

## Transformational School Leadership and the Making of a Professional Educator Ecosystem in Islamic Secondary Education

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**Abstrak:** Pendidikan merupakan pilar utama dalam membentuk generasi bangsa yang cerdas dan berakhhlak mulia. Dalam konteks tersebut, kepemimpinan kepala sekolah memiliki peran strategis dalam menciptakan ekosistem pendidik yang profesional, khususnya di SMA Muhammadiyah 3 Jember. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana kepemimpinan transformasional kepala sekolah, yang diwujudkan melalui fungsi manajerial, supervisi akademik, dan pembinaan profesional, berkontribusi terhadap pengembangan kompetensi guru secara berkelanjutan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan studi dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepala sekolah yang visioner, komunikatif, dan konsisten dalam mengimplementasikan program peningkatan kompetensi guru mampu membangun budaya belajar yang kolaboratif, reflektif, dan berorientasi mutu. Dukungan kepala sekolah terhadap pengembangan profesional berkelanjutan—melalui pelatihan, komunitas belajar, dan evaluasi berkala—terbukti efektif dalam meningkatkan kualitas pengajaran. Dengan demikian, kepemimpinan transformasional kepala sekolah berperan sebagai katalisator utama dalam pembentukan ekosistem pendidik yang profesional di lembaga pendidikan Islam tingkat menengah.

**Kata kunci:** Kepemimpinan transformasional, kepala sekolah, ekosistem pendidik, profesionalisme guru, pendidikan Islam

**Abstract:** Education serves as a fundamental pillar in shaping a generation that is intellectually capable and morally grounded. Within this context, the leadership of school principals plays a strategic role in cultivating a professional educator ecosystem, particularly in Islamic secondary education settings such as SMA Muhammadiyah 3 Jember. This study examines how transformational school leadership—manifested through managerial functions, academic supervision, and professional development initiatives—contributes to the continuous growth of teachers' competencies. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis. The findings reveal that a visionary,



communicative, and consistent principal, who effectively implements teacher development programmes, is able to foster a collaborative, reflective, and quality-oriented learning culture. Furthermore, the principal's support for continuous professional development—through training, learning communities, and periodic evaluations—has proven effective in enhancing teaching quality. In conclusion, transformational school leadership functions as a key catalyst in shaping a professional educator ecosystem within Islamic secondary education institutions.

**Keywords:** Transformational leadership, school principal, educator ecosystem, teacher professionalism, Islamic education

**How to Cite:** Nursyamsiyah, S., Wakit, S., Bahar, A.H., Setiawan, A., Rofi, S. (2025). Transformational School Leadership and the Making of a Professional Educator Ecosystem in Islamic Secondary Education. *EL-HIKMAH: Jurnal Kajian dan Penelitian Pendidikan Islam*, vol. 19(1), 42-57. <https://doi.org/10.20414/elhikmah.v19i1.13319>.

## Introduction

**E**ducators are individuals who are able to carry out educational actions in an educational situation to achieve educational goals. Educators are all those who influence a person's development and work according to their duties and functions to achieve educational goals. (Nursyamsiyah, 2021; Nursyamsiyah & Huda, 2024; Subiarto & Wakhidin, 2021). In the Indonesia's National Education System Law states that *professional educators are responsible for planning and implementing the learning process, assessing learning outcomes, providing guidance and training, and conducting research and community service, particularly for those working in higher education* (Undang-Undang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional, 2003).

Education is the main pillar in national development, where teachers as professional educators have a strategic role in determining the quality of educational outcomes. Teacher awareness in improving pedagogical competence is considered very important to support and motivate students' general knowledge, personal abilities, and 21st century competence. It is very important for teachers to update topics that are developing following the development of education and teachers to evaluate related to practices that have been carried out following the development and needs of stakeholders (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; L.M. Desimone, 2009; M.S. Garet et al.,

2001). Teacher professionalism is not only determined by individual competence alone, but is also greatly influenced by the educational ecosystem in which they work. In this context, the role of the principal as an educational leader becomes very important in creating and maintaining an ecosystem that supports the growth of teacher professionalism in schools.

Ecosystem is a collection of processes that are interrelated with each other. So it can be said that each individual is interrelated and has an impact on maintaining balance and harmony (Maknun, 2017). The professional educator ecosystem can be understood as a work environment that supports the development of teacher competencies in a sustainable manner, through various aspects such as coaching, training, academic supervision, collaborative culture, and a positive work climate. The principal as a manager and transformational leader has the responsibility to create an atmosphere that encourages innovation, reflection, and continuous improvement of teacher performance. The educator ecosystem is a design by Ki Hajar Dewantara which is called the *Tri Pusat Pendidikan*, namely school, community and family. The meaning of the trilogy is that students can learn wherever they are, educators who were initially active in learning but schools are expected to be able to utilize the environment as a source of learning both in the family and community (Suljatmiko, 2022).

Amidst the increasingly complex challenges of the world of education, including technological developments, curriculum changes, and the dynamics of the needs of 21st century students, principals are required not only to carry out administrative functions, but also to be the main drivers in improving the quality of education. This is in line with the Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation No. 15 of 2018 which emphasizes that principals must be instructional leaders who focus on strengthening the quality of teachers and the learning process.

However, in practice, not all principals are able to carry out this role optimally. Various obstacles are still found, such as weak leadership vision,

lack of systemic support, and limited managerial competence and academic supervision. Therefore, a study of the role of the principal in realizing a professional educator ecosystem is very relevant and important, especially to find effective leadership patterns in the context of Islamic educational institutions. There are several qualitative research results by Cochran, Levine and Horn, research that focuses on effective learning and professional teachers, for example Horn's research which discusses teachers in their practice applying discussions to solve problems, while the less active group, on the contrary, focuses more on teacher understanding. (Horn et al., 2020; Levine & Marcus, 2010; Smith & Lytle, 1999). Research by Mardhiah et al on teacher professional development through the Indonesian Teacher Professional Education Programme (Pendidikan Profesi Guru [PPG]) at Islamic Education Institutions, there are several qualitative research results by Cochran, Levine and Horn, research that focuses on effective learning and professional teachers, for example Horn's research which discusses teachers in their practice applying discussions to solve problems, while the less active group, on the contrary, focuses more on teacher understanding (Hasan & Patimah, 2022; Mardhiah & Musgamy, 2023).

Research by Gerry Czerniawski on: "Professional development or professional learning: developing teacher educators' professional expertise". The results of the research are that learning in schools carried out by teachers must be better, but the findings show a lack of support given by schools to educators at the beginning of their careers (Czerniawski, 2023). Of the four research results, all use qualitative research with the same object, namely educator competence. However, what distinguishes this study from the results of the study is the aspect of the ecosystem that supports the professional competence of educators.

This study aims to explore and analyze the role of the principal in building a professional educator ecosystem, as well as identifying supporting and inhibiting factors that influence the success of these efforts. The results of

this study are expected to contribute to the development of more effective educational leadership policies and practices and have an impact on improving the overall quality of education.

To comprehensively capture the multi-faceted dynamics of the professional educator ecosystem, this study employs a descriptive qualitative approach utilizing a single-case study design at SMA Muhammadiyah 3 Jember. This design was specifically chosen to allow for a holistic investigation into the principal's leadership interactions within their natural setting—capturing nuances that quantitative measures might overlook. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, prioritizing key informants including the principal, teachers, and administrative staff who possess profound, tacit knowledge of the school's organizational culture. To ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings, this study rigorously applies methodological triangulation by cross-referencing insights from in-depth semi-structured interviews, participatory observations, and a review of relevant institutional documentation. Furthermore, the data analysis adopts the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which proceeds through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data validity was maintained through triangulation of sources and techniques, namely comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documents to ensure consistency of findings. By adhering to these strict methodological standards, this study ensures that the resulting reconstruction of the educator ecosystem is empirically grounded, offering a valid and robust framework for understanding leadership practices in Islamic educational institutions.

## Discussion

Based on the comprehensive qualitative inquiry conducted at SMA Muhammadiyah 3 Jember, which synthesized data from observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation, this study illuminates the multifaceted

role of the principal. The analysis reveals that cultivating a professional educator ecosystem is not a singular administrative task, but a complex integration of strategic behaviors. Specifically, the findings crystallize into four fundamental dimensions: visionary leadership, the professional development of teachers, the strengthening of a collaborative culture, and strategic resource management. These interrelated aspects demonstrate how the principal acts as a central catalyst in transforming the school environment into a sustainable ecosystem for professional growth.

## **Visionary Leadership**

The principal has the responsibility to maintain the effectiveness of school management. Because the school is progressing inseparable from the role of the principal. As a leader, he must be able to see all opportunities and challenges, even obstacles in carrying out his leadership. Visionary leadership is able to carry out the school's vision in his leadership and is able to expand it in various contexts. Visionary leaders have progressive ideas to achieve school goals (Komariah & Triatna, 2006; Sodik & Iftitahul Husniyah, 2024).

The principal of SMA Muhammadiyah 3 has five roles in implementing visionary leadership in developing professional educators to advance the quality of the school as follows:

- 1) The principal as the direction maker. In this case, the principal creates a routine work program in 1 year such as: training in developing pedagogical, social, professional and personality competencies of educators, conducting supervision and coaching, strengthening professional ethics and character of educators, and monitoring and evaluating periodically.
- 2) The principal as an agent of change, such as: building a school vision together, creating a positive school climate, encouraging innovation and learning, collaboration and community involvement as well as continuous evaluation and improvement..

- 3) The principal as a representative of the press, such as: managing the school's media and website, building good relations between the committee and parents of students, building a positive image of the school, establishing strategic partnerships and becoming a school spokesperson.
- 4) The principal as a coach, such as: becoming a mentor for new educators, providing individual coaching for educators, providing small training in the school environment, and building a culture of learning and collaboration.
- 5) The principal is a role model for educators, such as: discipline and responsibility, how to communicate, having a high enthusiasm for learning, being fair and inspiring in action.

Based on the five roles of the principal, the theory of visionary leadership explains the characteristics of a visionary leader, which include: having a clear vision, being innovative and daring to take risks, effective communication, collaborative and inclusive, and being able to adapt to anyone (Annisa & Muttaqin, 2024). Principals who successfully create a professional educator ecosystem generally have a clear vision regarding the direction of developing the quality of education and teacher competence. They are able to translate this vision into a concrete and measurable school strategic plan, and involve all stakeholders in its implementation. Visionary leadership can be said to be effective if the principal is able to carry out his role well and can implement the school's vision in the form of a progressive work program in improving school quality:

1. Improve teacher and student performance. A visionary principal is able to motivate teachers to continue to develop. Teachers feel they have a clear direction, so they are more enthusiastic in teaching. As a result, student learning outcomes also increase.
2. Encourage innovation and creativity. With a visionary leadership style, the school is not afraid to try new things—whether in learning

methods, use of technology, or extracurricular activities. This creates a dynamic and adaptive school culture.

3. Building a positive school culture. Visionary leadership creates a collaborative, participatory, and vibrant environment. Teachers, students, and education staff feel they are an important part of achieving the school's vision..
4. Improve the image and trust of the community. Schools led by visionary principals usually have excellent programs, orderly systems, and good services. This makes the school gain more trust from the community.
5. Able to adapt to changing times. Visionary principals not only focus on current conditions, but also prepare schools to face future challenges, such as digitalization of education, independent curriculum, and the needs of the 21st century work world.

## **Teacher Professional Development**

Professional is a job or activity that requires expertise, skills, expertise and skills in accordance with the quality standards of professional education (Poncojari & Setia Budi, 2020).

One of the principal's main roles is as a coach and facilitator for improving teacher competency. This is done through training activities, internal workshops, academic supervision, and providing space for teachers to participate in self-development activities, both internally and externally. The principal is also active in providing constructive feedback on teacher performance.

Basically, teacher professionalism is an absolute thing that must be improved by each teacher and by the school through various activities that are able to develop learning management and other skills with the aim that students have skills including skills to acquire knowledge (learning to know), skills in carrying out certain tasks (learning to do), skills in building identity

(learning to be), and skills to be able to live side by side harmoniously (learning to live together). There are several activities in the development of sustainable professionalism, namely:

1. Actively participate in learning training

The training conducted is in the form of pre-service training and in-service training. This training emphasizes the evaluation of each teacher's performance to improve and enhance teaching competence.

2. Get used to writing scientific papers in journals

As a teacher, you should read scientific papers related to education and be able to write your own scientific papers related to your own competence or the competence of other teachers so that you can contribute to others.

3. Participate in scientific forums

Activities that are able to exchange information and provide new information and valuable innovations for the improvement and enhancement of competence.

4. Conducting Classroom Action Research

Reflection activities in classroom action research provide valuable experience for teachers to find and provide solutions to improve learning and are able to improve teacher competence from real experiences..

5. Participate in professional organizations

In each professional organization, there are usually scientific forum activities and other activities to improve teacher professionalism. This is where every teacher can often interact with other teachers.

6. Cooperation with other professional institutions

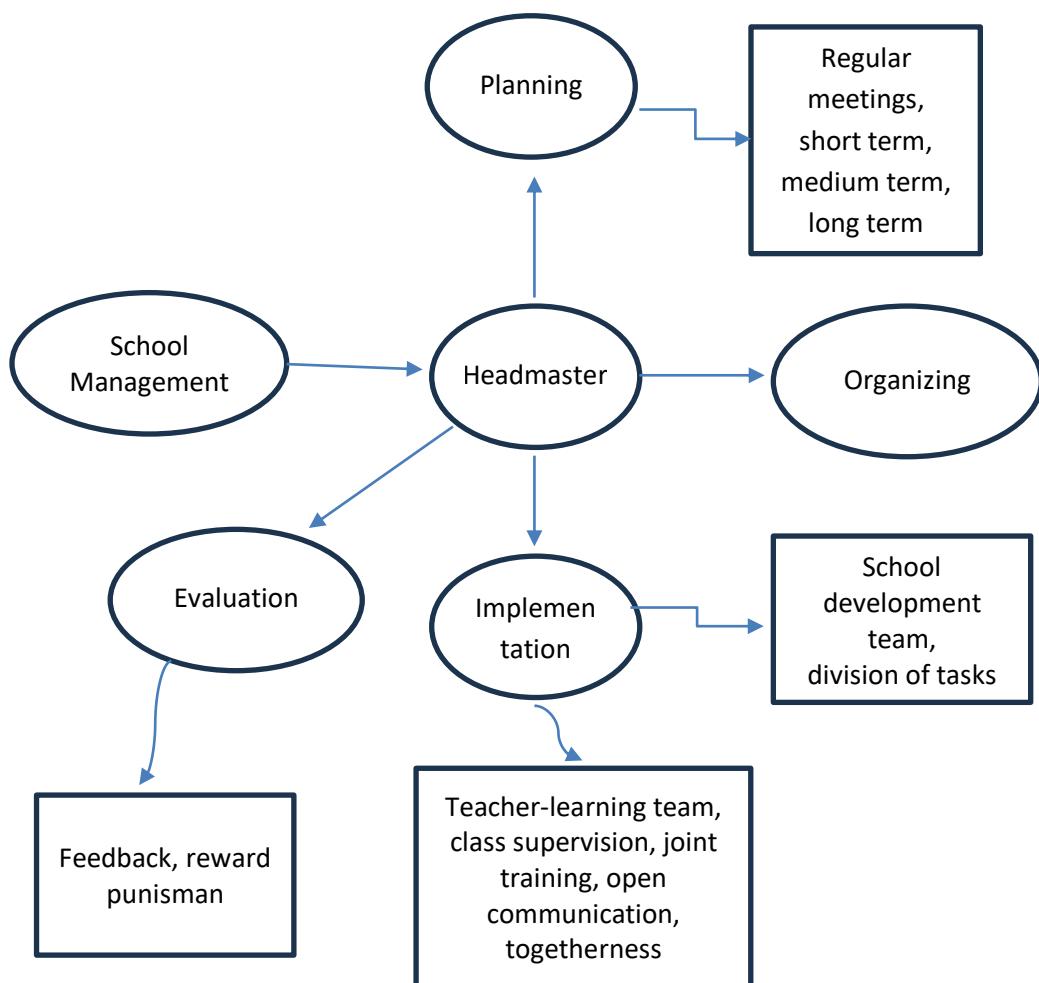
As a teacher, you should be able to open yourself up to other teachers. Exchanging information between senior and junior teachers aims to complement each other's shortcomings and weaknesses. In addition, cooperation with professional institutions that support education and

learning is considered important to hone competence and follow technological developments (Husaini, 2018).

### **Strengthening Collaborative Culture**

An effective principal encourages the creation of a collaborative work culture among teachers. Discussion forums, learning community activities, and best practices are part of the ecosystem that is built. A culture of mutual support between educators is one of the main pillars of the growth of professionalism. As has been done by the principal of SMA Muhammadiyah 3 Jember, a collaborative culture is expressed in school planning starting from determining the vision and mission, learning planning, annual budget planning and other activities. The principal's leadership is mentioned in Huxham's theory as being able to carry out interactive cooperation, open communication, division of responsibilities, and solving problems together.

The implementation of school culture is not only internal to the school but also involves external elements, namely: the school committee to listen to complaints and needs of parents, staff and teachers to determine decision making to determine development planning for a period of 5 years. The collaborative culture at SMA Muhammadiyah 3 includes: 1) the implementation of a collaborative culture involves skills development, active promotion, creating an environment and encouraging the participation of all school members. The purpose of this activity is to hone teacher skills continuously following the needs and developments of technology; 2) the development of cross-subject work teams and skills training can help create an inclusive school culture, the principal conducts coaching with teachers on collaborative culture practices. The form of school management coaching carried out by the principal includes several aspects, namely: planning, organizing, implementing and evaluating. The following is Figure 1. Related to school collaboration culture coaching:



**Figure 1. Collaborative Culture**

In the implementation of collaborative culture in Figure 1. There must be supporting and inhibiting factors. Supporting factors can be seen from the participation and enthusiasm of all elements of the school, both teachers and students, so that there is a positive impact, there is an increase in student discipline, teacher discipline, an increase in student and teacher achievement and an increase in teacher competence. While the inhibiting factors are that there are still apathetic teachers, the involvement of community participation has not been maximized and so on. As a principal, he is able to have 7 roles as mentioned by Mulyasa, namely the role of the principal as a manager, educator, motivator, innovator, supervisor, leader, and administrator (Mulyasa, 2019).

## Strategic Resource Management

School resources are divided into two, namely biotic resources (living resources) and non-living resources. Living resources include: principals, teachers, education personnel, students, parents of students, school supervisors, the surrounding community and the education office and local government. While non-living resources include finance, facilities and infrastructure, and the natural environment. In managing human resources according to the Ministry of Education and Culture, there are two approaches, namely: Deficit-Based Approach and an Asset-Based Approach (Putri, 2023). The Deficit-based approach focuses on how the principal plays his role in overcoming these problems, such as many teachers who are not yet certified, do not have a laboratory, etc. Meanwhile, the Asset-based approach focuses on how to empower so that it can provide benefits and continuous improvement.

Principals utilize available resources, both from the government and the community, to support teacher quality improvement programs. This includes the provision of supporting learning facilities and infrastructure, access to educational technology, and establishing partnerships with external institutions for teacher capacity development. However, this study also found a number of obstacles faced by principals, such as budget constraints, lack of teacher motivation in participating in training, and bureaucracy that is not yet flexible in supporting innovation in the school environment. However, principals who have good commitment and managerial skills are able to manage these challenges through an adaptive and participatory approach.

School resource management cannot be separated from school management including human, money, methods, machines, marketing, materials that are carried out systematically. Management is carried out by the principal as a manager with the aim of directing all human resources starting from planning, organizing, directing and controlling with the aim of achieving school goals (Harris & Jones, 2020).

Overall, the results of the study indicate that the principal has a strategic role in creating a professional educator ecosystem in high schools. The success of this role is highly dependent on strong leadership, a healthy organizational culture, and ongoing collaboration between the principal, teachers, and the entire school community.

## Conclusion

Based on the comprehensive findings at SMA Muhammadiyah 3 Jember, this study concludes that the principal plays a central and transformative role in constructing a robust professional educator ecosystem. The success of this ecosystem is not accidental but is the result of deliberate visionary leadership characterized by openness and inclusivity. The principal has successfully shifted the paradigm from traditional administration to a dynamic ecosystem builder through three strategic pillars.

First, in terms of professional development, the principal has institutionalized continuous growth by integrating semester-based training into the annual strategic plan. This ensures that teacher competence is not static but evolves alongside educational demands. Second, the cultivation of a collaborative culture proves to be a critical differentiator. By applying collective management functions—planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating—the principal fosters a sense of ownership among staff. The unique implementation of a transparent reward and punishment system during evaluations further reinforces this culture, motivating teachers to align their individual goals with the school's vision.

Third, strategic human resource management is positioned as the highest priority. The principal demonstrates that resource management is not merely about maintenance but about empowerment and optimization. By prioritizing human capital improvement before addressing other resources, the school maintains its existence and competitiveness.

Ultimately, this study implies that realizing a professional educator ecosystem requires a leader who acts as both a visionary architect and a strategic manager. For Islamic educational institutions, this model suggests that integrating open leadership with structured professional support is key to sustainable quality improvement. Future research should consider examining the long-term impact of this ecosystem on student achievement to further validate these leadership practices.

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