

Maternal, Democratic, and Situational Leadership: A Case Study of Women Principals in Pekanbaru Public High Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates women's leadership models and their role in enhancing the quality of education at SMA Negeri 16 and SMA Negeri 18 in Pekanbaru City. Drawing on the concept of maternal leadership, the research aims to understand how female principals shape school culture and instructional practices. A qualitative case study approach was employed, focusing on two public high schools. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis, with thematic coding facilitated by NVivo 12. Findings reveal that women leaders at both institutions exhibit humanistic, participatory, communicative, and maternal leadership characteristics. Maternal traits such as empathy, emotional closeness, and care for both teachers and students foster a harmonious and supportive school climate. At SMA Negeri 16, leadership emphasizes discipline and governance consistency, while at SMA Negeri 18, the focus is on innovation, collaboration, and empowerment. Key strategies across both schools include teacher motivation, intensive communication, reflective practices, and continuous quality improvement through a humanist approach. This study contributes to the growing discourse on gender and leadership in education by highlighting the effectiveness of maternal leadership styles in fostering inclusive, collaborative, and high-performing school environments. The findings suggest that such models hold significant promise for improving educational quality through relational and transformative leadership practices.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education serves as a foundational pillar in national development, playing a central role in improving the quality of human resources in a sustainable and inclusive manner. Within the educational ecosystem, leadership at the school level—particularly that of the principal—is a critical factor influencing the success of teaching and learning processes. Principals are no longer perceived merely as administrative managers but are increasingly expected to serve as transformational leaders who inspire,

motivate, and mobilize all school stakeholders toward the achievement of shared educational goals (Zhang, 2024). In the context of secondary education, the principal's leadership is particularly influential in shaping school culture, improving teacher performance, and ensuring student success.

Research consistently emphasizes that effective school leadership is one of the most significant school-based factors influencing student learning outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2020). Principals are key actors in establishing a conducive school climate, developing relevant curricula, building a positive learning culture, and forging strategic partnerships with internal and external stakeholders. Therefore, the overall quality of education—particularly at the high school level—is closely linked to the capacity and leadership style of the school principal.

In Indonesia, the growing recognition of leadership's impact on educational outcomes has coincided with a significant shift in the gender composition of school leadership. In the past two decades, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of female principals across educational levels. According to data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek, 2022), women are increasingly occupying leadership positions in primary, junior high, and senior high schools. This development is attributable to several factors, including greater access for women to higher education, government reforms supporting teacher career advancement, and heightened societal awareness of gender equality in education. Nonetheless, female school leaders in Indonesia continue to face multiple challenges, such as persistent gender stereotypes, the dual burden of professional and domestic responsibilities, and limited access to leadership training and mentorship programs (UNESCO, 2021).

The growing presence of women in educational leadership has brought attention to distinctive leadership styles commonly associated with female leaders. Studies indicate that women tend to exhibit more collaborative, communicative, participatory, and relationship-oriented leadership behaviors compared to their male counterparts (Aldighrir, 2024). These characteristics are often encapsulated in what scholars refer to as "motherhood leadership" or maternal leadership. This style is marked by empathy, emotional sensitivity, compassion, and attentiveness to the well-being of school members. In the context of schools, where emotional and social development are as critical as academic achievement, maternal leadership can foster a nurturing and inclusive environment conducive to holistic student development (Kim, 2023).

Maternal leadership is particularly relevant in Indonesian culture, which places high value on familial bonds, social cohesion, and communal harmony. Female principals who embrace motherhood values often play the dual role of institutional leader and emotional caretaker, creating a sense of security and trust among teachers, staff, and students. This phenomenon is observable in various high schools across the country, including in urban educational settings such as Pekanbaru, the capital of Riau Province. As a rapidly growing city, Pekanbaru faces complex educational challenges, including increased competition among schools, digital transformation, curriculum reforms, and pressure to meet national education standards (Kemendikbudristek, 2020). In such a dynamic environment, the maternal leadership style of female principals emerges as an adaptive and transformational response to the demands of modern schooling.

Despite the increasing visibility of women in school leadership, academic research in Indonesia on female leadership at the secondary level remains limited. Much of the existing literature either focuses on male leadership or addresses female leadership predominantly at the primary education level (Óskarsdóttir et al., 2020). However, the high school context presents distinct leadership challenges, such as preparing students for higher education and employment, managing adolescent development, and integrating 21st-century skills into teaching practices. The complexities of this educational stage necessitate a deeper investigation into how female leaders navigate and address these multifaceted demands.

Furthermore, the existing studies on educational leadership in Indonesia have predominantly employed quantitative approaches, focusing on outcomes such as academic performance or school rankings (Rakhman et al., 2023; Wibowo, 2019). While such studies are valuable, they often overlook the nuanced, day-to-day leadership practices that influence school culture, teacher motivation, and student

engagement. Moreover, very few studies have specifically examined motherhood as a dimension of educational leadership, despite anecdotal and observational evidence suggesting its prevalence and effectiveness in school settings.

Studies by Mulyasa (2018) and Rakhman et al. (2023) affirm the importance of transformational leadership in improving teacher engagement and school performance. However, they largely neglect the emotional and relational aspects of leadership that are increasingly recognized as vital components of effective school management. Wibowo (2019), in a comparative study of male and female principals, found notable differences in communication and conflict resolution styles, with women displaying more empathetic and solution-oriented approaches. Yet, the study did not explore how these leadership traits translate into specific strategies for enhancing educational quality.

This study addresses these gaps by exploring the leadership models of female principals at SMA Negeri 16 and SMA Negeri 18 Pekanbaru, with a focus on how maternal values influence their leadership practices. The study poses two primary research questions: (1) What are the leadership styles exhibited by female principals at SMAN 16 and SMAN 18, Pekanbaru? and (2) What strategies do these leaders use to improve educational quality? By answering these questions, the research aims to contribute both theoretically and practically to the understanding of women's leadership in Indonesian secondary education.

The novelty of this research lies in its effort to conceptualize motherhood not merely as a personal trait but as a strategic leadership approach that integrates emotional intelligence, relational trust, and inclusive decision-making. While previous research has largely framed educational leadership within the paradigms of transformational, instructional, or transactional models, this study introduces maternal leadership as a culturally grounded and contextually relevant model. Moreover, by using a qualitative case study method and employing NVivo 12 software for thematic analysis, the study provides a rich, in-depth understanding of the lived experiences, values, and strategies of female school leaders.

The choice of SMA Negeri 16 and SMA Negeri 18 as research sites also adds to the significance of the study. These schools present contrasting approaches to school governance and educational improvement, offering a comparative lens to understand the diversity and adaptability of maternal leadership in practice. Such contextual diversity enhances the validity and transferability of the findings, making them relevant for broader educational policy and leadership development programs.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the educational leadership literature by foregrounding motherhood as a legitimate and effective leadership style. It challenges the masculine bias in leadership theories and calls for a more inclusive framework that values emotional and relational competencies alongside managerial and instructional skills. Practically, the study offers actionable insights for school principals, teachers, and policymakers. For school leaders, it provides a model of leadership that is empathetic, collaborative, and human-centered. For policymakers, the findings underscore the importance of incorporating gender-sensitive and maternal values in leadership training and career development initiatives.

Ultimately, by documenting and analyzing how female principals lead with care, consistency, and creativity, this study not only enriches the academic discourse but also reaffirms that women's leadership—rooted in both professionalism and maternal wisdom—holds transformative potential for improving the quality of secondary education in Indonesia.

2. METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with an exploratory case study. This approach was chosen because the purpose of this research is to deeply understand the phenomenon of women's leadership in improving the quality of education at SMA Negeri Kota Pekanbaru, by paying attention to the social, cultural, and organizational context of the school. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research provides the flexibility to comprehensively explore the meanings, perceptions, and

strategies used by research subjects (Suravi L, 2023). Take a look at the chart below to see the stages in the research method:

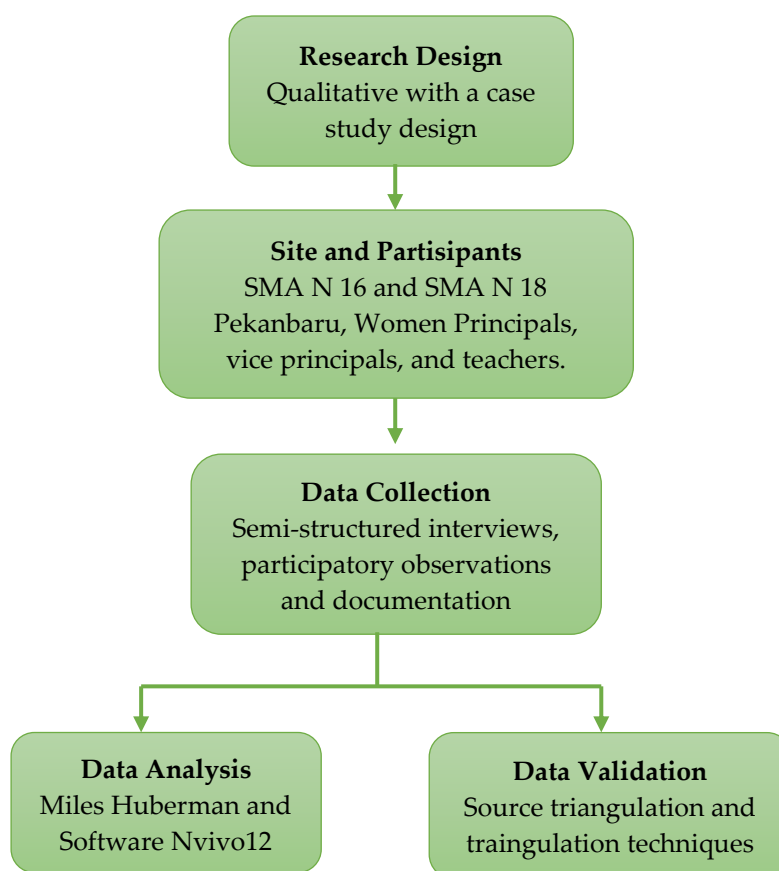


Figure 1. Methodological Flowchart: Steps in Case Study Design

2.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research methodology with a case study design, as outlined in the diagram above. The case study approach was selected to enable an in-depth exploration of the dynamics of women's leadership within the specific contexts of SMA Negeri 16 and SMA Negeri 18 in Pekanbaru. This design allows for a comprehensive understanding of the leadership styles, values, and strategies employed by female principals in their efforts to improve educational quality. Through this approach, the research aims to capture the complexity and uniqueness of leadership practices as they unfold in real school settings.

2.2 Participant

The research sites for this study were SMA Negeri 16 and SMA Negeri 18, Pekanbaru. Participants included female principals, vice principals, and teachers who were directly involved in school leadership and management processes. These participants were selected using purposive sampling, as they were considered to possess relevant knowledge and firsthand experience related to the focus of the study on women's leadership practices. The selection criteria were based on the principals' leadership performance, length of tenure, and professional qualifications, ensuring that the data collected reflected informed and credible perspectives on leadership dynamics within each school.

Table 1. Research Informant Profile

Informant Code	Gender	Position	Length of Tenure (Years)	Educational Background	Teaching Experience (Years)
KS-SMAN 16	Female	Principal	11 Years	S3 Environmental Science	20
KS-SMAN 18	Female	Principal	12 Years	S3 Environmental Science	23
WK-SMAN 16	Female	Student Representative	7	S1 Cultural Arts	15
WK-SMAN 18	Female	Curriculum Representative	2	S2 Education Management	12
G1-SMAN 16	Male	Physics Teacher	-	S1 Physics	15
G1-SMAN 18	Female	Chemistry Teacher	-	S1 Biology	10
G2-SMAN 16	Female	Geography Teacher	-	S1 Geography	9
G2-SMAN 18	Female	Geography Teacher	-	S1 Geography	3

2.3 Data Collection Techniques

Data collection in this study was conducted through three primary qualitative methods: semi-structured interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews provided flexibility for the researcher to explore emerging themes and probe deeper into participants' experiences and perceptions. Participatory observation enabled the researcher to directly witness the daily leadership practices of female principals in their natural school settings, offering contextual depth to the data. Meanwhile, document analysis—such as school policies, reports, and performance records—served to corroborate and enrich the findings with authentic and verifiable written sources.

2.4 Data Credibility and Ethical Considerations

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the data, this study employed both source triangulation and methodological triangulation (Ribeiro et al., 2021). Source triangulation involved comparing information obtained from different stakeholders, including principals, vice principals, and teachers. Methodological triangulation was implemented by cross-validating data derived from interviews, observations, and documentation, allowing for a more comprehensive and reliable interpretation of the research findings.

Ethical procedures were followed rigorously throughout the study. Formal approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Boards (IRB) of SMA Negeri 16 and SMA Negeri 18 Pekanbaru. All participants were provided with detailed information about the study and gave their informed consent voluntarily prior to their involvement, in line with ethical standards for qualitative research.

2.5 Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis was conducted using a qualitative approach grounded in the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which was chosen for its systematic and iterative framework suited to handling complex qualitative data (Suada et al., 2023). This model comprises four key stages: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

The first stage, data collection, involved gathering detailed information through interviews, observations, and document reviews at SMA Negeri 16 and SMA Negeri 18, Pekanbaru. All interviews were transcribed verbatim to maintain the accuracy and authenticity of the participants' narratives. The second stage, data reduction, focused on selecting, organizing, and simplifying the data to highlight information relevant to the research questions. At this stage, NVivo 12 software was utilized to assist with the coding, classification, and thematic categorization of the data. NVivo enabled the

systematic identification of key themes and patterns across a large volume of qualitative material, improving both efficiency and analytical depth.

The third stage, data display, involved presenting the reduced data in structured formats such as tables, matrices, and visual models generated using NVivo. These visual representations allowed for clearer interpretation of the relationships between codes and themes, such as leadership styles, strategic practices, and their influence on educational quality. This stage also facilitated the identification of leadership patterns unique to each school and helped in comparing similarities and differences between the two cases.

The final stage, conclusion drawing and verification, entailed interpreting the analyzed data to answer the research questions. Conclusions were continuously tested and validated through triangulation and iterative comparison across data sources to ensure the findings were credible, consistent, and grounded in the evidence.

By integrating the interactive analysis framework of Miles and Huberman with the technological capabilities of NVivo 12, this study ensured a rigorous, transparent, and traceable analysis process. The use of digital tools not only enhanced analytical precision but also strengthened the auditability of the research, resulting in findings that are valid, methodologically sound, and scientifically accountable.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Findings

3.1.1 Leadership Styles of Female Principals at SMAN 16 and SMAN 18 Pekanbaru

From the results of the researcher's interviews with resource persons in 2 (two) schools of the research subject, the results of the Nvivo12 analysis were obtained regarding the description of the leadership style of female principals at SMA Negeri 16 and SMA Negeri 18, Pekanbaru City, as shown in the following figure:

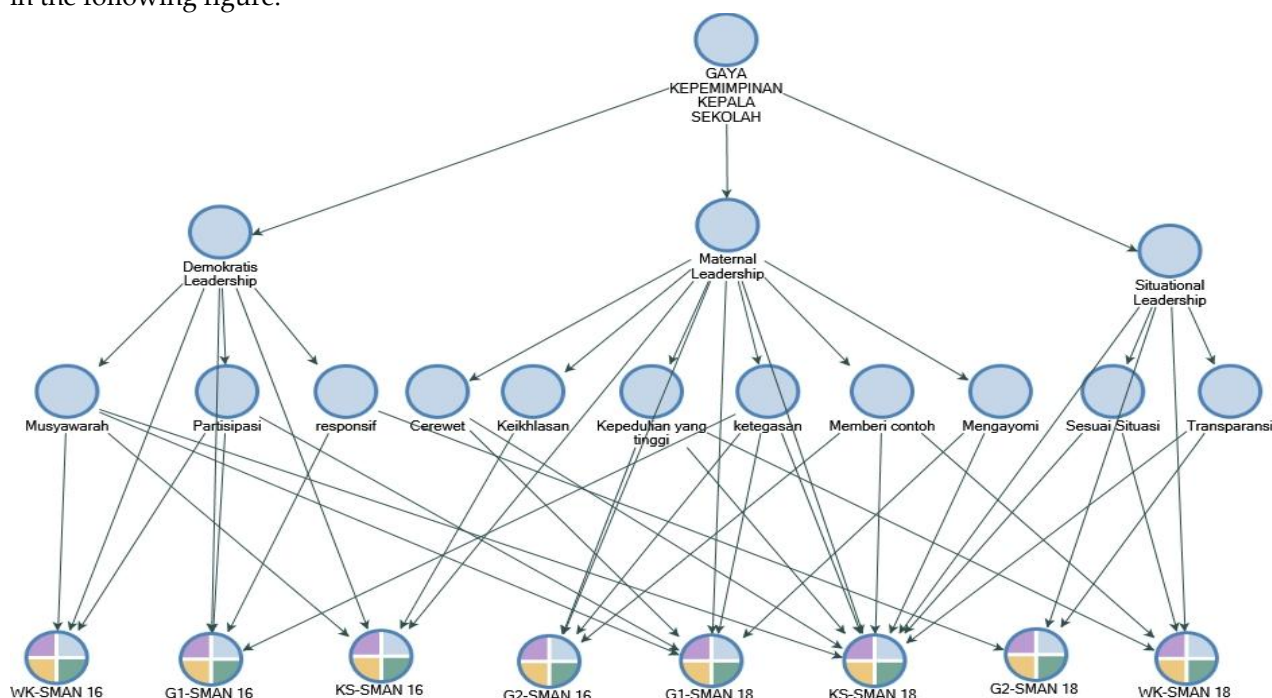


Figure 2. Visualisation Project Map Overview of Female Principals' Leadership Styles at SMAN 16 and SMAN 18 Pekanbaru

(Source: Nvivo 12 data processing by Researcher)

From the visualization of NVivo 12, it shows that the female leadership style at SMA Negeri 16 and SMA Negeri 18 Pekanbaru City, has a distinctive pattern, namely democratic style, maternal style, and situational style. These three patterns appear consistently from various informants, both from the principal himself, the vice principal, and the teacher, who provide a comprehensive overview of women's leadership practices in high school.

3.1.1.1 Women's Leadership Style at SMA Negeri 16 Pekanbaru

From the results of the nvivo visualization above, it can be seen that the principal of SMAN 16 applies a democratic leadership style which is clearly seen from the way female principals involve teachers in the decision-making process. There are 3 people who stated that the principal uses a democratic style, namely, (WK-SMAN 16, G1-SMAN 16 and KS-SMAN 16). The principal said that:

"Every time I make a decision, I always deliberate with representatives and teachers, because this is our school together, so the decisions taken must be based on mutual agreement" (KS-SMAN16)

The same thing was conveyed by a teacher at SMAN 16:

"Every time there is a new policy, the principal does not immediately decide for himself. He invited us to a meeting, listened to our opinions, and then found a middle ground that was mutually agreed." (G1-SMAN 16)

This statement shows that the leadership process is not authoritarian, but rather provides a wide space for participation for teachers. Similarly, a deputy principal at SMAN 16 confirmed that:

"He is always open to criticism, even encouraging us to express our opinions so that the decisions taken can be better." (WK-SMAN16)

From these findings, it appears that democratic leadership is one of the important foundations of women's leadership. In addition to being democratic, women's leadership also shows maternal nuances. Female school principals are often perceived not only as superiors, but also as mothers who provide attention, empathy, and moral examples and sincerity. 2 teachers (G1-SMAN16 and G2-SMAN16) and the principal of SMAN 16 conveyed the same thing. A teacher at SMAN 16 said:

"If there is a teacher who is sick or has personal problems, he usually asks directly, sometimes even visiting. We feel that there is more attention that makes us comfortable working." (G2-SMAN16)

This maternal attitude makes the work atmosphere warmer and fosters a positive emotional bond between the principal and the teacher. However, this attention is still accompanied by firmness. Another teacher pointed out that:

"Although he is kind and attentive, in terms of discipline, he is still firm. If there is a teacher who is often late, he will be immediately called and talked about not reprimanded in front of many people, but called out for his anger and here we feel that the principal also protects us." (G1-SMAN16)

This shows that motherhood does not mean ignoring professionalism, but rather a combination of caring and assertiveness. The principal of SMAN 16 also said:

"We as school principals must be sincere and patient, patience without sincerity is meaningless, in that sincerity we also embrace teachers and students". (KS-SMAN16)

3.1.1.2 Women's Leadership Style at SMA Negeri 18 Pekanbaru

Furthermore, the leadership style applied by the principal of SMAN 18 can be seen in the situational leadership style also seen in the practice of female principals. The principal is not fixated on one particular style, but is able to adjust the approach according to the existing conditions. This is the same as what was said by 2 teachers (G2-SMAN18 and WK-SMAN18) and KS-SMAN18, where a teacher at SMAN 18 said:

"He can be flexible. For academic matters, it is usually discussed in meetings. But if there is a disciplinary case, he immediately acts on his own, so our principal is in accordance with the existing situation and is also open." (G1-SMAN18)

This flexibility allows school principals to respond to problems more effectively, both in terms of academics, administration, and discipline. The vice principal at SMAN 18 also stated:

"His style depends on the situation. If the problem is minor, it will be handed over to us. But if the problem is serious, he intervenes directly." (WK-SMAN18)

This was also conveyed by the principal of SMAN 18:

"What I do is in accordance with the existing situation, if there is something that can make me authoritarian, then I will do it as a school principal if it involves mutual benefit" (KS-SMAN18).

In addition, the principal also applies a motherly leadership style, which is the qualities that only women have, such as: chatty, high caring, respectful, sincerity, firmness and setting an example. Of course, this was said by 2 teachers, 1 deputy and the principal of SMAN 18 himself. The principal of SMAN 18 said that:

"Being a school principal also has to be chatty, always asking about academic things and also personal problems of teachers, we must know the condition of teachers if we want to have empathy (high concern), we must also be able to protect all school residents because we have been given the mandate to lead this school and can be an example or example" (KS-SMAN16)

This was also said by a teacher at SMAN 18, who said that:

"Our principal if he has given an assignment then he will always charge and ask for it, he will never forget what assignment has been given to the teacher, maybe this can be said to be chatty but also decisive in work" (G2-SMAN18)

The vice principal of SMAN 18 also said the same thing:

"Our principal is indeed firm in terms of work and discipline, the principal shows an example in terms of discipline and cleanliness, indirectly we teachers who see this also follow in example such as a neat room, the principal cleans it himself without calling a cleaner, and always comes early" (WK-SMAN18).

From this, it can be seen that women's leadership is adaptive and is able to place leadership styles as needed. Overall, the results of this study show that the leadership of women at SMA Negeri 16 and SMA Negeri 18 in Pekanbaru City is not rigid, but rather integrative. Female school principals combine a participatory democratic approach, a caring and firm maternal approach, and an adaptive situational approach. The combination of these three traits becomes a major character in female leadership in secondary schools, which not only maintains a healthy work climate, but also influences teacher motivation and quality of education.

3.1.2 What strategies do these leaders use to improve educational quality?

To address the second research question concerning the strategies employed by female principals at SMAN 16 and SMAN 18 Pekanbaru in enhancing the quality of education, the researcher conducted a thematic analysis of interview data using NVivo software. This analysis identified several key themes that reflect the strategic approaches adopted by each principal. While the two schools exhibit differing emphases in their leadership strategies, both demonstrate a shared commitment to improving instructional quality, advancing teacher professional development, and fostering a positive and collaborative school culture. A summary of the thematic findings generated through NVivo analysis is presented in the following figure:

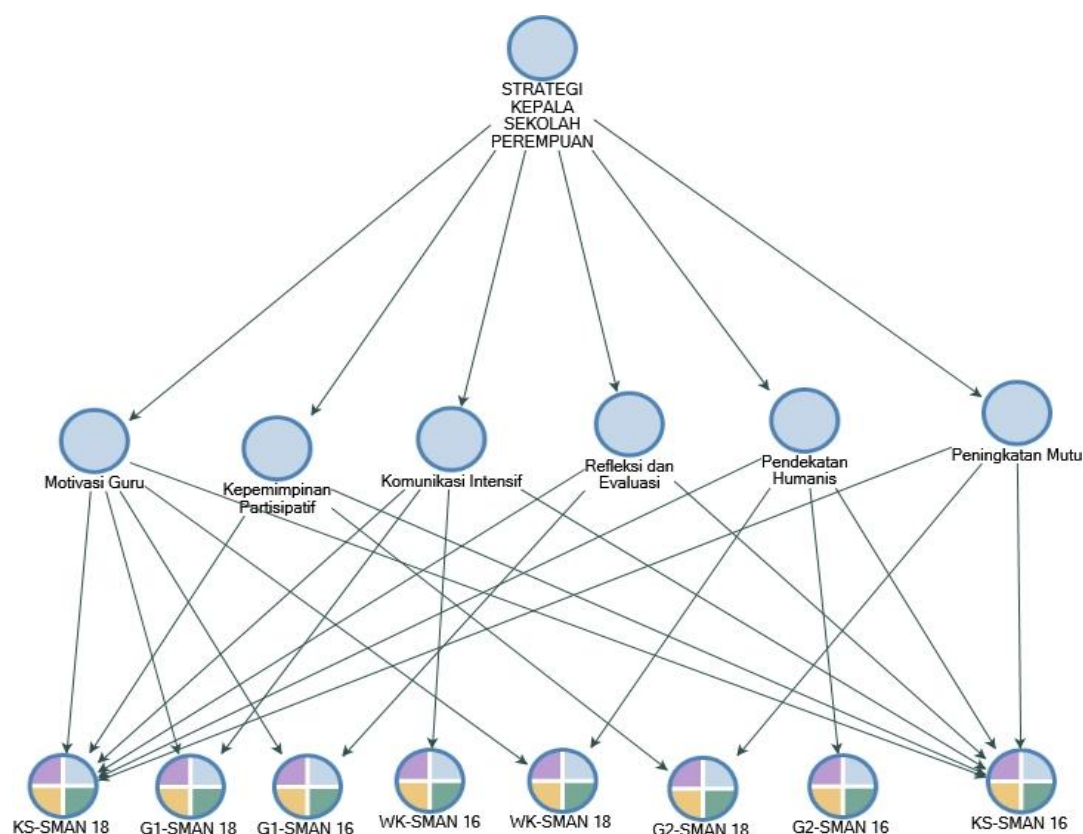


Figure 3. Project Map of School Principal's Leadership Strategy at SMAN 16 and SMAN 18 Pekanbaru
(Source: Nvivo 12 data processing by Researcher)

Based on data analysis using NVivo, it was found that the two female principals had different but complementary leadership strategies in managing the school.

3.1.2.1 SMAN 16 Principal's Strategy

a. Teacher Motivation

The principal of SMAN 16 builds teacher motivation through a moral and spiritual approach. He emphasized that the teaching profession must be interpreted as worship, not just an administrative routine. This view is conveyed repeatedly both in official forums and in daily interactions. The Principal of SMAN 16 said that:

"I always say, don't see work only as a pile of tiring obligations. If it is intended as worship, even every little thing will feel valuable. I want the teachers to keep their spirits up, because what they do is not only for the school, but also for the future of the children and charity for them." (KS-SMAN16).

This quote shows how the principal seeks to instill deep meaning in the teacher's work. This motivation based on spiritual values makes teachers feel that their work is more meaningful, not just an administrative burden. Teachers also feel the positive impact of this approach. The teacher of SMAN 16 said:

"Once we felt very bored because there were so many administrations. But our principal came and said, 'just think of it as worship, don't think about the burden'. The sentence is simple, but for us it means a lot. It feels like he really understands our condition, so we can go back to work with a more open heart." (G1-SMAN16).

From this statement, it can be seen that the principal's motivation strategy not only calms teachers, but also fosters new enthusiasm in dealing with workloads.

b. Participatory Leadership

Participatory leadership is a hallmark of SMAN 16, where the principal always involves teachers in making important decisions. He believes that this involvement will make the policy easier to accept and implement. The principal of SMAN 16 said:

"If there is a new policy, I will not immediately decide for myself. I invited a meeting of the deputy and teachers, listening to input from the deputy principal and teachers. That way, the decision taken is not only from me, but the result is mutual. It's important for everyone to feel included." (KS-SMAN16).

This statement confirms that the principal is not authoritarian, but rather opens up a space for dialogue. This involvement gives teachers the opportunity to feel valued. This was also felt by the deputy principal. He said:

"Every time there is a change, the principal always gives all parties the opportunity to talk. No one feels neglected. So the decision that comes out is usually the result of long deliberation, not a unilateral decision. It makes teachers feel more valued." (WK-SMAN16).

Thus, participatory leadership at SMAN 16 has fostered a culture of deliberation that strengthens the sense of togetherness.

c. Intensive Communication

To maintain the flow of information, the principal implements intensive communication through weekly meetings. This forum is a means to equalize perceptions while solving problems.

"Every week I hold a coordination meeting. Not only for reports, but also so that teachers can convey the problems they face. That way, there are no misunderstandings, and we can find a solution together." (KS-SMAN16).

This quote shows that meetings are not merely a formality, but also a means of finding solutions. Teachers also benefit from this communication pattern.

"We were helped by the meeting. Sometimes small problems such as student discipline can be immediately discussed and solutions are sought. So this communication is very helpful, not just a formality." (G1-SMAN16).

This proves that intensive communication is able to strengthen coordination and a sense of openness at SMA Negeri 16 Pekanbaru.

d. Reflection and Evaluation

The culture of reflection and evaluation is one of the main strategies of the principal of SMAN 16. Each activity ended with an evaluation to improve the next steps.

"After the activity, I always invite the teacher and vice principal for evaluation. I don't want to just look at the good results, but also what is lacking. From there we learn and improve ourselves in the next activity." (KS-SMAN16).

This quote confirms that evaluation is positioned as a means of learning, not fault-finding. Teachers also feel the benefits.

"Every time he finished the activity, he often asked what was lacking and what needed to be improved. It made us used to doing self-reflection. Evaluation is not just about finding faults, but for the common good." (G1-SMAN16).

This shows that the evaluation strategy at SMAN 16 forms a culture of continuous improvement.

e. The Humanist Approach

The principal of SMAN 16 displays a humanist approach by always trying to understand the condition of teachers and students. He prioritizes empathy rather than punitive attitudes.

"If there are teachers or students who have personal problems, I prefer to listen first. After that, we will find a way out. I want everyone to feel that this school is a place to care, not just a place to work." (KS-SMAN16).

This approach makes teachers feel close to the principal. The teacher added that this kind of attention strengthens the relationship.

"He often asked how our family was doing, even helping if there were difficulties. So he was very concerned, not only about work, but also about our lives." (G2-SMAN16).

This humanist approach builds a strong sense of community and emotional closeness in the school environment.

f. Quality Improvement

In an effort to improve quality, the principal of SMAN 16 emphasized the importance of professional development of teachers through training and participation in various activities.

"I always encourage teachers to participate in training or seminars. I believe that the quality of learning can only improve if teachers continue to learn and develop." (KS-SMAN16).

This encouragement is felt by teachers, because they are often facilitated to participate in various development programs.

"He often registers us to participate in competitions or training, sometimes we are even directed directly. It makes us more confident and feels like we're constantly improving." (G2-SMAN16).

This shows that the quality improvement strategy is carried out consistently by encouraging teachers to always improve their competence.

3.1.2.2 SMAN 18 Principal's Strategy

a. Teacher Motivation

The principal of SMAN 18 utilizes a motivational strategy by giving formal awards and personal recognition. This is believed to increase the enthusiasm of teachers because their efforts get real appreciation.

"I try to motivate teachers by giving awards, both in the form of certificates and charters. For me, gratitude is also important, because teachers feel that their work is appreciated by the leadership." (KS-SMAN18).

This quote shows that the principal not only emphasizes the rules, but also gives direct rewards as a form of positive reinforcement. This approach is reinforced by the experience of a teacher.

"When I managed to bring the students to win the competition, he called me to his room and thanked me directly. It was simple, but it made me feel appreciated. So we are even more enthusiastic." (G1-SMAN18).

This shows that the motivation strategy at SMAN 18 is carried out in real terms through formal rewards and personal recognition, so that teachers feel valued and motivated to improve their performance.

b. Participatory Leadership

Participatory leadership is implemented by encouraging teachers to be involved in school program planning. The principal not only gives instructions, but also gives space for the teacher's ideas.

"I always invite teachers to be involved in planning activities. That way, they feel that they have that program. If only I decide, later the implementation will be less than optimal." (KS-SMAN18).

This statement shows that teacher involvement is seen as important to create a sense of belonging. Teachers also acknowledged that there was a wide opportunity to participate.

"We are often invited to develop school programs, especially learning innovation activities. Our ideas are not only heard, but also executed. It makes us feel like we have an important role." (G2-SMAN18).

Thus, the participatory strategy at SMAN 18 strengthens the sense of togetherness and ownership of the school program, which has an impact on increasing the commitment of teachers in the implementation of the program.

c. Intensive Communication

Intensive communication is carried out by the principal through informal discussions that are more relaxed. This is done so that teachers are more open in conveying obstacles.

"I prefer to have casual discussions, for example in the teacher's room. If communication is too formal, teachers are often hesitant to talk. In a relaxed way, they can be more open to conveying obstacles." (KS-SMAN18).

Emphasize that communication doesn't have to be formal. The vice principal also emphasized that this kind of communication creates a more comfortable working atmosphere.

"The informal discussions that he often had were very helpful. Sometimes problems are solved without having to have an official meeting, because teachers feel free to express their opinions. It makes the working relationship more harmonious." (WK-SMAN18).

It can be concluded that intensive informality-based communication has succeeded in creating a more open, comfortable, and strengthening work climate at SMAN 18.

d. Reflection and Evaluation

Reflection and evaluation are applied by the principal together after the program is completed. This evaluation is positioned as a means of finding solutions, not blaming.

"After the school program is over, I always invite teachers for evaluation. For me, the important thing is to find a way out, not blame. This evaluation is for improvement, not looking for who is at fault." (KS-SMAN18).

This quote shows how the evaluation is focused on improvement steps. Teachers also corroborate this with their experiences.

"The joint evaluation that is carried out does not stop at the meeting, but there is a follow-up. For example, after the school exam, we were immediately directed to make improvements for the next semester. So it feels real." (G1-SMAN18).

This shows that the reflection and evaluation strategy at SMAN 18 emphasizes sustainability with real follow-up, so that evaluation really has an impact on improving the school program.

e. The Humanist Approach

The principal of SMAN 18 displayed a humanist approach by providing space for teachers to balance work and personal life.

"I am aware that teachers also have families and lives outside of school. So I always remind you, don't let work make us forget about family or health. This school should be a humane place." (KS-SMAN18).

This makes teachers feel cared for not only as workers, but also as human beings with personal lives. The vice principal added:

"He often asks how teachers are doing outside of work, even giving flexible permission if someone has important family matters. It makes us feel like he cares, not just demands work." (WK-SMAN18).

Thus, the humanist approach at SMAN 18 strengthens emotional relationships and builds teacher loyalty as they feel supported in maintaining a work-life balance.

f. Quality Improvement

In improving quality, the principal of SMAN 18 emphasizes more on project-based learning innovations and collaboration between teachers.

"I encourage teachers to make project-based innovations. For example, students are given the task of making real works, not just theories. In addition, I ask teachers to collaborate so that they learn from each other's experiences." (KS-SMAN18).

This statement emphasizes the need for innovation in learning. Teachers also admitted that the principal's support made them more confident.

"He supported us to try new learning models. Even when there were obstacles, he still encouraged them. It makes us dare to innovate and not be afraid to fail." (G2-SMAN18).

This quote can be concluded that the quality improvement strategy at SMAN 18 is carried out through the encouragement of innovation and collaboration, which provides space for teachers to experiment without fear of failure.

With this strategy, the principal is able to build a harmonious school climate and a sense of togetherness. Teachers feel valued, heard, and have a real role model to uphold discipline and responsibility.

To provide a clearer picture of the differences and similarities in leadership strategies applied by female principals in SMAN 16 and SMAN 18 Pekanbaru, the researcher compiled a summary of the results in the form of a comparison table. This table systematically presents the main strategies identified through NVivo analysis, making it easier for readers to identify common points and peculiarities of each school in an effort to improve the quality of education.

Table 2. Comparison of School Principal's Strategies

Strategy Aspects	SMAN 16 Pekanbaru	SMAN 18 Pekanbaru
Teacher Motivation	Providing moral encouragement and work spirit, often expressing appreciation directly.	Motivate teachers through formal awards (certificates, charters), as well as a personal approach.
Participatory Leadership	Involve teachers in making important decisions related to the curriculum and school activities.	Encourage teachers to be actively involved in extracurricular program planning and learning innovation.
Intensive Communication	Prioritize weekly regular meetings to equalize vision and evaluation.	More use of informal communication (casual discussions, personal conversations) to build closeness.
Reflection & Evaluation	Carry out monthly reflection based on the work team, emphasizing joint improvement.	Conduct a joint evaluation after each school program, focusing more on practical follow-up.
The Humanist Approach	Showing empathy and concern for the personal problems of teachers and students.	Provide a one-on-one consultation space for teachers and students, with an emphasis on work-life balance.
Quality Improvement	Focus on strengthening teachers' pedagogical competence through internal workshops.	It emphasizes technology-based learning innovations and collaboration between teachers.

From the comparison table, it can be seen that although both female principals emphasized the importance of human resource development and effective communication, there was a difference in the emphasis on the strategies implemented. SMAN 16 is more prominent in strengthening discipline and school culture that is oriented towards orderly governance, while SMAN 18 emphasizes more on learning innovation and strengthening a collaborative climate among teachers. This difference shows that there is a variation in women's leadership styles that are adjusted to the context of the needs and characteristics of each school, while emphasizing that leadership strategies are not single, but adaptive to the environment and educational goals to be achieved.

3.2 Discussion

3.2.1 Democratic Leadership

The results of the study show that female principals at SMAN 16 highlight a democratic leadership style. This style is evident in the decision-making process, where the principal consistently involves the teacher and the vice principal. Deliberation is used as the main mechanism before policies are set, so that the resulting policies reflect collective aspirations. Thus, this process not only creates a sense of ownership for teachers, but also increases commitment to policy implementation. This is in line with the theory of democratic leadership put forward by Lewin, Lippitt, & White, and reinforced by Yukl, who states that subordinates' involvement in decision-making strengthens their intrinsic motivation. (Novelina Andriani Zega & Nathanael Sitanggang, 2024) In the context of SMAN 16, democratization of leadership has been proven to maintain work harmony, strengthen a culture of collaboration, and foster solidarity among school residents. With these characteristics, democratic leadership contributes greatly to the consistency of governance and the resilience of the organization to dynamic changes in education policy.

3.2.2 Maternal Leadership and Empathy

In addition to being democratic, the maternal dimension emerged as a strong feature in the leadership style of female school principals. Motherhood is reflected through empathy, personal attention, and deep concern for teachers and students. The principal often inquires about the condition of the teacher's family, provides moral support when personal problems arise, and is even involved in offering practical solutions. This attitude shows the role of the principal not only as an administrator, but also as a mother figure who fosters a sense of security and emotional attachment. These findings are in line with the concept of ethic of care introduced by Gilligan (1982), as well as the transformational leadership of Bass & Riggio (Yulia Rahmi Ilmani, 2023), especially aspects of individualized consideration and idealized influence. With this approach, teachers feel valued as a whole human being, not just a worker. However, this motherhood does not diminish professional assertiveness. The principal continues to uphold discipline and consistency, even making himself an ethical example in terms of discipline and integrity. The combination of empathy and assertiveness shows that mother's leadership is able to build warmth while maintaining professionalism, making the school a humanistic and orderly workspace.

3.2.3 Situational Adaptability

Women's leadership also shows prominent situational adaptability, especially in SMAN 18. School principals are able to adjust their leadership style to the context of the problems they face. In situations where deliberation is possible, it tends to involve teachers and staff; Instead, in urgent cases such as discipline, he takes immediate decisions. This is in line with Hersey and Blanchard's situational leadership theory, which emphasizes the flexibility of leaders in adapting leadership styles to organizational conditions and subordinate readiness (Atiqoh et al., 2023). This adaptability allows the principal to maintain the effectiveness of the organization without sacrificing participatory value. In the context of dynamic secondary education, situational style is an important asset, as it allows school principals to respond to academic and non-academic problems proportionately and in a timely manner.

3.2.4 Strategic Variations Between Schools

The variation in leadership strategies in SMAN 16 and SMAN 18 shows that women leaders do not only rely on a single approach, but are adaptive to the organizational context. SMAN 16 emphasizes discipline-based strategies, monthly reflection, and strengthening teachers' pedagogical competence. The principal uses a consistent structural approach to ensure that all programs run according to the standards that have been set. On the contrary, SMAN 18 emphasizes innovation-based strategies, informal communication, and direct evaluation after the program. The principal provides space for teacher collaboration and project-based learning innovation, thereby enhancing the school climate to

become more creative and flexible. This difference is not a form of weakness, but an adaptive strength that shows that women's leadership is able to read organizational needs and adjust strategies. Thus, the variation in strategies between schools shows that women's leadership is contextual, responsive, and dynamic.

3.2.5 Contributions to Theory and Practice

From a theoretical perspective, this research makes a significant contribution to the educational leadership literature by adding the maternal dimension as an important component in the high school leadership model. Previously, educational leadership studies emphasized more transformational, transactional, or instructional styles. The findings of this study show that maternal leadership can be a complementary dimension that enriches the educational leadership model. In terms of practice, the results of this research are relevant for the formulation of leadership training programs in Indonesia. Leadership training should not only emphasize managerial skills but also develop gender sensitivity, empathy, and situational flexibility. For female principals, these findings can serve as inspiration to integrate democratic, maternal, and situational leadership into daily practice. As for policymakers, this research encourages the importance of paying attention to the role of women in school leadership and designing professional development programs that support the distinctive dimensions of women's leadership.

3.2.6 Contributions to the Educational Leadership Literature

This research also confirms its contribution to the educational leadership literature, particularly in Southeast Asia. In many global studies, women's leadership is often associated with collaborative, communicative, and participatory nature (Eagly & Carli, 2007). The findings of this study expand this perspective by adding the concept of maternal leadership that is contextual with Indonesian culture. Family values, empathy, and emotional care have proven to be the main strengths of women's leadership in Pekanbaru. Thus, this research not only enriches the international literature but also makes an important local contribution. At the global level, these results reinforce the argument that female leadership has unique characteristics that not only complement but can also correct masculine biases in educational leadership theory.

3.2.7 Integrative Model of Women's Leadership in High School

As a synthesis of the research findings, an Integrative Model of Women's Leadership in Secondary Schools can be proposed with three main pillars: (1) Democratic, namely involving teachers, students, and staff in decision-making; (2) Mother, which is to present leadership with compassion, empathy, example, and humanistic discipline; and (3) Situational, namely the ability to adjust leadership style according to conditions, needs, and urgency of problems. These three pillars form inclusive, humanist, and adaptive leadership. In this model, teacher motivation is a connecting variable that ensures that leadership style has an impact on the quality of education. Thus, this integrative model not only offers a new conceptual framework for academics but also serves as a practical guide for school principals in dealing with the challenges of secondary education. This model can be visualized in the form of a chart that shows three main pillars that are interconnected, forming a solid foundation for improving the quality of education in secondary schools.

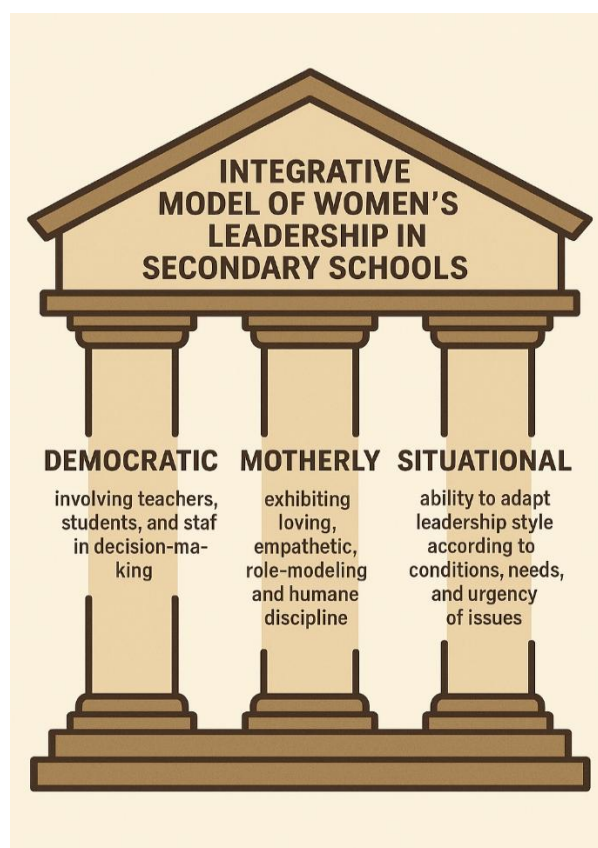


Figure 4. Integrative models of women's leadership

Thus, this discussion shows that the differences in the strategies of female school principals are not a weakness but a form of adaptation to different school contexts. The strategy at SMAN 16 is suitable for schools with a culture that emphasizes discipline and collectivity, while the strategy at SMAN 18 is more suitable for schools that demand innovation and a personal approach. This also emphasizes that women's leadership in secondary education has flexible, relational, and adaptive characteristics, which are able to encourage the creation of quality education according to the needs of each school.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that women's leadership in secondary schools is characterized by an integrative model that blends democratic values, maternal empathy, and situational adaptability—three dimensions that collectively enhance educational quality, foster a positive school climate, and boost teacher motivation. The findings highlight that female principals play a strategic role not only in managerial functions but also in strengthening relational dynamics marked by trust, solidarity, and collegiality. However, the study is limited by its qualitative scope and focus on only two schools in a single urban context, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future research is encouraged to adopt quantitative or mixed-methods approaches to assess the broader impact of this leadership model on measurable outcomes such as teacher performance, student achievement, and school climate across diverse cultural and educational settings. Additionally, expanding the inquiry to include other levels of education and regional contexts would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role and potential of maternal leadership in driving sustainable educational improvement in Indonesia and similar collectivist societies.

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