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Leadership Styles of Female Principals in the Context of Educational Management at MTs in Sukabumi Regency: A Multi-Case Study

Abstract

This study presents the findings of a qualitative investigation that explores the leadership styles of female principals at two madrasah tsanawiyah (MTs) in Sukabumi Regency. Using a multi-site case study approach, the research reveals that the dominant leadership practices are participative and transformational in nature. Female principals demonstrate strong abilities in fostering open communication, prioritizing collaboration, and providing motivation through empathetic and humanistic approaches. The findings also indicate that although the principals successfully cultivate supportive school environments, they continue to face challenges rooted in patriarchal culture and gender stereotypes that limit their authority and decision-making capacity. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and systematic document analysis. The results show that the leadership roles of female principals are significantly influenced by the local socio-cultural context, including societal perceptions of women in leadership. Nevertheless, their approaches effectively foster harmonious relationships, enhance teacher performance, and create inclusive learning environments. This study contributes empirical insights to the literature on gender-based educational leadership at the madrasah level, particularly within local contexts characterized by strong religious-cultural values. The findings provide a solid foundation for developing policies and training programs that support female leadership in education, and serve as a critical reference in promoting gender equality in school leadership practices.

Keywords: Leadership Styles, Female Principals, Educational Management

1. Introduction

Leadership in the field of education is a crucial element that determines the success of educational implementation in schools (Maulana et al., 2021). As leaders of educational institutions, school principals hold responsibilities not only in administrative management but also in creating a conducive learning climate and motivating all school members to achieve educational goals optimally. This is in line with the opinion of (Handayani et al., 2020), who state that the leadership style applied by principals significantly influences organizational culture, teacher performance, and student learning outcomes.

In recent decades, there has been a growing awareness of the importance of diversity in leadership, including the involvement of women in strategic positions such as school principals. As stated by (Wulandari et al., 2018), in Indonesia, although there has been an increase in the number of female school principals, their presence is still challenged by social and cultural barriers, particularly in areas where patriarchal values remain strong. This situation poses a specific obstacle for female principals in asserting their authority and exercising

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leadership effectively. Yet, the involvement of women in school leadership is highly relevant to the spirit of gender equality and the empowerment of women in the field of education.

Previous studies have shown that female principals tend to adopt participative and transformational leadership styles. (Manalu et al., 2025) revealed that female principals tend to employ collaborative, empathetic, and communicative approaches. Similarly, (Teknologi & Desain, 1805), authored by Muhammad Muzakki et al. (2024), stated that the leadership style of women is capable of inspiring teachers and creating a positive work environment, although it is still overshadowed by social stereotypes that undermine the position of female principals as leaders. These findings affirm that female leadership should not be seen as weak but rather possesses unique qualities in building relationships and influencing subordinates.

(Efendi et al., 2023) conducted a study on the leadership of female principals in the madrasah environment and found that the success of female principals is significantly influenced by their ability to build interpersonal relationships and create an inclusive school culture. However, challenges such as cultural resistance and a lack of trust from parts of the community remain major issues in the context of female leadership. In such situations, female principals must possess personal resilience and adaptive capabilities in facing organizational dynamics as well as social expectations attached to their roles (Patsun, 2020).

International studies such as Coleman (2003) and Blackmore (2006), as well as research by (Fitriani, 2015), affirm that female leaders in education face complex structural and cultural barriers. Female principals are often judged by double standards and are subjected to different social expectations compared to their male counterparts. Therefore, it is essential to explore in greater depth the leadership practices of female principals within specific local contexts. Such research provides a more realistic picture of how leadership strategies are developed by women in situations that require both caution and firmness.

This study possesses a distinctive character in terms of its location and research focus. Conducted in Sukabumi Regency, which is known for its religious and traditional socio-cultural characteristics, this research highlights the dynamics of female leadership in madrasah tsanawiyah Islamic-based educational institutions. This perspective adds a unique dimension to the leadership practices exercised by female principals. Supported by the findings of (Da Meisa & Anzari, 2021), madrasah, as institutions that not only provide academic instruction but also instill religious values, serve as a vital space for observing leadership rooted in values and spirituality.

The state of the art of this research lies in its focus on the actual practices of female leadership in madrasah settings, which remain underexplored in academic literature. While many previous studies have concentrated on public schools or modern educational institutions, this research broadens the discourse by highlighting religious-based educational institutions that often face distinct social dynamics. This makes the study relevant not only theoretically, but also practically, particularly in the context of developing inclusive educational policies.

This study also enriches the discourse on educational leadership by integrating gender perspectives, religious values, and local cultural contexts. The multi-site approach employed in this research allows for deeper comparisons and conclusions to be drawn regarding the leadership styles of women within the context of madrasah (Adolph, 2016).

Thus, this study not only contributes to the academic literature on female school leadership but also provides practical input in formulating policies that support the strengthening of women's roles in education, particularly in regions that are still deeply rooted in traditional values.

2. Method

This research employs a qualitative approach with a multi-site case study design. This approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the leadership practices of female principals within complex social and cultural contexts. The two research sites, MTs Sunanul Huda and MTs Azzainiyyah in Sukabumi Regency, were selected purposively based on the presence of active female principals who have held their positions for more than three years.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with principals, teachers, administrative staff, and the school committee to gather rich information about leadership experiences. Observations focused on the daily leadership activities within the school environment, including interactions between the principal and teachers. The documentation reviewed included school policy documents, work programs, and records of relevant activities.

Data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman model, which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The validity of the data was ensured through technique and source triangulation, as well as confirmation of findings with key informants (member checking). This method was used to ensure that the interpretations obtained truly reflect the actual experiences of the female principals at the research sites.

This methodology was chosen because it effectively captures the complexity of leadership phenomena within a strong local cultural context and provides space for a holistic understanding of the dynamics of female principals' roles in managing education in madrasah.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Result

The findings of this study highlight five key aspects that serve as thematic foci in this research: female leadership, school principals, madrasah, educational management, and patriarchal culture. Each aspect is discussed in two paragraphs to provide an in-depth understanding of the contributions of female leadership within the madrasah environment.

First, in the aspect of female leadership, the principals demonstrated a value-based leadership style that is both humanistic and ethical. The female principals emphasized principles of empathy, openness, and collaboration in building relationships with teachers, students, and parents. This aligns with the findings of (Purwanto et al., 2020), who stated that female leadership tends to adopt relational and transformative approaches, which positively impact a harmonious and productive work climate.

In addition, female leadership is also reflected in the principals' ability to unite a collective vision and build loyalty. The female principals lead by example rather than through command. This approach strengthens interpersonal relationships and enhances teachers' work enthusiasm. According to (Irawanty & Mulyanto, 2024), this type of leadership style is capable of improving the effectiveness of educational organizations through a relationship-focused approach and intrinsic motivation.

Second, in their capacity as school principals, female leaders demonstrated strong managerial capabilities. The female principals were actively involved in developing work plans, setting program priorities, and managing resources efficiently. These activities show that the principals are not merely symbolic figures but play an essential role in strategic decision-making within the school. The study by (Andriani, 2019) supports this finding by showing that female principals possess high competence in managing educational institutions.

The role of school principals is also evident in the enhancement of academic quality and discipline. The principals conducted supervision, guided teachers, and directed curriculum implementation in accordance with national standards. Despite facing various limitations, female principals have been able to consistently maintain school performance. This is in line with the study by (Munfarida & Munir, 2025), which states that female school leadership has a positive influence on improving the quality of learning and the performance of teaching staff.

Third, from the perspective of madrasah, the principals integrated Islamic values into their leadership practices. Values such as trustworthiness (*amanah*), justice (*adil*), and deliberation (*musyawarah*) served as the foundation for carrying out their duties. This created a religious work environment that supported students' character development. According to (Beno et al., 2022), madrasahs led by women tend to place greater emphasis on the spiritual dimension in educational management.

The principals also served as role models in religious practices and social behavior. The female principals were actively involved in religious activities, and their roles extended beyond administrative functions to include moral and cultural leadership. This affirms that female leadership in madrasahs is not merely managerial but also symbolic and ideological. This finding is supported by (Fatin & Ikhwan, n.d.), who state that female leadership in madrasahs reinforces a moderate and inclusive Islamic identity.

Fourth, in terms of educational management, female principals implemented management processes systematically from planning and implementation to evaluation. The female principals involved teachers and school committees in the formulation of policies and work programs, fostering active participation that supports transparency. According to the study by (Abdullah, 2018), this participatory involvement enhances school accountability.

The management practices also included financial administration, professional development for teachers, and the improvement of learning facilities. Despite budget constraints, the female principals continued to demonstrate innovation and the courage to make decisions. This adaptive and contextual leadership reflects the effectiveness of school-based management. These findings are supported by (Abrori & Muali, 2020), who emphasize that the role of school principals is crucial in the efficient management of educational resources.

Fifth, in relation to patriarchal culture, female principals still face the perception that leadership should be held by men. Some teachers and members of the community have shown resistance to decisions or policies made by the female principals. However, by demonstrating integrity, decisiveness, and strong performance, the female principals have gradually been able to change these perceptions. This aligns with the study by (Arimah, 2019), which states that female leadership requires achievement-based legitimacy to overcome social bias.

In facing patriarchal culture, female principals employed strategies of cultural diplomacy, dialogical approaches, and the development of strong social networks. The female principals were not confrontational; instead, they chose a transformative path to change public perceptions. Although this process is not easy, over time it has shown success in generating acceptance and support. The study by (Karso, 2019) concludes that female principals can become agents of social change through value-based leadership and exemplary conduct.

By reflecting on the overall findings, it can be concluded that female principals in madrasahs not only carry out managerial functions effectively but also lead through approaches rooted in values, local culture, and spirituality. The leadership style practiced by these female principals has successfully addressed social challenges and contributed to enhancing the overall quality and sustainability of education.

3.2. Discussion

The results of this study confirm that the leadership style adopted by female principals in madrasahs is highly aligned with participative and transformational approaches. Female

principals practice a form of leadership that emphasizes human values, participation, and inspiration, in line with the theory of transformational leadership proposed by (Komsiyah, 2016). This style of leadership strengthens interpersonal relationships within the school environment and enhances the motivation of all school members.

These findings are also in line with the study by (Firdausi & S.Sos., M.Med.Kom., 2023), which revealed that female principals tend to prioritize empathetic communication and collective decision-making. Through this leadership style, female leaders not only manage the school but also act as agents of social change, fostering an inclusive educational environment that is responsive to the needs of the community.

In the context of madrasahs, female leadership demonstrates a synergy between religious values and managerial competence. Values such as trustworthiness (*amanah*) and justice (*keadilan*) are concretely implemented in school management. Female principals serve as role models in shaping an ethical and spiritual work culture, reinforcing the findings of (Nopianti, 2018), who stated that madrasahs led by women tend to emphasize religious values in their governance practices.

The contribution of female principals to educational management is highly significant. Female leaders have demonstrated innovation in the use of resources, teacher empowerment, and the strengthening of learning programs. These findings support the argument made by (Patsun, 2020) that female principals are capable of creating school management models that are participative, efficient, and quality-oriented.

The presence of female principals also has a positive impact in addressing the challenges of patriarchal culture. Female leaders have been able to counter negative stereotypes through exemplary behavior and tangible achievements. Support from teachers and the community has increased in line with their success in building a competent and value-driven leadership image. This supports the findings of (Dewi, 2019), who asserted that female leadership can gain legitimacy through performance and steadfast values.

Moreover, the dialogical and diplomatic approaches employed by female principals in addressing social bias demonstrate the effectiveness of non-confrontational strategies in achieving cultural transformation. Female leaders do not oppose cultural norms frontally; instead, they embed values of change through consistent and meaningful practices.

The implications of this study point to the need for strengthening the role of women in educational leadership through gender-responsive training and affirmative policies. Empowering female principals will accelerate the realization of a more equitable, inclusive, and high-quality education. Educational institutions must actively accommodate and support leadership that is collaborative and rooted in local values.

From a practical standpoint, the findings of this study can serve as a reference for other school principals in developing value-based leadership models. An approach that places moral and social values at the core of decision-making has proven effective in creating a conducive and competitive school environment.

Nevertheless, this study has methodological limitations. The research was conducted in only two madrasahs in Sukabumi, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other regions with different characteristics. In addition, the use of a purely qualitative approach relies heavily on the subjective narratives of the informants..

To strengthen the findings, future research is recommended to employ a mixed-method approach so that the relationship between leadership styles and school success indicators can be measured more objectively. In this way, the effectiveness of female leadership can be demonstrated not only through perceptions and descriptions but also through measurable quantitative data.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

4.1. Conclusion

Based on the research findings described above, it can be concluded that the leadership style of female principals in madrasah tsanawiyah in Sukabumi Regency leans toward participative, transformational, and value-based leadership. The female principals demonstrated their ability to build open communication, make collective decisions, and provide motivation through empathetic and religious approaches. This leadership not only strengthens institutional performance but also creates an inclusive, spiritual, and socially and culturally responsive educational environment.

Female leadership in the context of madrasahs has successfully addressed the challenges of patriarchal culture through role modeling, diplomatic strategies, and consistent performance. These findings illustrate that women are not only capable of leading administratively but also serve as social change agents who inspire and positively impact the quality of education.

4.2. Recommendations

The recommendations proposed include the importance of educational institutions and policymakers providing structural support for female leadership through gender-responsive training, best practice-sharing forums, and affirmative policies. Additionally, future research is advised to adopt a mixed-method approach so that the effectiveness of female leadership can be quantitatively measured and examined across various educational contexts.

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