

# Empowering school community: A study of participatory leadership in madrasah

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## Abstract

This study aims to examine the empowerment of school members through the implementation of participatory leadership at MAN Konawe Selatan. Participatory leadership is seen as a strategic approach to increasing the active involvement of all members of the school community the principal, teachers, educational staff, and students in the decision-making process and management of the school. This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive study type. Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies. Research informants included the principal, vice principal, teachers, educational staff, and student representatives. Data analysis was carried out through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results show that participatory leadership at MAN Konawe Selatan is realized through the involvement of school members in program planning, collective decision-making, and strengthening communication and collaboration between members of the school community. The implementation of participatory leadership has a positive impact on increasing the sense of belonging, responsibility, and performance of school members, as well as creating a conducive and democratic work climate. However, this study also found obstacles in the form of differences in participation levels and time constraints in implementing deliberations. Overall, participatory leadership has proven to play a crucial role in fostering the empowerment of school members and strengthening sustainable madrasah governance.

## Keywords

School member empowerment, Participatory leadership, Madrasah

## Introduction

Empowering the school community is a strategic aspect in improving the quality of education and the sustainability of educational unit management [1];[2]. Schools are not only understood as learning institutions, but also as social organizations that require the active involvement of all members of the community, including the principal, teachers, education staff, students, and the school committee [3];[4]. Low levels of school

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community participation often result in a weak sense of ownership, minimal innovation, and suboptimal implementation of school programs [5].

In the context of educational management, leadership plays a central role in encouraging participation and empowerment of the school community [6]. Participatory leadership emphasizes openness, deliberation, collaboration, and the involvement of the school community in the decision-making process [7]. This leadership model is considered relevant to modern management principles and the values of democracy and collectivism [8], which align with the culture of education in Indonesia, particularly in the madrasah (Islamic school) environment.

State Islamic Senior High Schools (MAN), as Islamic educational institutions, face dual challenges: the demand for improving academic quality while simultaneously strengthening Islamic values and character. Amidst the dynamics of changing educational policies and the complexity of institutional management, the implementation of participatory leadership is a strategic alternative in creating inclusive and sustainable madrasah governance. However, in practice, not all madrasas are able to optimize the role of the school community as active participants in institutional development.

MAN 2 Konawe Selatan, one of the state madrasas in Southeast Sulawesi, has demonstrated efforts to strengthen the participation of the school community in madrasa management. This phenomenon is interesting to study in depth to understand how participatory leadership is implemented, the forms of empowerment of the school community that emerge, and its impact on the work climate and performance of the madrasa. Therefore, this research is important to provide an empirical overview and theoretical contribution regarding the role of participatory leadership in empowering the school community within the madrasa environment.

The novelty of this research lies in the following aspects: First, The Context of Madrasahs as Islamic Educational Organizations. This research specifically examines participatory leadership in the context of state Islamic high schools (madrasah aliyah), which have different values, culture, and governance characteristics than public schools. This enriches the study of educational leadership based on Islamic values and collectivism. Second, Focus on Holistic Empowerment of School Community. Unlike previous research that tends to emphasize the role of the principal or teacher performance, this research positions the entire school community as subjects of empowerment, including educational staff and students, thus providing a more comprehensive perspective. Third, Participatory Approach to Madrasah Decision-Making. This research highlights the actual practice of participatory leadership in program planning, decision-making, and evaluation of madrasah activities, not just at the normative or conceptual level.

## Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with a narrative method [9]. This narrative approach was chosen to explore and reconstruct the experiences, perspectives, and practices of participatory leadership experienced and felt by school members in the context of empowerment at MAN Konawe Selatan. This method allows researchers to understand the meaning behind leadership actions, interactions, and dynamics in depth and contextually.

The research was conducted at State Islamic Senior High School (MAN) 2 South Konawe, Southeast Sulawesi Province. This school was chosen because it demonstrates leadership practices that emphasize participation, deliberation, and collaboration in its management, making it relevant to the focus of the study on empowering school residents.

The research subjects were determined through purposive sampling, with the criteria being that informants had direct involvement and experience in the leadership and management processes of madrasahs. The informants included the madrasah principal, vice-principal, teachers, education staff, and student representatives. The diversity of informants was intended to obtain a comprehensive narrative regarding participatory leadership practices from various perspectives of the school community.

Data collection was conducted using the following techniques: 1) In-depth Interviews. Interviews were conducted semi-structured to explore informants' narrative experiences regarding the involvement of school community members in planning, decision-making, program implementation, and evaluation of madrasah activities. Interviews focused on personal experiences, perceptions, and the meaning of participatory leadership in empowering the school community; 2) Participatory Observation. Observations were conducted by directly observing leadership activities and interactions among school community members, such as work meetings, madrasah deliberations, and other collaborative activities. This observation aimed to understand the dynamics of participation and communication patterns that occur in participatory leadership practices; 3) Documentation Study. Documentation study was conducted by reviewing official madrasah documents, including work programs, meeting minutes, internal policies, and archives of activities related to empowering the school community. Documentation data was used to complement and corroborate the data from the interviews and observations.

Data analysis was conducted using a narrative-thematic approach, with the following stages: 1) Data Transcription and Organization. Interview and observation data were transcribed verbatim and systematically organized according to the source and time of data collection; 2) Coding and Theme Identification. The researcher conducted open coding to identify significant events, interaction patterns, and meanings emerging from the informants' narratives. These codes were then grouped into main themes that represent participatory leadership practices and the empowerment of the school

community; 3) Narrative Flow Construction. The identified themes were organized into a coherent narrative flow, describing the process, challenges, and impact of participatory leadership in empowering the school community at MAN 2 South Konawe; 4) Data Interpretation and Meaning. The final stage of analysis involved interpreting the informants' narratives reflectively and contextually, and linking them to participatory leadership theory and the concept of empowerment in education.

To ensure data validity, this study employed source and technique triangulation, comparing data from interviews, observations, and documentation. Member checking was also conducted by confirming the findings with key informants to ensure the data interpretations aligned with their experiences.

## Results

The results of this study are presented in the form of a thematic narrative that reflects the experiences, views, and practices of school residents regarding the application of participatory leadership in the empowerment process at MAN 2 Konawe Selatan. The research findings indicate that participatory leadership functions not only as a leadership style but also as a strategic mechanism in building involvement, a sense of ownership, and collective responsibility among school residents.

### *Participatory leadership practices at MAN 2 South Konawe*

Interviews and observations indicate that the madrasah principal implements participatory leadership through open communication and deliberation in all strategic decision-making. The madrasah principal actively involves the vice principal, teachers, and education staff in annual work program planning, internal policy development, and evaluation of madrasah activities.

Regular deliberations serve as a primary means of fostering community participation. In these forums, the school community is given space to openly express opinions, criticisms, and suggestions. This practice fosters a culture of democratic dialogue and strengthens egalitarian working relationships between the principal and the school community.

### *Forms of school community empowerment*

Empowerment of the school community at MAN 2 South Konawe is manifested in several main ways. First, by granting trust and delegating authority to teachers and educational staff in managing academic and non-academic programs. Teachers are given the freedom to develop innovative learning and extracurricular activities according to their potential and competencies.

Second, by actively involving educational staff in the management of madrasah administration and services. Educational staff not only play a technical role but are also involved in the planning and evaluation of educational services. Third, students are

empowered through student organizations and involvement in madrasah activities, such as religious, social, and character development activities.

### *Dynamics of school community participation*

Research findings reveal that the level of participation of school residents is dynamic and varied. Some teachers and educational staff demonstrate active participation and high levels of initiative in all madrasah activities. However, some school residents still demonstrate limited participation, particularly in strategic decision-making forums.

These differences in participation levels are influenced by factors such as work experience, workload, and the confidence of school residents in expressing their opinions. Nevertheless, the implementation of participatory leadership can create a work climate that encourages school residents to gradually increase their involvement.

### *The impact of participative leadership on the madrasah work climate*

The research results show that participatory leadership has a positive impact on the work climate at MAN 2 South Konawe. The school community perceives a more open, harmonious, and respectful work environment. A sense of belonging to the madrasah increases along with active involvement in the decision-making process.

Furthermore, participatory leadership also contributes to increased motivation and responsibility among the school community. Teachers and other educational staff feel valued and recognized for their roles, resulting in improved performance and commitment to achieving the madrasah's goals.

### *The meaning of participatory leadership for empowering school community*

Narratively, the school community interprets participatory leadership as a form of humanistic and inclusive leadership. This leadership is seen as capable of creating a shared learning space, strengthening solidarity, and fostering collective awareness of the importance of each individual's role in the development of the madrasah.

Participatory leadership is not simply understood as a division of tasks, but as a process of building awareness, trust, and ongoing collaboration. Thus, the empowerment of the school community at MAN 2 South Konawe occurs as a dynamic and contextual social process.

## **Discussion**

The research results show that participatory leadership at MAN 2 Konawe Selatan plays a strategic role in encouraging the sustainable empowerment of the school community. This finding confirms that leadership is not solely understood as a decision-making process by the leadership, but rather as a collective effort involving the entire school community in the management and development of the madrasah.

### *Participatory leadership as an instrument of empowerment*

The participatory leadership implemented by madrasah principals is reflected in open communication, deliberation in decision-making, and the delegation of authority to the school community. This practice aligns with participatory leadership theory, which emphasizes the importance of involving organizational members as active participants in the leadership process. Involving the school community in the planning and evaluation of madrasah programs strengthens a sense of belonging and collective responsibility, key indicators of empowerment in educational organizations.

In the madrasah context, participatory leadership also aligns with Islamic values such as deliberation (shura), justice, and togetherness. The integration of these values makes participatory leadership not only managerial but also normative and cultural, making it more easily accepted by the school community.

### *Empowering school community and strengthening organizational climate*

Empowerment of the school community at MAN 2 South Konawe is realized through the provision of trust and opportunities to contribute according to their respective roles and competencies. Teachers are empowered to innovate in learning and student development activities, while educational staff are involved in the management of the madrasah's administrative and managerial services. Students are also given space to participate through student organizations and extracurricular activities.

These findings support empowerment theory, which emphasizes that trust, autonomy, and support are important factors in increasing individual motivation and performance. The open and collaborative work climate created through participatory leadership has a positive impact on working relationships, solidarity, and the school community's commitment to the madrasah's vision and mission.

### *Dynamics and variation of school community participation*

Although participatory leadership has been implemented, this study reveals varying levels of participation among school members. Differences in background, experience, and workload influence the level of involvement of school members in the decision-making process. These findings indicate that empowerment is a gradual process that requires ongoing mentoring and capacity building.

This situation aligns with the view that participatory leadership does not automatically produce optimal participation but rather requires a supportive organizational culture, built trust, and individual readiness for active involvement. Therefore, the role of the madrasah principal as a facilitator and motivator is crucial in maintaining the sustainability of participatory leadership practices.

### *Challenges of implementing participatory leadership*

The research also revealed several challenges in implementing participatory leadership, such as limited time for deliberations, administrative burdens, and differing perspectives among school members. These challenges reflect the complex and

dynamic reality of madrasah management. However, participatory leadership provides a space for constructive dialogue to manage differences and find shared solutions.

These findings reinforce the argument that participatory leadership is not without its obstacles, but it has high adaptive potential in addressing challenges facing educational organizations. With a flexible and communicative approach, participatory leadership can be an effective strategy in maintaining the stability and sustainability of madrasah governance.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that participatory leadership plays a strategic role in fostering the empowerment of the school community at MAN 2 South Konawe. The implementation of participatory leadership is realized through open communication, deliberative decision-making, and the active involvement of the school community in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of madrasah programs. These practices foster a sense of ownership, collective responsibility, and commitment from the school community to madrasah development. The empowerment of the school community is reflected in the increased trust, autonomy, and participation of teachers, education staff, and students, in accordance with their respective roles and competencies. Participatory leadership also positively contributes to the creation of a democratic, harmonious, and collaborative work climate, which impacts the motivation and performance of the school community. However, this study identified challenges in implementing participatory leadership, such as differing levels of participation, time constraints, and administrative burdens. However, these challenges can be managed through an adaptive and sustainable leadership approach. Overall, participatory leadership has proven to be a relevant and effective approach in empowering the school community and strengthening madrasah governance towards sustainable improvement in educational quality.

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