

Innovative and Charismatic Authority Types of Principal Leadership in Increasing Competitiveness

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Article history

Submitted: 2026/06/01; Revised: 2026/07/11; Accepted: 2026/08/13

Abstract

This study aims to examine sociologically how innovative principal leadership combined with charismatic authority can increase the competitiveness of Islamic Elementary Schools. Using a qualitative case study approach, this study was conducted at Islamic Elementary School Ma'arif NU 01 Gancang, which is designated as an Islamic Elementary School. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews with the principal, vice principal, teachers, education staff, and school committee, as well as document analysis and academic profiles. The research findings indicate that the principal not only carries out standard managerial functions, but simultaneously develops strategic project-based innovations and fosters collective legitimacy and commitment through inspiring role models and extensive social networks. This study found three main findings: first, the emerging innovations are responsive to the challenges of the times (digitalization, curriculum autonomy, job market needs) and are more directed towards structured innovations in governance, learning, and partnerships; Second, the charismatic authority of the principal is built through convincing communication competencies, personal role models, and strong social networks with the education office, the business world, and the surrounding community; Third, the combination of innovation and charisma has been proven to increase organizational cohesion and motivation of school residents which leads to consistent improvements in academic and non-academic achievements at the regional and national levels. This study concludes that the principal of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah plays a role as an agent of change who simultaneously carries out two logics at once: managerial-rational logic (innovation) and cultural-symbolic logic (charismatic authority). These findings enrich the theory of educational leadership and the practice of superior school management in Indonesia.

Keywords

Innovative Leadership; Charismatic Authority; School Competitiveness; Superior Regional Schools; Educational Management



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INTRODUCTION

Globalization and rapid developments in information technology have made

educational quality one of the most important determinants of a nation's human resource competitiveness. Consequently, various educational policies in Indonesia have been directed toward improving the quality of schools, including A-accredited elementary schools and madrasahs. However, school competitiveness is not solely determined by adequate facilities and teacher competence. The leadership of the principal also plays a significant role in shaping educational outcomes. According to Ballantine et al. (2022), educational institutions serve as arenas for socialization, resource distribution, and the construction of social structures, making school leadership a critical factor in directing these processes.

Previous studies have emphasized the importance of principals as agents of change and innovation. Nevertheless, most research has focused primarily on administrative and supervisory functions, paying less attention to the interaction between innovative leadership and charismatic authority. In highly competitive educational environments, these two dimensions are essential because they contribute not only to organizational effectiveness but also to the legitimacy of leadership. Innovative leadership enables principals to introduce strategic improvements, while charismatic authority fosters trust, commitment, and cooperation among school stakeholders (Istanto, 2022; Safinah & Arifin, 2021).

This study aims to describe the innovations implemented by the principal in school governance, learning processes, and partnerships; analyze how charismatic authority is developed and utilized to gain legitimacy and collective commitment; and examine the relationship between innovative leadership and charismatic authority in enhancing school competitiveness. School competitiveness is assessed through both academic and non-academic achievements.

The study is based on the assumption that principals who successfully integrate innovative leadership with charismatic authority are more likely to improve school competitiveness. Such integration is reflected in strategic program development, effective communication, exemplary behavior, and strong social networks. These elements contribute to improved educational quality, stakeholder satisfaction, and public trust in the institution (Nasikhah et al., 2024; Resdiana, 2016).

METHODS

This research was conducted in Islamic Elementary School (A Accredited Madrasah Ibtidaiyah) designated as MI Ma'arif NU 01 Gancang Accredited A. This school has consistently achieved academic and non-academic achievements at the district level over the past three years, making it relevant to examine how innovative

principal leadership and charismatic authority can improve competitiveness. The research focuses on the unit of analysis, namely the principal's strategies, behaviors, and interactions with the school community and the external environment, which contribute to improving school performance.

This research uses a qualitative approach with an instrumental case study type, where primary data is obtained directly from the researcher's participation and observations in the field, as well as in-depth interviews with key informants. Secondary data in the form of school documents, academic profiles, achievement archives, and local education office policies will also be collected to complement the information on the school's competitiveness map.

The data sources for this study consisted of three categories of informants selected using purposive sampling: (a) the principal as the primary informant because he or she is the central actor exercising innovative leadership and charismatic authority; (b) the vice principal (curriculum, student affairs, public relations) and senior teachers who have a high level of interaction with the principal; (c) educational staff (administrative staff, librarians, laboratory assistants), the school committee, and parent representatives, to gain an outside perspective on the influence of these leadership styles on the school organization.

The data collection techniques used in this study included participatory observation within the school environment (coordination meetings, ceremonies, daily interactions between the principal and teachers and staff), semi-structured in-depth interviews with a guide based on the concepts outlined above, focus group discussions (FGDs) with groups of teachers and staff to discuss collective perceptions of the principal's leadership, and documentation in the form of achievement archives, academic profiles, activity photographs, and media coverage.

The data analysis technique used is interactive thematic analysis that follows procedures from experts, which consists of three activity flows that take place simultaneously and continuously: data reduction (identifying, categorizing, and discarding data that is not relevant to the main theme), data presentation in the form of a thematic matrix, descriptive narrative, and diagram of relationships between themes, as well as drawing conclusions and verification through triangulation of data sources, triangulation of methods, member checking, and discussion between researchers.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Innovative Leadership

Innovative leadership refers to a leader's ability to initiate change through creative ideas and strategic actions that support organizational development. In educational institutions, innovative leaders encourage continuous improvement, motivate organizational members, and create an environment that supports learning and achievement (Resdiana, 2016; Sanasa et al., 2024).

The findings indicate that the principal of MI Ma'arif NU 01 Gancang has demonstrated innovative leadership through various programs that have positively influenced school development. The principal adopts a transformational and participatory approach by involving teachers, students, parents, and community members in school activities. One significant innovation is the strengthening of religious culture through daily practices such as greetings, congregational prayers, Qur'anic recitation, and Dhuha prayer. In addition, the school has developed several extracurricular programs, including volleyball, sepak takraw, chess, hadroh, athletics, and marching band, which have become distinctive features of the institution.

The principal also promotes transparency in school management by actively involving parents in school programs and financial matters. Furthermore, participation in workshops, comparative studies, and professional development activities has enabled the school to adopt new ideas and improve educational practices. These initiatives have contributed to the creation of a disciplined, religious, and achievement-oriented school environment. These findings are consistent with Istanto (2022), who argues that innovative leadership plays a crucial role in improving the competitiveness of educational institutions.

2. Charismatic Authority

Charismatic authority refers to a form of leadership based on personal qualities that inspire trust, respect, and commitment among followers. In educational settings, charismatic principals often gain support because they demonstrate integrity, strong interpersonal skills, and a genuine concern for the school community (Safinah & Arifin, 2021).

The principal of MI Ma'arif NU 01 Gancang exhibits charismatic authority through exemplary behavior and close relationships with teachers, students, parents, and the surrounding community. The

principal actively participates in school and community activities, demonstrating commitment and responsibility. This leadership style encourages teachers to work collaboratively and creates a positive learning environment.

The findings further reveal that teachers consistently engage in reflective practices to identify learning challenges and develop appropriate solutions. This culture of reflection supports innovation and contributes to continuous improvement within the school. As a result, teachers and students remain motivated to achieve higher levels of performance.

3. School Competitiveness

School competitiveness refers to the ability of an educational institution to demonstrate superior performance and maintain public trust compared to other institutions. Competitiveness is influenced by educational quality, strategic management, innovation, and stakeholder involvement (Husni & Wahyudiati, 2022).

The findings show that MI Ma'arif NU 01 Gancang has enhanced its competitiveness through the implementation of flagship programs that distinguish it from neighboring schools. Programs such as hadroh and marching band have strengthened the school's identity and reputation. Moreover, students are encouraged to participate in various academic and non-academic competitions, contributing to the school's achievements and public image.

Partnerships with local government agencies, health services, community organizations, and parents further support the school's development. These collaborative efforts increase community engagement and reinforce the school's attractiveness. The findings support the argument that innovative leadership, combined with stakeholder participation, contributes significantly to school competitiveness (Komarudin & Shofiyyah, 2023).

4. Regional Superior School

A superior school is not merely characterized by academic excellence but also by its ability to develop students' potential comprehensively and maintain strong relationships with the community. Such schools continuously strive to improve educational quality through

effective management and the optimal utilization of resources (Komarudin & Shofiyyah, 2023).

The excellence of MI Ma'arif NU 01 Gancang is reflected not only in its A accreditation status but also in its strong religious culture, positive learning environment, and high level of community trust. The collaborative relationships among principals, teachers, students, and parents contribute significantly to the school's success. These factors distinguish the institution from other schools and support its reputation as a leading educational institution.

5. Educational Management

Educational management is a crucial component of school administration because it ensures that all educational activities are organized effectively and efficiently. Effective management encompasses planning, organizing, directing, and evaluating school programs to achieve educational goals and improve institutional quality (Khoirunnisa, 2022).

The findings indicate that MI Ma'arif NU 01 Gancang has successfully implemented quality-oriented management practices that contribute to its A accreditation status. The school consistently promotes religious values, character development, and academic excellence. Teachers actively participate in professional development programs such as workshops, training sessions, and teacher working groups, while students are encouraged to engage in extracurricular activities that support their holistic development.

The success of the school reflects the commitment and collaboration of school leaders, teachers, students, and parents in maintaining and improving educational quality on a sustainable basis.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the innovative leadership of the principal, supported by charismatic authority, plays a crucial role in enhancing school competitiveness at MI Ma'arif NU 01 Gancang. The principal not only manages the educational institution but also acts as an agent of change or the primary center capable of creating various innovations in education, particularly in the learning process, child character development, school management, and the excellence programs implemented at MI Ma'arif NU 01 Gancang. Innovative leadership is evident in the principal's ability to create excellence programs, thereby

fostering a religious culture, developing extracurricular activities, and implementing transparent and participatory school management.

Meanwhile, this charismatic authority is reflected in the leader's exemplary behavior through close relationships with the school community and community members, providing motivation that fosters trust and shared commitment to achieving the school's goals. The combination of innovation and charisma has created a powerful synergy in improving the quality of education, enhancing the school's image, and enhancing achievement in both academic and non-academic fields. Therefore, innovative leadership supported by charismatic authority can form a strategic factor and be able to compete amidst increasingly competitive developments.

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