



# The principal leadership in improving the performance of teaching and educational staff at the vocational school of Alkhairaat Palu

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## Abstract

This study investigates the principal's leadership in improving the performance of teaching and administrative staff at a vocational school of Alkhairaat Palu. This study uses qualitative research methods and the data were gathered through observation, in-depth interviews, and document studies. The data were analyzed through the process of data reduction, data presentation, data verification, and conclusion drawing. The results show that the principal improved the performance of educational staff and education at the vocational school by providing direction, guiding activities in a positive direction, and acting in a friendly and caring manner. The school principal also showed greater patience and helpfulness, and provided more sympathy and support. Every complaint and problem from educators and staff were addressed and solved in a friendly manner. The principal also motivated teachers and staff to increase their work spirit. Teachers' and staff's professionalism can be seen from the ability to produce work above standard. The research implies the rapid development of science and technology within the school. Although society's demands on the school have increased, more concrete and effective efforts are needed to improve the quality of education in the school.

**Keywords:** School principal, Teachers, Administrative staff, Work performance

## Introduction

A school principal must be able to mobilize and empower the entire school community, such as teachers, staff, and students, to effectively achieve the school's vision, mission, and educational goals in accordance with expected standards (Eden, 2015; Heenan, Lafferty, & McNamara, 2024) <sup>[1, 5]</sup>. Within a school or educational institution, the principal's position, role, and function are critically important and strategic; the principal serves not only as the top leader but also as an administrator, motivator, and supervisor. Consequently, a principal must possess robust and capable competencies, including personal, social, managerial, and professional competencies. As the highest-ranking leader in an educational institution, the principal absolutely requires such strong competencies; this necessity stems from the magnitude of their duties and responsibilities, as well as the complexity and diversity of the challenges involved, given that the final decision regarding any school program or activity rests with the principal.

Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to expect a school principal to possess the right personality and a comprehensive understanding of their duties and responsibilities. As the central figure within the school, the Principal's words and actions serve as a model for the entire school community—embodying the educational philosophy of National Education Figure Ki Hajar Dewantara, known as the Education trilogy) *Ing ngarsa sung tulada* (setting an example when at the front), *Ing madya mangun karsa* (fostering spirit and initiative when in the midst of the group), and *Tut wuri handayani* (providing

encouragement and support from behind). The success of an educational institution is inextricably linked to the principal's leadership. As the school's sole leader, the principal is responsible for guiding and influencing all stakeholders involved in educational activities to collaborate toward achieving the school's goals. Thus, leadership stands out as one of the most significant factors in creating a high-quality educational institution.

Several research findings (e.g. Hallinger, Liu, & Chen, 2025; Hashemi, Sadeghi, Roshanaei, & Purfarzad, 2025) <sup>[3, 4]</sup> indicate that the combination of leadership attitudes and behaviors accounts for a minimum of 31% of the variance. Leader behavior accounts for a greater share of the variance in leadership effectiveness than leader attitudes do. Research results also show that leader behavior mediates the relationship between leader attitudes and leadership effectiveness. Leadership behavior is inextricably linked to the definitions of the term's "behavior" and "leadership." In general, behavior is defined as an individual's response or reaction to stimuli or the environment (Hashemi *et al.*, 2025) <sup>[4]</sup>. In this sense, the definition of behavior is broad, encompassing not only human behavior but also that of other organisms. In certain discussions, the term is also referred to simply as "behavior." Behavior is how one acts or conducts oneself, especially toward others. In the context of human behavior, it can be defined as the manner in which a person acts or conducts themselves, particularly in relation to others. The term "behavior" is frequently used across various fields of study, including management and leadership.

Leadership is defined as the ability to influence others whether subordinates or a group and to direct their behavior, while possessing specific skills or expertise valued by the group to achieve organizational or group goals (Horner, 1997) <sup>[6]</sup>. Fundamentally, leaders exhibit diverse leadership behaviors; a successful leader provides direction, motivation, and monitoring to subordinates to enhance their performance. Performance is oriented toward maximizing work output. Educators' and educational staff's performance can be assessed based on their actions specifically, how they carry out their duties or their actual job performance. Thus, performance is not viewed merely as a ratio of input to output, but rather as the ability of educators and educational staff to contribute positively to their work environment, generate outcomes beneficial to themselves, demonstrate creativity and foresight, and consistently strive to achieve goals effectively and efficiently.

Performance refers to what is achieved, the accomplishments demonstrated, and work capability. The term "performance" signifies work achievement specifically, the result an individual attains after carrying out an activity (Justus, Arghode, & Barker, 2022) <sup>[7]</sup>. Performance, or work achievement, comprises three interrelated elements: skills, effort, and external conditions. Skill level represents the "raw material" an individual brings to the workplace, such as knowledge, abilities, and technical proficiency. Effort level refers to the motivation an employee applies to complete a task. Meanwhile, external conditions refer to factors outside the individual that support work productivity. Consequently, the higher an employee's performance level, the greater the work achievement produced; conversely, the lower the performance level, the lower the resulting performance or achievement.

In carrying out their duties, educators and educational staff rely heavily on effective leadership characterized by proper direction, motivation, and monitoring to enhance their performance within the school. This leadership is a crucial asset; the school principal's behavior, actions, and policies directly affect the performance of their subordinates. A good leader must consistently demonstrate positive conduct toward their staff and provide effective motivation, thereby fostering high work efficiency among educators and educational staff. Such leadership is expected to yield satisfying results for both the educational institution and staff members. Performance levels among educators and educational staff vary across institutions; this is evident in how the public evaluates, compares, and selects the best schools for their children. One key criterion for this assessment is the performance of the educators and educational staff. Given the proliferation of educational institutions today, the public is more cautious when choosing schools for their children.

The researcher selected the vocational school of Alkhairaat Palu as the study site because it is a highly progressive institution; indeed, in terms of quality, it stands out as a leading educational institution in Palu City. The school's progress and success did not come easily; rather, it required significant effort from all members of the school community particularly the principal, educators, and educational staff. Based on this, the

researcher assumes that both educators and educational staff bear a substantial workload in striving to meet targeted goals. Consequently, they require guidance, motivation, and monitoring from the principal to enhance their performance.

## Literature review

### The concept of leadership

Leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree on what needs to be done and how it can be done effectively, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives (KılıÇ & Bouchareb, 2025) <sup>[8]</sup>. Meanwhile, Harold Koontz (1980) <sup>[9]</sup> defines leadership as the art of influencing subordinates to accomplish their assignment with zeal and confidence. In addition, Reach and Behling said that leadership is the process of influencing an organized group toward accomplishing its goals. Thus, leadership is a form of behavior that uses a leadership style designed to influence group members' activities in achieving shared goals while benefiting both individuals and the organization. Another definition states that "leadership is the science and art of influencing individuals or groups to act expectedly in order to achieve goals effectively and efficiently.

Based on the definitions above, the author concludes that leadership is the art of influencing others to work willingly and enthusiastically toward achieving group goals. This requires leadership qualities characterized by a strong personality and authority, as well as the ability to employ appropriate behaviors and leadership styles to influence others. Leadership entails an interactive relationship involving a leader and those being led. Therefore, a leader must possess the spirit and capability to perform their duties mobilizing, persuading, and motivating subordinates to achieve goals as the leadership process is shaped by three factors: the leader, the followers, and the situation.

The concept of leadership in education cannot be separated from the general concept of leadership. Definitions of leadership continue to evolve with the roles performed and the ability to empower subordinates or members thereby fostering initiative, creativity in their work, and outcomes that are more meaningful to the organization. According to Robbins, leadership is the ability to influence a group toward achieving goals; meanwhile, Kouzes and Posner state that leadership involves creating ways for people to contribute to the realization of something extraordinary. Miftah Toha defines leadership as the activity of influencing people to direct them toward achieving organizational goals.

### School principal leadership in the execution of duties and functions

Principal leadership represents the results achieved by an individual or group within an organization, in accordance with their respective authority and responsibilities, toward the attainment of organizational goals (Hallinger *et al.*, 2025) <sup>[3]</sup>. This authority and responsibility are manifested through the execution of required functions and tasks. Both personal attributes and the nature of the work influence an individual's

performance. Personal attributes encompass fundamental abilities, personality traits, motivation, and high expectations, while clearly defined task forms and structures characterize the nature of the work. Consequently, the stronger an individual's attributes and their understanding of the tasks, the more effectively they can perform the work correctly.

A principal's leadership is influenced by factors such as leadership quality, behavioral flexibility in leadership style, followers, and the prevailing situation. Meanwhile, a principal's leadership within the managerial dimension is measured by the role they assume, the talents and abilities they have acquired to execute that role, and the effort they dedicate to actualizing those talents and abilities in that capacity. Principals are responsible for more than just the smooth technical and academic operation of the school; given the current circumstances and the evolution of schools in our country, numerous new challenges have emerged that fall under the principal's responsibility to resolve and address. In this study, principal leadership is defined as the outcome of the principal's performance in exercising influence, transforming the vision and mission, empowering and mobilizing staff, providing motivation, direction, and guidance, and fostering commitment among teachers to inspire them to improve their performance.

Exercising influence through authority means the principal can sway subordinates by using power derived from legitimate, coercive, and reward sources, ensuring compliance, loyalty, and the execution of assigned tasks. Furthermore, the Principal should use expert and referent power to earn subordinates' sympathy, fostering greater trust and admiration so they are willing to emulate the leader's behavior. When exercising influence, the principal should demonstrate honesty, self-confidence, and resilience, supported by strong personal attributes such as astuteness, communicativeness, creativity, and persuasiveness. The principal must also apply an appropriate leadership style. Transforming the school's vision and mission requires the principal to transform organizational culture among followers through transformational leadership. Key responsibilities include formulating the school's vision, mission, targets, and goals; developing strategies to achieve them in collaboration with the entire school community; and engaging teachers in conceptualizing and formulating these elements. Additionally, the Principal employs various methods to instill confidence and optimism in the vision among followers, motivate them to embrace it, and strengthen their belief in achieving success. The principal should also acknowledge followers' successes, reinforce the values embodied in the vision through dramatic and symbolic actions, and lead by example.

## Methodology

This study uses qualitative methods. In qualitative research, theory serves only as a guide for data gathering and analysis (Nurdin & Pettalongi, 2022; Nurdin, Stockdale, & Scheepers, 2016) [11, 15]. The data were collected through direct observation, in-depth interviews, and written document analysis at the research site (Nurdin, Pettalongi, Ahsan, &

Febrianti, 2023; Rusli, Hasyim, & Nurdin, 2021; Rusli & Nurdin, 2022) [12, 16, 17]. The research was conducted at a vocational school in Al-Khairaat, Palu City, Indonesia. The researcher chose the school because it is a reputable vocational school that implements the transformative leadership concept to build work performance in Islamic education. The results of this study can later serve as a reference and guideline for integrating local language into Islamic religion teaching and for making schools models for other educational institutions. Data were collected through direct observation, focus group discussion, in-depth interviews, and written document analysis. The interviews involved the school principal, five teachers, and ten students. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were reviewed with participants to obtain their consent (Nurdin, Scheepers, & Stockdale, 2022; Nurdin, Stockdale, & Scheepers, 2014) [13, 14]. The data analysis used a deductive approach, interpreted as a research procedure that produces deductive data from interviews and field notes. The data analysis used thematic analysis from Strauss and Corbin (1998) [19]. The analysis started with open, axial, and selective coding. The final result of the data analysis is the set of themes identified.

## Results and Discussion

### Principal leadership in improving teacher and staff performance

A leader serves as a figurehead and a role model for their staff. Leaders must be able to set a positive example for their subordinates. One such instance is the ability to provide guidance. Guidance, in this context, can be understood as modeling positive behavior such as interacting kindly with others and demonstrating attentiveness through mutual care. As one informant explained:

"I consistently provide guidance to all educators and educational support staff during nearly every activity, including meetings. Offering guidance is also a strategy for improving performance. I never stop providing direction to all the staff at this school. Ultimately, this guidance aims to instill honesty, trust, and work motivation—qualities cultivated from the very beginning. From this foundation, high work performance emerges, alongside a sense of mutual trust and respect among the staff."

Guidance can be put into practice through mutual tolerance and acceptance. When expressing opinions, differences of view often arise, making mutual tolerance essential; if one cannot agree, it is possible to respond kindly and politely without offending. This is precisely the approach taken by the principal. This attitude also shows in positive interactions among staff members acting in a friendly manner, free from aggression. When asked whether the principal provides guidance to the teaching and administrative staff, the teacher immediately answered in the affirmative. This guidance is clearly reflected in the principal's polite and friendly demeanor; she consistently sets a positive example for her staff. I observed that this attitude fosters strong communication between the staff and the principal. Consequently, rather than undermining one another, a spirit of mutual support and respect naturally emerges.

As the school principal, I foster an environment of mutual guidance and provide opportunities for both teaching and non-teaching staff to offer constructive input. This approach aims to create a positive and harmonious relationship between leadership and staff. Beyond friendliness and attentiveness, patience and a high level of tolerance are excellent ways to build rapport in professional relationships. At this school, direction is not one-way; staff members are also encouraged to contribute their own ideas. This is the approach I take with all the staff here, hoping it serves as a foundation for effective communication. As a leader, I also strive to be fair and to look after the well-being of every staff member.

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Furthermore, Fairhurst (2008) <sup>[2]</sup> emphasizes that trust and effective communication between leaders and subordinates are crucial factors in building a healthy organization. In the context of Alkhairaat Vocational School, Palu, the Principal has successfully fostered a supportive and empathetic work atmosphere for both staff and the surrounding community. This attitude strengthens the sense of togetherness and staff loyalty toward the school, thereby creating a work environment conducive to achieving educational goals professionally and effectively. Meanwhile, the Principal plays a strategic role as an educational leader responsible for mobilizing all school resources to ensure optimal operation (Yamani & Nurdin, 2023) <sup>[20]</sup>. Mulyasa explains that a professional principal must act as a motivator and innovator, while also cultivating positive social relationships with the school community and the public. The dedication shown by the vocational school of Alkhairaat Palu principal in providing support, attention, and empathy to staff reflects the humanistic and democratic leadership style described by Mulyasa. Mulyasa also notes that a leader's sympathy and empathy significantly influence the creation of a harmonious work climate within the school. The principal of the vocational school of Alkhairaat Palu fosters a sense of mutual care, compassion, and solidarity among the staff. Such positive emotional connections motivate employees to perform their duties and responsibilities more effectively. This demonstrates that the principal's leadership focuses not only on achieving organizational goals but also on nurturing positive social relationships to advance both the school and the surrounding community.

### **The school principal monitors teachers' work performance regularly**

As previously discussed, the school principal plays a crucial role in an educational institution. The success of such an

institution is inextricably linked to the leadership and vision of the person in charge. An effective leader cares about the educators and educational staff within their institution. A successful leader must be able to evaluate the performance of these staff members recognizing and rewarding their efforts while also being willing to administer disciplinary measures when necessary. Consequently, a leader's stance is vital when formulating institutional policies and regulations (Rustina *et al.*, 2026) <sup>[18]</sup>. Regarding the Principal's role in monitoring the performance of educators and staff, it is essential to implement regulations or policies that align with educational standards. Managing staff performance requires the principal to be adept at formulating institutional regulations; in this context, a key responsibility is monitoring performance.

Monitoring is the routine process of collecting data and measuring progress toward program objectives. It focuses on processes and outputs, while also providing the baseline data needed to address issues within an institution or agency. Monitoring conducted by the principal of the vocational school of Alkhairaat Palu begins with an analysis of the behavior of teaching and non-teaching staff specifically, by repeatedly evaluating their work attendance in relation to their respective areas of responsibility. A second aspect of monitoring involves providing information on attendance and work ethic, with the aim of positively influencing staff behavior at the institution. One informant stated the following:

"In my view, performance is the ability to produce work that exceeds standard or common benchmarks. Educators can be considered productive if they can deliver the expected services in a timely manner. Performance can be defined as the effective and efficient use of resources to achieve educational goals. Work, meanwhile, is the activity of doing something to produce an expected outcome. Teaching and non-teaching staff at SMK Alkhairaat Palu can be considered productive if they utilize resources effectively and efficiently specifically, by transforming previously poor work into better work and consistently producing high-quality results".

Educator and education personnel productivity can be assessed from various perspectives. They are considered productive if they can deliver expected services in a timely manner, use resources effectively and efficiently to achieve educational goals, and align work outcomes with the necessary resources (Nudin, Amin, & Sofyan, 2024) <sup>[10]</sup>. The productivity can also be gauged by changes in these staff members' behavior. Such behavior is reflected in their active school attendance and even their diligence in attending classes. Consequently, productive employees can also be considered professional in their work, although, in reality, not all educators and education personnel demonstrate professionalism in performing their duties.

The principal assigns roles to educators and educational staff at the Vocational School of Alkhairaat Palu based on their qualifications and capabilities, specifically their university degrees or fields of study relevant to the subjects they teach. Consequently, 90% of the educators and staff can be considered professionals whose assignments align with their

areas of expertise. However, some individuals have assigned subjects that do not strictly match their academic majors but do reflect specific skills or expertise; therefore, assign them roles that align with those skills. This is supported by research findings indicating that the educators and staff at this institution are generally professional, as their roles align with their fields of expertise. Nevertheless, some staff members' assignments do not match their academic majors; these individuals serve as laboratory operators or administrative staff at Vocational School of Alkhairaat Palu.

## Conclusion

The principal's leadership in enhancing the performance of educators and educational staff at the Vocational School of Alkhairaat Palu is implemented through several strategies. First, the school principal provides direction: a leader must guide activities in a positive direction, act in a friendly and attentive manner, remain patient and helpful, demonstrate sympathy and empathy, and listen to the grievances and issues faced by teachers and staff. Second, the school principal provides motivation: strategies include making an effort to understand all teachers and staff members thoroughly. Furthermore, as the top leader, the principal strives to assign personnel to roles that align with their interests, abilities, and expertise, while offering attention and support to all subordinates without favoritism or discrimination. Equal opportunities are provided for all teachers and staff to develop their skills and competencies; additionally, as a form of appreciation for their achievements and creativity, the principal grants both material and non-material rewards such as motivational praise or other forms of recognition aimed at boosting the performance and professionalism of the school's staff. Finally, the school principal monitors supervision is applied through specific steps, such as observing the execution of duties and the performance of educators and staff specifically regarding professionalism in teaching, educating, mentoring, and guiding students.

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