

## **Servant Leadership In Improving Teacher Performance At MAN Bondowoso**

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### **Abstrak**

Pendidikan merupakan landasan paling penting dalam mengembangkan sumber daya manusia yang berkualitas. Pendidikan diharapkan dapat menghasilkan manusia yang cerdas, kreatif, inovatif, berpikiran terbuka, dan berkarakter baik (Khofi, 2024). Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran servant leadership dalam meningkatkan kinerja guru di Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) Bondowoso serta dampaknya terhadap lingkungan pembelajaran. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan metode studi kasus. Data diperoleh melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan yang menekankan kemampuan mendengarkan, empati, pemberdayaan, serta pengambilan keputusan partisipatif mampu menciptakan lingkungan kerja yang lebih kolaboratif dan mendukung pertumbuhan profesional guru. Servant leadership terbukti meningkatkan motivasi, inovasi, dan kualitas pengajaran di madrasah. Kesimpulannya, penerapan servant leadership di MAN Bondowoso efektif dalam meningkatkan kinerja guru dan kualitas pendidikan secara keseluruhan.

**Kata Kunci:** *Servant Leadership, Kinerja Guru, Pengambilan Keputusan Partisipatif, Kepemimpinan Visioner, Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Bondowoso*

### **Abstract**

Education is the most critical foundation in developing quality human resources. Education is hoped to produce intelligent, creative, innovative, open-minded people with good character (Khofi, 2024). This study aims to analyze the role of servant leadership in improving teacher performance at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) Bondowoso and its impact on the learning environment. The research used a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study method. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. The findings indicate that leadership emphasizing listening, empathy, empowerment, and participatory decision-making fosters a more collaborative work environment and supports teachers' professional growth. Servant leadership significantly increases teacher motivation, innovation, and instructional quality. In conclusion, applying servant leadership at MAN Bondowoso effectively improves teacher performance and overall educational quality.

**Keywords:** *Servant Leadership, Teacher Performance, Participatory Decision-Making, Visionary Leadership, Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Bondowoso*

## INTRODUCTION

Education is the most critical foundation in developing quality human resources. Education is hoped to produce intelligent, creative, innovative, open-minded people with good character (Khofi, 2024). Teachers' performance greatly influences education's success as they are the main actors in the learning process (Faiz & Kurniawaty, 2022). Good teacher performance can promote the achievement of educational goals, namely producing students who are not only intellectually intelligent but also have strong character. An important factor that influences teacher performance is the principal's or madrasah's leadership style (Puspitasari et al., 2022).

In recent decades, traditional authoritarian leadership models have replaced more humanistic and collaborative approaches, such as servant leadership (Sawor & Budiyanto, 2023). Servant leadership emphasizes that a leader is not a ruler but a servant of the people he or she leads. Servant leaders will focus on individual development, listen to their needs, and encourage creating a supportive environment for personal and professional growth (Gunawan et al., 2023).

Robert K. Greenleaf, the initiator of the concept of servant leadership, stated that good leaders prioritize their followers' well-being (Handoyo, 2010; Ruata & Tung, 2024). In the context of education, madrasah principals who implement servant leadership will prioritize the needs of teachers and students, create a conducive working atmosphere, and increase the motivation and creativity of teachers (Imaduddin et al., 2022). Servant leadership implementation can improve teacher performance because teachers feel supported and empowered to maximize their potential (Waruwu et al., 2021). Servant leadership in madrasahs is an approach to leadership in which the madrasah leader makes service to teachers, staff, and students a top priority. In this approach, the madrasah leader focuses on the entire school community's needs, interests, and development (Rahayani, 2016). Servant leadership in madrasahs addresses ethical issues, learning experiences, and student engagement. It creates a collaborative madrasah culture in which leaders and all members of the madrasah work together to achieve educational goals without relying on formal authority. Teachers and staff are seen as essential assets in building a quality madrasah, with the main challenge being to maintain a committed, productive team and continuously improve performance through deeper engagement (Mumuh & Nugraha, 2023).

Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) Bondowoso is a senior high school that prioritizes quality education with a holistic approach combining general knowledge and Islamic religion. Located in Bondowoso Regency, MAN Bondowoso plays an essential role in producing a young generation that is high-achieving, competitive, and based on Islamic values. Supported by a professional teaching staff and adequate facilities, this madrasa is committed to producing graduates who are academically intelligent and have a strong Islamic character.

MAN Bondowoso has a vision: "Excellent performance, ready to compete, and Islamic in spirit." This vision illustrates MAN Bondowoso's determination to become an educational institution that can produce students who are excellent at both academic and non-academic levels, who are ready to compete in various competitions, and who have a character shaped by Islamic values. The principal of MAN Bondowoso has implemented a servant leadership model to improve the quality of education. However, there is still little research that specifically discusses how the implementation of servant leadership can directly impact teacher performance in this madrasah. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the role of servant leadership in improving teacher performance at MAN Bondowoso and how this leadership can promote a better learning environment. This study is expected to contribute to the development of educational leadership theory, especially in relation to the implementation of servant leadership in Islamic educational institutions. In addition, the results of this study are also expected to guide other madrasah principals in implementing a more effective leadership model to improve teacher performance and the quality of education.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study method. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation. The subjects of the

study consisted of the principal, teachers, and staff of MAN Bondowoso. Interviews were conducted to understand how servant leadership is implemented and affects teacher performance. Observations were used to observe the direct interaction between the principal and teachers. Documentation includes data related to policies and teacher performance reports. The data obtained were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Servant leadership has its advantages when applied to leadership in madrasahs. The advantage of this leadership is its ability to motivate teachers and staff to achieve the goals and objectives of the madrasah. Servant leadership also focuses on the well-being of teachers and staff, ensuring they feel valued and supported. A leader who applies servant leadership in madrasahs will listen, guide, and develop the skills and knowledge of all educators so that they are more motivated to work together to realize the vision, mission, and goals of the madrasah (Waruwu et al., 2021).

The principal of MAN Bondowoso applied the servant leadership model to his leadership. The results of the study on the application of servant leadership in improving teacher performance in MAN Bondowoso are as follows:

### 1. Listening and Empathy in Improving Teacher Performance

Listening and empathy are two essential elements in the concept of servant leadership. An effective leader is not only focused on instructions or directions but can also listen attentively to subordinates' input, concerns, and needs (Bufalino, 2017). Greenleaf (1970) emphasized that a servant leader must be able to listen well, not only to understand what is being verbally expressed but also to capture the meaning behind the words. Effective listening allows leaders to identify the needs, concerns, and potential of their subordinates so that they can provide more appropriate support. In addition, empathy plays a vital role in servant leadership because empathetic leaders can understand and feel what their subordinates are feeling, creating deeper and more trusting relationships (Spears, 2010).

Empathy also enables leaders to see situations from the perspective of others, allowing them to make more inclusive and fair decisions. In a study by (Barbuto and Wheeler, 2006), listening and empathy were positively correlated with increased employee performance, satisfaction, and loyalty. Servant leaders can create a harmonious and productive work environment by actively listening and showing empathy.

This study found that the principal of MAN Bondowoso consistently applied listening and empathy skills in his interactions with teachers. The principal actively listened to each teacher's input and complaints related to learning challenges, professional needs, and personal well-being. This creates a sense of being valued and understood by teachers, which motivates them to do their best work. The empathy shown by the principal also helps reduce teachers' work stress, which impacts improving the quality of their teaching. This supportive work environment builds trust between the principal and teachers, creating a more collaborative and harmonious work culture. Based on the explanation above, it can be understood that the implementation of servant leadership that emphasizes listening and empathy skills by the principal of MAN Bondowoso has been proven to improve teacher performance. Effective listening helps the principal understand the needs and challenges of teachers in-depth, while empathy creates a strong emotional bond and reduces teachers' stress levels. A work environment supported by these two elements creates a harmonious, collaborative, and productive atmosphere where teachers feel valued and more motivated to improve the quality of their teaching.

### 2. Building Teacher Self-Awareness

In servant leadership, building self-awareness in subordinates is a critical element that supports individual and organizational development. Self-awareness allows individuals to

identify their strengths, weaknesses, and potential, improving their performance and contribution to organizational goals. For servant leaders, helping followers understand themselves is about providing feedback and encouraging them to engage in deep self-reflection and continued growth (Spears, 2005).

Self-awareness is essential in increasing personal accountability and fostering innovation at work. In educational settings such as madrasahs, teacher self-awareness is essential to increasing teaching effectiveness and creating a dynamic learning atmosphere (Mumuh & Nugraha, 2023). Leaders who promote teacher self-awareness can facilitate the process of developing skills and self-understanding, which ultimately positively impacts the quality of education (van Dierendonck, 2011).

The results showed that the principal of MAN Bondowoso actively helped teachers improve their self-awareness by providing regular constructive feedback. This feedback not only focused on professional aspects such as teaching methods but also touched on the personal side of the teachers, encouraging them to understand themselves better. As a result, teachers were able to see their strengths and weaknesses more clearly and identify areas of potential that could be developed.

The self-awareness gained through this process made teachers more confident in trying new teaching methods. Several teachers reported feeling more courageous and creative in exploring teaching techniques after receiving input from the principal. In addition, this self-awareness helped them to be more proactive in evaluating student learning outcomes and identifying areas for improvement. As a result, teachers were able to manage their classes better and create a more effective and enjoyable learning environment.

Based on the results of this study, self-awareness significantly impacts teacher performance at MAN Bondowoso. With regular feedback encouraging deep reflection, teachers can better understand their role in the learning process and dare to change their teaching methods to be more effective. Self-awareness instilled through servant leadership helps teachers better manage their classrooms and creates a more collaborative and growth-oriented educational environment.

Continuously developed self-awareness enables teachers to engage in continuous self-evaluation, which in turn improves the quality of teaching and student achievement. Therefore, madrasa principals who adopt this servant leadership approach have the potential to create positive changes that have a long-term impact on the quality of education in the madrasa. Teacher self-awareness is crucial in increasing teaching effectiveness and creating a dynamic and productive learning atmosphere.

Teachers with high levels of self-awareness can better overcome learning challenges, identify their strengths and weaknesses, and create a more interactive and competitive classroom environment. Thus, building teacher self-awareness is essential for teachers' personal development and has a broad impact on improving the quality of education in madrasahs. Self-awareness allows teachers to be more adaptable, reflective, and innovative in teaching methods, benefiting students and the entire educational ecosystem at MAN Bondowoso.

### 3. Empowerment

Empowerment in Islam is known as *tamkin* (solid) and *istiqwa* (strong), which means strengthening and empowering someone by giving them authority and power to manage their own lives in a better direction (Ansori, 2019). Empowering others is one of the essential characteristics of a servant leader who actively cares about the development and well-being of each individual in the organization (Bier, 2021). Empowerment can be understood as a motivational concept that aims to provide opportunities for individuals to develop and encourage self-improvement (Bufalino, 2017). In an educational environment such as a madrasah, empowering all elements of the school, including teachers, students, and staff, plays a vital role in creating a culture of mutual support and care, building a sense

of togetherness, and ensuring that leadership prioritizes the well-being of all stakeholders (Crippen, 2012).

For a madrasah principal to become a leader who can empower others, a deep understanding of each individual's strengths and areas for development is required. With this understanding, leaders can tailor their leadership approach to capitalize on the strengths of each team member and provide the guidance and support needed to develop their potential (Rahayani, 2010). In addition, madrasa leaders who focus on empowerment must also be flexible and willing to let go of personal approaches to processes and outcomes to create space for teachers and students to find their best ways to achieve success (Tahir, 2021).

The principal of MAN Bondowoso empowers teachers through several strategic steps focused on increasing engagement and professional development. First, he empowers teachers to make decisions in the teaching process and curriculum development, allowing them to adapt learning methods to meet students' needs. This increases teachers' sense of ownership and creativity in the classroom. Second, the principal supports teachers' professional development by providing access to relevant training and workshops and constructive feedback. These steps help teachers grow and improve the quality of their teaching. Third, the principal encourages teacher collaboration through group discussions and experience-sharing sessions that foster cooperation and a spirit of innovation. Fourth, the principal recognizes teachers who show initiative and creativity, creating a culture of appreciation that motivates teachers to continue to innovate.

Based on the study findings above, it can be understood that the principal of MAN Bondowoso has taken several strategic steps to empower teachers to create a more collaborative, innovative, and professional growth-oriented educational environment. By providing freedom, support, and recognition, the principal improves teacher performance and the quality of education in the madrasa as a whole. The empowerment implemented by the principal of MAN Bondowoso can be seen as implementing the principles of *tamkin* (firm) and *istiqwa* (strong), which give teachers the authority to determine the direction and approach of their teaching. This aligns with the Islamic concept of empowerment, where individuals are empowered to take control of their learning process and professional life, resulting in better personal growth and more effective performance (Ansori, 2019). Overall, these empowerment steps show that the madrasa principal can integrate the principle of servant leadership in developing individual potential while building a stronger and more competitive organization in education.

#### **4. Visionary Leadership (Ability to See the Future)**

Forward-looking leadership is essential in madrasahs. Madrasah principals need to have a clear long-term vision while understanding the lessons of the past and current realities (Mardizal et al., 2023; Wahyono et al., 2024). Influential leaders must be able to identify hidden opportunities, avoid threats, and pay attention to things that might be overlooked, such as opportunities for team building or recognizing the contributions of teachers and students. In addition, madrasa principals need to ensure inclusiveness by involving all parties in decision-making and listening to voices that may not have been heard. This forward-looking perspective helps create an educational environment that is innovative, adaptive, and focused on shared growth (Mukaddamah, 2020).

Forward-thinking leaders must think beyond day-to-day operational challenges and short-term goals. They focus on the long-term impact of decisions and develop strategies to achieve a larger, sustainable vision for the organization (Bier, 2021). Conceptualization in servant leadership refers to the leader's ability to see the big picture and understand the organization's issues and challenges from a broader, longer-term perspective. This trait allows the leader to focus on operational tasks and think about holistic strategies and solutions to achieve the organization's long-term goals. A servant leader with this ability has

a clear vision, can anticipate the consequences of decisions, and sees opportunities and challenges that may not be immediately apparent (Goffar, 2024).

The Principal of MAN Bondowoso demonstrates visionary leadership by developing policies focusing on the future and continuous improvement of educational quality. As a leader who can identify long-term opportunities and challenges, the principal implements strategies to move the school forward through innovation and resource development. One of the leading strategies implemented is the program to develop teacher competence through continuous training. By providing access to relevant training, teachers are encouraged to continually improve their skills and knowledge to keep pace with curriculum and educational technology developments. In addition, the principal plays an active role in motivating teachers to continue to innovate in their teaching methods.

The principal also takes concrete steps to improve the infrastructure that supports learning. Each class at MAN Bondowoso is now equipped with an LCD projector, which facilitates the use of visual media in the learning process, making teaching and learning activities more interactive and exciting. In addition, the leading classes are equipped with Smart TV facilities to provide a more modern and technology-based learning experience. This Smart TV allows students to access interactive digital content, broaden their horizons, and enhance their understanding of the subject matter more effectively and innovatively.

Based on the study's results, it can be understood that visionary leadership is critical in madrasah education, as shown in MAN Bondowoso. A visionary madrasah principal can design long-term policies, think beyond day-to-day operational needs, and ensure sustainable strategies. With a conceptual approach, leaders can see the big picture, understand challenges and opportunities, and motivate teachers to innovate. Such leadership also promotes inclusiveness, involves all stakeholders in decision-making, and ensures that madrasas can continue to grow and adapt to future challenges. The result is improved educational quality and long-term success.

## 5. Shared decision making

Decision-making is determining choices or actions from several alternatives to achieve specific goals. According to Robbins and Coulter (2007), decision-making is choosing various possible alternatives to solve a problem. In educational organizations such as madrasas, decision-making is not only related to daily operations but also includes long-term planning and human resource management, where the involvement of all parties, including teachers, is significant (Pratama & Chaniago, 2017).

Decision-making is an essential aspect of madrasa management and is the primary responsibility of the madrasa principal at the educational unit level. The success or failure of a madrasa in achieving its goals depends mainly on the decisions made by the madrasa principal. The correct decision-making of the madrasah principal plays an essential role in the progress or decline of the madrasah. With good decisions, the principal is expected to solve existing problems effectively and efficiently. As the primary decision maker, the madrasah principal plays a crucial role in directing and managing the implementation of the educational process in the madrasah he leads (Septrisya et al., 2020).

Decision-making that involves multiple parties is known as a participatory approach. In this approach, leaders make decisions authoritarian and invite team members, in this case teachers, to participate in the process (Muktamar & Fenny Ramadani, 2023). This aligns with the principle of servant leadership, where leaders provide space for their subordinates to participate in formulating policies that affect their work and environment. This participatory approach not only improves the quality of decisions made but also strengthens team members' sense of responsibility and involvement in implementing those decisions.

The study results at MAN Bondowoso showed that an essential aspect of servant leadership applied at the madrasah was the involvement of teachers in the decision-making

process. The madrasah's principal not only made top-down decisions but also invited teachers to participate in discussions related to curriculum development, planning of school activities, and evaluation of the learning process. This participation gave teachers a sense of ownership, which increased their responsibility for implementing decisions that had been collectively agreed upon. Teachers became more active in contributing new ideas and solutions to problems facing the school. As a result, teachers' motivation to achieve better results increases because they feel they are part of the decision-making process, directly affecting their work.

Based on the study's results above, it can be understood that the participatory approach to decision-making at MAN Bondowoso, implemented by the madrasah principal, improves the quality of decisions and strengthens teachers' sense of responsibility and motivation. Involving teachers in this process creates a more collaborative and inclusive environment so that decisions are more effective and focused on achieving common educational goals. This approach also reflects the principle of servant leadership, which focuses on empowering and involving all stakeholders in achieving the vision of the madrasa.

The participatory approach to decision-making at MAN Bondowoso represents a shift from authoritarian leadership to a more inclusive style. Although effective, this approach can slow the decision-making process due to the significant input. Therefore, the madrasa principal must have good management skills to maintain a balance between participation and efficiency. This approach creates a more collaborative work environment and empowers all parties.

## CONCLUSION

Implementing servant leadership at MAN Bondowoso significantly improves teacher performance and the learning environment. The principal who listens, empathizes, and empowers teachers and involves them in decision-making successfully creates a collaborative work environment. Visionary leadership also encourages innovation and improvement in teacher competence, which positively impacts the quality of education. This leadership model has proven effective in creating a work atmosphere that supports professional growth and teacher well-being and can be used as a guide for other educational institutions.

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