



School Policy in Supporting Teacher Career Development at MIN 50 Bireuen

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how school policies are formulated and applied to support teacher career development in the context of an Islamic school in MIN 2 Bireuen. This study using a qualitative descriptive method, data were collected through interviews, direct observations, and document analysis involving key stakeholders such as the principal, vice principal, and selected teachers. The results reveal that MIN 50 Bireuen has initiated several strategies, including opportunities for further education, internal coaching programs, and performance-based incentives. While these policies are driven by the strong leadership of the principal and a supportive organizational climate, the study also identifies several barriers, such as limited funding allocation, inadequate institutional systems, and rigid bureaucratic procedures. The findings emphasize that effective school-level policies can significantly motivate teachers to pursue professional growth, provided they are aligned with the school's vision, supported by adequate resources, and implemented transparently. This study recommends a more structured and culturally responsive policy framework to ensure the sustainable development of teacher professionalism within Islamic educational institutions.

1. Introduction

In the modern landscape of global education, the role of teachers is increasingly recognized as a pivotal factor in determining the quality of educational outcomes. As noted by Aliakbari et al. (2025), teachers are not merely transmitters of knowledge, but agents of change whose continuous professional development (CPD) is essential for maintaining the relevance and effectiveness of educational practices. The Indonesian education system, particularly in Islamic-based institutions such as Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri (MIN), presents a unique context in which teacher career development is interwoven with religious, cultural, and pedagogical dimensions.

MIN 50 Bireuen, located in Aceh Province, Indonesia, exemplifies the complexity of teacher career development within Islamic educational institutions. This madrasah operates under the vision of becoming an excellent, competitive, creative, and Islamic school rooted in environmental awareness. However, despite this progressive vision, empirical observations and prior research indicate a significant gap between expected outcomes and actual implementation of career development policies for teachers (Hasan et al., 2020; Ismail et al., 2022). Many teachers express frustration over limited opportunities for advancement and the perceived lack of institutional support, which often leads to stagnation and demotivation in their professional journey (Martina, 2021).

Nationally, the importance of teacher development is codified in various education policies, yet implementation at the school level remains inconsistent. The Ministry of Religious Affairs of Indonesia and the Ministry of Education and Culture have both advocated for robust career development frameworks. However, structural and systemic barriers—such as insufficient funding, rigid bureaucracy, and lack of access to CPD programs—continue to hinder effective policy execution (Tanang et al., 2021). These challenges are further compounded in regions like Aceh, where educational institutions are expected to integrate Islamic values and local wisdom in their policy frameworks (Kahar, 2021).

Career development for teachers is not only a matter of individual growth but a strategic imperative for institutional quality and student success. As Subandi (2020) emphasizes, professional development should be viewed as a long-term investment in the human capital of schools. It must encompass various aspects of teacher competence, including pedagogical, professional, personal, and social dimensions. Effective career development policies should provide opportunities for academic advancement, participation in scholarly activities, involvement in professional learning communities, and recognition through structured promotion pathways.

In the context of MIN 50 Bireuen, the implementation of career development policies reflects both aspirations and limitations. Preliminary observations conducted in November 2024 revealed several constraints, including (1) limited access to ongoing professional development programs, (2) insufficient budget allocations, and (3) bureaucratic hurdles that restrict career progression. These findings are consistent with national trends reported in other studies (Rahmawati & Sukirno, 2022; Nafitupulu et al., 2023), which highlight the need for more localized and adaptive strategies to support teachers in Islamic schools.

The leadership of school principals plays a critical role in shaping the trajectory of teacher career development. Transformational leadership, as described by Leithwood and Jantzi (2000), encompasses inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and idealized influence. In practice, this means that school leaders must foster a supportive environment, encourage continuous learning, and advocate for policies that align with both institutional goals and individual teacher needs. At MIN 50 Bireuen, the principal's commitment to fostering a collaborative and growth-oriented culture has been a key factor in advancing certain aspects of teacher development, despite systemic constraints.

Another important aspect is the role of organizational culture in sustaining career development initiatives. As noted by Yohanes (2022), a positive school culture characterized by shared commitment, collaboration, and innovation significantly enhances the likelihood of successful teacher development. In MIN 50 Bireuen, this manifests in practices such as joint lesson planning, peer mentoring, and internal training programs. However, these initiatives often lack formal structure and policy support, which undermines their long-term sustainability.

Moreover, effective teacher career development policies must be aligned with broader educational goals and supported by measurable outcomes. According to Ingvarson (2019), structured career development pathways with clear competency standards and performance metrics can serve as powerful motivators for teachers. Unfortunately, in many Indonesian schools—including MIN 50 Bireuen—evaluation systems remain opaque and subjective, thereby weakening the connection between performance and career advancement.

Despite these challenges, there are promising opportunities for reform. Scholars such as Ulfatin et al. (2020) suggest that the integration of mentoring and coaching systems can significantly improve the effectiveness of teacher development programs. Similarly, research by Riatmaja (2022) emphasizes the importance of participatory and transparent policy-making processes in enhancing teacher motivation and institutional commitment. These recommendations are particularly relevant for schools operating in unique cultural and religious contexts like Aceh, where policies must be culturally sensitive and aligned with Islamic values.

A review of previous studies underscores the need for localized research that examines the specific dynamics of career development in Islamic primary schools. Most existing literature focuses on general education settings or Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), leaving a gap in understanding how career development unfolds in *madrasah* contexts. For example, research by Salabi (2021) and Kurniawan & Utari (2021) provided valuable insights into teacher development in *pesantren* and vocational schools, but did not address the unique policy frameworks and cultural imperatives present in public *madrasahs*.

This study aims to fill this research gap by providing an in-depth analysis of how school policies at MIN 50 Bireuen support or hinder teacher career development. Specifically, the research seeks to: (1) examine the implementation of career development policies at the school level, (2) identify the supporting and inhibiting factors in policy execution, and (3) explore the role of school leadership in shaping career development trajectories. By focusing on a single case study within the Aceh region, this research contributes to the broader discourse on educational reform, teacher professionalism, and policy implementation in Islamic schooling systems.

In sum, the development of effective and contextually relevant teacher career policies in Indonesian *madrasahs* demands a multifaceted approach—one that combines visionary leadership, participatory governance, adequate resourcing, and cultural alignment. This study provides empirical evidence and practical insights that can inform future policy design and implementation strategies, not only for MIN 50 Bireuen but for similar institutions across the country. Addressing the identified gaps and leveraging existing strengths can ultimately enhance the professionalism, motivation, and retention of teachers, thereby contributing to improved student outcomes and institutional effectiveness.

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the implementation of school policies in supporting teacher career development at MIN 50 Bireuen, Aceh, Indonesia. The choice of this approach aligns with the aim of understanding the complex and context-specific dynamics of policy enactment within Islamic elementary education settings. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative research is well-suited for examining processes, meanings, and experiences in natural contexts. In this study, the goal is to provide a detailed and nuanced picture of how school-level policies operate to either enable or hinder professional advancement for teachers.

2.1 Research Setting

The research follows a case study design, focusing on a single institution—MIN 50 Bireuen—as the unit of analysis. This design was selected because it enables an in-depth examination of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2014). As a public Islamic elementary school, MIN 50 Bireuen was chosen due to its proactive stance on teacher development, as well as its representative characteristics in the region of Aceh, which is governed under a unique system of Islamic law and educational autonomy.

The study investigates both formal policies (e.g., documents on teacher promotion, training allocations, and school planning) and informal practices (e.g., school culture, mentoring routines, and leadership behavior) that influence teacher career development. This holistic perspective allows the researcher to understand not only the structures but also the lived experiences of educators within this institutional framework.

2.2 Participants

The participants in this study consisted of the Principal of MIN 50 Bireuen, who serves as the primary policymaker and institutional leader; the Vice Principal for Curriculum, who is actively involved in supervising teachers and managing professional development programs; and five teachers with diverse teaching experiences and subject specializations.

The selection of participants followed the purposive sampling technique, which is common in qualitative research where information-rich cases are sought (Patton, 2015). All participants were involved in, or directly impacted by, the school's career development programs. Their selection was also based on their willingness to engage in repeated interviews and allow access to relevant documentation.

Ethical considerations were upheld throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their identities were anonymized to protect confidentiality. This approach aligns with qualitative research ethics as emphasized by Creswell (2018).

2.3 Data Collection Techniques

The study applied triangulation of data collection methods to enhance validity and reliability. The three main techniques used were:

1. *In-depth Interviews.*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant to gather deep insights into their experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of school policies related to career development. The interview protocol included open-ended questions that allowed for flexibility and probing, facilitating the emergence of rich narratives. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), this approach is particularly effective for exploring how individuals make sense of institutional policies.

2. *Observations.*

The researcher conducted non-participant observations during teacher meetings, training sessions, and classroom activities. Observational data provided direct insight into how career development initiatives were practiced and perceived in daily routines. Notes were taken systematically using an observation sheet structured around key themes from the literature, such as leadership behavior, collegial collaboration, and motivational climates (Subandi, 2020).

3. *Document Analysis:*

Institutional documents, including teacher development plans, training attendance records, promotion policies, and performance evaluation reports, were reviewed. These documents offered a formal perspective on the career development processes and allowed the researcher to verify and contextualize interview findings. Bowen (2009) suggests that document analysis is vital for triangulating qualitative data and uncovering policy intentions.

2.4 Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman (1994), which consists of three concurrent and cyclical components: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. This model was chosen due to its systematic yet flexible approach in handling qualitative data, allowing the researcher to make sense of complex narratives and contextual insights gathered from the field.

In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected, focused, and simplified the raw data obtained from interviews, observations, and document analysis. The data were transcribed, coded, and categorized through both deductive and inductive approaches. Deductive coding was guided by predetermined themes based on literature, such as school policy, leadership, and teacher career development, while inductive coding emerged from repeated patterns and meaningful insights expressed directly by the participants.

During the data display stage, matrices and narrative summaries were employed to organize and visualize the data, facilitating interpretation of interrelated themes such as support mechanisms, structural barriers, and the roles of school leadership. Finally, the conclusion drawing and verification stage involved ongoing reflection and triangulation to ensure accuracy. To enhance the credibility of the findings, the researcher conducted member checking by presenting the interpreted results back to the participants for validation and confirmation.

This systematic and reflective process of analysis was essential to maintain the trustworthiness of the study, which was further enhanced through peer debriefing and prolonged engagement in the field (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

2.5 Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure the credibility and dependability of the study, multiple verification strategies were applied throughout the research process. Triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained from interviews, observations, and document analysis to confirm the consistency of findings. Member checking was also utilized by presenting the interpreted data to participants to validate accuracy and confirm the researcher's interpretations. An audit trail was maintained to document each step of the research process, including data collection, coding, analysis, and decision-making, allowing for transparency and traceability.

In addition, prolonged engagement in the field was undertaken to build rapport with participants and to gain a deeper understanding of the institutional and cultural context. This immersive approach enabled the researcher to observe authentic practices and gather rich, meaningful data. These strategies align with established best practices in qualitative research, contributing to the production of robust, trustworthy, and transferable findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

3. Results

3.1 School Policies in Supporting Teacher Career Development

The implementation of career development policies at MIN 50 Bireuen demonstrates a conscious and structured institutional effort to enhance teacher quality through capacity-building measures. The leadership of the madrasah has taken deliberate steps to integrate these efforts within official school programs, reflecting alignment with both local needs and the national frameworks set forth by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kementerian Agama RI, 2020). Nonetheless, the effectiveness of these policies is shaped by a combination of strategic planning, institutional culture, resource availability, and individual teacher commitment.

3.1.1 *Internal Regulation and Planning*

At the foundation of MIN 50 Bireuen's career development policy is its Rencana Kerja Tahunan (RKT – Annual Work Plan) and Rencana Pengembangan Sekolah (RPS – School Development Plan), which explicitly include objectives for teacher professional advancement. These documents are not merely administrative formalities, but living frameworks that guide decision-making throughout the academic year. According to the Vice Principal for Curriculum, "We always start the school year with a reflection on teacher development priorities. These are discussed in planning meetings and embedded into each unit's action plan.

This participatory planning process ensures that teacher development is treated not as a peripheral concern, but as a central element of school improvement. The school leadership sets annual targets for teacher participation in training, encourages reflective teaching practices, and tracks progress through periodic evaluations. However, as the principal himself acknowledged, "We still need a more structured evaluation tool to measure the long-term impact of these development programs on teacher performance and student learning outcomes."

The policies also reference the Program Pengembangan Keprofesian Berkelanjutan (PKB – Continuous Professional Development Program), a national framework that encourages ongoing professional growth for teachers. At the local level, this program is adapted to accommodate the school's unique Islamic and community-based context. Teachers are encouraged to participate in both internal and external PKB activities. These include attending regional workshops organized by the Ministry, engaging in community learning circles, and participating in school-organized micro-trainings.

Subandi (2020) argues that schools that adopt localized versions of PKB frameworks tend to have greater ownership of their professional development agenda. This is visible at MIN 50 Bireuen, where the school's adaptation of PKB includes Islamic values, such as *ikhlas* (sincerity) and *amanah* (trustworthiness), in the objectives of professional development.

However, funding limitations continue to affect the depth and consistency of program implementation. Internal training programs are often short in duration and limited to broad pedagogical topics. According to one senior teacher, "Sometimes the training is too general. We need more subject-specific and advanced sessions." This sentiment reflects the need to diversify the themes of training in line with both teacher needs and national curriculum standards.

The lack of budget also hampers opportunities for long-term certification programs or postgraduate studies. This finding echoes what Ingvarson (2019) noted about the importance of aligning planning with resource allocation. Without funding, even the most well-intentioned policies risk becoming symbolic rather than transformative.

3.1.2 *In-House Training and Peer Learning*

Despite budget constraints, MIN 50 Bireuen has developed strong internal mechanisms for peer learning and knowledge sharing. The school's weekly MGMP (Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran – Subject Teacher Working Group) meetings have evolved into vibrant platforms for professional dialogue. Teachers gather in small groups based on their subjects to discuss lesson plans, evaluate assessment strategies, and share classroom challenges.

A young teacher in the Islamic Studies department described these sessions as "the most useful form of learning because we can immediately apply what we discuss." The informal and dialogical nature of these forums fosters a sense of ownership over learning and makes the sessions responsive to real classroom needs.

The culture of learning together (*belajar bersama*) is further reinforced through peer mentoring initiatives. Experienced teachers voluntarily mentor junior colleagues, often without formal appointment. According to the curriculum coordinator, “We don’t have an official mentoring system yet, but our senior teachers naturally take on that role. It’s part of our school’s culture.”

This aligns with what Avalos (2011) identified as the value of embedded professional learning—learning that occurs naturally within the rhythms of daily practice. Furthermore, these peer support systems help reduce the isolation often experienced by new teachers and allow for the transmission of institutional knowledge and values.

Reflective teaching also plays an important role. The school organizes monthly “sharing sessions” where one or two teachers present a classroom innovation or lesson they found successful. These sessions are not evaluative but rather intended to stimulate discussion and learning among peers. As one teacher explained, “Even just listening to a colleague talk about how they handled a difficult student gives me new ideas.”

These practices indicate a shift from top-down development models to more democratic, teacher-driven approaches to CPD, consistent with Vescio et al. (2008), who argue that professional learning communities improve teacher efficacy when built on collaboration and shared inquiry.

3.1.3 Academic Advancement and Further Studies

The school administration also actively encourages teachers to pursue formal academic advancement. Currently, two teachers are undertaking their master’s degrees in Islamic Education at local universities, with the school adjusting their workloads accordingly. Although no direct financial assistance is provided, the moral and logistical support from the school is a vital enabler.

The principal emphasized that “even if we cannot fund them, we can at least support them by reducing their teaching hours and helping them with schedules.” Such flexibility shows the school’s commitment to teacher development despite resource limitations.

Nonetheless, other teachers expressed concerns that the financial burden of higher education remains a major barrier. One teacher noted, “I want to continue my studies, but I cannot afford it without a scholarship. So I delay my plan every year.” This highlights the need for collaboration between schools and government agencies to provide accessible funding schemes.

The national teacher competency framework clearly positions postgraduate education as a pathway to career advancement (Kementerian Agama RI, 2020). However, without equitable access to higher education funding, the policy risks favoring teachers from better socioeconomic backgrounds.

Further studies not only improve teacher competence but also contribute to school reputation. Teachers with master’s degrees are often invited to present at academic forums or write in educational journals, bringing recognition to the school. As such, promoting academic advancement has both intrinsic and institutional benefits.

3.1.4 Reward and Promotion System

Recognition of teacher achievement at MIN 50 Bireuen operates on both formal and informal levels. Formally, promotions in rank (*golongan*) are administered through the national civil service system. The school supports this process by assisting teachers with document preparation, portfolio development, and coordinating with district education offices.

Informally, the school gives symbolic awards such as “Inspirational Teacher of the Month,” public mentions during flag ceremonies, and priority in attending external training. These rewards, although non-monetary, carry prestige and reinforce positive norms.

However, some teachers raised issues regarding consistency. As one teacher remarked, “Sometimes I feel my contribution is not seen, especially when I focus on students with special needs or behind-the-scenes work.” This illustrates that current reward systems may disproportionately favor visible or extroverted contributions.

To address this, the school is planning to develop a rubric-based internal appraisal system, as suggested by the vice principal. This tool would include multiple domains—pedagogical innovation, collegial collaboration, student feedback, and administrative responsibilities—allowing for a more holistic evaluation.

3.2 Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

The implementation of career development policies at MIN 50 Bireuen is deeply influenced by various contextual elements that act as either enablers or barriers. These factors arise from both internal school dynamics and external educational structures. Understanding these forces is essential in assessing the success and limitations of policy execution. The findings of this study reveal a complex interplay of institutional culture, leadership styles, bureaucratic frameworks, and resource availability.

3.2.1 Supporting Factors

1. Leadership Commitment

One of the most significant enabling factors in the school’s implementation of teacher development policies is the strong commitment from the principal. His leadership style is characterized by inclusiveness, participatory governance, and motivational engagement. Teachers consistently reported feeling valued and supported, particularly when given opportunities to contribute to decision-making processes.

As one senior teacher stated during the interview, “When we are involved in planning and given freedom to innovate, we feel trusted—and that motivates us.” This finding supports Leithwood and Jantzi’s (2000) theory of transformational leadership, which asserts that motivation, intellectual stimulation, and personalized consideration are key drivers of organizational improvement.

The principal not only initiates programs but also monitors their progress. He personally attends professional development sessions, delivers reflective talks during flag ceremonies, and encourages teachers to set individual learning targets at the beginning of each semester. His presence and involvement signal the seriousness of teacher development in the school’s broader mission.

2. Infrastructure and Technology

The school has made noteworthy efforts to upgrade its technological infrastructure. Most teachers have access to laptops provided by the school, and every classroom is equipped with basic digital tools such as projectors and speakers. These resources facilitate digital literacy and support the use of blended learning strategies—skills that are increasingly required in modern Islamic education (Ismail et al., 2022).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the school’s ability to transition to online platforms was bolstered by these existing resources. Teachers were able to attend webinars, access online courses, and utilize digital content without significant disruption. According to the ICT coordinator, “We made it a habit to practice using Zoom and Google Classroom even before the pandemic hit. So when it came, we were not entirely unprepared.”

This infrastructure also supports internal teacher training, allowing the school to invite speakers virtually and share recorded sessions among staff. The integration of technology into daily teaching routines strengthens the school's capacity to sustain continuous professional development.

3. Collaborative Work Culture

Another key strength at MIN 50 Bireuen is its collaborative work culture. Teachers view themselves not as isolated practitioners, but as members of a professional learning community. This sense of collegiality is nurtured through structured and informal forums for discussion, such as subject group meetings, team-teaching efforts, and classroom observation exchanges.

The vice principal for curriculum described this dynamic as “a culture of sharing,” where teachers are encouraged to critique constructively, celebrate successes, and collectively troubleshoot problems. This collaborative spirit reduces professional isolation and enhances the quality of teaching practice, especially in a context where external support is limited.

Research by Vescio, Ross, and Adams (2008) underscores the value of professional learning communities (PLCs) in enhancing teacher effectiveness. At MIN 50 Bireuen, the PLC model is localized through cultural concepts such as *gotong royong* (mutual assistance) and *musyawarah* (deliberation), reinforcing its sustainability and relevance.

3.2.2 Inhibiting Factors

While several strengths facilitate the realization of career development policies, the school also grapples with significant challenges that constrain progress.

1. Bureaucratic Constraints

A persistent issue faced by teachers is the bureaucratic complexity of the national education system. Teachers seeking promotions must navigate a multilayered approval process that involves submitting portfolios, securing endorsements from district offices, and waiting for extended periods for verification and issuance of certificates.

As one teacher lamented, “Even if I fulfill all the criteria, I have to wait months or years for approval. It makes me feel like all my hard work goes unrecognized.” This bureaucratic inertia demotivates teachers and can result in decreased participation in professional development efforts.

The principal himself acknowledged this problem, noting that “even though we assist with the documents, the process depends on offices outside our school. We are often left waiting.” Such delays reflect broader inefficiencies in Indonesia's civil service management of teacher careers, especially within the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Tanang et al., 2021).

2. Limited Financial Support

Financial constraints are perhaps the most tangible barrier to effective career development. The school operates on a limited budget, much of which is allocated for operational expenses, student welfare, and basic maintenance. As a result, there is little room for investing in teacher development programs.

While some external training programs are provided by the government or NGOs, many require registration fees, travel costs, or accommodation. These hidden costs often discourage participation, especially for teachers who live far from training centers or lack personal vehicles.

One junior teacher explained, “I was invited to a training in Banda Aceh, but I had to decline because I couldn't afford the travel costs—even though the training itself was free.” This situation indicates a need for more equitable funding mechanisms that consider geographic and socioeconomic disparities.

3. Workload and Time Constraints

Teachers at MIN 50 Bireuen often juggle multiple responsibilities, including classroom instruction, administrative tasks, extracurricular activities, and community service obligations. This workload leaves little time or energy for sustained engagement in professional development.

The school expects teachers to supervise after-school religious activities, serve as homeroom advisors, and manage various student competitions. Although these responsibilities enrich school life, they can overburden teachers and limit their availability for reflection, innovation, or academic pursuits.

As Hasan et al. (2020) noted in their study, excessive workload is a common obstacle to CPD participation among Indonesian teachers, particularly in under-resourced environments.

4. Lack of Clear Policy Guidelines

Although the school promotes professional growth, many initiatives are implemented on an ad-hoc basis without comprehensive documentation. Teachers expressed a desire for clear written guidelines on what constitutes “career advancement,” what activities are recognized officially, and how they can qualify for internal and external incentives.

The absence of a formal teacher development framework within the school leads to uneven understanding and inconsistent participation. Some teachers remain unaware of opportunities or unclear about how to prepare for promotions. According to the vice principal, “We need to formalize our system, not just rely on good intentions.”

The lack of policy clarity is not unique to MIN 50 Bireuen. It reflects a broader trend in Islamic schools where informal practices often substitute for structured policy, resulting in varying interpretations and inconsistent execution (Martina, 2021).

5. Absence of Structured Mentoring for Novice Teachers

Another noteworthy inhibiting factor is the lack of a structured mentoring program for new teachers. While informal peer support exists, there is no designated onboarding process or mentor-mentee framework to guide new staff through their first year.

Several new teachers reported feeling “overwhelmed” during their initial months. One stated, “I had to figure things out myself—lesson formats, student reports, even how to handle parents.” This points to a gap in induction policies that, if addressed, could significantly enhance teacher retention and early-career satisfaction.

Developing a formal induction and mentoring system would not only support novice teachers but also build leadership capacity among senior staff, aligning with long-term sustainability goals.

This initiative is in line with what Ingvarson (2019) and Darling-Hammond (2017) advocate: robust teacher appraisal systems should be transparent, fair, and integrated with teacher development goals.

3.3 The Role of the Principal in Career Development

The principal at MIN 50 Bireuen plays a central and multifaceted role in shaping the professional trajectories of teachers. His contributions extend beyond administrative duties to encompass leadership in visioning, mentoring, evaluation, and organizational culture. This study found that the effectiveness of the school’s career development initiatives is largely driven by the principal’s leadership capacity and his ability to integrate values, vision, and professional expectations.

3.3.1 As Facilitator and Motivator

The principal of MIN 50 Bireuen is perceived by staff as both a facilitator and motivator—roles that are essential in creating a psychologically safe and inspiring work environment. His approach aligns with transformational leadership, as defined by Leithwood and Jantzi (2000), which emphasizes motivation, support, and the capacity to influence teacher growth through vision and values.

According to interviews, the principal often initiates discussions on self-reflection and continuous learning, particularly during Monday flag ceremonies and regular staff briefings. One teacher mentioned, “He uses these moments to remind us that teaching is an act of worship (ibadah), and that our success depends on how sincere we are in improving ourselves.”

Such statements underscore the principal’s ability to blend spiritual values with professional development, thereby aligning institutional goals with teachers’ intrinsic motivation. The principal also uses student achievement data, classroom observations, and teacher feedback as tools to guide conversations about career planning, showing a data-informed leadership practice.

Moreover, he encourages teachers to identify personal learning goals each semester, and he revisits these goals during evaluations and informal discussions. This practice of goal setting and monitoring helps teachers stay accountable and focused on professional growth. It also builds a sense of ownership over one’s development—a hallmark of effective adult learning environments (Knowles, 1980).

3.3.2 Supervisory Role

Supervision at MIN 50 Bireuen is not limited to formal classroom visits or appraisal checklists. Instead, it is a relational and developmental process in which the principal plays an active coaching role. Teachers consistently reported that they did not perceive supervision as a judgmental exercise, but rather as a constructive opportunity for feedback and guidance.

A senior teacher shared, “The principal often comes into my class, sometimes unannounced, but afterwards we sit down and talk. He gives specific advice—never just general criticism.” This highlights a dialogical and growth-oriented approach to supervision.

This style reflects the model proposed by Blasé and Blasé (2004), who argue that effective instructional leaders engage teachers in reflective dialogue and provide meaningful, content-specific feedback. At MIN 50 Bireuen, this process includes post-observation conferences where the principal discusses what worked well and explores strategies for improvement.

The principal also encourages peer observations and cross-feedback among teachers, which complements his own supervisory activities. Teachers observe each other’s classes, provide non-threatening feedback, and document key takeaways. This decentralization of supervision strengthens the school’s collective capacity for instructional improvement.

In addition, the principal uses supervision results to inform future training plans. If several teachers are observed to struggle with a specific area—such as digital assessment or differentiated instruction—he invites external trainers or arranges in-house training sessions. This integration of supervision with professional development ensures continuity between evaluation and support.

3.3.3 Creating a Professional Culture

Perhaps the principal’s most lasting contribution lies in his ability to foster a professional school culture rooted in shared values, mutual respect, and high expectations. He consistently reinforces the belief that teachers are lifelong learners (*ustadz yang terus belajar*), and he models this behavior by engaging in his own professional development activities.

The principal regularly reads educational journals, attends seminars organized by the regional ministry, and shares insights during meetings. This role-modeling effect is critical in setting a tone for professional growth. As Fullan (2001) notes, “Change leaders build trust by walking the talk.” At MIN 50 Bireuen, the principal’s personal investment in learning inspires others to do the same.

Moreover, he institutionalizes cultural rituals that reflect professional values. For instance, each semester begins with a *taushiyah pendidikan*—a spiritual talk focused on ethics in teaching—followed by a collaborative planning session. This combination of religious reflection and academic planning embodies the integrated vision of the school: to form both morally upright and intellectually capable educators.

The principal also fosters a culture of appreciation and recognition. Small acts, such as handwritten thank-you notes or spontaneous applause during meetings, go a long way in creating a positive emotional climate. One teacher explained, “After I tried a new project-based learning method, the principal asked me to share it in a meeting. I felt proud—not just because it worked, but because he noticed.”

Furthermore, the principal has taken steps to strengthen policy foundations that support professionalism. He initiated the drafting of an internal Teacher Code of Conduct and collaborated with the school committee to establish criteria for awards such as “Innovative Teacher of the Month.” These structural supports contribute to a more systematic reinforcement of professional behavior.

Importantly, the principal emphasizes *ukhuwah Islamiyah* (Islamic brotherhood) as the foundation of all interactions within the school. By framing professionalism not just as performance, but as a form of service and integrity (*amanah*), he appeals to both the ethical and spiritual dimensions of teaching. This cultural framing is particularly effective in the Acehnese context, where religious identity is closely tied to professional identity in Islamic institutions (Kahar, 2021).

Through these various roles—facilitator, supervisor, and cultural architect—the principal of MIN 50 Bireuen exemplifies how school leaders can serve as catalysts for sustained teacher development. His leadership demonstrates that even in resource-constrained environments, strategic vision, relational competence, and value-driven governance can drive meaningful educational change.

4. Conclusions

This study highlights the significant role of school policy in supporting the professional career development of teachers at MIN 50 Bireuen. The findings reveal that the implementation of school-level initiatives, such as study permits, internal training programs, and performance-based incentives, contributes meaningfully to enhancing teacher motivation and professional growth. These policies reflect the leadership’s commitment to fostering a culture of continuous improvement and align with the school’s broader vision of delivering quality Islamic education.

The research also identifies several supporting factors that enable the effective execution of these policies. Chief among them is the proactive leadership of the principal, who not only sets strategic directions but also facilitates collaboration and builds trust among stakeholders. The presence of a supportive organizational culture that values learning, mutual respect, and innovation further strengthens the foundation for teacher development. The vice principal’s role in curriculum oversight and teacher mentoring also contributes to ensuring that the policies are implemented consistently and aligned with educational goals.

Despite the strengths observed, the study uncovers various challenges that hinder optimal policy implementation. These include limited financial resources, bureaucratic rigidity, and disparities in access to professional development opportunities, particularly for teachers in rural or less connected areas. The workload of teachers, which often includes administrative responsibilities in addition to teaching duties, also limits their capacity to engage in structured career development activities. Moreover, some policies lack clear evaluation mechanisms, making it difficult to measure their long-term impact.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that while the existing policies at MIN 50 Bireuen demonstrate a strong foundation for promoting teacher career development, there is still room for improvement in terms of resource allocation, inter-institutional collaboration, and policy monitoring. The success of such initiatives ultimately depends not only on well-crafted policies but also on how they are communicated, supported, and embedded within the school's daily practices.

To move forward, schools need to adopt a more systematic and inclusive approach in designing and implementing career development policies. This includes involving teachers in decision-making, ensuring transparency in program selection, and integrating local values and context-specific needs into the policy framework. Strengthening external partnerships and enhancing leadership capacity at the school level are also crucial in ensuring that teacher development remains a central pillar in the pursuit of educational excellence.

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