



Emotionally Intelligent Instructional Leadership: Madrasah Principal's Strategies in Building a Conducive School Climate for Learning

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Abstract

This study aims to describe and analyze the emotionally intelligent instructional leadership strategies implemented by the madrasah principal at MAN 2 Lebong in fostering a conducive school climate for learning. The background of this research lies in the critical role of madrasah principals, not only as academic leaders but also as managers of emotional dynamics within a complex school community. In the context of modern education, which is full of challenges, the ability of madrasah principals to understand and manage emotions effectively is a key factor in creating a healthy and productive learning environment. This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The participants included the madrasah principal, teachers, and educational staff. The findings reveal that the principal of MAN 2 Lebong integrates elements of emotional intelligence such as empathy, emotional regulation, social awareness, and interpersonal relationship skills into instructional leadership practices, including classroom supervision, teacher development, and the reinforcement of a collaborative and reflective learning culture. These strategies significantly contribute to the creation of an open, supportive, and conducive madrasah environment for both teacher development and student growth. The results indicate that emotional intelligence is a critical aspect that should be incorporated into the professional development of madrasah principals. Therefore, this study recommends that future educational leadership training emphasize emotional and relational dimensions as an integral part of efforts to build a positive and sustainable school climate.

Keywords: *Emotional Intelligence, Instructional Leadership, Learning Environment, Madrasah Principal, School Climate*

Introduction,

Instructional leadership has emerged as a critical approach in educational management, particularly in enhancing teaching quality, teacher professionalism, and student academic

performance. Dimmock et.al (2021) conceptualized instructional leadership through three primary dimensions: defining the school's mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school climate. These dimensions emphasize the role of the school leader not only as a manager but also as a visionary and learning-centered guide. In recent years, the integration of emotional intelligence (EI) into instructional leadership practices has gained attention, considering the increasing complexity of educational settings and the growing emphasis on human-centered leadership. The academic and practical importance of emotionally intelligent instructional leadership lies in its potential to foster inclusive, empathetic, and productive school environments. Gómez-Leal et al. (2022) defined emotional intelligence as the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions as well as the emotions of others. In the context of school leadership, emotionally intelligent principals can communicate effectively, build trust with teachers and students, resolve conflicts constructively, and create a psychologically safe environment for learning Sánchez-Núñez et al (2023). Such competencies are increasingly relevant as school leaders face diverse challenges, including teacher burnout, student behavioral issues, and the demand for inclusive pedagogies. Previous research has extensively examined the separate domains of instructional leadership and emotional intelligence. Kılınç et.al (2023) highlighted the correlation between instructional leadership and school effectiveness, particularly in terms of academic achievement and teacher motivation. Similarly, Kılınç et.al (2023) emphasized that emotional intelligence contributes significantly to interpersonal effectiveness and leadership quality. However, relatively few studies have combined these domains into a single framework. Notably, Sasere, O. B., et al. (2025) proposed that emotional intelligence enhances instructional leadership by enabling leaders to adapt to the emotional needs of staff and students, thereby improving organizational climate. Despite growing recognition of emotional intelligence in leadership theory, studies exploring its application within Islamic education contexts, particularly in Indonesian madrasahs, remain scarce. Most existing literature in Indonesia tends to focus on administrative leadership, curriculum development, or religious character building, while neglecting the emotional and relational dimensions of leadership. This presents a critical gap, especially considering the unique cultural and spiritual context of madrasahs that demands a more holistic leadership approach (Fauzi, 2024)). Furthermore, there is a lack of empirical data on how emotional intelligence is operationalized by madrasah principals in their daily leadership practices. This study addresses the aforementioned gaps by exploring how emotionally intelligent instructional leadership is practiced by the principal of MAN 2 Lebong, a state Islamic senior high school in Bengkulu Province. MAN 2 Lebong has demonstrated significant progress in developing a collaborative and character-driven learning environment. Initial observations indicate that the principal frequently engages in reflective supervision, promotes open communication, and fosters emotional bonds among staff and students. These practices provide a relevant case for analyzing the integration of emotional intelligence into instructional leadership. Accordingly, the primary objective

of this study is to investigate the strategies used by the madrasah principal at MAN 2 Lebong to incorporate emotional intelligence into instructional leadership and to examine how these strategies contribute to shaping a positive school climate. The research focuses on four units of analysis: communication practices, teacher supervision, professional development efforts, and the creation of a supportive school culture. Through a qualitative case study approach, this research aims to offer insights into the mechanisms through which emotional intelligence enhances leadership effectiveness in Islamic educational settings. The next section details the research methodology, including the research design, data collection techniques, sampling strategy, and data analysis procedures. This is followed by the presentation and discussion of findings, highlighting the specific leadership practices observed at MAN 2 Lebong and their implications for school climate. The article concludes with a summary of key insights, practical recommendations for educational leadership development, and suggestions for future research.

Research Methodology,

This research employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore how emotionally intelligent instructional leadership is practiced in a real-life educational context. This method was chosen because it allows for an in-depth, contextualized understanding of the complex interactions between leadership strategies and school climate, particularly in a madrasah setting. A qualitative case study approach was scientifically sound for this investigation as it focused on an individual school MAN 2 Lebong known for its collaborative learning environment and character-based leadership.

The target population for this study included the madrasah principal, teaching staff, and educational personnel at MAN 2 Lebong. The research context was a public Islamic senior high school located in Bengkulu Province, Indonesia, known for integrating religious values with formal education. The unit of analysis consisted of leadership practices, communication processes, and school climate dynamics as experienced and interpreted by key stakeholders. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on individuals who had significant experience and direct involvement in school leadership and instructional processes.

The sample comprised six participants: the madrasah principal, three teachers, and two educational staff members. The participants varied in gender, teaching experience (ranging from 5 to 20 years), and functional roles within the school. While purposive sampling limits the generalizability of findings, it was appropriate for this exploratory case study, which aimed to gain rich and detailed insights rather than statistical generalization. The sample size was determined based on data saturation, which was reached when no new information emerged from subsequent interviews. Therefore, the realized sample size was sufficient to capture diverse perspectives related to the research objectives.

Data collection involved three main techniques. First, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with all participants. These interviews allowed for open-ended responses while ensuring that key topics such as emotional regulation, teacher supervision, and school climate were addressed. Second, participant observation was used to examine how leadership practices unfolded in daily school interactions, including staff meetings, classroom observations, and informal gatherings. Third, document analysis was conducted on institutional records such as teacher supervision reports, meeting minutes, and school development plans. These multiple sources of data provided triangulation, enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Field notes and observation logs were maintained to support data triangulation. Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Nowell et.al (2021), involving data condensation, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions. Codes were generated both deductively (based on the theoretical framework) and inductively (emerging from the data). Themes were then categorized under broader constructs such as emotional intelligence dimensions, instructional leadership strategies, and indicators of a positive school climate. To ensure the reliability and validity of the research, several strategies were employed. These included triangulation of data sources and methods, member checking to validate interview findings, and peer debriefing to review the interpretation of results. Ethical considerations were addressed by obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring confidentiality, and maintaining voluntary participation.

In summary, the methodology adopted in this study was rigorous and appropriate for exploring the nuanced relationship between emotional intelligence and instructional leadership. The qualitative case study design, combined with purposive sampling, triangulated data collection, and systematic analysis, allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the research problem and generated findings that are meaningful within the specific context of Islamic education in Indonesia.

Findings and Discussion,

Findings

Empathetic Instructional Supervision

The principal demonstrated a highly empathetic approach to instructional supervision. Rather than adopting an evaluative or punitive stance, he focused on building emotional rapport with teachers during classroom observations and post-teaching reflections. "I try to feel what the teacher feels before I say anything about their teaching," (Principal, Interview). This strategy fostered psychological safety and motivated teachers to reflect openly on their teaching practices. Teachers reported that feedback from the principal was delivered in a way that empowered rather than intimidated.

Table 1. Emotional Features in Instructional Supervision

Supervision Practice	Frequency Observed	Emotional Intelligence Domain
Personal greetings before session	6 of 6 sessions	Empathy
Reflective questions used	6 of 6 sessions	Self-awareness
Praise before critique	5 of 6 sessions	Emotional Regulation
Follow-up encouragement message	4 of 6 sessions	Relationship Management

These consistent patterns reveal the deliberate application of emotional intelligence to supervision. Rather than focusing only on instructional techniques, the principal cultivated trust and growth through relational engagement.

Conflict Management through Emotional Regulation

Another critical finding is the principal’s ability to regulate emotions during conflict. Observations and interviews confirmed that in cases of interpersonal tension either between teachers or between teacher and student the principal exhibited composure, delayed reaction, and reframed the problem collaboratively. This finding contrasts with prior studies suggesting that school leaders often avoid emotional labor during conflict (Sasere, O. B., et al. 2025). In this context, the principal embraced the emotional dimension as a tool for resolution.

Figure 1. Emotionally Intelligent Conflict Management Model



This model illustrates the principal's non-reactive, emotionally intelligent sequence for deescalating conflicts. The steps were consistent across multiple incidents and were noted by both staff and students.

Emotionally Intelligent School Rituals and Cultural Practices

One of the most distinct and unexpected findings was the principal’s use of emotional rituals to build school climate. These included weekly “gratitude circles,” monthly “celebration of effort” gatherings, and informal one-on-one appreciations. These practices reflected not only emotional intelligence but also local cultural and religious values such as sincerity (ikhlas), patience (sabr), and respect (adab), offering a contextualized model of leadership.

Table 3. Emotional Rituals and Perceived Outcomes

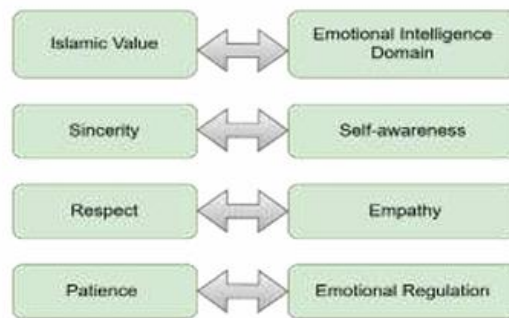
Ritual Practice	Frequency (Monthly)	Emotional Impact
Gratitude Circles	4	Positivity, Connectedness
Celebration of Small Wins	2	Motivation, Recognition
Friday Reflections	4	Self-awareness, Calmness

Teachers reported that these rituals significantly affected their emotional state and relationships with peers. This blending of leadership, emotion, and spirituality differs from most Western models, which separate personal faith from professional practice.

Integration of Spirituality and Emotional Intelligence

A particularly novel finding was the principal’s integration of Islamic values into emotional leadership strategies. He frequently referenced values such as sincerity (ikhlaṣ), mutual respect (ta’āruf), and patience (ṣabr) during meetings and decisions.

Figure 2. Synergistic Model of Spiritual and Emotional Intelligence



This synergy offers a culturally embedded model of leadership that balances professional, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. It extends current literature by showing how spiritual-emotional leadership can function in a madrasah context.

The emotionally intelligent leadership practices of the madrasah principal at MAN 2 Lebong significantly contributed to a positive school climate. Empathy, emotional regulation, and inclusive communication were deliberately employed. Additionally, local cultural rituals and Islamic values enriched the leadership model, producing a uniquely contextualized, emotionally responsive learning environment. These findings offer new insights into emotional intelligence in Islamic education and point toward more holistic leadership development frameworks for madrasah principals.

Discussion

Restating the Purpose and Contribution of the Study

This study aimed to explore how emotionally intelligent instructional leadership is enacted by the madrasah principal at MAN 2 Lebong, with particular attention to its influence on creating a conducive school climate. The core motivation behind this research lies in the increasing awareness

that effective school leadership must address not only technical and academic components but also emotional and relational aspects that shape daily school life.

By analyzing the leadership behaviors and strategies employed by the principal through a qualitative lens, this study has contributed to the understanding of how emotional intelligence is integrated into leadership practices in a specific cultural and religious context. It extends the discourse on instructional leadership by offering a framework that recognizes emotion as a resource, not an obstacle, in instructional improvement and school climate development.

The findings showed five major themes of practice:

- a. Empathetic instructional supervision, which fostered teacher openness and reflective growth.
- b. Emotional regulation in conflict resolution, which de-escalated tensions and strengthened trust.
- c. Inclusive communication, especially through informal interactions, which cultivated relational trust.
- d. School rituals that embedded emotional values, such as gratitude circles and reflective meetings.
- e. Spiritual-emotional integration, where Islamic values enhanced emotional intelligence competencies.

These findings collectively demonstrate that emotionally intelligent leadership does not operate in isolation from cultural or spiritual elements instead, it can be strengthened through context-specific values and practices. Thus, this study contributes a culturally rooted model of emotionally intelligent instructional leadership suited for madrasahs and other value-based educational institutions.

Relating Findings to the Literature

The core findings of this study align strongly with existing literature on emotional intelligence in leadership. Gómez-Leal et al. (2022) foundational framework identifies five key components of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Each of these elements was evident in the leadership practices of the principal studied. For example, his consistent display of empathy during supervision aligns with Goleman's assertion that understanding others' feelings is essential to effective leadership. Likewise, his ability to maintain calm during interpersonal tensions demonstrates self-regulation.

Moreover, this study reaffirms Sánchez-Núñez et al. (2023) proposition that emotional intelligence is essential for sustaining relational and organizational health. The relational atmosphere cultivated by the principal marked by emotional safety, mutual trust, and open communication reflects what these scholars describe as emotionally intelligent leadership: a practice rooted in empathy, trust building, and collaborative meaning-making.

Dimmock et.al (2021) model of instructional leadership emphasizes three key dimensions: defining the mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school climate. In the current study, the principal's strongest influence was on the third domain promoting school climate though not in the conventional, academic sense. Rather than focusing primarily on test performance or instructional audits, the principal prioritized emotional well-being, interpersonal harmony, and staff morale. This approach highlights how instructional leadership can evolve to encompass emotional and ethical priorities alongside academic goals.

The results also intersect with findings by Kılınċ et.al (2023), who argue that emotional understanding is not a "soft skill" but a core component of strategic school leadership. Emotional intelligence, according to them, supports teacher motivation, organizational learning, and resilience in the face of adversity all outcomes that were visible in this study's site.

At the same time, this study pushes beyond existing frameworks by illustrating how religious and cultural values such as *sabr* (patience), *ikhlas* (sincerity), and *adab* (ethical manners) reinforce emotional intelligence in Islamic education. This spiritual-emotional synergy is rarely emphasized in global EI literature, which often stems from secular, individualistic frameworks. The present study shows that emotional intelligence can be meaningfully contextualized within collectivist and faith-based traditions, offering a novel contribution to cross-cultural leadership research.

Explaining the Findings: Similarities and Differences with Other Research

The success of the principal's empathetic supervision approach can be partially explained by the social fabric of the school. MAN 2 Lebong is a relatively small institution with close-knit relationships among staff. In such environments, hierarchical distance is reduced, and emotional proximity becomes a natural feature of communication. This context enabled the principal's emotionally intelligent strategies to flourish, as teachers were receptive to relational leadership grounded in empathy.

The finding that informal communication (e.g., hallway conversations, WhatsApp chats) was more impactful than formal meetings is notable. While the literature (e.g., Thien, L. M., & Adams, D. (2024) often emphasizes structured communication systems, this study suggests that relational communication practices particularly those embedded in everyday social interaction play a more critical role in shaping emotional climate. The informal tone allowed staff to express concerns without fear, reinforcing the trust needed for effective leadership.

The finding regarding conflict management namely, the principal's use of reflection, delayed response, and mutual reframing is consistent with Gómez-Leal et.al (2022) view of emotional intelligence as emotional problem-solving. However, in contrast to Sasere et al. (2025), who observed that emotionally intelligent leadership primarily enhances motivation, this study found broader impacts, including increased interpersonal harmony and decreased emotional tension across the

school. This suggests that in collectivist cultures, emotional intelligence may function more as a communal resource than an individual asset.

A particularly unique finding was the use of rituals as emotionally intelligent leadership tools. Gratitude circles, reflective Friday meetings, and personalized appreciation messages were not only cultural practices but intentional emotional interventions. These practices built resilience and collective morale, acting as institutionalized forms of emotional support. This finding is rarely discussed in leadership literature, which tends to focus on technical or policy-based mechanisms. It also contrasts with studies that view rituals primarily as cultural symbols rather than leadership tools.

The integration of Islamic values with emotional competencies where concepts like sincerity align with self-awareness, and patience aligns with emotional regulation presents a contextual innovation. It suggests that emotional intelligence in education can be deepened and culturally legitimized through local spiritual frameworks. This differs significantly from secular EI models, which tend to abstract emotional intelligence from moral or religious grounding.

Finally, the absence of emphasis on academic performance in the findings may be explained by the principal's belief in the foundational role of emotional well-being. While many instructional leadership studies highlight academic outcomes as central, the principal's approach suggests that emotional readiness precedes academic excellence. This aligns with recent shifts in education that prioritize social-emotional learning as a prerequisite for cognitive development (e.g., OECD. (2021).

This study has shown that emotionally intelligent instructional leadership, when enacted with cultural and spiritual sensitivity, can foster a supportive school climate that empowers both teachers and students. The principal at MAN 2 Lebong demonstrated that leadership grounded in empathy, emotional regulation, inclusive communication, and local cultural rituals contributes not only to instructional improvement but to human development and collective well-being.

The findings reinforce many established theories in emotional intelligence and instructional leadership while also offering new insights especially in terms of spiritual integration and relational rituals. These insights call for leadership training programs that embrace emotional intelligence not as a peripheral skill, but as a central capacity, particularly in Islamic and collectivist educational environments. Future research could expand these findings by comparing schools across regions, faith traditions, or school sizes, and by combining qualitative insights with quantitative indicators of school climate and teacher performance. Nonetheless, this study confirms that emotionally intelligent leadership is not only possible but deeply impactful when tailored to context.

Conclusion and Suggestion

This study has explored the emotionally intelligent instructional leadership strategies employed by the principal of MAN 2 Lebong, with a focus on their role in shaping a supportive school climate. While the study has shed light on key emotional competencies applied in supervision, communication,

conflict resolution, and cultural-spiritual integration, its findings should be interpreted within the boundaries of its qualitative design and specific cultural setting.

One significant implication of this study lies in its illustration of how leadership in educational institutions can benefit from grounding emotional intelligence in cultural and religious contexts. The findings suggest that the integration of local values such as sincerity (ikhlās), patience (ṣabr), and mutual respect (ta'āruf) may enrich emotional leadership frameworks, especially in faith-based or community-oriented schools. This opens possibilities for leadership training programs to adapt emotional intelligence development to the specific cultural and spiritual values of their institutions.

In terms of limitations, the study focused on a single madrasah and did not use quantitative instruments to measure variables such as school climate, teacher morale, or student outcomes. As such, the depth of analysis came at the cost of breadth. Future research could incorporate mixed-methods approaches to triangulate data and evaluate the extent to which emotionally intelligent leadership correlates with measurable indicators of school improvement. In addition, exploring multiple schools across different regions or religious backgrounds could enhance the generalizability of culturally informed EI leadership models. There are also opportunities to further investigate how emotionally intelligent leadership interacts with broader systemic challenges, such as curriculum change, digital transformation, or policy reform. How do emotionally intelligent leaders adapt during crises, or lead innovation while maintaining emotional balance? These questions remain open and relevant, particularly as schools navigate complex social, emotional, and educational dynamics in an increasingly unpredictable world.

Finally, this study encourages scholars and practitioners to move beyond technical leadership models and give greater attention to the emotional lives of schools. Emotions are not marginal—they are central to how learning communities thrive, how teachers collaborate, and how school leaders build lasting trust. Recognizing and cultivating emotional intelligence, especially in culturally grounded ways, is thus not only relevant but necessary in the ongoing development of inclusive and responsive educational leadership.

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