



Deductive Thematic Analysis of Educational Leadership Styles in Indonesian Religious School

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Abstract: This research aims to reveal the principal leadership styles of Christian religious secondary schools in Indonesia. This study used a qualitative descriptive approach. The informants in the study were teachers, vice principal, and school principal in a Christian religious secondary school. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Subsequently, the data was analyzed using deductive thematic analysis, and its validity was checked using triangulation. The study results showed that the principal implemented five leadership styles in a Christian religious secondary school: paternalistic, charismatic, servant, transformational, and autocratic. This study indicates that leadership styles are urgently needed to improve Christian religious education quality; however, they are still limited in the literature. Therefore, the Ministry of Religion Affairs, particularly the Directorate General for Christian Community Guidance, should create a concise policy on leadership competency for Christian religious school principals. Furthermore, each principal in Christian religious schools should carry out various leadership styles properly to enhance management and leadership practices in their educational organizations.

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Introduction

In the Indonesian education system, two different ministries manage policies and curricula for all K–12 schools (Faisal & Martin, 2019). Firstly, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology is responsible for non-religious public and vocational schools. Finally, the Ministry of Religion takes responsibility for religious schools and universities. Despite the diversity of educational management, it does not mean that Indonesia is a secular state but a religious state (Parker, 2014), with six official religions: Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism. Accordingly, each religion has its own religious school, consisting of Islamic schools, Christian schools, Catholic schools, Buddhist schools, Hindu schools, and Confucian schools. Consequently, educational organizations in Indonesia must be operated appropriately, which cannot be separated from religious values. The religious values introduced in the 1945 Constitution are intended to accommodate a highly religious society in Indonesia (Rofii & Hosen, 2023).

In particular, according to Regulation of the Minister of Religion (PMA) Number 32 of 2019 on establishing and legalizing the Christian religious education organization, Christian religious schools are Christian religious educational organizations that integrate general education subjects with Christian religious education subjects. Christian religious



schools, including Christian Theology Elementary School (SDTK), Christian Theological Middle School (SMPTK), Christian Theological Secondary School (SMTK), and Christian Religion Middle School (SMAK), as learning organizations, carry out both basic and secondary education that is expected to operate well. Besides, "Christian [religious] schools are necessary for people to exercise their religious freedom and make society more moral and spiritual, and thus deserve receiving public aid. Nevertheless, public aid to religious schools needs to be carried out carefully, restrictedly" (Kang, 2006). Accordingly, it is expected that all Christian religious school principals will be able to lead and manage schools by applying leadership styles.

Leadership is an urgent aspect of school operations that can support its function (Makgato & Mudzanani, 2019) and improvement (Arjanto et al., 2023) because school principals as educational leaders have various responsibilities to guide and direct all the programs for developing schools (Lumban Gaol, 2023). School leaders must complete many school duties to activate teachers' teaching performance to increase school effectiveness (Mulyani et al., 2020). As a driving force for all school resources, such as teachers and staff, Christian religious school principals must be able to lead them appropriately. A previous study found that leadership positively and substantially impacted Christian school performance (Kalangi et al., 2021). In other words, the success of all programs in Christian religious schools is strongly determined by the quality of the school's principal leadership (Lumban Gaol et al., 2021). Therefore, principals must maintain a positive school culture by encouraging teachers to be enthusiastic about improving their competence, encouraging students to achieve their best, and embracing all people's characteristics in school. Creating their school as a learning organization that operates effectively is very important.

However, the quality of Christian religious schools still requires improvement. According to the National Accreditation Board of School/Madrasah (BAN S/M) (2023), there were 143 Christian religious secondary schools in Indonesia; however, only three have been accredited with a ranking of A. In addition, a study conducted by Gultom et al. (2022) at a Christian religious school in the Province of North Sumatra found poor quality. The poor performance of Christian religious education is inseparable from school principals' lack of competence, particularly in leadership. Indeed, some Christian school principals have not thoroughly carried out their leadership roles (Jovita, 2021). As a result, Christian school leaders do not comprehensively understand their leadership roles that impact the schools' success.

Leadership style is a pattern of a leader's behaviors that influence people's activities to obtain goals in a specific situation. In other words, "leadership styles can be characterized based on leaders' traits" (Maheshwari & Kha, 2023:2). Recently, many studies have examined leadership styles in the school context, such as paternalistic leadership (Da li & A alday, 2017; Qian & Walker, 2021; Shi et al., 2020), servant leadership (D'Ascoli & Piro, 2023; Nsiah et al., 2023), transformational leadership (Kılınc et al., 2022; Noori et al., 2023), autocratic leadership (Makgato & Mudzanani, 2019), and charismatic leadership (Ishaq et al., 2023; Ozgenel, 2020). Despite educational leadership being well documented in the literature, most leadership styles come from the Anglo-American context (Shi et al., 2020; Zheng et al., 2020).

Furthermore, many studies on educational leadership have been conducted in Indonesian non-religious schools (Amzat et al., 2022; Damanik & Aldridge, 2017; Juharyanto et al., 2020; Lessy et al., 2022; Wirawan et al., 2019) and Islamic religious schools (Arifin et al., 2018; Patoni & Rifai, 2022; Rahtikawatie et al., 2021; Shulhan, 2018). However, only a few studies have been conducted on leadership in the context of Christian religious schools

(Lumban Gaol et al., 2021); for instance, a study on principal leadership performance in the GMIM Christian Elementary School (Kalangi et al., 2021). This indicates a need to explore school leadership further in Christian religious schools. In other words, “it is necessary to explore more culturally specific leadership styles and mechanisms in various contexts” (Zheng et al., 2020), specifically in the context of Christian religious schools, because it is required to professionalize and develop Christian schools in the future (Bragg, 2008). Therefore, the primary purpose of this study is to examine various leadership styles in the context of Christian religious schools. This study's results may provide reliable information and best practices on how principal leadership styles are implemented in Christian religious schools.

Research Method

The research method used was a qualitative descriptive approach (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Qualitative inquiry is strongly recommended for studying leadership in education because of its appropriateness for relational phenomena (Knapp, 2017), such as leadership (Branson & Marra, 2019). Although many qualitative approaches in education, such as thematic analysis, are often used, there are “scant details in the data analysis process” (Xu & Zammit, 2020). In particular, only one study examined educational leadership (Edwards-Groves & Grootenboer, 2021) using deductive thematic analysis. It indicates that deductive thematic analysis is rarely used to study school leadership. The deductive thematic analysis uses theory as its basis of investigation (Pearse, 2019), which “begins the coding process with a pre-determined coding system; however, it also offers scope for inductively updating and refining that coding system as new content is encountered during the process” (Edwards-Groves & Grootenboer, 2021). Thus, to investigate leadership styles in a Christian religious school, deductive thematic analysis was employed in this research

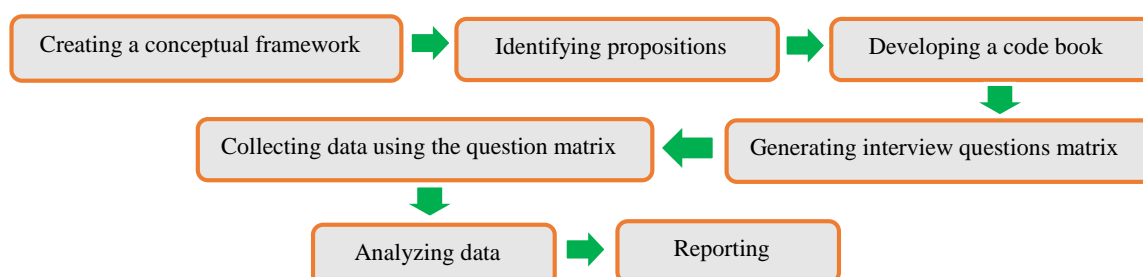


Figure 1. Steps in conducting analysis of deductive thematic

As shown in Figure 1, the deductive thematic analysis applied in this study consists of seven stages: (1) conducting a literature review to create a conceptual framework; (2) identifying propositions; (3) developing a code book; (4) generating an interview question matrix; (5) collecting data using the question matrix; (6) analyzing the data; and (7) reporting (Pearse, 2019). Accordingly, the five leadership styles of principals in Christian religious schools were used as an initial organizing framework after conducting a literature review of previous studies on leadership (Bragg, 2008; Ishaq et al., 2023; Saylık & ahin, 2021; Sen & Cooper, 2011; Winston, 2018). Then, data was collected using interviews and analyzed by deductive thematic analysis to understand further the leadership styles implemented by Christian religious school principals.

Before conducting semi-structured interviews, seven respondents (R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5, R.6, and R.7) were selected by purposive sampling. The respondents interviewed included teachers, vice principal, and school principal in a Christian religious secondary school, *Sekolah Menengah Teologi Kristen (SMTK) Cahaya Negeri Sidikalang*, North



Sumatra Province, Indonesia. Semi-structured interviews were conducted because they are more flexible (Merriam, 1998) and more effective in obtaining accurate and natural data from the leader (Tan et al., 2015). After data collection, deductive thematic analysis was applied, including the following steps: “(1) using the code book for analyzing the collected data; (2) identifying themes; and (3) for the propositions of each theory, a record of hits and misses is kept to identify which theory best fits the data while also applying theoretical triangulation to analyze how the theories complement each other” (Pearse, 2019). Finally, triangulation (researchers and theories) and respondent verification (Leung, 2015) were employed in order to improve the validity of the data.

Results and Discussion

This study reports on five leadership styles identified in the context of a Christian religious secondary school. The five leadership styles are paternalistic leadership, charismatic leadership, servant leadership, transformational leadership, and autocratic leadership. These leadership styles have key characteristics that differentiate them from one another. Moreover, each leadership style was discussed using the relevant literature and interview data.

Principal Paternalistic Leadership

Studies on paternalistic leadership originated in Asia (Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008), particularly in East Asia and the Middle East (Zheng et al., 2020). Indonesia is an Asian country with strong paternalistic leadership (Wirawan, 2011). Paternalistic leadership is a leadership style that integrates “strong authority with fatherly benevolence” (Zheng et al., 2020:1). For instance, in terms of personal relationships, paternalistic leadership displays dedication and commitment (Qian & Walker, 2021). This present study found that the principal of a Christian religious secondary school implemented a paternalistic leadership style when leading and managing the school. According to respondents’ comments, the principal created a family atmosphere to improve togetherness, establish close and individual relationships with subordinates, participate in social activities both in and out of school, and expect teachers and staff to have commitment or loyalty and act in line with the rules, etc. As a teacher stated that:

“...One teacher had ever had an accident, and all teachers came to visit the teacher who was feeling sick. In addition, we celebrated a teacher's birthday on the day and at the main service, by cutting a cake. Moreover, when there were family issues, the principal was understandable, and he was also helpful in administrative matters and willing to assist us...” (R.VI)

As a Christian leader, principal paternalistic leadership provides care and protection, and helps teachers and staff both professionally and personally. A previous study indicated that principal paternalistic leadership mostly creates a family atmosphere and positive aspects (Saylik & ahin, 2021) and properly exerts parent-like leadership practices to facilitate teacher commitment by managing teachers’ emotions (Zheng et al., 2020). Consequently, the results of this study are in line with the role of Christian leaders, who need to show paternalistic leadership in leading others (Winston, 2018). Thus, principal paternalistic leadership is responsible for the importance of good relationships and family-like relationships with others that are holistic and all-embracing, consisting of care for their welfare in terms of social, psychological, and economic aspects. In other words, paternalistic leaders behave as parents and are concerned with the entire person (Qian & Walker, 2021).

Principal Charismatic Leadership

The concept of charisma was historically derived from an old Greek word, the Bible, meaning “gift” (Crawford, 2002), and it was frequently used in political and religious



domains (Ozgenel, 2020). Accordingly, the concept of charisma exists because this study was conducted in a religious setting, in particular a Christian religious secondary school. Accordingly, the concept of charisma exists because this study was conducted in a religious setting, particularly a Christian religious secondary school (1) struggling with the status quo and willingness to change it; (2) having an ideal vision that is different from the status quo, interesting, and worthy to be followed by school members; (3) willing unconventional or overthrowing normative; (4) advocating vigorously when dealing with risk and personal cost; (5) experts in using conventional ways to go beyond the existing order; and (6) influence with personal power. For instance, a teacher said that:

“The principal cares about the condition of the school; for example, in a room that does not have a TV, the school principal has requested the school foundation, so when there is a need for facilities and infrastructure, he immediately actively prepares them. During the pandemic last time, the school principal immediately responded when there was a need for masks, for example, the Student Council fund was immediately allocated to buy masks; and explained the importance of masks...” (R.IV)

The result of the present study is related to a previous study that found seven categories of charismatic leadership: communication, personal appearances, stimulating motivation, meeting the needs of individuals, school environment, creativity and innovation, and having a vision (Ishaq et al., 2023). However, this study mainly shows the importance of passionate advocacy for others. That is because charismatic leaders have good recognition from their followers and strongly influence their emotions, values, beliefs, and behaviors (Yang & Zhu, 2016). As a result, charismatic leadership contributes significantly to improving the success culture, support culture, mission culture, and bureaucratic culture in schools. According to Winston's (2018) study, each Christian leader, including principal leaders in Christian religious schools, needs charisma when leading others. Therefore, school principals may spend considerable time, energy, and resources trying to change and manage the culture (Ozgenel, 2020).

Principal Servant Leadership

Servant leaders begin by serving others first rather than leading them. The leadership style wants to share power that concerns the subordinates' needs and commits to the development of others personally and professionally (Maheshwari & Kha, 2023). Hence, school principals who carry out servant leadership style encourage and enable others to become better people. The leader does not manipulate others so that their subordinate can increase their performance. For instance, teacher effectiveness can increase because teachers grow in values, interactions with colleagues, classroom leadership and pedagogy, interactions with students, and desire and ability to build a school community (Schroeder, 2016). Moreover, subordinates could become the best version of themselves through servant leaders, who improve their subordinates' personalities in different relational, ethical, emotional, and spiritual contexts (Clarence et al., 2021).

Previous studies have found different dimensions of servant leadership. Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) identified five servant leadership factors: altruistic calling, emotional healing, persuasive mapping, wisdom, and organizational stewardship. In contrast, Sen and Cooper (2011) identified six factors of servant leadership: voluntary subordination, authentic self, covenantal relationship, responsible morality, transcendental spirituality, and transforming influence. Despite accruing an inconsistency in terms of the servant leadership factors, this present study confirmed that principal leadership implemented servant leadership through their behaviors, consisting of self-authenticity, voluntary subordination, agreement



relationships, moral responsibility, wisdom, transcendent spirituality, and changing influences. As a teacher said that:

“The school principal performs his duties well and coordinates with the foundation”
(R.III)

“As far as my observations, school principal is a wise person...” (R.VII)

“Principal did as what was said. For instance, come and go to class on time. Whatever the activity outside of school hours, he didn't think of himself as a boss who rules but set an example for others” (R.VI)

This study emphasizes the importance of servant leadership in Christian religious schools. Previous study found that Christian leaders need to serve subordinates (Winston, 2018). Moreover, D'Ascoli and Piro (2023) identified two ways to facilitate others, consisting of using emotional intelligence and the principles of a learning organization. Furthermore, servant leaders need some competencies, including empathy, listening, communication, and trust (Mcquade et al., 2021). In addition, servant leadership has an impact on teachers' job satisfaction (Singh & Ryhal, 2021; Vikhanskiy & Myrakyanyan, 2018), teachers' commitment to school and psychological well-being (Clarence et al., 2021), and students' academic achievement (Gultekin & Dougherty, 2021). Therefore, according to the results of this research, principals in Christian religious schools that properly carry out servant leadership can improve teachers' job satisfaction, teachers' commitments to schools, and students' academic achievement. As Schroeder (2016:13) noted that:

“Servant leaders often put the needs of the organization ahead of personal needs and honour people, not programs and politics. Students ultimately benefit from this leadership approach as their teachers learn to serve them first as people, and then confidently lead them into their learning.”

Principal Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is one of the most commonly used leadership styles in educational settings (Thomas et al., 2020). In Christian educational organizations, transformational leadership plays a vital role in obtaining quality education (Windarwati et al., 2021). This current study found that Christian religious school leader carried out transformational leadership activities. The result of the study is in accordance with a previous study that showed Christian school leaders scored higher in transformational characteristics, such as idealized influence-attributed, idealized influence-behaviors, and inspirational motivation. This study confirmed that principal can be used as models by providing a good example of spirituality to other teachers and staff. For instance, the school principal seeks to develop Christian values in schools through worship and reading the Bible in class before learning begins. All activities conducted by the principal were associated with the transformational leadership style, as Maheshwari and Kha (2023:5) mentioned that a transformational leader aims to “motivate employees by acknowledging the importance of organizational objectives and promoting the positive transformation of their self-interests for the sake of the organization.”

In particular, this study emphasizes the importance of transformational leadership by (1) having the ability to develop the values of Christian educational institutions (2) having the ability to make all members aware of the sense of ownership and responsibility in carrying out their respective duties; (3) having the ability to carry out the decision-making process with intellectual abilities intelligently; (4) being loyal to all members in school; (5) having the courage to make changes towards higher organizational productivity; (6) having the ability to motivate themselves and their members; and (7) being a role model for all members in school. Moreover, the main finding of this research indicated the need to develop Christian values that differentiate them from non-religious schools. It can be understood that



transformational leadership from a Christian perspective is focused on vision and biblical foundation (White et al., 2017), and the principal has a strong Christ-centered vision. For example, some teachers mentioned that:

“School principal has developed Christian values in this school, by conducting a service every morning, reading bible in the classroom before the learning process begins, and there was a Christian religious holiday, services to churches.” (R.I, R.II, R.III, R.IV, R.V, R.VII)

This finding contributes to understanding how principals in Christian secondary religious schools implement transformational leadership. It is clear because transformational leadership has yet to be researched in Christian schools (Bragg, 2008). Moreover, transformational leadership significantly impacts teachers’ commitment to the institution, student development, and self-development (Kareem et al., 2023). Therefore, it is recommended to investigate further how principals in Christian religious schools may carry out transformational leadership in a better way. Bragg (2008) suggested that:

“Christian School transformational leaders are proactive and seek to optimize individual, group and organizational development. These leaders will promote innovation, not just achieve performance expectations. These leaders will convince their associates to strive for higher levels of potential, moral and ethical standards. The Christian school leader who understands transformation principles will display idealized behaviours. This includes talking about their most important Biblical values and beliefs. They will be very driven by the importance of having a strong sense of purpose and mission.”

Principal Autocratic Leadership

An autocratic leadership style is carried out by school principals who want to take control of followers in the school, such as teachers and staff. The principal strongly desires to ask followers to do what the leader wants without asking for suggestions from subordinates. Makgato and Mudzanani (2019) stated that an autocratic leader can only change anything without negotiation. In other words, autocratic leadership wants followers to accomplish a certain purpose by controlling subordinates, using their authority according to the structure of the organization, and demanding total obedience from followers (Maheshwari & Kha, 2023; Pizzolitto et al., 2023; Shulhan, 2018). Accordingly, this study shows that principals in Christian religious schools implemented autocratic leadership. However, it was only sometimes carried out because the principal showed a lack of affirmation of his position and insufficiency in showing rules for getting the desired behaviors from teachers and staff. For instance, the principal still tends to involve teachers in making decisions; however, the final decisions rely on the school's foundation because the school is private. For instance, a teacher explained that:

“Decisions are usually made at a meeting beforehand and the principal discusses them with the school foundation. For example, in terms of assessing a teacher, first the principal gives a questionnaire to students... He asked about the satisfaction of the students, and then recorded their answer how these teachers were doing. So, the decision making is not limited to just looking at it... A variety of information is collected to decide whether the teacher will be got the sack or not...many considerations, and the final decision depends on the school foundation...” (R.V)

Pizzolitto et al. (2023) reported that leaders were encouraged to increase or decrease their degree of authoritarian leadership depending on the context to connect leadership with performance more effectively. This present study was conducted in the context of a Christian religious school, which is a private school, autocratic leadership was still required. The findings indicated that the principal was more of a democratic and wise leader than an autocratic leader, as some teachers mentioned below:



“As far as my observations, school principal is a wise and democratic person...”
(R.VII)

“In making decisions, the principal involves all parties to get a good decision.” (R.I)

“Teachers are involved but the final decision remains with principal and the school foundation...” (R.VI)

Although some studies did not find a positive impact of autocratic leadership on learners' educational performance (Imhangbe et al., 2019; Makgato & Mudzanani, 2019), the present study emphasizes that autocratic leadership is essential for every principal in Christian religious schools. This aligns with a previous study that showed that the autocratic leadership style was most commonly used among the principals of senior secondary schools in Delta State, Nigeria (Duze, 2012). In addition, according to the study of Winston (2018), Christian leaders need to perform autocratic leadership in dealing with unexpected environments and people. However, principals should delegate tasks to others without alienating them so that they will work vigorously. Moreover, the principal should show love to others in order to avoid some bad experiences with subordinates, such as despair, dissatisfaction, stress, wrath, and making decisions to leave school (Achimugu & Obaka, 2019). Therefore, the findings of this study emphasize that Christian school religious principals implement authoritarian leadership wisely, conduct supervision appropriately, and avoid the tendency to be a dictator in schools.

Conclusion

Based on the results and discussion of the present study, principal leadership styles in Christian religious secondary schools consist of paternalistic leadership, charismatic leadership, servant leadership, transformational leadership, and autocratic leadership. This study indicates that leadership styles are urgently needed to improve the quality of Christian religious education. Consequently, each principal in Christian religious schools should implement various leadership styles properly to enhance management and leadership practices in their educational organizations. For instance, when a principal wants to implement a paternalistic leadership model, he or she needs to consider other leadership styles, such as servant leadership and autocratic leadership, so that his or her actions are not excessive and the principal can direct teachers and educational staff to work optimally. Therefore, various styles of educational leadership have interrelated concepts and practices that cannot stand alone in terms of leading schools.

Recommendation

This research provides a fundamental recommendation for improving the quality of Christian school principals. The Ministry of Religion Affairs, particularly the Directorate General for Christian Community Guidance, should create a concise policy on leadership competency required by Christian religious school principals. It will help educational stakeholders understand and develop educational quality in the context of Christian religious schools. On the other hand, school principals may need to employ various leadership styles when leading and managing the school. That is because school principals deal with people with different characteristics and many responsibilities.

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