

## Research Article

# The Managerial Role of the Principal in Developing a Character-Based Excellent Elementary School: A Case Study at School in Bojonegoro

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### Article Info

Received: 28<sup>th</sup> Oktober 2025

Revised: 02<sup>nd</sup> November 2025

Accepted: 05<sup>th</sup> November 2025

Available Online: 10<sup>th</sup> December 2025

### Keywords:

Managerial Role;

Principal;

Character

p\_2775-2682/e\_2775-2690/

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### Abstract

In order to respond to the development of the times, the principal of Muhammadiyah 3 ICP Bojonegoro Elementary School strives to make the institution he leads a superior school with character. This study aims to uncover new facts about the programs implemented by the principal in realizing a superior chartered school and his managerial role. The method used is qualitative with a descriptive research type. The results found indicate that: (1) the principal implements various strategic programs that not only focus on academic achievement but also on character building. The programs are listed in eight things, namely: a) Immersion program, b) Full day education, c) congregational prayer, d) Dear Time, e) blessed Friday, f) outdoor learning activity, g) Tahsin and Tahfidz class, and h) Open house. (2) The role carried out by the principal includes various managerial, pedagogical and social aspects, including: a) determining the vision and mission b) developing a character-based curriculum, c) developing human resources, d) developing a supportive school environment, e) collaboration with other levels and parents, f) monitoring and evaluation. This role can be seen in the creation of a family-like and open work environment, and the dissemination of information regarding the school's vision, mission, and program implementation to all members of the school community. This study makes an academic contribution to the field of educational management by providing empirical evidence on the practices of managing character-based superior schools at the elementary education level. The findings enrich scholarly discourse on the managerial role of school principals in systematically integrating academic achievement with character education, and may serve as a conceptual and practical reference for the development of policies and the implementation of character-based superior school programs in other educational institutions.

### To Cite this article:

Himmatin, U. The Managerial Role of the Principal in Developing a Character-Based Excellent Elementary School: A Case Study at School in Bojonegoro. *Journal of Education and Religious Studies*, Vol. 05 No. 03 December 2025. Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.57060/jers.t9gz3593>

## INTRODUCTION

Indonesian society is currently experiencing a rapid transformation from an agrarian-based structure to an industrial and information-oriented society. Such socio-cultural changes inevitably affect the orientation and practice of education, which positions human beings as both the subject and object of development. Educational institutions are therefore required to design learning systems that are responsive to dynamic societal needs (Tilaar, 2008). In the context of globalization and technological advancement, schools are increasingly challenged to produce graduates who are not only academically competent but also possess strong moral and character foundations.

Islamic educational institutions, in particular, are expected to integrate academic excellence with character education as part of their institutional identity. Character education has been widely acknowledged as a fundamental component of quality schooling, as it shapes students' moral reasoning, responsibility, and social awareness (Lickona, 2012; Berkowitz & Bier, 2005). In addition, effective schools are characterized not merely by high academic achievement but also by strong organizational culture, adaptability, and leadership

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effectiveness (Macneil, Prater, & Busch, 2009; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). These findings indicate that excellence is not solely determined by facilities or curriculum design, but by leadership capacity in managing and aligning institutional resources toward shared goals.

Within this framework, the principal plays a strategic role as the key agent of change and institutional development. Educational leadership literature consistently highlights that principals significantly influence school effectiveness, teacher performance, and student outcomes (Hallinger, 2011; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). In Indonesia, the principal's managerial responsibilities are formally regulated under the Regulation of the Ministry of Education and Culture No. 6 of 2018, which emphasizes managerial, entrepreneurial, and supervisory functions. Management, in this regard, refers to the systematic process of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling resources to achieve institutional objectives effectively and efficiently (Hasibuan, 2016). Consequently, the realization of a character-based excellent school requires a principal who is capable of integrating managerial competence with educational vision.

An excellent school, as defined by the Ministry of National Education, is an institution that consistently achieves superior educational outcomes through the alignment of inputs, processes, and outputs. However, the concept of school excellence in Islamic educational settings must also incorporate character formation as a core value. Previous studies have explored aspects of school excellence and leadership in different contexts. Natalia Syafitri (2025) found that the principal's managerial role significantly contributed to the development of an excellent school with character, supported by adequate infrastructure and extracurricular programs. Similarly, Rinatul Khumaimah (2018) emphasized the importance of school culture in shaping students' personalities within Islamic elementary schools. Although these studies provide valuable insights, they tend to focus on specific managerial functions or cultural dimensions and have not comprehensively examined how managerial leadership integrates character education within a holistic excellence framework.

Therefore, there remains a need for in-depth exploration of how principals operationalize managerial roles in developing character-based excellence, particularly within Islamic elementary school settings. This study seeks to address this gap by analyzing the managerial role of the principal in realizing a character-based excellent school at Muhammadiyah 3 ICP Elementary School, Bojonegoro. Despite its relatively young institutional age, the school has demonstrated notable academic and non-academic achievements, making it a relevant and strategic case for examining the integration of leadership, management, and character education in pursuing institutional excellence.

## METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach aimed at describing phenomena naturally, comprehensively, and responsibly. The research design was field research conducted directly at the research site, allowing data to be collected through direct observation and engagement with social activities. This research adopted a case study approach to gain an in-depth understanding of group characteristics. Primary data sources included the principal, supervisors, teachers, and educational staff, while secondary data were obtained from previous research, books, journals, and related documents. The data collection techniques in this study include interviews, observation, and documentation. The interviews were conducted using a structured interview format with the principal, the education coordinator, assistant teachers, and school therapists, employing the same set of written questions for each informant. Observations were carried out through direct and systematic observation of the educational implementation process and the school environment. Meanwhile, documentation was used to collect written data related to the implementation of education at SD Muhammadiyah 3 ICP Sumberrejo Bojonegoro, such as reports, records, and other supporting documents. (Rifa'i, 2021: 114).

The validity of data in qualitative research must be tested to ensure its scientific credibility. Referring to Sugiyono (2019: 369) as cited in Umar, data validity is examined through credibility testing using triangulation techniques. Triangulation is understood as the process of verifying data from various sources, techniques, and times. In this study, source triangulation and technique triangulation were employed. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing data obtained from multiple informants and conducting member checks to ensure the accuracy of the information. Meanwhile, technique triangulation was conducted by comparing data from

the same source using different data collection methods, namely interviews, observations, and documentation, in order to obtain valid and credible data.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Since its establishment in 2009, Muhammadiyah 3 ICP Sumberrejo Elementary School has developed rapidly and has become a school widely considered by many parents for their elementary-school-aged children. Aspiring to become an excellent school as stated in its vision, the achievement of this goal requires the active contribution of all school components, including the principal, teachers and educational staff, parents, the school committee, students, and the wider community. Therefore, to ensure that the entire learning process aligns with the school's vision and mission, the implementation of effective management is necessary to achieve efficiency and effectiveness in the distribution of school resources through structured school programs.

As one of the educational institutions that aspires to institutional excellence with strong character values, Muhammadiyah 3 ICP Sumberrejo has developed various programs to support the achievement of these goals. In order to design school programs that align with the school's vision and mission, Muhammadiyah 3 ICP Sumberrejo begins with the planning process. Planning is a process of preparing a series of decisions for future actions aimed at achieving objectives through the optimal use of resources. (Suharsimi Arikunto, 2019: 13)

The next management function is organizing. Organizing refers to the activity of arranging work structures so that organizational members can interact and collaborate to achieve organizational goals. In this context, the principal's organizing role refers to the management of roles and responsibilities in carrying out leadership and managerial duties within the school. The principal is responsible for ensuring that all school activities run effectively and in accordance with the established vision and mission. Based on observations and interviews conducted by the researcher, the principal has optimized the management of human resources, finances, facilities and infrastructure, curriculum, and learning activities. (John Suprihanto, 2019: 9)

After the implementation of the two management functions planning and organizing a structured work program is formulated. The stages involved in program formulation include:

a. Program Proposal

At this stage, all educators are given the opportunity to propose work programs to be implemented. Proposals are submitted to the relevant authorities, and those related to students are conveyed to the division coordinator.

b. Program Decision Meetings within the Core Team

Each vice principal presents programs that have been approved internally within their respective working groups. In determining which programs will be implemented, the core team applies consensus-based deliberation while considering relevant factors. The decisions include budget allocation, implementation schedules, and program accountability. At this stage, the principal requires strong conceptual skills to ensure that each program is based on the school's resource capacity and is aligned with institutional needs to achieve its objectives.

c. Submission to the Foundation (Internal Meeting)

At this stage, the principal conducts deliberations with the management, the Dikdasmen council, the Muhammadiyah Branch Leadership (PCM), and the school committee to obtain recommendations and budgetary support for program implementation.

These stages are consistent with the results of interviews conducted with the principal, staff, and several teachers. Based on the data presented above, the principal of Muhammadiyah 3 ICP Sumberrejo has effectively fulfilled the role of a good leader, as evidenced by active involvement in planning, organizing, supervising, and evaluating processes, as well as in providing motivation, guidance, and direction.

a. Vision and Mission Leadership

The principal's involvement in the school's vision and mission is a key factor in determining the success of achieving educational goals. The principal is not only the initiator of the vision and mission but must also be actively involved in every stage of their implementation. The achievement of educational objectives greatly depends on the wisdom and competence of the principal, as the principal is entrusted with managing the school organization and collaborating with educators to educate students in achieving educational goals.

b. Development of a Character-Based Curriculum

The principal makes continuous efforts to design and implement a curriculum that not only focuses on academic achievement but also emphasizes character development. This curriculum aims to instill moral, ethical, and social values in the learning process so that students grow into individuals with strong character, responsibility, and positive contributions to society. This aligns with the work of Abdul Majid and Dian Andayani, who state that character-based curriculum development strategies can be implemented through three approaches: (a) integrating character values into all subjects, local content, and self-development activities; (b) habituation in daily school life; and (c) strengthening collaboration between schools, parents, and communities to cultivate character values in school, family, and community environments. (Abdul Majid dan Dian Andayani, 2011: 11)

c. Human Resource Development

As an essential aspect of improving educational quality, the principal equips and develops teachers' professional competencies, which include the skills, knowledge, and attitudes required to perform their duties effectively in planning, implementation, and evaluation of learning. This is consistent with Edy Sutrisno's view that human resource development aims to enhance professionalism and employee skills in performing their duties optimally. Developing employee competencies involves leadership efforts to improve individual skills so that tasks can be performed more efficiently and productively. Therefore, organizations must continuously invest in human resource development to enhance human productive capacity. (Edy Sutrisno, 2010: 62)

d. Development of a Supportive School Environment

One strategic step in realizing a character-based excellent school is the development of a supportive school environment. The principal of Muhammadiyah 3 ICP Sumberrejo has undertaken strategic initiatives to create conditions conducive to learning, character development, and the well-being of all school members. A positive school environment encompasses not only physical aspects but also social, emotional, and cultural dimensions that collectively foster a positive learning atmosphere.

e. Collaboration with Other Educational Levels and Parents

Collaboration between educational institutions and other organizations is a strategy employed by the principal to strengthen educational quality, expand networks, and enhance resources and opportunities for students. Regarding parents or guardians, the school maintains strong communication by providing information through three primary channels: beginning-of-year meetings, report card distribution meetings, and the optimization of WhatsApp class groups. These channels are utilized according to the nature of the information conveyed, while routine information such as daily student activities is delivered online.

f. Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring is a systematic process of collecting and presenting information related to the achievement of specific objectives. Evaluation refers to a more advanced stage in which the collected information is analyzed and used as the basis for judgment and decision-making. (Lutfi Mustofa, 2012: 11). Monitoring and evaluation are distinct yet closely interconnected management tools that interact and support one another. Through tracking or investigating program progress, monitoring provides both quantitative and qualitative data that support evaluation design and implementation. (Lutfi Mustofa, 2012: 16).

Conversely, evaluation also supports the monitoring process. Monitoring and evaluation conducted by the principal are essential components of educational management to ensure that all school activities proceed as planned and achieve the intended objectives. These processes allow managers and program implementers to assess progress and identify strengths and weaknesses in program implementation.

Based on observations and interviews conducted by the researcher, the principal's efforts to realize a character-based excellent school at Muhammadiyah 3 ICP Sumberrejo Bojonegoro involve several leadership, management, and educational approach aspects. These include: (1) the development of a clear vision and mission that emphasize both academic excellence and character formation, which have been effectively socialized to all stakeholders (teachers, students, parents, and the community); (2) effective resource management, ensuring optimal utilization of teachers, facilities, and curriculum, including selective teacher recruitment to ensure competency; (3) implementation of a character-based curriculum that explicitly integrates values such as integrity, discipline, cooperation, and responsibility through subjects and extracurricular activities; (4) participatory leadership, involving teachers, students, and parents in decision-making processes

to foster shared responsibility for achieving the school's vision and mission; (5) continuous teacher development through training and professional guidance to enhance competence and understanding of character education; (6) cultivation of school cultural values through fair disciplinary policies, positive activities, and consistent application of agreed-upon values; and (7) evaluation and improvement through effective evaluation systems based on feedback from teachers, students, and parents, as well as academic outcomes and student behavior.

Ipong Dekawati (2020) in International Journal on Education, Management and Innovation (IJEMI) said that the principal's leadership has a positive and significant effect on the character of students. Therefore, efforts to build the character of students by improving the principal's leadership Start from the results of the study; the authors suggest the principal: (1) to increases information disclosure through communication by maximizing digital communication facilities and holding flag ceremonies is an opportunity to convey information optimally. (2) to build a reliable work team and participate in community social activities, through cooperation with local communities in protecting the environment.

Table 1. Comparison of the depth of analysis of the two studies

<b>Comparative Aspect</b>	<b>Result 1</b>	<b>Result 2</b>
Main Focus	The effect of the principal's leadership on students' character	Strategic programs and managerial roles of the principal in developing a character-based excellent school
Key Findings	The principal's leadership has a positive and significant effect on students' character	Eight strategic programs were effectively implemented and contributed to academic and non-academic achievements
Research Approach	Analysis of leadership influence and improvement recommendations	Analysis of program implementation and the principal's managerial roles
Forms of Intervention	Improving information transparency and strengthening teamwork	Integrated programs (Immersion Program, Full-Day Education, religious activities, literacy, outdoor learning, Tahsin-Tahfidz, and Open House)
Role of the Principal	Communication leader and team motivator	Managerial, pedagogical, and social leader
Practical Contribution	Recommendations for enhancing the principal's leadership	A practical model for implementing character-based excellent schools at the elementary level

Result of Ipong Dekawati and Result of this research both emphasize the crucial role of the principal's leadership in shaping students' character, yet they differ in focus and analytical depth. Result 1 highlights the causal relationship between the principal's leadership and students' character development and provides practical recommendations, particularly regarding information transparency, effective communication, teamwork, and community involvement. In contrast, Result 2 extends this finding by demonstrating how the principal's leadership is concretely manifested through eight integrated and sustainable strategic programs, supported by managerial, pedagogical, and social roles. Thus, Result 1 establishes empirical evidence of the leadership impact, while Result 2 explains the practical implementation of leadership in developing a character-based excellent elementary school.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the realization of a character-based excellent school at Muhammadiyah 3 ICP Elementary School is strongly influenced by the principal's strategic managerial role. The implementation of eight integrated programs—covering academic enrichment, religious habituation, and character development—reflects a systematic effort to align institutional vision, curriculum, human resources, school culture, collaboration, and continuous evaluation. The findings confirm that effective school excellence is achieved not merely through superior facilities, but through leadership that integrates managerial, pedagogical, and social dimensions.

Academically, this study contributes to the discourse on educational leadership by providing empirical evidence on how character education can be embedded within a school excellence framework. Practically, the identified strategies may serve as a reference for principals and policymakers in designing sustainable character-based school programs. However, as this research was conducted in a single institution using a qualitative approach, its findings are context-bound. Future research is recommended to involve multiple sites and mixed-method designs to further examine the measurable impact of character-based excellence programs.

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