



## The Democratic Leadership Model of the Madrasah Principal in Improving Educational Quality: A Case Study Analysis

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### ABSTRACT

Improving the quality of education is a strategic requirement in developing qualified and competitive human resources. One of the determining factors for success is the leadership of the madrasah principal, especially in managing resources and creating a conducive work climate. This study aims to analyze the democratic leadership model of the madrasah principal and its role in improving the quality of education at MI Masalikil Huda 01 Tahunan. The study used a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with the madrasah principal, the deputy head of curriculum, senior teachers, and junior teachers, supplemented by participatory observation and documentation studies. Data analysis used the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which includes reduction, presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results show that the madrasah principal applies democratic leadership through deliberation, two-way communication, and empowerment of teachers and education staff. This leadership has a positive impact on the quality of education, as seen in the development of flagship programs, improved learning quality, and the creation of a harmonious work climate. The findings also indicate that family values strengthen solidarity, but pose a challenge in maintaining consistent and sustainable leadership assertiveness.

**Keywords:** Democratic; Educational Quality; Leadership; Principal

## **INTRODUCTION**

Education is a strategic instrument in producing high-quality human resources with strong competitiveness (Cruz & Galigao, 2024). In the context of national development, educational quality serves as an important indicator of a nation's success because the quality of education reflects graduates' abilities to contribute to social, economic, and cultural development. Efforts to improve educational quality do not solely depend on curriculum aspects or the availability of facilities and infrastructure, but are also strongly determined by the quality of leadership within educational institutions, particularly the madrasah principal as the primary actor in managing educational institutions. The madrasah principal occupies a central position as an educational leader who not only performs administrative functions but also acts as a driver of madrasah cultural transformation, enhancement of learning quality, and the creation of a conducive work environment for the professional development of teachers and the improvement of educational quality (Pratama et al., 2023; Usmar & Santosa, 2022). This strategic role requires the madrasah principal to possess effective, adaptive leadership abilities and the capacity to empower all educational components in achieving shared goals. Therefore, the issue of madrasah principal leadership has become an important concern in efforts to improve educational quality.

The urgency of improving educational quality is also emphasized in Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, which states that education is organized to develop capabilities and improve the quality of life and dignity of Indonesian people. The implementation of this law implies the existence of nationally standardized educational quality benchmarks, requiring every educational institution to manage educational processes professionally and orient them toward improving learning outcomes. In this context, the leadership of the madrasah principal becomes a key factor in ensuring the fulfillment of educational quality standards in a sustainable manner. Improving educational quality can only be achieved when all educational components function optimally and synergistically. These components include the quality of educators and educational staff, curriculum relevance, the effectiveness of learning methods, the availability of learning media, and professionally managed educational systems. The madrasah principal acts as the main controller who coordinates all these components so that they move harmoniously toward achieving educational objectives. Therefore, the success or failure of madrasah programs is highly determined by the quality of the madrasah principal's leadership.

Various empirical studies have shown that the leadership style of school principals or madrasah principals significantly influences educational quality. (Lestari et al., 2024) found that a democratic leadership style is capable of creating a participatory and supportive work environment, thereby positively affecting teacher performance improvement. This finding is reinforced by Kholil and Karwanto (2021), who stated that teacher involvement in decision-making processes can foster collective responsibility and enhance work professionalism. Furthermore, Jalal and Mardizal (2024) emphasized that democratic leadership encourages the creation of two-way communication and an open work environment, which serve as essential foundations for innovation and the development of educational practices within schools. Research conducted by Salsabila et al. (2023) also demonstrated that the democratic leadership of school principals positively contributes to improving teacher motivation and performance through strengthened collaboration and healthy discussion spaces.

Nevertheless, studies on madrasah principal leadership still have limitations, particularly within the context of Islamic elementary schools, which possess different characteristics, organizational cultures, and challenges compared to public schools. Most previous studies have focused on public schools, while studies examining leadership within private madrasahs remain relatively limited. In addition, previous research has generally discussed leadership styles without examining in depth the practical implementation of

democratic leadership and its impact on improving educational quality in specific local contexts. Local context plays an important role in determining the effectiveness of a leadership model. Each madrasah has unique social, cultural, and institutional characteristics; therefore, the implementation of a particular leadership style may produce different impacts. However, there is still limited research specifically examining how the democratic leadership model of madrasah principals is implemented in practice and its contribution to improving educational quality at the Islamic elementary school level, especially at MI Masalikil Huda 01 Tahunan.

Theoretically, this study is based on democratic leadership theory, which emphasizes participation, openness, and appreciation for the contributions of all organizational members. Alma and Chapman stated that democratic leadership is characterized by member involvement in decision-making, two-way communication, and individual empowerment for development. In the educational context, democratic leadership enables teachers to develop a sense of ownership toward madrasah policies, increase self-confidence, and strengthen commitment to their professional responsibilities (Alzahra et al., 2025). Madrasah principals who implement democratic leadership encourage collaboration, open dialogue, and proportional distribution of responsibilities, thereby creating a positive and productive work environment. Based on the explanation above, this study offers scientific novelty through an in-depth examination of the democratic leadership model within the context of private Islamic elementary schools, focusing on its practical implementation and its impact on improving educational quality at MI Masalikil Huda 01 Tahunan. This research is expected to provide relevant and applicable empirical contributions to the development of educational leadership models that align with the characteristics of madrasahs. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze the democratic leadership model of the madrasah principal and examine its role in improving educational quality at MI Masalikil Huda 01 Tahunan.

## **METHODS**

### **Research Design and Data Source**

This study employed a qualitative approach to obtain an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of leadership practices in the school environment (Sugiyono, 2022). This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore leadership phenomena holistically based on the perspectives of individuals directly involved in educational processes.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews with key informants, namely Mrs. Rujiah, Bachelor of Economics, as the Principal; Mrs. Ratna Dewi, Bachelor of Education, as the Vice Principal for Curriculum Affairs; and two teachers, consisting of one junior teacher, Mrs. Dinda Afdinda Tawaffanal, Bachelor of Education, and one senior teacher, Mrs. Yuliatiningsih, Bachelor of Education. These interviews aimed to obtain comprehensive information regarding experiences, perspectives, and leadership practices implemented in improving educational quality within the school. In addition to interviews, data collection was complemented by participatory observation of school activities and dynamics, including interactions among school members and physical environmental conditions. This observation was conducted to directly capture empirical realities and understand the social context surrounding the leadership practices of the school principal. This study was also supported by documentation studies and literature reviews through the exploration of relevant scientific articles using Google Scholar. The literature review was utilized to strengthen the conceptual foundation of the research and compare field findings with previous relevant studies.

The entire research process was carried out in a natural setting in accordance with the characteristics of qualitative research, ensuring that the data obtained were authentic,

contextual, and scientifically accountable in describing the research setting, actions, social processes, and experiences of research subjects (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). The data analysis technique employed in this study referred to the interactive analysis model proposed by (Miles et al., 2014), which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing or verification. Data reduction was conducted by selecting, focusing, and simplifying data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation to align with the research focus. Subsequently, data presentation was carried out in descriptive narrative form to facilitate understanding of emerging patterns, relationships, and findings. The final stage involved continuously drawing conclusions throughout the research process by verifying findings to produce valid and credible conclusions.

## **RESULTS**

The results of the study indicate that the leadership model of the madrasah principal at MI Masalikil Huda 01 Tahunan Jepara reflects the characteristics of democratic leadership. The data were obtained through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation, which were subsequently analyzed through data triangulation. The research findings focused on four main aspects, namely decision-making, organizational communication, human resource empowerment, and the impact of leadership on improving educational quality. In the aspect of decision-making, the madrasah principal involved various parties such as vice principals, teachers, educational staff, and the committee in deliberative processes before policies were established. This finding was strengthened by the interview results with the vice principal, who stated that the madrasah principal did not make decisions unilaterally but always conducted coordination and deliberation with teachers and related parties. This was conveyed by the Vice Principal for Curriculum Affairs, Mrs. Ratna, who stated:

*"Yes, for example, if there is a decision regarding camping activities, we hold a coordination meeting at 9:15. That is one example of how Mrs. Rujiah does not make decisions unilaterally."*

In addition, the madrasah principal explained that every policy was carried out through stages of planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation continuously before being determined as a final policy. Mrs. Rujiah stated:

*"The mechanism is that I certainly have programs and plans, and after that comes the implementation in the field. During implementation, we supervise and monitor the progress of activities in the field. From there, we conduct evaluations. Based on direct observations in the field as well as communication with the related individuals involved in the implementation, we evaluate the process. From that evaluation, we can decide what policies or steps will be appropriate for the future. If it runs well, then we simply improve it further. However, if there is something that does not meet expectations, then we have to think about improving the existing policies. Therefore, there are stages of planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation."*

This process demonstrates that decision-making was conducted systematically and based on actual conditions in the field. The observation results also showed the existence of madrasah program evaluation forums and preparation meetings for semester report card distribution involving teachers and educational staff actively.



**Figure 1.** Implementation of Madrasah Program Evaluation with Teachers and Educational Staff



**Figure 2.** Preparatory Meeting for Odd Semester Report Card Distribution with Teachers and Educational Staff

In the aspect of organizational communication, the madrasah principal implemented open and communicative two-way communication. Mrs. Dinda explained:

*"Very communicative. She always supports us as well. She is very communicative, both online and in person."*

In addition, the relationship between the madrasah principal and teachers took place in a family-like atmosphere without any discriminatory treatment among teachers. Mrs. Ratna stated:

*"She is able to guide and embrace everyone."*

In the aspect of human resource empowerment, the madrasah principal provided opportunities for teachers to develop programs and learning innovations. Teachers were given opportunities to participate in committees, program development, and the establishment of excellent classes. This was reflected in the development of the Tahfidz class and the establishment of an English class as a new innovation in the madrasah.

The findings also showed improvements in educational quality, both academically and non-academically. Mrs. Ratna explained:

*"Since Mrs. Rujiah became the leader, the most visible change has been in the Tahfidz class. Previously, the Tahfidz class only focused on Juz 30. After further development, it expanded from only Juz 30 to reaching Juz 26. Previously, there were learning outcomes that had not met expectations. However, after Mrs. Rujiah became the principal, praise be to God, policies and strategies were developed in Tahfidz learning so*

*that students could better retain their memorization. Eventually, a joint decision was made to bring in a Tahfidz teacher during the zero-hour lesson. Alhamdulillah, this greatly helped students in memorizing the Tahfidz lessons as they approached completion from Juz 30 to Juz 26. Thus, they conducted Tasmi' for Juz 30, 29, 28, 27, and 26, totaling five Juz. That was the first achievement. Secondly, during Mrs. Rujiah's leadership, there were previously only regular classes and Tahfidz classes. Under her leadership, there are now three classes: regular classes, Tahfidz classes, and English classes. The English class emerged during Mrs. Rujiah's leadership."*

Furthermore, the establishment of the English class encouraged students' achievements to the point where they participated in PORSEMA and PORSENI competitions at the Central Java provincial level. However, the study also identified challenges in the implementation of democratic leadership, particularly regarding leadership assertiveness. The madrasah principal acknowledged that the family-oriented approach sometimes made her reluctant to exercise firmness toward certain teachers or educational staff members. Overall, the findings indicate that the democratic leadership of the madrasah principal was implemented through deliberation, open communication, teacher empowerment, and continuous evaluation, all of which had a positive impact on improving educational quality at MI Masalikil Huda 01 Tahunan Jepara.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the leadership model of the madrasah principal at MI Masalikil Huda 01 Tahunan Jepara substantively represents the practice of democratic leadership in educational institution management. These findings are reflected in participatory decision-making patterns, open organizational communication, human resource empowerment, and leadership orientation focused on improving educational quality. From the perspective of modern educational management, democratic leadership is a leadership model that places organizational member participation as a primary element in the management process of educational institutions. Therefore, the findings demonstrate that the madrasah principal did not exercise authoritarian leadership but instead built a collaborative and participatory organizational culture. In the aspect of decision-making, the findings show that the madrasah principal involved teachers, vice principals, educational staff, and the committee in every policy formulation process. These findings indicate that organizational decisions were not made unilaterally but through forums of deliberation and collective coordination. The statement by the vice principal explaining that every activity always went through coordination before being decided reflects the deliberative principle in the madrasah principal's leadership.

These findings are in line with the democratic leadership theory proposed by (Mustika et al., 2022), which states that democratic leadership is characterized by shared decision-making, appreciation of subordinates' opinions, and openness in communication to achieve organizational goals. In the madrasah context, the deliberative processes conducted by the principal demonstrate that teachers were positioned as work partners who contributed significantly to institutional policy directions. Furthermore, the decision-making mechanism implemented by the madrasah principal through stages of planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation demonstrates the systematic application of management functions. The principal considered not only administrative aspects but also actual field conditions before establishing policies. This indicates that democratic leadership at MI Masalikil Huda 01 Tahunan was not only participatory but also based on structured evaluation and supervision. When analyzed more deeply, this pattern demonstrates that the madrasah principal implemented the principle of reflective leadership, namely leadership that makes decisions

based on reflection upon organizational conditions. The principal directly monitored policy implementation and evaluated its effectiveness before determining further steps. This practice illustrates the close relationship between democratic leadership and evaluative culture within educational organizations.

From the perspective of educational management theory, teacher involvement in decision-making has implications for increasing teachers' sense of belonging toward madrasah programs. Teachers involved in policy formulation tend to demonstrate greater commitment to program implementation. These findings support the study by (Kholil & Karwanto, 2021), which stated that teacher participation in decision-making can enhance collective responsibility and work professionalism. The findings also indicate that the madrasah principal implemented open and communicative two-way communication. Teachers stated that communication occurred effectively both directly and through online media, allowing work coordination to function efficiently. These findings indicate that communication became an important instrument in building harmonious working relationships within the madrasah environment. In democratic leadership theory, two-way communication is one of the main indicators of a healthy and collaborative organization. Jalal and Mardizal (2024) explained that open communication enables constructive exchanges of ideas, criticism, and suggestions, allowing organizations to develop dynamically. The findings reinforce this theory because the madrasah principal did not limit communication access between leaders and teachers. Moreover, the communication implemented by the principal was not only formal but also interpersonal and family-oriented. Teachers stated that relationships among madrasah members were harmonious without discriminatory treatment. This condition indicates that the organizational culture at MI Masalikil Huda 01 Tahunan was built upon emotional closeness and a strong sense of family values.

These findings expand democratic leadership theory, which has traditionally emphasized structural organizational aspects. In this study, effective communication was influenced not only by organizational systems but also by emotional approaches and the social culture developing within the madrasah environment. In other words, the effectiveness of democratic leadership was influenced by the leader's ability to build humane interpersonal relationships. In the aspect of human resource empowerment, the findings indicate that the madrasah principal provided opportunities for teachers to develop innovations and learning programs. Teachers were entrusted with responsibilities such as serving as committee leaders, developing class programs, and organizing educational activities according to institutional needs. This practice demonstrates that the principal implemented the concept of distributed leadership, namely the distribution of leadership roles among organizational members. In this approach, teachers function not only as policy implementers but also as integral parts of the organizational leadership process. Through active teacher involvement, the principal successfully created a participatory and productive work culture. Teacher empowerment was also evident in the development of the madrasah's flagship programs, particularly the Tahfidz class and English class. The Tahfidz program experienced significant development, expanding from only reaching Juz 30 to reaching Juz 26. This change was achieved through policies involving additional Tahfidz teachers and special learning sessions during zero-hour lessons.

Additionally, the establishment of the English class represented a new innovation in the principal's leadership. The program successfully improved students' achievements, enabling them to participate in PORSEMA and PORSENI competitions at the Central Java provincial level. These findings demonstrate that democratic leadership not only impacts internal organizational relationships but also contributes to improving educational output quality. Theoretically, these findings are consistent with the view of (Wilujeng et al., 2023), who stated that democratic leadership can create organizational environments that support innovation and collaboration. Within the context of MI Masalikil Huda 01 Tahunan, innovation emerged as a

result of teachers' active involvement in institutional development.

However, the study also identified challenges in implementing democratic leadership, particularly concerning leadership assertiveness. The principal acknowledged that an overly strong family-oriented approach sometimes caused reluctance in imposing sanctions or exercising firmness toward certain teachers. These findings indicate that family culture has two dimensions within democratic leadership practices. On one hand, it strengthens solidarity, loyalty, and workplace comfort. On the other hand, an overly humanistic approach may weaken leadership authority in certain situations. From a leadership theory perspective, this condition illustrates that democratic leadership does not always operate ideally as described in normative theories. Democratic leadership still requires a balance between social empathy and professional assertiveness for organizations to function effectively.

These findings make an important contribution by demonstrating that the implementation of democratic leadership is strongly influenced by organizational culture. In family-based madrasahs such as MI Masalikil Huda 01 Tahunan, leadership effectiveness is determined not only by participation systems but also by leaders' ability to maintain balance between emotional relationships and professional work ethics. When related to previous studies, these findings support (Lestari et al., 2024), who found that teacher involvement in organizations enhances professionalism and collective responsibility. Furthermore, the findings reinforce the view of (Sari et al., 2022) that democratic leadership can improve productive cooperation through active participation of all school components. However, this study contributes a new dimension by introducing family values as a contextual variable affecting the effectiveness of democratic leadership. Therefore, this study demonstrates that the success of democratic leadership in madrasahs cannot be separated from the organizational culture developing within the educational institution.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the leadership model of the madrasah principal at MI Masalikil Huda 01 Tahunan Jepara reflects the characteristics of democratic leadership implemented through deliberation, two-way communication, active involvement of teachers and educational staff, and decision-making based on field evaluations. This leadership model proved capable of creating an open, collaborative, and harmonious work environment, thereby increasing collective responsibility and teacher motivation in supporting the achievement of educational objectives. Furthermore, the democratic leadership of the madrasah principal also contributed to improving educational quality in both academic and non-academic aspects, as reflected in the development of flagship programs such as strengthening the Tahfidz class and establishing English classes as forms of educational innovation based on madrasah needs. This study also demonstrates that the family culture developing within the madrasah environment became an important factor influencing leadership effectiveness because it strengthened solidarity and loyalty among madrasah members, although under certain conditions it could affect the principal's assertiveness in decision-making.

Theoretically, this study strengthens and expands the study of democratic leadership in Islamic educational institutions by demonstrating that leadership implementation in private Islamic elementary schools is influenced by family-based socio-cultural contexts. Therefore, democratic leadership implemented contextually, participatively, and adaptively has significant potential to improve educational quality and establish sustainable work cultures within madrasah environments. Based on these findings, the researchers recommend that madrasah principals continue developing participatory leadership patterns while maintaining a balance between humanistic approaches and professional assertiveness to ensure optimal organizational effectiveness. Furthermore, future studies are expected to examine the implementation of democratic leadership in broader madrasah contexts to obtain a more comprehensive

understanding of the influence of organizational culture on the effectiveness of leadership in Islamic education.

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## **DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT**

The data utilized and analyzed in this study were derived from publicly accessible scholarly references and empirical findings collected through interviews, observations, and documentation conducted at the research site. Supporting documents and the analytical framework used in this study may be made available by the corresponding author upon reasonable request for academic purposes.

## **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to this study. This research was conducted independently without any commercial, financial, institutional, or personal interests that could potentially influence the research process, findings, interpretation, or conclusions presented in this study.

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