy J. Moleong, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif* (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2019), hlm. 168.

¹⁴ Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif, Kuantitatif, dan R&D* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2017), hlm. 85.

¹⁵ Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2014), hlm. 33.

validity, triangulation was applied by cross-checking information from multiple sources and methods, as well as conducting member checks with participants.¹⁶

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Role of the Principal as a Leader

The findings indicate that the principal of MA NU Banat Kudus has demonstrated strong leadership in creating a disciplined and achievement-oriented school culture. He monitors teacher and student attendance, enforces discipline, and provides continuous professional development through internal and external training programs. This aligns with Ali Muhammad's view that strengthening human resources, particularly teachers, is central to improving graduate quality.¹⁷

Beyond classroom leadership, the principal also emphasizes student character and skills development. One notable program is *kulim* (five-minute lecture), conducted after midday prayers, where students practice public speaking while reinforcing religious values. This program not only cultivates students' communication skills but also strengthens their spiritual and moral foundation, consistent with Mulyasa's theory that principals as leaders must guide, supervise, and foster communication while developing teacher capacity.¹⁸

Another leadership initiative is the campus introduction program, designed to prepare students for higher education. By inviting university representatives and providing information on admissions pathways (SBMPTN, SNBT, independent admission), the program motivates students and raises their aspirations. Table 1 shows that more than 95% of graduates from the last three years continued their education to higher levels.

Table 1. Graduate Continuation Rates

Year	Graduates	Continued to Higher Education	Did Not Continue	% Continuing
2021/2022	335	318	17	95.2%
2022/2023	336	321	15	95.5%
2023/2024	344	336	8	96.0%

¹⁶ Norman K. Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln, *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2018), hlm. 127.

¹⁷ Ali Muhammad, *Manajemen Pendidikan Islam* (Jakarta: PT Raja Grafindo Persada, 2014), hlm. 87.

¹⁸ E. Mulyasa, *Menjadi Kepala Sekolah Profesional* (Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya, 2017), hlm. 45.

These results confirm that the principal's leadership positively impacts graduate quality, both academically and in terms of future readiness. This finding supports Mulyasa's assertion that principals must develop relevant programs aligned with student needs and global challenges.¹⁹

2. The Role of the Principal as a Manager

As a manager, the principal fulfills duties including planning, organizing, coordinating, supervising, and regulating educational processes. The principal formulates comprehensive work plans covering *tahfidz*, foreign language reinforcement, and digital learning through Google Classroom and the school's LMS. Financial resources are allocated strategically to prioritize flagship programs.

In staffing, the principal collaborates with coordinator teachers to oversee program implementation and conducts workshops to enhance teacher competence. This reflects Ali Muhammad's theory that improving the graduate process requires quality learning, effective leadership, and teacher empowerment.²⁰

Efforts to improve facilities-such as providing projectors in every classroom and enhancing accreditation status-demonstrate the principal's commitment to continuous improvement. Moreover, the implementation of the ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management System ensures that all school activities follow standardized procedures, increasing accountability and global competitiveness.

These managerial practices align with Basri's concept that effective principals must manage both instructional and non-instructional components to ensure high-quality and sustainable educational outcomes.²¹

3. The Role of the Principal as an Innovator

The principal also acts as an innovator by initiating programs that integrate religious, academic, and technological dimensions. Examples include the *One Day One Ayat* tahfidz program, *muhadatsah* (Arabic conversation), *Conversation Class* (English), and curriculum consolidation for Year 12. These programs reflect Ahmad Rahman's framework, where innovation includes developing new learning models, promoting technology, creating a conducive environment, fostering collaborative culture, and conducting continuous evaluation.²²

¹⁹ E. Mulyasa, *Manajemen Berbasis Sekolah* (Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya, 2016), hlm. 72.

²⁰ Ali Muhammad, *Pengembangan Sumber Daya Manusia dalam Pendidikan* (Jakarta: Kencana, 2015), hlm. 131.

²¹ Basri, *Manajemen Pendidikan dan Kepala Sekolah* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2018), hlm. 54.

²² Ahmad Rahman, *Inovasi Pendidikan Islam di Era Globalisasi* (Yogyakarta: Deepublish, 2020), hlm. 102.

Innovation in technology integration is evident through the use of Google Classroom, LMS, and ISO-based quality assurance. Learning innovations also extend to project-based learning, entrepreneurship education, and scientific writing, ensuring students gain practical life skills alongside academic knowledge. Teacher collaboration is fostered through pedagogical forums and internal training, reinforcing a culture of shared best practices.

These innovations are consistent with findings from previous studies that emphasize the importance of educational leaders as agents of change, particularly in preparing students for global challenges while maintaining local and religious values.²³

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, this study concludes that the role of the madrasa principal is central in improving the quality of graduates, particularly in shaping discipline, character, and religious values. The principal's leadership is manifested through discipline, firmness, and consistency in supervision, as well as the implementation of development programs such as five-minute lectures, monthly meetings, and two-way communication between the principal and teachers. These strategies strengthen the madrasa community and contribute to achieving the vision of producing graduates with integrity, religious commitment, and social responsibility.

The results of this study provide important implications for educational institutions, particularly madrasas, in strengthening leadership practices. Effective leadership from principals not only influences the professionalism of teachers but also directly impacts student character formation. This highlights the need for a leadership model that integrates managerial ability with religious and moral values. Furthermore, the findings emphasize that madrasas can serve as a model for educational institutions in balancing academic excellence and spiritual development.

Future studies are recommended to explore the role of other stakeholders, such as teachers, parents, and the wider community, in supporting the success of madrasa leadership. Practical recommendations for policymakers and education practitioners include the need for regular training and capacity building for madrasa principals to enhance their leadership skills. Additionally, collaboration between government and religious institutions is crucial to ensure that madrasa education continues to adapt to contemporary challenges while preserving its religious identity.

²³ Nur Hidayati & Siti Rohmah, "Educational Leadership as a Driver of Innovation in Islamic Schools," *Jurnal Kependidikan Islam*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2021): 115–130.

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