

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE SMART MODEL: TEACHERS' LIVED EXPERIENCES IN MADRASAH SETTING

Hesty Widiastuty¹, Moc Chotib², Ahmadi³, Zaitun Qamariah⁴, Harmini⁵,
Umami Qudsiyah⁶, Salasiah⁷

¹Institut Agama Islam Negeri Palangka Raya, Indonesia

²Universitas Islam Negeri Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq Jember, Indonesia

^{3,4,5,6,7}Institut Agama Islam Negeri Palangka Raya, Indonesia

Email: hesty.widiastuty@iain-palangkaraya.ac.id¹, mochchotiib@yahoo.com²,
ahmadi@iain-palangkaraya.ac.id³, zaitun.qamariah@iain-palangkaraya.ac.id⁴,
harmini.taufan78@gmail.com⁵, ummi.qudsiyah@iain-palangkaraya.ac.id⁶,
74.salasiah@gmail.com⁷

Abstract : *This phenomenological study explores madrasah teachers' experiences implementing the SMART Model (Support, Motivation, Assessment, Reward, and Training) in teacher management at MTs Terpadu Berkah, Palangka Raya. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 15 purposively selected participant, including the principal, vice-principals, and selected teachers, observations (20 hours), and document analysis. The findings reveal that the SMART Model enhances teacher professionalism through systematic support mechanisms, targeted motivation strategies, comprehensive performance assessments, structured reward systems, and sustainable professional development opportunities. However, challenges such as resource constraints, inconsistent implementation, and communication barriers limit its effectiveness. The study contributes to educational management literature by proposing a context-specific framework for teacher management in Islamic educational institutions and recommends optimizing performance-based evaluations and reward systems to improve educational quality in madrasahs. This research underscores the significance of integrating SMART Model components to foster a more supportive and motivating environment for teachers in Islamic educational settings.*

Keywords: Teacher management; SMART Model; Islamic education; Professional Development; Performance Evaluation.

Introduction

Managing effective teacher management plays a pivotal role in improving the quality of education, particularly within Islamic schools or madrasahs, where educational institutions are expected to balance academic excellence with religious instruction. Research has consistently shown that a well-managed educational workforce not only significantly enhances student achievement but also fosters a positive school climate and institutional effectiveness (Ahmad, 2020; Raihani, 2022). A structured and comprehensive approach to teacher management is essential in ensuring that teachers remain motivated, well-supported, and professionally equipped to navigate both pedagogical and administrative challenges. Without proper management strategies, issues such as low job satisfaction, teacher attrition, and stagnation in professional development can undermine the overall educational goals of madrasahs (Hasanah & Syafrudin, 2021). Therefore, addressing teacher management holistically is not only beneficial for individual educators but also for the long-term sustainability and academic credibility of Islamic educational institutions.

Despite the critical role of effective teacher management, Indonesian madrasahs continue to face systemic and persistent challenges that hinder the professional growth and overall effectiveness of their teaching staff. One of the primary concerns is limited access to professional development programs, which restricts teachers from

engaging in continuous learning and pedagogical innovation (Ahmad, 2020; Fauzi, 2021). Additionally, the absence of structured and meaningful performance evaluation mechanisms results in assessments that do not contribute to teacher improvement or guide necessary interventions. This issue is further exacerbated by inconsistent reward systems, where teachers often perceive monetary and non-monetary incentives as being arbitrarily distributed, thereby diminishing the potential motivational impact of such rewards. Furthermore, inadequate support structures prevent teachers from receiving the necessary guidance, mentorship, and resources to enhance their instructional practices. According to Hidayat and Machali (2023), these challenges are particularly acute in Islamic educational institutions, as madrasahs often operate within resource constraints, traditional management approaches, and competing priorities between religious and academic objectives. Consequently, there is an urgent need for a more structured, integrated, and research-based approach to teacher management that is contextually relevant to the unique socio-religious and structural dynamics of Indonesian madrasahs.

One promising framework that addresses these issues is the SMART Model, which encompasses Support, Motivation, Assessment, Reward, and Training as essential components of effective human resource management in education. This model has gained widespread recognition globally for its holistic approach to improving teacher performance by ensuring that educators receive adequate support, motivation, fair assessment, well-structured rewards, and continuous professional development opportunities (Wheeler & Richey, 2018). However, while the SMART Model has been extensively explored and implemented in various educational settings, its specific application in Islamic schools—particularly within the madrasah system—remains significantly underexplored. The lack of empirical studies examining how the SMART Model functions within the operational framework of madrasahs represents a notable research gap in the field of Islamic educational management. Given that madrasahs possess distinct educational objectives, governance structures, and pedagogical approaches, it is imperative to investigate whether the principles of the SMART Model can be effectively adapted to address the unique challenges faced by teachers in these institutions. By bridging this research gap, the present study contributes to the broader discourse on educational leadership and teacher management within Islamic educational contexts.

Preliminary interviews with the principal of MTS Terpadu Berkah Palangka Raya indicate that while certain elements of the SMART Model are present within existing teacher management practices, their implementation lacks consistency, integration, and systematic execution. For instance, teachers often experience limited access to continuous professional development opportunities, which subsequently affects both their instructional quality and career progression. Furthermore, the assessment system—which should ideally serve as a tool for teacher improvement—is often perceived as perfunctory rather than constructive, with evaluations failing to provide meaningful, personalized feedback that teachers can use to refine their teaching methodologies. In terms of reward mechanisms, many teachers express concerns over the perceived arbitrariness in how performance-based incentives are distributed. The absence of a transparent, meritocratic reward system weakens the motivational impact that such incentives are intended to have. Moreover, the study reveals that there is little to no integration between the SMART Model components, which further diminishes their overall effectiveness. For instance, teacher performance assessments do not systematically inform training needs, rewards are not clearly linked to evaluation outcomes, and support structures are not strategically designed to address the specific challenges identified through the assessment process. As a result, teacher management at MTS Terpadu Berkah Palangka Raya appears to be fragmented rather than synergistic, reducing its potential to drive sustained professional growth and instructional effectiveness. Despite the extensive structural implementation of the SMART Model, little attention has been given to teachers' subjective experiences and their perception of its effectiveness. Phenomenology provides a lens to explore how teachers personally interpret and navigate support, motivation, assessment, reward systems, and training within their professional lives. By uncovering these lived experiences, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of teacher management, moving beyond institutional strategies to focus on individual meaning-making processes.

This study aims to comprehensively analyze the implementation of the SMART Model at MTS Terpadu Berkah Palangka Raya and assess its implications for teacher management from the perspective of those directly involved in the educational process. Specifically, this research seeks to:

1. Analyze the current implementation of each component of the SMART Model in teacher management at MTS Terpadu Berkah Palangka Raya, identifying both strengths and weaknesses in the existing system.
2. Examine the impact of support, motivation, assessment, rewards, and training on teacher performance, instructional effectiveness, and professional development, with a particular focus on how these elements interact within the madrasah environment.
3. Identify the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing the SMART Model in the madrasah context, considering both institutional constraints and potential areas for policy reform.

4. Develop evidence-based recommendations to enhance teacher management practices in Islamic educational institutions, aiming to create a more systematic, integrated, and sustainable model for professional growth and performance improvement.

This research offers valuable insights into the applicability of the SMART Model within the specific operational and cultural framework of Indonesian madrasahs. By providing empirical evidence and contextually relevant recommendations, the findings of this study will serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, educational leaders, and madrasah administrators seeking to enhance teacher management systems in similar educational settings. Furthermore, by highlighting both the strengths and limitations of the SMART Model's implementation in madrasahs, this study contributes to the broader academic discourse on Islamic educational leadership, teacher professional development, and institutional governance in religious-based educational institutions.

Method

This research employs a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method, aiming to understand the lived experiences within the educational environment. Phenomenology was selected because it enables a deep exploration of how participants perceive, experience, and make sense of management practices within their specific context (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 2022). This study follows Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological methodology, which involves three key stages: epoche (bracketing preconceptions), horizontalization (identifying significant statements), and imaginative variation (constructing the essence of experiences). Researchers engaged in reflexivity journals throughout the data collection process to minimize interpretive bias.

The study was conducted at MTS Terpadu BERKAH Palangka Raya, a public Islamic junior high school located in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia. Using purposive sampling, 15 participants were selected based on their direct involvement with and experience of teacher management practices. Participants included the school principal (1 person), Vice principals (3 people), Department heads (2 people), and teachers with varying years of experience, subject specializations, and employment status (9 people). This sampling strategy ensured the representation of diverse perspectives and experiences related to the phenomenon under study. Participant selection criteria included a minimum of two years working at the institution and direct experience with at least three components of the SMART Model.

Data Collection Techniques

Multiple data collection methods were employed to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon:

1. In-depth Interviews: Semi-structured interviews, lasting 60-90 minutes, were conducted with each participant. Interview protocols were developed based on the five components of the SMART Model, with questions designed to elicit detailed descriptions of experiences, perceptions, and suggestions. All interviews were audio-recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim.
2. Direct Observations: A total of 20 hours of observations were conducted in various settings, including classroom teaching (10 sessions), teacher meetings and professional development activities (5 sessions), and administrative processes related to teacher evaluation and support (5 sessions). A structured protocol guided observations focused on evidence of SMART Model implementation.
3. Document Analysis: Relevant documents were collected and analyzed, including school policy documents on teacher management, teacher performance evaluation forms and reports, professional development plans and records, meeting minutes related to teacher support and reward mechanisms, and strategic planning documents.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using phenomenological analysis procedures (Moustakas, 2022) combined with thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). NVivo 14 software was used to facilitate the coding and thematic analysis process. The analysis process involved:

1. Data Familiarization: Repeated reading of transcripts and field notes to establish an immersive understanding.
2. Horizontalization: Identifying significant statements and quotes that reflect teachers' engagement with the SMART Model.
3. Thematic Clustering: Grouping statements into emergent themes aligned with phenomenological descriptions.
4. Textural and Structural Synthesis: Developing rich descriptions of teachers' experiences and the underlying structural meanings.
5. Member Checking: Validating findings by presenting synthesized themes to participants for confirmation.

Data Trustworthiness

Several strategies were employed to ensure research trustworthiness:

1. Triangulation: Using multiple data sources (interviews, observations, documents) and participant perspectives to corroborate findings.
2. Member Checking: Providing interview transcripts and preliminary analyses to participants for verification of accuracy and interpretive validity.
3. Peer Debriefing: Regular discussions with colleagues not involved in the research to challenge assumptions and interpretations.
4. Reflexivity: Maintaining a reflexive journal to document the researcher's preconceptions, decisions, and insights throughout the research process.
5. Thick Description: Providing detailed accounts of the context, participants, and findings to enable transferability judgments.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

The findings are organized according to the five components of the SMART Model, with each section presenting participants' experiences and perceptions based on interviews, observations, and document analysis.

1. Support Mechanisms for Teachers

The data revealed that teacher support at MTS Terpadu Berkah Palangka Raya is provided through multiple channels; however, its consistency and accessibility vary significantly. Three primary support mechanisms emerged from the analysis: administrative support systems, instructional support, and emotional and professional support:

- a) **Administrative Support Systems:** Teachers frequently expressed a sense of disconnect between the policies designed to support their professional growth and the actual effectiveness of these policies in practice. While administrative structures existed to provide assistance, the bureaucratic nature of these processes often led to inefficiencies that hindered teachers from accessing necessary resources. One teacher noted, *Sometimes I feel supported with teaching materials and equipment, but the process of requesting them is unnecessarily complicated. I submitted a request for science laboratory equipment three months ago, and I'm still waiting*" (Teacher 4, Science). This statement highlights how institutional support mechanisms often fall short due to excessive procedural barriers, which in turn affect teachers' ability to deliver quality education. Many teachers reported long waiting times for resource approvals, which led to frustration and a reliance on personal efforts to compensate for institutional shortcomings. Additionally, institutional inefficiencies were perceived to stem from a lack of coordination between school administrators and teaching staff. While policies were in place to provide material and instructional support, teachers found that such measures were inconsistently implemented. Some teachers received the assistance they needed in a timely manner, whereas others experienced prolonged delays without clear explanations. The inconsistency in support created uncertainty and added stress to teachers' professional responsibilities, ultimately impacting their effectiveness in the classroom.
- b) **Instructional Support:** Observational data and interview responses highlighted that pedagogical support—such as mentorship, collaborative planning, and access to teaching aids—was present but inconsistently implemented. While a mentoring program was established to connect experienced teachers with newer colleagues, the lack of clear goals and structured follow-ups limited its effectiveness. One participant explained, *The principal established a mentoring program where experienced teachers guide newer ones, but it's not structured enough. We meet occasionally, but without clear goals or follow-up*" (Teacher 2, Mathematics). This lack of systematic instructional support reflects broader challenges in ensuring that professional development initiatives translate into meaningful improvements in teaching practices.
- c) **Emotional and Professional Support:** Participants emphasized that collegial relationships played a crucial role in providing both emotional support and professional collaboration. Informal networks among teachers often served as the most reliable form of support, filling gaps left by formal structures. As one teacher expressed, *My colleagues are my greatest support system. We share ideas and materials and encourage each other when facing challenges. The formal system doesn't provide this kind of support consistently*" (Teacher 7, Islamic

Studies). This reliance on peer support highlights the need for formal mechanisms to recognize and reinforce these informal networks rather than leaving them as an unofficial or incidental resource.

Document analysis further corroborated these findings, revealing that while support policies were formally documented, their implementation was often inconsistent. Gaps in resource allocation and follow-through on support initiatives were particularly evident, raising concerns about the effectiveness of existing teacher support systems. Without a more structured and responsive approach, the potential benefits of these mechanisms remain limited, leaving teachers to navigate challenges with inadequate institutional backing

2. Motivation Strategies

The study identified both extrinsic and intrinsic motivational approaches employed at MTS Terpadu Berkah Palangka Raya with varying degrees of effectiveness. Three key motivational strategies emerged from the analysis: recognition practices, growth opportunities, and intrinsic motivation growth:

- a) **Recognition Practices:** Public acknowledgment of achievements was observed as a significant motivational strategy. Instances of recognition occurred during school assemblies and meetings, reinforcing positive behaviors and professional contributions. However, participants reported inconsistencies in the application of this strategy. Some teachers found recognition highly motivating, while others expressed concerns about its sporadic and seemingly arbitrary nature. As one participant noted, "One teacher shared, "Being recognized in front of my colleagues and students for my teaching innovation was incredibly motivating. But these recognitions are sporadic and sometimes seem arbitrary." (Teacher 5, Language). This inconsistency suggests that while recognition can be an effective motivator, its impact is diminished when it lacks transparency and systematic implementation
- b) **Growth Opportunities:** Career advancement and professional development opportunities were identified as crucial motivators for teachers. Document analysis confirmed the existence of formal policies for teacher promotion, but interview data highlighted implementation challenges. Teachers reported unclear career pathways and a lack of structured guidance on professional growth. One participant expressed this concern: "*The possibility of career advancement exists in theory, but in practice, the path is unclear. I've been teaching for eight years without clear guidance on how to advance professionally*" (Teacher 8, Social Studies). These findings indicate that while policies supporting professional development are in place, practical barriers hinder their effectiveness in motivating teachers.
- c) **Intrinsic Motivation Growth:** Leadership approaches that foster autonomy, purpose, and mastery were identified as powerful motivators. Teachers who were entrusted with decision-making responsibilities and given the freedom to innovate in their teaching methods reported higher levels of engagement and job satisfaction. One teacher emphasized the importance of autonomy, stating, "*When the principal trusts me to develop my own teaching approach and curriculum enhancements, I feel more motivated than by any external reward. This sense of autonomy is what keeps me engaged*" (Teacher 1, Islamic Studies). These findings align with broader research on motivation, which suggests that fostering intrinsic motivation through autonomy and professional agency leads to higher levels of commitment and performance.

Overall, the study highlights that while extrinsic motivational strategies such as recognition and career growth opportunities exist, their inconsistent implementation weakens their impact. Meanwhile, intrinsic motivators, particularly autonomy and professional purpose, emerge as critical drivers of sustained teacher engagement in the madrasah setting.

3. Assessment Practices

Performance evaluation emerged as a complex component with significant implementation challenges. While formal structures for assessment exist, their effectiveness is hindered by inconsistent application, lack of meaningful feedback, and limited integration with professional development efforts. Three key themes emerged from the analysis: formal evaluation processes, feedback mechanisms, and self-assessment opportunities:

- a) **Formal Evaluation Processes:** Document analysis revealed that the school utilizes structured evaluation forms and adheres to an established schedule for teacher assessments. However, interview data indicated that these evaluations are often perceived as perfunctory and lacking developmental value. One participant

described the process as follows: *"The evaluation happens once a year, but it feels like a checkbox exercise rather than a meaningful assessment that could help me improve."* (Teacher 3, English). This sentiment aligns with broader concerns in educational management literature, which suggests that when evaluations focus primarily on compliance rather than teacher growth, they lose their potential to drive instructional improvement.

- b) **Feedback Mechanisms:** A recurring theme in participant responses was the inconsistency and limited usefulness of post-evaluation feedback. Teachers reported that feedback was often vague, offering little practical guidance for professional development. As one participant noted: *"After classroom observations, the feedback is often generic like 'good job' or 'needs improvement' without specific guidance on what to improve or how."* (Teacher 6, Mathematics). This finding suggests a gap between evaluation practices and professional development, reinforcing previous research indicating that targeted and actionable feedback is essential for meaningful teacher improvement.
- c) **Self-Assessment Opportunities:** Despite the challenges associated with formal evaluations, several innovative self-assessment practices were identified. Teachers highlighted reflective teaching journals as a valuable tool for continuous improvement. One participant shared: *"The reflective teaching journal initiative started last year has been valuable. It helps me critically examine my teaching practices more regularly than formal evaluations."* (Teacher 9, Civic Education). This practice aligns with contemporary Islamic educational philosophy, which emphasizes *muhasabah* (self-reflection) as a means of personal and professional growth. The findings suggest that self-assessment initiatives could serve as a bridge between traditional evaluation processes and a more development-oriented assessment culture.

The study highlights that while formal assessment structures exist, they require refinement to become more impactful. Strengthening feedback mechanisms, integrating professional development into assessment practices, and further institutionalizing self-assessment initiatives could enhance the effectiveness of performance evaluations at the school.

4. Reward Systems

The analysis revealed that reward systems at the school play a crucial role in shaping teacher motivation; however, inconsistencies in their implementation have limited their effectiveness. Three main reward mechanisms emerged from the data: financial incentives, non-monetary recognition, and career advancement opportunities:

- a) **Financial Incentives:** Monetary rewards, such as performance-based allowances, were present but perceived as insufficient and inconsistently distributed. Several participants expressed concerns about the transparency of the reward criteria: *"There are performance-based allowances, but the criteria aren't transparent. Sometimes it seems more about who you know than how well you teach."* (Teacher 5, Language). This finding aligns with broader research on educational reward systems, which suggests that a lack of transparency in financial incentives can diminish their motivational impact. Furthermore, in resource-constrained educational settings, monetary rewards alone may not be sufficient to drive sustained motivation.
- b) **Non-monetary Recognition:** Many participants emphasized that non-monetary forms of recognition—such as certificates, public acknowledgment, and professional development opportunities—were more meaningful than financial incentives. One teacher described their experience: *"Being selected to represent the school at the provincial teaching competition was more meaningful than any financial bonus. It recognized my expertise and gave me a platform to share it."* (Teacher 2, Mathematics). This aligns with recent findings in educational management literature, which suggest that educators often derive greater motivation from professional growth and public acknowledgment than from financial rewards, especially when salary increases are minimal.
- c) **Career Advancement Opportunities:** A recurring theme in participant responses was the perceived disconnect between performance evaluations and career progression. While, in theory, strong performance should lead to promotions or leadership opportunities, many teachers found this pathway unclear: *"The connection between performance evaluation results and career advancement opportunities isn't clear. This reduces*

the motivational impact of both systems." (Vice Principal 1). This suggests that aligning performance assessments with clear career advancement opportunities could enhance motivation. Additionally, transparent criteria for promotion and professional recognition may strengthen teacher engagement and retention. The findings suggest that while reward systems are in place, their effectiveness is compromised by inconsistencies and a lack of transparency. Addressing these challenges – particularly by clarifying reward criteria, strengthening career advancement pathways, and expanding non-monetary recognition – could improve teacher motivation and performance at the school.

5. Training and Professional Development

Professional learning opportunities at the school exhibited significant variation in quality, relevance, and accessibility. The analysis identified three primary professional development mechanisms: formal training programs, peer learning opportunities, and external professional development initiatives.:

- a) **Formal Training Programs:** Scheduled training sessions were a regular feature of the school's professional development efforts, as confirmed through document analysis. However, participants frequently questioned their relevance and applicability: *"We have monthly in-service training, but topics are often disconnected from my daily classroom challenges. More targeted, subject-specific professional development would be more beneficial."* (Teacher 7, Islamic Studies). This finding aligns with broader critiques of generic professional development programs in educational settings, where a "one-size-fits-all" approach often fails to address teachers' specific instructional needs.
- b) **Peer Learning Opportunities:** Collaborative learning methods, such as peer observation and lesson study, emerged as valuable but underutilized professional development strategies: *"The lesson study approach we tried last semester was the most useful professional development I've experienced. Observing colleagues and receiving their feedback improved my teaching more than formal training sessions."* (Teacher 1, Islamic Studies). This supports the growing body of research emphasizing the effectiveness of school-based, peer-driven professional development over traditional workshop-based approaches. Expanding peer learning initiatives could provide a cost-effective and contextually relevant solution to professional growth.
- c) **External Professional Development:** Limited access to external training opportunities due to financial constraints was a recurring concern. However, participants who attended such events highlighted their transformative impact: *"The opportunity to attend the national conference on Islamic education last year completely transformed my teaching approach. We need more such opportunities."* (Teacher 4, Science). This underscores the need for more excellent institutional support in securing external professional development opportunities, whether through partnerships, funding allocation, or policy initiatives

6. Integration of SMART Model Components

One of the most critical findings of this study was the fragmented implementation of the SMART Model. While each component – support mechanisms, motivation strategies, assessment practices, reward systems, and training – was present to some extent, their lack of integration significantly reduced their effectiveness.

As the principal noted: *"Each element exists in some form, but they don't work together. Assessment doesn't inform training needs, rewards aren't linked to performance evaluation, and support systems aren't targeted based on identified needs."* This observation aligns with critiques of piecemeal approaches to educational management, where isolated interventions fail to produce meaningful, systemic improvements. Theoretical implications of this finding suggest that the success of the SMART Model depends on the intentional coordination of its components.

For example:

- a) Linking assessment and training could ensure that professional development programs directly address identified weaknesses.
- b) Aligning rewards with performance evaluation could enhance motivation and fairness in the reward system.
- c) Strengthening support mechanisms based on assessment data could ensure that teachers receive targeted assistance where they need it most.

To maximize the impact of the SMART Model, the school must transition from parallel implementation to an integrated approach. Establishing clear connections between assessment, training, support, and rewards

could create a more cohesive and effective educational management system.

Table 1
Summary of SMART Model Implementation at MTS terpadu BERKAH Palangka Raya Palangka Raya

Component	Implementation Level	Key Strengths	Major Challenges
Support	Moderate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collegial support networks • Material resources for teaching • Administrative assistance for required documentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bureaucratic inefficiencies • Inconsistent accessibility • Limited instructional support
Motivation	Moderate-to-Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public recognition practices • Religious purpose-driven motivation • Autonomy in instructional methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistent recognition • Unclear advancement pathways • Limited connection to performance
Assessment	Low-to-Moderate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established evaluation schedule • Comprehensive assessment criteria • Reflective practice initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perfunctory implementation • Inadequate feedback • Limited use of results for improvement
Reward	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance allowances exist • Non-monetary recognition opportunities • Special assignments for high performers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived inequity in distribution • Lack of transparency in criteria • Insufficient connection to performance
Training	Moderate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular in-service sessions • Peer learning initiatives • Subject-based professional communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generic rather than targeted content • Limited follow-up support • Resource constraints for external training

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal both opportunities and challenges in implementing the SMART Model for teacher management at MTS Terpadu Berkah, Palangka Raya. This section interprets the findings in relation to existing literature and theoretical frameworks.

1. Fragmented Implementation of Support Systems

The inconsistent implementation of support mechanisms aligns with Fauzi's (2021) findings regarding the fragmented nature of teacher support in Indonesian Islamic schools. While policies exist on paper, the gap between policy and practice reflects what Hasanah and Syafrudin (2021) describe as an "implementation deficit" in educational management. As one participant noted, "The intention to support teachers is there, but follow-through is lacking." This observation underscores a broader challenge in educational administration, where well-intended policies often fail to translate into tangible, sustainable practices. The disconnect between policy design and execution suggests that structural inefficiencies, resource limitations, or lack of accountability may hinder the effectiveness of teacher support systems. Without a concerted effort to bridge this gap, the benefits of these policies remain primarily theoretical rather than practical.

This study extends existing knowledge by highlighting the importance of informal support networks in madrasah settings. The strong collegial relationships that participants identified as their "most reliable support system" suggest that effective teacher management in Islamic schools should capitalize on these existing networks rather than imposing entirely new structures. This finding aligns with Raihani's (2022) observation that successful Islamic educational leadership is built upon communal values and relationships. By leveraging these informal support systems, schools can enhance teacher resilience, foster collaboration, and create an environment where educators feel more supported in their roles. Recognizing and formalizing these networks within the broader institutional framework may offer a practical and culturally relevant approach to strengthening teacher support, ensuring that initiatives are not only well-intentioned but also effectively implemented.

2. Balancing Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

The findings regarding motivation strategies reveal a tension between extrinsic incentives and intrinsic motivators, which is consistent with the broader literature on educational management. Wheeler and Richey (2018) argue that sustainable motivation depends on striking a balance between both approaches. While financial rewards and institutional recognition play a role in motivating teachers, long-term engagement and commitment are often driven by more profound, more personal factors. However, this study adds nuance by identifying the unique role of religious purpose as a motivational factor in Islamic educational settings. Unlike in secular institutions, where motivation is often framed in terms of career progression or financial incentives, teachers in madrasahs frequently emphasize their sense of religious duty and personal fulfilment as primary drivers of their work.

As Teacher 1 expressed, "My primary motivation is contributing to the religious and academic development of these children. Material incentives are secondary." This religious dimension of motivation in madrasahs is underexplored in mainstream educational management literature, which tends to focus on secular motivational frameworks (Hidayat & Machali, 2023). The findings suggest that Islamic schools should recognize and integrate this spiritual motivation into their teacher support strategies rather than relying solely on conventional incentive structures. Additionally, the inconsistency in recognition practices identified in this study contradicts the best practices outlined by Ahmad (2020), who emphasizes that recognition must be systematic and perceived as fair to be effective in motivating employees. When teachers perceive recognition as arbitrary or inconsistent, it undermines their sense of value and belonging, potentially diminishing the intended motivational impact. To foster a more sustainable and meaningful approach to teacher motivation, Islamic educational institutions should consider structured recognition programs that align with both material and spiritual incentives, ensuring that teachers feel appreciated in a way that resonates with their professional and religious commitments.

3. Assessment as Formality Rather Than Development Tool

The finding that performance evaluation is often perceived as a "checkbox exercise" rather than a developmental tool echoes concerns raised in previous studies of Indonesian educational institutions. Mulyani, Meirawan, and Rahmadani (2020) similarly found that school evaluations frequently focus on compliance rather than improvement, reducing their effectiveness as mechanisms for professional development. Rather than fostering meaningful feedback and continuous growth, assessments are often conducted to fulfil administrative requirements, leaving educators with little practical guidance on how to enhance their teaching. This study extends their work by examining this phenomenon specifically within the Islamic school context, where the tension between bureaucratic evaluation practices and the need for genuine professional development is particularly pronounced.

The disconnect between assessment and development opportunities identified at MTS Terpadu Berkah Palangka Raya reflects a missed opportunity to create what Suyanto (2021) refers to as a "growth-oriented evaluation culture." When assessment becomes divorced from professional growth, it loses its power to drive improvement, ultimately failing both educators and students. However, the self-assessment initiatives emerging at the school present a promising alternative, aligning with contemporary Islamic educational philosophy that emphasizes *muhasabah* (self-reflection) as a path to improvement (Hidayat & Machali, 2023). This suggests a potential bridge between Islamic educational values and contemporary management practices that could enhance teacher evaluation in madrasah settings. By integrating structured self-reflection with constructive feedback mechanisms, schools can move beyond compliance-based assessments and foster an environment where evaluation serves as a meaningful tool for professional growth, ensuring that teachers are both supported and empowered in their roles.

4. Reward Systems: Equity and Transparency Challenges

The perceived inequity in reward distribution reported by participants underscores the importance of transparency in educational management. When teachers feel that rewards are distributed arbitrarily or unfairly, it can lead to dissatisfaction, decreased motivation, and even resentment within the school environment. This

finding is consistent with Aldhaheeri's (2017) research, which demonstrated that perceived fairness in reward systems has a significant impact on teacher satisfaction and performance. A lack of transparency in how rewards are allocated can create distrust in the system, making it less effective in fostering motivation and professional commitment. Within Indonesia's public Islamic schools, where bureaucratic constraints often complicate administrative processes, ensuring equity in reward distribution presents an even greater challenge. This study contributes to the discussion by highlighting the specific difficulties faced in these institutions, particularly regarding balancing structural limitations with the need for a fair and motivating work environment.

Additionally, the finding that non-monetary recognition often carries more motivational weight than financial incentives challenge some assumptions in traditional management literature but aligns with recent research on education professionals. Wheeler and Richey (2018) note that educators often place a higher value on recognition and growth opportunities than on monetary rewards, mainly when financial incentives are modest. This suggests that schools should prioritize consistent and meaningful forms of recognition, such as career development programs, public acknowledgment of achievements, and opportunities for professional advancement. By fostering a culture of appreciation and transparency, school leaders can strengthen teacher morale and engagement, ensuring that rewards—whether financial or non-financial—are perceived as fair, meaningful, and aligned with teachers' intrinsic and extrinsic motivations

5. Professional Development: From Generic to Targeted

The preference for collaborative, subject-specific professional development reported by participants reflects a global trend toward more contextualized teacher-learning approaches. Traditional "one-size-fits-all" training models, which prioritize generalized instructional strategies over subject-specific pedagogy, have been increasingly criticized in recent educational research (Mulyani, Meirawan, & Rahmadani, 2020). Participants in this study echoed these concerns, emphasizing that professional development initiatives should be more directly relevant to their teaching contexts. This need is particularly pronounced in *madrasah* settings, where teachers must integrate both religious and academic content into their instruction. A generic training model fails to address the complexities of this dual responsibility, underscoring the importance of professional development programs that are tailored to the unique pedagogical demands of Islamic education.

Moreover, resource constraints significantly limit access to external professional development opportunities, presenting a significant challenge for *madrasah* teachers. As Fauzi (2021) notes, Indonesian *madrasahs* typically operate with fewer resources than their general education counterparts, leading to disparities in access to training and career development programs. This study confirms this issue while also identifying promising alternative approaches that maximize the use of limited resources. Notably, peer learning and collaborative teacher networks emerged as viable solutions, allowing educators to share expertise and refine their teaching practices despite financial and logistical constraints. By fostering a culture of professional collaboration, *madrasahs* can create sustainable, community-driven development opportunities that support both religious and academic pedagogical growth, ensuring that teachers receive the targeted training they need to enhance their effectiveness in the classroom

6. Integration: The Missing Link

Perhaps the most significant finding is the lack of integration among SMART Model components, which ultimately diminishes the potential impact of each element and the model as a whole. While individual components may be present in some form, their isolated implementation prevents them from functioning as a cohesive system. As noted by the principal, "Each element exists in some form, but they don't work together." This observation highlights a broader issue in educational management, where well-intentioned policies and frameworks often fail to produce meaningful change due to inadequate execution. This finding aligns with Ahmad's (2020) critique of piecemeal approaches to educational management in Indonesian Islamic schools, where structural and bureaucratic challenges often lead to disjointed reform efforts rather than comprehensive, system-wide improvements.

The theoretical implication of this study is that the SMART Model necessitates the intentional integration of its components rather than their parallel or isolated implementation. This extends Wheeler and

Richey's (2018) conceptualization by emphasizing the interactive nature of the model's elements, suggesting that a holistic approach is essential for maximizing its effectiveness. In the *madrasah* context, where resource constraints already limit the implementation of any single component to its full potential, integration becomes even more critical. By aligning policies, support systems, reward structures, and professional development efforts within a unified framework, madrasahs can optimize their limited resources and create a more sustainable and impactful approach to teacher management and school improvement. Without such intentional integration, even well-designed initiatives risk becoming fragmented and ineffective, ultimately failing to achieve their intended outcomes.

Conclusion

This phenomenological study has examined the implementation of the SMART Model in teacher management at MTS Terpadu Berkah Palangka Raya, revealing both promising practices and significant challenges. The research confirms that while individual components of the model are present to varying degrees, their fragmented implementation limits their collective impact on teacher performance and development. The study demonstrates that effective teacher management in madrasah settings requires not only the adoption of contemporary management frameworks, such as the SMART Model but also their thoughtful adaptation to the unique context of Islamic education. The religious dimension of teacher motivation, the value of informal collegial support networks, and the potential alignment between Islamic reflective practices and contemporary assessment approaches represent opportunities for context-specific enhancement of the SMART Model.

Several practical implications emerge from this research. Madrasah leaders should focus on integrating SMART components rather than implementing them in isolation, ensuring that assessment informs training, rewards align with performance, and support addresses identified needs. The development of transparent and equitable reward systems with clear connections to performance assessment is essential for enhancing teacher motivation and satisfaction. Professional development should shift from generic to targeted approaches, with a greater emphasis on collaborative learning and subject-specific content that addresses the dual academic and religious mission of madrasahs. Support systems should be streamlined to reduce bureaucratic barriers while leveraging the strengths of existing collegial networks. Religious values and purposes should be explicitly incorporated into motivation strategies, recognizing their significant role in motivating madrasah teachers.

This study's limitations include its focus on a single madrasah and the relatively short observation period. Future research should examine the implementation of the SMART Model across multiple Islamic educational institutions, including private madrasahs with varying organizational structures. Longitudinal studies tracking the impact of integrated SMART implementation on teacher performance and student outcomes would further enhance understanding of effective teacher management in Islamic educational contexts.

In conclusion, the SMART Model presents a promising framework for enhancing teacher management in madrasahs; however, its effectiveness depends on contextual adaptation, the integration of its components, and alignment with the unique values and challenges of Islamic educational settings. By addressing the implementation gaps identified in this study, madrasah leaders can create more supportive, motivating, and growth-oriented environments for teachers, ultimately enhancing educational quality for students.

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