

Leadership Transformation in Improving the Work Ethic And Professionalism Of Educators

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study is to analyze in depth how the leadership transformation applied by the principal at SMP Plus Darussalam Blokagung is able to improve the work ethic and professionalism of the teaching staff. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study to analyze the principal's leadership transformation in improving the work ethic and professionalism of teachers at SMP Plus Darussalam Blokagung. The research subjects included the principal, vice principal, teachers, and support staff. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies, then analyzed using thematic analysis. Source and method triangulation techniques and member checking were used to ensure the validity of the data, so that the research produced a complete and accurate picture of the impact of leadership on teacher professionalism. The results of this study show that the implementation of religious value-based leadership, participatory, and transparent evaluation system in SMP Plus Darussalam Blokagung significantly contributes to improving the professionalism of teaching staff. The principal as a role model in discipline, honesty, and responsibility creates a positive work atmosphere and strengthens teachers' work ethic. The application of participative leadership strengthens teachers' collaboration and sense of responsibility for the school's success, while the transparent evaluation system provides constructive feedback that encourages self-reflection and improved teaching quality. Overall, these leadership principles form a work culture that supports the development of professionalism in schools.

Keywords: Work Ethic, Professionalism, Educators

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INTRODUCTION

In the context of modern education, social facts show that school leadership dynamics are a key factor in shaping a productive and professional work culture (Steinsund & and Eid, 2024; Abrahamsen & and Helstad, 2025) . The challenges of globalization, technological advances, and the demands of the national curriculum encourage the need for transformation in the leadership style of school principals (Li et al., 2025; Tripathi et al., 2025; Wu et al., 2025) . Socially, teachers are not only required as teachers, but also as educators who are able to innovate, collaborate, and adapt to change (Fasting & and Breilid, 2024; Benerdal & and Westman, 2025; Prabowo & Ekanigsih, 2025) . However, the reality on the ground shows that there is still a gap between the expectations of educational institutions and the actual performance of educators.

The work ethic of some teachers is still stuck in administrative routines, lacking enthusiasm for self-development, and minimal in updating teaching methods (Sapkota et al., n.d.; Lindvall et al.,

2022; Samnøy et al., 2023) . This is not solely the fault of individuals, but also the impact of leadership patterns that have not fully inspired, motivated, and directed educators towards a superior work culture (Prabowo et al., 2025) . Therefore, leadership transformation from a bureaucratic style to a visionary, participatory, and inspiring leadership model is an urgent social need. This transformation has a direct impact on increasing the morale, moral responsibility and professional commitment of teachers as the main agents of educational change. Thus, the social reality in schools illustrates that the success of education lies not only in the curriculum, but also in the ability of leaders to form a healthy and professional work climate.

Given the importance of the role of leadership in directing the development of human resources in educational institutions. A study conducted by Santoso & Selwen, (2023) states that transformational leadership that emphasizes vision, motivation, and teacher empowerment is able to improve the morale and professional commitment of teachers in secondary schools. The research shows that principals who prioritize open communication, rewards, and moral examples tend to create a conducive work atmosphere and support the improvement of teacher quality. Another study by Wang et al., (2023) confirmed that leadership transformation has a significant effect on educators' professionalism, especially in the aspects of learning innovation and willingness to attend training. Meanwhile, research by Sezer & Uzun, (2023) reveals that teachers who feel emotionally and structurally supported by their leaders have higher levels of loyalty and work productivity.

In particular, research by Siswanto, (2022) highlights the role of school principals in building a collaborative work culture and high work ethic through a leadership approach based on spiritual values and local wisdom. This is relevant to the context of pesantren-based educational institutions, where religious and moral values are the main foundation. Thus, these previous studies reinforce that leadership transformation does not only have an impact on school governance, but also on the character building of educators in working professionally and with integrity. This research will expand the insights of previous studies by exploring the local context and how the implementation of transformational leadership in a pesantren environment is able to form educators who have a high work ethic and strong professionalism.

The novelty of this research lies in the focus of its study on the practice of leadership transformation in the context of pesantren-based educational institutions. Most previous studies tend to discuss transformational leadership in the context of public schools or modern formal institutions, while this research presents a new perspective by exploring how religious values, pesantren local culture, and spiritual-based leadership are able to shape the work ethic and professionalism of educators in a distinctive and holistic manner.

In addition, this study combines the transformative approach with strengthening the character of educators through moral habituation and exemplary behavior by school leaders. This nuance has

not been explored in depth in the previous literature. Thus, this study makes a scientific contribution in expanding the understanding of contextualized pesantren-based transformational leadership models, as well as offering a leadership approach that can be replicated by Islamic value-based schools to improve the quality of educator resources in a sustainable manner.

The urgency of this research looks at the dynamics of rapid change in the era of disruption, educational institutions are required to constantly adapt and transform, both in systems, organizational culture, and the quality of human resources. The principal as a strategic leader has a vital role in driving the wheels of change. One crucial aspect that needs serious attention is how the principal's leadership is able to shape the work ethic and improve the professionalism of educators. Without an adaptive and visionary leadership transformation, efforts to improve the quality of education will run slowly and even stagnate. Therefore, an in-depth study of the principal's leadership transformation pattern in building a productive and professional work culture in the school environment is needed. The main purpose of this study is to analyze in depth how the leadership transformation applied by the principal is able to improve the work ethic and professionalism of educators.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research was conducted at SMP Plus Darussalam Blokagung, an educational institution under the umbrella of a pesantren environment and has a strong vision in shaping the religious character and professionalism of educators. The selection of this location is based on the characteristics of the principal's leadership, which has an important role in the process of transforming work culture and strengthening the work ethic of teachers amidst the demands of educational change. The school environment that integrates Islamic values and spirituality is a relevant setting to explore in depth the dynamics of leadership transformation that takes place.

This research uses a qualitative approach with the type of case study. The choice of this approach aims to obtain a complete and in-depth understanding of how the leadership transformation process is applied by the principal in improving the work ethic and professionalism of teaching staff. Case studies are used because they provide room for exploration of the social and cultural dynamics that color the relationship between leaders and teachers in pesantren-based schools (Roosinda et al., 2021; Hasan et al., 2025) .

The informants in this study were purposively selected based on their roles as those directly involved in managerial and academic activities at the school. They consisted of the principal, deputy principal, permanent teachers and support staff. The following is a list of informants involved in the study:

Table 1; Research Informants

No.	Informant Code	Position
1	KI-1	Principal
2	KI-2	Vice Principal
3	KI-3	Permanent Teacher (Academic)
4	KI-4	Permanent Teacher (Bid. Student Affairs)
5	KI-5	Administrative Staff

Data collection was conducted through three main techniques that complement each other, namely observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies. Participatory observation was used to directly observe the principal's activities in managing interactions with teachers and to observe the working atmosphere and organizational culture of the school. In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants to explore their understanding, experiences and perceptions of the principal's leadership style and its impact on improving work ethic and professionalism. Meanwhile, documentation studies were used to review important documents such as the school's vision and mission, annual work programs, teacher performance evaluation results, and educator training and professional development documents that have been conducted (Sari et al., 2022; Nartin et al., 2024; Prabowo et al., 2024) .

The data obtained were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive analysis model, which consists of three main components: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. The data reduction process was carried out by simplifying, sorting, and focusing the data based on relevance to the research focus. Furthermore, the data was presented in the form of thematic narratives and matrices to facilitate the drawing of meanings and patterns. The final stage was conclusion drawing and verification, which was carried out continuously throughout the research process to ensure consistency and validity of the findings. To maintain data validity, researchers used source and method triangulation techniques, as well as member checking with informants to ensure that the resulting interpretations were in accordance with the reality they intended (Abdussamad & Sik, 2021; Mulyana et al., 2024) .

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Strengthening Work Culture Based on Religious Values

One of the key aspects of leadership transformation at SMP Plus Darussalam Blokagung is the strengthening of a religious value-based work culture that is integrated in every policy and decision made by the principal. Pesantren-based schools such as SMP Plus Darussalam have their own challenges in balancing academic aspects with strengthening spiritual values. The principal acts as a role model in applying religious values, which is not only limited to religious learning, but also in daily life at school. Exemplary discipline, honesty and responsibility become an integral part of the principal's leadership, which in turn shapes the work ethic of teachers. These values are not only

applied in the teaching context, but also in teachers' social and professional interactions, which focus on character building and integrity in the educational environment. Thus, the application of religious values becomes a strong foundation in building the professionalism of educators in the school.

To reveal more about the impact of strengthening the work culture based on religious values, an interview was conducted with one of the senior teachers at SMP Plus Darussalam Blokagung, namely Mrs. Siti Nurjanah, an Indonesian language teacher. The following is an excerpt of the relevant interview results:

The principal constantly emphasizes the importance of teaching with heart and upholding integrity. His exemplary discipline, responsibility and honesty in his work clearly inspire the teachers to do the same. His attitude and advice raised awareness among teachers that their job is not only to teach, but also to be role models for students.

From the interview, it can be seen that the principal plays an important role in instilling religious values that lead to the formation of a good work ethic. The example set by the principal creates an environment that prioritizes discipline and integrity, which encourages teachers to work more professionally and set a good example for students. As an integral part of the leadership transformation at SMP Plus Darussalam Blokagung, strengthening the religious value-based work culture plays a key role in creating an educational environment that is professional and full of integrity. The principal, as the main role model, integrates religious values in every aspect of school life. Values such as discipline, honesty and responsibility are not only taught in religious lessons but also applied in teachers' social and professional interactions. This creates a work atmosphere that supports the development of educators' professionalism. To better understand the effect of strengthening this religious value-based work culture, the following will explain some important indicators that show the impact of religious value-based leadership in schools. The following figure visualizes the key indicators that make up this work culture, which is then explained in more detail in the context of its implementation at SMP Plus Darussalam Blokagung.



Figure 1; Religious Value-Based Work Culture

The implementation of a religious value-based work culture at SMP Plus Darussalam Blokagung, which starts with the principal's exemplary discipline, honesty and responsibility, strengthens teachers' work ethic. This encourages them to be more professional and set an example for students. This integration of religious values creates a supportive environment for character building and integrity in teaching.

The interpretation of the findings reveals that the principal at SMP Plus Darussalam Blokagung plays a central role in shaping the religious value-based work culture. The example set by the principal, especially in terms of discipline, honesty and responsibility, not only influences teachers' work ethic but also shapes their character. This reflects the understanding that leadership based on religious values can influence the professionalism of educators in a more holistic way, beyond the technical aspects of teaching. The integration of religious values in daily life, both in interactions between teachers and between teachers and students, is a strong foundation for creating a positive and productive work atmosphere.

Theoretically, this finding is in line with the concept of *transformational leadership* initiated by Ardinata et al., (2022) , which emphasizes the importance of leaders as role models and inspiration for their followers. Transformational leadership encourages followers to achieve higher goals by setting an example and guiding them in the process of change. In this context, the principal is not only in charge of managing school operations, but also inspires teachers to apply deep moral values in their work. This emphasis on religious values in leadership also reinforces the views expressed by Akpa et al., (2021) regarding the importance of organizational culture built on shared values that are consistently applied in all organizational activities. Thus, strengthening the work culture based on religious values can improve the quality of professionalism of educators, which is reflected in changes in their attitude, discipline, and sense of responsibility for their work and the development of student character.

Participative Leadership Promotes Collaboration and Openness

One of the important findings in this study is the application of participative leadership by the principal at SMP Plus Darussalam Blokagung. Principals who apply this leadership style succeed in creating a more open, collaborative and democratic working atmosphere. By inviting teachers to be involved in the decision-making process, especially in planning and evaluation meetings, the principal provides space for teachers to contribute in determining the direction of school policies. This approach not only increases the sense of value among educators but also encourages them to feel more responsible for the success of the school. Collaboration between principals and teachers strengthens team bonds and creates a more positive work spirit where each teacher feels that they have an important role to play in achieving common goals. With greater involvement in decision-making, teachers also feel more confident in carrying out their duties and strive to improve the quality of their teaching.

To get a more in-depth picture of the implementation of participatory leadership at SMP Plus Darussalam, an interview was conducted with Mr. Ahmad Fauzi, one of the mathematics teachers at the school. The following is an excerpt of the relevant interview results:

We feel valued for being involved in planning meetings where the principal engages us in discussion and provides positive feedback. This makes us feel responsible for the school's progress and increases our motivation and morale through collaboration.

From the interviews, it appears that the participatory leadership implemented by the principal not only increases the sense of openness and collaboration but also has a positive impact on improving teachers' work ethic. Teachers feel valued and have greater responsibility for the success of the school, which in turn encourages them to work more professionally and commit to the school's educational goals.

Interpretation of the findings regarding the implementation of participatory leadership at SMP Plus Darussalam Blokagung shows that the principal who invites teachers to be involved in the decision-making process has succeeded in creating a more open and collaborative working atmosphere. By providing space for teachers to give their opinions and input in planning meetings, the principal not only strengthens the sense of being valued among educators, but also increases the sense of responsibility for the school's progress. This participatory leadership makes teachers feel that they have an active role in determining the direction of school policies, which in turn increases their commitment to the common goal. In addition, the positive feedback provided by the principal on teachers' contributions also plays a role in building higher motivation and morale.

Theoretically, this finding is in line with the concept of *participative leadership* proposed by Q. Wang et al., (2022) , which emphasizes the importance of involving team members in decision-making to increase their sense of ownership and responsibility for organizational outcomes. Participative leadership facilitates more effective two-way communication, which not only improves the quality of decisions, but also creates stronger team bonds and a more harmonious working atmosphere. In addition, these findings also reflect the principles in *transformational leadership* theory developed by Ardinata et al., (2022) , where leaders not only motivate followers to achieve common goals, but also empower them to be actively involved in the change process. By rewarding teachers' ideas and inputs, principals strengthen their involvement in achieving school goals, which in turn encourages the development of higher professionalism.

Implementation of Transparent and Accountable Evaluation System

A transparent and accountable evaluation system plays an important role in improving the professionalism of teaching staff at SMP Plus Darussalam Blokagung. The principal implements a performance evaluation system that is not only structured and systematic, but also involves teachers in every process. Evaluations are conducted regularly with the aim of providing constructive feedback, which encourages teachers to continuously develop and improve their teaching quality. In this system, teachers are given the opportunity to conduct self-evaluation, which not only increases self-awareness but also fosters a sense of responsibility towards achieving optimal results in the learning process. Principals not only provide assessments, but also open up space for teachers to reflect on their own performance and set higher development goals. This makes evaluation a means to motivate teachers to maintain and improve high teaching standards and ensure a better quality of education in the school. In addition, openness in the evaluation process provides a sense of fairness, where every teacher feels that the assessment is done objectively and accountably.

To further explore the implementation of the evaluation system at SMP Plus Darussalam Blokagung, an interview was conducted with Mr. Rahmat Hidayat, one of the science teachers. The following is an excerpt of the relevant interview results:

The principal's evaluation system helps us develop by providing constructive feedback every semester.

We are given opportunities for self-evaluation, which increases awareness of strengths and weaknesses.

The principal is supportive with constructive feedback, encouraging us to improve our teaching and take responsibility for our teaching.

From these interviews, it can be seen that the evaluation system implemented at SMP Plus Darussalam Blokagung serves not only as an assessment tool, but also as a means of continuous

learning for teachers. A transparent evaluation process that involves teachers in self-assessment raises awareness of the importance of professional development, which has a positive impact on improving the quality of teaching in the school.

The implementation of a transparent and accountable evaluation system at SMP Plus Darussalam Blokagung plays an important role in improving the quality of teaching. The following are the main aspects of the evaluation system implemented, which can be seen more clearly in the following table:

Table 2; Aspects and Description of Teacher Performance Evaluation System

No.	Aspects	Description
1	Structured and Systematic Evaluation System	Evaluations are conducted regularly with a clear and organized process.
2	Teacher Involvement in the Evaluation Process	Teachers are directly involved in every stage of evaluation, providing space for self-assessment.
3	Teacher Self Evaluation	Teachers are given the opportunity to assess their own performance, increasing self-awareness.
4	Constructive Feedback	The principal provides constructive and motivating feedback for improvement.
5	Openness and Objectivity of Evaluation	The evaluation process is conducted transparently, providing a sense of fairness and objectivity.

The implementation of a transparent and accountable evaluation system at SMP Plus Darussalam Blokagung creates an environment conducive to improving teaching quality. Involving teachers in the evaluation process, providing opportunities for self-evaluation and providing constructive feedback encourages teachers to continue to develop. With transparency and fairness in evaluation, the principal has succeeded in improving teacher professionalism and the quality of education in the school.

Interpretation of the findings regarding the implementation of a transparent and accountable evaluation system at SMP Plus Darussalam Blokagung reveals that the principal not only assesses teachers' performance but also involves them in the self-evaluation process. A regularly implemented evaluation system with constructive feedback encourages teachers to continuously develop and improve their teaching quality. The process also provides an opportunity for teachers to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses, which in turn increases self-awareness and responsibility for teaching quality. The implementation of transparent and fair evaluation provides teachers with a sense of confidence that the assessment is objective and accountable and motivates them to achieve higher standards of teaching.

Theoretically, this finding is consistent with the concept of *self-efficacy* proposed by Bourne et al., (2021) , where individuals who have the opportunity to conduct self-evaluations and get constructive feedback tend to feel more competent in performing their tasks. This strengthens their

belief in their ability to achieve goals and improve performance. In addition, this finding is also in line with the *360-degree feedback* theory known in human resource management, which emphasizes feedback from various sources, including superiors, peers, and self-evaluation, to provide a more comprehensive picture of one's performance. By involving teachers in the evaluation process, principals not only ensure transparency and fairness, but also create a culture of continuous learning, which in turn improves the professionalism of educators. In addition, research by Chang et al., (2024) also confirms the importance of engagement-based evaluation to improve teaching effectiveness and overall teacher performance.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study shows that the implementation of religious value-based leadership, participative leadership, and transparent and accountable evaluation system in SMP Plus Darussalam Blokagung significantly contributes to improving the professionalism of teaching staff. The principal acts as a role model who integrates religious values in every aspect of school life, which not only strengthens teachers' work ethic but also shapes their character. The example set by the principal in terms of discipline, honesty and responsibility creates a more positive working atmosphere, which encourages teachers to improve their teaching quality. By promoting deep moral values in leadership, principals create an environment that supports holistic professionalism, which includes not only technical aspects but also character and integrity in interactions.

In addition, the application of participatory leadership strengthens the sense of openness and collaboration between principals and teachers, which increases the sense of responsibility for the school's success. The involvement of teachers in decision-making, such as in curriculum and school program planning, makes them feel more valued and motivated to perform better. A transparent and accountable evaluation system also plays an important role in providing constructive feedback to teachers, allowing them to self-reflect and improve the quality of their teaching. Overall, the implementation of participatory and religious values-based leadership principles, as well as an evaluation system that involves teachers, has created a work culture that supports the improvement of educators' professionalism at SMP Plus Darussalam Blokagung.

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