

Leadership Style of Islamic School Principals and Its Impact on Organizational Communication Effectiveness: A Case Study in Indonesia

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Abstract

Leadership plays a pivotal role in the development and effectiveness of educational institutions. This study aims to explore the leadership style of a madrasah (Islamic senior high school) principal and its role in fostering effective communication within the institution. Conducted as a qualitative case study at MAN 1 Bone, Indonesia, data were collected through observations, interviews, and documentation. The findings reveal that the principal adopted a democratic leadership style characterized by inclusive decision-making, delegation of responsibilities, and regular supervision. This leadership approach significantly contributed to the development of a collaborative and communicative school environment. Effective communication, in turn, supported better coordination among teachers and staff, enhanced professional performance, and improved relationships with students' parents. The study underscores the importance of leadership style in building an open organizational climate and highlights communication as a critical tool in educational management.

Keywords: Leadership style, democratic leadership, effective communication

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INTRODUCTION

Education is universally recognized as a fundamental pillar of human development and societal advancement. It plays a critical role in shaping individuals' cognitive, emotional, and social capacities. According to UNESCO (2020), quality education fosters the necessary competencies to deal with global challenges, societal progress, and personal fulfillment. Educational institutions, both formal and non-formal, are therefore expected to be effectively managed, planned, and led to fulfill these transformative roles.

Leadership in educational settings is a critical determinant of school success. It is more than administration it involves influencing, guiding, and inspiring others toward shared goals (Bush, 2008). Effective school leadership has a significant influence on the organizational climate, instructional quality, and student learning outcomes (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). Among many factors, the leadership style adopted by school principals profoundly impacts school dynamics and the well-being of staff and students.

In Islamic educational institutions, leadership takes on a multidimensional role. Leaders are not only administrators but also moral and spiritual guides. Madrasahs, as Islamic schools, have a dual responsibility of academic excellence and moral education. As Kani (2019) explains, Islamic school leadership must balance educational policy with Islamic ethical principles to build a meaningful learning culture. Hence, examining leadership in madrasahs requires an understanding of both managerial competence and value-driven guidance.

One essential facet of effective leadership is communication. Communication enables the transmission of visions, goals, expectations, and feedback within an institution (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). It is also a mechanism to cultivate trust, cooperation, and shared understanding among stakeholders. In educational settings, effective communication is linked to enhanced staff collaboration, better decision-making, and greater institutional resilience (Hargie & Tourish, 2009).

Democratic leadership styles are frequently associated with more open and communicative school cultures. Principals who adopt democratic approaches promote teacher involvement, delegate responsibilities, and engage staff in participatory decision-making (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). Such leadership not only increases teacher motivation

but also improves institutional performance and innovation (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2013).

In the Indonesian context, madrasahs play a significant role in the national education system. They are recognized for integrating religious and general education, yet they also face challenges in modernization and management (Furqan, 2017). Therefore, leadership becomes pivotal in determining whether these institutions can adapt and flourish amidst changing educational demands.

Despite the importance of leadership and communication, few empirical studies have focused specifically on Islamic senior high schools in Indonesia. Most research on educational leadership is centered on public or secular schools, with limited attention to the cultural and religious dimensions of leadership in Islamic institutions (Rahman, 2015). This research addresses that gap by analyzing the leadership and communication practices of the principal at MAN 1 Bone.

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to explore how leadership style influences communication practices in a madrasah context. As Yin (2018) argues, qualitative case studies are well suited to investigate complex social phenomena in their real-life settings. Through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis, this research seeks to understand leadership strategies and communication dynamics at the institutional level.

Ultimately, the goal of this research is to demonstrate how democratic leadership fosters effective communication and promotes institutional growth. The findings may offer practical insights for Islamic school leaders, policymakers, and scholars interested in enhancing educational quality through leadership and communication strategies (Northouse, 2021).

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the leadership style of the principal at MAN 1 Bone and its influence on communication effectiveness within the school. The qualitative approach was chosen to allow a deep and contextual understanding of the behaviors, perceptions, and strategies utilized by the school

leader. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is appropriate for examining complex social phenomena, such as leadership and communication, within their natural settings.

Data were collected using three main techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to gain insight into the day-to-day practices and interactions within the school environment. Semi-structured interviews were held with the school principal, teachers, and administrative staff to gather personal narratives and in-depth perspectives on leadership and communication practices. Additionally, relevant documents such as school planning materials, organizational charts, and communication records were analyzed to triangulate the findings and ensure the validity of the data (Moleong, 2011).

The data analysis process followed the Miles and Huberman model, which involves data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the reduction phase, data were categorized and simplified to identify key themes. These themes were then organized and visualized during the data display phase, facilitating the interpretation of relationships and patterns. Finally, conclusions were drawn and verified through cross-checking and re-engagement with the participants. This systematic approach enabled the researcher to generate a reliable and nuanced understanding of how democratic leadership contributes to effective communication in an Islamic school context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The findings of this study reveal that the principal of MAN 1 Bone exercises a democratic leadership style, which plays a crucial role in shaping a collaborative and communicative school environment. This leadership approach emphasizes inclusivity, shared decision-making, and open communication between the principal, teachers, staff, and even parents. The principal's leadership style has established a school climate that supports dialogue, trust, and active participation.

The principal consistently performs key managerial functions such as planning, organizing, supervising, and evaluating school activities. During interviews, the principal

expressed a strong commitment to managing the school holistically by empowering all stakeholders, from teachers to administrative staff. The principal also emphasized the importance of building positive relationships with students' parents, recognizing their diverse backgrounds and roles in the educational process.

A major indicator of democratic leadership at MAN 1 Bone is the delegation of authority and encouragement of teacher participation in decision-making. Teachers are involved in planning instructional activities, developing school programs, and solving school-related problems. This participatory approach motivates teachers and enhances their sense of ownership and responsibility toward the school's success.

Another key aspect of leadership at MAN 1 Bone is supervision. The principal regularly monitors teaching and staff performance through classroom visits and personal interactions. Constructive feedback is provided during these observations to support professional development. This supervision is not seen as a form of control but as a collaborative process aimed at improving educational quality and teacher competence.

Communication at MAN 1 Bone is multidirectional and dynamic. The principal maintains open lines of communication with all departments through regular meetings, internal messaging groups, and informal discussions. A clear structure is in place to ensure that messages and decisions flow efficiently across different levels of the organization. This approach fosters clarity, minimizes misunderstandings, and promotes a unified direction for the school.

The principal also implements structural communication channels, such as WhatsApp groups for teachers, administrative heads, and school committees. These platforms facilitate fast and direct communication, allowing problems to be addressed promptly and tasks to be coordinated effectively. Teachers reported that they felt more informed and involved in school affairs due to these communication mechanisms.

Teachers and staff described the principal's communication style as respectful, clear, and motivating. They emphasized that the principal encourages them to express their opinions and ideas, and creates a non-threatening environment for dialogue. This mutual openness supports problem-solving and contributes to a more positive and productive work environment.

Furthermore, the leadership approach adopted by the principal appears to influence student outcomes indirectly. Teachers reported improved collaboration, morale, and engagement as a result of the school's leadership and communication practices. They also observed improvements in student behavior and academic performance, which they attributed to the well-structured and communicative environment supported by the school leader.

In conclusion, the findings suggest that the democratic leadership style applied by the principal at MAN 1 Bone significantly contributes to effective internal communication. This, in turn, enhances coordination, staff morale, and institutional performance. The study highlights the importance of leadership behaviors that foster trust, collaboration, and participation in achieving sustainable improvements in educational institutions.

Discussion

The findings of this study affirm the significant role of democratic leadership in fostering effective communication within educational institutions, particularly in the context of Islamic schools like MAN 1 Bone. The principal's ability to engage stakeholders in shared decision-making, establish open communication channels, and encourage teacher empowerment reflects key traits of transformational and democratic leadership. These leadership styles are widely recognized in the literature as essential for building a collaborative school culture (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Bush & Glover, 2014).

Democratic leadership supports not only staff morale but also promotes an environment of mutual respect and trust. This aligns with Northouse (2021), who posits that democratic leaders seek input from followers, value their contributions, and create a sense of ownership and commitment to organizational goals. At MAN 1 Bone, this was evidenced by how teachers and staff described their involvement in planning, communication, and problem-solving processes. Such inclusive practices are especially crucial in educational contexts, where collaboration is necessary to respond to the diverse needs of students and communities.

Effective communication, as demonstrated in this study, is both a tool and a product of good leadership. Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) highlight that leaders who communicate clearly and consistently influence not only staff engagement but also student achievement. The findings from MAN 1 Bone support this notion, as teachers reported improvements in both professional performance and student behavior following the principal's structured and respectful communication practices.

The integration of formal and informal communication channels, including digital messaging platforms, underscores the principal's adaptive approach to leadership. As suggested by Hargie and Tourish (2009), modern educational leaders must utilize diverse communication methods to ensure timely information flow, especially in complex institutional settings. The use of WhatsApp groups at MAN 1 Bone exemplifies how technology can enhance communication effectiveness when aligned with inclusive leadership practices.

Moreover, this study contributes to the growing body of research on school leadership within Islamic educational contexts. While most global literature on school leadership is based on secular or Western settings, this study illustrates how Islamic values and democratic leadership can coexist to improve institutional outcomes. As Kani (2019) notes, ethical leadership grounded in Islamic principles emphasizes consultation (shura), justice, and servant leadership—traits evident in the leadership practices of the principal in this study.

The results also resonate with Hallinger and Heck's (2010) model, which argues that leadership indirectly affects student learning by shaping the school climate and professional capacity of teachers. At MAN 1 Bone, the principal's leadership did not directly intervene in classrooms but facilitated a supportive environment where teachers could thrive. This confirms the indirect but critical influence of leadership on school effectiveness.

In terms of practical implications, the study reinforces the need for leadership development programs that emphasize democratic values, communication skills, and cultural sensitivity, particularly in faith-based schools. According to Bush (2008), leadership preparation should not only focus on managerial competencies but also on building

interpersonal and ethical capabilities. MAN 1 Bone serves as a model where democratic and Islamic leadership principles are applied successfully.

Finally, while this study offers valuable insights, it is limited by its single-case focus. Future research could expand this inquiry by including multiple madrasahs across diverse regions in Indonesia, allowing for comparative analysis. Yin (2018) suggests that multi-site case studies can enhance generalizability and provide richer understandings of complex social phenomena.

In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of democratic leadership in shaping effective communication within Islamic schools. By fostering participation, respect, and collaboration, such leadership not only strengthens internal processes but also enhances the overall quality of education.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the leadership style of a madrasah principal and its impact on communication effectiveness at MAN 1 Bone, Indonesia. The findings indicate that the principal adopts a democratic leadership approach characterized by inclusive decision-making, delegation of authority, and continuous supervision. This leadership style has been instrumental in building a collaborative and communicative environment, enhancing professional relationships, and supporting institutional performance.

Effective communication was identified as both a tool and an outcome of this leadership model. The principal's emphasis on mutual respect, openness, and timely information sharing enabled the school to function with greater coordination and coherence. The use of formal structures and digital communication platforms facilitated ongoing dialogue among stakeholders and helped resolve issues efficiently. These practices fostered trust, improved staff morale, and contributed to the professional growth of teachers.

In conclusion, democratic leadership combined with effective communication strategies has a transformative effect on school climate and organizational effectiveness. The case of MAN 1 Bone demonstrates that leadership rooted in participation, shared responsibility, and Islamic ethical values can significantly enhance the quality of educational management. This study recommends that school leaders, particularly in Islamic educational

settings, prioritize communication and inclusive leadership as foundational strategies for sustainable development.

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