

Principal Leadership in Managing Human Resources to Improve School Performance

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Abstract

Leadership has an important role in determining the success of an educational institution. This research focuses on the strategic role of the principal's leadership in managing human resources (HR) to improve overall school performance. Principals have an important responsibility in creating a work environment that supports, motivates and empowers teachers and staff to achieve the school's vision and mission. This research identifies various leadership approaches, such as the development of a collaborative work culture, effective conflict management, providing constructive feedback, and implementing training programs and continuous professional development. This research method uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore in depth how principals implement leadership strategies in managing human resources (HR) to improve school performance. The results showed that strong, strategic and visionary leadership of school principals is a fundamental element in driving overall school success. Effective principals not only act as administrative leaders, but also as prime movers who are able to motivate, inspire and empower all elements of the school. By promoting a clear vision and a collaborative approach, principals are able to create a healthy, harmonious and innovative work culture. Effective human resource management is one of the key aspects in this success. The implications of this study emphasize that principals need to continue developing their leadership competencies through professional training and mentor. In addition, education policy should support a leadership system that is oriented towards strengthening human resources to improve the quality of education in schools.

Keywords: Principal Leadership, Human Resources, School Performance, Education Management

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Introduction

Principal leadership is one of the key factors that determine the success of educational institutions in facing various challenges, both from internal organizational dynamics and external pressures such as policy changes, technological developments, and community demands. As a strategic leader, the principal plays an important role in formulating a clear vision, mission and goals of the school and ensuring that all elements of the organization are aligned and coordinated to achieve these goals. In carrying out his role, the principal must be able to be an effective director, mobilizer and supervisor, so that all existing resources, both human and non-human, can be maximally utilized. Previous studies have shown that principals' leadership plays a significant role in managing academic aspects, including

strategic decision-making and developing quality learning programs (Nurahman, 2024; Hartati, 2022; Fitrah, 2017). These studies have proven that effective principals are able to create positive changes in improving the quality of education. Most of these studies focus more on the policy and academic strategy aspects, often neglecting other dimensions that are no less important, namely the management of human resources (HR). In fact, human resources, which include teachers, administrative staff and other support personnel, are the main foundation of school success (Widiastuti, 2024; Kholik, 2024). Effective human resource management involves not only administrative aspects such as recruitment, training and evaluation, but also includes efforts to create a collaborative, innovative and professional development-oriented work culture. Thus, the role of the principal in managing HR is not only as an administrator, but also as a transformational leader who is able to empower individuals in the organization to contribute optimally. Unfortunately, this aspect has received less attention in the literature, so further studies are needed to understand how principals can utilize their leadership strategies in managing HR to improve overall school performance.

In the context of human resource management (HRM), principals have responsibilities that go far beyond administrative aspects such as recruitment, attendance management, or routine performance evaluation. Principals also play an important role as facilitators and motivators who are tasked with creating a collaborative, innovative, and professional development-oriented work environment for each individual in the organization (Muhharam, 2024; Faizah, 2024). A work environment that supports the spirit of collaboration and innovation allows teachers, administrative staff and other support personnel to work synergistically, develop new ideas and continuously improve the principal's competence in facing increasingly complex educational challenges. These efforts not only improve work efficiency but also have a direct impact on the quality of the learning process and overall school performance. There is a significant research gap regarding how principals can apply specific leadership strategies in managing human resources to support improved school performance. Most existing studies still focus on conceptual approaches or general theories, without providing practical guidance that can be implemented in various contexts of educational institutions. In fact, in the modern era characterized by technological developments, changes in education policy, and increasing public demands for the quality of education, relevant and adaptive leadership approaches are needed. Further research is needed to explore specific strategies that can help principals maximize their human resources potential, from developing a positive work culture to empowering individuals to increase productivity and innovation. By bridging this gap, research in this area can make practical and theoretical contributions to the development of educational leadership in the future.

This research explores in depth how principals can implement effective leadership strategies in human resource management (HRM) to create a work environment that is not only efficient but also collaborative, creative and innovative. This research seeks to go beyond traditional approaches that often only highlight administrative efficiency, by delving deeper into how principals can motivate and empower individuals in educational organizations. The focus of this research is not only on technical human resource management, but also on aspects that encourage the development of a work culture that supports professional growth, the strengthening of teamwork, and the utilization of creativity to face the challenges of modern education. This research aims to fill the gap in the literature by offering an approach that is more focused, contextual, and relevant to the needs of educational institutions in the era of globalization and digitalization. Through this approach, this research not only aims to provide theoretical contributions, but also to produce practical guidelines that can be used by school principals in managing human resources strategically. By focusing on the implementation of strategies based on innovation and collaboration, this research is expected to provide significant new insights to support the continuous improvement of school performance. In addition, the results of this study are expected to be an important reference for educational policy makers, principal trainers, and other educational institutions in designing more effective and contextual leadership development programs.

Methodology

This research method uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore in depth how principals implement leadership strategies in managing human resources (HR) to improve school performance. The qualitative approach was chosen because it provides a holistic and contextual understanding of the principal's leadership dynamics as well as the interaction between the principal and teachers, administrative staff, and other support personnel. The study was conducted in several different schools, including elementary, junior and senior high schools, which have varying characteristics of environment, size and resources. The research participants consisted of principals, teachers, administrative staff and other support personnel, who were selected through a purposive sampling technique based on their experience in HRM in schools. Data were collected through three main techniques: in-depth interviews, participatory observation and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with principals, teachers and staff to explore their views on the implementation of leadership strategies in HRM and its impact on collaboration, creativity and innovation in the work environment. Direct observations were made of interactions between principals and staff and teachers on various occasions, such as meetings, trainings and other school activities. In addition, documentation related to leadership policies and school performance evaluation were also analyzed to understand the implementation of existing strategies. The collected data were then analyzed using thematic analysis techniques to identify key themes related to HRM, collaboration and innovation. These findings will be analyzed to see how leadership strategies impact on improving school performance. To ensure the validity of the findings, triangulation techniques were applied by comparing the results of interviews, observations and documentation, as well as member checking with participants to obtain feedback and ensure that the research findings are in line with their views. Based on the results of the data analysis, this research will develop a more targeted and contextualized principal leadership model in HRM to improve school performance. The model will include aspects of collaboration, creativity and innovation, which are expected to be adapted.

Results and Discussion

Principal leadership is one of the key factors in achieving overall school management success. Effective principals not only carry out administrative tasks, but also act as visionary leaders who are able to inspire and motivate all elements of the school (Putri, 2024; Mardizal, 2023; Nor, 2024). Successful principals have the ability to guide teachers and staff through a clear, strategic and inspiring vision. The vision not only guides a concrete direction, but also builds a sense of togetherness, solidarity and collective responsibility in achieving a common goal. By creating an open, transparent and trust-based dialog, principals are able to strengthen two-way communication channels. This allows teachers and staff to feel heard, valued and actively involved in decision-making. More than just conveying a vision, good communication also strengthens collaboration, minimizes potential conflicts and improves efficiency in achieving school goals. The combination of a strong vision, inclusive leadership and effective communication is the main foundation for successful and sustainable school management.

The collaborative approach adopted by principals is one of the effective leadership strategies in encouraging the involvement of all parties (Hasanah, 2024; Paulina, 2024). Principals who adopt this leadership style tend to integrate various perspectives, not only from teachers and staff, but also from students, parents and the surrounding community. This multi-stakeholder decision-making process creates a strong sense of ownership of the school's vision and goals. When all parties feel heard and valued, they tend to give their full support in realizing the programs designed together. This approach helps the principal build deeper trust, both individually and collectively. Relationships formed from open communication and close cooperation strengthen commitment to school success. Collaboration-based strategic leadership also enables principals to deal with operational challenges in a more flexible, innovative and solutive way. With multiple perspectives gathered through a process of discussion and consensus, the resulting solutions are often more mature and relevant to the needs of the school.

This collaborative approach ultimately creates a school environment that is harmonious, inclusive and oriented towards sustainable progress.

Human resource management (HRM) is one of the main focuses of school principals in carrying out their leadership duties, because the success of a school is highly dependent on the quality and performance of its educators and staff (Ali, 2021; Sudana, 2023). HRM that is managed effectively is not only the foundation to support the achievement of educational goals, but also creates a productive, harmonious, and quality-oriented work culture on an ongoing basis. The process of HRM in schools includes several important aspects, starting with the recruitment of competent educators and staff who are in line with the needs of the school. After recruitment, the training and professional development stage becomes a strategic step to ensure that teachers and staff can continuously improve their knowledge, skills and competencies in accordance with the times. This training covers not only technical aspects but also pedagogical approaches, learning innovations, as well as emotional management and interpersonal communication. Continuous professional development is key in creating educators who are adaptive to curriculum changes, educational technology and student needs (Rudianti, 2024; Mustofa, 2024). Principals also play an important role in developing an objective, fair and transparent performance evaluation system. This evaluation is not merely to assess, but also to provide constructive feedback that can encourage each individual to develop better. With effective HR management, the principal is able to create a solid, competent and committed work team in supporting the achievement of the school's vision and mission.

At the recruitment stage, principals play a frontline role in ensuring that teachers and staff recruited not only meet the technical requirements but also have the competence, commitment and alignment with the school's vision, mission and values (Ellis, 2024). The selection process is rigorous and structured, covering various stages such as administrative assessments, in-depth interviews, and teaching simulations or specific competency tests. The aim is to find individuals who are not only academically qualified, but also able to contribute maximally to the achievement of educational goals, both in terms of learning and managing school operations. Once recruitment is complete, great attention is paid to training and professional development to ensure that educators and staff continue to develop in accordance with the needs and challenges of the times. The principal together with the management team design training programs that cover various aspects, from improving pedagogical skills to strengthening classroom management capabilities (Anselmus, 2022). These trainings aim to ensure that teachers can deliver learning that is engaging, relevant and suited to the needs of diverse students.

Professional development is not only limited to technical training, but also includes enriching understanding of the rapidly evolving educational technology (Wang, 2024). The program includes the introduction of digital tools for learning, innovative strategies in the use of technology-based learning media, and the use of data to support decisions in learning. Principals also support teachers' engagement in external training, seminars, workshops and educational conferences, which enable teachers to share experiences, broaden their horizons and build professional networks (Tolwinska, 2021). With this approach, principals ensure that each individual in the team not only has adequate skills but also a spirit of lifelong learning, so that they can continue to make significant contributions to the school's progress. Teacher professional development is conducted on an ongoing basis as a strategic effort to ensure teachers are always ready to face new challenges in the dynamic world of education. Effective principals understand that learning does not only apply to students, but also to teachers who must continuously update their knowledge and skills in accordance with curriculum developments, technology and the increasingly complex needs of students. The development program includes various activities, such as intensive training, thematic workshops, educational seminars and comparative studies to other schools to enrich insights and teaching methods. In addition to professional development, competent principals also implement a regular, structured and transparent performance evaluation system to ensure the teaching effectiveness of each teacher (Arya, 2024). These evaluations are designed using various methods, such as direct classroom observations to assess teaching strategies and interactions with students, analysis of student learning outcomes to measure academic achievement, and student and parent satisfaction surveys to gain perspectives

from stakeholders. The various data obtained from these evaluations provide a comprehensive picture of teacher performance, which forms the basis for providing constructive and in-depth feedback.

Evaluation results are used to design specific and relevant individual development plans, tailored to the needs and potential of each teacher. This approach ensures that each teacher receives the right support to improve his or her pedagogical, managerial and educational technology competencies. Furthermore, these evaluations not only highlight areas that need improvement but also actively recognize and reward teachers' achievements. This can take the form of formal recognition in school meetings or events, certificates of appreciation, financial incentives or opportunities to attend exclusive training programs. This genuine appreciation has a significant impact on teacher motivation and confidence. Teachers who feel valued for their contributions tend to be more eager to continue innovating, improving performance and sharing best practices with fellow teachers (Sapitri, 2024; Riatmaja, 2024). This creates a positive work culture where collaboration, mutual support and a spirit of moving forward together become part of the core values in the school environment.

With a fair, transparent and appreciative performance evaluation system, principals have the ability to create a work environment that is not only harmonious but also productive and innovative (Tumusiime, 2022). This system ensures that each teacher is treated objectively based on the teacher's performance, thus building a sense of trust and fairness in the school environment. Evaluations designed with a collaborative approach allow teachers to feel heard, valued and supported in developing their full potential. This not only strengthens the relationship between principals and teachers but also reinforces a sense of community and collective responsibility in achieving educational goals. The integration of performance evaluation with continuing professional development programs amplifies its positive impact. Teachers not only get constructive feedback but also the opportunity to attend training, workshops or mentoring relevant to their needs. This combination encourages teachers to continuously improve their competencies, both in their mastery of subject matter, pedagogical skills and use of educational technology. Thus, this system focuses not only on assessment, but also on the growth and empowerment of teachers as professional educators.

The impact of this approach extends to all aspects of school life. More confident and motivated teachers tend to provide students with richer, interactive and inspiring learning experiences (Rahmawati, 2024; Widiyanto, 2023). Students, in turn, are more motivated to learn, improving their academic and non-academic outcomes. Parents also feel this positive impact, as they see their children thriving in a supportive and quality environment. At a broader level, the quality of school education collectively improves, creating a positive reputation in the eyes of the community. The school becomes a respected institution because it is able to maintain the quality of its education consistently. With a good reputation, schools are more likely to receive support from various parties, whether in the form of increased student numbers, facility assistance or collaboration with external parties. Ultimately, this fair and integrative performance evaluation system not only improves the performance of individual teachers but also strengthens the quality of education in the school as a whole. This approach creates a sustainable education ecosystem, where teachers, students and the community move together to achieve mutual success with long-term impact.

The impact of strategic principal leadership and effective human resource (HR) management can be felt thoroughly in various aspects of school performance. One of the most obvious indicators is the improvement of student learning outcomes, which is the main goal of every educational institution (Masnawati, 2022). Principals who lead with a strategic vision are able to create a supportive work environment, where teachers feel motivated to continue learning and innovating (Pisriwati, 2024). Through continuous training, guidance and evaluation, teachers can implement more creative, relevant and interactive learning methods, which not only increase student engagement but also deepen their understanding of the subject matter. The positive impact of effective leadership and HRM is also seen in the increased motivation, collaboration and professionalism among teachers. Teachers who feel supported by their principals tend to be more confident in adopting new teaching strategies that suit students' needs, such as the use of

digital technology in learning, project-based learning or student-centered approaches. This creates a more dynamic classroom atmosphere where students are not only recipients of information but also active participants who are critical and creative. The principal's strategic leadership also contributes to improving the relationship between the school and the community. By building trust and collaboration between the school, students, parents and the community, principals create a harmonious educational ecosystem that supports holistic student success. All this shows that good leadership and effective HRM not only impact academic outcomes but also the establishment of an inclusive, innovative and sustainability-oriented school culture.

The level of teacher satisfaction also increases along with the consistent support, attention and appreciation given by the principal (Majid, 2024; Hidayat, 2021). Principals who care about teachers' needs and professional development create a deep sense of value, so that teachers feel an important part of the school's success. Teachers who feel supported, whether emotionally, professionally, or materially, tend to show high loyalty to the school. This has a direct effect on teachers' motivation, encouraging them to innovate in their teaching methods and contribute more to student development and the overall progress of the school. High job satisfaction also has a positive impact on the working atmosphere in the school environment. Satisfied and motivated teachers create more harmonious relationships, both with colleagues and with students. Teachers are more open to working together, sharing ideas and supporting each other in overcoming educational challenges. This close collaboration reinforces a positive work culture where each individual feels involved in achieving common goals. A harmonious and collaborative work environment also impacts teachers' emotional well-being (Rizkya, 2024; Putra, 2024). By feeling comfortable and supported in their work, teachers can work more effectively, maintain a balance between work and personal life demands, and radiate positive energy to students. This creates a mutually supportive cycle of productivity: teacher satisfaction drives better teaching quality, which in turn contributes to student success and overall school reputation. Principals who are able to build this job satisfaction have, in effect, created a strong foundation for the growth and sustainability of educational institutions.

Strong principal leadership plays a major role in creating a school environment conducive to supporting students' holistic development (khana, 2023; Maulidin, 2024; Alkasih, 2024). By building a healthy, harmonious and collaborative work culture among teachers and staff, principals create the foundation for a fun, safe and inclusive learning environment. In such an environment, students not only feel comfortable but are also encouraged to explore their full potential. Students feel supported emotionally, intellectually and socially, which is key in building confidence and high motivation to learn. A positive school environment plays a role in fostering close relationships between students, teachers and parents (Sari, 2022; Istianah, 2023; Pratiwi, 2015). A strong principal is able to establish open communication with all parties, ensuring that every voice is heard and every individual's needs are met. This creates a sense of community and shared responsibility, which not only supports student success but also builds a solid school community.

The impact of effective principal leadership can also be seen in the increasing reputation of the school in the eyes of the community. Schools led by principals with a clear vision, purposeful strategies, and concern for all elements of the school will more easily attract public attention (Nadur, 2017; Suherman, 2023). Factors such as a conducive learning atmosphere, excellent educational outcomes, and harmonious relationships between teachers, students and parents are key indicators that strengthen the school's positive image. This good reputation builds public trust, which is manifested in an increase in the number of applicants from year to year. This public trust also opens up greater opportunities for schools to gain support from various external parties. Governments, private institutions, non-profit organizations, and local communities tend to pay more attention to schools that demonstrate good achievement and governance. This support can take the form of additional funding allocations, procurement of modern facilities, training programs for teachers or other development initiatives. In addition, cooperation with external parties also enables schools to run innovative programs, such as the introduction of technology in learning, the implementation of environment-based education programs, or the development of students' soft skills. With a growing reputation, the school is not only the first

choice for students and parents, but also a respected learning center and a model for other schools (Laudia, 2024; Muharam, 2023; Khalifatunnisa, 2024). Support from the community and external parties further strengthens the school's capacity to achieve greater success in both academic and non-academic aspects. Thus, strong principal leadership not only impacts the school's internal success but also extends the school's positive influence on a broader scale, making it an institution that is respected, trusted and supported by various parties.

Conclusion

Strong, strategic and visionary principal leadership is a fundamental element in driving overall school success. Effective principals not only act as administrative leaders, but also as prime movers who are able to motivate, inspire and empower all elements of the school. By promoting a clear vision and a collaborative approach, principals are able to create a healthy, harmonious and innovative work culture. Effective human resource management is one of the key aspects in this success. Rigorous recruitment, continuous training, professional development and fair performance evaluation ensure that teachers and staff are competent and highly motivated to carry out their duties. Increased job satisfaction among teachers contributes to a positive working atmosphere, which in turn impacts more effective, creative and relevant teaching to students' needs. In addition, teachers' continuous professional development allows them to always be ready to face the challenges of modern education, including adaptation to technology and curriculum changes. A school environment that is conducive to student development is a tangible result of strong leadership. By creating a safe, inclusive and fun learning atmosphere, students are encouraged to explore their full potential, both academically and non-academically. This atmosphere also increases student confidence, motivation and engagement in the learning process. In the long run, this not only has an impact on individual student achievement but also on the achievement of the school as a whole. In addition to the internal impact, the principal's leadership also contributes to improving the school's reputation in the eyes of the community. A well-led school is more likely to attract the attention of the community, increase enrollment and gain support from various external parties. This support can be in the form of program cooperation, facility improvements, and financial assistance that strengthens the sustainability of the school. With all these elements, effective principal leadership is able to create schools that not only excel in academics but also become innovative, inclusive and impactful learning centers for the community. Principals who are able to integrate vision, management and collaboration well are key in building a highly competitive and sustainable education ecosystem

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