

Instructional Leadership Practice in Elevating the Quality of Education in Islamic School

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to scrutinize the practice of instructional leadership implemented by the school principal of SMA Muhammadiyah (SMAM) 4 Depok in advancing the quality of Education. The approach used in this study is qualitative research employing a case study design. Result of this study reveals that the strategy of instructional leadership practiced by the principal of SMAM 4 Depok encompasses the followings: a). Broadening the school vision into more outward looking which integrates Islamic values with national and global curriculum into its instructional programs; b). Managing instructional programs based on periodical basis such as supervision, curriculum coordination, and monitoring students' progress; and c). Providing appreciation to the best teacher and the excellent student, developing teachers with some professional trainings, and maintaining high visibility entirely both internal and external involvement in building school positive school climate. In a nutshell, the instructional leadership practiced by the principal of SMAM 4 Depok is effectively implemented where Islamic values are systematically internalized. Nonetheless, it is imperative to pay attention to strengthening the instructional programs of global dimension to enhance the quality of academic outcome (competitive advantage) towards higher level both national and global one.

Keywords: Instructional Leadership, Quality of Education, SMAM 4 Depok



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1. INTRODUCTION

Educational leadership plays a pivotal role in determining the quality of learning and overall school effectiveness (Hallinger, 2018: 12). Strong leadership is particularly crucial in Islamic schools, where the integration of religious values with academic excellence forms the foundation of education (Hadi & Yusuf, 2021: 45). Principals who adopt effective leadership models can significantly enhance teacher performance, student engagement, and institutional outcomes. However, many Islamic schools in Indonesia struggle to implement structured leadership approaches, resulting in inconsistent educational quality. This study explores how instructional leadership—a model that emphasizes curriculum development, teacher support, and student learning—can address these challenges and elevate educational standards in Islamic institutions.

Despite the critical role of leadership, many Islamic schools in Indonesia face significant challenges, including unclear leadership models and insufficient principal involvement in instructional matters (Suryadi & Karim, 2022: 34). These shortcomings often translate into poor academic outcomes, as evidenced by low rankings in national exams such as the Ujian Tulis Berbasis Komputer (UTBK). For instance, Istikomah (2024, 92) reports that only 15% of Islamic senior high schools in Depok scored above the national UTBK average in 2023, highlighting a systemic issue in educational quality. Such disparities underscore the urgent need for effective leadership strategies to improve student competitiveness and institutional performance.

Regarding the challenges above, instructional leadership has been widely advocated as an effective model for enhancing school quality, particularly in contexts where academic performance lags behind national standards (Hallinger & Murphy, 2018: 23). Phillips Hallinger and Joseph Murphy are prominent figures in the field of educational leadership, particularly known for their work on instructional leadership (Istikomah, 2024: 352). Based on theoretical and empirical analysis, these experts formulated an instructional leadership framework with three dimensions comprising defining

the mission, managing instructional programs, and developing a positive school learning climate. This leadership approach prioritizes the principal's active role in guiding teaching practices, monitoring student progress, and fostering professional development among teachers (Robinson et al., 2019: 89). Studies have shown that schools adopting instructional leadership demonstrate significant improvements in both teacher efficacy and student achievement, making it a viable solution for Islamic schools coping with leadership deficiencies.

The implementation of instructional leadership in Islamic schools is further supported by its alignment with Islamic pedagogical principles, which emphasize mentorship, knowledge transmission, and ethical development (Hadi & Yusuf, 2021: 50). Based on field research conducted, the author finds out that in contrast to the challenges faced by Islamic schools, SMAM 4 Depok has emerged as an exemplary institution, achieving remarkable academic success. This school is considered superior for several achievements earned: national scale (belongs to 1000 UTBK), local scale (belongs to 13 best private high schools in Depok & superior to other SMAM in Depok city), Excellent accreditation with grade (A), 43% of graduates accepted at PTN spreading throughout Indonesia, achievements in various fields both academic and non-academic competitions, and international networks.

This is the major reason why SMAM 4 Depok is selected as a research object to examine how effective leadership can drive educational excellence in Islamic institution. The primary objective of this study is to analyze the instructional leadership practices at SMAM 4 Depok and their impact on the school's academic achievements in improving educational quality. Moreover, the culture of mutual cooperation and family spirit still grow strongly in the daily lives of Depok residents. This is reflected in the social interaction between teachers and parents at SMAM 4 Depok, the interaction between students and educators and education staff, and interactions between students.

The findings will contribute to the broader discourse on educational leadership, notably instructional leadership model offering practical recommendations for policymakers, school administrators, and educators committed to elevating the quality of Islamic education. Hence, the study can contribute to this discourse by examining the practice of instructional leadership at SMAM 4 Depok, a leading Islamic school in Indonesia especially in Depok, to identify best practices that can be replicated in similar contexts.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The approach used in this research is qualitative with a case study design. The data was collected using in-depth interview techniques with school principal, deputy head of curriculum, deputy head of student affairs, teachers, students, and school committee. Participatory observation techniques are used to support the data on the practice of 3 dimensions of instructional leadership at SMAM 4 Depok. Meanwhile, the documentary study technique is used to collect written data such as guidelines (curriculums, student, supervision) annual report, website pages, flyers, etc. 3 Primary data sources were obtained through purposive sampling technique. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained from online and offline sources. The data analysis in general refers to the Miles & Huberman interaction (2016); where the data analysis process is administered in stages which include: data reduction, data display, and conclusion.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings of this study are obtained from observation, documentation study, and in-depth interview with the school principal, deputy head of curriculum, deputy head of student affairs, teachers, and school committee. Based on the research findings, the practice of the instructional leadership of principal at SMAM 4 Depok according to the model of Hallinger Murphy (1985) in 3 dimensions: defining vision, managing instructional programs, developing school climate can be summarized in the table below:

Table 1. Summary of Instructional Leadership Practices Based on Hallinger and Murphy Model

Dimension	Function	Practice at SMAM 4 Depok
1. Defining the School Mission	Formulating school goals	Principal revised school vision from inward-looking "discipline, creative, Islamic" to globally

2. Managing the Instructional Program	Communicating school goals	oriented vision with participatory approach involving respective stakeholders. Vision and mission disseminated through forums (School meetings & forums with relevant Stakeholders) & Innovation through school mars songs using conventional media & social media
	Supervising and evaluating instruction	1. Regular supervision conducted via class observations and teacher assessments. 2. Innovation on Post-supervision through "recommitment"
	Coordinating curriculum	1. Curriculum Alignment by integrating National <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i>) ISMUBA & Local content. 2. Coordinating Meeting and Regular Evaluation
	Monitoring student progress	1. Semester & Annual academic Assessment 2. Test Result Evaluation on ISMUBA 3. SNBP eligibility tracking & UTBK results
3. Developing School Climate	Protecting instructional time	Teacher's Monthly Evaluation and Adjustment to School activities
	Promoting professional development	Continuous teacher development-- through in-house training, workshops, and reflective forums-- Focus on global pedagogical standards and Islamic values (English In-house Training, DIKSUSPALA, PMM Training (pelatihan merdeka mengajar), religious meeting, Baitul Arqam & MGMP)
	Maintaining high visibility	Principal actively involved in defining vision, instructional programs and developing school climate & external activities
	Providing incentives for teachers and students	1. Recognition of academic and non-academic excellence; performance-based appreciation events; rewards for teacher innovation (job promotion, incentive, and certificate of appreciation) 2. Deduction of students 'tuition fee, principal's certificate and coaching for universities admission

Source: Data taken from primary sources

Based on the findings presented on the table above, using Hallinger and Murphy (1985) Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) framework, the principal of SMAM 4 Depok demonstrates comprehensive instructional leadership across the three core dimensions: Defining the school mission, managing the instructional program, and developing a positive school learning climate. A comprehensive analysis is discussed below:

a. Defining the School Mission: Formulating and Communicating the School Mission

The principal's reformulation of the school's vision from "discipline, creative, Islamic" to a more outward-facing, globally oriented vision indicates a strategic shift aligned with Hallinger and Murphy's function of goal formulation, which emphasizes developing a clear instructional focus for the school (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985, p. 223). At the same, the school principal, Haryanto Sutan Kamil, M.Pd, M.Hum, emphasized the importance of involving relevant school stakeholders in formulating the school goal. This reflects common understanding which leads to visible realization of the school vision. Hallinger (2011, p. 129) encouraged this shift toward inclusive leadership where goal formulation is a collaborative process. Modern scholarship confirms this evolution: Leithwood et al. (2020, p. 29) argue that involving teachers and the community in defining school goals increases collective efficacy and goal.

The strategy of disseminating the school goal vision at SMAM 4 Depok through various channels—such as meetings, forums, and digital platforms—is very effective. It illustrates alignment with the second function of the first dimension: articulating and promoting school goals. Hallinger and Murphy (1985, p. 225) emphasized that leaders must ensure the school vision is widely known and understood and embed the school's vision into everyday operations. Hallinger (2011, p. 132) further stated that repeated and strategic communication helps internalize the mission among staff and students. This is confirmed by the student of SMAM 4 Depok (M. Nur Ikhsan) who stated that “Singing the school Marche entitled school vision over and over boost their spirit for going to school”. In addition, the use of innovative methods like school marches and social media parallels contemporary theories on school branding and strategic communication (Bush & Glover, 2014). Dissemination through physical visualizations such as banners and information boards spread throughout the school environment at SMAM 4 Depok allows all school residents to be exposed directly and repeatedly. In the digital era, the dissemination of this information is expanded by the school using social media such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok as emphasized by Haryanto Sutan Kamil, M.Pd., S.Pd. (the Principal of SMAM 4 Depok). This strategy shows the principal's ability to utilize technology as an instructional communication tool.

b. Managing the Instructional Program: Instructional Supervision, Curriculum Coordination, & Monitoring Student Progress

The supervision and evaluation approach at SMAM 4 Depok, regular class observations and innovative post-supervision recommitment sessions show the principal's role in instructional monitoring and evaluation with direct involvement of the principal, both in the observation process in class and even during reflection. According to Hallinger and Murphy (1985), this function involves monitoring classroom practices to improve teaching quality. The innovation of “recommitment” meetings shortly after supervision is uniquely held by SMAM 4 Depok as asserted by Farullina Sari, S. Pd (Deputy Head of Curriculum). The focus of reflection carried out by the principal of SMAM 4 Depok is not merely on shortcomings, but also on developing teacher potential, such as technological skills, English literacy or classroom management techniques, etc. This adds a developmental and reflective element, consistent with the modern concept of formative supervision (Marzano & Toth, 2013), which shifts the focus from control to teacher support and professional learning. Instructional supervision is no longer a top-down inspection but a formative, capacity-building process (Neumerski et al., 2018, p. 12). Current evidence suggests that such reflective supervision practices improve teacher motivation and student learning in the class. This is confirmed by the students of SMAM 4 Depok (M. Nur Ikhsan, Revalina Jasmine, and Syifa Syabrina) that the class atmosphere is very exciting regarding teachers teaching methods and performance.

At SMAM 4, curriculum coordination is demonstrated through the integration of Kurikulum Merdeka, ISMUBA (Muhammadiyah curriculum), and local content in translating their school vision. Special for global purpose, extra hours of English language is set into the school curriculum as asserted by Farullina Sari S.Pd (Deputy Head of Curriculum of SMAM 4 Depok). It reflects the principal's flexibility in managing the school curriculum. Hallinger and Murphy (1985: 227) emphasized the need for principals to ensure curriculum alignment with school goals. This practice is consistent with Fullan's (2020: 71) assertion that instructional leaders must align curriculum with both cultural identity and 21st-century competencies to foster relevance and engagement. As a result, it can balance standardized expectations with contextual relevance at SMAM 4 Depok. By combining national, religious, and local curricula, the school practices culturally responsive leadership which fosters inclusivity and relevance. This reflects distinctive characteristics among other private schools in Depok.

In monitoring student progress, as required by Hallinger and Murphy (1985: 229), the principal actively monitors student outcomes both academic and religious aspects using semester assessments, ISMUBA performance data, and SNBP/UTBK tracking. During the 2017–2023 period a total of 128 students were eligible for State Universities (PTN). It indicates the effectiveness of the school's learning program which is able to prepare students to face the strict selection of the PTN selection exam. This aligns with Hallinger's later work, which underscores using student data to guide school improvement (Hallinger, 2011: 134). Modern educational leadership research underscores the importance of data-driven decision-making (Datnow & Park, 2019: 5), where assessment results are not only for reporting but for refining instruction and closing learning gaps. Hence, the management of instructional evaluation can be further improved by the principal of SMAM 4 Depok to elevate the

learning outcomes. In addition, the Islamic approach applied can be a unique competitive advantage in forming the character of students who are not only academically superior but also have integrity.

c. Developing School Climate: Protecting Instructional Time, Promoting Professional Development, Maintaining High Visibility & Providing Incentives for Teachers and students

The principal's initiative in dealing with instructional time through monthly teacher evaluations and schedule adjustments supports Hallinger and Murphy's function of protecting learning time (1985: 232). Modern research also affirms that protecting instructional time requires not only structural changes but also cultural reinforcement of instructional priorities (Grissom et al., 2021: 348). It is evident that increasing academic learning time positively impacts student achievement. Therefore, a clearer attempt must be made in maintaining learning time at SMAM 4 Depok to optimize the student learning outcome.

The provision of professional development programs at SMAM 4 Depok—ranging from in-house English training to religious and pedagogical forums—align with Hallinger and Murphy's function of developing teacher capacity (1985: 234). According to Math and Physics teachers of SMAM 4 Depok (Novianda Herwin, S.Pd & Alfiyah, S.Pd), the principal, Sutan Kamil, M. Pd, strongly encouraged all teachers personally and intuitionally to increase their capacity in all aspects. It reflects what instructional leaders must promote and organize continuous teacher development. Hallinger and Murphy (1985: 234) said that the school's focus on global pedagogical trends and Islamic values reflects the dual need for professional growth and contextual relevance, a theme echoed by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), who argue for job-embedded, culturally responsive professional learning.

In maintaining school visibility, the principal's active role in both internal school activities and community outreach embodies Hallinger's principle of visibility as a symbolic leadership function (1985: 235). His involvement is evidently shown in overall instructional programs: vision formulation, class supervision, curriculum coordination, and extra-curricular activities carried out at SMAM 4 Depok even surprisingly he serves himself as music coach and school march writer. This practice aligns with recent findings that visible leadership—both in classrooms and public domains—builds trust, models commitment to learning, and sustains high expectations (Robinson et al., 2020: 56).

The principal of SMAM 4 Depok also puts a greater concern on providing appreciation both for teachers and students for their best performance in several aspects. The school's system of recognizing teacher work and innovation through promotions, incentives, and appreciation certificates corresponds with Hallinger and Murphy's recommendation for using incentives to reinforce instructional goals (1985: 237). This strategy is consistent with motivational theories such as Deci and Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory, which emphasizes that both extrinsic and intrinsic motivators can enhance professional commitment and effectiveness. Exemplary teachers in SMAM 4 Depok who got job promotion, Rabiatal Alawiyah, S.Pd (as Deputy Head of Student Affairs) and Novianda Herwin, S.Pd (as Class Supervisor) enthusiastically confirm this positive effect. Even another category of teacher recognition which is assessed by students is also served as admitted by the most favorite teacher, (Alfyiah, S.Pd) at SMAM 4 Depok.

Similarly, the leadership practice of the Principal of SMAM 4 Depok, Haryanto Sutan Kamil, M.Pd., M.Hum., in giving appreciation to students reflects an effective instructional leadership approach. Appreciation is given in various forms, both for academic, non-academic excellence, and discipline achievements, which aim to motivate students and develop their potential to the maximum outcome as shown in table below:

Table 2. Students' Achievement of SMAN 4 Depok

Academic achievement (Academic Report)	X 1-3	9	Tuition fee deduction 1-3 months according to championship level
	XI IPA 1-2	6	
	XI IPS 1-2	6	
Tahfidz achievement	XI MIPA 2	1	Tuition fee deduction of 4 months
	X.1	2	
Academic championship (OSN, O2SN)	XII-IPS	16	Tuition fee deduction
	XII-MIPA	19	

	X-XI	12	
Non-Academic (O2SN, FLSN)	championship	XII IPS	18
		XII IPA	18
		XI	15
		X	9
Championship achievement from private sector	All	20	Certificate
Disciplined achievement	X	11	Certificate
	XI MIPA	4	
	XI IPS	1	
	XII MIPA	2	
	XII IPS	4	
Eligibility of 40% quota for SNPB	XI & XII	10	PTN admission though SNBP

Source: Interview with Deputy Head of Students Affairs SMAM 4 Depok & Documentation

This evidence reflects the principal concern in seeing any individual excellence is essential and is in line with the goal of cultivating a learning-focused school climate.. It supports to Hallinger and Murphy (1985) that giving appreciation to students can provide motivation as well as create a conducive school learning environment. Hallinger and Murphy (1985: 238) advocated student motivation as part of the school climate strategy. Further, Robinson, C. (2023: 85-102) added that the principal's involvement in providing motivation, facilities, and inspiration strengthens the relationship between leadership and student achievement. Moreover, unique way of the principal in giving appreciation is carried out by public announcement at school ceremony activities. The practice as such affects personalized recognition which strongly creates a competitive climate among students at SMAM 4 Depok as asserted by Rabiatal Awaliyah, S.Pd, (Deputy Head of Students Affairs of SMAM 4 Depok).

4. CONCLUSION

On the basis of research findings above, it can be drawn a conclusion that the instructional leadership practices of the principal at SMAM 4 Depok based on Hallinger and Murphy's framework, demonstrate remarkable effectiveness across all three dimensions. The principal has excelled in formulating and communicating a clear, innovative, and measurable vision that transcends mere slogans and is tangibly integrated into the school's curriculum, regulations, and daily activities. This strategic vision-setting reflects strong leadership in guiding the school toward its goals. Additionally, the alignment of the Kurikulum Merdeka, ISMUBA (Muhammadiyah's distinctive curriculum), and local priorities showcases a well-balanced and adaptive approach to curriculum development, ensuring that the school's mission is effectively realized in practice.

Beyond curriculum design, the principal has fostered a highly conducive learning environment through targeted initiatives. Recognition programs for students have significantly boosted both academic and non-academic achievements, while comprehensive teacher development efforts—pedagogical including English literacy, spiritual, and moral competencies—have elevated instructional quality. The principal's hands-on involvement in maintaining discipline, protecting instructional time, and engaging with both internal and external stakeholders has further strengthened the school's inspiring and competitive atmosphere. These attempts collectively contribute the significant impact of effective instructional leadership on overall school performance.

However, opportunities for improvement remain. The school would benefit from establishing a formal mechanism for periodic vision and mission reviews, better aligning supervisory feedback with tailored teacher training, and implementing a more structured system for developing global competencies, particularly in English proficiency. Addressing these areas would not only refine the school's instructional leadership but also enhance its capacity to compete on national and global levels. By proactively tackling these challenges, SMAM 4 Depok can solidify its position as a model of educational excellence in Islamic, committed to continuous growth and innovation in preparing students for future success.

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