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The Role of the Principal's Leadership in Enhancing Teacher Professionalism at SMK Negeri 4 Bandar Lampung: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Teacher professionalism is a crucial factor in improving the overall quality of education. The school principal plays a pivotal role in fostering this professionalism by motivating, guiding, and acting as a role model for teachers in areas such as instructional practices, professional development, and the integration of technology. This study aims to analyze the leadership practices of the principal in enhancing teacher professionalism at SMK Negeri 4 Bandar Lampung. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were gathered through interviews, observations, and document analysis. The research subjects included the principal, vice principal of curriculum, department heads, and selected teachers. Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, with validation ensured via triangulation of techniques and sources. The findings indicate that the principal enhances teacher professionalism in three key ways: (1) motivating teachers through personal example, structured support, and motivational strategies; (2) implementing continuous development programs, such as in-house training, academic supervision, teacher internships, and collaboration through teacher working groups; and (3) serving as a role model in professionalism, discipline, work ethic, and in fostering a religious and positive school culture. Additionally, the principal demonstrates strong communication skills and active participation in professional organizations. This study concludes that proactive, inspirational, and communicative leadership significantly contributes to the development of teacher professionalism in vocational school settings.

Keywords: Teacher Professionalism, Principal Leadership, Vocational Education, School Culture.

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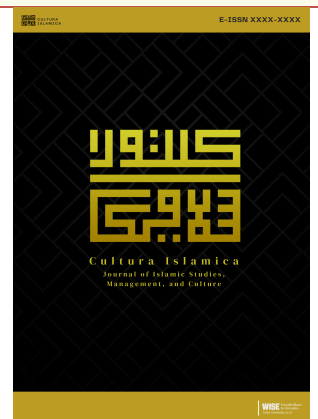
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INTRODUCTION

Education in Indonesia, particularly at the Vocational High School (SMK) level, faces significant challenges in improving the quality of education, especially amidst the rapid pace of globalization and the ever-evolving advancements in technology [1]. SMKs play a crucial role in preparing a skilled workforce that can meet the needs of industries and keep pace with the times [2], [3], [4], [5]. Moreover, SMKs are expected to shape the character and intellectual development of students. However, despite their strategic role, SMKs often experience a gap between the quality of instruction provided and the development of the curriculum, which should be aligned with the needs of industries and the demands of globalization [6], [7]. This gap becomes an obstacle in enhancing the quality of education, thus posing a significant challenge for vocational education institutions in Indonesia [8].

Amid these challenges, the role of the school principal as an educational leader becomes critically important [9]. The principal is not only responsible for the operational management of the school but also plays a key role in enhancing the quality of instruction through the professional development of teachers [10]. The leadership of the principal is a vital element that influences the effectiveness of education in vocational schools (SMK), as it must address these needs [11]. Given the characteristics and dynamics inherent in vocational education, principals are expected to possess leadership skills that focus not only on administration but also on the continuous development of teachers to improve the quality of teaching, making it relevant to the evolving demands of the industry and global education [12].

Teacher professionalism is one of the key factors that determine the quality of education in vocational schools (SMK). The quality of education is significantly influenced by the professionalism of teachers, who are the main implementers of the learning process. In this context, the improvement of teaching quality depends not only on the curriculum developed but also on how teachers can continuously develop their professional skills. Therefore, the principal plays a crucial role in motivating and mentoring teachers to enhance their competencies, both in pedagogical aspects and in the use of technology in teaching. As professionals, teachers are not only responsible for teaching but also for conducting mentoring, training, research, and community service activities [5][6][7].

Several studies have discussed the important role of the principal in improving the quality of education through the enhancement of teacher professionalism. An effective principal is expected not only to possess managerial skills but also to be able to encourage and motivate teachers to continuously develop, both in terms of pedagogical competence and the use of technology in teaching [13][14]. For example, Rully Permata [15] in his research, revealed that the principal can enhance teacher professionalism through a managerial approach that includes structured planning, organizing, implementation, and supervision. Another study by Rosita [16] showed that the principal at SMP Negeri Meulaboh plays a significant role in encouraging teachers to participate in various competency improvement programs, both through subject teacher working groups (MGMP) and training provided by the government.

However, despite the numerous studies that discuss the role of the principal in improving teaching quality and teacher professionalism, there is a significant gap in the literature examining the direct relationship between school leadership and the enhancement of teacher professionalism in vocational schools (SMK). Moreover, vocational education in SMKs faces

unique challenges distinct from those in primary and secondary education, such as the need to align with industry demands and the rapid pace of technological advancements [17][18]. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating in greater depth how the principal at SMK Negeri 4 Bandar Lampung enhances teacher professionalism.

Although various studies have discussed the role of the principal in improving teaching quality and teacher professionalism, there is still a significant gap in research regarding the direct relationship between school leadership and the enhancement of teacher professionalism in vocational schools (SMK). Many previous studies have focused more on general school management, with few addressing how principals can directly contribute to the development of teacher professionalism, particularly in SMKs, which have specific needs related to vocational curricula. Therefore, it is essential to explore in greater depth the role of the principal in mentoring and motivating teachers in the context of vocational education, which is fraught with unique challenges.

In addition, the shift in educational policies and the demands for higher teacher competency standards increasingly emphasize the importance of effective school leadership. Principals are expected to be more proactive in planning and implementing the development of teachers' competencies [19][20]. However, principals also face the significant challenge of balancing administrative duties with the responsibility of ensuring that teachers have opportunities to continually develop their professional skills in line with the rapidly changing global developments.

This study aims to fill the existing research gap by analyzing the role of the principal's leadership in enhancing teacher professionalism at SMK Negeri 4 Bandar Lampung. The primary focus of this study is on three key dimensions: how the principal motivates, mentors, and serves as a role model for teachers in efforts to improve teaching quality. This research is important because the principal plays a significant role in motivating teachers and creating an environment that supports the development of teacher professionalism, particularly in the face of global challenges. By gaining a deeper understanding of the principal's role, this study is expected to contribute to the development of educational leadership in vocational schools (SMK) and provide valuable insights for policymakers in designing more effective and sustainable strategies for improving education quality.

METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to describe the role of the principal in enhancing teacher professionalism at SMK Negeri 4 Bandar Lampung. The research process began with the purposive selection of participants, including the principal, vice principal for curriculum, department heads, and ten teachers directly involved in teaching activities and competency development. Data collection was conducted over six weeks, from January 8 to February 19, 2025. The data collection techniques employed include semi-structured interviews, direct observation, and documentation. Each data collection method provided different but complementary information in depicting the leadership practices of the principal on the ground.

Interviews were conducted with the principal, vice principal, department heads, and teachers to explore their perspectives on the role of the principal in enhancing teacher

professionalism. The semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to delve deeper into how the principal motivates, mentors, and serves as a role model for teachers. In addition to interviews, the researcher also conducted direct observations of the principal's activities at the school, such as coordination meetings, teacher development sessions, and decision-making processes involving teachers. These direct observations were carried out to capture the interactions between the principal and teachers, as well as the methods used to support teacher professionalism development within the school environment.

The research procedures also involved the collection of documentation data, including the principal's work program, reports on teaching activities, and data related to the facilities and infrastructure used in the teaching process. The data collected through these three techniques were then analyzed thematically, with three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, source triangulation and technique triangulation were employed. This triangulation involved comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation to obtain a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of the principal's role in improving teaching quality and teacher professionalism. Through this procedure, the study is expected to provide an in-depth understanding of the leadership practices of the principal at SMK Negeri 4 Bandar Lampung.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The professional status of teachers at SMK Negeri 4 Bandar Lampung is institutionally demonstrated through certification in accordance with the Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation No. 37 of 2017, which states that certification aims to enhance pedagogical, personal, social, and professional competencies. Certification data from the school show a positive and sustained trend in teacher professionalism (Figure 1), indicating the successful implementation of professional development policies.

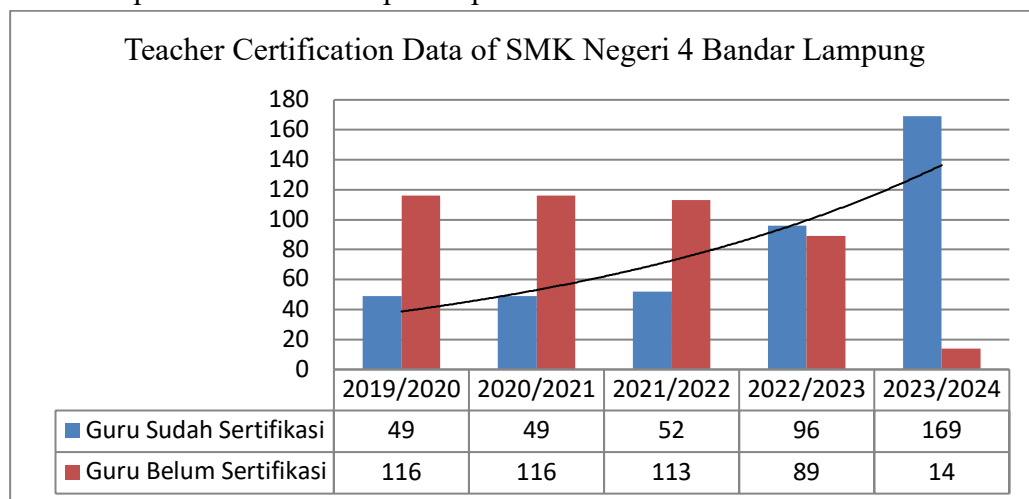


Figure 1. Teacher Certification Graph at SMK Negeri 4 Bandar Lampung

The leadership practices implemented by the principal demonstrate transformational characteristics that influence teachers' behavior and professional engagement. The leadership model applied includes three dimensions: motivating (inspirational), mentoring (instructional), and setting an example (behavioral). The principal consistently initiates professional growth by demonstrating punctuality, discipline, and a compassionate attitude, which are subsequently

emulated by the teachers. This approach aligns with transformational leadership theory, which emphasizes the role of the leader as a role model in shaping organizational culture [21][22].

Regular coordination meetings and evaluations held every semester are used to set performance targets and ensure alignment across departments (Figures 2 and 3). These forums facilitate the communication of the e-performance system, including the reward and sanction system, which is generally implemented on National Teacher’s Day. Clear communication, sensitive to local culture, ensures that policies are effectively conveyed, both through meetings and informal digital platforms such as WhatsApp groups.



Figure 2. Coordination Meetings and Teacher Performance Evaluation



Figure 3. Coordination Meetings for Teacher Task Allocation

In terms of capacity development, the principal adopts a tiered professional development framework that integrates internal training with external collaboration. Regular workshops, In-House Training (IHT), and upskilling/reskilling programs funded by the School Operational Assistance (BOS) demonstrate a commitment to pedagogical innovation [22] (Figures 4–6). Academic supervision is conducted cyclically, with a priority given to new teachers for more intensive mentoring. Feedback from supervision serves as the basis for subsequent performance improvements.



Figure 4. Workshop on Enhancing Teacher and Education Personnel (GTK) Capabilities



Figure 5. In-House Training Activities



Figure 6. Upskilling and Reskilling Activities

Pedagogical innovation is also supported through teacher participation in the Subject Teacher Working Group (MGMP), literacy culture programs such as "Pohon Literasi" (Literacy Tree), and environmental awareness training, such as waste management. These initiatives reflect a distributive leadership approach that promotes collaborative learning and capacity building at various levels of the institution. The principal's role as a role model is based on ethical consistency and public recognition of achievements [23]. The principal received the "Inspirational Principal" award and third place in the alumni testimonial video competition

(National Great GTK Jamboree). This achievement not only enhances the visibility of the institution but also serves as intrinsic motivation for teachers. Transformative initiatives such as the "7 Good Habits," GLITER (Literacy and Numeracy Movement), and character development activities like morning exercise, Duha prayer, and Quran recitation support a holistic educational ecosystem.



Figure 7. Achievements of the Principal of SMK Negeri 4 Bandar Lampung

Overall, the leadership of the principal reflects the principles of transformational leadership: promoting innovation, setting an ethical example, and enhancing the collective professionalism of teachers [24]. By combining strategic management with moral inspiration, the leadership model at SMK Negeri 4 Bandar Lampung aligns with best practices in educational leadership literature. This approach not only improves teacher competence but also fosters a collaborative, student centered school environment.

Discussion

The Principal's Role in Motivating Teachers to Enhance Professionalism at SMK Negeri 4 Bandar Lampung

The leadership of the principal at SMK Negeri 4 Bandar Lampung plays a crucial role as an agent of change in improving teacher professionalism. The principal not only manages administrative tasks but also acts as a catalyst, encouraging teachers to enhance their performance through a model of leadership based on setting an example and motivation [25]. In the context of Islamic education, this aligns with the concept of *uswah* (role model), which teaches that a leader must exemplify the desired behavior and actions, as emphasized in numerous hadiths of Prophet Muhammad SAW, stating that a good leader is the one who serves as the best example for those they lead [26].

The principal at SMK Negeri 4 Bandar Lampung implements a leadership policy based on setting an example, where they demonstrate discipline, arrive on time, and greet students with full attention every morning. In Islam, good manners and etiquettes are highly emphasized in leadership, and the principal embodies these values. The principal directly sets an example in every activity, both formal and informal, and serves as a model in fostering a professional and harmonious work culture within the school environment [27]. The cultivation of noble moral values derived from Islamic teachings plays a significant role in shaping the mindset and professional attitudes of teachers. This approach not only directly motivates teachers but also creates a work climate that supports the sustainable development of education [28]. Through

periodic evaluations conducted by the principal, teachers receive constructive feedback and opportunities for continuous growth. This aligns with Islamic principles of *ta'lim* (teaching) and *tarbiyah* (education), which emphasize the importance of lifelong learning and self-development within a broader context [29].

The Principal's Role in Mentoring Teachers to Enhance Their Professionalism

The mentoring conducted by the principal at SMK Negeri 4 Bandar Lampung focuses on the development of teachers' abilities, both in pedagogical aspects and professionalism. This mentoring is rooted in deep Islamic values regarding the importance of knowledge and action. In Islam, enhancing knowledge and skills is considered an obligation for every individual, and the principal, as an educational leader, plays the role of a facilitator to help teachers access professional development opportunities [30]. The training programs, seminars, and workshops organized by the principal aim to enrich teachers' competencies, aligning with Islamic teachings that encourage the pursuit of knowledge as a means to improve the quality of life [31].

Through academic supervision and performance evaluations, the principal ensures that each teacher receives structured mentoring. This supervision process is crucial in the context of *muhasabah* (self-reflection), which is also taught in Islam. Teachers are encouraged to reflect on their teaching practices, and through open dialogue with the principal, they are provided with guidance to improve and develop better teaching methods [32]. The mentoring provided not only focuses on improving technical skills but also emphasizes character development, in line with the ethical teachings of Islam. Additionally, the principal encourages teachers to actively participate in the Subject Teacher Working Group (MGMP), which serves as a forum for sharing knowledge, experiences, and solving educational problems together. From an Islamic Studies perspective, this reflects the principles of *ukhuwah* (brotherhood) and *ta'awun* (cooperation), where individuals collaborate for a greater purpose, which is to enhance the quality of education and benefit society [32][33].

The Principal's Role in Setting an Example to Enhance Teacher Professionalism

Setting an example as an educational leader is a core value practiced by the principal at SMK Negeri 4 Bandar Lampung. The principle of *uswah hasanah* in Islamic teachings emphasizes that a leader must exemplify virtuous behavior in all aspects of life, including social relationships, discipline, and work ethics. By embodying time management, strong work ethics, and positive interactions, the principal effectively inspires teachers to adopt these behaviors in managing their classrooms and engaging with students. In Islamic teachings, the example set by a leader is not limited to words but is primarily reflected in actions that prioritize moral integrity [34].

The example set by the principal not only enhances teacher professionalism but also strengthens social and religious bonds within the school. The principal, by demonstrating Islamic manners, such as speaking politely, respecting others, and showing commitment to decisions made, creates a harmonious and productive environment. The principal's success in setting a positive example reflects the Islamic philosophy regarding the importance of leadership based on moral and ethical values [34]. Through various programs initiated by the principal, such as the Character Check-in, Morning Exercise, and Salat Dhuha (Dawn Prayer), the principal encourages teachers to participate in activities that not only support their

professional development but also strengthen Islamic spiritual values. This serves as a reminder that Islamic education focuses not only on the teaching of knowledge but also on the formation of character and morals in accordance with Islamic teachings [35].

Integration of Islamic Traditions in Teacher Professionalism Development

The principal at SMK Negeri 4 Bandar Lampung has successfully integrated Islamic principles into every aspect of teacher professionalism development. In the context of Islamic Studies, professionalism is not merely about teaching skills, but also about how teachers can serve as role models in ethics, morals, and character. The principle of *ilmu* (knowledge) and *amal* (action) embedded in Islamic teachings is reflected in every policy of the principal, which focuses on balanced personal development, encompassing both technical skills and the cultivation of good morals [36].

In this regard, the principal has also introduced the Literacy and Numeracy Movement (GLITER), which aims not only to improve students' academic abilities but also to foster a learning culture that integrates Islamic values. This demonstrates that the development of teacher professionalism should involve a holistic approach, where spirituality and character development are inseparable components of an effective educational process [37]. Thus, the principal at SMK Negeri 4 Bandar Lampung focuses not only on school management and enhancing teachers' skills but also on character development that reflects Islamic values, creating an environment that is not only professional in education but also ethical and civilized in accordance with Islamic teachings.

CONCLUSION

This study has identified the principal's crucial role in enhancing teacher professionalism at SMK Negeri 4 Bandar Lampung through an approach based on role modeling, motivation, and structured mentoring. Effective school leadership has proven to improve teaching quality and create a professional, disciplined, and goal-oriented work environment. The approach implemented by the principal focuses not only on school administration but also on the development of morals and ethics that reflect Islamic values. Through role modeling in time discipline, work ethic, and polite interaction, the principal has successfully instilled moral values and professionalism in alignment with Islamic principles such as *uswah* (role model) and *akhlaq mulia* (noble character). The principal also encourages teachers' active participation in self-development through training, seminars, and other professional development activities, reflecting the importance of *ilmu* (knowledge) and *amal* (action) in Islamic education.

In terms of teacher development, the principal plays a strategic role in enhancing teachers' pedagogical competencies, as well as improving teaching quality through routine supervision and regular evaluations. This integrates the concepts of *ta'lim* (teaching) and *tarbiyah* (education) in learning, where not only teaching skills are improved but also character and ethics, which are vital in the context of Islamic education. Overall, the success of the principal at SMK Negeri 4 Bandar Lampung in improving teacher professionalism demonstrates that a leadership approach based on role modeling and Islamic values can foster a harmonious, disciplined, and effective work culture. This leadership model not only supports the

improvement of teaching quality but also plays an essential role in shaping the character of teachers, in accordance with the noble values taught in Islam.

LIMITATIONS


This study has several limitations that should be considered in the interpretation of results and the generalization of findings. First, this study is limited to a single school, SMK Negeri 4 Bandar Lampung, meaning that the findings obtained may not be fully generalized to other schools in Indonesia, particularly in the context of vocational education in different regions. Therefore, further research in various vocational schools with different characteristics will be necessary to strengthen the findings of this study. Second, although a qualitative approach was used to gain an in-depth understanding of the principal's role in enhancing teacher professionalism, the use of interviews as a data collection method may introduce subjective bias from respondents. Although data triangulation was performed to ensure the validity of the findings, differences in perspectives between the principal, teachers, and other stakeholders within the school environment may influence the objectivity of the results.

Third, this study is also limited in terms of time. The limited data collection period did not allow for the observation of long-term changes in teacher professionalism development at SMK Negeri 4 Bandar Lampung. Longitudinal studies that involve continuous monitoring of the professionalization process of teachers and its impact on the quality of education would provide a more comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of principal leadership in enhancing teacher professionalism. Fourth, while this study links the principal's leadership to Islamic values, not all elements of Islamic education could be covered in this research. Further research on the application of akhlaq (ethics), uswah (role modeling), and ta'lim (teaching) principles in the context of vocational education will contribute further to understanding how Islamic values can enrich education and the professional development of teachers within the school environment. By addressing these limitations, future research can broaden its scope to provide a more holistic view of principal leadership in the context of Islamic education and teacher professionalism development in Indonesia.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

NS was responsible for leading the research implementation, including study design, data collection, analysis, and drafting the initial manuscript. HJ and YA provided guidance on the conceptual framework, supervised the research process, and assisted in refining the methodology and revising the manuscript. All authors contributed to the discussion of the findings and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DECLARATION OF USE OF AI IN SCIENTIFIC WRITING

I affirm that Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools were employed in the preparation and writing of this scientific work. The AI was primarily utilized for enhancing language clarity, correcting grammar, and providing recommendations for organizing the content. All AI-generated contributions have been carefully reviewed and revised to ensure they align with the research objectives and meet academic standards.

I acknowledge that the assistance provided by AI tools was used as a supplementary resource, and the final content represents my intellectual work, reflecting my understanding, research, and analysis. Any use of AI for content generation or idea organization has been explicitly cited in accordance with academic integrity guidelines. This declaration confirms that the application of AI in this research complies with the principles of transparency, academic honesty, and ethical writing.

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