THE ART OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP: A SYNTHESIS OF THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD'S MODEL, THE COMBAT MODEL, AND *MANUNGGALING KAWULA GUSTI*

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Abstract

Global challenges and the growing complexity of national education issues demand leaders who are not only managerially competent but also possess moral integrity, strategic resilience, and a humanistic orientation. This article seeks to propose a synthesized model of educational leadership that integrates Islamic spiritual values, modern strategic approaches, and Javanese local wisdom. This study employs a library research method with a qualitative–descriptive approach. The data were analyzed using content analysis and comparative techniques applied to primary and secondary sources concerning the Leadership Model of Prophet Muhammad SAW, Cohen's Combat Model, and the Javanese philosophy of Manunggaling Kawula Gusti. The study results in a holistic synthesis of educational leadership. The Prophet Muhammad SAW Model provides the foundation for character and ethics. The Combat Model offers a strategic and action-oriented framework, while the Manunggaling Kawula Gusti philosophy serves as the spiritual essence that nurtures harmony and collegiality. Together, these three models form an ideal educational leader—one who possesses the heart of the Prophet (noble in character), the mind of Combat (strategic and innovative), and the soul of Manunggaling (humanistic and harmonious).

The synthesis of these models offers a fresh and contextualized perspective on educational leadership development in Indonesia. It is recommended that school principal training programs incorporate these three dimensions in a balanced manner to cultivate leaders who are not only operationally effective but also transformative and grounded in character.

Keywords: Educational Leadership, Prophet Muhammad SAW, Combat Model, Manunggaling Kawula Gusti, Model Synthesis, School Principals

INTRODUCTION

The era of globalization and the rapid advancement of information technology in the 21st century have placed Indonesia's education system in the midst of increasingly complex and multidimensional challenges. On one hand, education is required to produce human resources who are excellent, ethical, and globally competitive (Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System). On the other hand, fundamental problems—such as disparities in quality, curriculum relevance, and suboptimal governance—remain pressing issues that need to be addressed (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2023).

Within this context, educational leadership—particularly the role of the school principal as the forefront manager of educational institutions—becomes a decisive factor in responding to these challenges (Leithwood et al., 2020). A principal today is no longer merely an administrator or manager, but an *instructional leader* capable of mobilizing all school resources to create a conducive and innovative academic environment (Fullan, 2014). The significant influence of school leadership on teacher performance and student achievement has been well-documented (e.g., Hallinger & Heck, 2011). However, in practice, leadership development for school principals often remains focused on technical managerial aspects, while the "art" or philosophical dimension of leadership—one that is transformative, ethical, and contextually grounded—receives less attention.

Addressing this gap, this article argues that effective educational leadership requires a holistic and integrative approach that combines modern leadership theories with spiritual values and local wisdom embedded in society. Previous studies have explored the leadership model of Prophet Muhammad SAW (Alamsyah, 2017; Thaib, 2019), strategic leadership frameworks such as Cohen's Combat Model (Cohen, 1990), and Javanese leadership philosophy (Hidayat et al., 2023), yet mostly in isolation. Few studies have attempted to synthesize these three paradigmatically distinct frameworks—Islamic spirituality, modern strategy, and local philosophy—into a coherent model of educational leadership.

Therefore, this article seeks to fill that academic gap by proposing a synthesized perspective titled *"The Art of Educational Leadership: A Synthesis of the Prophet Muhammad's Model, the Combat Model, and Manunggaling Kawula Gusti."* Specifically, this study aims to:

1. Analyze the main characteristics and core principles of the Prophet Muhammad SAW Model, the Combat Model, and the *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* philosophy.

2. Identify points of convergence and complementary elements among the three models within the context of educational leadership.

3. Formulate practical implications of this synthesis for the professional development of school principals in Indonesia.

It is expected that this synthesis will contribute an alternative perspective that enriches the theoretical landscape of educational leadership and offers a more contextual and applicable framework for educational leaders in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHODS

This article employs a library research method with a qualitative–descriptive approach. The library study was conducted by collecting, analyzing, and synthesizing data from various written sources to construct a new conceptual framework or model (Zed, 2008). The data and analytical materials were drawn from three types of sources: (1) Primary sources, which contain the core teachings, values, and principles of the three leadership models under study, including the Qur'an and Hadith of Prophet Muhammad SAW (e.g., *Sahih Bukhari*) as the foundation for the Prophet Muhammad's Leadership Model, Javanese philosophical texts discussing the concept of *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* as the basis for the Javanese philosophical model, and William A. Cohen's *The Art of the Leader* (1990) as the main reference for the Combat Model; (2) Secondary sources, consisting of supporting materials such as books, scholarly journals, academic articles, and theses that discuss the three leadership models, educational leadership, *sirah nabawiyah*, and Javanese mysticism; and (3) Tertiary sources, such as dictionaries (e.g., KBBI) and encyclopedias used to clarify key terms like "art" and "leadership." Data were collected through documentation techniques, involving careful note-taking and citation of relevant information from all identified sources. The collected data were then analyzed critically using content analysis and comparative analysis techniques through several stages: data reduction (focusing on information relevant to leadership principles within each model), data display (systematic presentation of each model's characteristics), analysis and synthesis (identifying points of convergence, divergence, and complementarity among the three models to formulate an integrative educational leadership framework), and verification (cross-checking interpretations with the original sources to ensure accuracy and validity). Through this methodological framework, the study aims to produce a comprehensive, in-depth, and contextually grounded synthesis model of educational leadership

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Prophetic Leadership Model: Moral and Transformational Foundations

The leadership model of Prophet Muhammad SAW offers a comprehensive and universal paradigm of leadership grounded in both moral and practical dimensions. Based on studies of *sirah nabawiyah*, his leadership stands on two interrelated foundations: personal traits (self-leadership) and public traits (social leadership).

On the personal level, the Prophet demonstrated *siddiq* (truthfulness), where honesty served as the foundation of trust—the essential social capital in educational leadership. *Amanah* (trustworthiness) and *tabligh* (responsibility and transparency) represent the leader's duty to fulfill institutional mandates and communicate the school's vision and mission clearly to all stakeholders. *Fathonah* (wisdom and intelligence) reflects the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual capacity required to analyze problems, design strategies, and guide teachers and students.

His charisma, derived not from innate magnetism but from integrity, moral consistency, and a clear vision, shows that authentic influence emerges from exemplary character rather than positional authority.

2. The Social Dimension of Prophetic Leadership: Participatory and Humanistic Practice

In the public dimension, the Prophet's leadership was participatory and human-centered. The principle of *Ibdā' bi al-Nafsik* ("begin with oneself") aligns with the modern notion of "walking the talk," emphasizing exemplary behavior before expecting others to act.

His communication was clear, direct, and emotionally resonant—skills essential for school principals in building shared understanding and commitment. The Prophet's closeness to his followers modeled participatory engagement, which in educational contexts translates to *management by walking around*, where the leader remains present and involved.

The practice of *shura* (consultation) underscores the importance of collaborative decision-making, while his mastery in providing recognition and motivation highlights the humanistic art of uplifting morale. Above all, his leadership was guided by *akhlāq al-karīmah* (noble ethics), affirming that success in leadership is measured not merely by outcomes but by ethical and humane processes.

3. Cohen's Combat Leadership Model: Strategy, Adaptability, and Decisive Action

Cohen's (1990) Combat Leadership Model presents a dynamic, action-oriented framework suitable for navigating the volatile, uncertain, and complex landscape of modern education. This model operates through two major dimensions: the pre-combat mindset and the in-combat strategy.

The pre-combat mindset involves cultivating reflection on past successes and failures, nurturing an attitude of service and empathy, taking initiative without waiting for formal designation, and developing situational awareness in rapidly changing environments. It emphasizes motivation, resilience, and the belief that leaders are "made" through experience rather than born with fixed traits.

The in-combat strategy focuses on concrete action: taking calculated risks, fostering innovation, maintaining high expectations, demonstrating optimism under adversity, and leading from the front. These principles empower school leaders to act decisively, inspire confidence, and sustain organizational momentum in times of uncertainty.

4. The Manunggaling Kawula Gusti Model: Spiritual and Cultural Unity in Leadership

The Manunggaling Kawula Gusti model, rooted in Javanese philosophy, represents the unity between the leader (*Gusti*) and the followers (*Kawula*). This concept transcends its theocentric dimension—the unity between human and God—to include a profound anthropocentric meaning: the harmonious integration of leader and community.

Vertically, leadership is perceived as an act of worship (*ibadah*), in which the leader assumes the divine mandate of *khalīfah* (stewardship). This awareness fosters humility (*tawadhu'*), detachment from material ambition (*zuhud*), and a deep sense of accountability to God.

Horizontally, it manifests through harmony (*hamemayu hayuning bawana*), where educational leaders cultivate balanced relationships among all members of the school ecosystem—teachers, students, staff, and parents. It also embodies servant leadership, where the leader serves the needs and growth of others.

This unity unfolds across three levels of leadership energy:

a. Weak energy, where actions are merely transactional and compliance-based.

b. Strong but rigid energy, characterized by discipline without empathy, producing good but uninspired results.

c. Profound energy, driven by love, sincerity, and shared purpose, creating collegiality, creativity, and collective flow—the ultimate expression of *kemanunggalan* (oneness in action).

5. Comparative Analysis: Synthesizing Three Leadership Models

Through comparative analysis, this study synthesizes the three leadership models into a holistic framework of educational leadership. These models are not contradictory but complementary, forming an integrated architecture of leadership.

a. The Prophet Muhammad SAW Model serves as the ethical foundation—anchoring leadership in moral integrity, sincerity, and wisdom.

b. The Combat Leadership Model functions as the strategic framework—translating moral principles into decisive and adaptive action.

c. The Manunggaling Kawula Gusti Model provides the spiritual and cultural soul—ensuring leadership remains humane, relational, and harmonious.

Without the prophetic moral foundation, leadership risks manipulation; without combat strategy, it lacks dynamism; without *Manunggaling* harmony, it loses humanity. Therefore, true leadership must integrate all three: ethical grounding, strategic capability, and spiritual harmony.

6. Toward a Holistic Paradigm of Educational Leadership

The synthesis of these three perspectives reveals a multidimensional paradigm: effective educational leadership harmonizes the heart (spiritual and moral values), the mind (strategic thinking and innovation), and the soul (human relationships and collective harmony).

The ideal school leader is one who embodies the prophetic character of integrity and humility, the strategic vigor of Combat leadership, and the unifying spirit of *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*. Such integration fosters schools that are not only academically excellent but also ethically grounded and socially cohesive—spaces where leadership becomes both an act of transformation and a manifestation of spiritual artistry

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis conducted, it can be concluded that the art of educational leadership requires an integrative and multidimensional approach. The three leadership models—Prophet Muhammad SAW, Combat, and *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*—are not separate entities but can be synthesized into a comprehensive and holistic framework. The Prophet Muhammad's Leadership Model provides a strong ethical and moral foundation, emphasizing exemplary conduct, honesty (*siddiq*), trustworthiness (*amanah*), and humanistic communication. The Combat Leadership Model serves as a dynamic and strategic framework that equips leaders with pragmatic tools to face challenges with courage, innovation, and result-oriented thinking. Meanwhile, the Manunggaling Kawula Gusti Leadership Model embodies the spiritual and cultural essence of leadership that humanizes relationships, promotes harmony, unity, and servant leadership, transforming hierarchical relations into collegial partnerships. The

synthesis of these three models creates the ideal profile of an educational leader—one who possesses the heart of a Prophet (noble character), the mind of a Combat leader (strategic and resilient), and the soul of *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* (humanistic and harmonious). This integrative framework offers a contextual solution for addressing the complex challenges of educational leadership in Indonesia. Theoretically, this study contributes to the body of knowledge in educational leadership by introducing a synthetic model that integrates spiritual values, modern strategies, and local wisdom, offering a new theoretical foundation for more contextual leadership research. Practically, it suggests that (1) educational institutions such as the Ministry of Education and local governments should design leadership training programs that integrate moral formation, strategic simulation, and local cultural wisdom to build a positive school climate; (2) prospective and current educational leaders, including principals and teachers, should actively cultivate not only managerial skills but also spiritual integrity, strategic resilience, and humanistic relationships within the school community; and (3) future researchers are encouraged to empirically test this synthesized model using quantitative or qualitative methods to evaluate its impact on school climate, teacher performance, and student achievement. By adopting this integrative framework, it is hoped that Indonesia will nurture educational leaders who not only achieve academic excellence but also embody noble character and foster a humane and transformative educational civilization

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