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Servant Leadership and Influence on Teacher Professional Development in Islamic Boarding Schools

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Abstract: This study investigates the influence of servant leadership on teacher professional development in an Islamic boarding school in Tulungagung. The research addresses how leadership practices shape professional learning, how they affect teacher development outcomes, and how both elements interact within the institutional context. A qualitative case study design was employed to explore in-depth perspectives from the kyai, teachers, and administrative staff. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations of daily educational activities, and document analysis, followed by thematic analysis. The findings indicate that servant leadership creates a supportive, value-oriented environment that encourages continuous professional growth through mentoring, collaboration, and reflective practice. Teachers demonstrate improved competence in instructional strategies, classroom management, and integration of religious values into teaching. Professional development outcomes are reflected in increased engagement, confidence, and participation in learning activities. The study also reveals a dynamic and interconnected relationship in which leadership values shape teacher development, professional practices enhance instructional quality, and feedback informs leadership refinement. These findings highlight the critical role of servant leadership in sustaining effective teacher development within Islamic boarding school contexts.

Keywords: Servant Leadership, Teacher Professional Development, Islamic Boarding School, Teacher Competence.

INTRODUCTION

Educational institutions are expected to continuously improve teacher competence in response to evolving demands related to instructional quality, curriculum implementation, and student outcomes. Teacher professional development becomes a central element in ensuring that educators possess the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to support effective learning. This expectation is closely linked to global trends in educational accountability, where institutions are required to demonstrate

measurable improvement in teaching effectiveness and student achievement. Within this context, leadership plays a critical role in shaping professional development by creating conditions that support learning, reflection, and collaboration. Servant leadership offers a perspective that prioritizes human growth and relational engagement, positioning leaders as individuals who serve the needs of teachers and support their development. This leadership approach emphasizes empathy, listening, and commitment to the growth of others, which



contributes to the development of a supportive professional environment (Greenleaf, 1977; Liden et al., 2008). In educational settings, such an approach enables leaders to build trust and foster a culture where teachers are encouraged to engage in continuous learning and improvement. In Islamic boarding schools, leadership is closely associated with moral guidance and community values, which shape how professional development is designed and implemented. Based on this context, this study addresses how servant leadership shapes teacher professional development practices in an Islamic boarding school in Tulungagung.

Teacher professional development involves continuous processes that include training, mentoring, collaboration, and reflective practice. These processes are not limited to formal programs but extend to daily interactions, shared experiences, and collective learning activities within the institution. Effective professional development requires leadership support that is responsive to teacher needs and aligned with institutional values. In Islamic boarding schools, teachers are expected to integrate academic instruction with religious and character education, creating a complex instructional environment that requires both pedagogical competence and moral awareness. Leadership that emphasizes service and guidance supports teachers in navigating these responsibilities by providing direction, encouragement, and opportunities for growth. Servant leadership promotes open communication, trust, and shared responsibility, which contribute to the development of professional learning communities where teachers collaborate and

learn from one another (Spears, 2010). Such communities strengthen teacher engagement and create opportunities for collective reflection on instructional practices. Teachers who experience supportive leadership are more likely to demonstrate commitment to their roles and actively participate in professional development activities. Empirical studies indicate that servant leadership positively influences teacher motivation and professional growth by fostering a sense of belonging and purpose within the organization (Eva et al., 2019). This study examines how servant leadership influences teacher professional development outcomes within the institutional setting.

The relationship between servant leadership and teacher professional development reflects a dynamic interaction within the institution. Leadership practices influence how teachers engage in learning activities, while professional development outcomes shape instructional practices and student experiences. This interaction creates a continuous cycle in which leadership supports teacher growth, teacher development enhances instructional quality, and classroom outcomes provide feedback that informs leadership strategies. Feedback from teaching practices, student engagement, and institutional evaluation contributes to the refinement of both leadership approaches and professional development programs. Alignment between leadership values, professional learning processes, and institutional goals becomes essential in sustaining this cycle. In Islamic boarding schools, this alignment is influenced by shared moral and spiritual values that guide both leadership actions and teacher practices. Leadership that reflects these values



strengthens institutional cohesion and encourages teachers to integrate professional growth with ethical responsibility. Research highlights that value-based leadership contributes to organizational commitment and enhances professional development outcomes by aligning individual and institutional goals (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). Understanding this relationship provides insights into how leadership contributes to sustainable teacher development in Islamic boarding schools. Based on this background, this study also addresses how servant leadership influences teacher professional development and how both elements are interconnected within the institutional context.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative case study design conducted at an Islamic boarding school in Tulungagung to examine how servant leadership influences teacher professional development. A qualitative approach enables a deep exploration of leadership practices, teacher experiences, and professional learning processes within their natural setting. This approach is suitable for understanding complex social interactions and contextual meanings that cannot be captured through quantitative measurement. The case study design focuses on a bounded system, allowing detailed investigation of how leadership values and practices are enacted within a specific institutional environment. Such a design supports the development of rich and contextualized findings that reflect real-life dynamics within educational settings (Yin, 2018).

Participants in this study include the kyai, teachers, and administrative staff

selected through purposive sampling. The selection criteria emphasize individuals who are directly involved in leadership practices and teacher development activities, ensuring that the data are relevant and information-rich. The kyai provides insights into leadership philosophy, decision-making processes, and value-based guidance that shape institutional practices. Teachers contribute perspectives related to their experiences in professional learning, instructional improvement, and engagement with leadership support. Administrative staff offer additional information regarding institutional systems, coordination of development programs, and organizational support mechanisms. Purposeful selection of participants allows the study to capture diverse perspectives that contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon (Patton, 2015).

Data were collected through multiple techniques to enhance depth and credibility. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore participants' experiences and interpretations of servant leadership and professional development. This method allows flexibility for participants to express their views while maintaining alignment with the research focus. Observations were conducted to examine teaching activities, leadership interactions, and daily practices within the boarding school environment. These observations provide direct evidence of how leadership values are translated into practice. Document analysis involved reviewing training programs, institutional policies, and development plans to understand formal structures and evidence of implementation. The use of multiple data sources supports triangulation and



strengthens the validity of findings (Tracy, 2013).

Data analysis followed a thematic approach involving data reduction, coding, categorization, and interpretation. The process began with organizing data from interviews, observations, and documents, followed by coding to identify meaningful units related to leadership and professional development. Codes were grouped into categories and developed into themes that represent recurring patterns. Interpretation focused on explaining relationships between themes and linking them to the research questions. Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation of data sources and member checking, where participants reviewed the findings to confirm accuracy. These strategies enhance the credibility and rigor of qualitative research (Nowell et al., 2017).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Servant Leadership and Teacher Professional Development Practices

Servant leadership in the Islamic boarding school is reflected in the kyai's strong commitment to serving teachers through guidance, empathy, and personal engagement. Leadership is not positioned as authority that controls, but as a moral responsibility to nurture the growth of teachers both professionally and spiritually. The kyai articulates values that integrate educational competence with ethical conduct, creating a holistic orientation toward teacher development. Teachers perceive leadership as a source of support that strengthens their sense of purpose and belonging within the institution. This orientation aligns with the core principles of servant leadership, which emphasize prioritizing the development and

well-being of followers as a central leadership function (van Dierendonck, 2011). The presence of value-based leadership contributes to a professional environment where teachers are motivated to improve their competence while maintaining alignment with institutional values.

Leadership practices are embedded in daily interactions and are not limited to formal programs. Mentoring becomes a central mechanism through which the kyai supports teacher development. This mentoring process occurs through both structured sessions and informal encounters, allowing teachers to receive guidance in a continuous and contextual manner. Teachers describe how these interactions provide opportunities to discuss instructional challenges, receive feedback, and reflect on their professional practices. Informal discussions create a space where teachers feel comfortable expressing their concerns and exploring new ideas. This relational approach reduces hierarchical barriers and strengthens communication between leadership and teachers. Research indicates that servant leadership fosters high-quality relationships characterized by trust and mutual respect, which enhance engagement in professional development activities (Lemoine et al., 2019). Teachers become more open to feedback and more willing to participate in learning processes when leadership is perceived as supportive and approachable.

Collaborative practices form an essential component of teacher professional development within the boarding school. Study circles, peer discussions, and joint reflection sessions are organized regularly to facilitate shared learning. These activities enable teachers to exchange experiences,



discuss instructional strategies, and develop collective solutions to classroom challenges. Teachers report that collaboration helps them gain new perspectives and refine their teaching approaches. The presence of a collaborative culture transforms professional development into a collective responsibility rather than an individual task. Leadership plays a key role in facilitating this culture by providing opportunities, encouragement, and structure for collaboration. Evidence suggests that professional learning communities supported by leadership contribute to sustained teacher development and improvement in instructional practices (Hairon & Dimmock, 2012). The collaborative environment strengthens relationships among teachers and enhances their commitment to institutional goals.

Reflective practice emerges as a significant outcome of servant leadership within the institution. Teachers engage in ongoing reflection on their teaching methods, classroom interactions, and student responses. Leadership encourages reflection as part of professional growth by creating a safe environment where teachers can evaluate their practices without fear of criticism. Teachers describe how reflection allows them to identify areas for improvement and consider alternative instructional strategies. This reflective orientation supports continuous learning and enables teachers to adapt to changing educational demands. The integration of reflection into daily practice contributes to the development of a professional culture that values learning and self-improvement. Studies highlight that servant leadership promotes reflective behavior by fostering psychological safety and encouraging

individuals to engage in self-evaluation and innovation (Eva et al., 2019).

The supportive leadership environment also encourages innovation in teaching practices. Teachers are given the flexibility to explore new instructional approaches while maintaining alignment with institutional values. Leadership support reduces the risk associated with experimentation and creates a sense of trust that enables teachers to try different strategies. Teachers describe how this environment allows them to respond more effectively to student needs and develop engaging learning activities. Innovation becomes part of routine practice rather than an isolated effort. This adaptability contributes to the development of instructional practices that are both dynamic and responsive. Research indicates that servant leadership enhances creativity and innovation by empowering individuals and providing them with the autonomy to explore new ideas (Yoshida et al., 2014).

Professional development practices within the boarding school become increasingly structured and meaningful as a result of leadership influence. Activities such as mentoring, collaboration, and reflection are integrated into daily routines, creating a continuous learning process. Teachers demonstrate increased awareness of their professional roles and responsibilities, which contributes to the improvement of instructional quality. Leadership ensures that these practices remain aligned with institutional values, creating coherence between professional development and organizational goals. The integration of moral and professional dimensions strengthens the sustainability of teacher development within the institution.



The findings indicate that servant leadership plays a central role in shaping teacher professional development practices through relational engagement, collaboration, reflection, and innovation. Leadership creates conditions that enable teachers to grow continuously while maintaining alignment with institutional values. The interaction between leadership practices and teacher learning processes forms a dynamic system that supports both individual and organizational development. Professional development becomes an integral part of institutional life, reflecting the effectiveness of servant leadership in fostering a culture of learning and continuous improvement.

2. Servant Leadership and Teacher Professional Development Outcomes

Teacher professional development outcomes in the Islamic boarding school are closely shaped by leadership practices that emphasize care, trust, and empowerment. Servant leadership positions the kyai as a figure who prioritizes the growth of teachers through attentive guidance and relational engagement. Teachers experience leadership as a source of encouragement that strengthens their motivation to improve their professional competence. This supportive orientation contributes to the development of confidence in carrying out instructional responsibilities. Teachers demonstrate increased competence in instructional planning, classroom management, and the integration of religious values into teaching practices. The alignment between professional competence and moral responsibility reflects the distinctive context of Islamic boarding schools, where teaching is closely connected with character formation. Empirical research indicates that

servant leadership enhances employee development outcomes by fostering empowerment and psychological ownership, which contribute to improved performance and professional growth (Hoch et al., 2018).

The improvement in teacher competence is reflected in the ability to design structured and effective learning activities. Teachers organize lessons with clear objectives, appropriate sequencing, and strategies that facilitate student understanding. Leadership support enables teachers to refine their instructional approaches through continuous feedback and mentoring. Teachers report that guidance from the kyai and senior educators helps them align instructional practices with both curriculum standards and institutional values. This alignment strengthens the coherence of teaching practices and contributes to the development of consistent instructional quality across classrooms. Professional competence is also evident in teachers' ability to manage classroom dynamics effectively, creating an environment that supports student participation and engagement. Research shows that leadership that emphasizes empowerment and support contributes to the development of professional competence by enabling individuals to take initiative and improve their performance (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016).

Professional development outcomes are further reflected in the active participation of teachers in learning activities such as training sessions, mentoring programs, and collaborative discussions. Teachers engage in these activities with a sense of responsibility and commitment that is influenced by leadership practices. Participation is not



driven solely by institutional requirements but emerges from intrinsic motivation supported by a positive leadership climate. Teachers describe how involvement in collaborative learning activities enhances their understanding of instructional strategies and allows them to learn from the experiences of their peers. This shared learning process contributes to the development of pedagogical skills and strengthens professional confidence. The presence of a supportive leadership environment encourages teachers to view professional development as an opportunity for growth rather than an obligation. Studies indicate that servant leadership promotes engagement in professional learning by fostering a sense of trust and belonging within the organization (Sousa & van Dierendonck, 2017).

Student engagement and learning experiences also reflect the outcomes of teacher professional development influenced by servant leadership. Teachers implement instructional strategies that encourage active participation, discussion, and critical thinking. Students respond positively to these approaches, demonstrating increased involvement in classroom activities and improved interaction with learning materials. The connection between teacher development and student engagement highlights the indirect influence of leadership on learning outcomes. Leadership shapes teacher behavior, which in turn influences the quality of student experiences in the classroom. This relationship underscores the importance of focusing on teacher development as a pathway to improving overall educational quality. Evidence suggests that leadership practices that

prioritize teacher growth contribute to enhanced student outcomes through improved instructional quality (Liu et al., 2021).

Leadership also contributes to the development of a professional culture that values continuous learning and shared responsibility. Teachers perceive professional development as a collective process that involves collaboration, reflection, and mutual support. This perception strengthens commitment to institutional goals and encourages teachers to maintain consistency in their performance. A culture of continuous learning is sustained through regular interaction, feedback, and shared experiences among teachers. Leadership fosters this culture by modeling behaviors that emphasize humility, service, and commitment to growth. Teachers are encouraged to support one another and contribute to the development of a positive learning environment. Research highlights that servant leadership plays a significant role in shaping organizational culture by promoting collaboration, trust, and shared responsibility (Neubert et al., 2016).

The sustainability of teacher professional development outcomes is closely linked to the consistency of leadership practices. Servant leadership ensures that professional growth is not treated as a temporary initiative but as an ongoing process embedded in institutional life. Teachers continue to develop their skills and adapt their practices in response to changing educational demands. Leadership provides continuous support that enables teachers to maintain their commitment to improvement. This sustained effort contributes to the



stability and effectiveness of instructional practices within the institution.

The findings indicate that servant leadership has a significant influence on teacher professional development outcomes through its emphasis on empowerment, participation, and cultural development. Teachers demonstrate improved competence, confidence, and engagement as a result of leadership support. Professional development becomes a continuous and integrated process that supports both individual growth and institutional effectiveness. This relationship highlights the importance of servant leadership in creating conditions that enable sustainable teacher development and improved educational outcomes within Islamic boarding schools.

3. Interconnection Between Servant Leadership and Teacher Professional Development

The relationship between servant leadership and teacher professional development in the Islamic boarding school forms a continuous and interconnected process that links leadership practices, teacher learning, and instructional outcomes within a dynamic system. Leadership does not operate as an isolated function but becomes embedded in daily institutional life, shaping how teachers engage in professional learning and how instructional practices evolve over time. The kyai's leadership approach emphasizes service, moral guidance, and relational interaction, which influences how teachers perceive their roles and responsibilities. Teachers respond to this leadership orientation by engaging actively in learning activities, reflecting on their practices, and aligning their professional growth with institutional values. This

interaction creates a system in which leadership actions initiate professional development processes, and teacher responses contribute to the refinement of leadership strategies. Research indicates that servant leadership fosters reciprocal relationships between leaders and followers, creating a cycle of influence that supports continuous development and organizational learning (Eva et al., 2019).

Leadership values are translated into practical actions through mentoring, collaboration, and daily interaction, which serve as mechanisms for connecting leadership intentions with teacher practices. Mentoring sessions provide structured opportunities for guidance and feedback, while informal interactions reinforce values such as humility, responsibility, and commitment to growth. Teachers internalize these values and implement them in their instructional practices, creating alignment between leadership expectations and classroom activities. This alignment ensures that professional development is not limited to theoretical understanding but is reflected in concrete teaching practices. Teachers design learning activities that integrate pedagogical strategies with value-based education, demonstrating how leadership influences instructional behavior. Studies show that value-driven leadership contributes to alignment between organizational vision and professional practices, strengthening institutional coherence and effectiveness (Sendjaya et al., 2019).

The role of feedback within this interconnected process is central in sustaining continuous improvement. Feedback emerges from multiple sources, including classroom observations, student



responses, and reflective discussions among teachers. These feedback mechanisms provide information that allows leadership to evaluate the effectiveness of its strategies and make necessary adjustments. Teachers also use feedback to refine their instructional approaches and improve their professional competence. This feedback loop creates a cycle of reflection and adaptation in which both leadership and teaching practices evolve in response to emerging needs. The presence of structured and informal feedback processes strengthens accountability and supports ongoing development. Evidence suggests that feedback-informed leadership enhances organizational learning by promoting reflection and enabling continuous refinement of practices (London, 2014).

Teacher practices function as a key link in connecting servant leadership with professional development outcomes. Leadership influences teacher behavior through support, empowerment, and value-based guidance, while teachers translate this influence into instructional strategies that shape student learning experiences. Teachers engage in collaborative planning, reflective dialogue, and continuous skill development, which contribute to the improvement of teaching quality. These practices demonstrate how leadership impact is mediated through teacher actions rather than direct control. The effectiveness of leadership is reflected in the ability of teachers to adapt their practices, engage students, and maintain alignment with institutional goals. Research highlights that leadership influence on educational outcomes is largely indirect and operates through teacher capacity and instructional practices (Pietsch et al., 2019).

Organizational processes within the boarding school further strengthen the interconnected relationship between leadership and teacher professional development. Activities such as planning, mentoring, evaluation, and collaborative learning provide a structured framework that supports continuous growth. Leadership ensures that these processes are aligned with institutional values and goals, creating coherence between professional development and organizational direction. Teachers participate actively in these processes, contributing to a sense of shared responsibility for institutional improvement. This structured yet flexible system enables the institution to maintain stability while adapting to changing educational demands. Studies indicate that leadership that integrates organizational processes with professional learning enhances institutional capacity and supports sustainable development (Parris & Peachey, 2013).

The development of an adaptive and reflective educational environment is closely linked to the interaction between servant leadership and teacher professional development. Leadership encourages openness to change, continuous learning, and responsiveness to feedback, allowing teachers to adjust their practices based on student needs and contextual conditions. Teachers demonstrate adaptability by experimenting with new instructional approaches and refining their methods through reflection. This adaptability ensures that professional development remains relevant and effective in addressing evolving challenges. The institution becomes a learning-oriented environment where growth is sustained through ongoing interaction



between leadership and practice. Research suggests that servant leadership contributes to adaptive organizational behavior by fostering trust, collaboration, and shared commitment to improvement (Liden et al., 2014).

Alignment among leadership, professional development, and institutional goals emerges as a central element in this interconnected process. Leadership establishes direction and values, professional development translates these into teacher practices, and instructional outcomes reflect the effectiveness of this alignment. When coherence is achieved, the institution operates as an integrated system where each component reinforces the others. Teachers demonstrate a shared understanding of goals and actively contribute to institutional development, while leadership continues to provide support and guidance. This alignment strengthens sustainability and ensures that professional development is maintained over time. Evidence indicates that alignment between leadership practices and professional learning processes is essential for achieving long-term organizational effectiveness (Schaubroeck et al., 2011).

The findings demonstrate that the interconnection between servant leadership and teacher professional development forms a foundation for continuous improvement within the Islamic boarding school. Leadership influences teacher learning, teacher practices shape instructional outcomes, and feedback informs leadership refinement. This cyclical interaction creates a system that supports reflection, adaptation, and sustained growth. Servant leadership functions as a driving force that connects values, practices, and outcomes, ensuring that

professional development remains meaningful and aligned with institutional goals. This relationship highlights the importance of leadership in building an integrated and sustainable system of teacher development within Islamic educational contexts.

CONCLUSION

Servant leadership in the Islamic boarding school context in Tulungagung demonstrates a strong influence on teacher professional development through its emphasis on service, empathy, and relational engagement. Leadership practices centered on mentoring, guidance, and moral responsibility create a supportive environment where teachers feel valued and encouraged to grow. Professional development is not limited to formal training programs but becomes embedded in daily interactions, collaborative learning, and reflective practices. Teachers respond to this leadership approach by improving their instructional competence, strengthening their commitment, and integrating religious values into their teaching. This condition reflects the alignment between leadership values and professional growth, which supports the development of both pedagogical skills and ethical awareness among teachers.

The relationship between servant leadership and teacher professional development reflects a continuous and systemic process. Leadership provides direction and creates conditions that support learning, while teachers actively engage in professional development activities that enhance instructional quality. Outcomes from these processes generate feedback that informs leadership strategies and supports



further refinement. This interaction forms a cycle of development in which leadership, teacher learning, and instructional practices are interconnected. Alignment between institutional values, professional learning, and instructional outcomes becomes essential in maintaining this cycle. A collaborative culture strengthens this alignment by encouraging shared responsibility, open communication, and mutual support among teachers.

Sustained implementation of servant leadership contributes to the development of an adaptive and reflective educational environment. Teachers continuously refine their practices in response to student needs and institutional expectations, while leadership remains responsive to feedback and changing conditions. This dynamic interaction ensures that professional development remains relevant and effective over time. The findings indicate that servant leadership functions as a driving force that connects values, professional practices, and institutional goals. Such leadership not only enhances individual teacher competence but also supports long-term institutional effectiveness. The study underscores the importance of adopting value-based leadership approaches in Islamic boarding schools to ensure sustainable teacher development and meaningful educational improvement.

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