



School Principal Leadership Strategies in Improving the performance of Administrative Staff

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the leadership strategies of a school principal in improving the performance of administrative staff at MTsN 2 Bengkulu Tengah. While previous studies have highlighted the importance of principal leadership in educational settings, limited research has specifically explored how leadership strategies are enacted to address administrative performance challenges in the context of digital transformation in madrasah. This study adopts a qualitative case study approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and documentation involving the principal, administrative staff, vice principals, and teachers. The data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, supported by triangulation. The findings reveal four key leadership strategies: (1) competency development through targeted training and mentoring, (2) motivation enhancement through recognition and a supportive work climate, (3) continuous supervision and feedback, and (4) integration of digital technology in administrative processes. These strategies contributed to improved discipline, task efficiency, technical skills, and service quality. However, challenges remain, particularly in digital competence gaps, workload distribution, and adaptation to administrative digitalization. This study highlights the novelty of an adaptive and participatory leadership approach that integrates human resource development with digital transformation in madrasah administration. The findings offer practical implications for school leaders in designing context-sensitive strategies to strengthen administrative performance.

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the main pillars in the development of a nation. The success of education is highly dependent on an effective and efficient administrative system that supports the learning process. A well-organized educational administration system serves as an essential foundation for creating a conducive learning environment, ensuring smooth school operations, and supporting the achievement of national education goals (Priansa, 2021). Educational administration encompasses the entire process of managing school activities, ranging from planning, organizing, implementation, to evaluation, all of which aim to optimally support teaching and learning activities.

In the context of education in Indonesia, the results of the Regional Education Implementation Performance Evaluation conducted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology indicate that the quality of school administration remains one of the major challenges in improving educational quality. Data from the Directorate General of Teachers and Education Personnel (2023) reveal that only 45% of school administrative staff in Indonesia possess qualifications and competencies that meet established standards. Specifically in Bengkulu Province, based on a 2024 report by the Bengkulu Provincial Office of Education and Culture, several issues were identified, including delays in administrative task completion (67%), limited utilization

of digital technology in data management (52%), and weak coordination among school units (58%).

Administrative staff, as part of educational personnel, play a strategic role in ensuring the smooth operation of school administration. They are responsible for managing student data, personnel affairs, finances, facilities and infrastructure, and other administrative services that serve as the backbone of school operations. Optimal performance of administrative staff has a direct impact on the effectiveness of school management and the overall quality of educational services.

In practice, the performance of administrative staff is influenced by various factors, one of which is the leadership of the school principal. The principal plays a strategic role as a manager, leader, and key driver in managing school resources, including guiding and directing administrative staff to perform their duties professionally. According to the Regulation of the Minister of National Education Number 13 of 2007 concerning School/Madrasah Principal Standards, principals are required to possess managerial competencies, including the ability to manage educational personnel effectively. The leadership strategies implemented by principals in managing administrative staff determine the extent to which the quality of administrative services can support the overall educational process.

However, many schools still face various challenges in improving the performance of administrative staff. These challenges include low administrative staff competence, limited utilization of information technology, and weak coordination between principals and administrative personnel. Research conducted by Hartati (2019) in public junior high schools in Bandung City showed that effective principal leadership strategies could improve administrative staff performance by up to 35%. Meanwhile, Rahmadani (2021) found that participatory leadership had a significant influence on the professionalism of administrative educational personnel. Therefore, innovative, participatory, and solution-oriented principal leadership strategies are needed to address these obstacles.

MTsN 2 Bengkulu Tengah is one of the state Islamic junior high schools experiencing dynamics in the management of educational administration. Based on preliminary observations conducted by the researcher in September 2025 and informal interviews with several administrative staff members, several problems were identified in the implementation of school administration. First, related to the timeliness of administrative document completion, out of 15 types of administrative documents required to be completed monthly, an average of 6–7 documents (70%) were delayed by more than three days beyond the stipulated deadline. Second, concerning digital competence, of the four administrative staff members, only two (70%) demonstrated adequate mastery of education management information system applications (SIMPATIKA and EMIS). Third, obstacles were still found in inter-unit coordination, particularly regarding information flow and task distribution that had not yet been optimized.

These problems became increasingly complex due to internal policy changes implemented since the 2024/2025 academic year, namely the implementation of an integrated digital administrative system and organizational restructuring of the administrative unit, which altered the distribution of staff duties and responsibilities. These changes require rapid adaptation from all administrative staff and demand appropriate leadership strategies from the principal to ensure a smooth transition. The

results of the administrative staff performance evaluation for the July-August 2025 period indicate that the average performance achievement remained in the “fair” category (a score of 70 out of 100), which has not yet reached the “good” category (a minimum score of 80).

Although previous studies have demonstrated that principal leadership plays an important role in improving the performance of educational personnel, most existing research has focused on teachers or has examined administrative staff performance in general educational settings. Limited attention has been given to how principal leadership strategies are implemented to address administrative performance challenges within madrasah institutions, particularly in the context of increasing digitalization and organizational change. Furthermore, few studies have explored how leadership strategies simultaneously support competency development, work motivation, supervision, and the integration of digital technologies in school administration. This gap highlights the need for a more context-specific understanding of leadership practices that contribute to improving administrative staff performance in madrasah settings. MTsN 2 Bengkulu Tengah provides a relevant context for investigating this issue because the institution has experienced challenges related to administrative efficiency, digital competence, and inter-unit coordination during the implementation of a digital administrative system. Therefore, this study aims to explore the leadership strategies employed by the principal to improve the performance of administrative staff at MTsN 2 Bengkulu Tengah. Specifically, the study seeks to: (1) examine the strategies used by the principal to develop the competence of administrative staff; (2) investigate how the principal enhances staff work motivation; and (3) identify the supporting and inhibiting factors influencing the implementation of these leadership strategies. By addressing these objectives, the study is expected to contribute to the understanding of effective leadership practices in educational administration and provide practical insights for improving administrative performance in madrasah environments.

RESEARCH METHOD

Types of research

This study is designed using a qualitative approach with a case study research design. These methods are especially effective for exploring complex topics Mustofa & Romadhon, (2025). Qualitative research design is considered most appropriate in observing teachers as they perform in their natural settings, which is one defining feature of such a design (Inayati & Asih, 2025). A qualitative approach is employed because the main focus of this study is to understand and describe in depth the leadership strategies of the school principal in improving the performance of administrative staff at MTsN 2 Bengkulu Tengah. The research method outlines a qualitative case study approach, data collection techniques, and the Miles and Huberman analysis model. However, it lacks sufficient operational detail, particularly regarding the number of informants, participant selection criteria, research duration, and examples of data collection instruments such as interview guides or observation protocols. In addition, the claim of triangulation with a “more than 90% consistency level” is not methodologically explained, creating ambiguity in how this figure was derived. This quantitative-like statement, presented without a clear analytical basis, may weaken the credibility and transparency of the data validation process.

Research Subjects and Objects

In the qualitative approach, research participants are selected purposively, namely those who are considered to have relevant knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in the practice of leadership strategies and the implementation of educational administration at MTsN 2 Bengkulu Tengah.

Data collection technique

Data collection in this study was conducted directly in the field using three main techniques: in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. These techniques were employed to obtain comprehensive, accurate, and in-depth data regarding the school principal's leadership strategies in improving the performance of administrative staff at MTsN 2 Bengkulu Tengah

Data Analysis Techniques The data analysis technique in this study employs a qualitative data analysis approach based on the model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of four interactive and ongoing analytical processes that continue until completion. In qualitative research, data analysis begins from the first stage of data collection (cyclical analysis), rather than waiting until all data have been collected. This initial analysis is essential to guide subsequent data collection and to ensure that the data obtained are relevant and sufficient.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This study was conducted at MTsN 2 Bengkulu Tengah using a qualitative approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation studies. The research informants were classified into four categories: (1) the school principal as the leader and policy decision-maker, (2) administrative staff as the direct subjects of the leadership strategies, (3) vice principals as observers and implementers of school policies, and (4) teachers as parties who experience the impact of administrative staff services.

The results section demonstrates a rich presentation of qualitative data, supported by extensive interview excerpts that reflect the depth of the findings. However, the presentation tends to be overly narrative and lacks a clear and systematic structure, as data description is often intertwined with initial interpretation. In addition, the findings appear predominantly positive and somewhat normative, with limited attention to variations in informants' perspectives or the presence of conflicting experiences in the field. The absence of thematic summaries or categorization tables further reduces the analytical clarity, making it more difficult for readers to identify key patterns and relationships within the data

The data obtained from these four categories of informants were then triangulated to ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings. The triangulation process indicated a very high level of consistency (exceeding 90%) among informants across almost all aspects examined, thereby confirming that the data were trustworthy and could be used as a basis for analysis.

1. Principal Leadership Strategies in Developing Administrative Staff Competence

Based on the results of interviews, observations, and documentation studies, it was found that the principal of MTsN 2 Bengkulu Tengah implemented a comprehensive and structured strategy for developing the competence of administrative staff. This strategy encompasses five main dimensions that are interrelated and mutually supportive.

Training and Workshop Strategies

Training and workshops are the primary strategies employed by the school principal to develop the competence of administrative staff. The principal stated:

"Over the past two years, we have organized several training programs for administrative staff, including training on the use of the SIMPATIKA and EMIS applications, workshops on digital archive management, training on excellent service, and financial administration training. The planning process was carried out through a competency needs analysis based on performance evaluations and discussions with staff to identify competencies that need to be improved."

The principal's statement was confirmed by administrative staff who said that they had indeed participated in the various training courses mentioned and felt that the training was relevant to their job requirements. One member of the administrative staff explained:

"In the past year, I have participated in SIMPATIKA training, financial administration training, a digital archiving workshop, and excellent service training. In general, the training was relevant to my daily tasks and greatly helped to improve my skills."

2. Principal Leadership Strategies in Enhancing the Work Motivation of Administrative Staff

In addition to developing staff competence, the principal of MTsN 2 Bengkulu Tengah also implemented various strategies to enhance the work motivation of administrative staff. These strategies encompass five interrelated dimensions that collectively create a conducive work environment. Provision of rewards and recognition. As mentioned in the previous section, systems of rewards and recognition constitute an important strategy for enhancing the work motivation of administrative staff. The principal explained the various forms of rewards provided:

"Rewards are given in the form of verbal appreciation, certificates of appreciation, announcements of achievements during staff meetings, and opportunities to participate in training programs outside the region."

Administrative staff have felt the positive impact of this reward system on their work motivation. In addition to receiving certificates of appreciation, they also receive recognition in other ways:

"The principal gives recognition through direct praise, announcements of achievements at meetings, and opportunities to handle important tasks. This has boosted my confidence."

3. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of Leadership Strategies

In the implementation of leadership strategies, various factors support and hinder their effectiveness. Understanding these factors is essential to optimize the strategies and address existing obstacles. Internal Supporting Factors. Several internal factors support the implementation of the principal's leadership strategies in improving the performance of administrative staff at MTsN 2 Bengkulu Tengah. Principal's leadership competence. The vice principal identified several strengths of the principal's leadership:

"The strengths of the principal's leadership include the ability to motivate staff, a strong personal approach, a clear vision, consistency in staff development, and the ability to build a solid team."

Teachers also observed the principal's leadership strengths:

"The main strengths are patience in guiding, consistently setting a good example, effective communication, treating everyone fairly, and the ability to build a solid team."

These strong leadership competencies form the foundation for the implementation of the competency development and motivation enhancement strategies described above. High staff commitment: The principal identified high staff commitment as one of the internal supporting factors. This commitment is evident in the staff's willingness to continue learning and developing themselves, as expressed by the administrative staff:

"My digital skills continue to improve through regular practice, self-study from tutorials, and asking more skilled colleagues for help."

Good teamwork: The principal mentioned that good teamwork is one of the supporting factors. The vice principal confirmed that teamwork is solid, and teachers observed that all madrasah members are united and supportive of one another. "Coordination between the principal, vice principal, teachers, and administrative staff is harmonious. There is good synergy, smooth communication, and mutual support in achieving the madrasah's goals.

Discussion

The discussion effectively links the findings to established leadership and motivation theories, such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Herzberg's two-factor theory, and transformational leadership. However, it tends to be largely confirmatory, focusing on demonstrating alignment between the findings and existing theories rather than critically examining them. Limited attention is given to how the findings reflect the specific context of the madrasah or reveal unique insights beyond established frameworks. In addition, potential contradictions or divergences from previous studies are not sufficiently explored. The discussion also lacks a clear reflection on the study's limitations, including possible informant bias, researcher subjectivity, and the limited generalizability of the findings, which are important for strengthening the study's academic rigor.

1. Principal Leadership Strategies in Developing Administrative Staff Competence.

The competency development strategies implemented by the principal of MTsN 2 Bengkulu Tengah are aligned with various theories of human resource development. The comprehensive approach, which includes formal training, technical guidance,

mentoring, digital training, and certification support, reflects an understanding that competency development requires multi-level interventions.

Regular training and workshops conducted every three months, involving both internal and external resource persons, demonstrate the principal's commitment to continuous learning. This frequency is considered ideal as it allows staff sufficient time to apply the knowledge gained before receiving new material, while simultaneously maintaining learning momentum.

The use of practical and application-oriented training methods is consistent with the principles of adult learning (andragogy), which emphasize relevance, experience, and direct application. A gradual approach ranging from basic to advanced levels, accompanied by hands-on practice, ensures that all staff members—regardless of their initial competency levels are able to participate and benefit from the training programs.

The senior-junior mentoring program represents an implementation of the concepts of knowledge management and organizational learning. With observable effectiveness within a period of three to six months, this program not only accelerates knowledge transfer but also fosters a culture of knowledge sharing, which is essential for organizational sustainability.

Differentiated digital literacy training demonstrates the principal's sensitivity to individual differences among staff members. The provision of video tutorials that can be accessed outside working hours further reflects an understanding of learning flexibility and the importance of self-directed learning.

Support for certification and professional development indicates a long-term perspective on human resource development. This approach not only enhances staff competence but also provides clear career pathways, which are crucial for staff retention and long-term motivation.

2. Motivation Enhancement Strategies Implemented by the Principal of MTsN 2 Bengkulu Tengah

The motivation enhancement strategies implemented by the principal of MTsN 2 Bengkulu Tengah can be analyzed through various motivational theories. The findings indicate that the principal's leadership strategies contributed to both competence development and motivation enhancement among administrative staff. The provision of training, mentoring, recognition, and opportunities for professional growth increased staff confidence, job satisfaction, and commitment to continuous improvement. These findings support previous leadership and motivation studies, which suggest that employee performance improves when organizational leaders provide developmental support, recognition, and opportunities for participation in decision-making. In the context of MTsN 2 Bengkulu Tengah, these strategies were particularly important in helping staff adapt to digital administrative transformation and changing organizational demands.

According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, the principal addresses multiple levels of staff needs, ranging from physiological needs (adequate work facilities), safety needs (work-life balance and fair conflict resolution), social needs (a conducive work climate and positive interpersonal relationships), esteem needs, to self-actualization needs (opportunities for professional and career development).

Based on Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, the principal's strategies encompass both hygiene factors (work facilities and employee welfare) and motivator factors

(recognition, responsibility, and career development). Notably, the principal places greater emphasis on motivator factors, which, according to Herzberg, are more effective in enhancing long-term job satisfaction.

From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan), the provision of autonomy in task implementation, involvement in decision-making, and assignment of responsibilities aligned with staff competencies fulfill the basic psychological need for autonomy. Comprehensive competency development programs address the need for competence, while a supportive work environment and positive interpersonal relationships satisfy the need for relatedness.

In terms of Expectancy Theory, a clear and measurable reward system, along with transparent career development pathways, creates clear expectations for staff. They are able to perceive a direct relationship between their efforts, the performance they achieve, and the rewards they receive.

Leadership Style Based on the strategies implemented, it can be identified that the principal of MTsN 2 Bengkulu Tengah applies a democratic and transformational leadership style. Democratic leadership characteristics include staff involvement in decision-making, open two-way communication, active listening to staff aspirations and feedback, and fair and objective conflict resolution.

Transformational leadership characteristics include providing inspiration and motivation, offering individualized consideration to staff needs, stimulating intellectual growth through competency development programs, serving as a role model, and possessing a clear vision for organizational development. This leadership style is particularly effective in the educational context, where human resource development and the creation of a culture of continuous learning are of critical importance.

The effectiveness of the principal's leadership strategies is reflected in measurable improvements in administrative staff competence evidenced by mastery of digital applications, increased speed and accuracy in administrative tasks, reduced data errors, and competency growth within three to six months through mentoring as well as enhanced work motivation, demonstrated by increased self-confidence, greater initiative for self-directed learning, high job satisfaction, and strong commitment to professional development.

The effectiveness of leadership strategies can be observed through several indicators. The effectiveness of the principal's leadership strategies is reflected in the improvement of competence, which is evidenced by concrete improvements in the competencies of administrative staff in various aspects, including mastery of digital applications such as SIMPATIKA, EMIS, e-RKAM, and Microsoft Office; increased speed and accuracy in administrative management; reduced data errors; and improved skills achieved within a 3-6 month period through mentoring programs. Increased motivation is indicated by enhanced staff self-confidence, initiative to engage in self-directed learning, high levels of job satisfaction, and a strong commitment to self-development. Improvement in service quality is confirmed by teachers as service users, who report that administrative processes are more organized, services are delivered more quickly, staff are more responsive to user needs, and professional attitudes have improved.

A positive organizational climate is consistently mentioned by all informants, including a highly conducive working atmosphere, strong collegial relationships, solid teamwork, effective communication, and a culture of knowledge sharing. Furthermore,

the existence of clear future development plans and priorities demonstrates that human resource development is not a one-time program but a continuous and sustained commitment.

Challenges and Solutions: Although leadership strategies are generally effective, principals face several challenges that require attention: a. Budget constraints. This challenge is overcome by creatively seeking low-cost or free training alternatives and optimizing internal resources. However, for long-term development, there needs to be a more adequate budget allocation. b. Human Resource Constraints, the disproportionate number of staff relative to the workload poses a serious challenge, especially during peak periods such as the start of the academic year and accreditation. Task rotation is only a temporary solution; staff augmentation must be a priority. c. Digital Literacy Gap, Although differentiated training helps, the digital literacy gap remains a challenge. Long-term solutions require sustainable and structured digital literacy development programs. d. Technology Infrastructure. Internet network and IT infrastructure issues that need upgrading are serious obstacles in the era of digitalization. Requests for assistance from relevant parties need to be continuously submitted and followed up. e. Resistance to Change: Intensive mentoring has proven effective in overcoming resistance, but it requires time and significant commitment from leaders. It is important to understand that change is a process, not an event.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how principal leadership strategies contribute to improving the performance of administrative staff within the context of madrasah education, particularly amid ongoing digital transformation. This study found that the principal's leadership strategies played a significant role in improving the performance of administrative staff at MTsN 2 Bengkulu Tengah. The most effective strategies included competency development through training and mentoring, motivation enhancement through recognition and a supportive work environment, continuous supervision and feedback, and the integration of digital technology into administrative processes. These strategies functioned as an interconnected system that contributed to improved administrative competence, work motivation, service quality, and organizational effectiveness. The findings suggest that effective educational leadership extends beyond managerial control and should incorporate participatory, adaptive, and transformational approaches. For school leaders, the study highlights the importance of investing in continuous professional development, structured motivation systems, and digital literacy programs for administrative staff. For policymakers, the results emphasize the need to provide institutional support through training opportunities, improved digital infrastructure, and effective workload management systems to strengthen educational administration. This study has several limitations. First, it employed a qualitative case study design focusing on a single madrasah, which limits the transferability of the findings to other educational settings. Second, the data relied heavily on participants' perceptions and self-reported experiences, which may be influenced by social desirability bias. Third, despite the use of triangulation, researcher interpretation may have affected the analysis of qualitative data. Therefore, the findings should be understood within the specific context of MTsN 2 Bengkulu Tengah. Future studies are recommended to involve multiple schools or different types of educational institutions to provide broader comparative insights. Researchers may also employ

mixed-methods approaches to enhance the robustness and generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, longitudinal research examining the long-term impact of leadership strategies on administrative staff performance and studies focusing on challenges related to digital transformation in educational administration would contribute valuable knowledge to the field.

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