

## Participatory Leadership in Madrasah Governance: Exploring Practices, Paradoxes, and Power Relations in Islamic Secondary Education

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### Abstract

Participatory leadership in madrasah governance has become increasingly significant in response to growing demands for transparency, accountability, and collaboration in Islamic education. This study aims to examine and analyze participatory leadership practices in a Madrasah Tsanawiyah, focusing on mechanisms of participation, teachers' interpretations, and the distribution of roles and responsibilities. Employing a qualitative case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis involving the principal, vice principals, and teachers engaged in madrasah management. Data were analyzed using an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that participatory leadership is primarily enacted through deliberative forums that function as formal spaces for teacher involvement while simultaneously serving as mechanisms of social legitimacy for institutional decisions, despite the persistence of centralized authority. Teacher participation in supervision and deliberation is experienced ambivalently, functioning both as a dialogical process of professional development and as a source of professional pressure. Furthermore, the distribution of roles reflects organizational trust and collaboration but also generates role ambiguity due to limited clarity of authority and resource support. These findings suggest that participatory leadership in madrasah governance is best understood as a dynamic and context-dependent spectrum of social practices.

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### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the discourse on educational leadership has undergone a significant shift toward more participatory, collaborative, and context-sensitive approaches (Bozkurt, 2022; Cobbinah & Eshun, 2025; Lakomski & Evers, 2022). This transformation is driven not only by increasing demands for transparency and accountability in educational governance but also by the recognition that complex educational challenges require collective engagement rather than centralized authority (Gorodensky et al., 2023; Hidayat, 2025; Nunes et al., 2023). Within the context of

Islamic educational institutions, particularly madrasahs, this shift becomes even more nuanced. Madrasahs are not merely administrative entities but socio-religious organizations where leadership is expected to balance managerial efficiency with moral and spiritual authority (Danz, 2022; Gomez et al., 2022; Syakhrani, 2024). Madrasahs play a vital role in shaping both academic competence and religious identity, the emergence of participatory leadership reflects broader institutional efforts to adapt to contemporary educational demands while preserving Islamic values (Amrullah, 2022; Hanisa et al., 2023; Ichwanudin et al., 2025). However, this transformation is neither linear nor without tension, as traditional hierarchical structures continue to coexist with emerging participatory practices.

Existing literature has extensively explored participatory and distributed leadership as mechanisms for enhancing organizational effectiveness and teacher engagement. Studies have shown that participatory leadership fosters collaborative decision-making, strengthens organizational commitment, and improves institutional outcomes (Butcher, 2022; Domin & Klawitter, 2025; Kahn & Bullis, 2025). Similarly, research on distributed leadership emphasizes the importance of shared responsibilities and collective agency in educational settings (Buyukgoze et al., 2024; Polatcan, 2024; Shal et al., 2024). At the same time, recent studies have highlighted the complexity of implementing participatory leadership, particularly in contexts characterized by strong hierarchical traditions (Berhanu, 2023; Cansoy et al., 2025; Pauna et al., 2021). For instance, Barras (2024) argue that participatory practices often operate within structured boundaries, resulting in what is termed “guided participation” rather than full decentralization. Moreover, global critiques of educational governance indicate that participatory approaches are frequently intertwined with accountability regimes, creating tensions between empowerment and control (Baidya, 2025; Baştumur & Uçar, 2022; Skedsmo & Huber, 2022). Despite these insights, much of the existing research remains rooted in Western educational contexts, with limited attention to how participatory leadership is enacted within Islamic educational institutions.

This gap becomes particularly evident when examining the unique characteristics of madrasah governance, where leadership is shaped not only by organizational structures but also by religious values, cultural norms, and moral expectations. While previous studies have examined leadership styles in Islamic education, they tend to focus on effectiveness, motivation, or institutional performance, often overlooking the procedural and experiential dimensions of participation. In addition, there is a scarcity of qualitative, context-specific studies that explore how participatory leadership is practiced, interpreted, and negotiated by actors within madrasahs. Consequently, there is limited understanding of how participation unfolds in real institutional settings, particularly in relation to decision-making processes, professional interactions, and the distribution of roles. Addressing this gap requires a deeper exploration of participatory leadership as a lived and socially constructed phenomenon rather than a prescriptive managerial model.

Based on this gap, this study aims to analyze participatory leadership practices in the governance of a Madrasah Tsanawiyah through a qualitative case study approach. Specifically, the study seeks to examine how participation is enacted through deliberative processes, how it is experienced by teachers within supervisory practices, and how responsibilities are distributed within the organizational structure. By focusing on these dimensions, the study intends to provide a more nuanced understanding of participatory leadership that goes beyond formal structures and captures its practical implications in everyday institutional life. Furthermore, this research contributes to the

growing body of literature by situating participatory leadership within the socio-cultural and religious context of Islamic education, thereby offering insights that are both empirically grounded and contextually relevant.

The central argument of this study is that participatory leadership in madrasah governance should not be understood as a uniform or fully egalitarian model, but rather as a dynamic spectrum shaped by the interplay of participation, hierarchy, and contextual constraints. Participation, in this sense, is not merely a technical mechanism of inclusion but a negotiated social process that involves multiple actors, interests, and power relations. By examining how this process unfolds in practice, this study seeks to reveal the underlying tensions, ambiguities, and possibilities embedded within participatory leadership. This perspective provides a more realistic and critical understanding of leadership practices in Islamic educational institutions and sets the foundation for the methodological approach adopted in this research.

## RESEARCHS METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore participatory leadership practices in madrasah governance. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate as participatory leadership is a socially constructed phenomenon that is contextual, complex, and rich in meaning, thus requiring in-depth exploration beyond quantitative measurement (Billsberry, 2025; Goebel & Maistry, 2022; Minceş et al., 2025). The case study design enables a holistic investigation of leadership practices within their natural setting, capturing social interactions, decision-making processes, and the construction of meaning among actors involved (Anisa et al., 2024; Yammarino, 2010). The research was conducted at MTs Madinatul Ulum, which was purposively selected due to its observable practices of involving teachers and staff in decision-making processes. This context provides a relevant setting to examine how participatory leadership is enacted in Islamic educational institutions, where organizational practices are influenced by both managerial structures and religious-cultural values (Arif, 2021; Nurbayani & Amiruddin, 2024; Supriyono et al., 2025).

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis. These methods were selected to ensure a comprehensive understanding of participatory leadership practices from multiple perspectives. Interviews were conducted to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of leadership practices. Observation was employed to capture the dynamics of leadership interactions, deliberation processes, and communication patterns in both formal and informal settings. Document analysis included meeting minutes, principal decrees, and supervision reports as supporting evidence. The research participants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on individuals with strategic roles and direct involvement in madrasah governance. These included the principal, vice principals/senior teachers, and active teachers. The researcher acted as the primary instrument, engaging directly with participants while maintaining reflexivity throughout the data collection process (Stige et al., 2025; von Unger et al., 2022; Yoon & Uliassi, 2022). To enhance the credibility of the findings, data triangulation was applied across interviews, observations, and documents (Musa & Isha, 2021).

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Bennardo & De Munck, 2023; Finkelstein et al., 2024; McGill et al., 2023). Data reduction involved selecting, focusing, and simplifying raw data obtained

from interviews, observations, and documents to identify relevant patterns. Data display was carried out through thematic categorization and narrative organization to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn through an iterative process of verification, ensuring consistency and depth of interpretation. This analytical approach allows for a systematic and reflective examination of qualitative data, enabling the identification of key themes related to participatory leadership practices (Laari, 2025). The use of multiple data sources and iterative analysis strengthens the credibility of the findings and supports the development of a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study (Causer et al., 2024; Forbat, 2025; Scott et al., 2025).

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Result**

The results of this research are presented based on the analysis of interview data, observations, and supporting documents which include meeting minutes, academic supervision and the decree of the head of the madrasah related to the division of duties. This results in three main things that are intertwined and form a complete picture of participatory leadership practices in madrasah governance.

#### **Deliberation as a Formal Space for Participation and Decision Legitimacy**

Deliberation serves as the primary space for practicing participatory leadership at MTs Madinatul Ulum. This is evident in various meeting agendas, ranging from the evaluation of teaching and learning activities, academic supervision of teachers, to discussions of annual work programs. Meeting minutes indicate that strategic decisions, such as the determination of program priorities and adjustments to academic policies, are formulated through forums involving the principal, teachers, and representatives of the foundation. A senior teacher described the process as follows: "Before making decisions, we usually discuss them first through deliberation or meetings. The principal gives teachers the opportunity to express their opinions or ideas, although the final decisions are still formulated together."

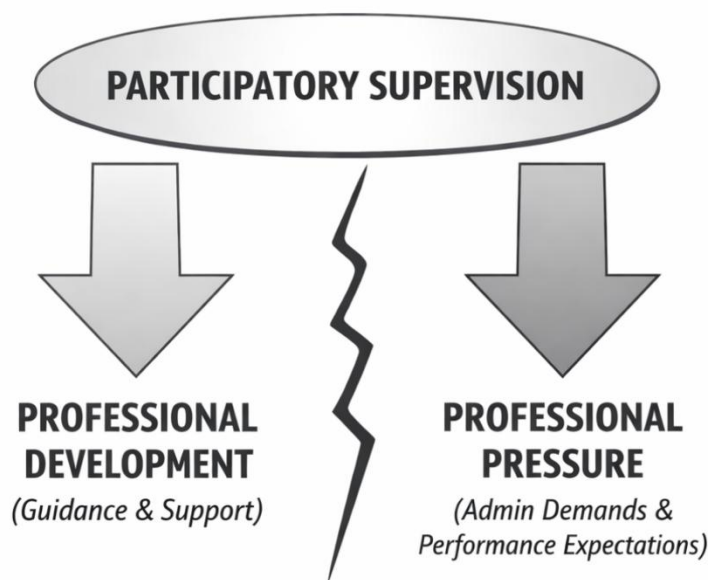
This statement reflects both a sense of involvement and an awareness of the principal's structural authority. Deliberation functions not only as an administrative procedure but also as a symbol of social legitimacy for the decisions made. However, participation is not always equal. Some teachers acknowledged that, in certain situations, their contributions tend to be consultative rather than decisive, creating ambiguity between participatory practices and the reality of hierarchical leadership.

#### **Participatory Supervision: Development and Professional Pressure**

This finding emerges from the practices of academic supervision and teacher performance evaluation. Supervision reports indicate that the process is not merely focused on monitoring, but is also followed by technical guidance, reflective discussions, and the provision of instructional examples. In this context, the madrasah principal acts as a facilitator who encourages performance improvement through a dialogical approach. The principal stated: "Supervision is not intended to find faults, but to guide and evaluate. If there are shortcomings, we discuss them together and look for solutions."

However, behind this developmental narrative, several teachers experience professional pressure, particularly related to administrative demands and performance

standards. One teacher expressed: “We understand that it is for improvement, but sometimes it feels burdensome because there is a lot of administrative work to prepare, while teaching hours are already demanding.” This condition indicates a paradox within participatory leadership, where supervision simultaneously opens space for dialogue and professional growth, while also imposing structural pressures that are not entirely negotiable for teachers. The coexistence of professional development and professional pressure within participatory supervision is further illustrated in **Figure 1**.



**Figure 1. The Paradox of Participatory Supervision: Between Professional Development and Professional Pressure**

**Figure 1** illustrates the paradoxical nature of participatory supervision identified in this study. On one hand, supervision functions as a mechanism for professional development through guidance, dialogue, and collaborative reflection. On the other hand, it simultaneously generates professional pressure due to administrative demands and performance expectations imposed on teachers. The visual model highlights that these two dimensions are not mutually exclusive but coexist within the same supervisory process. This tension reflects the complex reality of participatory leadership in madrasah governance, where efforts to empower teachers are often intertwined with institutional accountability requirements, resulting in an ambivalent professional experience.

### **Distribution of Roles and Responsibilities**

The distribution of roles and responsibilities, as outlined in the principal’s decree regarding the assignment of vice principals, homeroom teachers, extracurricular coordinators, and administrative staff, reflects a systematic effort to involve various human resources in madrasah governance. For some informants, this distribution of tasks is perceived as a form of trust in individual capacities. One teacher explained: “The distribution of tasks is the result of deliberation. We first discuss who is ready, although there are still considerations from the leadership.” However, other teachers perceive this distribution as an additional responsibility that is not always accompanied by

adequate resource support. This condition creates a subtle tension between the spirit of collaboration and the reality of limited capacity. Such complexity indicates that participatory leadership in the madrasah operates within a dynamic spectrum, balancing efforts to empower staff with the need to maintain organizational effectiveness.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that participatory leadership at MTs Madinatul Ulum is neither linear nor free from tension. Rather, it emerges as a social process characterized by negotiated meanings and a paradox between participation and hierarchy. This complexity shapes the madrasah's governance dynamics in a contextual and realistic manner. To further clarify the empirical findings, the results of this study are summarized in **Table 1**.

**Table 1. Research Findings**

| Theme  | Description of Findings  | Data Sources                    | Informants                          |
|--|--|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Deliberation as a formal space for participation and decision legitimacy | Deliberation serves as the main forum for decision-making in the madrasah, including the evaluation of teaching and learning activities, academic supervision, and annual program planning. Teachers are given the opportunity to express their views, although final decisions remain under the authority of the principal. | Interviews, meeting minutes     | Principal, Vice Principal, Teachers |
| Participatory supervision: development and professional pressure         | Academic supervision is conducted dialogically through discussion and guidance; however, teachers also experience professional pressure related to administrative demands and performance standards.   | Interviews, supervision reports | —                                   |
| Distribution of roles and responsibilities                               | The assignment of roles, including vice principals, homeroom teachers, and activity coordinators, is carried out through deliberation and formalized through the principal's decree. Some teachers perceive this as a form of trust, while others view it as an additional workload without sufficient resource support.     | Interviews, principal's decree  | —                                   |

**Table 1** indicates that participatory leadership at MTs Madinatul Ulum operates within a dynamic spectrum. Practices such as deliberation, dialogical supervision, and role distribution do not always produce full equality. Instead, participation coexists with hierarchical structures, professional pressures, and structural limitations, thereby shaping a complex and contextual pattern of madrasah governance.

## Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that participatory leadership in madrasah governance does not operate as an idealized normative model, but rather as a dynamic social practice shaped by the interaction between formal structures, organizational culture, and power relations. Participation among stakeholders, particularly teachers, is manifested through three primary domains: deliberation, participatory supervision, and the distribution of roles and responsibilities. Deliberation functions as a formal space that enables teacher involvement in decision-making while simultaneously serving as a

mechanism for legitimizing institutional policies. Participatory supervision reflects a dual process, combining professional development through dialogical engagement with the experience of professional pressure driven by administrative and performance demands. Meanwhile, the distribution of roles illustrates efforts to involve broader human resources in governance, yet also generates ambiguity and additional workload for teachers. Collectively, these findings indicate that participatory leadership in madrasahs is characterized by tensions between inclusion and hierarchy, empowerment and control, and collaboration and structural limitations, highlighting its contextual and non-linear nature.

These findings contribute to and extend existing scholarship on participatory and distributed leadership. Consistent with prior studies (Bush, 2024), this research confirms that dialogue, collaboration, and shared involvement are central to participatory governance in educational settings. However, unlike the assumption of fully shared authority, the findings demonstrate that participation in madrasahs tends to operate within bounded structures, aligning with the concept of “bounded participation” (Hall, 2024) and “guided participation” (Mennaa & Belhadj, 2024). This suggests that decision-making authority remains concentrated in leadership positions despite the presence of participatory mechanisms. Furthermore, the paradox identified in participatory supervision supports critiques of global educational reforms that combine empowerment with accountability pressures (Iswari, 2025; Kazanskaia, 2025; Perryman et al., 2025). While supervision fosters professional growth, it simultaneously reinforces bureaucratic control, echoing tensions reported in teacher performance studies (Amini et al., 2024; Even-Zahav et al., 2022; Pronina, 2022). Importantly, this study addresses a gap in the literature by situating participatory leadership within the context of Islamic education, where religious values, collective culture, and hierarchical authority intersect—dimensions that are often underrepresented in mainstream leadership research.

This study offers both theoretical and practical contributions to the field of Islamic educational management. Theoretically, it advances the understanding of participatory leadership by conceptualizing it as a dynamic spectrum rather than a fixed or uniform model. By demonstrating how participation can be symbolic, consultative, or substantive depending on context, this study challenges dominant Western-centric frameworks that often assume egalitarian organizational structures. It also enriches the discourse by integrating Islamic management principles such as *shura* (deliberation) and *tawazun* (balance), highlighting how participatory practices are embedded within religious and cultural values. Practically, the findings provide actionable insights for madrasah leaders, emphasizing the need to design participatory mechanisms that go beyond procedural involvement toward meaningful influence. This includes balancing workload distribution with adequate resource support, ensuring clarity of roles, and managing supervision processes that support professional growth without exacerbating pressure. Thus, the study contributes to developing more context-sensitive and sustainable governance practices in Islamic educational institutions.

In conclusion, this study underscores that participatory leadership in madrasah governance is inherently complex, shaped by the interplay of empowerment, hierarchy, and contextual constraints. Rather than representing a purely democratic or egalitarian model, participatory leadership emerges as a negotiated practice in which inclusion and authority coexist. The findings highlight the importance of understanding participation

not as an absolute condition but as a context-dependent process influenced by cultural, institutional, and structural factors. From a broader perspective, this research calls for a re-examination of participatory leadership frameworks to better accommodate non-Western educational contexts, particularly those grounded in religious values. Future research is recommended to explore comparative studies across different madrasah settings or Islamic educational institutions to deepen understanding of how participatory leadership evolves across contexts. Additionally, policy and practice should focus on strengthening supportive structures that enable meaningful participation while minimizing unintended pressures on educators, thereby enhancing both organizational effectiveness and teacher well-being.

## CONCLUSION

This study has examined how participatory leadership is enacted within the governance of a madrasah, particularly in the context of increasing demands for collaboration, accountability, and contextual relevance in Islamic education institutions. Rather than functioning as an idealized model of shared decision-making, the findings reveal that participatory leadership operates as a dynamic and negotiated practice shaped by organizational structures, cultural values, and power relations. Participation is primarily facilitated through deliberative forums, dialogical supervision, and the distribution of roles and responsibilities. However, these practices do not fully eliminate hierarchical authority. Instead, they produce a complex interplay between inclusion and control, where teachers are involved in consultative processes while final decision-making remains centralized. In addition, participatory supervision reflects a dual experience, serving as both a space for professional development and a source of professional pressure, while role distribution simultaneously represents trust and generates workload ambiguity.

These findings highlight the importance of understanding participatory leadership as a contextual spectrum rather than a uniform or fully egalitarian model. In the context of Islamic educational management, this study underscores the need to integrate participatory practices with culturally embedded principles such as *shura* and organizational balance, while ensuring that participation does not become merely symbolic or burdensome. Practically, madrasah leaders are encouraged to design more meaningful participatory mechanisms by balancing authority, responsibility, and resource support. From a broader perspective, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on educational leadership by offering an empirically grounded understanding of participation in non-Western contexts. Future research is recommended to explore comparative and multi-site studies to deepen insights into how participatory leadership evolves across different institutional and cultural settings.

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