

# **Transformational Leadership: The Principal's Efforts in Enhancing Teacher Professionalism at Al-Husna Islamic Boarding School, Marendal**

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## **Abstract**

Principal leadership plays a strategic role in directing and fostering teachers to be more professional in carrying out educational duties. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study type, which is conducted through field observations, in-depth interviews with the head of the pesantren and teachers, and documentation of activities at the Al-Husna Marindal Islamic Boarding School. In addition to primary data, secondary data from various scientific sources such as journals, books, and other scientific works were also used. Data were analyzed through the process of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results show that the principal plays an important role as a transformational leader who not only develops the vision and mission, but also actively motivates teachers through regular coaching, job evaluation, and rewarding. This leadership approach succeeded in improving teachers' morale, creativity in teaching, and the quality of interaction in the learning process. This finding confirms that the transformational leadership style applied consistently and contextually is able to build a collaborative work climate, encourage the improvement of teacher professionalism, and strengthen the role of Islamic boarding schools as educational centers that are responsive to the challenges of the times.

**Keywords:** *Transformational leadership; Teacher professionalism; Boarding school*

**Abstrak:** Kepemimpinan kepala sekolah memegang peran strategis dalam mengarahkan dan membina guru agar lebih profesional dalam menjalankan tugas kependidikan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis studi kasus, yang dilakukan melalui observasi lapangan, wawancara mendalam dengan kepala pesantren dan para guru, serta dokumentasi kegiatan di Pondok Pesantren Al-Husna Marindal. Selain data primer, juga digunakan data sekunder dari berbagai sumber ilmiah seperti jurnal, buku, dan karya ilmiah lainnya. Data dianalisis melalui proses reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepala sekolah memainkan peran penting sebagai pemimpin transformasional yang tidak hanya menyusun visi dan misi, tetapi juga secara aktif

memotivasi guru melalui pembinaan rutin, evaluasi kerja, dan pemberian penghargaan. Pendekatan kepemimpinan ini berhasil meningkatkan semangat kerja guru, kreativitas dalam mengajar, serta kualitas interaksi dalam proses pembelajaran. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa gaya kepemimpinan transformasional yang diterapkan secara konsisten dan kontekstual mampu membangun iklim kerja kolaboratif, mendorong peningkatan profesionalisme guru, serta memperkuat peran pondok pesantren sebagai pusat pendidikan yang responsif terhadap tantangan zaman.

**Kata Kunci:** *Kepemimpinan transformasional; Profesionalisme guru; Pondok Pesantren*

## Introduction

Islamic boarding schools are one of the main pillars in the Islamic education system in Indonesia which has long contributed to forming a generation of faith and noble character. One of the Islamic boarding schools that stands out in its work is the Al-Husna Islamic Boarding School, which is located in Marindal Pasar 3, Patumbak District, Deli Serdang Regency. As an Islamic educational institution, the Al-Husna Islamic Boarding School is not only a center for learning Islamic science, but also a place for character development and life skills training for students. Its existence has become an integral part of the surrounding community in forming a generation that is ready to face the challenges of the times without losing Islamic values.

The advantage of Al-Husna Islamic Boarding School lies in its holistic educational approach that combines religious learning, character, and general knowledge in a balanced manner. This pesantren not only equips students with religious knowledge such as the Qur'an and fiqh, but also provides space for the development of social skills, independence attitudes, and understanding of modern science and technology. Through extracurricular activities, community service, and value-based learning, students are trained to become individuals who are not only intellectually intelligent, but also have high moral and social commitment.

The success of this pesantren in improving the quality of education is inseparable from the strategic role of the principal as a transformational leader. Based on the results of observations in December 2024, the principal of Al-Husna Islamic Boarding School is active in directing and motivating teachers to become more professional through various approaches, such as routine coaching, periodic evaluations, and training involving external agencies. Supported by adequate infrastructure, teachers in this pesantren can apply varied and contextual learning methods, thereby encouraging the creation of a dynamic and effective learning process.

Several previous studies have also shown that transformative leadership styles have a significant influence on improving teacher performance and quality of education. For example, a study by Suyatno (2020) shows that communicative, visionary, and appreciative leadership

of school principals is able to form a positive work climate for teachers. Likewise, research by Fitriyah and Nugroho (2021) found that school principals who are able to establish personal relationships and provide space for self-development to teachers have succeeded in significantly increasing the professionalism of teaching staff. This reinforces the importance of follow-up studies that highlight leadership patterns in the pesantren environment.

Based on this background, this study aims to examine more deeply how the leadership pattern of school principals at Al-Husna Marindal Islamic Boarding School in improving teacher professionalism. The focus of this study includes the leadership strategies applied, supporting and inhibiting factors, and the real impact of leadership practices on the quality of education in the pesantren environment. Through this research, it is hoped that it can make a conceptual and practical contribution to the development of Islamic education management, especially in the context of pesantren leadership in the modern era

## **Method**

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study type focused on the Al-Husna Marindal Islamic Boarding School as the main location of the study. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to delve deeply into the phenomenon of transformational leadership of principals in improving teacher professionalism in a real and natural context. This case study research aims to understand holistically how the leadership process is carried out and how it impacts the improvement of the quality of educators in the pesantren environment.

Data collection techniques are carried out through direct observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observation was carried out by observing daily activities in the pesantren environment, especially the interaction between the principal and teachers in the implementation of educational activities. Through this technique, researchers can get a real picture of the leadership practice that takes place. In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants, namely the head of the Islamic boarding school and several teachers as the main subjects involved in the process of increasing professionalism. This interview aims to explore the experiences, views, and strategies used by school principals in encouraging change in the pesantren education environment.

In addition to primary data obtained through observation and interviews, this study also utilizes secondary data obtained from various relevant sources such as scientific journal articles, academic books, theses, theses, and dissertations that discuss educational leadership, teacher professionalism, and the management of Islamic boarding schools. The use of these secondary data is useful to enrich the context of the analysis and provide a theoretical perspective that supports the findings in the field.

The data that has been collected is analyzed through three main stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. Data reduction is carried out by sorting out important information that is directly related to the focus of the research, so that the data obtained becomes more targeted and does not overlap. The presentation of data is carried out in the form of descriptive narratives, tables, or informant quotes, to facilitate the understanding and interpretation of the findings. The final stage is the drawing of conclusions that are carried out inductively based on the data that has been analyzed to answer the formulation of the problem and the purpose of the research.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Overview of Al-Husna Islamic Boarding School**

Al-Husna Marendal Islamic Boarding School is one of the Islamic educational institutions born from the integration of scientific vision, experience, and the spirit of transformative leadership. This Islamic boarding school was founded by a married couple, Drs. KH. Usman Husni, MA, and Hj. Aidatul Fauziah, Hsb, S.Pd., who have the same views in building an Islamic education system that is not only oriented towards the mastery of religious knowledge, but also the formation of character and independence of students. The idea of establishing this pesantren has grown since KH. Usman Husni was educated at the Salafiyah Islamic Boarding School Hubbul Wathan Aceh Singkil in 1957-1959, and was strengthened through his study experience at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, which he completed in 1976.

As an alumnus of Gontor, KH. Usman Husni was inspired by the leadership model and pesantren education system designed by KH. Imam Zarkasyi and KH. Ahmad Sahal. He brought the values of independence and renewal of pesantren education into his leadership practice. On the other hand, Hj. Aidatul Fauziah, who has an educational background and experience in the world of art and da'wah, also makes an important contribution to the development of Islamic boarding schools, especially in forming an educational space that is also friendly to female students. The ideals of the two are combined in one strong vision to establish an Islamic educational institution based on spiritual and social values.

Before establishing Al-Husna, KH. Usman Husni was once one of the important figures in the establishment and leadership of the Ar-Raudlatul Hasanah Islamic Boarding School in Medan between 1981-1987. However, idealism and the desire to build a more independent pesantren in accordance with the principles of education that he believed prompted him to resign. The momentum of this resignation became the starting point for the birth of the Al-Husna Islamic Boarding School. The decision is not just an administrative action, but a strategic step in realizing educational autonomy and the sovereignty of Islamic boarding school values which are expected to have a long-term impact on the young generation of Islam.

The establishment of the pesantren began on April 17, 1988 (11 Ramadan 1409 H) with the laying of the first stone on an area of 3.5 hectares in Marindal I Village, Patumbak District, Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatra. The name "Al-Husna" was chosen as a form of tafa'ul (hope of goodness) from Asma'ul Husna, which is expected to be a symbol of blessings and nobility of values in all aspects of education carried out. The main focus of pesantren from the beginning was not only the teaching of the yellow book or religious studies, but also the strengthening of mentality, morals, and the formation of the character of students in the context of broader social life.

The first educational program to be opened was Madrasah Diniyah Awwaliyah (MDA) with a four-year level. In 1992, this pesantren opened the Tarbiyatul Mu'allimin al-Islamiyah (TMI) program with a six-year study period covering junior to upper secondary education levels. This program adopts an integrated system between formal and early education, as well as strengthening the independence aspect of students in boarding life. This system continues to develop and becomes the main pillar in organizing pesantren education based on an integrated curriculum, character, and global Islamic insights.

Thus, the Al-Husna Islamic Boarding School not only stands as a religious educational institution, but also as a manifestation of transformative leadership that is able to answer the challenges of the times through a humanistic, value-based, and reaching educational approach that reaches the formation of kamil people. The history of its establishment is an important reflection in understanding how vision and values can be realized through consistent and long-term oriented leadership in the world of Islamic education.

### **The Form of Leadership of the Head of the Al-Husna Islamic Boarding School**

The results of field research show that the principal at the Al-Husna Marindal Islamic Boarding School plays a strategic role in improving the professionalism of teachers. This role is not only manifested in administrative management, but also through transformative leadership functions. There are at least two main roles carried out by school principals, namely as leaders and as motivators (Bellibaş et al., 2021).

#### **1. As a Leader**

As leaders, school principals have the responsibility to compile and formulate the vision and mission of the institution as the direction of education policy. At the beginning of his tenure, the principal was tasked with designing a vision and mission that would be the main guideline in carrying out work programs during the leadership period. The vision and mission were formulated not unilaterally, but through a process of discussion and deliberation with the school committee and the Al-Husna Islamic Boarding School Foundation. After obtaining input and approval, the vision and mission were then socialized to all school residents, including teachers and education staff.

The process of socializing the vision and mission is carried out through official meetings with all teachers and staff. In the meeting, the principal explained the policy direction and goals to be achieved. The principal also emphasized the importance of collaboration between all elements of the school to realize the vision and mission through the programs that have been designed. In practice, the principal actively directs and reminds teachers to work in accordance with the work program targets that have been set. Thus, the leadership of school principals is not only symbolic, but also operational and oriented towards measurable achievements (Mansor et al., 2021).

## 2. As a Motivator

In addition to playing the role of a strategic leader, the principal also performs a function as a motivator for teachers. One concrete form of this role is the morning briefing activity which is carried out regularly before class hours start. In the briefing, the principal gave a brief direction aimed at arousing work morale, strengthening dedication, and instilling exemplary values in teachers. This activity is not only a formal communication medium, but also a space to build emotional closeness between the principal and teachers.

Furthermore, the principal also opened a dialogue room and accepted complaints or problems faced by teachers in carrying out their duties. This action shows the presence of empathy and social sensitivity from the principal to the condition of his subordinates. By knowing firsthand the obstacles faced by teachers, the principal can provide relevant solutions so as not to interfere with the learning process in the classroom.

As an additional effort to strengthen teacher motivation, the principal periodically invites external resource persons or professional motivators. This activity is carried out every month, precisely in the fourth week, and is designed to provide new enthusiasm and a positive perspective for teachers. The variety of speakers invited every month is also a strategy to maintain enthusiasm and avoid boredom.

Overall, the leadership pattern of the principal at the Al-Husna Marindal Islamic Boarding School reflects a transformative approach that combines strategic vision and interpersonal abilities. Through the synergy between the roles of leaders and motivators, school principals are able to create a conducive, collaborative, and oriented work climate for the sustainable development of teacher professionalism (Valckx et al., 2020).

## 1. As a Supervisor

The role of the principal as a supervisor is carried out through a supervision process consisting of three main stages: planning, implementation, and evaluation. All of these stages are designed to ensure the improvement of teacher performance and the suitability of learning practices with the standards that have been set (Sholeh, 2021).

### 1) Supervision Planning

The supervision of learning carried out by the principal is incidental, without a fixed schedule, but with the target that each teacher will be

supervised at least once a month. The time of implementation of supervision is adjusted to the availability of the principal's time. When they have free time, the principal will use it to observe the implementation of learning in the classroom. The main focus in this planning is the suitability between the Learning Implementation Plan (RPP) prepared by teachers and the learning practices implemented. Teachers are required to submit weekly lesson plans to the principal to be corrected and adjusted to the type of subject, learning approach, and media used.

#### 2) Implementation of Supervision

In the implementation stage, the principal directly observes the learning process in the classroom. Supervision is carried out without prior notice to get an objective picture of the real conditions in the classroom. In this implementation, the principal not only assesses aspects of mastery of the material, methods used, and the use of media, but also assesses work discipline and teacher readiness. If a teacher is found who shows good performance, the principal gives an award as a form of motivation. On the other hand, if deficiencies are found, the principal delivers a personal reprimand so as not to cause embarrassment in front of his peers.

#### 3) Supervision Evaluation

The evaluation stage is an important part of following up on the results of supervision. Teachers who are considered to have weaknesses in mastering the material or using learning media will be given further guidance. This evaluation is then followed up in the form of a training or professional development program carried out both by the principal himself and by the Al-Husna Islamic Boarding School Foundation. Coaching is carried out every month by the principal, while the foundation organizes development at the beginning of the semester. The main goal of this process is to form teachers who are professionally competent and have good personality traits in fostering students.

#### 1. School Principal as an Innovator

As innovators, school principals play an important role in introducing and implementing various reforms to encourage the improvement of the quality of education. At the Al-Husna Marindal Islamic Boarding School, the innovation is manifested in two main forms.

##### 1) Encouraging Teacher Participation in Training

Principals actively involve teachers in training, training, and workshops relevant to their field. This activity aims to increase the professional capacity of teachers as well as expand their insights and skills in facing modern learning challenges. The training was held by various parties, including government agencies and socio-religious organizations such as Muhammadiyah. The principal also allocated a special budget to support teachers' participation in these development activities.

##### 2) Implementing the Reward and Punishment System

In order to maintain teacher motivation and discipline, the principal implements a system of rewards and sanctions. Teachers who show superior performance are rewarded, while teachers who show deficiencies are given sanctions or coaching as needed. The assessment

is carried out through direct observation by the principal, who periodically monitors teaching and learning activities in the classroom. Corrective actions are carried out personally to maintain ethics and professionalism in the work environment (Kılınç et al., 2024).

### **Supporting and Inhibiting Factors**

Improving the professionalism of teachers in the pesantren education environment is not an easy task. Support from various parties and the ability of school principals to manage various existing challenges are needed. Based on the results of interviews with the principal and several teachers at the Al-Husna Marindal Islamic Boarding School, there are a number of factors that are both supporters and obstacles in efforts to improve teacher professionalism.

In terms of supporting factors, one of the things that is very helpful is the teacher's educational background that is in accordance with the subjects taught. Most of the Islamic Religious Education teachers in this pesantren have studied up to the master's level, which directly contributes to improving the quality of the learning process. In addition, the existence of a harmonious working relationship between teachers and principals, as well as between fellow teachers, creates a positive collaborative atmosphere. This collaboration facilitates the process of exchanging ideas, discussing problem-solving, and supporting each other in carrying out learning tasks (Karacabey et al., 2022).

The principal also noted that teachers' awareness to continue to develop themselves is one of the important keys in improving professionalism. Teachers who actively participate in training, seminars, or other competency development activities show a commitment to improving their self-esteem. The support provided by the principal through guidance, briefing, and providing opportunities to participate in decision-making also strengthens the enthusiasm of teachers in carrying out their roles professionally. No less important, a conducive work atmosphere and a collective spirit in achieving the institution's goals create an environment that encourages teachers to continue learning and developing (Li & Liu, 2022).

However, there are also a number of obstacles faced in an effort to improve the professionalism of teachers. One of the most obvious obstacles is the limitation of learning support facilities and infrastructure. Some learning devices such as LCD projectors no longer function optimally due to their long service life, so their use must be alternated between classes. This limitation certainly has an impact on the variety of teaching methods that can be used by teachers (Setiyaningtiyas & Hartutik, 2022).

In addition, internal factors from teachers are also a challenge in itself. For example, limited understanding of the latest learning strategies, health conditions, psychological states, and different levels of dedication. External factors also have an effect, such as a less supportive work environment, lack of peer support, or an imbalance between workload



and financial well-being. Teachers who feel unappreciated or experience excessive work pressure tend to lose motivation, which ultimately affects their performance and enthusiasm in developing professionalism.

The principal realized that these challenges could not be solved instantly. Therefore, the approach used is to continue to evaluate, provide motivation, and find long-term solutions that can help improve the quality of education as a whole. By optimizing supporting factors and gradually overcoming existing obstacles, it is hoped that efforts to improve the professionalism of teachers at the Al-Husna Marindal Islamic Boarding School can be achieved in a sustainable manner.

## Conclusions

This research shows that the transformative leadership of the principal at the Al-Husna Marindal Islamic Boarding School plays a crucial role in improving the professionalism of teachers. The principal not only performs administrative functions, but also appears as a visionary leader, motivator, supervisor, and innovator. These four roles are carried out consistently through the formulation of inclusive visions and missions, regular motivation, the implementation of learning supervision, and the implementation of teacher development innovations.

In particular, the improvement of teacher professionalism is reflected in active involvement in learning planning, participation in external training, and willingness to accept evaluation and coaching. However, this process also faces a number of obstacles, such as limited learning facilities and differences in internal motivation among teachers. However, with the support of a collaborative work environment and a participatory leadership approach, these barriers can be overcome gradually. Thus, transformative leadership has proven to be effective in creating a school climate conducive to sustainable teacher professional development.

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