

Progressive leadership in strengthening teacher professionalism at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Baturetno

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran kepemimpinan progresif kepala sekolah dalam penguatan profesionalisme guru di SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Baturetno. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan kepala sekolah dan guru, observasi kegiatan pembelajaran serta forum kolaboratif guru, dan studi dokumentasi. Analisis data dilaksanakan secara interaktif melalui tahapan reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan progresif yang diterapkan kepala sekolah tercermin dalam praktik kepemimpinan yang partisipatif, humanis, dan berorientasi pada pemberdayaan. Strategi utama yang ditemukan meliputi pelibatan guru dalam pengambilan keputusan, pendampingan pembelajaran yang bersifat reflektif, serta dukungan terhadap inovasi dan kolaborasi antarguru. Praktik tersebut berkontribusi positif terhadap peningkatan komitmen, tanggung jawab, dan keberanian guru dalam mengembangkan pembelajaran yang inovatif dan bermakna. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa profesionalisme guru tidak hanya dibangun melalui supervisi formal, tetapi juga melalui relasi kepemimpinan yang dialogis dan kolaboratif. Kepemimpinan progresif dapat menjadi alternatif model kepemimpinan sekolah dalam meningkatkan mutu pembelajaran, khususnya di sekolah kejuruan berbasis nilai-nilai keislaman.

Kata kunci: kepemimpinan progresif; profesionalisme guru; kepemimpinan kepala sekolah

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the role of the principal's progressive leadership in strengthening teacher professionalism at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Baturetno. This study used a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews with the principal and teachers, observations of learning activities and teacher collaborative forums, and documentation studies. Data analysis was carried out interactively through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results show that the progressive leadership implemented by the principal is reflected in participatory, humanistic, and empowerment-oriented leadership practices. The main strategies found include teacher involvement in decision-making, reflective learning mentoring, and support for innovation and collaboration between teachers. These practices contribute positively to increasing teacher commitment, responsibility, and courage in developing innovative and meaningful learning. This study concludes that teacher professionalism is not only built through formal supervision, but also through dialogic and collaborative leadership relationships. Progressive leadership can be an alternative model of school leadership in improving the quality of learning, especially in vocational schools based on Islamic values.

Keywords: progressive leadership; teacher professionalism; principal leadership

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1. INTRODUCTION

Teacher professionalism is a key factor in improving the quality of education, particularly in vocational schools (*Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan*—SMK), which emphasize competency-based learning and are closely aligned with the needs of the workforce. SMK teachers are required not only to master pedagogical and subject-matter competencies but also to adapt to technological developments, industry demands, and evolving educational policies. In this context, strengthening teacher professionalism constitutes a complex and multidimensional challenge.

Various studies indicate that the development of vocational school teachers' professionalism is still constrained by limited resources, inadequate learning infrastructure, and insufficient administrative and managerial support. Restricted access to quality instructional materials hinders the continuous improvement of teachers' professional competence (Tanang et al., 2014), a condition further exacerbated by weak institutional support at the school level (Nugroho & Angraini, 2025). Meanwhile, the rapid advancement of educational technology requires teachers to possess adequate digital literacy in order to creatively utilize interactive learning media and applications (Ginting et al., 2025). However, low levels of digital literacy remain a major barrier to the effective integration of technology into instructional practices (Desiga & Liswati, 2025).

Efforts to enhance vocational teachers' professionalism are also closely related to the implementation of Vocational Teacher Professional Education (*Pendidikan Profesi Guru Vokasi*—PPGV), which aims to produce teachers who are academically, socially, and ethically competent. Professional certification through PPGV is considered a strategic initiative for improving the quality of vocational teachers (Handayani & Djohar, 2020), although its implementation continues to face challenges, particularly regarding the relevance of curricula to industry needs (Aryawan, 2023). Furthermore, the quality of teacher training and professional development programs, including Field Experience Practice (*Praktik Pengalaman Lapangan*—PPL), has not yet been managed systematically and sustainably, thereby potentially reducing teachers' readiness to respond to the demands of vocational learning in the era of technology and industry (Sari & Atmoko, 2024; Widayana, 2022).

Moreover, strengthening teacher professionalism cannot be separated from stakeholder support and a conducive school culture. Support from parents, communities, and industry plays an important role in providing resources and creating learning environments that foster teacher professionalism (Tanang et al., 2014). A positive school culture is also closely associated with teacher ethics and professional conduct.

In the context of SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Baturetno, these challenges are reflected in learning practices that are not yet fully adaptive to technological developments and labor-market demands. Some teachers still employ conventional instructional methods with limited integration of theory and practice and minimal utilization of digital media. Professional development activities for teachers have not been implemented in a structured and sustainable manner, while the principal's leadership role tends to be administrative and has not been fully optimized to encourage innovation and teacher empowerment. These conditions underscore the need to strengthen progressive leadership as a strategic approach to improving teacher professionalism and the quality of vocational learning at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Baturetno.

Based on the empirical conditions and theoretical perspectives outlined above, the main problem addressed in this study concerns the suboptimal professionalism of teachers at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Baturetno in responding to the demands of vocational education that is adaptive to technological developments and labor-market needs. These challenges include limitations in developing teachers' pedagogical and professional competencies, weak integration of theory-based and practice-based learning, and suboptimal use of learning technology. In addition, the principal's leadership, which still tends to be administrative in orientation, has not yet fully encouraged innovation, empowerment, and continuous professional development among teachers. Therefore, this study focuses on how progressive leadership can contribute to strengthening teacher professionalism at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Baturetno.

This study aims to examine and analyze the role of the principal's progressive leadership in strengthening teacher professionalism at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Baturetno. Specifically, it seeks to understand how progressive leadership practices can promote improvements in teachers' pedagogical and professional competencies, strengthen the integration of vocational learning that is responsive to technological developments and labor-market demands, and foster a collaborative school culture oriented toward continuous professional development. The findings of this study are expected to provide both conceptual and practical contributions to the development of school leadership and the enhancement of vocational education quality.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *The Concept of Progressive Leadership*

Progressive leadership can be defined as a leadership approach that emphasizes innovation, collaboration, and adaptability to change within educational environments. In the context of Islamic and

Muhammadiyah education, progressive leadership focuses on developing character as well as visionary leadership competencies that enable educational institutions to advance, both in academic quality and in strengthening students' moral and spiritual values (Cahyani et al., 2019).

The principles of progressive leadership include the following:

1. Participatory – Leaders encourage the involvement of all stakeholders in decision-making and school management. This aligns with democratic principles in education, where the voices of all community members are valued (Supriadi & Hakim, 2024).
2. Innovative – Progressive leaders continuously seek new and improved ways to enhance educational quality, including the development of curricula and teaching methods relevant to contemporary needs (Hawna et al., 2024).
3. Humanistic – Humanistic leadership emphasizes positive interpersonal relationships and attention to students' emotional and social well-being (Jaswadi et al., 2025).
4. Adaptive – Leaders must be able to respond effectively to rapid changes in educational and industrial environments and remain responsive to the needs of students and society (Kurniawan et al., 2023).

B. Teacher Professionalism

Teacher professionalism encompasses four core competencies that educators are expected to possess:

1. Pedagogical competence, which refers to the ability to design and implement effective and engaging learning processes.
2. Professional competence, defined as a deep understanding of subject matter and current developments within the field.
3. Social competence, namely the ability to communicate and interact effectively with students, parents, and colleagues.
4. Personal competence, which involves developing positive attitudes, exemplary behaviour, and strong character so as to serve as a role model for students (Faisal & Sobarna, 2022).

Within the context of vocational education, teacher professionalism plays a crucial role in preparing students for the workforce. Empirical studies indicate that teacher professionalism contributes significantly to graduates' work readiness. With appropriate training and adequate school management support, teachers can enhance students' technical competencies and practical skills, thereby increasing their competitiveness in the labour market (Zulijah, 2025; Adam et al., 2025).

C. Educational Leadership in the Context of Muhammadiyah Schools

Leadership in Muhammadiyah schools is expected to integrate Islamic and Muhammadiyah values into everyday educational practices. These values include the cultivation of noble character, environmental awareness, and exemplary conduct that can serve as a model for students (Sijabat et al., 2023). Consequently, leadership in Muhammadiyah schools is not limited to achieving formal educational goals but also involves developing students into individuals with integrity who contribute positively to society.

D. Research Conceptual Framework

The relationship between progressive leadership and teacher professionalism can be observed through the ways in which school principals implement progressive leadership principles. Participatory and innovative leaders tend to encourage teachers to become more actively involved in instructional processes, which positively influences their professional development and skills. Moreover, humanistic and adaptive leadership fosters a supportive and conducive work environment that enables teachers to grow and meet contemporary educational demands (Aminu, 2022). Strengthening progressive leadership within educational institutions is therefore expected to enhance teacher professionalism, ultimately leading to improved educational quality in Muhammadiyah schools.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical design aimed at obtaining an in-depth understanding of the role of progressive leadership in strengthening teacher professionalism at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Baturetno. A qualitative approach was selected because the study focuses on uncovering meanings, processes, and social dynamics occurring within the school's natural context without manipulating research variables (Creswell, 2014; Moleong, 2017).

The research participants consisted of the principal, teachers, and other relevant stakeholders directly involved in the management and implementation of learning at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Baturetno. Participants were selected purposively, taking into account their relevance to the research focus, namely school leadership and the development of teacher professionalism (Sugiyono, 2019).

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted to explore participants' perspectives and experiences regarding the principal's leadership practices and efforts to enhance teacher professionalism. Observations were undertaken to obtain an authentic picture of instructional implementation, leadership interactions, and school culture. Document analysis was

used to examine institutional records, such as teacher development programs, academic supervision reports, and internal policies, in order to corroborate findings obtained from interviews and observations (Yin, 2018).

Data analysis was conducted interactively and continuously through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification, following the framework proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). The analytical process began during data collection and continued until the end of the study, allowing the researcher to comprehensively identify patterns, themes, and relationships among concepts.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, this study applied triangulation techniques, including both source triangulation and methodological triangulation. Triangulation was employed to enhance the credibility of the findings by comparing and cross-checking information obtained from different sources and methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Through this methodological approach, the study is expected to produce valid and in-depth findings regarding progressive leadership practices in strengthening teacher professionalism at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Baturetno.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Forms of Progressive Leadership by the Principal

Based on participatory observation, the principal's progressive leadership was reflected in open and egalitarian interaction patterns. During teacher meetings and internal discussions, the principal did not dominate the forum but acted as a facilitator who encouraged teachers' active participation. Teachers were given space to express opinions, critiques, and suggestions without experiencing hierarchical pressure.

Observations indicated that in monthly coordination meetings, the principal consistently began sessions with joint reflection and evaluation activities. This practice strengthened a culture of dialogue and collective decision-making. These observations align with the principal's statement emphasizing the importance of teacher involvement in all school policies.

In addition, the principal was observed providing informal guidance by visiting the staff room and classrooms, particularly when teachers were preparing or conducting lessons. This approach demonstrates leadership that is approachable and oriented toward strengthening professional relationships.

This was emphasized in the principal's statement:

"I don't want teachers to simply carry out instructions, but to be involved in designing school programmes. Teachers need to feel ownership and responsibility for every policy that is implemented." (KS)

Teachers also perceived openness and dialogue in school leadership, as expressed by one teacher:

"We are given the opportunity to express our opinions, and even new learning ideas are always discussed together. The headteacher is open to input from teachers." (G1)

These findings indicate that progressive leadership in schools is not hierarchical but dialogical and participatory.

Research findings further suggest that participatory and humanistic progressive leadership contributes significantly to strengthening teacher professionalism. Leadership that positions teachers as strategic partners encourages their active involvement in decision-making, programme planning, and learning evaluation. This not only increases teachers' sense of ownership but also strengthens their commitment and professional responsibility as educators.

Providing opportunities for reflection and innovation enables teachers to develop pedagogical and professional competencies in contextual and sustainable ways. Teachers no longer function merely as policy implementers but as active and reflective agents of learning. These findings align with Lubis and Fadhli (2024), who confirm that participatory leadership positively affects teacher professionalism through the development of collaborative and reflective school cultures.

Furthermore, Rivada et al. (2025) emphasize that principals who act as learning facilitators can create working environments conducive to the continuous development of teacher competencies. In this context, leadership is manifested not only through administrative supervision but also through mentoring, professional dialogue, and teacher empowerment. Thus, teacher professionalism is constructed through dialogical, humanistic, and empowering leadership relationships that simultaneously enhance learning quality.

B. Progressive Leadership Strategies in Strengthening Teacher Professionalism

Teacher professionalism is strengthened through collaborative and reflective strategies. Observations of learning activities show that teachers are increasingly willing to apply diverse instructional methods, such as group discussions, simple project-based learning, and contextual learning media. Teachers appear to focus not only on delivering content but also on fostering active student participation. In several observed sessions, teachers conducted brief reflections with students at the end of lessons. This practice reflects growing pedagogical awareness and indicates improvement in teacher professionalism. These findings corroborate interview results suggesting that teachers are encouraged to be reflective and innovative.

Observations also show that the principal provides tangible support for innovative teaching practices by acknowledging teachers' efforts, both verbally and through official school forums. Such appreciation contributes to increased teacher confidence and motivation.

One teacher explained:

"Through discussions and sharing among teachers, we can learn from each other. The principal often facilitates reflection forums after learning activities." (G2)

In addition, the principal entrusts teachers with autonomy to innovate in teaching according to vocational students' characteristics:

"We encourage our teachers to try new methods. It doesn't matter if they are not perfect yet; the important thing is that there is a process of learning and evaluation together." (KS)

The progressive leadership approach implemented in the school encourages teachers to experiment more confidently and continuously strive to improve learning quality. Such confidence does not emerge instantly but develops through leadership strategies that consistently cultivate psychological safety and professional self-efficacy. Strategies such as inter-teacher collaboration, constructive mentoring, and support for innovation have proven effective in strengthening teacher professionalism, particularly in pedagogical competence and reflective practice.

These findings are consistent with Maesaroh and Utami (2025), who confirm that professional development becomes more meaningful when supported by leadership that promotes participation, dialogue, and continuous reflection. Through such processes, teachers not only exchange best practices but also internalize professionalism as a core school value.

Similarly, Akrima (2024) explains that innovative school leadership plays a crucial role in creating a conducive climate in which teachers feel supported to try new methods without fear of failure. Such an environment allows teachers to perceive innovation as a learning process rather than a risk. This supports the present findings that teachers' willingness to innovate at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Baturetno is closely linked to progressive leadership that is supportive, participatory, and oriented toward sustainable human resource development.

C. The Impact of Progressive Leadership on Teacher Professionalism

Observations of the school environment reveal a shift toward a more collaborative work culture. Teachers were frequently seen discussing learning practices both in the staff room and during informal interactions. Teacher interactions extended beyond administrative matters to include pedagogical discussions and professional development.

A conducive and respectful work atmosphere was also reflected in open communication between leaders and teachers. The principal regularly provided constructive feedback without adopting an authoritarian approach. This strengthened a humanistic professional climate and supported continuous competency development.

Overall, observational data confirm that progressive leadership is not only reflected in formal policies but also internalized in daily school practices, producing positive impacts on teacher professionalism at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Baturetno.

One teacher described changes in professional attitude:

"Now we are more aware of the need to continue learning and improving our teaching methods. There is encouragement from the leadership to always reflect, not just complete administrative tasks." (G3)

Another teacher highlighted motivational impacts:

"The headmaster's approach is more supportive. We feel valued, so we are more enthusiastic about carrying out our duties as teachers." (G1)

Overall, the findings indicate that progressive leadership significantly strengthens teacher professionalism through the development of collaborative, reflective, and innovative school cultures. Teachers become oriented not only toward completing administrative tasks but also toward improving instructional quality. This is consistent with Kasmawati (2019), who argues that professional teacher culture develops optimally in democratically and communicatively led schools. Likewise, Carudin (2017) emphasizes that humanistic leadership fosters respectful working relationships that enhance teacher motivation and performance. These conditions are reflected in this study, where positive interpersonal relationships between the principal and teachers strengthen professional commitment.

Progressive leadership at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Baturetno is characterized by the integration of humanistic values and collaboration within vocational education. This reinforces the view that school leadership functions not only as organizational management but also as an agent of change that drives teachers' professional transformation. Therefore, the findings enrich the literature on educational leadership by demonstrating that progressive leadership can serve as an effective model for strengthening teacher professionalism, particularly in values-based vocational secondary schools.

5. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the principal's progressive leadership plays a strategic role in strengthening teacher professionalism at SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Baturetno. Leadership characterized by participatory, humanistic, and empowerment-oriented approaches creates a school climate conducive to the development of teachers' pedagogical and professional competencies. Teacher involvement in decision-making processes, reflective instructional mentoring, and institutional support for learning innovation contribute to increased commitment, responsibility, and confidence among teachers in developing more meaningful learning practices.

The findings indicate that teacher professionalism is shaped not only through formal supervisory mechanisms but also through dialogical and collaborative leadership relationships. Progressive leadership provides opportunities for teachers to reflect, experiment, and learn from experience, thereby fostering sustainable instructional innovation. Consequently, progressive leadership may serve as an effective model for strengthening teacher professionalism, particularly within Islamic-based vocational school contexts such as SMK Muhammadiyah.

This study recommends that school principals adopt more inclusive and adaptive leadership practices as part of their strategic efforts to improve educational quality. Future research is encouraged to examine more comprehensively the impact of progressive leadership on student learning outcomes as well as overall school performance.

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