



Innovative Leadership Behavior for Developing National Education Standards

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Abstract: Educational institutions are increasingly required to respond to rapid educational reforms, technological advancement, and rising expectations for educational quality, making innovative leadership an essential competency for school principals. However, limited empirical research has examined how innovative leadership behavior contributes to the development of the National Education Standards (Standar Nasional Pendidikan) within Islamic educational institutions. This study aims to analyze the innovative leadership behavior of madrasah principals in developing the National Education Standards through a multisite qualitative study conducted at MTs Negeri 3 Jombang and MTs Negeri 16 Jombang, Indonesia. A qualitative multisite case study design was employed, involving principals, vice principals, teachers, administrative staff, school committee members, and supervisors selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis and were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, followed by within-site and cross-site analysis. The findings reveal that innovative leadership behavior operates through four interconnected stages: opportunity exploration, idea generation, idea championing, and idea implementation. These behavioral stages enable principals to transform educational challenges into sustainable institutional innovation through collaborative planning, stakeholder engagement, resource mobilization, and continuous evaluation. The study proposes an Innovative Leadership Behavior Model for Madrasah Development, extending the Innovative Work Behavior framework into educational leadership. The findings contribute to the literature on educational leadership by providing a behavioral perspective for understanding sustainable school improvement and offer practical implications for strengthening leadership capacity in implementing the National Education Standards within Islamic educational institutions.

Keywords: Innovative Leadership Behavior; Madrasah Principal; National Education Standards; Educational Leadership; School Innovation.

Abstrak: Lembaga pendidikan dihadapkan pada tuntutan reformasi pendidikan, perkembangan teknologi, dan meningkatnya ekspektasi masyarakat terhadap mutu pendidikan, sehingga kepemimpinan inovatif menjadi kompetensi yang semakin penting bagi kepala madrasah. Meskipun demikian, kajian empiris mengenai bagaimana perilaku kepemimpinan inovatif berkontribusi terhadap pengembangan Standar Nasional Pendidikan di lembaga pendidikan Islam masih relatif terbatas. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis perilaku kepemimpinan inovatif kepala madrasah dalam mengembangkan Standar Nasional Pendidikan melalui penelitian kualitatif multisitus di MTs Negeri 3 Jombang dan MTs

Negeri 16 Jombang. Penelitian menggunakan desain studi kasus multisitus dengan melibatkan kepala madrasah, wakil kepala madrasah, guru, tenaga kependidikan, komite madrasah, dan pengawas yang dipilih menggunakan teknik purposive sampling. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi nonpartisipan, dan studi dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif Miles, Huberman, dan Saldaña yang dilanjutkan dengan analisis dalam situs dan lintas situs. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa perilaku kepemimpinan inovatif berkembang melalui empat tahapan yang saling berkaitan, yaitu opportunity exploration, idea generation, idea championing, dan idea implementation. Keempat tahapan tersebut memungkinkan kepala madrasah mentransformasikan berbagai tantangan pendidikan menjadi inovasi kelembagaan yang berkelanjutan melalui perencanaan kolaboratif, pelibatan pemangku kepentingan, mobilisasi sumber daya, serta evaluasi berkelanjutan. Penelitian ini menghasilkan Model Perilaku Kepemimpinan Inovatif dalam Pengembangan Madrasah yang memperluas kerangka Innovative Work Behavior ke dalam konteks kepemimpinan pendidikan. Temuan ini memberikan kontribusi teoretis bagi pengembangan kajian kepemimpinan pendidikan sekaligus memberikan implikasi praktis bagi penguatan kapasitas kepala madrasah dalam mengembangkan Standar Nasional Pendidikan secara berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci: Perilaku Kepemimpinan Inovatif; Kepala Madrasah; Standar Nasional Pendidikan; Kepemimpinan Pendidikan; Inovasi Sekolah

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Introduction

Educational institutions worldwide are currently confronted with increasingly complex challenges resulting from rapid technological advancement, policy reforms, globalization, and rising public expectations regarding educational quality (Hassan et al., n.d.). School leaders are no longer expected merely to maintain administrative stability (Ayumi & Nasution, 2025). Still, they are required to become agents of innovation capable of initiating change, responding to uncertainty, and creating adaptive educational environments. In this context, leadership effectiveness is increasingly measured by leaders' capacity to generate new ideas, encourage innovation among organizational members, and transform educational challenges into opportunities for institutional improvement rather than solely by their managerial competence (Hallinger, 2020; Fullan, 2020). Consequently, innovative leadership has become one of the most frequently discussed issues in educational leadership research because it is considered essential for sustaining school improvement and enhancing educational quality in rapidly changing environments.

The importance of innovative leadership is particularly evident in educational institutions that operate under continuously evolving quality assurance systems. Educational reforms implemented in many countries increasingly emphasize innovation, organizational learning, collaborative culture, and evidence-based decision-making as fundamental elements of school improvement (Hopkins et al., 2014). Rather than functioning exclusively as policy implementers, school principals

are expected to facilitate innovation by encouraging teachers to experiment with new instructional practices, strengthening professional collaboration, mobilizing institutional resources, and creating organizational climates that support continuous improvement. Educational leadership therefore shifts from maintaining organizational routines toward promoting innovation as a sustainable organizational capability (Brown et al., 2017). This perspective positions innovative leadership behavior as an essential determinant of institutional effectiveness because organizational innovation largely depends upon leaders' ability to inspire, coordinate, and institutionalize change across multiple educational dimensions.

Within educational leadership literature, innovative leadership behavior has attracted increasing scholarly attention over the past decade. Existing studies consistently demonstrate that leaders' innovative behavior positively influences organizational performance, teacher commitment, organizational learning, and school effectiveness. Innovative leaders are characterized by their ability to identify opportunities, generate creative solutions, champion new ideas, mobilize organizational support, and successfully implement innovation within educational organizations (Riddel & Zulfikar, 2024). These behavioral dimensions emphasize that innovation is not merely the outcome of organizational policy but also the consequence of leaders' individual actions and interactions with organizational members. Accordingly, innovative leadership behavior provides a more operational perspective for understanding how educational change is initiated and sustained within schools than broader leadership constructs such as transformational or instructional leadership (Hsiao & Chang, 2011).

Despite the growing body of literature on educational leadership, previous studies have predominantly examined transformational leadership, instructional leadership, distributed leadership, and servant leadership as determinants of school effectiveness (Hallinger, 2020; Leithwood et al., 2020). While these leadership approaches have contributed significantly to understanding educational improvement, relatively limited attention has been devoted to examining principals' innovative leadership behavior, particularly within Islamic educational institutions. Most empirical investigations focus on leadership styles, organizational commitment, teacher performance, or school effectiveness without exploring how innovative behaviors are enacted throughout the process of educational improvement (Dou et al., 2017; Hammad et al., 2024). Consequently, the behavioral mechanisms through which school leaders identify opportunities, develop innovative ideas, mobilize institutional support, and implement educational innovation remain insufficiently understood.

This research gap becomes more significant within the context of Indonesian madrasahs. As Islamic educational institutions operating under the national education system, madrasahs face dual responsibilities of maintaining Islamic

educational values while simultaneously fulfilling the National Education Standards (Standar Nasional Pendidikan). The implementation of these standards requires continuous innovation across curriculum development, learning processes, educational assessment, teacher professionalism, school management, infrastructure, financing, and graduate competencies (Nasir, 2021; Pak et al., 2020). Such complexity demands capable principals not only of managing educational administration but also of demonstrating innovative leadership behaviors that enable institutions to adapt successfully to changing educational policies and community expectations. Nevertheless, existing research concerning Indonesian madrasah leadership has largely concentrated on transformational leadership, spiritual leadership, or managerial competence, leaving innovative leadership behavior relatively underexplored.

Furthermore, previous studies generally investigate school leadership within single institutional settings. Although single-case studies provide valuable contextual understanding, they offer limited opportunities to identify behavioral patterns that remain consistent across different organizational environments. Multisite qualitative research provides stronger analytical insights because it enables researchers to compare leadership practices across institutions with different organizational characteristics while identifying common behavioral patterns underlying successful educational innovation. Such comparative analysis is particularly important for developing a more comprehensive understanding of innovative leadership behavior that extends beyond the uniqueness of individual schools.

The present study addresses these limitations by investigating innovative leadership behavior of madrasah principals in developing National Education Standards through a multisite qualitative study conducted at two Indonesian public Islamic junior secondary schools. Rather than examining leadership style as a general organizational characteristic, this study focuses specifically on principals' innovative leadership behavior throughout the process of educational improvement. The analysis explores how principals identify opportunities for innovation, generate new ideas, mobilize organizational support, and implement innovation across various components of the National Education Standards. By emphasizing behavioral processes instead of leadership typologies, this study provides a more detailed explanation of how innovation is initiated, developed, and institutionalized within Islamic educational organizations.

This study contributes to educational leadership literature in several important ways. First, it extends existing knowledge by shifting analytical attention from leadership styles toward innovative leadership behavior as a dynamic process of educational change. Second, it proposes an integrated model of innovative leadership behavior consisting of opportunity exploration, idea generation, idea

championing, and idea implementation, illustrating how principals translate innovative ideas into sustainable institutional practices. Third, the study enriches empirical evidence regarding educational leadership within Indonesian madrasahs, a context that remains underrepresented in international educational leadership research. Finally, the findings are expected to provide practical implications for policymakers, school leaders, and educational practitioners seeking to strengthen school innovation and improve the implementation of National Education Standards through effective educational leadership.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative multisite case study design to investigate the innovative leadership behavior of madrasah principals in developing the National Education Standards (Standar Nasional Pendidikan) in Indonesian Islamic junior secondary schools (Yin, 2014). A qualitative approach was chosen because it enables an in-depth understanding of leadership behaviors, innovation processes, and contextual interactions occurring in authentic educational settings rather than measuring leadership variables quantitatively (Creswell, 2014). The multisite design facilitated analytical comparison between two cases, thereby enhancing the robustness and transferability of the findings (Yin, 2018). The research was conducted at MTs Negeri 3 Jombang and MTs Negeri 16 Jombang, East Java, Indonesia. These institutions were purposively selected because both have consistently demonstrated organizational improvement in implementing the National Education Standards while exhibiting distinctive innovation programs under the leadership of their principals. Participants were selected through purposive sampling and included the principals as key informants, vice principals responsible for curriculum, student affairs, infrastructure, and public relations, teachers, administrative staff, school committee representatives, and supervisors from the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The inclusion of participants from different organizational levels enabled comprehensive perspectives on innovative leadership behavior and strengthened source triangulation (Patton, 2014).

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis. The interviews explored participants' experiences regarding leadership behavior, innovation initiatives, decision-making processes, organizational collaboration, and the implementation of programs supporting the National Education Standards. Observations focused on leadership practices, school culture, organizational interactions, and innovation activities within their natural settings, while documentary evidence—including strategic plans, annual work programs, accreditation reports, quality assurance documents, meeting minutes, curriculum documents, and policy records—was examined to verify and enrich the empirical findings. The combination of interviews, observations, and document analysis provided methodological

triangulation, thereby improving the comprehensiveness and credibility of the collected data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of (Miles et al., 2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Analysis began concurrently with data collection through iterative coding and categorization of interview transcripts, field notes, and documentary evidence to identify themes related to innovative leadership behavior. Within-site analysis was first conducted for each madrasah, followed by cross-site analysis to identify similarities, contextual differences, and recurring leadership patterns, which were subsequently synthesized into an integrated conceptual model of innovative leadership behavior in developing the National Education Standards. The trustworthiness of the study was ensured through (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability by employing prolonged engagement, methodological triangulation, member checking, rich contextual description, systematic documentation of the research process, and an audit trail. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant educational authorities and participating madrasahs before data collection. All participants provided informed consent, confidentiality was maintained through anonymization of research data, and all information was used exclusively for academic purposes in accordance with accepted principles of qualitative research ethics (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Results And Discussion

Results

Opportunity Exploration: Identifying Strategic Opportunities for Educational Improvement

The cross-site analysis revealed that innovative leadership behavior began with principals' ability to identify strategic opportunities for improving educational quality rather than merely responding to administrative requirements. At both MTs Negeri 3 Jombang and MTs Negeri 16 Jombang, principals continuously monitored changes in educational policies, institutional performance, stakeholder expectations, technological developments, and community demands to identify areas requiring innovation. Rather than perceiving the National Education Standards as a regulatory obligation, the principals interpreted them as a strategic framework for continuous institutional improvement. This proactive orientation enabled both schools to anticipate educational challenges while simultaneously transforming external demands into opportunities for organizational development.

Interview findings indicated that opportunity exploration was conducted systematically through environmental scanning, performance evaluation, stakeholder consultation, and continuous reflection on institutional strengths and weaknesses. School leaders regularly organized coordination meetings involving

vice principals, teachers, administrative staff, school committees, and supervisors to identify emerging educational issues and formulate potential improvement strategies. These discussions encouraged organizational members to participate actively in recognizing institutional problems before they developed into significant barriers to school improvement.

One principal explained:

"Every change in educational policy should be viewed as an opportunity for development rather than as an administrative burden. We continuously evaluate our school's condition, identify weaknesses, and seek opportunities that can improve educational quality." (Principal Interview)

The findings further demonstrated that opportunity exploration was strongly supported by data-driven decision-making. Accreditation reports, student achievement records, teacher performance evaluations, school self-evaluation documents, and stakeholder feedback were utilized as important sources of information during institutional planning. Such evidence enabled principals to prioritize innovation according to institutional needs rather than implementing programs based solely on intuition. Consequently, innovation initiatives were closely aligned with measurable educational problems affecting the implementation of the National Education Standards.

Cross-site comparison revealed that although both schools shared similar opportunity exploration processes, each principal demonstrated different strategic emphases. At MTs Negeri 3 Jombang, opportunity exploration focused primarily on strengthening academic quality, curriculum innovation, and student achievement. Meanwhile, MTs Negeri 16 Jombang emphasized institutional collaboration, community participation, and improving organizational management systems. Despite these contextual differences, both principals consistently demonstrated proactive leadership behavior characterized by openness toward change, environmental awareness, and strategic anticipation of future educational challenges.

Overall, the findings indicate that opportunity exploration constituted the initial behavioral stage through which innovative leadership emerged. Rather than waiting for external instructions, principals actively searched for opportunities capable of strengthening institutional quality. This behavior became the foundation for subsequent innovation processes because successful educational innovation originated from leaders' ability to recognize strategic opportunities before designing and implementing organizational change.

Idea Generation: Transforming Educational Challenges into Innovative Programs

The second stage of innovative leadership behavior identified across both research sites was the principals' capacity to generate innovative ideas in response to institutional challenges and opportunities. The findings demonstrate that

innovation was not produced through individual decisions made solely by the principals but emerged from collaborative processes involving teachers, vice principals, administrative personnel, school committees, and external stakeholders. Rather than imposing predetermined solutions, the principals encouraged organizational members to contribute ideas, evaluate alternative strategies, and formulate improvement programs collectively. This collaborative process strengthened organizational ownership of innovation while increasing the feasibility of program implementation across different components of the National Education Standards.

Interview data revealed that idea generation was initiated through regular coordination meetings, teacher working groups, curriculum development forums, and quality assurance discussions. During these meetings, participants were encouraged to identify institutional problems, propose innovative solutions, and discuss the potential impact of each proposed program on educational quality. Such collaborative forums created opportunities for teachers and staff to actively participate in institutional decision-making, thereby fostering a culture of innovation throughout the organization.

One vice principal explained:

"Innovation in our madrasah does not come only from the principal. Every teacher is encouraged to provide suggestions, identify problems, and propose solutions. The principal always opens space for discussion before making strategic decisions." (Vice Principal Interview)

Observation data further confirmed that principals consistently facilitated open communication during institutional planning. Discussions were characterized by reciprocal interaction rather than hierarchical instruction, enabling participants to express opinions without hesitation. This participatory climate contributed significantly to the diversity of ideas generated during planning processes and strengthened collaboration among school personnel.

Cross-site analysis indicated that although both schools adopted participatory decision-making, the characteristics of generated innovations reflected their respective institutional priorities. At MTs Negeri 3 Jombang, innovation programs primarily focused on strengthening academic excellence through curriculum development, digital learning integration, teacher professional development, and student achievement programs. Meanwhile, MTs Negeri 16 Jombang emphasized strengthening school governance, community engagement, religious character development, and improving educational services. Despite these contextual differences, both schools demonstrated similar leadership behavior in transforming institutional challenges into innovative educational programs.

Document analysis also showed that the proposed ideas were systematically incorporated into strategic planning documents, annual work plans, school

operational programs, and quality assurance activities. Rather than remaining conceptual discussions, innovative ideas were translated into measurable institutional programs with clearly defined objectives, implementation strategies, responsible personnel, and evaluation indicators. This systematic planning process ensured that innovation became an integral component of institutional development rather than isolated initiatives.

Overall, the findings indicate that idea generation represents a collaborative leadership process through which principals transform institutional challenges into strategic educational innovations. The ability to encourage participation, facilitate dialogue, and synthesize diverse perspectives enables school leaders to formulate innovation programs that are responsive to institutional needs while simultaneously supporting the continuous development of the National Education Standards.

Idea Championing: Building Organizational Commitment toward Educational Innovation

The findings further demonstrate that innovative leadership behavior extends beyond generating ideas to include the principals' ability to mobilize organizational commitment for implementing educational innovation. Cross-site analysis revealed that both principals consistently acted as advocates for innovation by communicating institutional visions, motivating teachers, facilitating collaboration, and strengthening stakeholders' confidence in planned improvement programs. Rather than relying on formal authority, principals exercised persuasive leadership that encouraged teachers and staff to perceive innovation as a shared organizational responsibility.

Interview findings indicate that principals actively communicated the importance of innovation during staff meetings, professional development activities, and informal interactions with teachers. They consistently emphasized that educational improvement required collective commitment rather than individual effort. This communication strategy reduced resistance to organizational change while strengthening teachers' willingness to participate in innovation initiatives.

One teacher stated:

"The principal never forces us to accept new programs. Instead, he explains why change is necessary, listens to our opinions, and encourages us to work together. As a result, teachers feel involved and become more committed to implementing the programs."

(Teacher Interview)

Observation data confirmed that principals frequently demonstrated supportive leadership during the implementation of innovation programs. They monitored progress, provided constructive feedback, recognized teachers' achievements, and facilitated professional collaboration whenever implementation challenges emerged. Such leadership practices increased teachers' confidence and

strengthened organizational commitment toward continuous educational improvement.

Another important finding concerns stakeholder engagement beyond the school community. Both principals actively collaborated with school committees, parents, local government agencies, religious leaders, alumni, and community organizations to secure support for institutional innovation. These partnerships provided additional financial resources, professional expertise, and social legitimacy for various school development programs. Consequently, innovation was perceived not merely as an internal school initiative but as a collaborative endeavor involving multiple educational stakeholders.

Cross-site comparison indicates that both principals successfully cultivated organizational trust through transparent communication, participatory decision-making, and consistent leadership behavior. Teachers reported that they were more willing to support innovation because principals demonstrated fairness, openness, and consistency throughout the implementation process. Such findings suggest that organizational commitment emerged primarily from interpersonal trust rather than administrative authority alone.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that idea championing constitutes a crucial stage of innovative leadership behavior because successful educational innovation depends not only on generating creative ideas but also on building organizational commitment capable of sustaining institutional change. Principals therefore functioned as facilitators of organizational collaboration who transformed innovative ideas into collective institutional aspirations.

Idea Implementation: Institutionalizing Innovation for the Development of National Education Standards

The final stage of innovative leadership behavior identified in this study concerns the principals' ability to transform innovative ideas into sustainable institutional practices. Cross-site findings indicate that innovation did not end at the planning stage but was systematically implemented through structured programs, organizational coordination, continuous monitoring, and periodic evaluation. Rather than introducing isolated improvement initiatives, both principals institutionalized innovation by integrating it into the school's strategic planning, quality assurance system, and daily educational practices. This approach enabled innovation to become part of the organizational culture rather than a temporary response to educational policies.

Interview findings revealed that the implementation of innovation was preceded by careful planning involving the formulation of program objectives, activity schedules, resource allocation, responsible personnel, and measurable performance indicators. Each innovation program was incorporated into the annual school work plan and aligned with the strategic priorities of the National Education

Standards. Teachers and administrative staff were assigned clear responsibilities according to their expertise, while vice principals coordinated implementation within their respective areas of responsibility. Such systematic planning minimized uncertainty during implementation and ensured that innovation programs were carried out consistently across different school units.

One principal explained:

“Every innovation must become part of the school's work system. If an idea is not translated into clear programs, responsibilities, and evaluation mechanisms, it will remain only a concept. Therefore, every innovation is integrated into our planning documents and implemented collectively.” (Principal Interview)

This statement illustrates that implementation was viewed as a managerial and organizational process rather than merely the execution of individual ideas. Innovation became sustainable because it was embedded within institutional planning and supported by organizational commitment.

Classroom observations and school activities further demonstrated that innovation was implemented across multiple components of the National Education Standards. Curriculum innovation was reflected in the development of contextual learning programs, teacher collaboration, and curriculum enrichment aligned with students' needs. Improvements in the learning process included the integration of digital learning media, active learning approaches, and continuous classroom supervision to strengthen instructional quality. Teacher professionalism was enhanced through regular workshops, peer learning activities, professional mentoring, and participation in external training programs. Simultaneously, improvements in school management were supported through the utilization of digital administration, systematic quality assurance mechanisms, and evidence-based planning. These innovations collectively contributed to strengthening institutional performance across academic and managerial dimensions.

Cross-site analysis also indicates that innovation implementation was characterized by continuous monitoring and evaluation. Rather than assuming that innovation would automatically produce positive outcomes, principals regularly reviewed program implementation through coordination meetings, classroom observations, performance evaluations, and quality assurance activities. Evaluation findings were subsequently used to revise existing programs, identify implementation constraints, and formulate follow-up improvement strategies. This cyclical implementation process enabled innovation to evolve continuously in response to institutional needs and environmental changes.

One teacher described this process as follows:

“After every major program, we always conduct evaluation meetings. We discuss what has worked well, what obstacles emerged, and what improvements should be made. The

principal encourages us not to see evaluation as criticism but as an opportunity for continuous improvement.” (Teacher Interview)

The findings demonstrate that evaluation functioned not as an administrative requirement but as an organizational learning mechanism supporting sustainable innovation.

Another significant finding concerns the principals' ability to mobilize institutional resources during implementation. Human resources were strengthened through teacher empowerment, professional development, delegation of responsibilities, and collaborative teamwork. Financial resources were managed strategically by aligning school budgets with innovation priorities and maximizing available funding opportunities. Infrastructure was continuously improved to support innovative learning environments, including classroom facilities, digital technology, and educational resources. In addition, partnerships with parents, school committees, alumni, local government, universities, and community organizations expanded institutional capacity to implement educational innovation beyond internal school resources. These collaborative efforts illustrate that successful implementation depended upon effective resource mobilization rather than financial capacity alone.

Although both schools demonstrated successful implementation of innovation programs, several implementation challenges were also identified. Limited financial resources, differences in teachers' readiness to adopt change, varying technological competencies, and external policy adjustments occasionally affected the pace of innovation. Nevertheless, rather than perceiving these constraints as barriers, principals responded through adaptive leadership practices by modifying implementation strategies, strengthening internal communication, providing additional mentoring, and gradually introducing organizational change according to institutional readiness. Such adaptive responses enabled both madrasahs to maintain innovation continuity despite contextual challenges.

The multisite comparison further revealed that the implementation strategies adopted by the two principals shared similar behavioral characteristics despite differences in institutional context. Both leaders consistently demonstrated strategic planning, participatory implementation, collaborative coordination, continuous monitoring, reflective evaluation, and adaptive decision-making. These recurring behavioral patterns indicate that successful innovation implementation was influenced less by institutional characteristics than by the principals' consistent innovative leadership behavior throughout the organizational change process.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that idea implementation represents the culmination of innovative leadership behavior through which educational innovation becomes institutionalized within school management and instructional practice. Successful implementation was achieved not through isolated leadership

actions but through the integration of strategic planning, collaborative participation, systematic monitoring, continuous evaluation, and effective resource mobilization. Cross-site analysis confirms that sustainable educational innovation depends upon principals' ability to transform creative ideas into organizational routines that continuously support the achievement of the National Education Standards.

Discussion

The findings of this multisite study demonstrate that innovative leadership behavior represents a dynamic behavioral process through which madrasah principals continuously initiate, sustain, and institutionalize educational improvement in developing the National Education Standards. Unlike conventional leadership perspectives that primarily classify principals according to leadership styles, the present study reveals that educational innovation evolves through a sequence of observable leadership behaviors beginning with opportunity exploration, followed by idea generation, idea championing, and culminating in idea implementation. These four behavioral stages collectively explain how school leaders transform organizational challenges into sustainable institutional improvement. Rather than functioning as independent activities, each stage reinforces the others, forming an integrated behavioral system that enables principals to respond proactively to educational change while maintaining organizational stability. This finding extends the innovative work behavior framework developed by (Amir, 2015), which conceptualizes innovation as a sequence of behavioral processes involving opportunity recognition, idea generation, promotion, and implementation.

The first stage, opportunity exploration, emerged as the strategic foundation of innovative leadership behavior. The principals did not wait for external policy directives before initiating organizational change; instead, they actively monitored educational reforms, evaluated institutional performance, interpreted stakeholder expectations, and examined emerging educational trends to identify opportunities for improvement (Leithwood et al., 2002; Spillane & Kenney, 2012). Such proactive behavior indicates that educational innovation begins with leaders' capacity to recognize possibilities that remain invisible to others. Rather than perceiving the National Education Standards as regulatory obligations requiring compliance, both principals interpreted them as strategic instruments for institutional transformation (Suheri, 2025). This finding broadens current educational leadership literature by demonstrating that opportunity exploration is not merely environmental scanning but a strategic cognitive process through which school leaders reinterpret external pressures as opportunities for organizational learning and innovation. Recent leadership scholarship likewise emphasizes that educational leaders increasingly require contextual responsiveness and adaptive decision-making to address complex educational environments.

Another important finding concerns the collaborative process of idea generation. The study demonstrates that innovation was not produced exclusively through principals' individual creativity but emerged through systematic interaction among teachers, vice principals, administrative personnel, school committees, supervisors, and other stakeholders. This finding challenges traditional assumptions portraying principals as the sole source of organizational innovation. Instead, innovation developed through collective reflection, collaborative dialogue, and shared problem-solving processes that enabled diverse organizational members to contribute their expertise. Such evidence supports organizational learning theory, which argues that innovation becomes sustainable when knowledge creation is distributed across organizational members rather than concentrated within individual leaders. Consequently, the principal's role shifts from being an idea producer to becoming a facilitator of organizational creativity capable of integrating diverse perspectives into coherent institutional strategies (Drago-Severson, 2012; Mainemelis et al., 2015).

This collaborative dimension also reflects broader developments in educational leadership research, which increasingly recognizes that school improvement depends upon collective professional capacity rather than heroic individual leadership (Mulford, n.d.). Previous studies on instructional and distributed leadership have emphasized collaboration as an important characteristic of effective schools; however, they often describe collaboration as an organizational structure rather than a behavioral process. The present findings extend this perspective by demonstrating that collaboration functions as the primary mechanism through which innovative ideas are generated, refined, and legitimized before implementation. Therefore, innovative leadership behavior should be understood not only as an individual capability but also as a relational process that mobilizes organizational intelligence toward shared educational goals.

The third behavioral stage identified in this study, idea championing, provides further insight into the mechanisms through which innovation becomes organizationally acceptable. The findings indicate that principals consistently communicated institutional visions, explained the rationale for change, encouraged participation, addressed concerns, and cultivated trust before implementing innovation programs. Rather than relying upon positional authority, both principals employed persuasive communication and participatory engagement to strengthen organizational commitment. Such findings reinforce earlier arguments that innovative leadership extends beyond generating creative ideas because innovation frequently encounters resistance during implementation. Leaders therefore require behaviors that inspire confidence, build legitimacy, and sustain organizational motivation throughout the change process (Conger & Kanungo, 1998; Paglis & Green, 2002). Studies examining innovative leader behavior likewise emphasize that

leaders stimulate innovation through communication, empowerment, psychological safety, and trust-building rather than through directive control alone.

An interesting contribution of this research lies in the observation that organizational commitment was constructed primarily through interpersonal trust rather than formal administrative authority. Teachers repeatedly emphasized that their willingness to participate in innovation programs originated from principals' openness, transparency, consistency, and respect for professional opinions (Geijsel et al., 2001; Zhang et al., 2011). This relational foundation reduced resistance toward organizational change while encouraging greater ownership of innovation among teachers. Such findings suggest that innovative leadership behavior operates simultaneously through structural and relational mechanisms. Structurally, principals establish systems supporting innovation; relationally, they cultivate trust that enables organizational members to embrace change voluntarily. This dual mechanism provides a richer explanation of educational innovation than perspectives focusing exclusively on managerial competence or leadership style.

The final stage, idea implementation, illustrates how innovative leadership behavior becomes institutionalized through systematic organizational practice. The findings reveal that implementation involved strategic planning, resource mobilization, collaborative execution, continuous monitoring, reflective evaluation, and adaptive improvement rather than one-time program execution. Innovation was incorporated into annual work plans, quality assurance systems, teacher professional development activities, and school management processes, thereby becoming embedded within organizational routines (Akiba & Wilkinson, 2016; Knapp, 1997). This institutionalization process distinguishes sustainable innovation from temporary educational projects because organizational learning continues beyond the completion of individual programs. Fullan argues that sustainable educational change depends on leaders' ability to develop organizational coherence through continuous learning rather than isolated reforms, and the present findings strongly support this perspective.

Another important implication emerging from this study concerns the relationship between innovative leadership behavior and educational quality assurance. Existing discussions concerning the National Education Standards frequently emphasize compliance with national regulations. However, the findings demonstrate that both principals interpreted these standards as developmental instruments rather than compliance mechanisms. This behavioral orientation fundamentally influenced the manner in which innovation was designed and implemented (Dobni, 2010; Makkonen et al., 2016). Instead of pursuing accreditation solely to satisfy external accountability, innovation initiatives were directed toward strengthening curriculum quality, improving instructional processes, developing teachers' professional competence, optimizing school management, and enhancing

student outcomes. Consequently, educational quality improvement became a continuous organizational process supported by innovative leadership behavior rather than periodic administrative preparation for external evaluation.

Compared with previous empirical studies, this research offers a distinctive theoretical contribution by proposing an Innovative Leadership Behavior Model for Madrasah Development. While innovation literature has previously identified behavioral dimensions such as idea generation, promotion, and implementation, empirical evidence explaining how these behaviors operate sequentially within Islamic educational institutions has remained limited. The multisite findings demonstrate that innovative leadership in madrasahs develops through four interconnected stages: opportunity exploration, idea generation, idea championing, and idea implementation. These stages do not operate independently but continuously reinforce one another, producing a cyclical process of organizational learning and educational improvement. This integrated model therefore extends existing innovative work behavior theory from the level of individual employees toward educational leadership practiced by school principals, while simultaneously enriching the literature on Islamic educational leadership through empirically grounded behavioral evidence.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that leadership development for madrasah principals should extend beyond managerial training toward strengthening innovative behavioral competencies. Professional development initiatives should cultivate principals' abilities to identify strategic opportunities, facilitate collaborative problem-solving, mobilize organizational commitment, and institutionalize innovation through systematic planning and continuous evaluation. Educational policymakers should likewise recognize that sustainable implementation of the National Education Standards depends not only upon regulatory compliance but also upon principals' behavioral capacity to transform policy into meaningful organizational change. Strengthening professional learning communities, expanding collaborative leadership networks, and encouraging reflective organizational learning may therefore enhance the long-term sustainability of educational innovation across Indonesian madrasahs. Through this perspective, innovative leadership behavior becomes not merely an individual characteristic of effective principals but a strategic organizational capability capable of continuously improving educational quality within increasingly complex educational environments.

Conclusion

This multisite study demonstrates that the development of the National Education Standards in madrasahs is strongly influenced by principals' innovative leadership behavior, which extends beyond conventional managerial and administrative functions. The findings reveal that innovative leadership is

manifested through four interconnected behavioral stages: opportunity exploration, idea generation, idea championing, and idea implementation. These stages collectively enable principals to identify strategic opportunities, transform institutional challenges into innovative programs, mobilize organizational commitment, and institutionalize innovation through systematic planning, collaborative implementation, continuous monitoring, and reflective evaluation. Consequently, the successful implementation of the National Education Standards is not solely determined by compliance with educational regulations but by principals' capacity to translate policy into sustainable organizational innovation. This finding confirms that innovative leadership behavior constitutes a strategic mechanism for improving educational quality within Islamic educational institutions.

The principal contribution of this study lies in the development of an Innovative Leadership Behavior Model for Madrasah Development, which conceptualizes innovative leadership as an integrated and cyclical behavioral process rather than as a collection of isolated leadership practices or leadership styles. Unlike previous studies that predominantly examine transformational, instructional, or distributed leadership independently, this study demonstrates that educational innovation emerges through the sequential interaction of opportunity exploration, idea generation, idea championing, and idea implementation. The proposed model extends the Innovative Work Behavior framework into the context of educational leadership while enriching the literature on Islamic educational leadership by providing empirical evidence from multisite research conducted in Indonesian madrasahs. The findings therefore contribute theoretically to leadership studies by offering a behavioral perspective for understanding how principals initiate, sustain, and institutionalize innovation to improve educational quality.

Despite these contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study was conducted in two public madrasahs within the same regional context, which may limit the transferability of the findings to other educational institutions with different organizational characteristics, governance structures, or socio-cultural environments. Furthermore, the study focused primarily on principals' leadership behavior without examining its relationship with institutional performance or student learning outcomes. Future research is therefore encouraged to investigate the applicability of the proposed Innovative Leadership Behavior Model across diverse educational settings, including private schools, pesantren, and higher education institutions. Quantitative, mixed-methods, or longitudinal studies are also recommended to validate the relationships among innovative leadership behavior, organizational innovation, school effectiveness, and educational quality, thereby strengthening the theoretical and practical development of innovative leadership within contemporary educational organizations.

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