
Strategic Leadership of Madrasah Principals in Enhancing Teacher Professionalism at School

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Abstract: The quality of education in Islamic elementary schools (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah) is highly dependent on the professionalism of educators, which in turn requires effective strategic management by school principals. to describe and analyze the formulation, implementation, and control of strategies in developing the professionalism of educators at MI KHR Ilyas Tanjungrejo Buluspesantren Kebumen. This study investigates the strategic management practices employed by the principal of MI KHR Ilyas Tanjungrejo, Kebumen, Central Java, Indonesia, in developing educator professionalism. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis from January to March 2025. Informants included the school principal, two teachers, and the school committee chair. The findings reveal three interconnected strategic management processes: (1) strategy formulation, encompassing vision-mission determination, SWOT analysis, and strategic planning through internal Teacher Working Groups (KKG), workshops, and professional training; (2) strategy implementation, involving motivational reinforcement and resource allocation, including performance rewards, seminar participation, and digital media integration; and (3) strategy control, through instructional supervision, peer observation, monitoring and evaluation by school supervisors, and mandatory teacher performance reporting. These strategic interventions resulted in measurable improvements in teacher pedagogical competence, instructional quality, and student academic achievement above the minimum competency standard. This study contributes to the growing literature on educational leadership and strategic management in Islamic educational institutions.

Keywords: strategic management; educator professionalism; madrasah principal; teacher competence

INTRODUCTION

Education is a universal necessity and the most strategic means of advancing human civilization. In Indonesia, the quality of education has become a persistent challenge, particularly in Islamic elementary schools (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah/MI) under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. As Fullan (2020) emphasizes, sustainable school improvement is fundamentally shaped by the quality of educational leadership, which includes the capacity of school principals to develop teachers' professional competence. Similarly, Bush and Middlewood (2022) argue that strategic management in educational settings enables school leaders to align organizational goals with instructional quality through purposeful planning, implementation, and evaluation processes.

Teacher professionalism remains a central concern in Indonesian education policy. The Ministry of Education and Culture has identified three primary challenges facing educators: uneven

distribution, inadequate competence, and welfare disparities (Iman et al., 2022). Research by Pramesti and Sobri (2021) found that teacher competence directly and significantly influences the quality of student learning outcomes in Islamic primary schools in Indonesia, reinforcing the urgent need for school principals to adopt evidence-based strategies for professional development.

Strategic management, as conceptualized by Wheelen and Hunger (2012), refers to a set of managerial decisions and actions that determine an organization's long-run performance through the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of strategies (Wheelen & Hunger, 2012). In educational contexts, strategic management enables institutions to respond to external challenges such as curriculum reform, technological advancement, and shifting community expectations, while simultaneously strengthening internal organizational capacities (Bryson, 2018). Specifically, in the context of madrasah education, Mulyasa (2021) contends that principals who apply strategic management principles are better positioned to build professional learning communities and sustain teacher development.

Research conducted by Warisno A and Hidayah N shows that the leadership of the head of the madrasah plays an important role in developing teacher professionalism through coaching, motivation, supervision, and strengthening an effective work culture in the madrasah environment (Warisno & Hidayah, 2022). Research conducted by M. Rofiki shows that the strategy of the head of the madrasa in improving teacher performance is carried out through strengthening academic supervision, continuous training, providing motivation, as well as structured performance evaluations to support educator professionalism (Rofiki & others, 2025).

The role of the principal as strategic leader is paramount. Leithwood et al. (2020) demonstrated through a large-scale meta-analysis that principal leadership is second only to classroom instruction as a school-level influence on student learning (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). In the Indonesian context, research by Inayati (2016) and Sholeh (2017) confirmed that the principal's ability to motivate, supervise, and develop teachers is a key determinant of teaching quality and institutional effectiveness in both public and Islamic schools (Inayati, 2016; Sholeh, 2016). However, empirical studies on strategic management practices in MI settings, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas of Central Java, remain limited.

MI KHR Ilyas Tanjungrejo, established in 1968, serves as a representative case of a community-based Islamic primary school that has demonstrated consistent growth, with student enrollment reaching 145 students across six grade levels in the academic year 2024–2025, and

multiple student achievements at the district and sub-district levels. This growth can be attributed in part to the principal's strategic leadership in developing educator professionalism. Yet, no systematic study has examined the specific strategic management mechanisms employed at this institution.

This study aims to address this gap by describing and analyzing: (1) how strategies are formulated to develop educator professionalism at MI KHR Ilyas Tanjungrejo; (2) how these strategies are implemented; and (3) how strategy control and evaluation are conducted. The findings are expected to contribute theoretical insights to the field of educational management and offer practical implications for school principals, educational policymakers, and researchers in Islamic education.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design with a case study approach, which is appropriate when the researcher seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2018). The case study method is widely used in educational leadership research because it enables a holistic examination of complex managerial processes as they unfold within specific institutional settings (Tisdell et al., 2025).

The research was conducted at MI KHR Ilyas Tanjungrejo, located in Tanjungrejo Village, Buluspesantren Sub-district, Kebumen Regency, Central Java, Indonesia. Data collection took place from January to March 2025. The study adopted purposive sampling to select informants who possessed direct knowledge of and involvement in the principal's strategic management practices. Key informants included: (1) the school principal (Ibu Reni Kurniasih, S.Pd.I.), who serves as the primary strategic decision-maker; (2) two classroom teachers with different levels of experience and subject responsibilities; and (3) the school committee chair, whose involvement reflected community stakeholder perspectives.

Three primary data collection techniques were employed. First, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with each informant on multiple occasions to explore their perceptions of strategy formulation, implementation, and control. Second, participant observation was carried out on school premises to document strategic activities such as workshop sessions, teacher meetings, internal KKG activities, and supervisory interactions. Third, document analysis was performed on institutional documents including the school profile, teacher performance reports,

workshop documentation, and student achievement records. This triangulation of data sources strengthened the credibility and confirmability of the findings (Cresswell, 2013).

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), involving three concurrent processes: data condensation (identifying and condensing relevant information), data display (organizing data into thematic categories), and conclusion drawing/verification (interpreting patterns and confirming findings through member checking and peer debriefing). Trustworthiness of the data was established through triangulation of sources and methods, prolonged engagement at the research site, and thick description of contextual details.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

1. Strategy Formulation in Developing Educator Professionalism

The first dimension of strategic management at MI KHR Ilyas Tanjungrejo involves the systematic formulation of strategies to develop educator professionalism. The findings indicate that this process encompasses three interrelated sub-processes: vision-mission determination, SWOT analysis, and strategy selection.

The principal initiates the strategy formulation process by engaging all teachers in collaborative meetings to reaffirm and align the school's vision and mission with professional development goals. As the principal stated: "We assign teaching responsibilities according to each teacher's qualification and educational background, and we require teachers to analyze the curriculum carefully so that instruction truly leads to the achievement of learning objectives." This practice aligns with Bryson's (2018) assertion that effective strategic planning in public and nonprofit organizations begins with a clear articulation of mission and long-term directional goals. Research by Hallinger and Heck (2022) similarly found that principals who regularly revisit institutional vision and mission with their staff foster higher levels of collective efficacy among teachers.

The SWOT analysis component involves periodic evaluation of internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats. Meetings are held monthly and bi-semesterly to assess the school's instructional strengths (e.g., certified teachers, available facilities), weaknesses (e.g., limited budget, uneven digital literacy), opportunities (e.g., government training programs, KKG activities at the district level), and threats (e.g., competition from neighboring schools, declining student enrollment in prior years). This

process reflects the strategic planning model described by David and David (2023), in which environmental scanning is a prerequisite for meaningful strategy development.

From this analysis, concrete strategies are identified and operationalized. The principal articulated these as follows: "We form an internal Teacher Working Group (KKG) within the school, actively promote KKG participation at the sub-district and district levels, organize school staff meetings, conduct seminars and workshops, facilitate offline and online training, hold two workshops per year, and require teachers to submit daily performance reports." These strategies reflect the multi-level professional development model advocated by Darling-Hammond et al. (2022), which emphasizes the importance of both school-embedded and external professional learning opportunities in building sustained teacher capacity. Research by Pramuaji and Prasajo (2021) in the Indonesian context confirmed that principals who apply structured strategy formulation through collaborative meetings and professional development planning significantly improve teacher performance outcomes.



Figure 1 determination of vision, mission, and long-term goals

2. Strategy Implementation in Developing Educator Professionalism

The second dimension encompasses how formulated strategies are enacted in practice. The findings demonstrate that implementation at MI KHR Ilyas Tanjungrejo is organized around two primary mechanisms: motivational reinforcement and resource allocation.

Motivational reinforcement is regarded by the principal as a foundational driver of professional growth. The principal stated: "We encourage teachers to be disciplined in carrying out their duties, provide opportunities to attend seminars and scientific meetings, offer rewards to teachers who successfully guide students to academic achievements in competitions, and provide the media and tools teachers need to develop their instruction." This approach is consistent with self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2020), which identifies autonomy, competence, and relatedness as core psychological needs that motivate sustained professional

effort. In the educational leadership literature, Leithwood and Sun (2018) found that principals who employ motivational strategies, including recognition, capacity-building opportunities, and professional autonomy, exert significant positive effects on teacher commitment and performance.

One of the teachers (Ibu Kumalasari Nugraha, M.Pd.) described the motivational environment as follows: "We participate in the Teacher Working Group, which meets every two weeks. We receive the latest training aligned with current government policy, such as the Merdeka Curriculum. We also receive certificates that serve as evidence of our professional development." This reflects the importance of structured, continuing professional development (CPD) as a motivational mechanism. Tan et al. (2023) found in a multi-country study that school-based CPD activities that incorporate peer collaboration and formal recognition are significantly associated with higher levels of teacher professional identity and instructional innovation.

Resource allocation constitutes the second major implementation mechanism. The principal systematically mobilizes available human, financial, and technological resources to support professional development activities. Teachers are encouraged to use varied instructional methods and digital media, reducing reliance on lecture-only approaches. One teacher explained: "We use various methods and media. For instance, rather than lecturing for the whole lesson, we incorporate group discussions and presentations so students remain actively engaged." This finding echoes UNESCO's (2023) recommendation that school leaders invest in technology integration and active learning pedagogies as part of strategic capacity-building for teachers (Antoninis et al., 2023). Research by Yuliani et al. (2022) in Indonesian Islamic schools confirmed that principals' strategic allocation of resources for technology and professional learning significantly correlates with improvements in teachers' pedagogical innovation.



Figure 2 Teacher Performance Group Activities

3. Strategy Control in Developing Educator Professionalism

The third dimension of strategic management involves the monitoring, evaluation, and corrective adjustment of strategies. At MI KHR Ilyas Tanjungrejo, the strategy control process consists of four interconnected mechanisms, as articulated by the principal: (1) supervision of learning implementation; (2) peer observation of classroom teaching; (3) monitoring and evaluation by external supervisors and the school's monitoring team; and (4) mandatory submission of teacher performance reports and student progress evaluation results.

Instructional supervision is conducted by the principal on a regular basis to identify gaps between planned and actual teaching quality. This is complemented by peer observation, in which teachers systematically observe and provide feedback on each other's classroom practice. This peer-learning mechanism aligns with the research of Fernandez and Chiu (2021), who found that structured peer observation programs in Asian educational contexts significantly enhance teachers' reflective practice and pedagogical skill. The external monitoring component involves collaboration with the regional school supervision team (pengawas) and an internal monitoring and evaluation committee, ensuring accountability at multiple organizational levels.

The reporting requirement whereby teachers must submit regular performance records and student learning progress data serves as a formal accountability instrument that provides the principal with data for evidence-based decision-making. This practice reflects the performance management frameworks described by Armstrong and Taylor (2020), which emphasize the importance of continuous feedback loops in improving organizational performance. In the Indonesian educational context, research by Arifin and Setiawan (2023) demonstrated that principals who implement systematic performance monitoring and feedback

mechanisms report significantly higher rates of improvement in teacher professional competency scores on national certification evaluations.

The cumulative impact of strategy control at MI KHR Ilyas Tanjungrejo is evident in measurable outcomes. The principal reported: "Teachers can carry out their teaching duties well, are able to analyze strengths and weaknesses of their instruction including through Classroom Action Research (PTK)—and students are able to master learning materials both theoretically and practically, as evidenced by evaluation scores above the minimum competency threshold (KKM)." These findings corroborate the argument of Schleicher (2022) that effective school leadership, when operationalized through systematic monitoring and feedback, creates a culture of continuous improvement that benefits both teachers and students.

Taken together, the three strategic management dimensions observed at MI KHR Ilyas Tanjungrejo form a coherent and iterative cycle that corresponds to the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) quality management model. This cyclical approach to professional development aligns with the educational strategic management framework proposed by Wheelen and Hunger (2012), in which strategy formulation, implementation, and evaluation are not linear stages but dynamic, interdependent processes. The findings thus extend the existing literature by demonstrating how this framework operates in the specific institutional context of a community-based Islamic primary school in rural Central Java, a setting that has received limited scholarly attention.

Discussion

The formulation of strategies for developing the professional competence of educators at MI KHR Ilyas Tanjungrejo is carried out through systematic and directed stages. These stages begin with the determination of the vision, mission, and long-term goals of the madrasa as a guideline in educational development. The vision and mission serve as the basis for the head of the madrasa in determining the direction for enhancing teacher professionalism. With clear goals, the educator competence development program can be implemented more effectively and measurably.

The madrasa also carries out identification of internal strengths and weaknesses as a basis for determining the appropriate strategy. The head of the madrasa plays an important role in designing strategies, providing direction, and building cooperation with all educational components. The implemented strategies aim to improve the quality of educators through various professional development programs. Through well-planned and organized strategies, the

professional competence of educators at MI KHR Ilyas Tanjungrejo is expected to develop optimally.

The stage of strategy implementation in developing the professional competence of educators at MI KHR Ilyas Tanjungrejo is the next stage after the strategy formulation. In this implementation, there are two activities carried out by the school principal for educators in improving their professional competence, namely providing motivation to educators and allocating resources. This is in line with the application of the strategy, which includes determining annual operational targets, company policies, motivating employees, and allocating resources so that the established strategy can be implemented. Furthermore, a teacher can be considered professional if, among other things, they: have skills/expertise in educating or teaching, have adequate intellectual abilities, the ability to understand the vision and mission of education, expertise in transferring knowledge or learning methodologies, understand the concept of child development/developmental psychology, have the ability to organize and creative problem-solving, and have the art of educating. Therefore, in the implementation of resource management applied by the head of the madrasah to educators, it is highly needed. Because with the implementation of these resources, teachers can be creative, have skills, and continue to develop.

From the research results at MI KHR Ilyas Tanjungrejo, a headmaster always provides motivation to educators. The motivation from the headmaster also greatly influences educators in giving encouragement to always develop their professional competence. Educators who are always given motivation will be more enthusiastic about continuously advancing. The motivation given by the headmaster to educators comes in the form of encouragement to always improve their professional competence. For example, encouraging teachers to always use available learning media, encouraging teachers to always participate in teacher working group activities held internally or externally, encouraging teachers to always use e-learning methods, and also giving rewards to teachers who have achievements. Thus, this will provide encouragement and motivation to educators to always develop their professional competence.

The evaluations that have been carried out by the head of the madrasa should continue to be maintained in order to monitor the educators and to see the extent of the improvement in the competencies possessed by the educators at MI KHR Ilyas Tanjungrejo. In its implementation at MI KHR Ilyas Tanjungrejo, a madrasa head carries out strategy control. This control is intended to monitor or as an effort by the head of the madrasa to see the developments and weaknesses

faced. With the existence of strategy control, it will be easier to know the shortcomings and strengths possessed by MI KHR Ilyas Tanjungrejo. The madrasa head carries out this control not only to monitor, but also to take actions that can bring about changes at MI KHR Ilyas Tanjungrejo. There are many efforts that can be made by the head of the madrasah in controlling strategies to develop the professional competence of educators at MI KHR Ilyas Tanjungrejo. These include (1) supervision of learning implementation, (2) peer observation of learning, (3) monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of learning by educators in the classroom by supervisors and the monitoring and evaluation team, (4) requiring teachers to submit performance reports and the results of student learning progress evaluations.

The controls carried out by the head of the madrasah are very important to implement at MI KHR Ilyas Tanjungrejo. With these controls, information and data can be provided about how the strategies carried out by the head of the madrasah are implemented with educators in an effort to develop the educators' professional competence. Professional educators bring a good quality to the implementation of learning in the classroom; professional educators will have a positive impact on the madrasah. Furthermore, professional educators also realize the goals or educational aspirations expected for the madrasah as well as the goals of national education. Professional educators will provide enjoyable learning, so that students do not feel bored with always following the learning delivered by the teacher in the classroom.

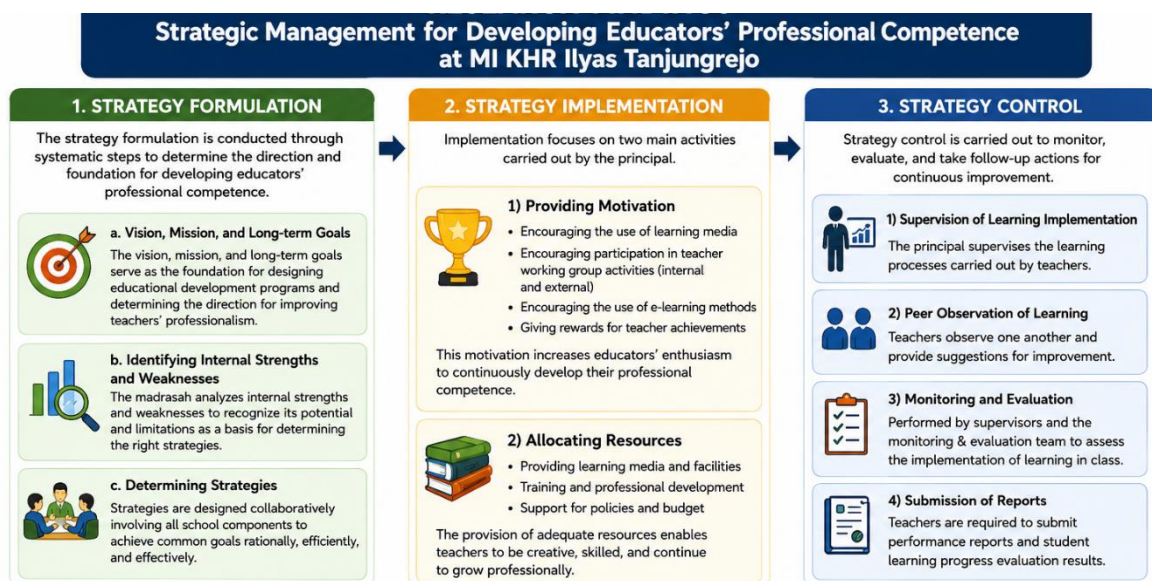


Figure 3 Researh Finding

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the strategic management of educator professionalism at MI KHR Ilyas Tanjungrejo is carried out through collaborative strategy formulation, including vision-mission alignment, SWOT analysis, and professional development planning. The implementation of the strategy focuses on motivational support, professional opportunities, and the provision of learning resources to improve teaching quality. Furthermore, strategy control is conducted through supervision, peer evaluation, external monitoring, and teacher performance reporting to ensure continuous professional improvement. These findings provide a practical model for school leaders and policymakers in strengthening teacher professionalism within Islamic primary education institutions.

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