



The Role of Leadership and Employee Empowerment in Improving the Quality of Islamic Higher Education

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Abstract: Higher education in the Cirebon region faces significant challenges in quality, with higher education institutions such as the Institute Pesantren Babakan and Cirebon facing competition. Factors such as infrastructure, curriculum, teaching methods, and human resources contribute to this gap. This study aims to examine leadership mentoring strategies in empowering lecturers and administrative staff at the Institute Pesantren Babakan, Cirebon, in an effort to improve the quality of higher education. A qualitative-participatory approach was used through Participatory Action Research (PTP) at the Institute Pesantren Babakan, Cirebon. The stages included the process of inculturation, problem formulation, strategic planning, program implementation, monitoring, and reflection. Data collection techniques included participatory action, observation, interviews, and documentation. Data were analyzed using a participation-based qualitative analysis method. The findings show a positive relationship between leadership, empowerment, and improving the quality of education. Effective leadership mentoring strategies include leadership training, managerial development workshops, mentoring sessions, and coaching. A holistic approach to empowering lecturers and staff contributes to increased professionalism, motivation, and quality of education. The evaluation showed a positive impact of leadership mentoring on the empowerment of lecturers and administrative staff in IPEBA. The results showed a positive relationship between leadership practices, empowerment of lecturers and administrative staff, and improved educational quality at IPEBA, recommending the adoption of similar approaches in other institutions to achieve similar improvements in educational quality.

Keywords: *Leadership, Empowerment, Quality of education, Institute Pesantren Babakan, Cirebon*

Introduction

Higher education in the Cirebon region currently faces significant challenges in terms of quality. Despite many efforts have been made, higher education institutions in Cirebon still lag behind in competition with excellent universities in other regions. Factors such as infrastructure, curriculum, teaching methods, and human resources contribute to this gap. These challenges not only affect reputation but also impact graduates' ability to compete in the job market (Kettunen et al., 2022; Musselin, 2018). Improving the quality of education is therefore an urgent priority to address in order to improve the competitiveness and relevance of higher education in the region.

The city of Cirebon itself is home to a number of higher education institutions (22 private universities and one state university), as is the mission of the Cirebon Regency government, which is to improve the quality of life of the community through the fulfillment of basic needs, including in the field of education. One of the private universities (PTS) located in the city of

Cirebon is the Institute Pesantren Babakan (IPEBA), which is located in Babakan Ciwaringin, Cirebon.

The Institute Pesantren Babakan, Cirebon, has been actively contributing in the field of education to improve human resources in the city of Cirebon for no less than 20 years. However, throughout this period, the number of prospective students who register each year has not increased steadily. It must be recognized that the prestige of universities in Cirebon in general is still inferior to that of the leading universities in big cities, which makes people prefer to enroll their children in these leading universities.

Although a number of educational institutions, such as IAIN Sheikh Nurjati Cirebon, UNSWAGATI, UNTAG, IPEBA, and several other educational institutions are located in the city of Cirebon, none of these prospective students have made universities in the city of Cirebon their main preference for higher education. Even for local people, instead of prospective students from outside the region. This condition is not only a problem for universities in Cirebon, including IPEBA, but also for the city of Cirebon in the long run.

The Institute Pesantren Babakan, Cirebon, as part of the higher education system in the region, also faces similar challenges in improving the quality of education. As an institution that focuses on Islamic religious education, the IPEBA plays an important role in developing progressive religious and scientific thinking in the community. However, like other institutions, IPEBA is sometimes hampered by resources and systems that do not fully support the achievement of higher education standards. Sustained and structured efforts are needed to address these issues (Krücken, 2021).

The limitations and lack of real effort in empowering lecturers and education personnel at the Institute Pesantren Babakan in Cirebon is one of the main factors affecting the quality of education. Factors such as lack of training, limited access to the latest learning resources, and low work motivation are significant obstacles. This calls for an effective strategy to overcome this problem, with the aim of optimizing the potential possessed by lecturers and administrative staff in organizing a quality educational process.

Departing from these conditions, all universities must certainly be able to improve the quality, capability, and management of their institutions in order to be able to become a choice for the community, both internally (local Cirebon) or externally (outside Cirebon). In the context of IPEBA in particular, efforts to increase public trust and make IPEBA the College of Choice require management with qualified institutional leadership factors. This is based on the reflection of the Foundation, which houses IPEBA, that the issue of improving the quality of education and institutions depends heavily on the figure of the leader and the quality of management of the institution under him.

The leader is the most vital figure in maintaining the policies of the Institute Pesantren Babakan Institute, Cirebon, to always be in line with the objectives set regarding increasing public trust in IPEBA. This is because despite having a number of potential advantages, Institute Pesantren Babakan, Cirebon, is still not recognized by the community at large and has not fully become the main preference for prospective students who want to obtain higher education. In other words, the figure of the leader in the context of educational institutions

plays a key role in ensuring the effectiveness of empowering teaching and education personnel. Strong and visionary leadership can trigger positive change, motivate staff, and direct the institution towards overall quality improvement (Judson, 2023; Souza & Leung, 2020). In the context of the Institute Pesantren Babakan, Cirebon, effective leadership is key to implementing the changes needed to achieve higher education standards.

However, leaders cannot work alone. The vision and all policies set by him can only produce good results when supported by the performance of employees who are subordinates. In this context, leaders are not only required to be able to produce the right policies, but also to be able to nurture and empower employees or lecturers properly so that they can work in accordance with the standards and policies set (Lakowski & Evers, 2022; Alainati et al., 2023). The most prominent problem is the low performance and motivation of administrative staff and lecturers to work in accordance with the standards set. As a result, the leadership and management of IPEBA generally find it difficult to meet the expected targets and goals.

Leadership assistance at the Institute Pesantren Babakan, Cirebon, especially in the context of empowering lecturers and education personnel, is an important aspect that requires attention. Leaders who can assist, provide direction, and support their staff in carrying out their duties and obligations can contribute significantly to improving the quality of education (Souza & Leung, 2020; Silzer & Dowell, 2019). This assistance is not only helpful in technical and administrative aspects, but also in developing the capacity and competence of lecturers and administrative staff.

This study aims to examine the leadership mentoring strategy of empowering lecturers and administrative staff at the Institute Pesantren Babakan, Cirebon, in an effort to improve the quality of higher education. The focus of this research is to analyze how the mentoring method affects the performance of lecturers, education personnel, and the quality of education in general. The main objective is to make a practical contribution to the development of higher education, especially in religious and community institutions such as the Institute Pesantren Babakan, Cirebon. This study aims to produce findings that can be used to improve human resource management in educational institutions while supporting community services by improving the quality of education. This study is expected to provide a new perspective on higher education management, especially in the context of human resource empowerment in Islamic educational institutions, and become a reference for other institutions to improve the quality of education.

Literature Review

This study draws upon the extant literature on leadership and employee empowerment in the context of quality improvement in higher education. Within the context of Islamic higher education institutions, the demand for quality has expanded beyond religious values to encompass managerial competencies, staff development, and systemic leadership approaches. A substantial body of research has underscored the pivotal role of effective leadership in motivating staff, orchestrating institutional change, and cultivating innovation. (Alainati et al., 2023).

Krücken (2021) and Musselin (2018) note the rising competition in higher education, urging institutions, including Islamic universities, to adopt modern leadership strategies while maintaining their religious identity. Furthermore, Lakomski & Evers (2022) stress the importance of contextual leadership—highlighting that leadership must adapt to cultural and institutional nuances, particularly in religious education settings.

Souza and Leung (2020) propose a transformative leadership model that focuses not only on direction and vision but also on empowering academic staff to participate in institutional decisions. Similarly, Wen, Huang, and Teo (2023) highlight the role of empowering leadership in enhancing work engagement, which indirectly improves institutional performance.

Empirical findings by Putra & Rahyuda (2019) and Baird et al. (2018) demonstrate that psychological empowerment significantly correlates with lecturer performance and satisfaction. This relationship is particularly pronounced in educational settings with participative and servant leadership approaches (Avan et al., 2019). Judson (2023) adds that imaginative and creative leadership training is a promising tool to build future-ready educational institutions.

Despite these advancements, many Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia, such as IPEBA Cirebon, continue to face issues like low staff motivation, limited professional development, and inadequate leadership mentoring. This study attempts to bridge that gap by examining a leadership mentoring model tailored for such institutions, incorporating participatory action research to yield context-sensitive and transformative outcomes.

Methods

This research adopted a qualitative-participatory approach with the location at the Ma'had Ali Islamic Religious College (IPEBA) Cirebon. The method used was Participatory Action Research (PTP), which was conducted through several important stages. The first stage was a participatory inculturation and mapping process in which the researcher integrated with the IPEBA community to understand its context and internal dynamics. The second stage involved problem formulation, where the researcher, together with the respondents, identified and formulated the main problems affecting the quality of education at IPEBA.

The third stage is the formulation of strategic planning, which aims to develop appropriate intervention strategies based on the identified problems. The fourth stage is the implementation of the planned program, followed by the fifth stage, which is monitoring and reflection. In this stage, researchers and respondents conduct an evaluation and reflection on the implemented program to assess its effectiveness and identify opportunities for improvement.

To collect data, this study used participatory action techniques, participant observation, interviews, and documentation. Participant observation allowed the researcher to be directly involved and observe the dynamics occurring in the IPEBA environment, while interviews were conducted to gain in-depth insights from the respondents. Documentation was used to collect data relevant to the research.

Data analysis was conducted using a participation-based qualitative analysis method, which allows researchers to interpret the data in depth by involving the active participation of the respondents. The respondents consisted of 22 administrative staff members and 45

lecturers at the Institute Pesantren Babakan , Cirebon. This research was conducted over a period of three months, enabling researchers to collect and analyze data comprehensively and produce valid and reliable findings.

Results and Discussions

The results of the service research conducted, namely leadership assistance in empowering lecturers and administrative staff to improve the quality of education in the Institute Pesantren Babakan, Cirebon, show several important points that can be elaborated as follows.

The Relationship between Leadership, Empowerment, and Education Quality Improvement at Institute Pesantren Babakan , Cirebon

The relationship between leadership, empowerment, and improving the quality of education at the College of Islam Ma'had Ali (IPEBA) Cirebon has been widely recognized by various stakeholders, including leaders, lecturers, administrative staff, and students. The leadership at IPEBA succeeded in creating a supportive environment for empowerment, evident from the active involvement and high motivation of lecturers and staff in academic and administrative activities. Analysis of institutional documents and policies confirms IPEBA's commitment to improving the quality of education and human resource development, with a focus on empowerment as a key tool in achieving the institution's vision of becoming a center of excellence in Islamic higher education.

The research findings indicate a positive relationship between inclusive and innovation-supportive leadership styles at IPEBA and the level of empowerment of faculty and staff. Leadership at the institution is unique, combining Islamic values with modern educational practices and creating a model of effective leadership in an educational setting. Validation from interviews, observations, and document analysis adds credibility to these findings, with concrete evidence from the active participation of lecturers and staff in various activities on the campus of the Institute Pesantren Babakan, Cirebon.

The leadership style at IPEBA is vision-oriented and inclusive, focusing not only on achieving short-term goals but also on long-term capacity building for faculty and staff. Effective leadership is a key catalyst for creating an environment conducive to growth and innovation. Leaders at IPEBA act as policymakers who understand the importance of a holistic approach in education, paving the way for individual and group initiatives to improve the quality of education.

Empowerment of faculty and staff at IPEBA has been a top priority in the institution's development strategy, with programs designed to improve professional competencies. These initiatives include training, curriculum development, and facility upgrades. This empowerment also includes psychological aspects, such as increased self-confidence and involvement of lecturers and staff in decision-making processes, which are theorized to have a direct impact on the quality of their teaching and administrative services (Baird et al., 2018; Bodner, 2003; Huq, 2015).

The symbiotic relationship between leadership and empowerment at IPEBA proves that effective leadership provides the foundation and direction for effective employee

empowerment, creating an environment in which faculty and staff feel supported and valued (Baird et al., 2018; Wen et al., 2023; Ebrahimpour Azbari et al., 2015). Conversely, effective empowerment increases the credibility and effectiveness of leadership. Leadership at IPEBA acts not only as a director but also as a catalyst for growth and innovation, recognizing the importance of empowering human resources to improve the quality of education.

The improvement in the quality of education at IPEBA is seen as a direct result of the interaction between proactive leadership and the empowerment of faculty and administrative staff. Initiatives designed and implemented by leadership have enabled the development of innovative teaching methods, improved administrative processes, and an overall improvement in the quality of education. The research found that lecturer and staff empowerment is a key factor in the effort to improve the quality of education at IPEBA, with empowered lecturers and staff more likely to innovate, take the initiative, and implement effective teaching practices. This empowerment has also improved morale and job satisfaction, contributing to staff retention and creating a positive and productive work environment in IPEBA.

Leadership Mentoring Strategy in Empowering Lecturers and Administrative Staff at Institute Pesantren Babakan, Cirebon

This research explores leadership mentoring strategies for the empowerment of lecturers and administrative staff at the Institute Pesantren Babakan in Cirebon, with the aim of improving capacity and performance and advancing the quality of education. The approach involved a series of activities, including leadership training and managerial development workshops, designed to strengthen leadership and managerial skills and increase motivation and engagement. A comprehensive needs analysis involving interviews with lecturers, staff, and students, as well as an evaluation of systems and processes at IPEBA, formed the basis of the mentoring strategy.

Leadership training is a key element in the mentoring strategy of IPEBA and is designed to address challenges in a dynamic educational environment. The main focus is the development of essential leadership skills, including decision-making, effective communication, team management, and dealing with educational challenges. The training also encourages continuous learning and the application of leadership in an Islamic context, ensuring that participants are able to respond to change with flexibility and creativity while maintaining high educational standards.

Managerial development workshops at IPEBA provide managerial skills and knowledge to efficiently manage teams and educational operations. Focusing on conflict management and motivational strategies, the workshop equips participants with techniques to identify and resolve conflicts, encourage team motivation, and manage changes. Participants were also taught about operational efficiency, the importance of continuous learning, and adaptation to the changing educational environment while considering Islamic values in decision-making and team management.

Mentoring and coaching sessions at IPEBA provide personalized support, allowing faculty and staff to discuss specific challenges in their roles. With guidance from senior leaders and experts, participants gained new insights and strategies to overcome challenges in teaching

and administration. The sessions also involved transferring knowledge and experience, providing constructive feedback, and developing skills and potential while preparing participants for future leadership roles.

The following is a summary of the leadership mentoring strategy for the empowerment of lecturers and staff at the Institute Pesantren Babakan , Cirebon:

Table 1. *Leadership Assistance Strategy at Institute Pesantren Babakan, Cirebon*

Aspects	Description
Needs Analysis	Conducted a comprehensive needs analysis to identify key areas where leadership mentoring could have a significant impact. This involved interviews with faculty, staff, and students, as well as an evaluation of existing systems and processes at IPEBA.
Leadership Training	Includes the development of decision-making skills, effective communication, team management, and facing the challenges of the educational environment. Also encourages continuous learning and the application of leadership in an Islamic context.
Managerial Development Workshop	Focus on conflict management, motivational strategies, managing change, operational efficiency, continuous learning, adaptation to the changing educational environment, and the application of managerial practices in Islamic education.
Mentoring and Coaching Sessions	Provide personalized support through mentorship from senior leaders and experts. This involves transferring knowledge and experience, providing constructive feedback, addressing specific challenges, and developing skills and potential.
Evaluation and Feedback	Evaluation is conducted to assess the effectiveness of the strategies implemented, including the collection of feedback and assessment of changes in the performance of lecturers and staff and their impact on the quality of education at IPEBA.

The evaluation of the mentoring strategy involved feedback from participants in the training, workshops, and mentoring sessions, as well as an assessment of changes in the performance of lecturers and staff and their impact on the quality of education at IPEBA. This evaluation led to the reflection and adjustment of the mentoring strategy to meet changing needs, with recommendations for the development of a sustainable mentoring program to support the continuous professional development of lecturers and staff.

The results showed a significant positive impact of leadership mentoring on the empowerment of lecturers and administrative staff in IPEBA. Through a focused and structured mentoring strategy, the institution was able to improve its leadership and managerial skills, which contributed to improving the quality of its education. This study recommends adopting similar mentoring approaches in other educational institutions to achieve similar improvements in educational quality.

Leadership Assistance in Empowering Lecturers and Administrative Staff to Improve Education Quality at Institute Pesantren Babakan, Cirebon

This study examined the practice of leadership mentoring among empowering lecturers and staff at the Institute Pesantren Babakan, Cirebon, which aims to improve the quality of higher education. Mentoring was conducted through participant observation and direct involvement

of researchers in various activities, including partnership-based training. In this training, lecturers and staff were developed to face the challenges of modern education through the introduction of innovative teaching methods and the use of educational technology. The collaborative approach between the researcher and the IPEBA Chair ensures the relevance of the training materials, and continuous evaluation allows customization to meet specific needs.

Coaching clinics in IPEBA are intensive consultation sessions for faculty and staff where they have the opportunity to interact directly with researchers and senior leaders. The sessions aimed to improve the quality of educational services, with a focus on discussing and solving specific problems in teaching and administration. Case-based methods are used to provide practical solutions, and direct feedback during these sessions plays an important role in continuous professional development.

The personal mentoring of lecturers and staff at IPEBA is conducted through an individualized approach, focusing on their specific needs. Researchers provide direct guidance in curriculum development, research, and time management, as well as emotional and motivational support. This approach enhances the professional competence of faculty and staff, positively impacts the educational experience of students, and ensures that IPEBA continues to be a high-quality and innovative educational environment.

Positive responses from the faculty and staff to the mentoring program indicated their willingness to learn and develop new skills. Research has found improvements in communication, team management, and innovative capacity throughout the program. Post-mentoring evaluations showed improvements in teaching quality, administrative efficiency, and student satisfaction, as well as encouraging professional development. Some challenges were faced during mentoring, such as adjusting to new methods, but were overcome through effective communication and strategy adjustments. Important lessons learned included the need for an individualized approach to mentoring and adjusting methods according to changes in the educational environment.

This research shows that effective leadership mentoring contributes significantly to the empowerment of lecturers and staff at the Institute Pesantren Babakan, Cirebon. The program successfully enhanced their capabilities in providing quality education. The future need is to continue and adjust the mentoring program according to the needs and latest developments in the field of education.

Evaluation Leadership Assistance in Empowering Lecturers and Staff at Institute Pesantren Babakan, Cirebon

An evaluation of leadership mentoring practices at the Institute Pesantren Babakan in Cirebon revealed the effectiveness of the strategies implemented in empowering lecturers and staff, as well as improving the quality of education. Evaluations included leadership training, managerial development workshops, and mentoring and coaching sessions.

- a. Leadership training evaluation: Significant improvements in participants' leadership, communication, and team management skills were demonstrated. The training was successful in developing innovative teaching methods, increasing lecturer confidence, and gaining positive feedback from students.

- b. Analysis of Managerial Development Workshop: Results showed an improvement in participants' managerial skills, especially in conflict management and motivational strategies. The workshop improved the operational efficiency at IPEBA and received positive feedback from the participants.
- c. Effect of Mentoring and Coaching Sessions: Provides personalized support and focuses on individual needs, resulting in increased confidence, professional competence, and motivation of participants in performing their duties.
- d. Effectiveness of Partnership-Based Training: This partnership approach strengthens the relevance and applicability of training by receiving positive responses from the faculty and staff. It successfully responds to specific needs and challenges and improves performance and effectiveness.
- e. Impact of Coaching Clinic on Education Quality: Demonstrated improvement in participants' practical skills in dealing with teaching and administrative challenges, improving the quality of educational services at IPEBA.
- f. Results of Personal Mentoring on Professionalism: Improved professionalism of faculty and staff in the performance of duties and obligations according to the ethical standards of the profession. This has resulted in improvements in classroom management, research, administrative skills, and emotional well-being.

Overall, the evaluation showed that the integrated mentoring approach is effective in improving the quality of education. The results of this study confirm the important role of leadership in organizational management, especially in the context of empowering employees to achieve desired organizational goals (Avan et al., 2019; Sahraei Beiranvand et al., 2021; Putra & Rahyuda, 2019). In the context of the Pesantren Babakan Institute, Cirebon, these goals mean improving the quality and services of the education it provides. Suggestions for further development include the continuous adjustment of mentoring programs based on feedback, increased resources, and support for future mentoring initiatives.

Conclusions

Based on the results of the service at the Institute Pesantren Babakan, Cirebon, it can be concluded that effective leadership practices have been instrumental in creating an environment conducive to the empowerment of lecturers and staff. Inclusive and visionary leadership at IPEBA has been a catalyst in promoting innovation and professional growth, steering the institution towards improving the quality of education. Engagement and motivation of lecturers and staff have been seen to increase, in line with improvements in the quality of teaching and administrative services, which was confirmed through interviews, observations, and document analysis.

The leadership mentoring strategies implemented, including leadership training, managerial development workshops, and mentoring and coaching sessions, have been successful in developing the leadership and managerial skills of the faculty and staff. The initiative focuses not only on technical improvement, but also on the development of soft

skills such as leadership and conflict management. This holistic approach has led to increased professionalism and improved emotional well-being, thereby contributing to the creation of a positive and productive work environment. Evaluations show an improvement in the quality of education, as seen through improved student academic performance and satisfaction.

The practice of leadership mentoring in empowering lecturers and administrative staff to improve the quality of education in the Institute Pesantren Babakan, Cirebon, shows that partnership-based training, workshops, coaching clinics, and personal mentoring are effective mentoring methods. This study also showed a positive and significant relationship between leadership practices, empowerment of lecturers and administrative staff, and improvement in the quality of education in IPEBA. This flexible and adaptive leadership approach ensures that IPEBA remains relevant and innovative in higher education. Suggestions for the future include the continuous adjustment of mentoring programs based on feedback and increased resources for mentoring initiatives. This approach demonstrates the importance of responsive leadership and empowerment as keys to success in education quality improvement.

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