

Transformation of Principals' Leadership in Improving Teacher Professionalism and Classroom Management Effectiveness

Sulastri, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Bone, Indonesia*

Sahari, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Bone, Indonesia

Andi Ayu Sulastri, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Bone, Indonesia

Kasma, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Bone, Indonesia

Abstract

This study aims to describe and analyze the role of principal leadership in improving teacher professionalism on the effectiveness of classroom management at MI Amir Fil Jannah Tippulue. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data was obtained through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation of principals and classroom teachers. The results of the study show that school principals have carried out their strategic role as leaders through structured supervision, providing direction, and facilitating teacher competency improvement. The professionalism of teachers is reflected in the preparation of lesson plans, mastery of materials, and the use of varied learning methods. However, challenges are still found in terms of students' limited literacy skills, low motivation to learn, and support for a learning environment that is not optimal. Overall, the principal's leadership has proven to have a significant contribution in building teacher professionalism and more effective classroom management, although ongoing interventions are needed to address external constraints that affect student learning outcomes.

Keywords: Principal's leadership, teacher professionalism, classroom management

* Corresponding Author:

Sulastri,

Institut Agama Islam Negeri Bone

Jln. Hos. Cokro Aminoto Kecamatan Tanete Riattang Barat, Kabupaten Bone, Sulawesi Selatan

Email: sulastrilastri@gmail.com

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INTRODUCTION

Education is universally recognized as a fundamental pillar in developing human resources who are competent, resilient, and competitive in the global era. Among the multiple variables that influence educational outcomes, the role of school leadership particularly that of the principal is increasingly acknowledged as central to institutional quality and instructional effectiveness. Principals are no longer viewed merely as administrators, but as instructional leaders who shape the academic climate and culture of learning within schools (Hallinger, 2011). Their leadership has a significant and direct impact on teacher development, pedagogical quality, and ultimately, student achievement (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2020).

In the framework of school improvement, teacher professionalism is a crucial determinant of the quality of teaching and learning. A professional teacher demonstrates mastery in instructional planning, classroom management, curriculum adaptation, and formative assessment. However, professional competence among teachers is not naturally acquired—it must be continuously cultivated through structured professional development, mentoring, and instructional supervision (Guskey, 2002). This underscores the need for leadership practices that are developmental in nature and aim to foster teacher growth.

One key element of teacher professionalism is classroom management. Effective classroom management is not limited to maintaining discipline; it involves organizing learning activities, engaging students in active learning, and creating a psychologically safe and inclusive environment (Marzano & Marzano, 2003). When properly supported, teachers who can manage their classrooms effectively are more likely to implement differentiated instruction and achieve learning outcomes aligned with curriculum goals.

School principals play a decisive role in strengthening classroom management capacity through academic supervision. Instructional leadership that includes regular and constructive classroom observations, feedback mechanisms, and targeted coaching has been shown to positively influence teaching practices and student behavior (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2014). Yet, many school systems particularly in under-resourced contexts such as rural or faith-based schools continue to face limitations in both the enactment of such leadership and the infrastructure to support professional learning.

In Islamic primary schools (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah), these challenges are often compounded by constraints in teacher qualifications, lack of access to digital teaching resources, and socio-economic disparities that affect student readiness to learn. Studies have noted that many principals remain focused on administrative tasks rather than adopting transformational or instructional leadership roles (Alfian, 2022). Consequently, efforts to improve teacher effectiveness and student outcomes are hampered by systemic inertia and weak pedagogical support structures.

Furthermore, research has identified that teachers often struggle with managing heterogeneous classrooms, especially where students come from linguistically or economically marginalized backgrounds. Limited parental involvement and low student motivation also contribute to classroom management issues, reducing instructional time and weakening the learning process (Iskandar & Yusnita, 2021). These external constraints require systemic responses, in which school leadership must act as a catalyst for change and capacity-building.

Given these conditions, there is a compelling need to examine how principal leadership contributes to teacher professionalism and effective classroom management within the specific context of Islamic primary education. Such a study can provide insight into contextually appropriate leadership models and supervision strategies that can be adapted in similar underrepresented or faith-based educational settings.

This research therefore seeks to address the following questions: How do school principals contribute to the enhancement of teacher professionalism? What is the relationship between teacher professionalism and classroom management effectiveness? And what are the enabling and inhibiting factors that mediate this process? The study aims to contribute to the discourse on leadership for learning by offering evidence from a context that remains under-explored in mainstream educational research.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design aimed at exploring how school leadership practices contribute to enhancing teacher professionalism and classroom management. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate for this study as it allows for a deeper understanding of social phenomena in their natural settings and provides rich, contextualized insights from the perspectives of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The research was conducted at MI Amir Fil Jannah Tippulue, a Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (Islamic primary school) located in Bone Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. This site was selected based on purposive sampling due to its unique institutional structure and leadership dynamics, which are representative of many Islamic-based elementary schools in rural Indonesian contexts.

The participants in this study consisted of the school principal and three classroom teachers who were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in instructional planning, classroom teaching, and interaction with school leadership. The inclusion of these informants was intended to enable triangulation of perspectives and ensure the credibility of data through cross-validation (Patton, 2002).

Data collection was carried out using three primary techniques: in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with both the principal and teachers to gather insights into leadership practices, supervisory mechanisms, and teaching experiences. Observation was employed to examine real-time classroom interactions and principal-teacher engagement, while school documents such as lesson plans (RPP), supervision records, and attendance logs were analyzed to complement verbal data.

The interviews were conducted in the local language (Bahasa Indonesia) and later translated into English for analysis. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' consent. Observation notes and field memos were also compiled to contextualize the findings.

Data were analyzed thematically using an inductive coding process. The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: familiarization with data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming

themes, and producing the report. To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed triangulation of data sources, member checking with participants, and peer debriefing with academic supervisors.

Ethical considerations were strictly adhered to throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their rights to anonymity and withdrawal, and signed informed consent forms prior to data collection. The study received ethical clearance from the academic committee of the Faculty of Education at the State Islamic Institute (IAIN) of Bone.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The findings of this study highlight the interrelated roles of principal leadership, teacher professionalism, and classroom management in shaping the quality of education at MI Amir Fil Jannah Tippulue. These themes emerged consistently across interview data, classroom observations, and document analysis. Each dimension is discussed in depth below.

First, the principal demonstrated active instructional leadership through the planning and implementation of structured academic supervision. Regular schedules were arranged for classroom observations, followed by post-observation feedback and mentoring. According to the principal, supervision was intended not merely for evaluation but also to develop the pedagogical competence of teachers and foster a culture of continuous improvement.

Teachers confirmed the positive impact of the principal's leadership, noting that clear guidance and frequent feedback contributed to their professional growth. Several teachers indicated that knowing when they would be supervised and receiving constructive input helped them remain disciplined in preparing lesson plans, selecting appropriate teaching methods, and managing classrooms effectively. The principal's presence in daily instructional matters appeared to promote both accountability and motivation among teaching staff.

Second, in terms of teacher professionalism, the findings indicate that all participating teachers demonstrated a baseline level of professional competence. They regularly prepared instructional tools such as lesson plans (RPP) and syllabi, employed varied teaching strategies, and actively engaged in professional development through local teacher working groups (Kelompok Kerja Guru, or KKG). This reflects a commitment to lifelong learning and continuous pedagogical refinement.

Despite this, teachers still encountered significant external challenges that affected instructional outcomes. A major concern was students' limited proficiency in the Indonesian language, which served as the medium of instruction. Additionally, many students exhibited low levels of Qur'anic literacy, which further impeded their ability to understand religious content. These factors, rooted in socio-cultural environments, hindered the effectiveness of even the most well-prepared teaching practices.

Third, classroom management was generally observed to be efficient and consistent. Teachers arrived on time, followed lesson schedules, and used varied techniques to maintain student engagement. Observations confirmed that teachers attempted to align their classroom strategies with students' emotional and academic needs. Nonetheless, disparities in student participation remained noticeable, with some students demonstrating minimal involvement during lessons.

Student motivation emerged as a critical barrier to effective classroom dynamics. Many learners came from households with limited educational support, and some parents were not involved in their children's academic progress. This lack of family engagement weakened students' learning habits and overall classroom responsiveness. The principal acknowledged these systemic issues and emphasized the need for broader community involvement in education.

Taken together, the interplay between principal leadership, teacher professionalism, and classroom practices forms a foundational system that supports instructional delivery. However, the efficacy of this system is largely dependent on the extent to which external factors particularly those related to socio-economic and cultural constraints can be addressed collaboratively.

These findings suggest that sustainable school improvement requires more than individual leadership or isolated teacher efforts. Instructional effectiveness must be situated within a holistic strategy that includes stakeholder engagement, parental involvement, and systemic support. The principal's leadership, while crucial, must be complemented by a school culture that values cooperation across all levels of the educational ecosystem.

In conclusion, this study affirms the pivotal role of instructional leadership in enhancing teacher quality and classroom practice. The principal's consistent supervision and motivational strategies contributed to a more professional teaching environment. Nonetheless, overcoming classroom learning gaps will require interventions that extend beyond the classroom, involving families and community networks as active partners in the educational process.

Discussion

The findings of this study reinforce the critical role of principal leadership in shaping the professional behavior of teachers and influencing classroom management practices. These results align with previous research that emphasizes the significance of instructional leadership in improving teaching quality and student learning outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2020). The structured supervision practices observed at MI Amir Fil Jannah Tippulue indicate that the principal fulfilled her role not only as an administrator but also as a pedagogical mentor. This is consistent with Hallinger's (2011) model of instructional leadership, which advocates for active engagement in teacher supervision and curriculum monitoring.

Teacher professionalism, as demonstrated through the preparation of lesson plans, implementation of varied teaching strategies, and participation in professional development programs, reflects a commitment to continuous learning. However, professionalism in teaching cannot be isolated from its sociocultural context. As Guskey (2002) notes, meaningful teacher change occurs when new practices lead to observable improvements in student outcomes. In this study, despite well-prepared instruction, learning challenges persisted due to students' limited language and literacy skills.

This finding resonates with research by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), which shows that professional development must be responsive to contextual realities and aligned with student needs. Teachers in this study faced a gap between planning and classroom performance, not due to lack of skill, but because of external factors such as low student motivation, linguistic barriers, and minimal parental support. These findings suggest that instructional success requires a systemic response involving family and community engagement.

Effective classroom management was another core theme in the study. Teachers consistently maintained order, adhered to schedules, and adapted methods to sustain student interest. This supports Marzano and Marzano's (2003) assertion that effective classroom management is a cornerstone of high-quality teaching. However, the reality of uneven student engagement indicates that technical management strategies alone are insufficient. Emotional and motivational aspects of student behavior must also be addressed, particularly in contexts where socioeconomic disadvantage limits learning readiness.

The role of parental involvement or the lack thereof emerged as a critical factor influencing classroom dynamics. Previous studies have shown that family engagement significantly contributes to student success, especially in primary education (Epstein, 2011). Yet, in the context of MI Amir Fil Jannah Tippulue, parental involvement was minimal, and learning environments at home were not conducive to reinforcing school-based instruction. This highlights the need for broader school-community partnerships and parent education programs as part of instructional leadership strategies.

Furthermore, the principal's effort to bridge the school with the surrounding community is a valuable example of distributed leadership in action. As Spillane et al. (2004) argue, leadership in education should be viewed as a shared function that extends beyond the principal and includes teachers, families, and community actors. Building such collaborative structures could improve student learning by aligning school goals with community support systems.

This study also supports the notion that educational improvement in under-resourced settings requires adaptive leadership. In rural or religious-based schools, where access to technology and learning materials may be limited, principals and teachers must be innovative

and context-sensitive in designing and delivering instruction (Khan et al., 2022). The observed efforts to personalize instruction, despite infrastructural constraints, reflect such adaptability.

In summary, the results of this study contribute to the existing body of literature by providing context-rich evidence from a faith-based educational setting. The interplay between leadership, teacher professionalism, and classroom conditions underscores the importance of coherent, multi-level strategies for school improvement. While the principal's instructional leadership had a positive influence, its impact was moderated by broader sociocultural and economic factors that must be addressed through integrated policies and stakeholder collaboration.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between principal leadership, teacher professionalism, and classroom management at MI Amir Fil Jannah Tippulue, an Islamic elementary school located in a rural Indonesian context. The findings highlight that strong instructional leadership, as demonstrated by the principal, contributed significantly to cultivating professional teaching practices and establishing a structured approach to classroom supervision.

Teachers exhibited professionalism through the consistent preparation of lesson plans, diverse instructional methods, and active participation in professional development forums. However, their effectiveness was constrained by contextual challenges, including students' limited language proficiency, low motivation, and minimal parental support. These factors limited the full realization of professional instruction despite the structured efforts of both the school leader and teachers.

The study confirms that while instructional leadership and teacher capacity are central to improving classroom dynamics, they are insufficient on their own. External variables particularly those related to socio-economic and familial conditions remain critical factors influencing student learning outcomes. Addressing these challenges requires a systemic, whole-school approach that includes community and parental engagement.

Moreover, the study affirms the value of distributed leadership in faith-based and resource-constrained educational settings. The principal's efforts to foster collaborative relationships with teachers and initiate engagement with parents and the wider community represent promising practices for similar institutions seeking to elevate learning standards under structural limitations.

In conclusion, strengthening school quality in such contexts must go beyond administrative reforms and individual training programs. It demands a sustained leadership vision that promotes professional growth, contextual responsiveness, and inclusive partnerships across all stakeholders in the learning process.

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