

## EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP BASED ON ETHICS AND RESPONSIBILITY IN FACING THE CHALLENGES OF 21ST CENTURY EDUCATION

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### Abstract

Ethics and responsibility are fundamental aspects of educational leadership because they serve as the moral foundation for carrying out duties, authority, and decision-making that impact the entire school community. This study aims to analyze and describe the concept of ethics and responsibility of educational leaders and their relevance in facing various educational challenges in the modern era. The study used a library research method with a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were obtained from various scientific literature sources, such as journal articles, books, proceedings, and previous research results relevant to the research theme. Data analysis was carried out through a process of collection, reduction, interpretation, and synthesis of the various selected sources. The results of the study indicate that ethics and responsibility play a crucial role in shaping effective, professional, and integrity-based educational leadership. Leadership based on ethical values has been proven to increase organizational effectiveness, build a positive work culture, strengthen the commitment of organizational members, and support the creation of a fair and conducive educational environment. In addition, educational leaders are required to be able to face various ethical dilemmas through decision-making that takes moral, social, and professional aspects into account in a balanced manner. The novelty of this study lies in the presentation of a study that integrates the concepts of ethics, responsibility, organizational culture, ethical dilemmas, and educational leadership in one comprehensive discussion. The results of this research are expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of educational leadership science and become a reference for educational practitioners in implementing ethical and responsible leadership.

**Keywords:** Educational Leadership, Ethical Dilemmas, Ethics, Responsibility, Organizational Culture



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## INTRODUCTION

Education is a key instrument in developing quality human resources. The success of educational provision is determined not only by the curriculum, facilities and infrastructure, and the competence of educators, but also by the quality of leadership implemented within educational institutions. Educational leaders are responsible for directing, managing, and ensuring that the entire educational process runs in accordance with established objectives. Therefore, leadership is a strategic factor in determining the quality and effectiveness of educational delivery.

Technological developments, globalization, and rapid social change have presented new challenges for educational leaders. Leaders are no longer merely required to perform administrative and managerial functions but must also be able to address the various ethical issues that arise in decision-making. Various policies often involve the interests of multiple parties, requiring careful moral consideration. In this context, ethics and responsibility are inseparable aspects of educational leadership practice.

Educational leadership is the process of directing and influencing all school members, such as teachers, students, and the school community, so that educational goals can be effectively achieved. In its implementation, educational leaders play a crucial role in determining the direction, culture, and quality of learning in schools. Therefore, a leader is required not only to possess managerial skills but also to possess excellent communication and interaction skills to create a comfortable, conducive learning environment that supports the development of students' character and skills.

Ethics in educational leadership is a set of moral values that serve as guidelines for carrying out duties, authority, and responsibilities. Ethical leaders are not only oriented towards achieving organizational targets but also consider the impact of decisions on students, educators, education personnel, and the community. Responsible leadership requires leaders to act fairly, honestly, transparently, and accountably in every policy they make (Iskandar et al., 2025). Therefore, ethics and responsibility are essential foundations for creating quality and integrity-based educational governance.

The urgency of ethically grounded leadership is increasing in the current digital era. Digital transformation in education presents both opportunities and challenges, particularly related to the use of technology, data management, equitable access to education, and technology-based decision-making. Research shows that educational leaders are required to possess the ability to integrate technological innovation with ethical principles to ensure the educational process remains aligned with humanitarian values and broader educational goals.

Various studies also show that ethical leadership has a positive influence on the effectiveness of educational organizations. A meta-analysis conducted by Mehmet Özdoğru and Yılmaz Sarier (2024) of 47 studies with 18,423 respondents showed that ethical leadership of school principals has a strong relationship with organizational behavior, work attitudes, perceptions, and teacher commitment to the school. These findings demonstrate that leadership practices based on ethical values can create a more positive and productive work environment.

However, various studies on educational leadership to date have tended to focus more on the influence of leadership on organizational performance, teacher commitment, job satisfaction, and school effectiveness. Most studies also use a quantitative approach that focuses on the relationships between variables. Meanwhile, studies that specifically integrate the concepts of ethics and responsibility of educational leaders as a unified theme are still relatively limited. Consequently, a comprehensive understanding of how ethics and responsibility form the foundation for implementing educational leadership has not been developed.

Furthermore, technological developments and the highly dynamic educational environment have given rise to various new ethical dilemmas that have not been widely discussed in previous studies. Today's educational leaders face not only managerial challenges but also must balance the demands of innovation, transparency, fairness, and social responsibility in every policy they adopt. This situation highlights the need for a more in-depth study of the ethics and responsibilities of educational leaders as a foundation for addressing contemporary educational challenges.

Based on this description, this study was conducted to comprehensively examine the concepts of ethics and responsibility. The answers of educational leaders are based on various relevant scientific literature sources. This research is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the role of ethics in educational leadership, the forms of responsibility that educational leaders must have, and their relevance in facing today's educational challenges. The results of this study are expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of educational leadership studies and serve as a reference for educational practitioners in implementing leadership with integrity, responsibility, and orientation toward moral values.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed a library research method with a descriptive qualitative approach. Library research is conducted by collecting, reviewing, and analyzing various literature sources relevant to the research topic. This approach was chosen because the research focuses on examining concepts, theories, previous research findings, and various scientific ideas related to the ethics and responsibilities of educational leaders. Through a descriptive qualitative approach, the researcher seeks to understand, interpret, and describe the phenomena under study based on data obtained from various scientific literature.

This research aims to analyze and describe the concept of ethics and responsibilities of educational leaders based on various scientific literature sources. Furthermore, this research aims to identify the role of ethics in educational leadership practices, the forms of responsibility educational leaders must possess, and their relevance in addressing various educational challenges in the modern era. This study is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the importance of ethics and responsibility in supporting the effectiveness of educational leadership.

The data used in this research are secondary data obtained from various scientific literature sources. Data sources include national journal articles, scientific books, proceedings, previous research results, and other academic documents relevant to the theme of ethics and responsibilities of educational leaders. The literature used is prioritized to come from publications that have academic credibility and relevance to the research focus.

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## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The ethics of responsibility in educational leadership is a set of values, moral principles, and attitudes that serve as the foundation for educational leaders in carrying out their duties, authority, and decision-making responsibly. This ethic requires educational leaders to consider the impact of every policy and action on students, educators, education personnel, and the wider community, so that decisions made are not only administratively correct but also fair, moral, and oriented towards the common good.

Ethically grounded leadership has also been shown to increase employee loyalty and organizational effectiveness. Research by Zhang & Lin (2022) in the education sector shows that leaders who emphasize honesty and transparency have a positive influence on the psychological well-being of educators, leading to increased productivity and work loyalty. These findings align with Islamic principles regarding the importance of justice and trustworthiness in managing institutions (Guo, 2022).

Ethically grounded leadership plays a crucial role in creating an inclusive, equitable, and integrity-based learning environment. In an era where technology is transforming teaching and learning, educational leaders are required to integrate technology into the curriculum, adapt learning methods, and address emerging ethical dilemmas. Moral leadership provides direction and builds a solid foundation for improving the quality of education. Furthermore, leaders must understand multiple perspectives, manage digital transformation, and maintain a balance between personal and organizational needs, as well as long-term sustainability (Daga et al., 2024).

Ethical leaders will ensure that the implementation of technology is based on ethical principles that consider social impact, student well-being, and broader educational goals. They will guide educators in the wise use of technology to improve the quality of teaching and learning, while maintaining the moral values underlying education. By integrating ethical values into educational leadership, we can ensure that education not only evolves in line with technological developments but also maintains the essential values of humanity, justice, and integrity in producing a generation ready to face the challenges of the future.

Leadership is a crucial part of the management function, occupying a strategic position within the organizational structure and responsibilities. The word "leader" itself means someone who has the ability to direct, guide, organize, and influence others to achieve common goals. A leader is not only responsible for technical work success but must also ensure a balance between the physical and spiritual needs of the organization. Therefore, being a leader is not an easy task because each individual has a different approach to leadership, in accordance with their vision, mission, and values.

A leader, typically a principal, is required to maintain high professional standards because the quality of their leadership significantly impacts the progress, effectiveness, and success of the school organization. In carrying out their duties and responsibilities, principals must uphold positive leadership values, such as honesty, integrity, reliability, responsibility, and sincerity in serving all school members. These duties and functions align with the provisions stipulated in Article 1 Paragraph (1) of Minister of Education and Culture Regulation Number 6 of 2018, which emphasizes the principal's role as the leader of the educational unit responsible for the implementation of education in the school (Rochaendi et al., 2021).

Ethical leadership influences employee behavior in various ways, such as increasing commitment, innovation, and reducing unethical behavior. Organizations must implement training, employ ethical leaders, and establish clear ethical expectations. Factors such as organizational commitment, reducing power distance, and perceived support are also crucial. The results show that ethical leadership is crucial for organizational success (Soro et al., 2024).

Organizational culture has several important elements. First, organizational culture is reflected in members' perceptions of the various things they see, hear, and experience in their daily work environment. Second, organizational culture is descriptive because it reflects how members understand and view the organization in which they work. Third, organizational culture is formed from a system of values shared by all members, thus becoming a distinctive characteristic that distinguishes it from other organizations. These values are then reflected in symbols, customs, and rituals.

The actual and practices that develop within the organization. Through these elements, organizational culture shapes the way members think, behave, and act in carrying out organizational activities. Ethical leadership emphasizes the importance of communicating openly and honestly with others within the educational community. To ensure that stakeholders are adequately informed about decisions, policies, and initiatives, leaders prioritize clear, honest, and consistent communication. Actively engaging with stakeholders and encouraging open discussions fosters trust and a shared understanding of the institution's goals and principles.

In philosophy, an ethical dilemma is also called an ethical paradox or moral dilemma. It is a situation in which an agent faces two (or more) conflicting moral demands, neither of which should affect the other (Kurniawaty & Faiz, 2022). A closely related definition characterizes an ethical dilemma as a situation in which every available choice is wrong. The term is also used colloquially to refer to a potentially resolvable ethical conflict, a psychologically difficult choice, or other types of difficult ethical issues.

A dilemma is a situation in which there are two possible solutions, each of which is morally justifiable. A dilemma requires a person to choose between two courses of action, each of which has some benefits but also some risks. In a dilemma, the legitimate needs and interests of one individual or group must give way to the needs and interests of another individual or group, hence the commonly used expression "on the horns of a dilemma," which describes the two-sided nature of this situation. A characteristic of ethical dilemmas is that they involve consideration and can rarely be resolved quickly or simply by applying rules and relying on facts (Kurniawaty & Faiz, 2022). In general, there are patterns, models, or paradigms that occur in ethical dilemma situations that can be categorized. In more detail, here is an explanation of the four paradigms (Nurcahyo, 2023).

First, Individual vs. Group (individual vs. community). In this paradigm, there is a conflict between an individual and a larger group of which the individual is also a part. This paradigm can also relate to conflicts between personal interests versus the interests of others, or small groups versus large groups. "Individual" in this paradigm doesn't always mean "one person," but can also mean a small group in relation to a larger group. "Group" in this paradigm can mean a larger group, such as a real city community, or a school group, a family group, or your family.

The individual versus group dilemma is about making a choice between what is right for one person or small group and what is right for the larger group. As educators, we sometimes have to make similar choices in the classroom. One group takes longer to complete an assignment, while another group can complete it more quickly and is ready for the next lesson. In this situation, teachers may face an individual versus group dilemma.

Second, justice versus mercy. In this paradigm, the choice is between following the written rules or not following them completely. We can choose to be fair by treating everyone equally, or make exceptions out of generosity and compassion. Sometimes it's right to stick to the rules, but sometimes it's also right to make exceptions. The choice to follow a rule can be made based on respect for fairness (or equality).

The choice to bend a rule can be made based on compassion (kindness). For example, there's a rule at home that you have to be home for dinner. For example, one day you come home late because a friend needs your help. This situation can illustrate the dilemma of justice versus compassion toward your parents.

Third, truth versus loyalty. Honesty and loyalty are often conflicting values in ethical dilemmas. Sometimes we must choose between being honest or loyal (or responsible) to others. Will we honestly convey information based on facts, or will we uphold the value of loyalty to our profession, a particular group, or a previous commitment. In war situations, captured soldiers sometimes have to choose between.

Telling the truth to the enemy or remaining loyal to fellow soldiers. Almost all of us have experienced having to choose between telling the truth or protecting a friend (or relative) in trouble. This is one example of the choice between truth and loyalty.

Fourth, short-term versus long-term (short-term vs. long-term) is the most common and easily observed paradigm. We often have to choose what seems best for the present or best for the future. This paradigm can occur in everyday situations or on a broader scale, such as global issues, such as the environment, and so on. As parents, we often have to make this choice, for example, when we have to choose between how much money to spend now and how much to save later.

The responsibilities of educational leaders include a strategic role in directing, managing, and developing all components of the educational institution so that educational goals are effectively achieved. Educational leaders are responsible for establishing the vision and mission, creating a conducive learning climate, and ensuring that the learning process is high-quality and equitable. Furthermore, educational leaders also play a role in decision-making, human resource management, and professional development of teachers and education personnel. Furthermore, educational leaders have a moral and social responsibility to instill ethical values, character, and integrity, as well as to collaborate with parents and the community to continuously improve the quality of education.

Within an organization, the role of leadership is crucial in directing the team toward established goals. A leader is not merely someone holding a high position, but also an individual capable of inspiring, guiding, and supporting their members to achieve their best performance. For clarity, here are some of the key roles and responsibilities a leader must possess to ensure team and organizational success.

First, School Management and Operations. Educational leaders are responsible for managing all aspects of school operations effectively and efficiently. This includes managing facilities and infrastructure to support the learning process, transparent and accountable financial management, and implementing the curriculum in accordance with national policies and student needs. Furthermore, educational leaders also foster harmonious relationships with parents and the community as strategic partners for the school in supporting educational success.

Second, Teacher Supervision and Development. In this aspect, educational leaders act as mentors and guides for teachers and other educational staff. Leaders conduct academic and managerial supervision to monitor teacher performance, provide constructive feedback, and help improve the quality of learning. Educational leaders are also responsible for encouraging teacher professional development through training, scientific discussions, and continuous competency development, enabling teachers to adapt to developments in science and technology.

Third, Strategic Leadership. Educational leaders are responsible for establishing a clear and realistic vision and mission as the direction for the development of educational institutions. Strategic leadership requires the ability to lead change, manage organizational dynamics, and make fair and wise decisions. Leaders must be the primary drivers in creating a collaborative, participatory school culture oriented toward improving the quality of education.

Fourth, Learning and Innovation. Educational leaders are responsible for creating a conducive, safe, and enjoyable learning environment for students. Furthermore, leaders encourage innovation in learning by utilizing technology, creative learning methods, and strategies. Motivating teachers and students is crucial to ensuring the entire school community is enthusiastic about continuing to learn, achieve, and innovate. Five, Character Education. As a central figure in an educational institution, educational leaders must be role models in attitudes, behavior, and moral values. Leaders are responsible for instilling character values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, and tolerance in school life. Through exemplary behavior and appropriate policies, educational leaders create a harmonious, ethical school atmosphere that supports the holistic development of students' character.

The Role of Islamic Educational Leadership: The madrasah principal, as the leader of an Islamic educational institution, in addition to leading the implementation of education at his/her madrasah, also carries out a number of roles/functions of the madrasah principal. The principal carries out numerous and complex tasks.

First, in his role as an educator, the principal is tasked with guiding teachers, staff, and students, developing staff, keeping abreast of developments in science and technology, and serving as a role model in the learning process. Second, in his role as a manager, the principal is tasked with developing programs, organizing the school, mobilizing staff, optimizing school resources, and controlling activities.

Third, as an administrator, the principal is tasked with managing administration, teaching and learning activities and guidance, student affairs, personnel, finances, facilities and infrastructure, correspondence, and school household affairs. Fourth, as a supervisor, the principal is tasked with developing educational supervision programs and utilizing the results of supervision.

Fifth, as a leader, the principal is tasked with developing and socializing the vision and mission of a school program, making decisions, and communicating. Sixth, as a reformer, the principal is tasked with fostering and implementing innovations in various aspects, encouraging teachers, staff, and parents to understand and support the innovations proposed.

Seventh, as a motivational force, the principal is tasked with creating a positive work environment and atmosphere, and establishing principles of rewards and punishments. This is where the principal plays a crucial role in achieving the success of an Islamic educational institution. Therefore, to be a successful principal, they must possess a passion for high performance, develop their own insights and skills, and understand the duties and functions of each school element so that their potential can be channeled proportionally (Nasution & Putra, 2023).

Based on these various roles, the principal not only serves as the authority within the educational institution but also as the primary driver determining the direction of the madrasah's development. The success of Islamic education is greatly influenced by the principal's ability to integrate leadership, managerial, administrative, and supervisory functions in a balanced manner. Furthermore, the principal is required to create a conducive work environment, build a positive organizational culture, and encourage the participation of all school members in achieving educational goals. With effective leadership, the various resources available to the madrasah can be optimally utilized to improve the quality of education and produce high-quality graduates. Therefore, the competence, integrity, and commitment of the madrasah principal are important factors in supporting the success and sustainability of Islamic educational institutions.

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## CONCLUSION

Based on the literature review, it can be concluded that ethics and responsibility are the primary foundations of educational leadership practice. Educational leadership is not only related to the ability to manage an organization and achieve institutional goals, but also encompasses the leader's ability to carry out duties based on moral values, integrity, honesty, fairness, and accountability. Ethics serve as a guideline that guides a leader's behavior in every action and decision-making, while responsibility reflects the leader's commitment to carrying out the mandate professionally and oriented towards the common good.

This study demonstrates that educational leaders play a highly strategic role in determining the direction, quality, and success of educational institutions. This responsibility encompasses various aspects, from developing a vision and mission, managing human resources, developing organizational culture, improving the quality of learning, to fostering the character of the entire school community. Therefore, the success of an educational institution is not only determined by the availability of facilities and infrastructure or the quality of the curriculum, but is also greatly influenced by the quality of leadership implemented by educational leaders in carrying out their functions and roles.

The study also shows that ethically grounded leadership can create a more conducive, harmonious, and productive educational environment. Leaders who uphold ethical values tend to be able to build healthy working relationships, increase trust among organizational members, strengthen work commitment, and foster a positive organizational culture. An organizational culture built on shared values, integrity, and a sense of responsibility will shape the behavior of organizational members in alignment with educational goals and support the continuous improvement of the quality of educational services.

In practice, educational leaders are often faced with various ethical dilemmas that require careful moral consideration. These dilemmas can arise in the form of conflicts between individual and group interests, justice and compassion, truth and loyalty, or short-term and long-term interests. These situations demonstrate that educational leaders must possess not only technical and managerial skills but also wisdom, emotional intelligence, and ethical sensitivity in decision-making. The ability to consider the various consequences of each policy is a crucial indicator of responsible leadership.

In the context of Islamic education, ethics and responsibility have a broader meaning because they relate not only to interpersonal relationships but also reflect a form of trust that must be accounted for morally and spiritually. As leaders of Islamic educational institutions, madrasah principals are required to integrate their roles as educators, managers, administrators, supervisors, innovators, and motivators with Islamic values that emphasize honesty, justice, trustworthiness, and exemplary behavior. Through the application of these values, Islamic educational leaders are expected to create an educational environment that not only excels academically but also fosters strong character and moral development in students.

Overall, this study confirms that ethics and responsibility are crucial elements in developing effective, professional, and integrated educational leadership. Amidst the various challenges of education in the era of globalization and digital transformation, educational leaders are required to maintain a balance between achieving organizational goals and implementing moral values in every policy they adopt. Therefore, strengthening ethics and responsibility in educational leadership needs to be continuously developed as a foundation for creating a quality, equitable education system that meets the needs of society and current developments.

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