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Leadership Strategies for Teachers' Social Competence Development Through Pesantren Values Integration in East Lombok Islamic Schools

Zaetullah*¹, Fizian Yahya², Sri Harmonika³

¹⁻³ Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam (STAI) Darul Kamal, NTB, Indonesia

*e-mail corresponding: fizian_Y@gmail.com

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Abstract

Teachers' social competence is a crucial dimension of educational quality because it shapes communication, collaboration, and the relational climate of learning; recent studies in Islamic educational settings also show that teachers' social competence contributes positively to student motivation and classroom interaction. This study aims to analyze principal leadership strategies for developing teachers' social competence through the integration of pesantren values at SMP IT NW Otak Kebon, East Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara. Using a qualitative descriptive field-research design, the study was conducted from May to August 2025 through interviews with the principal, teachers, and students, supported by observation and documentation. Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, while validity was strengthened through source and technique triangulation. The findings reveal four principal strategies: acting as a motivator through appreciation and moral support, functioning as a facilitator through collaborative programs and training, serving as a role model through exemplary conduct, and building a collaborative culture through participatory coordination and shared responsibility. The study also identifies supporting factors, including teacher participation, adequate facilities, and institutional openness, as well as inhibiting factors such as uneven motivation, heavy teaching loads, and limited relevance of some training activities. These findings show that leadership grounded in pesantren values contributes significantly to the development of teachers' social competence and to the creation of a more conducive educational climate in Islamic schooling

Key Word:

Leadership Strategies,
Teachers' Social
Competence,
Pesantren Values,
Integrated Islamic
School

INTRODUCTION

Teacher quality is not solely determined by subject mastery or pedagogical skills. Behind every effective classroom lies a dimension that often escapes attention: the teacher's capacity to build meaningful relationships with students, colleagues, parents, and the broader community. This dimension, known as social competence, is one of four competencies mandated by Law Number 14 of 2005 on Teachers and Lecturers, yet it frequently becomes one of the less systematically developed aspects of teacher

professional growth in practice. In recent discussions on Islamic education, teacher competence and professionalism have continued to require strengthening through training, collegial forums, and institutional support, indicating that social and relational dimensions of competence remain an important agenda in school improvement (Hasbi, 2012; Zainal & Mega, 2023).

The consequences of weak teacher social competence are far-reaching. Teachers who struggle to communicate effectively, collaborate with peers, or establish warm relationships with students tend to create rigid and uncondusive classroom atmospheres. This situation becomes particularly important in Islamic educational institutions, where value cultivation and character formation are central missions alongside knowledge transfer. Hasbi (2012) noted that teachers' social competence in Islamic education is not merely an interpersonal skill, but a reflection of Islamic values that should permeate every educational interaction. Zainal and Mega (2023) further affirmed that social competence is an indispensable prerequisite for sustaining students' motivation and learning interest over time, while more recent reviews also underline that communication and cooperation are key dimensions of social competence in Islamic educational practice.

Principal leadership emerges as the decisive variable in this equation. Mulyasa (2013) asserts that school principals are not merely educational administrators, but the driving force that determines the direction and quality of all educational processes within their institutions, including teacher competence development. This position is reinforced by Government Regulation Number 28 of 1990, which explicitly mandates principals to be responsible for educational activities, guidance of teaching staff, and utilization of school facilities. In the context of developing teachers' social competence, principals play a strategic role as motivators, facilitators, role models, and architects of collaborative culture. Anwar, Kurniawati, and Yuliasari (2023) further argued that the effectiveness of principal leadership in improving teachers' social competence depends heavily on structured and consistent managerial approaches. This view is also in line with recent studies showing that teacher competence development is strongly supported by school leadership, professional upgrading, and institutional learning environments that promote participation and service-oriented work ethics.

What is particularly compelling is that the values essential for building strong social competence—exemplary conduct, collaborative spirit, care for others, and commitment to self-improvement—have long been living traditions within the pesantren environment. As Indonesia's oldest Islamic educational institution, pesantren has cultivated a system that places leadership role-modeling and a culture of mutual cooperation at the core of character formation. These deeply rooted values hold enormous potential to be internalized within principal leadership strategies, particularly in schools that are institutionally embedded in the pesantren ecosystem or operate under an Integrated Islamic School framework. Recent studies indicate that pesantren continue to preserve traditional moral values while adapting to contemporary educational demands, and that pesantren-based leadership remains central in guiding institutional culture without losing its ethical foundation.

Several prior studies have addressed related themes. Murni Yanto (2020) examined principal management in nurturing teachers' social competence at a Muhammadiyah Islamic elementary school, focusing on administrative management dimensions. Siska Zahrotul Hidayah et al. (2022) investigated the strategies of a madrasah principal in enhancing teachers' social competence at MTs Al-Khoiriyah Gresik, emphasizing structural approaches. Anwar, Kurniawati, and Yuliasari (2023) analyzed strategic management of school principals in the context of a public vocational high school in Garut. Meanwhile, Tri Yuliani and Muhammad Kristiawan (2016) explored the role of principal leadership in fostering the social competence of administrative staff in an Islamic higher education institution.

However, these studies leave significant gaps unaddressed. First, none of them explicitly integrates pesantren values as an analytical framework for understanding leadership strategies in developing teachers' social competence. Second, existing research has predominantly been conducted in public madrasas or conventional schools, not in integrated Islamic schools that are institutionally rooted in the pesantren ecosystem. Third, no study has examined in depth how values of exemplary leadership, collaborative culture, and empowerment—drawn from pesantren tradition—can be operationalized as concrete principal leadership strategies within the context of formal Islamic-based education. Recent literature on pesantren development and value-based Islamic leadership strengthens this point by showing that pesantren values remain influential in shaping institutional adaptation, but their translation into principal leadership strategies in formal integrated schools is still underexplored.

These gaps constitute both the foundation and the novelty of the present study. By positioning pesantren values as an analytical lens, this research moves beyond describing what principals do, and instead illuminates why and how such strategies prove effective within the institutional context of Islamic schooling. The novelty of this study therefore lies not in claiming that leadership and social competence have never been studied, but in demonstrating how pesantren-derived values function as an operational leadership framework for developing teachers' social competence in a formal school setting. Based on the foregoing discussion, this study aims to analyze leadership strategies for teachers' social competence development through pesantren values integration at SMP IT NW Otak Kebon, East Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to capture the depth and complexity of social phenomena as they naturally occur in their real-world setting. As field research, the investigation was conducted directly at the research site to obtain firsthand data from informants and observe conditions as they unfolded. The qualitative descriptive design was selected because it allows for thick description of contextual processes, particularly leadership practices embedded in institutional culture (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The research took place at SMP IT NW Otak Kebon, located in Beriri Jarak Village, Wanasaba District, East Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara Province, from May to

August 2025. This single-site selection followed purposive sampling criteria for case study research, targeting an institution where pesantren values and formal schooling intersect meaningfully (Patton, 2015). The site's institutional relevance as a school under the Ahlussunnah Wal Jama'ah NW Foundation—deeply connected to Nahdlatul Wathan pesantren traditions—made it contextually appropriate for examining value integration in leadership practices.

Data sources comprised both primary and secondary materials. Primary data were gathered from key informants through purposive sampling, which prioritizes information-rich cases with direct involvement in the phenomenon (Patton, 2015). Informants included the school principal (1 person), classroom teachers (6 people selected based on their roles in collaborative programs and minimum 3 years service), and students (8 people chosen for their exposure to teacher-student interactions). Secondary data included institutional documents (school profile, teacher records, organizational structure) and academic literature for theoretical triangulation.

Data collection proceeded through three interconnected techniques aligned with multi-method case study protocols (Yin, 2018). Observation (participant and non-participant) examined teachers' social competence manifestations and interaction dynamics over 12 weeks. Semi-structured interviews (45–60 minutes each, 2 rounds) with the principal, teachers, and students followed a protocol balancing structure and flexibility (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Documentation gathered institutional records for corroboration.

Data analysis followed the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), consisting of three concurrent stages. Data reduction involved reviewing, coding, and filtering material for relevance. Data display organized findings into matrices and narratives. Conclusion drawing identified patterns through iterative verification against evidence. NVivo software assisted thematic coding.

Credibility was ensured through methodological rigor over the four-month period (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Source triangulation cross-checked accounts across informant groups. Technique triangulation verified interviews against observations and documents. Prolonged engagement (12 weeks) and persistent observation deepened contextual insight. Member checking reconfirmed interpretations with informants. These procedures established trustworthiness equivalent to quantitative reliability and validity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The Principal as a Motivator

Motivation in educational leadership is rarely about a single dramatic gesture. What the fieldwork at SMP IT NW Otak Kebon revealed is something more textured: a sustained, day-to-day pattern of relational encouragement that has gradually and quietly reshaped the professional culture of the school. The principal approaches teacher motivation not as a managerial instrument but as a living practice — listening actively

to concerns, offering solutions without imposing them, and ensuring that every teacher's contribution is acknowledged in ways that feel genuine rather than procedural.

What distinguishes this motivational practice is its dual channel of delivery. Appreciation is offered formally during staff meetings and school events, but it is the informal dimension — personal conversations, spontaneous words of encouragement, a willingness to sit with a struggling teacher and talk through a problem — that teachers appear to value most deeply. The principal described this practice: *"I try to be an example for the teachers by being friendly, open, and respectful to everyone. I frequently give appreciation to teachers, listen to their concerns, then help find solutions and give encouragement. Training and coaching activities are combined with togetherness activities to make the atmosphere more familiar"* (Principal, June 16, 2025). A teacher confirmed the cumulative effect: *"The principal often gives appreciation and motivation, both during meetings and personally. So I feel valued and more motivated to build good relationships with students and fellow teachers"* (Teacher S., June 16, 2025).

The ripple effect of this motivational culture reached the classroom in ways that students could directly perceive. They described teachers as becoming more patient, more willing to engage beyond the curriculum, and more present in their interactions — qualities they associated explicitly with the visible encouragement teachers received from school leadership. This chain of influence, running from principal to teacher to student, reflects a motivational ecosystem in which the tone set at the leadership level permeates the entire learning community, making social competence not an individual achievement but a shared institutional disposition.

The Principal as a Facilitator

Genuine facilitation goes beyond organizing events. At SMP IT NW Otak Kebon, the principal's facilitative role is better understood as the deliberate engineering of conditions — physical, programmatic, and relational — within which teachers can naturally develop their social capacities through repeated practice and exposure. This distinction matters: where mere event-organizers create occasions, a true facilitator creates ecosystems.

The concrete forms of this facilitation are diverse. The principal ensures the availability of a comfortable staff room, designated discussion spaces, and access to technology — recognizing that informal interaction requires the right physical conditions to flourish. Beyond physical infrastructure, he has instituted collaborative programs including joint lesson plan development, mentoring arrangements for newly appointed teachers, and school social activities coordinated collectively by staff. *"I provide a forum for teachers to develop their social skills through discussion forums, communication training, and togetherness activities. We often create collaborative programs, such as making learning tools together and mentoring for new teachers"* (Principal, June 16, 2025).

Teachers reported that these facilitative provisions produced outcomes that extended well beyond the programs themselves. Engagement in joint activities created familiarity among staff members who might otherwise remain professionally distant. *"The principal often provides opportunities for us to participate in various activities together. There are group work programs such as making lesson plans together or participating in social work, and that makes it easier for us to get close to other teachers. Because the relationship between teachers is good, we are more enthusiastic and have positive energy that carries into the classroom"* (Teacher Z., June 16, 2025). The facilitative role, in this sense, functions as a catalyst that transforms institutional structures into genuine relational opportunities.

The Principal as a Role Model

Among the four strategies identified in this study, the principal's role as a living model stands out as the one most deeply resonant with pesantren tradition. In the pesantren world, the formation of character has never been primarily a matter of instruction — it is a matter of proximity to someone whose conduct is worth emulating. The principal at SMP IT NW Otak Kebon appears to have internalized this logic fully, understanding that no amount of training or encouragement can substitute for the daily visibility of values made flesh in his own behavior.

Punctuality, genuine respect for all school members regardless of their position, active participation in school activities, and a consistently open posture toward different opinions — these are not policies the principal announces; they are habits he practices. *"If I want teachers to be friendly, disciplined, and open, then I myself must apply that every day. I try to be present on time, respect the opinions of teachers, and participate in school activities"* (Principal, June 16, 2025). The effect on teachers was both acknowledged and internalized. *"He always greets everyone regardless of position. That makes us comfortable and motivated to imitate that attitude when interacting with students and colleagues"* (Teacher A.M., June 16, 2025). Students independently observed the same phenomenon — that the friendliness and patience they experienced from their teachers seemed to radiate outward from the principal himself, creating a coherent social atmosphere that ran through the entire institution.

Building a Collaborative Culture

A collaborative culture is not something that can be decreed. It emerges gradually from repeated experiences of working together, of having one's ideas heard, of finding that others can be trusted with shared responsibility. The principal's strategy for building such a culture at SMP IT NW Otak Kebon is therefore not a single program but a consistent architecture of participation — one in which every school activity becomes an opportunity for collective engagement rather than individual execution.

The structural foundations of this collaborative culture are straightforward: regular coordination meetings, shared task distribution, cross-subject working groups, and a

policy of equal voice in which every teacher is invited to contribute ideas to institutional decisions. *"I always encourage teachers to work as a team through regular meetings, shared task distribution, and group discussions. In every school activity, I try to involve all teachers so that there is a sense of togetherness and shared responsibility. I make sure every idea is appreciated"* (Principal, June 16, 2025). What gives this structure its depth is the accompanying relational culture — one in which the principal not only opens the floor for input but actively validates and acts upon what teachers offer.

Teachers experienced this as a qualitative shift in their sense of professional belonging. One teacher described how the principal's inclusive approach to decision-making had transformed his own willingness to contribute: *"He always invites us to discuss before making decisions. The principal also provides time and facilities for meetings, such as discussion rooms and access to technology, so coordination between teachers runs smoothly. Every idea that we share is appreciated, which makes us feel valued and increasingly enthusiastic to contribute"* (Teacher M.Z., June 16, 2025).

The effects of this collaborative culture were felt most concretely in the classroom. Students noted that teachers frequently shared instructional ideas with one another, that lessons had become more varied and creative, and that when one teacher was occupied, others would step in naturally to help. This solidarity — visible to students and felt among staff — reflects the consolidation of a genuine collaborative ethic, one that extends well beyond formal meetings into the everyday fabric of the school's social life.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

The four leadership strategies described above did not operate in a vacuum. Their effectiveness was shaped by a constellation of institutional conditions — some enabling, some constraining — that the principal and teachers navigated throughout the research period.

Among the enabling conditions, the most consequential was the intrinsic motivation of a significant portion of the teaching staff to develop themselves professionally. No external program can substitute for this internal drive; where it exists, it amplifies every facilitative effort the principal makes. Active teacher participation, the availability of adequate physical facilities, and the principal's own demonstrated openness to criticism and new ideas collectively created a working environment that was, for the most part, genuinely conducive to growth. Teachers felt heard, resourced, and safe enough to take interpersonal risks — the very conditions that allow social competence to develop organically.

The challenges, however, were real and should not be minimized. The motivation of some teachers remained uneven, with certain individuals maintaining a passive posture despite the opportunities made available to them. Heavy teaching schedules created genuine time constraints that limited participation in development programs. Training content was at times perceived as insufficiently aligned with the actual

challenges teachers faced in the classroom, which dampened enthusiasm for engagement. Perhaps most significantly, the collaborative culture — while clearly taking root — had not yet achieved uniform depth across the entire staff. Some teachers retained a preference for working independently, and occasional differences of opinion created friction that required careful management. These inhibiting factors represent not failures of leadership but honest indicators of the complexity involved in shifting institutional culture — a process that unfolds gradually, unevenly, and always incompletely.

Table 1. Summary of Research Findings

Strategy	Form of Implementation	Key Outcome
Motivator	Appreciation, moral support, personal coaching	Increased teacher confidence and relational openness
Facilitator	Training, workshops, collaborative programs	Stronger teacher cohesion and communication
Role Model	Punctuality, openness, respectful conduct	Teachers emulate positive social behaviors
Collaborative Culture	Regular meetings, team tasks, equal participation	Harmonious and collective working environment
Supporting Factors	Teacher participation, facilities, institutional openness	Smoother program implementation
Inhibiting Factors	Low motivation, heavy schedules, training relevance	Uneven participation and collaboration

Discussion

Leadership Strategy as an Institutional Value System

What this study ultimately reveals is that the four leadership strategies identified at SMP IT NW Otak Kebon — motivation, facilitation, role modeling, and collaborative culture-building — are not discrete managerial techniques assembled pragmatically. They constitute a coherent value system, one whose internal logic is deeply continuous with the tradition of pesantren leadership. Understanding them as such changes the analytical frame considerably: rather than asking what the principal does, the more generative question becomes what the principal *embodies* — and how that embodiment shapes the social landscape of the institution.

This finding resonates with and extends the work of Mulyasa (2013), who positioned the school principal as simultaneously educator, manager, supervisor, and creator of institutional climate. What the present study adds is a specifically cultural and spiritual dimension to that multi-role understanding. The principal at SMP IT NW Otak Kebon does not occupy these roles sequentially or compartmentally; he inhabits them simultaneously, and the coherence among them is sustained precisely by the value framework of pesantren tradition — in which leadership is never merely positional but

is always, above all, formational. Anwar, Kurniawati, and Yuliasari (2023) found that strategic management of social competence development requires consistent and structured approaches; this study affirms that finding while demonstrating that the most enduring structure is not procedural but cultural.

The significance of this insight should not be underestimated. In many educational institutions, professional development programs operate as episodic interventions — workshops attended, certificates earned, and practices largely unchanged. What distinguishes the approach documented here is its embeddedness in daily institutional life. Teachers are not developed through occasional programs alone; they are shaped continuously by the quality of the environment in which they work, the conduct of the leader they observe, and the culture of relationships in which they participate. This distinction between episodic intervention and embedded formation is one of the study's most important contributions to the literature on principal leadership in Islamic educational contexts.

Keteladanan as the Axis of Social Competence Development

Of the four strategies, role modeling — or what the pesantren tradition calls *keteladanan* (exemplary conduct) — deserves particular analytical attention, not because it is more important than the others but because it is the one on which all others depend for their credibility. Motivation offered by a leader who does not himself embody what he asks of others quickly loses its moral authority. Facilitation provided by a principal who remains distant in his daily interactions fails to create the relational safety teachers need to take social risks. Collaborative culture cannot be constructed by a leader who does not himself demonstrate genuine openness to others' ideas.

Tri Yuliani and Muhammad Kristiawan (2016) underscored the centrality of leadership conduct in shaping the social competence of institutional members, noting that the behavioral example set by leaders carries a formative weight that formal programs rarely match. The data from this study emphatically confirms this finding. Teachers at SMP IT NW Otak Kebon did not describe their principal primarily in terms of the programs he organized or the policies he implemented; they described him in terms of how he greets people, how he listens, how he responds when someone disagrees with him, and how he shows up — punctually, consistently, and without pretension — in the daily life of the school. These are the details that formation is made of, and they are precisely the details that pesantren tradition has always understood to be irreducible.

Collaborative Culture and the Pesantren Spirit of Mutual Cooperation

The collaborative culture that the principal has been building at SMP IT NW Otak Kebon draws its vitality from a value that is thoroughly indigenous to the pesantren world: the spirit of mutual cooperation, or what Indonesian society broadly understands as *gotong royong*. In pesantren life, learning has never been a solitary enterprise. Santri (students) study together, live together, and support one another in ways that dissolve the boundary between academic formation and social formation. The principal's strategy

of involving all teachers in every school activity, ensuring equal voice in decision-making, and rewarding collective effort rather than individual performance translates this pesantren ethos into the operational culture of a formal school.

Siska Zahrotul Hidayah et al. (2022) found that collaborative strategies employed by madrasah principals significantly strengthened teachers' social competence by creating structured opportunities for interpersonal engagement. The present study extends this finding by demonstrating that collaboration, when it is rooted in a shared value framework rather than imposed as a procedural requirement, produces a qualitatively different kind of cohesion. Teachers at SMP IT NW Otak Kebon did not describe their collaborative activities as obligations; they described them as sources of energy, belonging, and professional renewal. This is the difference between compliance and culture — and it is a difference that matters enormously for the sustainability of any institutional development effort.

The incomplete penetration of this collaborative culture across the entire staff — acknowledged candidly by both the principal and teachers — is itself analytically instructive. Cultural transformation is neither linear nor uniform. It tends to take root first among those who are already predisposed to the values it embodies, and to encounter resistance among those whose professional identity has been shaped by more individualistic norms. The principal's challenge, going forward, lies less in expanding the programmatic scope of collaborative activities and more in deepening the relational conditions — trust, psychological safety, meaningful inclusion — that allow the collaborative spirit to become genuinely contagious.

Institutional Constraints and the Limits of Leadership

No honest discussion of these findings can overlook the inhibiting factors that shaped, limited, and at times frustrated the implementation of the principal's strategies. Heavy teaching schedules, uneven teacher motivation, and training content that did not always speak directly to classroom realities are challenges that no amount of good leadership vision can dissolve on its own. They reflect structural conditions — workload distribution, professional development design, institutional resource allocation — that require systemic responses beyond what a single principal can provide.

Murni Yanto (2020) similarly documented that management efforts to develop teachers' social competence frequently encounter resistance rooted not in teachers' lack of goodwill but in structural constraints that limit their capacity to engage. This finding resonates powerfully with the present study. The teachers who showed passive engagement in collaborative programs were not, in most cases, indifferent to their own professional development; they were exhausted, overextended, and in need of institutional conditions that matched the ambition of the development agenda being offered to them. Recognizing this distinction — between motivational deficit and structural constraint — is essential for designing interventions that are genuinely responsive rather than merely aspirational.

What the principal at SMP IT NW Otak Kebon has demonstrated, despite these constraints, is that leadership character and relational integrity can create pockets of

genuine transformation even within imperfect institutional conditions. The collaborative culture that has begun to take root, the teachers who have grown in their social confidence, and the students who experience a warmer and more engaging school climate are all evidence that principled, value-grounded leadership produces real and meaningful outcomes — outcomes that are not contingent on ideal conditions but are forged, precisely, in the midst of limitation.

CONCLUSION

Teaching quality in Islamic educational institutions cannot be separated from the social dimension of professional practice — the capacity of teachers to communicate, collaborate, and build meaningful relationships across the entire school community. This study has demonstrated that principal leadership, when grounded in the living values of pesantren tradition, constitutes a powerful and coherent strategy for developing this capacity in ways that go far deeper than conventional training programs can reach.

The four strategies identified — serving as motivator, facilitator, role model, and builder of collaborative culture — do not operate as isolated techniques but as an integrated leadership orientation whose internal coherence derives from a shared value foundation. This coherence is what distinguishes the approach documented here from managerial programs that address social competence as a skills deficit rather than as a cultural aspiration. When leadership is itself the curriculum, the entire institutional environment becomes a site of formation.

The integration of pesantren values into these strategies reveals something important about the untapped potential of Islamic educational heritage in contemporary school leadership. Values such as *keteladanan* (exemplary conduct) and the spirit of mutual cooperation embedded in community life are not historical artifacts; they are living resources that can be purposefully mobilized to shape institutional culture in ways that are both spiritually meaningful and educationally effective. Schools that carry this heritage — whether explicitly or implicitly — hold a distinctive advantage that deserves far greater recognition in the broader discourse of educational leadership.

This study nonetheless acknowledges that the transformation documented here remains incomplete. Structural constraints including heavy teaching loads and uneven professional development quality continue to limit the reach and depth of the principal's strategies. Future research is encouraged to examine how institutional policy and resource allocation can be better aligned with value-based leadership approaches, so that the conditions for teachers' social competence development are not dependent solely on the character of individual leaders but are embedded in the architecture of the institution itself. Longitudinal studies examining how pesantren-rooted leadership values sustain their formative influence over time would further enrich the emerging literature on Islamic educational leadership and its distinctive contributions to the broader field of educational management.

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