
LEADING WITHIN BOUNDARIES: LEADERSHIP PRACTICES FOR ENHANCING TEACHER WELL-BEING IN PESANTREN-BASED SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Teachers in pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) often work at the intersection of institutional obligations, religious devotion, and personal life, making their psychological well-being vulnerable to emotional strain and blurred work-life boundaries. Although educational leadership research has examined formal management and organizational support, little is known about how everyday leadership practices protect teachers' psychological well-being in pesantren-based schools. This study investigates how leadership behaviors preserve and enhance teacher well-being in two Indonesian Islamic boarding schools. Using a qualitative multiple-case study design, data were collected from 18 participants, including principals, teachers, and administrative staff, through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis between January and April 2025. The data were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis and cross-case comparison. The findings identify three mutually reinforcing leadership dimensions: relational leadership through exemplary conduct, collegiality, and caring interactions; spiritual leadership through the reinforcement of religious and professional meaning; and managerial leadership through empowerment, recognition, workload regulation, and collective responsibility. The study proposes boundary-setting leadership as an integrated model that combines relational, spiritual, and managerial practices to sustain teachers' psychological well-being in pesantren-based schools. This model contributes to debates on educational leadership in faith-based institutions by showing how leaders negotiate institutional commitment and teachers' need for psychological sustainability.

Keywords: boundary-setting leadership, teacher psychological well-being, spiritual values, workload regulation, Islamic boarding schools

Abstrak

Guru di pesantren sering bekerja pada persinggungan antara kewajiban institusional, pengabdian keagamaan, dan kehidupan pribadi, sehingga kesejahteraan psikologis mereka rentan terhadap tekanan emosional dan kaburnya batas antara pekerjaan dan kehidupan pribadi. Meskipun penelitian tentang kepemimpinan pendidikan telah banyak membahas manajemen formal dan dukungan organisasi, masih sedikit kajian yang menjelaskan bagaimana praktik kepemimpinan sehari-hari melindungi kesejahteraan psikologis guru di sekolah berbasis pesantren. Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana perilaku kepemimpinan mempertahankan dan meningkatkan kesejahteraan guru di dua pesantren di Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan desain studi kasus ganda kualitatif, data dikumpulkan dari 18 partisipan, yang terdiri atas pimpinan sekolah, guru, dan staf administrasi, melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis dokumen pada periode Januari hingga April 2025. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik induktif dan perbandingan lintas kasus. Temuan penelitian mengidentifikasi tiga dimensi kepemimpinan yang saling menguatkan, yaitu kepemimpinan relasional melalui keteladanan, kolegialitas, dan interaksi yang penuh kepedulian; kepemimpinan spiritual melalui penguatan makna religius dan profesional; serta kepemimpinan manajerial melalui pemberdayaan, pengakuan, pengaturan beban kerja, dan tanggung jawab kolektif. Penelitian ini mengusulkan kepemimpinan penetapan batas kerja sebagai model terpadu yang menggabungkan praktik relasional, spiritual, dan manajerial untuk menopang kesejahteraan psikologis guru di sekolah berbasis pesantren. Model ini berkontribusi pada diskursus kepemimpinan pendidikan di lembaga berbasis keagamaan dengan menunjukkan bagaimana para pemimpin menegosiasikan komitmen institusional dan kebutuhan guru akan keberlanjutan psikologis.

Kata kunci: kepemimpinan penetapan batas kerja, kesejahteraan psikologis guru, nilai-nilai spiritual, pengaturan beban kerja, sekolah berbasis pesantren

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Introduction

Educational leadership plays an important role not only in managing institutions but also in aligning professional demands with the ethical and service-oriented values of the organization (Bergmark & Hansson, 2021; Imjai et al., 2024). In pesantren-based schools (Islamic boarding schools), teachers are often expected to demonstrate high levels of commitment, availability, and devotion. These expectations frequently blur the boundary between teachers' professional roles and personal lives (Molefi et al., 2024). As a result, teachers may experience greater job pressure, emotional fatigue, and reduced psychological well-being (Fitri et al., 2023; Javad et al., 2023). Many teachers perform duties beyond formal teaching responsibilities without clearly defined work boundaries. In such contexts, well-being is not merely an individual issue; it is also a structural concern shaped by leadership practices and institutional culture.

In the educational leadership literature, organizational support, workload, and general leadership style are commonly used to explain teacher well-being (Hobbs & Allen, 2023). However, when everyday leadership practices are not examined closely, leadership is often treated as either a structural factor or an individual attribute rather than as a process through which work boundaries are developed and maintained (Frick et al., 2021). The concept of boundary-setting leadership offers a more focused perspective by emphasizing the role of leaders in creating, maintaining, and negotiating boundaries between organizational expectations and teachers' well-being needs (Anglani et al., 2023; Cheng & Liu, 2024). However, because pesantren-based schools have ideals, rituals, and social expectations that differ substantially from mainstream educational settings, this concept has received limited empirical attention in such contexts.

Previous studies have shown significant relationships between leadership, role clarity, organizational support, workload management, and teacher well-being (Amin et al., 2024; Pariyanti et al., 2022). Research on work-life balance also suggests that work boundaries are crucial for increasing job satisfaction and reducing burnout (Hermawan et al., 2024). Much of this literature, however, has focused on formal educational institutions or modern organizational environments in which personal and professional domains are more clearly differentiated (Hermawan et al., 2024). Consequently, understanding remains limited regarding how work boundaries are constructed, contextualized, and interpreted in highly immersive environments such as Islamic boarding schools (Bruckberger et al., 2023). This gap indicates that existing research has not sufficiently explained the dynamics of leadership in contexts that prioritize service, collaboration, and institutional commitment.

A further gap concerns the level of analysis. Leadership has often been treated as a variable that directly influences well-being, without sufficient attention to the micro-processes through which leadership behavior is enacted in everyday practice (Pham et al., 2024; Saif et al., 2024). In pesantren-based schools, work boundaries are shaped through continuous interaction among social relationships, religious values, communal expectations, and institutional constraints (Jusubaidi et

al., 2024; Tadege et al., 2022). Understanding this phenomenon therefore requires an analysis that moves beyond structural explanations and attends to everyday practices within the pesantren ecosystem.

This study explores boundary-setting leadership in pesantren-based schools to deepen understanding of how work boundaries are constructed, negotiated, and implemented in a highly committed institutional setting. In pesantren, teachers are not only classroom instructors but also mentors, moral guides, and caregivers for students. The overlap between teaching, dormitory supervision, religious activities, and community life makes the boundary between professional and personal life especially thin. This condition can produce emotional and psychological exhaustion, particularly when institutional resources are limited and expectations for teacher availability are high. Leadership is therefore central to establishing balanced work standards, providing social support, and moderating institutional expectations so that teachers can perform their duties without compromising their mental health.

Accordingly, this study asks how leadership practices contribute to teachers' psychological well-being within the boundary conditions of pesantren-based schools. Leadership is conceptualized as an evolving social practice that combines structural responsibility with relational, emotional, and spiritual support. In this view, leaders do not merely distribute tasks; they create a fair, humane, and sustainable work environment through example, care, recognition, and value-based guidance. The study therefore positions leadership as a contextual practice shaped by social interaction, spiritual meaning, and teachers' everyday work experiences in pesantren settings.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a multiple-case study design to investigate leadership behaviors that contribute to the psychological well-being of teachers in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren). This design was selected because the study aimed to develop an in-depth understanding of leadership phenomena across different institutional settings and to enable comparison between cases.

Two Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia were purposively selected as research sites. The sites were chosen because they integrate formal education with the pesantren system, implement dormitory-based education, and involve school leaders actively in educational activities and teachers' social life. Although the two schools share comparable religious characteristics, they differ in institutional practices and leadership arrangements, making them suitable for cross-case analysis.

The study involved 18 participants: four Islamic boarding school leaders, 10 teachers, and four administrative staff members. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their experience, institutional role, and involvement in leadership practices and institutional processes. Snowball sampling was also used to obtain broader information through recommendations from previously interviewed participants.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observation, and document analysis between January and April 2025. Observations were conducted during formal and informal activities, including classroom learning, teacher meetings, dormitory activities, religious programs, and everyday interactions between leaders and teachers. The observations focused on leadership approaches, communication styles, workload management, and teachers' responses to institutional demands.

Each in-depth interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and was recorded with participants' consent before being fully transcribed for analysis. The interviews explored participants' experiences and views regarding leadership, emotional support, work-life balance, task management, and the meaning of psychological well-being in the context of Islamic boarding schools.

Triangulation also involved the analysis of various institutional documents, including internal regulations, teachers' work schedules, organizational structures, meeting minutes, human resource policies, activity plans, and documents related to teacher development and well-being. These documents were examined to contextualize institutional practices and to validate findings generated through observations and interviews.

Data were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis. First, statements relevant to the research focus were identified and coded. Related codes were then grouped into categories and broader themes. A cross-case analysis was subsequently conducted to identify similarities and differences in leadership practices that influenced teachers' psychological well-being in the two Islamic boarding schools.

Several strategies were used to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, including source and method triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, and the maintenance of audit trails throughout the research process. The researcher also engaged in continuous reflexivity to minimize the influence of personal assumptions on data interpretation. The study followed ethical research standards by obtaining voluntary informed consent from participants, maintaining data confidentiality, protecting participants' identities through pseudonyms, and safeguarding institutional privacy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The analysis shows that leadership in Islamic boarding schools influences teachers' psychological well-being through supportive role modeling, reinforcement of spiritual values, and adaptive workload regulation. Interview, observation, and document data indicate that relational leadership practices and proportionate work management mediate teachers' well-being. These findings suggest that teacher well-being is shaped by integrative and context-sensitive leadership practices.

Exemplary and Supportive Leadership in Strengthening Teachers' Psychological Well-Being

The findings show that leadership practices emphasizing exemplary conduct, emotional closeness, and supportive interpersonal relationships influence teachers' psychological well-being in Islamic boarding schools. In both cases, teachers described leaders not merely as administrative authorities but as morally engaged figures embedded in everyday institutional life. In Case 1, leader support was mainly demonstrated through active involvement in students' daily activities and close interpersonal relationships. In Case 2, leader support was more visible through intensive communication and responsiveness to teachers' needs.

Interview, observation, and document data indicate that exemplary supportive leadership emerged through five interconnected dimensions: exemplary behavior, a climate of brotherhood, supportive leadership, care-oriented leadership, and the reinforcement of spiritual values. The findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Exemplary Supportive Leadership in Building Teachers' Psychological Well-Being

Participant Statement	Code
"Leadership is not only about giving instructions. Leaders join our teaching activities, participate in dormitory programs, and sometimes help with night-time student supervision. It makes us feel that we are working together, not merely receiving orders." (T3, Case 1)	Exemplary Leadership
"We are more likely to speak openly about problems when we know that our leaders understand what teachers are experiencing." (T5, Case 1)	Exemplary Leadership
"Our relationship is more personal and less formal or bureaucratic. We can discuss challenges openly without fear of retaliation." (T2, Case 2)	Climate of Brotherhood
"When a teacher is sick or has personal problems, the administration usually reorganizes duties temporarily." (Staff 1, Case 2)	Supportive Leadership
"Leaders often ask about our personal condition, not only about our teaching performance. As human beings, we feel touched by that care." (T7, Case 1)	Care-Oriented Leadership
"The kyai often reminds us that teaching is part of worship. Even when the work becomes difficult, those reminders help us stay calm." (T4, Case 2)	Spiritual Reinforcement Values

These findings are supported by field observations. In Case 1, pesantren leaders often held informal meetings with teachers after evening religious services. These interactions created an open communicative space in which teachers could discuss ideas, experiences, and concerns related to institutional life. Teachers felt able to raise work-related matters without being constrained by hierarchy. In Case 2, observations showed that leaders frequently adjusted activity schedules when teachers needed support, particularly during intensive pesantren programs and examination periods.

Document analysis further supports this finding. Internal documents from both schools indicate the existence of informal mentoring activities, religious study groups, and procedures for adjusting duties when teachers faced family or personal circumstances. In Case 2, task rotation was recorded systematically in workload distribution documents to prevent teachers from becoming overburdened.

Overall, the findings indicate that the quality of relationships between leaders and teachers has a substantial influence on teachers' psychological well-being in Islamic boarding schools. Leadership functions not only to coordinate organizational activities but also to provide emotional support and strengthen teachers' sense of belonging to the institution.

First, leaders' exemplary conduct contributes to trust and emotional connection. Leaders provide direction while also taking part in school activities and dormitory life. Teachers perceive this involvement as a form of shared commitment and responsibility, which reduces psychological distance between leaders and teachers. This process is important for building trust and positive interpersonal relationships in the pesantren environment.

Second, the climate of brotherhood that develops in Islamic boarding schools provides important social support for teachers. Close relationships and open communication allow teachers to express concerns, work pressures, and emotional fatigue without fear of judgment. This environment cultivates psychological safety and enables teachers to seek support from colleagues and leaders when facing institutional challenges.

Third, care-oriented leadership helps teachers manage work expectations in a healthier way. Work stress is reduced when leaders demonstrate concern for teachers' well-being and adopt a flexible approach to assigning duties and responsibilities. Teachers feel valued when leaders understand their personal needs and circumstances rather than assessing them solely through job performance.

Fourth, spiritual values are an important component of teachers' psychological well-being. Sincerity, worship, trust, and dedication are not merely moral attributes; they also function as meaning structures that help teachers understand and cope with work-related demands. From a spiritual perspective, challenges at work are interpreted as part of a meaningful process of service rather than simply as burdens.

Taken together, the findings show that strong interpersonal relationships, compassionate leadership, the reinforcement of spiritual values, and an institutional culture of unity contribute to teachers' psychological well-being in Islamic boarding schools. Teachers who feel accepted, respected, and supported are better able to develop psychological resilience, work satisfaction, and the capacity to respond to the multiple demands of their profession.

Strengthening Spiritual Values Through Institutional Workload Regulation

The second finding shows that institutional workload regulation, when integrated with spiritual values, also supports teachers' psychological well-being. In both pesantren, workload management was not perceived merely as administrative control but also as a moral and collective responsibility shaped by pesantren values. However, the two cases demonstrated different institutional responses. In Case 1, workload reduction relied mainly on informal cooperation and

collective solidarity among teachers. In Case 2, more structured scheduling practices and transparent task distribution systems were used to protect teachers' work-life balance.

Table 2. Strengthening Spiritual Values Through Institutional Workload Regulation

Participant Statement	Code
"Teachers feel appreciated and valued when leaders openly acknowledge their achievements." (T1, Case 1)	Empowerment and Recognition
"It makes us more accountable and more invested in our work because the leadership trusts us to take responsibility." (T6, Case 2)	Empowerment and Recognition
"When we are having a hard time, other teachers often help without being asked. That culture makes the burden lighter." (T8, Case 1)	Collective and Familial Culture
"The new schedule is much more orderly. We now have clearer time between teaching, dormitory duties, and rest." (T9, Case 2)	Time Regulation
"Teachers are no longer required to attend every institutional activity, so the workload has become more reasonable." (Staff 2, Case 2)	Workload Distribution
"This means I can still spend time with my family after work. That balance helps me keep my emotions stable." (T10, Case 1)	Work-Life Balance

The findings reveal five interconnected mechanisms through which spiritual values and workload regulation supported teachers' psychological well-being: empowerment and recognition, collective culture, time regulation, workload distribution, and work-life balance (see, table 2).

Observations indicate that both Islamic boarding schools developed flexible task management strategies to help teachers cope with high work demands. In the first school, workload management was supported primarily through collective participation. During large institutional activities, teachers voluntarily divided tasks so that responsibilities did not fall on one person. In the second school, a more structured system was used, including the separation of academic and extracurricular duties, teacher rotation, scheduled rest periods, and clear task assignments.

These findings were corroborated by institutional documents. The second school had systematic procedures for managing working hours, dividing responsibilities, and regulating teachers' participation in institutional programs. In the first school, documents emphasized togetherness, mutual assistance, and collective participation as the basis for implementing activities. Although the two pesantren used different mechanisms, both emphasized religious commitment, shared responsibility, and a spirit of service within their organizational cultures.

The data further show that the combination of spiritual support and adaptive institutional management influenced teachers' psychological well-being. Teachers felt appreciated through trust, recognition, and opportunities to participate in institutional development. This sense of appreciation strengthened emotional involvement and motivation at work.

A strong communal culture also functioned as a source of support for teachers. Work-related stress was alleviated through close collegial relationships, shared responsibility, and mutual

assistance. The collaborative culture of pesantren fostered solidarity and resilience, helping teachers manage the challenges of living and working in an intensive institutional environment.

Time regulation and proportional task allocation also helped reduce burnout. A more balanced division of labor enabled teachers to maintain a sustainable work rhythm without becoming overwhelmed. Providing space for personal and family needs was also important for maintaining emotional balance and long-term psychological health.

In conclusion, the findings indicate that teachers' psychological well-being in Islamic boarding schools is shaped by the interaction of formal management systems, spiritual values, collective culture, and workload management that is sensitive to teachers' needs. Through emotional support, moral reinforcement, and organizational flexibility, the two schools created work climates that supported both teacher well-being and sustained professional performance.

Discussion

Teachers' psychological well-being in Islamic boarding schools is shaped by consistent leadership practices that integrate institutional commitment, spiritual devotion, collective responsibility, and teachers' personal well-being in everyday life (Bradford et al., 2024; Mathew & Kumar, 2022). The findings suggest that leadership in pesantren involves more than managerial oversight or administrative authority. It is a relational, spiritual, and organizational process through which leaders balance the demands of religious service, institutional expectations, emotional support, workload management, and teachers' need for recovery and personal balance (Gunawan et al., 2023; Rodliyah et al., 2024). In this context, teachers' psychological well-being is not sustained merely by reducing work stress; it also depends on meaningful relationships, recognition, spiritual purpose, and adaptive institutional support.

The findings indicate that leadership legitimacy in pesantren is constructed not only through formal authority but also through moral exemplification and relational presence. Previous studies of educational leadership have shown that effective leadership increases trust and teacher engagement because leaders embody institutional values and professional commitment. This study supports these views by demonstrating that exemplary leadership in pesantren settings carries additional spiritual and communal meanings (Heru & Bali, 2024; McConnell et al., 2021). Leaders are expected not only to direct institutional operations but also to model sincerity, collective responsibility, humility, and involvement in the daily life of the pesantren community (Priyanto et al., 2023; Zaki et al., 2022). Thus, leadership effectiveness is assessed not only through organizational outcomes but also through leaders' ability to maintain emotional closeness and moral consistency in collective institutional life.

Spiritual values also play a significant role in shaping how teachers perceive their work and well-being. Values such as sincerity, commitment, worship, and shared responsibility help teachers interpret institutional demands in meaningful ways. These findings are consistent with the

literature on spiritual leadership, which explains how spirituality strengthens psychological resilience, intrinsic motivation, and emotional endurance in educational organizations. This study adds that spiritual values in Islamic boarding schools are not abstract ideological ideals. Rather, they are embedded in everyday practices, institutional narratives, religious activities, and leadership communication that shape teachers' sense of work, sacrifice, and professional devotion.

At the same time, the findings show that spiritual values alone are insufficient to maintain teachers' psychological well-being without sound task management. Pesantren leadership operates through a continuous relationship between spiritual commitment and responsible institutional management. In many Islamic boarding school environments, the expectation of devotion and full involvement can blur personal and professional roles. Teachers are often expected to participate not only in classroom teaching but also in dormitory supervision, religious programs, institutional events, and informal mentoring. Without adaptive leadership strategies, these overlapping duties can lead to emotional exhaustion and psychological distress.

The cross-case findings highlight different institutional approaches to managing this tension. In Case 1, task management relied on informal collaboration and solidarity among teachers. Mutual assistance, shared responsibility, and strong social support within a familial institutional culture helped reduce work stress. Because tasks were shared socially rather than carried individually, teachers often perceived their workloads as more manageable. In Case 2, a more formal approach was used, involving clearer task distribution, structured time management, regular teaching rotations, and workload adjustment mechanisms. Although these approaches differ, both attempt to reconcile institutional commitment with teachers' psychological sustainability.

These findings also extend discussions of work-life balance and educational leadership by showing how boundary-setting leadership in Islamic boarding schools differs from conventional organizational models. In many modern organizations, work-life balance is often understood as a separation between personal and professional domains. In Islamic boarding schools, however, strict separation is often unrealistic because educational, social, and spiritual lives are closely intertwined. Boundary-setting leadership in pesantren therefore does not mean fully separating work from personal life. Rather, it involves flexible and culturally acceptable arrangements that allow teachers to remain committed to institutional duties while also preserving rest, emotional well-being, and personal balance.

In this context, the data suggest that boundary-setting leadership in pesantren is essentially a process of value negotiation. Within the moral context of pesantren culture, leaders continuously balance institutional commitment, collective responsibility, emotional care, recognition, spiritual meaning, task distribution, and teachers' personal well-being (Hanafi et al., 2021; Rodliyah et al., 2024). This negotiation is reflected in flexible planning, adaptive workload allocation, emotional support, collective coping strategies, and leaders' responsiveness to teachers' personal circumstances (Apud et al., 2020). Teacher well-being is therefore not determined by reducing institutional

commitment but by developing leadership practices that make commitment psychologically sustainable.

Theoretically, this study advances debates on teacher well-being and contributes to the literature on educational leadership beyond managerial and structural approaches. Previous studies have often focused on the relationship between teacher well-being and workload, administrative support, or the work environment. This study identifies relational leadership, spiritual meaning, collective culture, and adaptive workload management as key factors that shape teacher well-being in Islamic boarding schools. It also frames leadership as a process of cultural negotiation between institutional values and teachers' personal well-being.

The study also contributes to the literature on spiritual leadership by showing that spiritual meaning supports teachers' psychological and emotional sustainability when it is combined with practical organizational strategies. Spiritual narratives alone cannot sustain well-being if institutional structures continue to generate excessive fatigue. Therefore, the strength of spiritual leadership in pesantren is enhanced when it is accompanied by opportunities for recovery, recognition, emotional support, and caring workload management.

Practically, the findings suggest that reducing teachers' administrative burdens is not sufficient to enhance their well-being in Islamic boarding schools. Educational leaders need to cultivate emotionally supportive institutional cultures, implement adaptable workload structures, communicate openly, recognize teachers' efforts, and foster collaborative support strategies (Anglani et al., 2023; Archambault et al., 2024). Without compassionate organizational processes, dedication and religious service may become sources of uncontrolled psychological strain. Spiritual values therefore need to be supported by humane and sustainable institutional practices.

The limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, the findings were drawn from two Islamic boarding schools; therefore, they cannot be generalized to all educational institutions. Second, the study focused primarily on internal leadership dynamics and did not examine external factors in depth, such as educational policy, economic conditions, or technological developments that may also influence teacher well-being. Future studies should address these wider factors to provide a more comprehensive understanding of psychological well-being in faith-based educational institutions.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that leadership in Islamic boarding schools plays an important role in supporting teachers' psychological well-being through the integration of emotional support, spiritual value reinforcement, and adaptive workload management. In both cases, teachers' well-being was supported by exemplary leadership, friendly relationships, a caring culture, collective empowerment, flexible task assignments, and attention to work-life balance. These findings show

that pesantren leadership is concerned not only with achieving institutional goals but also with sustaining teachers' well-being as part of the social and spiritual life of the school.

This study contributes theoretically to the understanding of leadership in faith-based education. Work-boundary management in pesantren is not determined solely by formal rules; it is also shaped by religious values, social relationships, and collective culture. To enhance teachers' psychological well-being, pesantren-based schools therefore require leadership that balances workload demands with emotional support, recognition, and a work climate that is conducive to mental health.

Because this study was conducted in only two Islamic boarding schools, the findings should be understood within the context of each institution and should not be treated as broadly generalizable. Future research could involve a larger and more diverse sample of Islamic boarding schools, compare religious and non-religious educational environments, or use a mixed-methods approach to obtain a more holistic understanding of the relationship between leadership, organizational management, and teacher psychological well-being.

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