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## The Effects of Principal Leadership, Exemplary Leadership, and Decision-Making on The Job Satisfaction of Teachers at Public High Schools in Jambi Province

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**Abstract:** In this study, teacher job satisfaction at public high schools in Jambi Province is viewed as related to the quality of principal leadership, exemplary leadership, and the decision-making process. This study aims to analyze the direct and indirect effects of the principal's leadership (X1), exemplary leadership (X2), and decision-making (X3) on teachers' job satisfaction (X4). The study employs a quantitative approach with an explanatory causal survey design. Data were collected via a 15 Likert-scale questionnaire from 96 civil servant teachers selected through proportionate stratified random sampling from a population of 836 teachers at three public high schools representing the Jambi Province region. Analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics and path analysis with the aid of SPSS and SEM. The results showed that the principal's leadership had a significant direct effect on teachers' job satisfaction with a path coefficient of 0.320,  $t = 3.276$ ,  $\text{Sig.} = 0.001$ , and  $R = 0.102$ . Exemplary leadership also had a significant direct effect with a path coefficient of 0.479,  $t = 5.297$ ,  $\text{Sig.} = 0.000$ . The direct relationship between leadership and exemplary leadership and decision-making was not significant, while the direct effect of decision-making on teachers' job satisfaction was also reported as not significant (coefficient 0.032;  $t = 0.313$ ;  $\text{Sig.} = 0.755$ ). However, the source text reported an indirect effect of leadership and exemplary behavior on teachers' job satisfaction through decision-making, with determination contributions of 8.6% and 21.4%, respectively. The combined model of leadership, exemplary behavior, and decision-making on teachers' job satisfaction was reported to have  $R = 0.500$ ,  $R = 0.250$ ,  $F = 10.246$ , and  $\text{Sig.} = 0.000$ . These findings are understood within the framework of Islamic Educational Management through the concepts of *uswatun hasanah*, *amanah*, justice, *shura*, and data-driven decision-making.

**Keyword:** Principal Leadership, Exemplary Leadership, Decision-Making, Teacher Job Satisfaction, Islamic Educational Management.

## INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental pillar in the development of civilization and human resources. Within the school ecosystem, teachers occupy a central position because the success of the educational process is greatly influenced by the quality of educational interactions,

professionalism, and teachers working conditions. Therefore, teacher job satisfaction cannot be separated from the school's organizational environment and the quality of the leadership managing it. This dissertation positions the principal as a figure who not only performs administrative functions but also provides direction, builds culture, serves as a role model, and makes decisions that impact teachers' work experiences.

Teacher job satisfaction is a positive psychological state formed from affective and cognitive evaluations of one's job and work experiences. Locke (1976) views job satisfaction as a pleasant or positive emotional state resulting from an evaluation of one's job or work experiences. Spector (1997) asserts that job satisfaction is multidimensional and can be viewed through various facets of work. Robbins and Judge (2019) also describe job satisfaction as a positive feeling toward one's job resulting from an evaluation of job characteristics. In the source study, the construct of job satisfaction was constructed through tasks, the work environment, rewards, psychological attachment to the institution, and leadership.

Leadership is understood as the process of influencing others to understand and agree on what needs to be done, as well as facilitating individual and collective efforts to achieve shared goals (Yukl, 2010). In the school context, Wahjosumidjo (2011) defines school principal leadership as the ability to influence the school community to collaborate effectively and efficiently in achieving the school's goals. In line with this, Mulyasa (2022) positions the principal as a leader who performs managerial and leadership functions to mobilize school resources. In this study, the principal's leadership is understood through managerial capacity, academic supervision, personality, and social-community aspects.

In addition to formal capacities, this study pays special attention to exemplary leadership. The perspective on exemplary leadership in this study integrates Bandura's (1986) \*modeling\* theory, the ethical leadership framework of Brown et al. (2005), and Mulyasa's (2022) perspective on educational leadership. Exemplary leadership is positioned as a manifestation of the \*uswatun hasanah\* value, particularly through integrity and trustworthiness, discipline and consistency, ethical communication and service, as well as dedication and spirituality. A principal who serves as a role model does not merely convey rules but demonstrates through behavior that the values demanded of teachers are also practiced by the leader (Mulyasa, 2022).

The third variable is decision-making. Siagian (2018) defines decision-making as the process of selecting alternative courses of action to solve problems and achieve organizational goals. In this study, decision-making encompasses problem identification and formulation, analysis of alternatives and selection, transparency and participation, as well as implementation and evaluation. From the perspective of Islamic Educational Management, this process is linked to the principle of \*shura\* or consultation, such that decisions are evaluated not only based on their final outcomes but also on the process followed (Siagian, 2018).

The research problem arises from the need to understand how formal leadership, moral exemplarity, and decision-making are related to teachers' job satisfaction. Conceptually, leadership is the process of influencing and facilitating the achievement of shared goals (Yukl, 2010), while job satisfaction is an individual's evaluation of their job and work experience (Spector, 1997; Robbins & Judge, 2019). Based on this, the study not only examines direct effects but also treats decision-making as an intervening variable.

Specifically, the study analyzes ten relationships, namely: the effect of leadership on job satisfaction; the effect of exemplary behavior on job satisfaction; the simultaneous effect of leadership and exemplary behavior on job satisfaction; the effect of leadership on decision-making; the effect of exemplary behavior on decision-making; the simultaneous effect of leadership and exemplary behavior on decision-making; the effect of decision-making on job satisfaction; the indirect effect of leadership on job satisfaction through decision-making; the indirect effect of exemplary behavior on job satisfaction through decision-making; and the combined effect of leadership, exemplary behavior, and decision-making on job satisfaction.

The conceptual contribution of this study lies in its effort to integrate school leadership competencies with prophetic exemplary behavior and the decision-making process within the framework of Islamic Educational Management. The source study states that the integration of the concept of *uswatun hasanah* into empirically testable constructs serves as a bridge between leadership theory and Islamic leadership values. Furthermore, decision-making is positioned as an intervening variable in the context of senior high school education in Indonesia.

Based on this framework, this article condenses the entire source research into a journal article format while retaining the terminology, design, sample, statistical results, interpretation, and conclusions as reported in the dissertation. This article does not include data or findings from sources outside the research document.

## METHOD

### Research Approach and Design

The study employed a quantitative approach using a causal survey method and an explanatory survey design. The quantitative approach was chosen because the study aimed to test hypotheses regarding relationships between variables based on numerical data. The analysis technique used was path analysis within the SEM framework, as described in the dissertation. The model distinguishes between direct and indirect effects among variables. The selection of the quantitative survey approach and the testing of relationships among variables followed the methodological framework of the source study (Sugiyono, 2022).

### Location, Population, and Sample

The study was conducted at three public high schools representing the geographical zones of Jambi Province: SMAN 4 Kerinci Regency as the Western Zone, SMAN 1 Jambi City as the Central Zone, and SMAN 1 Tanjung Jabung Timur as the Eastern Zone. The study's population consisted of 836 teachers, while the sample comprised 96 civil servant teachers. The sampling technique used was proportionate stratified random sampling.

**Table 1. Location, Population, and Sample**

| Components | Description                                                              |
|------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Location   | SMAN 4, Kerinci Regency; SMAN 1, Jambi City; SMAN 1, East Tanjung Jabung |
| Population | 836 teachers                                                             |
| Sample     | 96 civil servant teachers                                                |
| Sampling   | Proportional stratified random sampling                                  |
| Approach   | Quantitative                                                             |
| Design     | Explanatory causal survey                                                |
| Instrument | 1 5-point Likert scale questionnaire                                     |
| Analysis   | Descriptive statistics and path analysis using SPSS/SEM                  |

### Variables and Instruments

This study utilized four constructs. X1 is principal leadership; X2 is exemplary leadership; X3 is decision-making; and X4/Y is teacher job satisfaction. The instrument was developed through conceptual and operational definitions, the creation of a test blueprint, item development, validation, revision, empirical testing, and validity and reliability testing.

**Table 2. Variables and Instruments**

| Variables                       | Main Dimensions                                                                                                               | Number of Items |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Teacher job satisfaction (X4/Y) | Duties; work environment; recognition; psychological attachment to the institution; leadership                                | 48              |
| Principal leadership (X1)       | Managerial; academic supervision; personality; social-community                                                               | 40              |
| Exemplary leadership (X2)       | Integrity/trustworthiness; discipline/consistency; communication/service ethics; dedication/spirituality                      | 44              |
| Decision-making (X3)            | Problem identification/formulation; analysis of alternatives/selection; transparency/participation; implementation/evaluation | 44              |

### Data Collection and Analysis Techniques

Primary data were collected through questionnaires administered to respondents. Before the instrument was used in the actual study, a pilot test was conducted on 30 civil servant teachers from other schools not included in the study sample. Data analysis included analysis of the pilot study data, analysis of the analytical requirements, descriptive statistics, and hypothesis testing. The dissertation mentions the use of SPSS for the analysis of the pilot study and the analysis of the analytical requirements, as well as AMOS for SEM analysis and hypothesis testing; the results section also presents calculations performed using SPSS 27. Hypothesis testing used path coefficients and a significance level of 0.05. For direct relationships, testing decisions were based on a comparison of the calculated t-value with the table t-value and the significance level. For the joint model, the R, R<sup>2</sup>, F, and model significance measures were used. Indirect effects were reported through a model that included decision-making as an intervening variable. The presentation of statistical analyses follows the analytical framework used in the source studies (Sugiyono, 2022; Pallant, 2020).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Overview of the Research Model

The research model positions teachers job satisfaction as the final endogenous variable. Principal leadership and exemplary leadership are exogenous variables, while decision-making is positioned as an intervening variable. Conceptually, leadership provides direction and structure, exemplary leadership provides moral legitimacy, and decision-making translates leadership direction into organizational actions experienced by teachers.

**Table 3. Results of the Direct Effect Test**

| Relationship | Coefficient/Statistic                         | Sig.  | Reported Conclusion |
|--------------|-----------------------------------------------|-------|---------------------|
| X1 → X4      | $\beta = 0.320$ ; $t = 3.276$ ; $R = 0.102$   | 0.001 | Significant         |
| X2 → X4      | $\beta = 0.479$ ; $t = 5.297$                 | 0.000 | Significant         |
| X1 → X3      | $\beta$ is reported as $-0.070$ ; $R = 0.005$ | 0.499 | Not significant     |
| X2 → X3      | $\beta = 0.033$ ; $t = 0.324$ ; $R = 0.001$   | 0.747 | Not significant     |
| X3 → X4      | $\beta = 0.032$ ; $t = 0.313$ ; $R = 0.001$   | 0.755 | Not significant     |

The principal s leadership has a significant direct effect on teachers job satisfaction. The path coefficient of 0.320 indicates a positive relationship, as reported in the study. The coefficient of determination is  $R = 0.102$ . Exemplary leadership also has a significant direct effect with a coefficient of 0.479,  $t = 5.297$ , and a p-value of 0.000. On the path to decision-

making, neither leadership nor exemplary behavior showed a significant direct effect. Decision-making itself also did not show a significant direct effect on teachers job satisfaction.

### Simultaneous Effects

The combined model of leadership and exemplary behavior on teachers job satisfaction was reported to have an R of 0.250. When leadership, exemplary behavior, and decision-making were included together, the dissertation reported  $R = 0.500$ ,  $R = 0.250$ ,  $F = 10.246$ , and  $\text{Sig.} = 0.000$ . The author used these results to conclude that there is a simultaneous effect on teachers job satisfaction.

### Indirect Effect Through Decision-Making

The study also examined indirect pathways. Regarding the principal's leadership on teachers job satisfaction through decision-making, the dissertation reported an R Change of 0.086, or 8.6%. Regarding exemplary leadership on teachers job satisfaction through decision-making, the reported coefficient of determination reached 0.214, or 21.4%. Based on the tests presented in the manuscript, both indirect pathways were found to be significant.

**Table 4. Summary of Research Findings**

| No. | Hypothesis/Relationship                                          | Results                                                              |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | Leadership → teacher job satisfaction                            | Significant; $\beta$ 0.320; $t$ 3.276; Sig. 0.001                    |
| 2   | Exemplary Behavior → Teacher Job Satisfaction                    | Significant; $\beta$ 0.479; $t$ 5.297; Sig. 0.000                    |
| 3   | Leadership + role modeling → teacher job satisfaction            | Combined model R 0.250                                               |
| 4   | Leadership → decision-making                                     | Not significant; Sig. 0.499                                          |
| 5   | Exemplary Behavior → Decision Making                             | Not significant; $\beta$ 0.033; Sig. 0.747                           |
| 6   | Leadership + role modeling → decision-making                     | Not significant; R output 0.009                                      |
| 7   | Decision-making → teacher job satisfaction                       | Not significant; $\beta$ 0.032; Sig. 0.755                           |
| 8   | Leadership → satisfaction through decision-making                | Significant; R Change 0.086                                          |
| 9   | Exemplary behavior → satisfaction through decision-making        | Significant; contribution 0.214                                      |
| 10  | Leadership + exemplary behavior + decision-making → satisfaction | Significant; $R = 0.500$ ; $R = 0.250$ ; $F = 10.246$ ; Sig. = 0.000 |

## Discussion

### Principal Leadership and Teacher Job Satisfaction

The research results indicate a significant direct effect of the principal's leadership on teachers job satisfaction. This finding is situated within the framework that the principal serves as the key figure who sets the direction, establishes the structure, determines the division of labor, provides supervision, facilitates communication, and oversees teachers professional development. When teachers receive clear goals, support for their tasks, constructive supervision, and fair treatment, their work experience becomes more positive.

In the research construct, leadership is not limited to administrative functions. The managerial dimension relates to the ability to plan and organize work; academic supervision relates to professional development; the personality dimension relates to integrity and personal maturity; while the social-community dimension relates to the ability to build relationships. These four dimensions shape teachers experiences of their leaders and the organization.

These findings align with the discussion in the dissertation, which identifies leadership competencies as a key determinant of job satisfaction. Leadership provides strategic direction while creating organizational conditions that enable teachers to perform their work in a more focused manner. In the school context, leadership that is perceived as clear, fair, supportive, and consistent can strengthen teachers commitment to the institution.

### **Leadership Exemplarity and Teacher Job Satisfaction**

The leadership exemplary behavior coefficient of 0.479 and a significance level of 0.000 represent one of the study's key findings. The dissertation interprets exemplary behavior as a dimension that imbues managerial actions with a moral spirit. Teachers evaluate not only what the principal says but also the alignment between the values communicated and the behavior demonstrated.

The four dimensions of exemplary leadership used are integrity/trustworthiness, discipline/consistency, communication ethics/service, and dedication/spirituality. From the perspective of Islamic Educational Management ( ), all of these dimensions are related to *uswatun hasanah*. Exemplary leadership serves as a mechanism for building trust because leaders are seen as upholding the same values that are demanded of their subordinates.

The research discussion positions these findings as confirmation that formal leadership and moral exemplary behavior are complementary. Managerial competence provides the ability to manage a school, while exemplary leadership provides a moral dimension to a leader's behavior (Mulyasa, 2022). This view is consistent with the idea that leadership is not merely a matter of formal structure but also a process of influencing and facilitating the achievement of shared goals (Yukl, 2010).

### **Leadership, Exemplary Behavior, and Job Satisfaction in Simultaneous Terms**

The simultaneous influence of leadership and exemplary behavior on teachers job satisfaction demonstrates that these two dimensions can be understood as complementary. Leadership addresses aspects of direction, structure, planning, coordination, and supervision; exemplary behavior addresses aspects of values, integrity, consistency, and moral legitimacy. In teachers work experiences, these two dimensions can coexist.

The dissertation describes this relationship as an integration of technical capacity and moral character. Teachers need leaders who are capable of managing an organization while also serving as ethical role models. Therefore, the principal development model in this study is directed not only toward managerial competencies but also toward the development of leadership character.

### **Leadership and Decision-Making**

Test results indicate that the direct influence of leadership on decision-making is not significant. This finding is interesting because, conceptually, a school principal's managerial capacity is expected to be related to decision quality. The dissertation explains that decision quality does not automatically result merely from the presence of formal leadership. Decision-making is a distinct construct that encompasses the processes of problem identification, analysis of alternatives, transparency, participation, implementation, and evaluation.

Thus, a school principal may possess strong leadership capacity, but the quality of the decision-making process is still influenced by how information is gathered, how alternatives are analyzed, the extent to which teachers are involved, and how decisions are implemented and evaluated. This perspective reinforces the position of decision-making as a function with its own distinct characteristics within school governance.

### **Exemplary Leadership and Decision-Making**

The direct influence of exemplary leadership on decision-making was also reported to be insignificant. This finding indicates that a leader's moral character does not automatically result in measurable decision quality. Exemplary leadership provides an ethical foundation, but decisions still require an analytical process, adequate information, participation, and evaluation mechanisms.

Within the framework of Islamic Educational Management, this relationship can be explained by distinguishing between values and processes. *Uswatun hasanah* provides a moral example, while *shura* provides a consultative mechanism. Therefore, exemplary leadership becomes more meaningful when translated into a decision-making process that is transparent, participatory, fair, and accountable.

### **Decision-Making and Teacher Job Satisfaction**

Decision-making did not show a significant direct effect on teachers' job satisfaction. The reported path coefficient was 0.032 with  $t = 0.313$  and  $\text{Sig.} = 0.755$ . The dissertation interprets this finding to mean that decision-making alone does not automatically increase job satisfaction. Administrative decisions that are not perceived as fair, are not transparent, or do not provide tangible support for teachers do not, by themselves, result in a positive work experience.

These findings emphasize the quality of the decision-making process and context. Teachers need not only quick decisions but also decisions that are understandable, implementable, and accountable. Within Siagian's (2018) framework, decision-making is the process of selecting alternative courses of action to solve problems; therefore, the quality of the process is a crucial component of organizational decision-making.

### **Decision-Making as an Intervening Variable**

Although decision-making does not show a significant direct effect on job satisfaction, the source study reports an indirect effect of leadership and exemplary behavior on satisfaction through decision-making. For leadership, the indirect contribution is reported to be 8.6%, while for exemplary behavior, it is 21.4%.

Conceptually, these results suggest that decisions serve as a channel through which the quality of leadership and exemplary behavior is translated into organizational actions. Leaders may possess good competencies and character, but their impact on teachers' experiences is realized through decisions that are made, explained, implemented, and evaluated. In other words, the decision-making process serves as the space where leadership values take on an operational form (Siagian, 2018; Mulyasa, 2022).

Regarding the exemplary leadership pathway, this dissertation pays special attention to fairness, transparency, deliberation, and consistency. Moral exemplary leadership can foster trust in the decision-making process because leaders are perceived as consistent between their values and behavior (Brown et al., 2005; Mulyasa, 2022). This is where the concept of *\*syura\** is positioned as an ethical mechanism in decision-making, in line with the discussion of decision-making from a research perspective (Siagian, 2018).

### **Simultaneous Influence of Three Variables**

The model that simultaneously incorporates leadership, exemplary conduct, and decision-making shows significant results with  $R = 0.500$ ,  $R^2 = 0.250$ ,  $F = 10.246$ , and  $\text{Sig.} = 0.000$ , as reported in the source. This model positions job satisfaction as the result of the interaction of several managerial and moral aspects, rather than as a consequence of a single leadership characteristic.

The research discussion describes the three variables as complementary forces: leadership provides strategic direction (Yukl, 2010), exemplary behavior provides a model of conduct and ethical dimensions (Bandura, 1986; Brown et al., 2005), and decision-making provides a mechanism for selecting organizational actions (Siagian, 2018). This integration is interpreted within the context of the sample and research design used.

### **Conceptual Contributions of the Study**

The conceptual contribution of this study lies in the integration of educational leadership with the values of Islamic Educational Management. Exemplary behavior is not merely treated as a personal trait but is developed into a measurable academic construct. Decision-making is also not merely a part of managerial functions but is examined as an intervening variable linking leadership and teachers work experiences.

The dissertation argues that this model enriches the body of knowledge on Islamic educational leadership by incorporating *uswatun hasanah* into an empirical framework. The model also fills a research gap regarding the role of decision-making as an intervening variable in the relationship between leadership and teacher job satisfaction in high schools. Other novelties include the positioning of leadership as the primary determinant, exemplary behavior as a reinforcer of the work climate, and decision-making as an instrumental variable within the integrative model.

### **Practical Implications**

For school principals, the research findings direct attention toward simultaneously strengthening managerial, social, and personal competencies. Principals need to foster a culture that values teachers, creates opportunities for participation, and ensures that decisions are made objectively and responsibly. Exemplary behavior must be demonstrated in daily actions, not merely through normative statements.

For the Department of Education, the study recommends the training and development of school principals competencies with a focus on instructional leadership, moral exemplary behavior, and data-driven participatory decision-making. For teacher training institutions (LPTK) and graduate programs, the findings can serve as a reference for developing principal training programs that integrate leadership competencies with prophetic leadership values. For future researchers, the study recommends expanding the sample to include more districts/cities and types of educational institutions; using a longitudinal design; combining surveys with interviews and observations; testing additional constructs such as school culture, social support, workload, and psychological safety; and conducting psychometric audits and independent replication of the instruments.

### **Conceptual Foundation of Teacher Job Satisfaction**

In the source study, teacher job satisfaction is defined as an affective and cognitive evaluation of one's job and work experience. This construct does not merely describe a feeling of happiness toward one's job but encompasses teachers' assessments of teaching tasks, the work environment, recognition, psychological attachment to the institution, and leadership. This interpretation is important because teachers' work takes place within a complex organizational environment. Teachers simultaneously face demands related to learning, relationships with students, administration, coworkers, leadership, and school policies.

The teaching task dimension relates to teachers' experiences in carrying out their core work as educators; Spector (1997) identifies the *nature of work* as one facet of job satisfaction. The work environment relates to the work climate, interpersonal relationships, and working conditions; Mulyasa (2013) emphasizes the importance of a conducive work environment in the school context. Rewards relate to compensation and recognition, while psychological attachment relates to a sense of belonging to the institution. The leadership

dimension reflects teachers assessments of the principal's support, supervision, fairness, and exemplary behavior (Mulyasa, 2013; Robbins & Judge, 2019).

This framework positions job satisfaction as a variable that is both organizational and individual in nature. It is experienced by individual teachers but is shaped within the context of the employment relationship. Therefore, this study does not treat job satisfaction as a matter of personal motivation alone. Leadership, exemplary behavior, and organizational decisions are integral parts of the context that shapes this experience.

### **Conceptual Foundation of School Principal Leadership**

Principal leadership in this dissertation is constructed through four main dimensions: managerial, academic supervision, personality, and social-community. The managerial dimension emphasizes the principal's ability to plan programs, organize work, distribute tasks, manage resources, and ensure programs run smoothly. The academic supervision dimension relates to guiding the learning process and supporting teachers professional development. The personality dimension pertains to personal integrity and consistency, while the social-community dimension relates to the ability to build communication and relationships with the school community and stakeholders.

In the research instrument, the construct of leadership is translated into observable behaviors. Examples include the planned and systematic development of work programs, the involvement of stakeholders, the distribution of tasks based on competencies, the transparent management of finances and facilities, data-driven decision-making, and the facilitation of teacher competency development. Thus, leadership in this study is a combination of technical capacity, managerial behavior, and personal character.

Leadership is also understood as the process of influencing individuals and groups to achieve educational goals. Because the principal holds a formal position within the school structure, his or her behavior can influence teachers' perceptions of fairness, support, psychological safety, and opportunities for growth. This pathway of influence forms the basis for testing the relationship between X1 and X4.

### **Conceptual Foundation of Exemplary Leadership**

Exemplary leadership is a construct that distinguishes this study from discussions of leadership that focus solely on formal competencies. In this dissertation, exemplary leadership is linked to the concept of *uswatun hasanah*, meaning a good role model. This construct consists of integrity or trustworthiness, discipline and consistency, ethical communication and service, as well as dedication and spirituality.

Integrity and trustworthiness emphasize the alignment between a leader's professional responsibilities and their behavior; within the framework of ethical leadership, leaders are expected to serve as models of trustworthy behavior (Brown et al., 2005). Discipline and consistency emphasize that leaders practice the same standards they expect from teachers, in accordance with the *\*modeling\** principle in social learning theory (Bandura, 1986). Communication and service ethics relate to how school principals treat the school community, while dedication and spirituality position leadership work as a moral responsibility (Mulyasa, 2022).

Exemplary leadership in this study, therefore, has two aspects. The first aspect consists of observable daily behaviors, such as discipline, honesty, consistency, and responsibility. The second aspect comprises the underlying values that drive these behaviors. The integration of both is viewed as fostering teachers' trust in the leader. This trust then serves as a crucial context for experiences of job satisfaction and acceptance of school decisions.

### **Conceptual Foundations of Decision-Making**

Decision-making is positioned as a primary function of educational leadership. School principals face various strategic and operational decisions related to human resources, school programs, the learning process, facilities, welfare, and the resolution of organizational problems. This study operationalizes decision-making through four dimensions: problem identification/formulation, analysis of alternatives/selection, transparency/participation, and implementation/evaluation.

The first dimension ensures that problems are properly formulated before a course of action is selected. The second dimension requires the consideration of alternatives and the selection of an option. The third dimension emphasizes transparency and participation, while the fourth dimension ensures that decisions do not end with selection but are implemented and evaluated. This framework aligns with the understanding of decision-making as the process of selecting alternative courses of action to achieve organizational goals (Siagian, 2018).

From the perspective of Islamic Educational Management, this process relates to shura or consultation. Consultation emphasizes the involvement of relevant parties, careful consideration, and moral responsibility. Within this framework, good decisions are measured not only by the efficiency of the results but also by the fairness of the process and the leader's responsibility for its impacts.

### **Hypothesis Development and the Logic of Relationships Among Variables**

The relationship between X1 and X4 is based on the view that leadership is a process of influencing and facilitating individuals and groups toward a common goal (Yukl, 2010), whereas the principal, in an educational context, plays a role in mobilizing the school community and creating conditions that support the school's goals (Wahjosumidjo, 2011; Mulyasa, 2022). The relationship between X2 and X4 is based on \*modeling\* theory, which explains that a leader's behavior can serve as an example observed and learned by followers (Bandura, 1986), as well as on ethical leadership, which emphasizes the leader's moral exemplarity (Brown et al., 2005). Thus, the simultaneous relationship between X1 and X2 combines technical-managerial and moral aspects.

The relationships between X1 and X2 and X3 are based on the idea that decision-making is an essential part of managerial and leadership work. Siagian (2018) views decision-making as the process of selecting alternatives to solve problems. Therefore, the quality of decisions depends not only on the leader's character but also on information, analysis of alternatives, participation, implementation, and evaluation. The empirical results of this study indicate that this direct relationship is not significant.

The relationship between X3 and X4 is based on the assumption that a transparent, participatory, and accountable decision-making process can influence teachers' work experiences. This principle aligns with organizational decision-making theory, which emphasizes the process of selecting alternatives and considering the consequences of decisions (Siagian, 2018). However, the non-significant direct result suggests that decision-making, as a standalone process, does not sufficiently explain job satisfaction in the data from this study.

Thus, the research model posits that leadership quality and exemplary behavior provide managerial and moral resources, while decision-making serves as the mechanism for translating these into policy. Teachers' job satisfaction is the final outcome experienced at the level of work experience.

### **Discussion of the Integrated Hypothesis Testing Results**

The ten tests conducted revealed a pattern that was not entirely linear. The two main variables, leadership and exemplary behavior, had significant direct paths to job satisfaction. Conversely, neither of these variables had a significant direct path to decision-making.

Decision-making also did not have a significant direct path to job satisfaction. However, the indirect paths were still reported as significant. This pattern suggests that intervening variables do not necessarily have to be strong direct predictors to play a role in indirect pathways, as presented in the research model.

For leadership, a coefficient value of 0.320 indicates that an increase in leadership quality, as measured in this study, is positively correlated with an increase in job satisfaction. For exemplary behavior, the coefficient of 0.479 indicates a direct relationship that is reported to be stronger than that of the leadership coefficient. The dissertation then emphasizes that a leader's moral character and exemplary behavior are an important part of teachers' work experience. However, these findings must still be understood as results specific to the study sample, not as a universal measure applicable to all school principals.

When all three variables are included together, an R of 0.250 indicates that the model used in the study explains a certain portion of the variation in teachers' job satisfaction as reported. This means there is still variation not explained by the model. The dissertation itself acknowledges the need to consider other factors in future research, including school culture, social support, workload, and psychological safety.

From a managerial perspective, these findings point to the importance of integration. Managerial competence without integrity can result in procedural compliance but does not necessarily build trust. Exemplary leadership without managerial capacity can generate sympathy but does not necessarily lead to effective governance. Decisions made without data and participation can create uncertainty and resistance. Therefore, teacher job satisfaction is understood as the result of a leadership ecosystem, not merely a single administrative action.

The research also attaches special significance to the principle of shura. Consultation is not treated as a formality but as a mechanism to foster a sense of ownership, clarify the rationale behind decisions, and bridge the gap between policy and teachers' experiences. When teachers are involved in relevant decisions, they feel that their interests are taken into account. Within the research framework, this process becomes part of the effort to build job satisfaction and commitment.

From the perspective of exemplary leadership, fair and transparent decisions serve as a concrete manifestation of a leader's moral values. Exemplary leadership is not merely demonstrated through personal discipline but must be reflected in how leaders treat teachers, manage information, explain decisions, accept criticism, and take responsibility for the consequences of policies. This is what makes exemplary leadership relevant to job satisfaction through the decision-making process.

From a leadership perspective, data-driven decision-making is an operational manifestation of managerial competence. A principal who systematically designs programs, uses evidence, delegates tasks based on competencies, and evaluates decisions demonstrates that leadership is more than just authority. In teachers' experience, such behavior can serve as a source of clarity and organizational support.

Ultimately, this study views educational leadership as a unity of the ability to manage an organization and the ability to instill values. School principals provide direction; exemplary leadership strengthens trust; decision-making translates direction into action; and these organizational experiences are linked to teachers' job satisfaction. This framework forms the core of the study's conceptual contribution.

## CONCLUSION

The study shows that the principal's leadership has a significant direct effect on teachers' job satisfaction in the study sample, with a path coefficient of 0.320,  $t = 3.276$ , Sig. = 0.001, and  $R = 0.102$ . Exemplary leadership also has a significant direct effect on teachers' job satisfaction with a path coefficient of 0.479 and  $t = 5.297$ , Sig. = 0.000. These findings position

leadership capacity and exemplary behavior as two crucial elements in teachers work experiences.

Conversely, the direct effects of leadership and exemplary leadership on decision-making were not significant, and decision-making also did not show a significant direct effect on teachers job satisfaction. Nevertheless, the source study reported indirect effects of leadership and exemplary leadership on job satisfaction through decision-making, with reported contributions of 8.6% and 21.4%, respectively. Simultaneously, leadership, exemplary behavior, and decision-making produced a model with  $R = 0.500$ ,  $R = 0.250$ ,  $F = 10.246$ , and  $\text{Sig.} = 0.000$ .

Conceptually, the study underscores the importance of integrating technical-managerial competencies with moral exemplary behavior and a decision-making process that is fair, transparent, participatory, and data-driven. Within the framework of Islamic Educational Management, *uswatun hasanah* and *shura* are key concepts for understanding how leadership translates into teachers work experiences. The findings of this article apply to the context and sample of the source study and are not intended as a universal generalization for all schools.

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