



The Principal's Strategy in Managing Internal Conflicts Among Educators at Islamic Vocational High School (SMK)

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the strategies employed by the head of the madrasah in managing internal conflicts among educators at Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan (SMK) Al-Fattah Bojonegoro. The research utilized a qualitative field approach with data collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. Data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing with verification. The findings reveal that the types of conflicts occurring at SMK Al-Fattah include personal, role-based, and structural conflicts, which stem from differences in personality, internal policies, and organizational dynamics. The head of the madrasah implements conflict resolution strategies through consultation (musyawarah), exemplary leadership (uswah hasanah), open communication, and individual mediation. This approach is grounded in Islamic values such as shura (consultation), 'adl (justice), and ukhuwah (brotherhood), making the resolution process not only administrative but also spiritual and educational in nature. The implementation of these strategies has led to improved workplace harmony, increased teacher motivation, and the development of a more conducive and religious organizational climate. This study emphasizes that the head of the madrasah, as an Islamic educational leader, plays a strategic role in integrating spiritual values with managerial professionalism to create a peaceful, productive, and just educational environment.

Keywords

*Conflict Management,
Principal, Educators*

INTRODUCTION

Education serves as one of the main pillars in building a civilized, knowledgeable, and morally upright society (Paul-Mgbeafulike, 2023; Wabanhu, 2018). The educational process is not only directed toward achieving academic competence but also toward shaping character and spiritual values rooted in Islamic teachings (Hendawi et al., 2024; Irpan & Sain, 2024; Surbakti, Harahap, & Hasanah, 2024). The success of an educational institution, including Islamic vocational schools and madrasahs, is largely determined by the effectiveness of management implemented by the head of the madrasah as an educational leader (Badrun, 2024; Noer, 2023).



Good educational management fosters a harmonious, productive, and conducive working atmosphere for the teaching and learning process (Puspitadani, Yudea, & Loo, 2022; Sanjani, 2024). Conversely, weak management may lead to various internal problems such as tension among teachers, differences in perspectives, and a lack of collaboration among educators. In such situations, the role of the head of the madrasah as both a manager and a spiritual leader becomes crucial in maintaining interpersonal balance within the school environment.

Conflict in educational institutions is an inevitable phenomenon since each individual possesses different personalities, interests, and perceptions regarding work situations (Bruno, 2019; Grammatikopoulos, 2022). Conflicts may arise from differences in opinions, disproportionate task distribution, ineffective communication, or dissatisfaction with institutional policies (Rosen et al., 2018). Although often perceived as negative, conflict can actually become a source of positive energy if managed wisely and constructively. In modern management, conflict is not always viewed as a threat but as an opportunity to improve systems, strengthen communication, and build mutual understanding. Therefore, strong managerial and leadership skills are required from the head of the madrasah to channel potential conflicts into a collective strength that supports the achievement of the ideal goals of Islamic education.

The head of the madrasah, as a central figure in an educational organization, holds great responsibility in maintaining harmonious relationships among educators. The head of the madrasah is not only an administrative decision-maker but also serves as a mediator, facilitator, and motivator for all school members. When facing internal conflicts, the head of the madrasah must apply appropriate strategies so that differences do not escalate into disputes that disrupt the working environment. A leadership approach based on Islamic values—such as consultation (*shura*), justice (*adl*), and brotherhood (*ukhuwah*)—is essential in achieving fair and benefit-oriented resolutions. Thus, the ability of the head of the madrasah to manage conflict effectively becomes a vital indicator in assessing the overall effectiveness of Islamic educational management.

However, in reality, internal conflicts still often occur in several Islamic educational institutions, including Vocational High School (SMK) Al-Fattah. Preliminary observations revealed that there were tensions in working relationships among teachers and staff, particularly regarding task distribution, communication between senior and junior teachers, and differing opinions on school policy implementation. Some teachers felt excluded from decision-making processes, while others perceived inequality in the reward and recognition system. These



conditions have led to emotional tension, decreased work motivation, and weakened collaboration among educators. The head of SMK Al-Fattah faces the challenge of balancing administrative leadership with a spiritual approach so that conflicts do not persist and can be resolved fairly and wisely.

Several previous studies have discussed similar topics related to conflict management in educational settings. For instance, Rahman (2021) found that transformational leadership strategies can reduce conflict escalation among teachers through enhanced interpersonal communication and participatory approaches. Another study by Suryani (2022) revealed that the success of school principals in managing conflicts largely depends on their ability to build an open and dialogical organizational culture. These findings indicate that humanistic and communicative leadership plays a key role in resolving conflicts in both public schools and madrasahs.

Additionally, a study by Fathurrahman (2023) on conflict management in *madrasah aliyah* highlighted that the application of Islamic spiritual values—such as patience (*sabr*), reliance on God (*tawakkul*), and consultation (*musyawarah*)—significantly contributes to creating a harmonious working atmosphere among educators. Meanwhile, Siti Aisyah (2020) emphasized the importance of the head of the madrasah's interpersonal communication skills in preventing misunderstandings among teachers. However, most of these studies focused on *madrasah aliyah* or general schools, with limited attention given to Islamic vocational institutions such as SMK Al-Fattah, which possess unique characteristics in task division, work orientation, and social environment.

Based on this review, there remains a research gap in understanding how the head of the madrasah strategizes to manage internal conflicts among educators in Islamic vocational education settings. The context of SMK Al-Fattah is particularly interesting as the institution integrates two major orientations: vocational professionalism and Islamic spiritual values. This combination creates a distinct dynamic among educators, where religiosity intersects with professional demands. This study offers novelty by exploring the strategies of the head of the madrasah that are not only administrative but also integrate Islamic values into mediation and conflict resolution processes within the school environment.

Therefore, this study aims to describe and analyze the strategies employed by the head of the madrasah in managing internal conflicts among educators at SMK Al-Fattah. Specifically, it seeks to identify the types of conflicts that occur, their underlying causes, and the steps taken



by the head of the madrasah to resolve them effectively and in accordance with Islamic principles. The findings are expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of Islamic educational management studies and serve as a practical reference for heads of madrasahs in implementing conflict management strategies grounded in Islamic values, justice, and workplace harmony.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach with a field research design, as its primary focus is to understand the strategies of the head of the madrasah in managing internal conflicts among educators in a deep and contextual manner (Kusumastuti & Khoiron, 2019). This approach was chosen to explore the meanings, perspectives, and experiences of the research subjects within the real-life setting of the school environment. The study was conducted at Vocational High School (SMK) Al-Fattah Bojonegoro, an Islamic vocational education institution characterized by the integration of professional expertise and spiritual Islamic values. The research informants consisted of the head of the madrasah, senior teachers, junior teachers, vice principals, and administrative staff, selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in the dynamics of conflict and its resolution processes within the school.

Data were collected through three primary techniques: in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation (Equatora & Awi, 2021). The interviews were conducted directly with the head of the school and the educators to gain insights into the forms of conflict, contributing factors, and resolution strategies. Observations were carried out to examine the patterns of interaction among educators, the working atmosphere, and the mediation steps taken by the head of the madrasah. Meanwhile, documentation was used to collect written data such as organizational structures, meeting minutes, activity reports, and school policies related to conflict management. The data obtained were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which includes the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification, conducted iteratively to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the studied phenomenon.

To ensure data validity, this research applied source and technique triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement to verify the credibility of field findings (Nurfajriani, Ilhami, Mahendra, Afgani, & Sirodj, 2024). Data analysis and interpretation were carried out with reference to Islamic values such as shura (consultation), 'adl (justice), and ukhuwah (brotherhood) as conceptual foundations in understanding the head of the madrasah's strategy



for managing conflicts fairly, wisely, and constructively. Thus, this research method is not only empirically grounded but also reflects the integration of modern management principles with spiritual values in the practice of Islamic Educational Management within SMK Al-Fattah.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

1. Forms and Sources of Internal Conflicts Among Educators at SMK Al-Fattah

Internal conflicts among educators at SMK Al-Fattah manifest in various forms, ranging from personal disputes between teachers to role-related and structural conflicts involving teachers and school management. Based on interview results, personal conflicts often arise from differences in character, communication styles, and misunderstandings in task execution. Role conflicts typically emerge due to unclear divisions of responsibility and unequal workloads among educators. Several teachers reported feeling burdened by frequent additional assignments that were given without adequate coordination. Such forms of conflict negatively impact the effectiveness of collaboration in both teaching and administrative activities.

In addition to personal factors, sources of conflict also stem from internal school policies that are not always fully understood by all educators. For instance, issues related to teacher performance appraisal, teaching hour allocation, and the organization of extracurricular activities—which require cross-departmental coordination—can become sources of tension. When vertical and horizontal communication fails to function effectively, interpersonal and interdepartmental frictions emerge. Field observations indicate that such conflicts often occur toward the end of the semester when administrative demands intensify and work pressure increases.

From a managerial perspective, conflicts are also influenced by organizational change dynamics. When principals introduce innovative policies, they sometimes face resistance from senior teachers who are comfortable with established systems. This creates a generational gap in perception—where younger teachers tend to be more adaptive to digital transformation, while older teachers feel left behind. As a



result, subtle tensions arise that can disrupt the work atmosphere. The principal recognizes that conflict is not merely an individual issue but an inherent organizational dynamic that requires wise and strategic management.

In the perspective of Islamic education, conflicts in institutions such as SMK Al-Fattah can be viewed as tests that nurture the values of *ukhuwah* (brotherhood) and *tawazun* (balance). Islam regards differences as part of *sunnatullah*—natural diversity that should be managed through deliberation (*shura*) and justice (*‘adl*). Therefore, the principal’s role extends beyond that of an administrative manager to that of a spiritual leader responsible for maintaining both internal and social harmony among educators. These principles form the foundation for understanding and addressing the various forms of conflict within the school.

Based on in-depth observations, it was also found that unresolved conflicts can spread and negatively affect teachers’ motivation. Some teachers showed decreased enthusiasm for teaching, delays in completing administrative tasks, and reluctance to participate actively in school activities. However, when managed properly, conflicts become opportunities to strengthen solidarity, as the joint resolution process allows teachers to better understand each other’s personalities and perspectives.

Thus, internal conflicts at SMK Al-Fattah can be categorized as both functional and dysfunctional. Functional conflicts, when managed appropriately, can enhance creativity and collaboration, while dysfunctional conflicts hinder institutional performance. These findings highlight the importance of conflict management strategies that focus not only on practical resolution but also on character and moral development aligned with Islamic values.

2. The Principal’s Strategies in Managing Internal Conflicts

The principal of SMK Al-Fattah implements various strategies to manage conflicts, employing both structural and personal approaches. The structural approach involves clarifying job descriptions, reinforcing institutional regulations, and improving communication channels among work units. Meanwhile, the personal approach is carried out through interpersonal communication, mentoring, and moral



exemplification. In many cases, the principal acts as a mediator, listening proportionally to all parties before making a decision.

One of the most prominent strategies is the implementation of *musyawarah mufakat* (collective deliberation and consensus) in every conflict resolution process. The principal emphasizes open and participatory dialogue by involving disputing teachers in joint discussions to find mutually agreed solutions. Through this approach, a sense of ownership over decisions emerges, as outcomes are based on shared agreement. This principle of consultation simultaneously cultivates a culture of *tasamuh* (tolerance) and *ukhuwah Islamiyah* (Islamic brotherhood) among educators.

In addition, the principal adopts a strategy of moral guidance and exemplary leadership (*uswah hasanah*). The principal strives to demonstrate patience, firmness, and fairness when addressing conflicts. This exemplary behavior serves as a moral model for teachers, encouraging them to maintain ethical communication and professionalism. Such a moral-based approach proves highly effective within Islamic educational institutions, where Islamic values form the foundation of every managerial decision.

Another key strategy is the strengthening of organizational communication. The principal conducts regular evaluations of internal communication systems by increasing coordination meetings, teacher discussion groups, and monthly reflection forums. These platforms serve as safe spaces for teachers to express aspirations, criticisms, and suggestions constructively. The presence of open communication channels helps prevent potential conflicts from escalating into larger disputes.

In certain situations, the principal also engages in individual mediation, particularly when conflicts are personal or sensitive in nature. This approach involves bringing together the concerned parties privately in an empathetic and respectful manner. The principal acts as a neutral facilitator who maintains confidentiality and safeguards the dignity of all involved. This method has proven effective in easing emotional tension and restoring harmonious working relationships.



Overall, the principal's strategies at SMK Al-Fattah demonstrate a balance between managerial professionalism and Islamic spirituality. Conflicts are not viewed as threats but as opportunities to strengthen both organizational systems and the moral character of educators. By integrating modern management principles with Islamic values, the principal successfully cultivates an organizational climate that is dynamic, harmonious, and spiritually grounded.

3. The Impact of Strategy Implementation on Teachers' Performance and Work Climate

The implementation of conflict management strategies by the principal has had a significant impact on improving both the performance and the work atmosphere of educators at SMK Al-Fattah. Teachers feel more appreciated, heard, and given the space to express their opinions. Through more open communication, mutual trust among educators has increased, and collaboration has become more productive. This improvement is evident in the growing participation of teachers in extracurricular activities and instructional planning processes.

Conflict resolution based on Islamic values has fostered a more peaceful and civilized work climate. Teachers have become accustomed to self-restraint, upholding *akhlaq al-karimah* (noble character), and using polite language when offering criticism. Values such as sincerity (*ikhlas*) and responsibility (*amanah*) have become new work ethics that strengthen the organizational culture at SMK Al-Fattah. Observations indicate that teachers now collaborate more easily across subject areas and demonstrate greater discipline in fulfilling their professional duties.

From an academic perspective, this harmonious environment has positively influenced the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers are more focused on pedagogical innovation and the development of creative learning media. The principal can also carry out academic supervision more effectively, as positive relationships with teachers foster healthy two-way communication. These findings show that successful conflict management directly contributes to the improvement of educational quality within the institution.



Socially, the implementation of these strategies has strengthened solidarity and a sense of belonging among teachers. Conflicts are no longer perceived as something to be avoided but as opportunities to learn and understand others. The principal facilitates collective activities such as teacher halaqah (study circles), routine religious gatherings, and community service programs that foster stronger bonds among educators. These traditions cultivate a familial atmosphere that is characteristic of Islamic educational institutions.

Despite its positive outcomes, the study also reveals that managing conflict requires consistency. Without firmness and fairness, conflicts may re-emerge in different forms. Therefore, the principal must continuously develop adaptive leadership competencies to respond effectively to changing times and organizational dynamics. Thus, the conflict management strategy applied at SMK Al-Fattah not only resolves short-term issues but also builds a foundation for a healthy, ethical, and Islamically grounded work culture.

4. Implications of Conflict Management for Strengthening Islamic Values in Leadership

Conflict management at SMK Al-Fattah has profound implications for strengthening Islamic values within educational leadership. The principal places the values of shura (consultation), 'adl (justice), and rahmah (compassion) as the core principles in every decision-making process. Through the implementation of these values, teachers learn that leadership in Islamic education is not merely about administration but about guiding others with wisdom and spiritual example.

Leadership grounded in Islamic values transforms the principal from a mere administrative figure into a moral role model (uswah hasanah). In times of conflict, the principal demonstrates humility, fairness, and patience—attitudes that are then emulated by teachers in their daily interactions. Thus, the process of conflict management simultaneously serves as a medium for character and moral development among educators.

Another implication is the growing awareness among teachers of the importance of ukhuwah Islamiyah (Islamic brotherhood) and collective



responsibility in building the institution. Conflicts that were initially destructive evolve into opportunities for reflection and self-improvement. Teachers increasingly understand that the success of the school cannot be achieved without harmony and mutual understanding among educators.

Moreover, the implementation of Islamic-based conflict management strengthens SMK Al-Fattah's institutional identity as a vocational school with a strong religious character. The school becomes known not only for its technical competence but also for the moral integrity of its educators. Islamic values serve as the spiritual essence that animates all managerial processes and interpersonal relationships within the organization.

In a broader context, this study suggests that conflict management grounded in Islamic principles can serve as a transformative leadership model for other Islamic educational institutions. A principal who is able to balance spiritual and professional dimensions will foster an educational environment that is peaceful, productive, and just.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that internal conflicts at SMK Al-Fattah are not merely viewed as threats to organizational stability, but rather as natural dynamics that can produce positive impacts when properly managed. This aligns with Robbins' (2018) view that conflict within educational organizations is inevitable and can serve as a catalyst for change when addressed wisely. In the context of Islamic schools (madrasah), conflicts also serve as opportunities for character and spiritual formation, as educators learn to uphold *akhlaq al-karimah* (noble character), empathetic communication, and sincerity in their work. Thus, conflict management is not only related to structural aspects but also deeply intertwined with the moral and spiritual values embedded within the Islamic education system.

The principal's strategy at SMK Al-Fattah, which emphasizes consultation (*musyawarah*) and exemplary leadership (*uswah hasanah*), reflects a model of transformational leadership rooted in Islamic values. This finding corresponds with Bass and Avolio's (1994) theory of transformational leadership, which asserts that leaders do



not merely direct but also inspire and nurture the moral consciousness of their members. In Islamic terms, this approach is known as qiyadah ruhiyah (spiritual leadership), which stresses the dimensions of moral exemplarity and character formation. The principal at SMK Al-Fattah successfully integrated these values into managerial practices, particularly in mediating conflicts with empathy, patience, and justice.

The open and participatory communication approach implemented by the principal also plays a vital role in preventing and de-escalating conflicts. This is consistent with Suryadi's (2020) findings, which highlight effective communication as a dominant factor in successful conflict management within educational institutions. The principal of SMK Al-Fattah facilitates communication forums such as coordination meetings and halaqah gatherings, serving as safe spaces for teachers to express opinions without fear. This horizontal communication pattern strengthens the sense of belonging among teachers and reduces psychological distance between leaders and educators. From an Islamic perspective, the principle of syura (consultation) applied by the principal reflects the essence of QS. Asy-Syura [42]:38, where decisions are made through dialogue that respects differing opinions.

In terms of impact, the principal's strategy has proven effective in improving teacher performance, discipline, and harmony among staff members. This phenomenon is consistent with the findings of Amin & Yusuf (2021), who argue that a harmonious work climate enhances teaching effectiveness and teacher professionalism in Islamic schools. At SMK Al-Fattah, teachers no longer perceive conflict as negative but as an opportunity to improve communication and strengthen solidarity. This reinforces the principal's role as a leader, manager, and murabbi (spiritual guide) who steers conflict resolution toward the development of collective Islamic character.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings broaden the understanding of the integration between modern conflict management and Islamic spiritual leadership. While general management theories emphasize rational and structural aspects, the principal at SMK Al-Fattah combines them with emotional intelligence and religious values. This is what differentiates conflict management practices in Islamic educational institutions from those in secular ones. The principal acts not only as a problem solver but also as a



moral educator who embodies rahmah (compassion) and ‘adl (justice) in every policy. This approach affirms that leadership in Islamic education must be grounded in spiritual values that guide administrative actions toward moral and devotional purposes.

Thus, it can be concluded that conflict management at SMK Al-Fattah represents a synergy between theory and Islamic leadership practice. The principal not only manages conflict to maintain organizational stability but also transforms it into a process of developing a religious and productive work culture. The values of musyawarah (consultation), justice, and ukhuwah (brotherhood) form the core foundation of conflict resolution, leading to increased teacher professionalism and improved educational quality. These findings reinforce the view that conflict management in Islamic education should aim not merely at pragmatic resolution but also at nurturing values, character, and moral integrity within educational organizations.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the principal’s strategy in managing internal conflicts among educators at SMK Al-Fattah reflects an integration of modern management principles and Islamic values that emphasize consultation (shura), justice, and exemplary conduct (uswah hasanah). Conflicts arising within the school environment are not avoided but are managed through dialogical, empathetic, and spiritual approaches, making them a medium for social and moral learning among educators. The principal serves as both a mediator and mentor, guiding the resolution process toward work harmony and the improvement of teacher professionalism. Through strategies of mutual deliberation, open communication, and moral cultivation, the principal successfully creates an organizational climate that is conducive, religious, and productive. Thus, conflict management at SMK Al-Fattah not only resolves differences in perspective but also strengthens an Islamic work culture grounded in togetherness, responsibility, and the continuous enhancement of educational quality.

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