

## The Role of Principal Leadership in Managing Internal Conflicts at Zamzam Integrated Islamic School Cilongok

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores the strategic role of school principals in managing internal conflicts at Zamzam Integrated Islamic School (ZIIS) Cilongok. Using a qualitative case study approach with interviews, observations, and document analysis involving principals, teachers, and staff, the findings reveal that principals play a central role in conflict resolution through dialogical, inclusive, and consensus-based approaches. Mediation, compromise, and accommodation of diverse perspectives were identified as effective strategies, and when managed constructively, conflicts contributed to institutional reform and improvement. The transformational leadership style adopted by the principal fostered trust, collaboration, and a conducive working atmosphere. The study concludes by recommending the strengthening of principals' conflict management capacity and the promotion of collaborative leadership in contemporary Islamic educational governance.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The school principal holds a strategic position in directing the vision, shaping the atmosphere, and determining the quality of the educational environment. A positive and supportive school climate greatly influences the effectiveness of the learning process, enhances teacher performance, and optimizes student development. The principal's leadership role is also a key factor in institutional management, ensuring school continuity, and driving innovation and overall progress. Moreover, the principal bears a significant responsibility in responding to the ongoing dynamics and changes within the field of education (Azzahra & Hanif, 2024; Mahfud & Hanif, 2024; Widiyastuti & Hanif, 2024).

The role of a school principal extends beyond administrative duties; it also encompasses the functions of mentor, motivator, and driver of innovation. A competent school leader is capable of fostering harmonious relationships with teachers, cultivating a spirit of collaboration, and creating a work environment that supports both productivity and shared well-being (Fadhilatul Febriyanti et al., 2024; Arifin & Hanif, 2024). With a flexible leadership style that emphasizes collaboration, the principal can address various challenges such as limited facilities and resources, while still fostering a comfortable learning environment and enhancing the quality of the educational process (Ekawardani et al., 2024; Hanif & Junaidi, 2025).

Research indicates that school principals who adopt a participative leadership style, lead by example, and foster a sense of togetherness are capable of creating a conducive school climate. Efforts such as participatory planning, proportional task delegation, classroom supervision, and teacher recognition have proven effective in cultivating a school atmosphere that encourages innovation and a strong learning spirit (Azzahra & Hanif, 2024; Arifin & Hanif, 2024).

Amid the current changes and challenges in education, such as the implementation of online learning, principals who are adaptable and capable of creative thinking are highly needed to maintain a conducive learning environment. In addition, a principal's ability to build synergy with teachers, parents, and the school committee is also a crucial factor in establishing an environment that supports the success of the educational process (Hanif & Junaidi, 2025; Mahfud & Hanif, 2024).

Internal conflicts in schools, such as those between teachers, among students, or between teachers and administrative staff, are inevitable and often arise from differences in opinion, miscommunication, as well as varying personalities and interests. These conflicts can have negative impacts if not properly managed, hindering both individual and organizational performance. However, if handled appropriately, conflict can also generate positive outcomes for school development. The principal plays a significant role in addressing conflicts through the application of effective management strategies such as collaboration, accommodation, and compromise, involving all human resources in the school to seek joint solutions in a democratic and familial manner, while preserving a harmonious school environment. Additionally, approaches such as

deliberation, mediation, conciliation, and capacity building are also necessary to minimize the negative effects of conflict and maintain optimal school performance (Widiyastuti & Hanif, 2024; Hanif & Junaidi, 2025).

Nevertheless, school principals continue to face various challenges, including limited time to resolve conflicts and insufficient in-depth information regarding the root causes. Conflicts often stem from communication misunderstandings, differences in opinion, and gaps among school members, such as teachers, staff, and students. Therefore, adaptive and communicative leadership is essential, one that thoroughly explores the background of each issue and allocates adequate time for conflict resolution, so that conflicts do not persist and disrupt the learning environment. Through effective leadership, principals can manage conflicts constructively, preventing them from becoming obstacles to achieving the school's educational goals (Widiyastuti & Hanif, 2024; Hanif & Junaidi, 2025).

Zamzam Integrated Islamic School (SMA ZIIS) Cilongok was selected as the research site based on several considerations. This school is one of the rapidly growing modern Islamic schools in the Banyumas region, characterized by a diverse human resource profile, which increases the potential for internal conflict. Moreover, preliminary observations indicated that the school actively implements various leadership approaches, yet still experiences dynamic interpersonal conflicts among school members. The school's openness to research activities and its strategic location further supported its selection as the research setting. Through this study, it is expected that valuable insights will be generated to improve conflict management strategies at Zamzam Integrated Islamic School and contribute to the broader discourse on Islamic educational leadership, particularly in the context of managing internal school conflicts (Mahfud & Hanif, 2024; Azzahra & Hanif, 2024).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *School Leadership*

Educational leadership is the ability and process of influencing, guiding, coordinating, and mobilizing individuals or groups involved in the development of educational knowledge and the implementation of teaching and learning activities, so that educational processes can be carried out effectively and purposefully to achieve educational goals (Hanif & Junaidi, 2025; Arifin & Hanif, 2024). This type of leadership involves the role of the school principal or educational leader in directing and motivating all elements within the school to create a conducive learning environment and improve the overall quality of education (Widiastuti & Hanif, 2024; Azzahra & Hanif, 2024).

In implementing educational leadership, various leadership theories serve as important references for understanding how school principals can effectively manage their organizations. The following leadership theories are relevant in the educational context and provide a foundation for efforts to improve school quality (Mahfud & Hanif, 2024; Hanif & Barokah, 2025).

### ***Transformational Leadership***

This theory was developed by Bernard M. Bass (Bass & Avolio, 1994) and emphasizes a leader's ability to inspire and motivate followers to commit to the organization's vision and goals. The core elements of transformational leadership include four dimensions: Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration. This leadership style has proven effective in enhancing creativity, managing crises, and developing the potential of followers through guidance and support. In the field of education, transformational leadership enables school principals to act as agents of change who promote innovation and the development of human resources (Mahfud & Hanif, 2024; Hanif & Barokah, 2025).

Transformational leadership is one of the leadership approaches that emphasizes the development and motivation of individuals within an organization to achieve common goals. This concept was first introduced by James MacGregor Burns (1978) in his book *Leadership and Followership*, in which he distinguished between transactional and transformational leaders. A transformational leader not only performs managerial functions but also inspires and motivates followers to transcend personal interests for the sake of the group or organization. In the context of education, transformational leadership is effective in building active and motivated teams, empowering educators to think critically, explore new teaching methods, and foster an intellectual culture that is responsive to students' evolving needs. For example, the principal of MAN 3 Banyumas applies transformational leadership by encouraging teachers and students to become visionary, creative, and socially responsible individuals, in line with an educational vision that is ethical, innovative, and transformative (WIDIASTUTI & Hanif, 2024; Hanif & Junaidi, 2025).

### ***Transactional Leadership***

Transactional leadership focuses on achieving goals through structure, rules, and a system of rewards and punishments. This style emphasizes clear management and strict supervision to ensure performance aligns with established standards. In educational practice, transactional leadership helps maintain operational stability and the achievement of short-term objectives. The integration of transformational and transactional leadership can create a balanced approach between innovation and stability within the school setting (WIDIASTUTI & Hanif, 2024; Mahfud & Hanif, 2024).

This leadership style is characterized by clear and specific directives from the leader to subordinates. In this model, rewards are given to subordinates who successfully meet predetermined targets or standards. Conversely, punishments are imposed in cases of failure to achieve targets or violations of established rules. The communication pattern tends to be one-way, from superior to subordinate, with a strong emphasis on task execution according to instructions. The main focus of this leadership style is efficiency, increased productivity, and the optimal achievement of short-term goals (Hanif & Junaidi, 2025; Hanif & Barokah, 2025).

Transactional leadership has been shown in several studies to have a positive and significant impact on employee performance (Azzahra & Hanif, 2024; Arifin & Hanif, 2024). When leaders implement a clear system of rewards

and punishments, employees tend to be more motivated to achieve established targets. However, other research findings suggest that the influence of transactional leadership on performance is not always significant. This depends on the organizational context and other factors such as the level of employee motivation and the prevailing work culture within the institution (Hanif & Salsabillah, 2024).

About employee loyalty and job satisfaction, transactional leadership can foster greater loyalty when applied consistently and fairly. Employees feel appreciated for their achievements, which in turn can strengthen their attachment to the organization (Hidayati & Hanif, 2025). This leadership style also impacts job satisfaction, especially when combined with high work motivation and strong employee engagement (Hanif & Barokah, 2025). Furthermore, transactional leadership can help establish a structured and responsive organizational communication climate. Clear, goal-oriented communication is crucial for achieving strategic organizational targets, particularly in sectors that demand precision, speed, and adaptive leadership, such as healthcare and construction (WIDIASTUTI & Hanif, 2024).

### *Situational Leadership*

Situational leadership is a leadership model that emphasizes the importance of a leader's flexibility and adaptability in adjusting their leadership behavior according to the situation and the needs of individuals or groups being led (Anggraeni & Hanif, 2025; Mahfud & Hanif, 2024). In this model, the leader does not rely on a single style but can modify their approach based on the readiness, competence, and motivation of subordinates. Situational leadership theory is relevant in education as it highlights that leadership styles must align with the conditions and specific needs of each situation. An effective school principal can adapt their leadership approach according to the context of the problem, the maturity level of teachers and students, and the dynamics of the school environment (Hanif & Junaidi, 2025).

Situational leadership is characterized by the leader's ability to adjust their leadership style based on the condition and situation at hand, including factors such as the maturity, experience, and motivation of team members (Azzahra & Hanif, 2024). This model includes four main leadership styles: telling, selling, participating, and delegating. Each style is applied according to the readiness and capability of the individuals or groups being led. Flexibility and adaptability are the key factors in the success of this leadership model, as leaders are required to accurately assess the situation and respond with the most effective approach to achieve organizational goals (Widiyastuti & Hanif, 2024).

After understanding various leadership theories relevant to the educational context, it is important to further examine how the role of the principal is implemented in school management to improve the quality of education and the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. Effective school management heavily depends on the principal's role in enhancing educational quality and fostering an efficient learning environment. The principal serves as a leader, decision-maker, communicator, supervisor, and

human resource developer within the school. Through effective leadership, the principal provides direction and motivation to teachers and staff to improve the quality of instruction and directly supervises the learning process (Azzahra & Hanif, 2024; Arifin & Hanif, 2024). In addition, the principal is also responsible for the planning, implementation, and supervision of all school activities, as well as resolving emerging issues to ensure the smooth operation of school management (Hanif & Junaidi, 2025).

In the context of educational quality management, the principal plays a vital role in formulating educational policies, conducting assessments and evaluations, developing human resources, managing school resources, and engaging stakeholders through effective communication. The principal is also responsible for problem-solving and empowering the school management team to drive continuous improvement (Hanif & Salsabillah, 2024; Hanif & Efendi, 2024). This role has a positive impact not only on an individual level but also collectively, in alignment with the school-based management (SBM) approach as an effort to enhance the overall quality of educational institutions. Furthermore, the principal acts as a key driver in implementing School-Based Management, particularly in managing educational facilities and infrastructure according to school needs and established standards (Muslihudin & Hanif, 2024). In executing school empowerment programs, the principal is involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of such programs to ensure their success and sustainability (Hanif & Barokah, 2025).

Overall, the principal serves as a visionary, facilitator, motivator, and driver of innovation who strengthens staff coordination and promotes improved performance among teachers and staff to achieve optimal educational goals. Therefore, effective school management is highly dependent on the principal's strategic role in managing resources, learning processes, and the comprehensive development of the school.

### ***Conflict Management in Education***

Conflict management in education is a critical process that involves identifying, analyzing, and resolving conflicts within the school environment. Such conflicts may arise from various sources, including differences in values, interests, or ineffective communication between teachers, students, and administrative staff. Therefore, educational leaders, such as school principals, must possess strong conflict management skills to create a conducive learning environment (Hanif & Junaidi, 2025; Widiyastuti & Hanif, 2024).

Conflict management, as defined by Murn (2018), involves a series of actions taken to manage and resolve conflicts constructively. This process includes interactions among the involved parties as well as the influence of external stakeholders. In the educational context, the goal of conflict management extends beyond merely resolving issues; it also aims to create a harmonious and productive atmosphere. Properly managed conflict can serve as a catalyst for growth and innovation, while poorly managed conflict can damage institutional performance and achievement. Therefore, effective conflict

management is a crucial element in establishing a high-quality educational ecosystem (Azzahra & Hanif, 2024; Mahfud & Hanif, 2024).

The stages of conflict management in education involve a structured process to ensure effective resolution. The first stage is conflict planning and analysis, where the principal identifies the issues, determines the root causes of the conflict, and recognizes the parties involved. This step is essential to understanding the dynamics of the conflict before taking further action (Hanif & Junaidi, 2025). The second stage is conflict assessment, which involves evaluating the condition of the conflict, whether it is still latent or approaching a critical point. This assessment helps determine the most appropriate resolution strategy (WIDIASTUTI & Hanif, 2024). The final stage is conflict resolution, which can be carried out through mediation between the conflicting parties or by using collaborative strategies to reach a mutual agreement (Azzahra & Hanif, 2024).

In the process of conflict management in schools, several resolution strategies can be applied according to the situation and the characteristics of the individuals or groups involved. Collaboration strategies involve all parties in finding solutions together. Accommodation is done by listening to the ideas of the other party and finding a middle ground. Compromise focuses on an agreement where all parties benefit. Meanwhile, coercion strategies are used by making decisions based on authority to ensure compliance with certain policies. Determining the appropriate strategy is key in building a harmonious atmosphere, encouraging development, and maintaining productivity in the educational environment (Mahfud & Hanif, 2024; Hanif & Barokah, 2025).

### ***The Relationship Between Leadership and Conflict Management***

Leadership style has a significant influence on conflict resolution within organizations, including in schools. Research indicates that democratic or participative leadership styles tend to result in more effective conflict management, as they involve all members in decision-making and problem-solving processes, thereby fostering a comfortable and harmonious environment (Arifin & Hanif, 2024; Azzahra & Hanif, 2024). In addition, transformational leadership has a strong and meaningful impact on conflict resolution, as transformational leaders can inspire, motivate, and encourage open communication and collaboration in seeking solutions (Widiyastuti & Hanif, 2024; Hanif & Junaidi, 2025). In contrast, transactional leadership does not show a significant effect on conflict resolution, as it focuses more on rules and rewards rather than dialogue and empowerment (Hanif & Salsabillah, 2024; Mahfud & Hanif, 2024). Therefore, selecting the appropriate leadership style, particularly democratic and transformational, is crucial for achieving effective conflict resolution and supporting organizational performance.

Understanding that leadership style plays a vital role in resolving conflicts within the school environment, it is also important to examine previous research findings that explore the relationship between school principal leadership and the dynamics of internal conflict within educational institutions. The following studies provide empirical foundations that reinforce the urgency of this research.

Research by AF & Nugraha (2023) shows that transformational leadership plays an active role in addressing conflicts within educational institutions. The head of the madrasah acts as a mediator and facilitator, emphasizing mediation, deliberation (*musyawarah*), and reconciliation (*islah*) approaches that are impartial and non-harmful to any party. This leadership style has proven effective in achieving fair and harmonious conflict resolution in the school environment (WIDIASTUTI & Hanif, 2024; Azzahra & Hanif, 2024).

Furthermore, the study by Wiratama et al. (2025) on student leadership training (LKMM-TD) found that effective training enhances participants' capacity to lead teams with motivation, make decisions based on situational analysis, and manage conflicts effectively. The participants were also able to apply constructive conflict resolution techniques to build harmonious working relationships, underscoring the importance of synergy between leadership and conflict management within an organization (Hanif & Junaidi, 2025; Mahfud & Hanif, 2024).

Similarly, research conducted by Ardhana et al. (2023) on the leadership of *kiai* in conflict management at Islamic boarding schools found that conflicts in *pesantren* often arise from diverse backgrounds, communication issues, and inconsistent leadership styles. Authoritarian leadership tends to exacerbate conflict, whereas communicative and consistent leadership is more effective in resolving disputes and fostering peace in educational settings (Hanif & Barokah, 2025; Hanif & Salsabillah, 2024).

All three studies consistently emphasize that the effectiveness of conflict management is significantly influenced by leadership style and skills, both in formal and non-formal educational contexts. Participative, communicative, and values-based leadership approaches have been shown to facilitate constructive conflict resolution and contribute to the creation of a conducive learning environment.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a qualitative approach using a case study method conducted at Zamzam Integrated Islamic Senior High School (SMA ZIIS), Cilongok. The main objective of this research is to provide an in-depth description of the principal's role in managing internal conflicts. This approach allows the researcher to explore the social context and human behavior in a natural setting and to capture the complex dynamics between leaders and members of the school organization. The research is limited to a single secondary education institution, enabling a thorough exploration of leadership practices, interpersonal relationships among school members, and conflict resolution strategies employed. The study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of principal leadership in addressing internal conflicts to foster a harmonious and effective educational environment (Ultavia et al., 2023).

Data were collected through three main methods: participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the principal and several teachers who had direct experience with conflicts or their resolution processes. Observation was carried out through active involvement in school activities to directly observe

interactions, communication patterns, and the principal's responses to emerging dynamics. Document analysis included the review of school policy documents, meeting minutes, conflict resolution reports, and teacher performance evaluation records (Nasution, 2023). Participants in this study were selected purposively, namely, individuals considered to have the most insight and direct involvement in the principal's leadership and internal conflict management at Zamzam Integrated Islamic School, Cilongok.

A similar approach was used by Christanti & Hanif (2024), in their study of the principal's communication strategies through the morning apple. In their research, they examined how school principals use apple forums as a medium to build teacher discipline and motivation. Their study also applied a case study method with data triangulation techniques through interviews, observations, and documentation. This model is considered effective for examining leadership practices in microcontexts such as schools.

In addition, research by Suparyo et al. (2024) indicates that case studies in leadership research can be used to capture the characteristics of leadership styles and their impact on social relations within the school. In the context of conflict management, the case study method provides a platform for closely examining the interaction process between the principal and teachers, including decision-making and conflict mediation. The main instrument in this study is the researcher, by the fundamental principle of qualitative research, which relies on the human researcher as the key instrument for capturing meaning in the field (Rasyid, 2022). To support the validity of the data, the researcher also employed interview guidelines, observation sheets, and documentation formats.

The research was carried out in several stages: (1) Pre-research stage, which involved initial observations at Zamzam Integrated Islamic School Cilongok and building rapport with the principal, teachers, and staff who served as participants; (2) Data collection stage, which included observing leadership activities and interactions among school members, conducting in-depth interviews with the principal and relevant parties, and analyzing documents such as policy records and conflict resolution reports; (3) Data analysis stage, which was conducted simultaneously with data collection by categorizing relevant findings; (4) Triangulation stage, aimed at testing data validity by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation; and (5) Research reporting stage, which involved summarizing the findings and compiling the study results systematically (Abdussamad, 2021).

In this study, data were obtained through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Observation was conducted directly within the environment of Zamzam Integrated Islamic School, Cilongok, to understand how the principal performed their leadership role in managing internal conflicts among teachers, staff, and students. In-depth interviews were used to explore the perceptions and subjective experiences of the principal, teachers, and staff regarding the conflict management strategies implemented. Meanwhile, document analysis was employed to obtain written data such as meeting minutes, school policies, conflict resolution reports, and other documents that supported the field findings (Nasution, 2023).

The data analysis model used in this study is the interactive model by Miles & Huberman (1994), which consists of three main components: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction was carried out by filtering interview and observation results into thematic categories. The data were then presented narratively to systematically illustrate the dynamics of conflict management. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on patterns identified in the data, and the results were verified through source and method triangulation to ensure the validity of the findings.

The trustworthiness of the data was reinforced through triangulation techniques (source, method, and theory), member checking (confirming findings with the informants), and peer debriefing to minimize researcher subjectivity. This study also adhered to ethical research principles by providing clear explanations to all informants regarding the purpose and benefits of the study, as well as ensuring the confidentiality of their identities. By employing this approach, the research aims to generate a comprehensive, authentic, and contextual understanding of how the principal exercises leadership in managing and resolving internal conflicts within a modern Islamic school setting.

## **RESEARCH RESULT**

Interviews with the principal of Zamzam Integrated Islamic Senior High School revealed that internal conflict is an inevitable part of school organizational dynamics. Conflicts frequently arise from issues such as the allocation of teaching hours, differences in instructional methods, and miscommunication between teachers and administrative staff. This confirms that conflict does not stem from ill intent but rather from differing perceptions, responsibilities, and interests among stakeholders.

In a broader context, conflict can also be triggered by tensions rooted in the socioeconomic dynamics of the surrounding community, which are reflected within the school environment. As noted by (Hanif et al., 2024), "In the current era of globalization, socioeconomic changes are becoming increasingly complex and rapid. These changes often result in inequality and disparities that affect access to education." Such structural tensions may manifest in internal school interactions, requiring conflict management strategies that are sensitive to the school's social context.

The researcher's observations at Zamzam Integrated Islamic Senior High School indicated that minor tensions between teachers or between teachers and staff often occur before major school events, such as final assessments or annual programs. These tensions are frequently caused by unequal workloads and misaligned communication. This demonstrates that, without proper management, conflict can disrupt the work environment and lower performance. Internal school documentation also revealed several cases of personal complaints among teachers that required the principal's intervention. If left unaddressed, such cases can escalate into open conflicts that negatively affect the organizational climate. This evidence reinforces the notion that internal conflict is a real phenomenon with potentially negative consequences if not managed promptly.

However, interviews also revealed that when conflicts are managed constructively, they can become opportunities for evaluation and systemic improvement. Mrs. Devi, the principal, cited an example in which a conflict over the teacher duty roster led to the creation of a new, more equitable rotation system that was mutually agreed upon. This process fostered a spirit of togetherness and openness among school members. In the broader context of social change, conflict also reflects responses to systemic complexity. Hanif & Rijal (2024) note that “socioeconomic change encompasses economic aspects such as GDP growth and unemployment rates, as well as social aspects such as family structure, cultural values, and political dynamics.” Thus, conflict within schools can be seen as a reflection of external pressures that simultaneously present opportunities for innovation in institutional governance.

Teachers who had previously been involved in conflicts stated that after being facilitated through *musyawarah* (deliberation), their relationships became stronger. Several teachers mentioned that once the conflict was resolved, they gained a better understanding of their colleagues’ personalities and work boundaries. This indicates that, when resolved through dialogue, conflict can strengthen working relationships. The school has also begun holding regular reflective meetings at the end of each semester to anticipate tensions that could escalate into conflict. This initiative has proven effective in reducing the frequency of complaints among staff. Therefore, well-managed conflict not only diffuses tension but also promotes a more reflective and participatory work culture.

The principal plays a key role in the conflict resolution process. Mrs. Devi explained that she consistently opens space for mediation and encourages *musyawarah* (deliberation) as the first step before making any administrative decisions. This strategy prevents conflict escalation and makes teachers feel involved. In cases of conflict between teachers, the principal does not immediately take sides but instead gathers information from multiple perspectives. She adopts a conciliation approach, acting as a neutral and fair mediator. This approach has successfully built trust in her leadership. Compromise and accommodation strategies are also used when the two parties cannot reach an agreement. For example, in the distribution of additional duties, the principal seeks middle-ground solutions that are acceptable to all. As a result, conflicts do not escalate, and all parties feel respected. This highlights the importance of leadership capacity in creating win-win solutions.

## DISCUSSION

The interview with Mrs. Devi, the principal of Zamzam Integrated Islamic Senior High School, revealed that her leadership style tends to be participative, democratic, and communicative. Mrs. Devi explicitly emphasized the importance of fostering a culture of open dialogue, deliberation (*musyawarah*) in problem-solving, and involving all elements of the school community in decision-making. This reflects the characteristics of transformational leadership as proposed by Bass & Avolio (1994), in which the leader acts as an inspirer and facilitator of change, encouraging loyalty and participation (WIDIASTUTI &

Hanif, 2024; Azzahra & Hanif, 2024). In the context of conflict management, the principal demonstrated social sensitivity and a collaborative approach in addressing emerging dynamics. Conflicts at Zamzam Integrated Islamic School—such as differences of opinion among teachers, tensions between teachers and administrative staff, or individual personality clashes—were approached through musyawarah, mediation, and a familial spirit. This strategy aligns with the collaborative conflict management model suggested by Erwin (2023), in which the leader seeks mutually beneficial solutions that promote long-term harmony (Hanif & Junaidi, 2025; Mahfud & Hanif, 2024).

The findings of this study are consistent with those of AF & Nugraha (2023), who concluded that transformational leadership, when practiced with neutrality and open communication, is effective in de-escalating conflict within institutions. Additionally, findings from Puspanegara et al. (2023) also revealed that democratic and open leadership approaches can create a comfortable and productive work environment. Leadership that emphasizes dialogue has also been shown to reduce resistance while enhancing the loyalty of school community members (WIDIASTUTI & Hanif, 2024; Azzahra & Hanif, 2024; Hanif & Barokah, 2025).

Nevertheless, challenges remain. Mrs. Devi acknowledged that maintaining neutrality and objectively gathering information are major obstacles in resolving conflicts. Additionally, limited time due to administrative workloads often reduces the effectiveness of the principal's interventions. This is supported by the findings of Manzil Silsa Sabila et al. (2024), who noted that the workload of school principals frequently hampers the ability to engage in in-depth conflict resolution efforts (Hanif & Junaidi, 2025; Mahfud & Hanif, 2024). Despite these challenges, Mrs. Devi's leadership is recognized for successfully fostering a communicative and open organizational culture, where teachers and staff feel safe to express concerns. This demonstrates that a leadership style grounded in empathy, openness, and equality can create a harmonious and productive educational ecosystem. Thus, the role of the school principal is not only to provide direction but also to serve as a guardian of social harmony within the educational institution.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study examined the role of the principal in the process of internal conflict management at Zamzam Integrated Islamic Senior High School, Cilongok, using a qualitative case study approach. Based on in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis, it was found that internal conflict within schools is a common and inevitable condition. Conflicts arise from interpersonal interactions influenced by differences in perception, interests, workload, and communication styles. In general, conflicts occur among teachers, between teachers and staff, or within internal coordination processes related to duties and responsibilities in the school environment. Unmanaged conflict can negatively affect the work climate, productivity, and relationships among school members. However, when managed with the appropriate approach, conflict can become a means of reflection and a starting point for organizational improvement. In the context of Zamzam Integrated Islamic School, the principal, Mrs. Devi, plays a

central role in guiding conflict resolution through approaches such as deliberation (*musyawarah*), mediation, collaboration, accommodation, and compromise. Her approach is participative, open, and dialogical to foster a harmonious and productive working atmosphere.

The leadership style demonstrated by the principal in this case reflects the characteristics of transformational leadership, in which the leader not only regulates and controls but also inspires, mediates, and accompanies school members in resolving issues. This strategy shows that leadership in conflict management is not merely about assertiveness, but also about the ability to listen, act fairly, and build trust. The principal acts as a facilitator in every problem-solving process, rather than as an absolute decision-maker. This approach has had a positive impact on increasing openness, loyalty, and collective spirit within the school community. Furthermore, this study highlights that the effectiveness of conflict management in schools is also highly influenced by the principal's social sensitivity to interpersonal and organizational dynamics. Principals who are attuned to emerging tensions, able to gather comprehensive information, and maintain neutrality in each conflict case tend to be more successful in de-escalating tensions and fostering reconciliation. This aligns with findings in various studies that emphasize the importance of communicative and participatory leadership in resolving internal conflicts within educational institutions.

Another important finding is that positively managed conflicts often lead to the emergence of new, fairer, and more participatory policies. For instance, a conflict over the teacher's duty schedule led to the creation of a consensus-based rotation system. Similarly, a conflict regarding the roles between teachers and administrative staff resulted in a clearer and more transparent division of responsibilities. This demonstrates that conflict should not always be viewed as a threat, but rather as an opportunity for system improvement and strengthening. In the context of modern Islamic education, such as at Zamzam Integrated Islamic School, values such as *musyawarah* (deliberation), justice, brotherhood, and shared responsibility are highly relevant as foundations for conflict management. The principal's approach, non-authoritarian yet firm and communicative, has been key in defusing potential conflicts and maintaining a conducive learning environment. Thus, it can be concluded that the success of conflict management is closely linked to the leadership style adopted by the principal and the communication culture cultivated within the school. This study reinforces the notion that the role of a school principal is not confined to administrative management but also encompasses the socio-psychological dimension of fostering organizational harmony. Inspirational and humanistic leadership holds significant potential for uniting diverse individuals within the complex environment of a school. Amid ongoing social changes, principals are expected not only to act as educational administrators but also as adaptive, reflective, and empathetic leaders in navigating transformation.

## ADVANCED RESEARCH

Building on these findings, future research should advance by employing a multi-case comparative study across different Islamic and non-Islamic schools to capture variations in conflict management practices, leadership styles, and cultural values. A mixed-methods design integrating social network analysis, surveys, and ethnographic observation could provide a deeper understanding of how interpersonal dynamics, communication patterns, and organizational culture shape conflict resolution outcomes. Longitudinal research would also be valuable to examine how principals' transformational and participatory leadership strategies sustain harmony and institutional resilience over time. Furthermore, incorporating digital ethnography could reveal the role of online communication platforms in triggering or mitigating school conflicts. By exploring these dimensions, advanced research can contribute to the development of a more comprehensive model of conflict management in education that integrates psychological, organizational, and cultural perspectives, thereby offering actionable insights for policy and practice in contemporary educational governance.

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