

PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP POLICIES IN ENHANCING EDUCATIONAL QUALITY FROM AN ISLAMIC EDUCATION PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how principal leadership policies contribute to educational quality improvement at SDN 226 Arcamanik Endah, Bandung City, by integrating managerial effectiveness with value-based educational principles. While existing studies on school leadership and character education often address administrative performance or pedagogical outcomes separately, this research offers a distinctive contribution by positioning principal policies as a strategic mechanism for simultaneously enhancing instructional quality and fostering students' social and moral character within a public primary school context. Employing a qualitative case study design, data were collected through systematic analysis of school policy documents, principal work programs, and relevant scholarly literature to capture leadership practices within their natural institutional setting. The findings demonstrate that principal leadership policies influence educational quality through four interconnected domains: instructional supervision, teacher professional development, needs-based management of facilities and infrastructure, and structured stakeholder participation. These policies were implemented through participatory planning, collaborative execution, and continuous evaluation, enabling sustainable quality improvement. From the perspective of Islamic Education (التربية الإسلامية), the study highlights that educational quality extends beyond academic achievement to include the internalization of ethical values, discipline, responsibility, and social awareness. By integrating leadership policy analysis with an ethical and culturally responsive educational framework, this study contributes to ongoing scholarly debates on school leadership and character education in culturally diverse educational contexts.

INTRODUCTION

In recent international discourse, early childhood education has increasingly emphasized the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy as a framework for fostering children's holistic development, including spiritual, moral, and social dimensions. Numerous studies highlight that educational practices grounded in local culture can enhance relevance, identity formation, and value

internalization among young learners; however, much of this literature remains dominated by Western or generalized cultural contexts. Consequently, limited attention has been given to how indigenous wisdom traditions in non-Western societies, particularly within Islamic educational settings, can inform character education models in early childhood (Agustin, 2020). This gap is especially evident in discussions surrounding Islamic early childhood education, where global pedagogical frameworks are often adopted without sufficient integration of local cultural values. Therefore, this study seeks to contribute to the global debate by examining how Javanese local wisdom can be systematically integrated into Islamic early childhood education, offering a culturally grounded perspective that enriches existing theories of culturally responsive pedagogy while addressing the specific socio-religious context of Indonesian Muslim communities (Muslim, 2020).

Education plays a strategic role in enhancing the quality of human resources and serves as a fundamental pillar of national development (Karoso et al., 2024; Trinh, 2023). Through the provision of high-quality education, nations are able to cultivate individuals who possess not only strong intellectual capabilities, but also well-developed social competencies and sound moral character (Hermawan et al., 2025; Kadek & Sukmadewi, 2022; Robaeah et al., 2023; Suhermanto et al., 2024). Education therefore functions as a transformative process that equips learners with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to participate productively in social, economic, and civic life (Jaenudin et al., 2023; Sabarudin et al., 2025). Within formal education systems, schools operate as the primary institutions responsible for the systematic transmission of knowledge, values, and skills to learners in a structured and sustainable manner (Nurulita et al., 2025). Schools provide organized learning environments in which educational objectives are translated into instructional practices, assessment processes, and developmental programs. As such, the effectiveness of schools in fulfilling their educational mandate is closely linked to the quality of leadership, management, and policy implementation at the institutional level. Effective school leadership plays a critical role in ensuring that educational processes are aligned with broader national goals while responding to the contextual needs of learners and communities.

From the standpoint of Islamic Education (التربية الإسلامية), education is not merely oriented toward cognitive development, but is fundamentally aimed at forming holistic human beings who possess intellectual competence, spiritual awareness, moral integrity, and social responsibility. Islamic education emphasizes the integration of knowledge ('ilm), values (akhlaq), and action ('amal) as the foundation of educational quality. Therefore, leadership in educational institutions plays a crucial role in ensuring that educational processes contribute to both academic excellence and character development in accordance with Islamic values (A'yunin et al., 2022). In this context, school principals are positioned as moral and instructional leaders who are responsible not only for administrative effectiveness but also for cultivating an ethical school culture grounded in values such as honesty, discipline, justice, responsibility, and mutual respect. These values are central to the objectives of Islamic education, even when implemented within public schools. Consequently, principal leadership policies can be viewed as strategic mechanisms for internalizing Islamic educational values through school programs, professional development initiatives, and collaborative engagement with stakeholders.

School quality is closely linked to the effectiveness of school management and the leadership capacity of the principal as the highest decision-maker at the institutional level (Parveen et al., 2024; Sunaengsih et al., 2019). Beyond fulfilling administrative duties, principals function as instructional leaders who influence teaching practices, shape learning environments, and determine overall educational outcomes. Through their leadership, principals set academic expectations, guide pedagogical improvement, and create conditions that support effective teaching and learning. Numerous studies have shown that strong principal leadership has a positive impact on teacher performance, school climate, and student achievement (Aningsih et al., 2022; Fonseca et al., 2024; Maharani et al., 2025; Nadeem, 2024). From the perspective of educational management grounded in Islamic Education (التربية الإسلامية), principal leadership policies serve as strategic instruments for

harmonizing institutional resources with the school's vision (Arif et al., 2024), mission, and long-term educational objectives while upholding ethical and moral values. Through carefully formulated policies, principals translate educational ideals rooted in knowledge ('ilm), moral conduct (akhlaq), and responsible action ('amal) into concrete programs and operational practices that guide both instructional and organizational processes. These policies encompass key areas of school management, including curriculum implementation, teacher professional development, facilities and infrastructure management, and the cultivation of a collaborative school culture based on integrity, responsibility (Jo, 2022), and mutual respect. When developed through systematic needs analysis and implemented consistently, such policies function not merely as administrative mechanisms but as drivers of continuous improvement and institutional learning, enabling schools to adapt to changing educational demands while maintaining a strong commitment to holistic educational quality and character development.

In the Indonesian context, efforts to improve educational quality at the primary school level continue to face complex and multifaceted challenges. These challenges include relatively low levels of student academic achievement, persistent disparities in school quality between regions and socio-economic contexts, and limited managerial and leadership capacity at the school level. Such conditions often result in uneven implementation of national education policies and hinder the achievement of equitable and sustainable educational outcomes (Mutmainah et al., 2024; Prieto et al., 2018; Sibuea, 2020; Usman et al., 2024). As a result, schools frequently struggle to translate policy directives into effective instructional practices that directly enhance learning quality.

These challenges highlight the urgent need for school principals who are capable of demonstrating visionary, innovative, and context-responsive leadership. Principals are expected not only to comply with administrative regulations but also to act as change agents who can interpret national policies in ways that are relevant to local school conditions. Effective principals must be able to design strategic policies, mobilize school resources, and foster collaborative school cultures that support continuous improvement in teaching and learning. Leadership that is adaptive and grounded in the specific needs of the school context is therefore essential for addressing persistent quality gaps in primary education.

Within this broader context, this study aims to systematically examine how principal leadership policies contribute to the improvement of educational quality at the primary school level, using SDN 226 Arcamanik Endah in Bandung City as a case study. Specifically, the research seeks to analyze the formulation, implementation, and strategic orientation of leadership policies related to instructional improvement, teacher professional development, and stakeholder engagement. By focusing on this school, the study intends to generate empirical evidence on how context-responsive principal leadership functions as a key mechanism for addressing institutional challenges and promoting sustainable educational quality improvement in Indonesian primary schools.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a case study design to obtain an in-depth and contextualized understanding of principal leadership policies as they are enacted within a real educational setting (Busetto et al., 2020; Garrido, 2017). The qualitative approach was selected because it is particularly effective for exploring complex social and organizational phenomena that involve values, interactions, and decision-making processes, which cannot be adequately captured through quantitative methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). By emphasizing depth and meaning rather than generalization, this approach enables a holistic examination of how leadership policies influence educational quality and contribute to the development of students' social and moral character. The case study design was chosen to allow a detailed exploration of leadership practices within a bounded system, namely SDN 226 Arcamanik Endah in Bandung City. This school was

purposely selected due to its sustained efforts in strengthening instructional quality, enhancing teacher professionalism, and fostering a value-oriented school culture, making it a relevant and appropriate context for examining the role of principal leadership in shaping educational quality at the primary school level.

Data were collected from multiple sources, including school policy documents, principal work program reports, and relevant scholarly literature on educational leadership and school quality management, in order to capture diverse perspectives and strengthen the analytical depth of the study. Data analysis followed systematic stages of data reduction, data display, and thematic conclusion drawing, allowing patterns and relationships to emerge across data sources. To ensure data trustworthiness in line with international qualitative research standards, several strategies were applied (Arif et al., 2025; Yin, 2018). Credibility was established through source triangulation and careful cross-checking of evidence across documents. Dependability was ensured by maintaining a transparent and well-documented research procedure, enabling the consistency of the analytical process to be evaluated. Confirmability was addressed by grounding interpretations firmly in empirical data and established theoretical frameworks, thereby reducing researcher subjectivity and enhancing the reliability of the study's findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the perspective of Islamic Education (التربية الإسلامية), the principal's policies at SDN 226 Arcamanik Endah reflect an effort to integrate effective school management with ethical and value-based leadership. These policies emphasize the development of character, moral discipline, mutual respect, and responsibility, which are in line with the fundamental goals of Islamic education that promote holistic human development. The findings show that policy formulation and implementation were carried out systematically and responsively, based on the school's vision and mission, internal needs assessment, and alignment with national education policies. Through this approach, the principal played a strategic role in translating policy directions into concrete programs that support continuous improvement in educational quality.

The findings of this qualitative study are derived from document analysis and in-depth interviews with the school principal and teachers at SDN 226 Arcamanik Endah, Bandung City. The results reveal that principal leadership policies are implemented in substantive ways that directly influence instructional practices, teacher development, resource management, and stakeholder engagement. These policies are not merely administrative in nature, but are embedded in daily school practices and perceived by teachers as meaningful drivers of educational quality improvement.

Policy Implementation in Improving Learning Quality

Interview data reveal that academic supervision is consistently perceived by both the principal and teachers as a core policy instrument for enhancing instructional quality. The principal explicitly described supervision as an ongoing process of professional guidance rather than a mechanism for inspection or control. Supervision activities are deliberately structured to support teachers' instructional development through regular classroom observations followed by reflective and collegial discussions. During these post-observation sessions, the principal focuses on identifying strengths in teaching practices, discussing challenges encountered during instruction, and jointly exploring alternative strategies to improve student engagement and learning outcomes. Teachers reported that this non-punitive and supportive approach created a sense of psychological safety, encouraging them to openly reflect on their classroom practices and to view supervision as an opportunity for professional growth. As a result, academic supervision functions not merely as an administrative requirement, but as a continuous mentoring process that strengthens instructional competence and contributes directly to the overall improvement of learning quality at the school level.

As stated by the principal: “Supervision is not intended to find teachers’ mistakes, but to accompany them in improving their teaching practices so that learning becomes more effective for students” (Principal Interview).

Teachers confirmed that classroom observations are followed by reflective discussions that focus on instructional strategies and student engagement. One teacher explained: “After the observation, the principal usually invites us to discuss what worked well and what can be improved. This makes us more aware of how our teaching affects students” (Teacher 1 Interview). Mentoring related to lesson planning and instructional materials was also identified as a key component of supervision. Teachers reported that feedback received during supervision sessions helped them refine learning objectives, teaching methods, and assessment techniques. These findings demonstrate that academic supervision functions as a structured and ongoing practice that supports instructional improvement at the classroom level.

Policy on Teacher Professional Development

The results show that teacher professional development is implemented through a combination of internal and external activities. According to the principal, strengthening teacher competence is viewed as a long-term investment: “Teacher quality determines student learning. Therefore, we encourage teachers to continuously develop their skills through training and professional forums” (Principal Interview).

Teachers reported active participation in Teacher Working Groups (KKG), in-school workshops, and external seminars. One teacher noted: “Through KKG activities, we can share teaching experiences with colleagues from other schools and learn new approaches that we can apply in our classrooms” (Teacher 2 Interview). Interview data further indicate that professional development activities significantly contribute to strengthening teachers’ confidence and adaptability in their instructional roles. Teachers reported that participation in training programs, workshops, and Teacher Working Groups (KKG) helped them better understand curriculum changes and apply new teaching strategies in response to diverse student needs. These activities were perceived as supportive rather than compulsory, creating a positive and non-threatening learning atmosphere among staff. As a result, teachers felt more motivated to improve their instructional practices and more prepared to face classroom challenges. This supportive professional development approach fostered a collaborative learning culture within the school, encouraging continuous reflection, shared learning, and sustained improvement in teaching quality.

Policy on Facilities and Infrastructure Management

Findings from document analysis and interviews indicate that facilities and infrastructure management is guided by instructional priorities. The principal explained that decisions regarding facilities are based on identified learning needs: “We prioritize facilities that directly support the learning process, such as classrooms, learning media, and student facilities” (Principal Interview). Teachers confirmed that improvements in classroom conditions and learning resources have positively affected teaching effectiveness. One teacher stated: “The availability of learning media and comfortable classrooms makes it easier for us to implement interactive learning activities” (Teacher 1 Interview). The involvement of the school committee in planning and monitoring infrastructure development was also highlighted. This participatory approach enhances transparency and ensures that resources are allocated efficiently to support educational activities.

Policy on Strengthening Stakeholder Participation

The results reveal that stakeholder participation is actively encouraged through structured communication and collaborative activities. Parents and school committee members are involved in

program planning, school meetings, and evaluation processes. The principal stated: “Parents and the school committee are our partners. Their involvement helps the school programs run more smoothly and sustainably” (Principal Interview).

Teachers observed that increased parental involvement contributes to better student discipline and learning motivation. As one teacher explained: “When parents are involved in school activities, students become more disciplined and motivated because there is consistent support from home and school” (Teacher 2 Interview). These findings indicate that stakeholder participation plays a significant role in strengthening social trust, shared responsibility, and collective commitment to school improvement efforts. Active involvement of parents, school committees, and community members fosters open communication and mutual understanding between the school and its stakeholders. Through regular meetings, collaborative planning, and joint evaluation of school programs, stakeholders develop a sense of ownership toward educational initiatives. This shared responsibility encourages sustained support for school policies and activities, both academically and socially. As trust increases, cooperation becomes more effective, enabling the school to implement improvement programs more smoothly. Ultimately, strong stakeholder engagement contributes to a supportive educational environment that reinforces the sustainability of school improvement efforts.

Table 1. Summary of Principal Leadership Policies and Empirical Findings

Policy Area		Main Activities	Evidence from Interviews
Learning Improvement	Quality	academic supervision, classroom observation, mentoring	Teachers receive constructive feedback and improve instructional practices
Teacher Development	Professional	KKG participation, training, workshops	Teachers report increased competence and confidence
Facilities and Infrastructure		Needs-based planning, stakeholder involvement	Improved learning environment supports teaching effectiveness
Stakeholder Participation		Parent meetings, school committee collaboration	Stronger school-community relationships and shared responsibility

The findings indicate that principal leadership policies at SDN 226 Arcamanik Endah are implemented across four interconnected policy areas that collectively support educational quality improvement. In the area of learning quality enhancement, academic supervision through classroom observation and mentoring provides teachers with constructive feedback that directly contributes to the refinement of instructional practices. Teacher professional development is pursued through active participation in Teacher Working Groups (KKG), training programs, and workshops, which teachers reported as increasing their pedagogical competence and professional confidence. Facilities and infrastructure management is guided by needs-based planning and stakeholder involvement, resulting in a more supportive learning environment that enhances teaching effectiveness. In addition, stakeholder participation is strengthened through regular parent meetings and collaboration with the school committee, fostering stronger school community relationships and a shared sense of responsibility for the successful implementation of educational programs.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that the principal occupies a pivotal position in shaping school improvement efforts, particularly in directing policies toward the enhancement of educational quality. At SDN 226 Arcamanik Endah, leadership practices demonstrate an orientation toward transformational leadership, as reflected in the principal’s capacity to articulate a clear direction, build shared commitment, and encourage teachers and staff to engage actively in quality-oriented initiatives. Rather than emphasizing administrative compliance alone, leadership practices at the school prioritize the development of human resources and institutional capacity in a sustainable

manner. This finding reinforces the argument proposed by Bush and Glover that effective school leadership is a decisive factor in determining school performance, especially through the creation of a supportive organizational culture and the establishment of a coherent strategic direction for improvement (Bush & Glover, 2014).

Viewed from the perspective of Islamic Education (التربية الإسلامية), the leadership policies identified in this study embody ethical and value-based principles that are central to Islamic educational philosophy. Leadership is understood not merely as a technical function but as a moral responsibility grounded in integrity, trustworthiness (amanah), and exemplary behavior (uswah hasanah). The principal's involvement in guiding teachers, overseeing learning processes, and fostering collaborative relationships reflects the Islamic conception of educational leadership as a form of moral stewardship that influences both institutional effectiveness and character formation within the school community. The emphasis on participatory leadership further strengthens this ethical foundation. Collaborative decision-making and stakeholder engagement observed in this study align with Islamic principles of consultation (shura) and collective responsibility. Through participatory practices, educational quality is not narrowly defined by academic achievement but is understood as a broader process that includes the cultivation of ethical conduct, social awareness, and responsibility among students and educators. This approach highlights the integration of managerial effectiveness with moral and social objectives in school leadership (Hermawan et al., 2025; Robaeah et al., 2023, 2024).

One significant finding concerns the implementation of systematic academic supervision as a means of improving learning quality. At SDN 226 Arcamanik Endah, supervision is not treated as a control mechanism but as a continuous professional learning process. Classroom observations, reflective dialogue, and mentoring activities enable teachers to evaluate and refine their instructional practices based on constructive feedback. Such practices strengthen the principal's role as an instructional leader who directly influences teaching quality. This finding is consistent with previous studies showing that sustained and structured teacher coaching contributes positively to instructional effectiveness and student achievement (Frihastama & Hermanto, 2022; Irmayani et al., 2018; Nasir et al., 2023).

In relation to teacher professional development, the principal's policies demonstrate a deliberate effort to enhance teacher capacity through continuous learning opportunities. Active participation in training programs, Teacher Working Groups (KKG), and professional forums reflects a strategic investment in human resources as the core determinant of educational quality. From a quality management perspective, teachers represent the most critical component of educational service delivery. Therefore, systematic efforts to strengthen pedagogical, professional, and reflective competencies are essential in responding to curriculum reforms and the demands of contemporary education. This finding supports the view of Djoyo et al. that sustainable improvement in educational quality is inseparable from the ongoing development of teacher professionalism (Djoyo et al., 2024).

The management of facilities and infrastructure also emerges as an important dimension of leadership policy. Rather than focusing solely on the availability of physical resources, the principal prioritizes their instructional relevance and effective utilization. Needs-based planning, transparent decision-making, and stakeholder involvement in infrastructure management reflect sound educational governance practices. Such an approach enhances accountability and reinforces stakeholder trust, which in turn strengthens institutional support for school improvement initiatives (Adiyono et al., 2022). Stakeholder participation constitutes another critical aspect of leadership effectiveness identified in this study. The involvement of parents, school committees, and the wider community extends beyond material support to active engagement in planning, implementation, and evaluation of school programs. Through structured communication and regular coordination, stakeholder participation becomes an integral component of school governance, fostering a supportive and inclusive educational environment.

Sustained stakeholder engagement also contributes to greater legitimacy and accountability of school policies. When stakeholders are meaningfully involved in decision-making processes, they are more likely to develop a sense of shared ownership and responsibility for school outcomes. This shared commitment enhances trust between the school and its community and facilitates smoother policy implementation. Consequently, leadership policies are not only more widely accepted but also more effective in achieving their intended objectives. Overall, the leadership policies implemented at SDN 226 Arcamanik Endah reflect a model of collaborative leadership that integrates diverse perspectives and resources toward common educational goals. By mobilizing collective efforts and aligning them with institutional values and priorities, the principal strengthens the school's capacity to sustain quality improvement initiatives and adapt to emerging challenges. This finding is consistent with previous research emphasizing the importance of collaborative and participatory leadership in supporting long-term educational quality improvement (Diyanto & Latipah, 2024; Mena-Guacas et al., 2025; Prasetya et al., 2025; Rosyidin & Arifin, 2021).

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings and discussion presented, it can be concluded that principal policies play a highly strategic role in improving educational quality at SDN 226 Arcamanik Endah, Bandung City. The principal functions not only as an administrative manager but also as a strategic leader and instructional leader who is capable of integrating all school resources toward the achievement of sustainable educational quality. The policies formulated reflect alignment among the school's vision and mission, the internal needs of the educational institution, and the direction of national education policies.

The success of educational quality improvement at this school is determined by the principal's ability to formulate policies that are visionary, contextual, and implementable. Continuous academic supervision, teacher professional development, needs-based management of facilities and infrastructure, and the strengthening of stakeholder participation have been shown to contribute significantly to improvements in learning quality, school climate, and teacher performance. The participatory implementation of these policies, accompanied by ongoing evaluation, demonstrates a strong commitment to systematic and sustainable quality improvement.

The implications of these findings underscore that improving the quality of primary education cannot be separated from the leadership capacity of the principal. Therefore, strengthening principal leadership competencies including managerial skills, academic supervision, and transformational as well as collaborative leadership is a fundamental prerequisite for enhancing educational quality. This study is expected to serve as an empirical reference for education policymakers, school administrators, and principals in designing and implementing effective policies to sustainably improve the quality of primary education.

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