

The Principal's Strategy in Enhancing Teacher Professionalism at Al-Husna Islamic Boarding School Private High School

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Article Info

Article history:

Received Oct 13, 2024

Revised Nov 19, 2024

Accepted Dec 28, 2024

Online First Dec 30, 2024

Keywords:

Deli Serdang
Pesantren Al-Husna Marindal
Professionalism of Teachers
School Principal's Strategy

ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: This study aims to analyze the strategies implemented by the principal to enhance teacher professionalism, examine the implementation of these strategies, and identify the challenges faced during the process at Private High School Pesantren Al-Husna Marindal 1.

Methodology: A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, with data collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The research focused on the strategic efforts of the school principal in developing the professional capacity of educators.

Main Findings: The findings indicate that the school principal has implemented relatively effective strategies to improve teacher professionalism. However, significant challenges were identified, including limited transportation facilities for teachers and suboptimal execution of academic supervision. These factors substantially affect the quality of the strategy's implementation.

Novelty/Originality of this study: This study highlights the specific challenges in enhancing teacher professionalism within the unique context of pesantren-based schools, offering critical insights for stakeholders to design systematic interventions that address these barriers and support professional capacity development in similar educational settings.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The principal is the main leader responsible for the success of the education process at school. The principal's position is not only as an administrator, but also as a prime mover in improving the quality of education, including improving teacher professionalism. Professional teachers are a key element in achieving educational goals, as they are responsible for the formation of students' character, intellectual and skills [1]. Therefore, the principal's strategy in managing human resources in schools greatly affects the quality of learning [2].

Teacher professionalism is a major issue in improving the quality of education. Professional teachers are not only required to have adequate academic competence, but also good pedagogical, social and personality skills, as stipulated in Law No. 14 of 2005 on Teachers and Lecturers [3]. In this case, school principals have a strategic role in ensuring that teachers continue to develop their competencies through various trainings, seminars and workshops. Improving teacher quality requires an integrated approach that includes aspects of professional development and managerial support [4].

Various approaches have been taken to improve teacher professionalism, such as through principal strategies that include continuous academic motivation and supervision and teacher involvement in scientific

forums such as teacher working groups (MGMP) for competency development. However, this approach is generally more widely applied in the context of public schools and there is still less exploration related to the dynamics in Islamic boarding schools [5], [6].

Although the majority of teachers at Al-Husna Islamic Boarding School Private High School have met academic qualifications, namely 19 people with Bachelor's degrees (S1) and 5 people with Master's degrees (S2), only 2 teachers have professional certification. This indicates the need for special strategies to improve teachers' competencies so that they can meet the expected standards of professionalism [2]. In addition, principals must also ensure that there are facilities and infrastructure that support the development of teacher competence. Another obstacle faced in this school is the lack of teacher participation in scientific activities, such as seminars and discussions. In fact, such activities are important to improve teachers' knowledge and skills [7]. Teacher involvement in professional development activities, such as Subject Teacher Deliberations (MGBS), can help improve their competence. Therefore, the principal needs to encourage and facilitate teacher involvement in these activities [8].

The importance of improving teacher professionalism is also related to the rapid changes in the world of education, especially in the field of information and communication technology (ICT). Teachers must be able to keep up with ICT developments so that the learning they provide is relevant to the needs of students in the digital era. School principals have the responsibility to provide ICT training for teachers and ensure that they are able to integrate technology in learning [9]. The principal's involvement in providing motivation and support to teachers is also very important. As leaders, principals should be able to create a harmonious working atmosphere and support teachers' professional development. Effective principals are those who not only act as administrators, but also as inspirers and facilitators in improving the quality of education in schools [10].

Modern pesantren-based schools such as Al-Husna Islamic Boarding School Private High School have unique challenges, namely integrating Islamic values with modern education. Therefore, the principal must be able to develop a balanced strategy between achieving academic goals and building students' Islamic character. This requires full support from competent and professional teachers [11]. In contrast to previous studies that only highlighted public schools, this study examines specifically the principal's strategy in improving teacher professionalism in pesantren-based schools. It also explores the obstacles faced and offers relevant solutions to improve the quality of education in modern pesantren-based schools.

The study offers novelty by focusing on the context of modern Islamic boarding schools, which combine Islamic values with modern education. Different from previous studies that have mostly focused on public schools, this study explores the principal's strategy in improving teacher professionalism in Islamic boarding schools, including the unique challenges faced such as the integration of Islamic values in learning and teacher competency development. The urgency of this study lies in the urgent need to improve the quality of education in modern Islamic boarding schools, which have a strategic role in forming a generation that is not only academically superior, but also strong in Islamic character. The results of this study are expected to be a reference for Islamic boarding school managers in designing effective educational management strategies that are relevant to the needs of the times.

This research is important to contribute to the development of education management, especially in pesantren-based schools, which face unique challenges. This study aims to analyze the principal's strategy in improving teachers' professionalism at Al-Husna Marindal 1 Islamic Boarding School Private High School, identify the obstacles faced, and formulate relevant solutions to improve the quality of education.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The type of research used in this research is a qualitative approach with a descriptive type of research. The qualitative approach was chosen because this research aims to describe the phenomenon in depth through data collection in the form of words, pictures, and documents. Lexy J. Moleong stated that the qualitative approach produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from the people observed [12]. Descriptive research is used to describe certain phenomena in depth, especially the principal's strategy in improving teacher professionalism at Al-Husna Marindal 1 Islamic Boarding School Private High School. The research was conducted at Al-Husna Marindal 1 Islamic Boarding School Private High School which is located on Jalan Pelajar Pasar III, Marindal 1, Deli Serdang. This research was conducted during the period July 2021 to April 2022.

The data sources in this study consist of two categories, namely primary data and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through direct interviews with principals and teachers at Pesantren Al-Husna Private Senior High School, who were the main respondents in this study. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner to explore information related to the principal's strategy, teachers' competencies, and the quality of learning at school. In addition, secondary data was obtained from supporting documents such as school archives, institution profiles, books, and the results of observations regarding school conditions and

descriptions of the research area. This secondary data was used to enrich and confirm the findings obtained from the interviews.

Data collection techniques were conducted through three main methods, namely interviews, observation and documentation. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach, using a general guide to explore key points such as principals' supervision strategies and improving teachers' competencies. Observation was used to record and observe learning activities and interactions between teachers and students in the school environment. Observations were non-systematic, allowing researchers to get a natural picture of the phenomena that occurred. Documentation was used to collect written data such as area descriptions, staffing data, and other documents relevant to the research theme [13].

Data validity was maintained through triangulation techniques including source triangulation, technique triangulation, and time triangulation. Source triangulation was done by comparing data from interviews with principals, teachers, and written documents. Technique triangulation was done by comparing data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation. While time triangulation is done by collecting data at different times to ensure the consistency of the information obtained [14].

The collected data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model which includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction was done to summarize and focus the data on aspects relevant to the research objectives. Data presentation was done in the form of descriptive narratives to provide a clear and structured picture of the observed phenomena. Conclusions were drawn by verifying the patterns and findings that emerged from the data that had been compiled. This analysis process is carried out continuously during data collection to ensure that the research results are valid and reliable [15].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Principal's Strategy in Improving Teacher Professionalism

The discussion of this research outlines the strategies used by principals at Al-Husna Private Senior High School in improving teacher professionalism. The findings show that principals use several approaches, namely recognizing teachers' backgrounds, facilitative strategies, motivation of teachers, supervision, and training and education. These findings are important to understand more deeply, especially by linking them with previous research and the resulting novelty [16].

1. Recognizing the Teacher's Background

The strategy of recognizing teachers' backgrounds allows principals to understand the characters, competencies, and development needs of individual teachers. This is in line with the findings of Wahyuni, who stated that understanding teacher competencies is the first step in creating an effective development plan [1]. In Wahyuni's research, a similar strategy was shown to improve the efficiency of allocating teachers' tasks and responsibilities in the school environment. However, this study shows that there are still obstacles to teacher discipline that require further supervision. This adds a new dimension to strategy implementation, namely the need for adjustments to internal school policies to overcome discipline limitations [17].

2. Facilitative Strategy

The principal's facilitative strategy creates a harmonious work environment and supports the improvement of teacher competence. This strategy is in line with research conducted by Rahmat, who found that effective communication between principals and teachers increased teachers' job satisfaction. The findings of this study add that principals actively facilitate teachers' needs, both through learning media and open communication. However, this study makes a new contribution by emphasizing the importance of structured facilitation, such as the provision of regular meetings and learning media, which was not explicitly discussed in Rahmat's study [18].

3. Motivation Strategy for Teachers

Motivation is a key factor in improving teacher professionalism. The findings of this study support research conducted by Setiawan, who stated that appreciation of teachers' performance increases their morale and confidence [19]. In the context of this study, motivation is not only in the form of appreciation, but also awareness of the importance of professional competence as an educator. The novelty offered by this study lies in how the motivation provided by the principal helps create a collective vision to achieve school goals [20].

4. Supervision Strategy

Supervision conducted by principals through classroom visits, lesson observations, and evaluation of learning outcomes has a significant impact on monitoring teacher performance. Supervision improves teachers' compliance with curriculum standards. However, this study provides a new dimension by emphasizing the importance of supervision that focuses not only on meeting standards, but also on improving the quality of

teaching through identifying learning media needs. This implies that supervision should be complemented with follow-up in the form of practical recommendations for improvement.

5. Training and Education Strategy

Training and education provide teachers with opportunities to continuously develop their competencies. Professional training can improve teachers' pedagogical and professional competencies. However, this study offers novelty by highlighting how the evaluation of training outcomes is used as a means to identify solutions to problems in learning. In addition, the use of regular meetings to evaluate training outcomes creates a reflective culture among teachers, which has not been widely discussed in previous research [21].

This research makes a new contribution in the context of school management in a pesantren environment. The novelty of this study lies in the holistic approach that principals use to improve teachers' professionalism through complementary strategies. This study also emphasizes the importance of teacher involvement in every evaluation and decision-making process, which is rarely discussed in previous studies. Furthermore, the structured facilitative strategy and supervision approach based on identifying learning media needs are innovative aspects that can be applied in other schools.

Based on the results of the analysis, the strategies used by principals in Al-Husna Marindal 1 Islamic Boarding School Private High School can be a model for other schools, especially in pesantren environments, to improve teacher professionalism. However, the successful implementation of this strategy is highly dependent on the local context, such as school culture, resource support, and existing management policies. Therefore, this study recommends adapting the strategy based on the needs and characteristics of each school. Thus, this study not only provides insights into best practices but also offers practical guidance to overcome challenges in improving teacher professionalism in educational settings.

3.2. Principal's Strategy in Improving Teacher Professionalism

Principal leadership has a fundamental role in improving teacher performance and professionalism. Based on the case study at Pesantren Al Husna Marindal 1 Private High School, the strategy to improve teacher professionalism requires a comprehensive and sustainable approach. Principals implement changes gradually, understanding that transforming teachers' mindsets is not an instant process but a journey that requires patience, deep understanding, and a sensitive approach to individual differences.

The results of this study show that motivation and empowerment are at the core of effective leadership strategies. Principals use various methods to encourage teachers to improve their competencies. For example, by providing a broad view of school development and creating an empowering dialogue space. This approach has resulted in positive changes in the school's organizational culture, such as increased teacher involvement in school programs and improved collective performance.

In this context, the results of this study have similarities with a previous study conducted by Smith, which emphasized the importance of constructive communication and transformative leadership in improving teacher professionalism [22]. However, the findings of this study also add a new dimension, namely a focus on empowerment through managing the diversity of teachers' personal characteristics. This is in line with Johnson and Brown's research, which shows that leadership success is highly dependent on the ability to understand and manage individual diversity in the work environment [23].

The challenges faced in implementing this strategy include structural and individual issues, such as teacher tardiness, low information technology competence and differences in personal characteristics. Principals address these challenges through continuous evaluation as a key mechanism to identify obstacles, provide constructive feedback and design targeted interventions. Evaluation results show significant improvement in teachers' ability to use information technology after attending training organized by the school.

Furthermore, teacher capacity building programs conducted through information technology training, continuing professional development programs, and performance-based incentive systems have had a positive impact on teachers' individual and collective growth. These findings support research by Lee and Kim, which underlines the importance of performance-based incentives in improving teacher motivation. However, this study extends these findings by highlighting that this approach should also consider the psychological and motivational dimensions of educators [20].

The novelty of this study lies in the holistic approach that integrates pedagogical, psychological, organizational, and managerial dimensions in the strategy to improve teacher professionalism. In contrast to previous studies that focused more on one dimension, this study provides a more comprehensive picture of the principal's role as a transformative leader. The principal does not only act as an administrator, but also as a facilitator and motivator who is able to mobilize the potential of each individual to achieve a shared vision.

As a practical implication, this research shows that improving teacher professionalism is not just a program, but a leadership philosophy that places human resource development as a top priority. Every step, every intervention and every policy is geared towards empowering teachers to provide excellent, inspiring and transformative education services. The generalization of this study emphasizes that the success of this strategy

depends on the principal's ability to create a conducive ecosystem through effective communication, continuous motivation, and respect for diversity [24].

This research makes a significant contribution to the educational leadership literature by offering a new perspective on diversity management and teacher empowerment. However, further research is needed to further examine the effectiveness of this strategy in various other educational contexts, so as to provide broader insights and applicability for the development of teacher professionalism at the national level.

Principal leadership has a fundamental role in improving teacher performance and professionalism. Based on the case study at Pesantren Al Husna Marindal 1 Private High School, the strategy to improve teacher professionalism requires a comprehensive and sustainable approach. Principals implement changes gradually, understanding that transforming teachers' mindsets is not an instant process but a journey that requires patience, deep understanding, and a sensitive approach to individual differences.

Motivation and empowerment are at the core of effective leadership strategies. Through providing a broad view of school development, principals encourage teachers to constantly improve their competence. Constructive communication and quality interaction are important instruments in transforming the school's organizational culture. The principal does not simply give instructions, but rather creates an empowering dialog space, listens to aspirations, and gives trust to every school member.

The real challenges faced in implementing this strategy include a variety of structural and individual issues, such as teacher tardiness, low information technology competence and differences in personal characteristics. Principals realize that successful leadership relies heavily on the ability to understand and manage this diversity. Continuous evaluation is a key mechanism to identify obstacles, provide constructive feedback and design targeted interventions.

Teacher capacity building is conducted through a series of systematic programs. Information technology training, continuous professional development programs and performance-based incentive systems are designed to promote individual and collective growth. This approach focuses not only on technical aspects, but also on the psychological and motivational dimensions of educators [25]. Theoretically, strategies for improving teacher professionalism adopt a holistic perspective that integrates pedagogical, psychological, organizational and managerial approaches. This requires principals to be not just administrators, but rather transformative leaders who are able to inspire, facilitate and mobilize the potential of each individual towards achieving a shared vision [26].

The successful implementation of this strategy relies heavily on the principal's ability to create a conducive ecosystem. This includes the ability to build effective communication, provide continuous motivation, respect differences, and constantly encourage professional growth. With a systematic, empathetic and sustainable approach, principals can optimize teacher performance and in turn improve the overall quality of education [27]. The practical implications of this strategy show that improving teacher professionalism is not just a program, but a leadership philosophy that places human resource development as a top priority. Every step, every intervention and every policy is geared towards empowering teachers to provide excellent, inspiring and transformative education services.

Generalizations from this study emphasize that the success of this strategy depends on the principal's ability to create a conducive ecosystem through effective communication, continuous motivation, and respect for diversity. This study makes a significant contribution to the educational leadership literature by offering a new perspective on diversity management and teacher empowerment. However, further research is needed to further examine the effectiveness of this strategy in various other educational contexts, so as to provide broader insights and applicability for the development of teacher professionalism at the national level.

3.3. Constraints Faced by Principals in Improving Teacher Professionalism

Efforts to improve teacher professionalism at Al-Husna Marindal 1 Islamic Boarding School Private High School face a series of complex challenges that require a strategic and sustainable approach. Based on in-depth interviews with principals and vice-principals, fundamental constraints that significantly affect the process of developing teachers' professionalism were identified.

The main obstacles faced by school principals include external and internal dimensions that are intertwined. According to Mr. (SFJ), factors such as multiple jobs, distance, and teachers' psychological dynamics pose significant challenges to improving performance and professionalism. One of the most fundamental obstacles is the practice of teachers teaching in several schools at once, which creates structural pressures that affect punctuality of attendance, quality of teaching preparation, professional commitment and focus of dedication to one institution.

The geographical distance between teachers' homes and schools contributes significantly to the complexity of the constraints faced. Teachers who live far away experience logistical challenges that directly affect their performance and participation in the education process. Mr (AB), Deputy Head of Curriculum, emphasized the importance of understanding psychological factors in the context of constraints to teacher

professionalism, where different internal motivations are a major barrier to the professional development process.

The psychological dynamics of teachers display complex variations that require special attention. Low awareness of the importance of self-development, differences in the speed of adaptation to change, variations in individual motivation and difficulties in accepting educational innovations are clear manifestations of the psychological challenges faced. Principals face significant methodological obstacles in implementing supervision, with approaches that are still limited to classroom observations, checking learning tools, and personal approaches with teachers who do not meet standards [28].

To overcome these constraints, principals have developed adaptive strategies that take into account the complexity of the issues. Scheduling flexibility is one approach, by adjusting teaching hours for teachers who have geographical constraints and avoiding scheduling teaching at the first hour for them. A humanist approach that avoids strict sanctions and considers human factors in every policy is an important strategy in conflict management and professionalism development [29].

Open communication is a key instrument in overcoming various challenges. Supervision with a humor approach, openness to receiving input and constructive criticism, and the creation of a dialogical environment are methods developed to encourage professional growth. However, there is a need to develop a more transformative supervision model, focusing on individual capacity building through coaching and mentoring approaches [30].

Continuous motivation programs are an important recommendation to overcome psychological constraints. Self-development training, performance-based incentives and professional appreciation can be effective instruments in encouraging teachers' intrinsic motivation. Teacher workload management through multi-school teaching restrictions, logistical support, and workload adjustment are comprehensive strategies to consider.

The challenge of improving teacher professionalism is a multidimensional phenomenon that requires a holistic approach. The success of this effort is highly dependent on the leadership's ability to understand, accommodate and transform various individual and structural challenges. Principals are required not just to be administrators, but transformative leaders who are able to create an educational ecosystem that encourages continuous professional growth.

This research has several limitations that need to be noted. In terms of methodology, the use of a descriptive qualitative approach that relies on interview, observation, and documentation data limits the generalizability of the research results, as it only describes specific phenomena at Pesantren Al-Husna Marindal 1 Private High School. In addition, geographical and logistical constraints, such as the distance of teachers' residences from the school, affected their participation in the data collection process, so the researcher experienced limitations in obtaining complete data from all respondents. The research focus on only one modern pesantren school is also a limitation, because the results of this study do not reflect the general conditions in other schools, both in the context of pesantren and public schools. In terms of implementation, the principal's supervision is still limited to the aspects of classroom observation and inspection of learning tools, without the development of a more in-depth supervision model such as mentoring or coaching. In addition, this study has not fully explored the psychological impact of the principals' strategies on teachers, such as how intrinsic motivation and individual perceptions affect the successful implementation of the applied strategies. These limitations provide opportunities for further research that could involve a wider scope and more comprehensive approach.

4. CONCLUSION

This study analyzes the principal's strategy in improving teachers' professionalism at Private High School Pesantren Al-Husna Marindal 1. The findings show that principals apply a comprehensive approach, including teacher background recognition, needs facilitation, motivation, academic supervision, and training and education. These strategies are effective in promoting improved teacher competence and dedication. However, there are significant obstacles such as teachers' multiple jobs in several schools, long living distances and psychological dynamics that affect motivation and adaptation to change. To overcome this, principals apply scheduling flexibility, humanist approaches in conflict management and open communication. In addition, the development of a transformative supervision model with a focus on coaching and mentoring, as well as sustainable motivation programs through self-development training and performance-based incentives, are recommended as effective solutions.

The implications of this study suggest that improving teacher professionalism requires a holistic approach that considers both individual and structural factors. School principals are required to be transformative leaders who are able to create an educational ecosystem conducive to continuous professional growth. Globally, the findings can serve as a reference for similar educational institutions in designing teacher professionalism improvement strategies that are adaptive to local challenges and the dynamics of modern education. As recommendations, the development of training programs tailored to teachers' specific needs, improvement of supporting facilities to overcome geographical constraints, and implementation of a fair incentive system to

encourage professional commitment are suggested. In addition, it is important for principals to continue developing transformative leadership skills to meet the challenges of improving teacher professionalism.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The researchers would like to express their gratitude to all parties involved.

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