

Servant Leadership As A Leadership Model For The Principal Of the Special Program of Muhammadiyah Junior High School Kottabarat Surakarta

Abid Daffa Khairullah¹, Istanto²

^{1,2} University of Muhammadiyah Surakarta

*Corresponding Author. E-mail: G000210019@student.ums.ac.id

Abstract: This study examines implementing a leadership model by the principal of Muhammadiyah Junior High School Program Khusus Kottabarat Surakarta, an Islamic school known for its character education and spirituality-based learning. This study collected data through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis using a qualitative descriptive design. The study revealed that the principal consistently applies servant leadership principles, including empathetic listening, empowering teachers, modeling spirituality, and transparent communication. These practices foster a collaborative and religious school climate. Despite facing challenges such as differences in personality and communication styles, the principal overcomes these challenges through personal engagement and the instillation of values. These findings offer an original contribution by contextualizing Servant leadership within the cultural and spiritual values of Muhammadiyah schools and confirming its relevance as a transformative model of Islamic educational leadership.

Keywords: Educational Leadership, Muhammadiyah Schools, Principals, Servant Leadership, Teacher Empowerment.

Introduction

School leadership plays a strategic role in realizing the vision, mission, and effective, quality-oriented school management. In Islamic schools, this role is not merely administrative but also carries a moral and spiritual mission, particularly in instilling Islamic values among students and the entire school community¹. Muhammadiyah schools, as educational institutions that blend religious values with modernity, require a leadership model capable of aligning professional management

¹ Dian Nur Afiah, Rasiman, and Sumarno, "The Influence Of School Principals' Managerial Skills And Teacher's Work Motivation On The Quality Of Junior High School," *AJIS: Academic Journal of Islamic Studies* 10, no. 1 (2025): 149-66, <https://doi.org/10.29240/ajis.v10i1.12983>.

with principles of exemplary conduct and service².

One leadership approach that emphasizes the dimension of service is Servant Leadership. This model places leaders as servants who prioritize the needs and development of organizational members before pursuing their interests³. In the school setting, principals with a Servant leadership style not only lead from above but are also personally involved in the dynamics of the school, such as listening to teachers, nurturing student character, and maintaining healthy two-way communication. This style aligns with Islamic values that position leaders as *khadim* or servants to the community⁴. Recent empirical research shows that Servant leadership positively contributes to increasing teacher motivation, community participation, and a more harmonious school environment⁵. In Muhammadiyah schools, which have a mission of preaching and values-based education, Servant leadership is a strategic approach in grounding religious values in everyday leadership practices⁶. However, despite its significant potential, in-depth studies on implementing Servant leadership by school principals at the junior high school level within the Muhammadiyah environment, particularly in Surakarta, remain relatively limited⁷.

This study was conducted at SMP Muhammadiyah Program Khusus Kottabarat Surakarta, a progressive Islamic school known for its character-building system and academic innovation. The focus of this research is to explore how the school principal implements the principles of Servant leadership in the context of daily leadership. Thus,

² Syahlarriyadi, "The Role Of Leaders Of Islamic Educational Institutions In Increasing The Quality Of Islamic Education In Madrasah" 1, no. September (2023): 443–70.

³ Marinu Waruwu, "Improvement Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah Dalam Perspektif Servant Leadership Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah Dalam Perspektif Servant Leadership Marinu Waruwu Prodi Magister Administrasi Pendidikan," no. December (2021), <https://doi.org/10.21009/10.21009/Improvement.082>.

⁴ Lilik Nur Kholidah, Uyu Wahyudin, and Yuyu Yuhana, "PERAN SERVANT LEADERSHIP TERHADAP KINERJA GURU (LITERATURE REVIEW)" 11, no. 1 (2023): 9–12.

⁵ Akhmad Muadin, "PERAN KEPEMIMPINAN SERVANT LEADERSHIP KEPALA" 4, no. 2 (2023): 199–203.

⁶ Afiah, Rasiman, and Sumarno, "The Influence Of School Principals' Managerial Skills And Teacher's Work Motivation On The Quality Of Junior High School."

⁷ Arham Junaidi, "Peran Kepemimpinan Servant Leadership Kepala Sekolah Dalam Meningkatkan Kepuasan Stakeholder Di SMP YPM TENGGARONG SEBERANG," 2021.

this study is expected to provide empirical contributions to developing a contemporary Islamic leadership model, particularly in Muhammadiyah schools⁸. Previous studies, such as those by Nikmah, Lailiyah, and Nurkolis, emphasize implementing instructional leadership among elementary school principals, focusing on efforts to enhance teaching quality and teacher performance. While insightful, these studies did not explore leadership models rooted in service and spiritual values, especially relevant in Islamic education⁹.

Previous research supports the effectiveness of this model in education. Muaddin revealed that Servant leadership can increase teacher loyalty and create a more positive work culture at SMA Islam Yogyakarta¹⁰. Similar results were shown in the context of madrasahs, where principals who implemented Servant leadership created a more harmonious work environment and increased teacher job satisfaction. Both studies highlight the importance of humanistic aspects in school leadership¹¹. Risky studied secondary schools in East Java and found that Servant leadership positively correlates with teacher work motivation and trust in leadership¹². On the other hand, Muadin's study concluded that Servant leadership can bridge communication between school elements and foster a sense of ownership among teachers and staff. This reinforces the argument that this model is not only conceptually ideal but also applicable at various levels of education.

The implementation of Servant leadership in Islamic schools is also reinforced by research, which shows that the principal's strategy in improving educator competence is highly dependent on a collaborative approach, continuous empowerment, and spiritual guidance¹³. The study

⁸ Lasminah, Bukman Lian, and Mulyadi, "The Influence of School Committees and School Principals Leadership on the Quality of Education," *Proceedings of the International Conference on Education Universitas PGRI Palembang (INCoEPP 2021)* 565, no. 20 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.210716.151>.

⁹ Nurun Nikmah, Muhimatul Lailiyah, and Nurkolis, "Implementation Of Instructional Leadership By School Principals In Elementary School," *AJIS: Academic Journal of Islamic Studies* 10, no. 1 (2025): 213–30, <https://doi.org/10.29240/ajis.v10i1.12974>.

¹⁰ Muadin, "PERAN KEPEMIMPINAN SERVANT LEADERSHIP KEPALA."

¹¹ Muh Ibnu Sholeh, "EVALUASI DAN MONITORING MANAJEMEN PEMBELAJARAN PENDIDIKAN ISLAM DALAM UPAYA PENINGKATAN KUALITAS" 1 (2023): 48–73.

¹² Muhammad Rizky Alfathir, "Pengaruh Servant Leadership Terhadap Kinerja Karyawan Dengan Kepuasan Kerja Sebagai Variabel Mediasi," 2022.

¹³ Ayunda Istanto, "The Head o Madrasah Strategis in Improving the Competency of Educators at MAN 1 Surakarta" 11, no. 1 (2019): 1–14,

confirms that effective leadership in Islamic educational institutions is oriented toward academic achievement, character building, and a religious and participatory work culture. These findings align with the Servant leadership approach, which emphasizes the values of service, individual development, and the social responsibility of leaders toward the educational community. In the Muhammadiyah school environment, Servant leadership is considered highly relevant because it aligns with Islamic teachings on responsible, trustworthy leadership and upholds the value of togetherness. However, studies on the practice of Servant leadership at the junior high school level in Muhammadiyah schools, particularly in Surakarta, remain very limited. Previous research has primarily focused on senior high schools or madrasahs, with few exploring the experiences of school principals at the junior high school level. SMP Muhammadiyah Special Program Kottabarat Surakarta is a progressive and outstanding Islamic educational institution known for its character-building initiatives. The school emphasizes the integration of the national curriculum with moral education, supported by a values-based managerial system. The Servant leadership approach is particularly intriguing in this context, as its values align with the school's vision and the Muhammadiyah culture.

Based on this background, this study aims to describe in depth how the principal at Muhammadiyah PK Kottabarat Surakarta Junior High School implements the principles of Servant leadership. The survey's focus includes the form of implementation, empowerment strategies, communication dynamics, and challenges faced in applying this leadership model. This research is expected to contribute theoretically and practically to developing Islamic leadership based on service values.

Research by Wulandari and Istanto emphasizes that the strategies of school principals in Islamic-based schools, such as SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Gatak, in building public trust are inseparable from implementing religious values and participatory leadership. School principals build public trust by improving the quality of teachers and students through Islamic-based programs such as Quran memorization, congregational prayers, regular charity contributions, and the cultivation of the 5S character traits (Smile, Greet, Greet, Polite, Courteous). These

findings align with the servant leadership model, which positions leaders as servants and character developers for the entire school community¹⁴.

Research Methods

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of the servant leadership model by the principal at SMP Muhammadiyah Program Khusus Kottabarat Surakarta. Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis, all of which were conducted triangulatively to increase the validity of the findings. The research subjects were the school principal as the primary informant, supported by teachers and educational staff as supporting informants. The data analysis technique used was the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. The researcher also applied member checks and peer debriefing techniques to maintain data credibility throughout the research process.

Results and Discussions

SMP Muhammadiyah Program Khusus Kottabarat Surakarta is an Islamic educational institution integrating the national curriculum with the instillation of character values based on Muhammadiyah teachings. The principal of this institution plays an essential role in shaping a collaborative, religious, and participatory school culture. The leadership approach is based on Servant leadership principles, emphasizing service, empowerment, and teachers' spiritual and professional growth¹⁵.

Implementation of Servant Leadership Values at SMP Program Kota Barat Surakarta

The principal of SMP Muhammadiyah Program Khusus Kottabarat Surakarta demonstrates the application of the principle of listening by providing an open dialogue space for teachers, students, and educational staff. Communication forums such as regular meetings, informal discussions, and personal consultations serve as a platform for gathering aspirations and input from all elements of the school. This approach reflects participatory leadership that prioritizes empathy and openness.

¹⁴ Istanto Romadona Antika, "Strategi Kepala Sekolah Dalam Membangun Kepercayaan Masyarakat Di SMP Muhammadiyah 1 GATAK," n.d., 1–10.

¹⁵ Junaidi, "Peran Kepemimpinan Servant Leadership Kepala Sekolah Dalam Meningkatkan Kepuasan Stakeholder Di SMP YPM TENGGARONG SEBERANG."

According to Atika's research, listening in Servant leadership significantly contributes to the improvement of healthy interpersonal relationships and a collaborative work environment within the school¹⁶.

The principles of empathy and healing are evident in the way the principal responds to personal problems faced by school members, both teachers and students. The principal focuses on academics and considers each individual's emotional, social, and spiritual conditions. This aligns with Bora's observation that principals who apply Servant leadership can create a safe and supportive psychological environment, which results in low work stress and increased teacher well-being¹⁷.

Applying awareness and persuasion is also an essential part of school leadership. He can encourage all school components to understand the direction of the shared vision, without using an authoritative approach. The principal emphasizes the values of togetherness, trust, and integrity in the decision-making process. In Eka's research, servant leadership that emphasizes self-awareness and non-coercive persuasion has been proven to build an inclusive organizational culture and encourage more acceptable change to all parties.¹⁸

As a conceptualizer and visionary, the principal demonstrates the principles of conceptualization and foresight in developing long-term programs. They address daily technical issues and consider strategies for the school's sustainable development, such as educational innovation, student character building, and partnerships with external communities. This is reinforced by Atika, who emphasizes that a school principal with a high level of foresight within the framework of Servant leadership can create transformative policies with long-term impact¹⁹.

The principle of stewardship is reflected in the attitude of the principal, who views his duties as a mandate and social responsibility. He constantly strives to manage school resources wisely for the common

¹⁶ Nova Atika, "Hubungan Instructional Leadership Dan Servant Leadership Kepala Sekolah Dasar Dengan Mutu Pembelajaran Di Era Society 5.0" 4 (2024): 55–70.

¹⁷ Febryanto R Bora, "Analisis Praktik Kepemimpinan Servant Leadership Para Kepala Sekolah TK/PAUD Katolik," *Murhum : Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini* 5, no. 1 (2024): 471–84, <https://doi.org/10.37985/murhum.v5i1.565>.

¹⁸ Eka Faricha Bachrie et al., "Servant Leadership Dalam Era Digital : Adaptasi Model Kepemimpinan Yang Mengutamakan Pelayanan Kepada Tim Dalam Dunia Kerja Yang Semakin Terdigitalisasi" 5 (2025): 1458–72.

¹⁹ Atika, "Hubungan Instructional Leadership Dan Servant Leadership Kepala Sekolah Dasar Dengan Mutu Pembelajaran Di Era Society 5.0."

good. This approach fosters trust and enhances the participation of teachers and educational staff in maintaining the institution's integrity. In Trisnawati's view, leadership grounded in stewardship promotes collective accountability and strengthens team cohesion within academic institutions²⁰.

The principal's commitment to the growth of people is evident in various efforts to improve the capacity of teachers and students. The principal actively encourages teachers to participate in training, seminars, and other self-development activities. He also pays special attention to developing students' potential, not only in academic aspects but also in their interests and talents. Hasra's study in Islamic-based schools shows that principals with a servant leadership style have a real contribution in shaping a school culture that supports holistic individual growth²¹.

The implementation of community-building values is carried out through activities that strengthen relationships among school members. Mentoring programs, social activities, and community service projects serve as means to foster a sense of belonging, togetherness, and collective responsibility. The school principal plays a key role in creating a close-knit, family-like atmosphere.

The implementation of spiritual values in the principal's leadership is further strengthened by the findings of Mobonggi's research, which indicate that spiritual leadership characterized by patience, humility, and sincerity significantly improves educational services and public trust in Islamic educational institutions²². Similarly, a study by Ifani states that leaders who prioritize spiritual values can encourage a culture of mutual care in schools (organizational citizenship behavior) and strengthen relationships among school members. Thus, applying Servant leadership based on spirituality is relevant theoretically, contextual, and applicable in building a transformative

²⁰ Trisnawati, "Penerapan Kepemimpinan Transformasional Dalam Upaya Meningkatkan Kinerja Guru Di MAN 5 Tasikmalaya" 4, no. 2 (2024): 108–21.

²¹ Hasra Hasra, Wulan Novianty Asyarah, and Azainil Azainil, "Kepemimpinan Profesionalisme Kepala Sekolah Berbasis Servant Leadership Dalam Perkembangan Manajemen Mutu Pendidikan," *Journal of Education Research* 5, no. 3 (2024): 4168–76, <https://doi.org/10.37985/jer.v5i3.1478>.

²² Arten Mobonggi et al., "Accreditation-Based Assistant Leadership Model and Spiritual Values in Academic Service" 16, no. 2 (2024): 953–68, <https://doi.org/10.37680/qalamuna.v16i2.5317>.

Islamic school culture²³.

The Impact of Servant Leadership on the School Environment

Implementing the servant leadership model by the principal at SMP Muhammadiyah Program Khusus Kottabarat Surakarta has made a real contribution to creating a positive and inclusive school climate. In practice, the principal places the role of serving as the primary focus of his leadership, prioritizing the needs of the entire school community, from teachers and students to educational staff. This approach aligns with Islamic values, emphasizing exemplary behavior, sincerity, and moral responsibility. Through the principle of service, the principal has successfully built harmonious relationships based on mutual trust.

One implication of implementing Servant leadership is in teachers' increased motivation and job satisfaction. The principal provides opportunities for active participation, emotional support, and recognition of teachers' initiatives in performing their duties. Ifani found that leadership with a spiritual and inspirational approach can enhance teachers' prosocial behavior at school, such as helping without being asked and commitment to the institution's vision. This fosters a collaborative and productive work culture within the school environment²⁴.

On the other hand, this leadership model also encourages the development of positive character traits in students. Principals who consistently demonstrate humility, patience, and empathy serve as moral role models for students. The learning environment created is humanistic and supports children's spiritual development. Mobonggi's research reveals that leadership with a spiritual approach can strengthen community trust and encourage improvements in the quality of educational services in Islamic schools²⁵.

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²³ Nadia Nur Ifani and Asti Putri Kartiwi, "Leadership in Indonesian Islamic Schools: How Leader Spiritual and Motivational Styles Affect Organizational Citizenship Behavior and Employees' Religiosity," 2024, 67–78.

²⁴ Ifani and Kartiwi.

²⁵ Mobonggi et al., "Accreditation-Based Assistant Leadership Model and Spiritual Values in Academic Service."

research reveals that leadership with a spiritual approach can strengthen community trust and encourage improvements in the quality of educational services in Islamic schools²⁶.

Equally important, Servant leadership also encourages the development of educational staff capacity. Principals do not only focus on administrative management, but also actively nurture and motivate all staff to develop professionally. Overall, implementing Servant leadership by school principals is effective from a managerial perspective and relevant within the context of Islamic values that form the foundation of Muhammadiyah schools. This approach transforms the school into an inclusive and transformative learning community. This success demonstrates that Servant leadership can serve as a strategic and contextual model for building an excellent and sustainable Islamic educational culture²⁷.

Supportive school leadership is critical in maintaining a favorable work climate and safeguarding teachers' rights and well-being. This finding resonates with Nuraini and Nurkolis, who emphasized the role of professional organizations like PGRI in defending teacher professionalism and resolving professional disputes.¹ Servant leadership complements such institutional support by fostering mutual respect and a service-oriented culture within the school²⁸.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that the principal of SMP Muhammadiyah Program Khusus Kottabarat Surakarta can apply Servant leadership's values in his daily leadership. An approach that emphasizes service, empathy, spiritual care, and active involvement of all elements of the school makes this leadership style effective in building a harmonious, collaborative, and participatory work culture. The principal performs administrative duties and serves as a character builder and role model in Islamic values that are alive in the school community.

²⁶ Ifani and Kartiwi, "Leadership in Indonesian Islamic Schools: How Leader Spiritual and Motivational Styles Affect Organizational Citizenship Behavior and Employees' Religiosity."

²⁷ Mobonggi et al., "Accreditation-Based Assistant Leadership Model and Spiritual Values in Academic Service."

²⁸ Nuraini and Nurkolis, "The Role Of The Teacher Professional Organization (PGRI) In Protecting Teacher Profession Disputes," *AJIS: Academic Journal of Islamic Studies* 10, no. 1 (2025): 181–94, <https://doi.org/10.29240/ajis.v10i1.12979>.

Servant leadership contributes to improvements in various aspects of the school environment, from teacher morale, student character development, parent involvement, to strengthening the work ethic of educational staff. This leadership style has proven capable of creating a healthy and transformative educational environment. In the context of Muhammadiyah schools, this leadership model aligns with Islamic values and is relevant for developing an excellent, character-driven, sustainable educational institution.

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