

### Info Artikel

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## The Importance of Principal Leadership in Creating A Culture of Teacher Professionalism in Indonesian Primary Schools

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### Abstrak

Penelitian ini membahas mengenai peran penting kepala sekolah dalam memupuk budaya profesionalisme di sekolah dasar Indonesia. Ini menekankan bahwa kualitas pendidikan sangat bergantung pada kepemimpinan yang efektif, terutama dalam pengambilan keputusan, pencapaian siswa, dan keterlibatan siswa. Mengambil pendekatan penelitian kualitatif berbasis literatur, studi ini menerangi kurangnya eksplorasi dalam kepemimpinan sekolah di Indonesia meskipun signifikansinya yang penting. Ini menjelaskan sifat multiaspek kepemimpinan, menekankan perlunya kepala sekolah untuk menggunakan pendekatan transaksional dan transformasional dalam pengambilan keputusan, mempertimbangkan berbagai preferensi kepribadian, dan segera merespons para pemangku kepentingan. Selain itu, penelitian ini menyoroti peran penting kepala sekolah dalam membentuk pencapaian siswa dengan memupuk pembelajaran kolaboratif, pengembangan kurikulum, dan alokasi sumber daya. Ini lebih menekankan pentingnya meningkatkan keterlibatan siswa melalui integrasi teknologi yang efektif, menekankan peran kepala sekolah dalam memfasilitasi peningkatan kapasitas guru dalam implementasi TIK. Studi ini memberikan kontribusi pada wacana kepemimpinan sekolah di Indonesia, advokasi untuk pemahaman yang lebih dalam tentang peran kepala sekolah dalam menumbuhkan profesionalisme dan meningkatkan hasil pendidikan di sekolah dasar.

### Abstract

This research delves into the pivotal role of school principals in fostering a culture of professionalism in Indonesian primary schools. It underscores that the quality of education heavily relies on effective leadership, particularly in decision-making, student achievement, and student engagement. Drawing from a literature-based qualitative research approach, the study illuminates the dearth of exploration in school leadership within Indonesia despite its crucial significance. It elucidates the multifaceted nature of leadership, emphasizing the necessity for principals to employ both transactional and transformational approaches to decision-making, considering various personality preferences and promptly responding to stakeholders. Moreover, the research highlights the principal's pivotal role in shaping student achievement by fostering collaborative learning, curriculum development, and resource allocation. It further stresses the importance of enhancing student engagement through the effective integration of

technology, emphasizing the role of principals in facilitating teachers' capacity building in ICT implementation. This study contributes to the discourse on school leadership in Indonesia, advocating for a deeper understanding of principals' roles in nurturing professionalism and enhancing educational outcomes in primary schools.

**Keywords:** *Leadership, principals, teacher professionalism.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The quality of education plays a pivotal role in shaping the excellence of the workforce it produces. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of education hinges on the quality of educators who impart knowledge within educational institutions. The competence of a proficient teacher is undoubtedly shaped by a school principal possessing strong skills and abilities that foster a conducive learning atmosphere. Consequently, when considering the development of human resources in the education sector, it is consistently crucial to prioritize investments aimed at enhancing the competencies of school principals (Mahmudah & Prasojo, 2016).

The quality of education stands as a cornerstone in the construction of a skilled and knowledgeable workforce, directly influencing the trajectory of societal progress and economic prosperity. However, this edifice of education is not solely built upon the curriculum or the resources available; rather, it is profoundly shaped by the individuals who inhabit its halls, particularly the educators who serve as the conduits of knowledge. The effectiveness of education, therefore, is not solely dependent on the content disseminated but is intricately woven into the fabric of the teaching profession itself.

At the helm of every educational institution stands a school principal, whose leadership is instrumental in sculpting an environment conducive to learning and growth. The competence and proficiency of teachers are nurtured and amplified under the guidance of a skilled principal, whose managerial acumen and pedagogical vision set the tone for the entire institution. A capable principal not only ensures adherence to educational standards but also fosters a culture of collaboration, innovation, and continuous improvement among the faculty.

In essence, the development of human capital in the education sector necessitates a strategic focus on enhancing the competencies of school principals. Investing in the professional growth and leadership skills of principals reverberates throughout the entire educational ecosystem, amplifying the impact of educational initiatives and ensuring the cultivation of a workforce equipped to meet the challenges of the future. Therefore, prioritizing resources and attention towards the development of principals is not just a prudent investment but a vital imperative for the advancement of education and society as a whole.

Moreover, the effectiveness of an educational institution heavily relies on the quality of its principal's leadership, as it plays a vital role in ensuring the school's seamless operation and the development of a conducive school culture (Stergios et al., 2017). The quality of a principal's leadership profoundly impacts the effectiveness of an educational institution. A skilled principal fosters an environment where teachers can thrive, students can learn effectively, and the school can operate smoothly. Their leadership sets the tone for the entire school community, influencing everything from academic achievement to morale.

A strong principal not only manages day-to-day operations but also inspires staff, sets high expectations, and promotes a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement. They create a vision for the school's future and guide its implementation,

ensuring that all stakeholders are aligned and working towards common goals. Ultimately, the principal's leadership determines the overall success and reputation of the institution, making it a critical factor in achieving educational excellence. Therefore, the efficacy of a leader ensures that the organization's goals are achieved in alignment with its vision and mission.

School leaders take control in creating a teachers' professionalism culture where for a few decades, it has been widely acknowledged that the professional growth of teachers is not solely dependent on their traits (Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1994). Principals are ideally positioned to facilitate and nurture this professionalism among their teaching staff. Their ability to inspire, guide, and shape the professional growth of teachers plays a decisive role in creating a culture where educators are motivated to excel and ultimately contribute to the academic success and personal development of the students (Dinsdale, 2017).

The concept of teacher professionalism is socially constructed and subject to change due to evolving circumstances and is a multifaceted as well as context-dependent matter that fluctuates across various situations and eras (Lai & Lo, 2007). In addition, the notion of teacher professionalism is not static; it's a dynamic construct molded by societal perceptions and responsive to evolving contexts. It's a complex concept, influenced by multifaceted factors and varying greatly depending on the situation and era. What defines professionalism for a teacher today may differ vastly from what it meant a decade ago or what it might entail in the future. This dynamism reflects the adaptability and responsiveness required in education, where teachers must navigate shifting landscapes of pedagogy, technology, and social norms to effectively fulfill their roles as educators and mentors.

Some Asian nations such as Vietnam, Myanmar, and Indonesia have yet to make significant contributions to the realm of school leadership (Walker & Hallinger, 2015). Additionally, compared to leadership and leadership development in other Asian nations, there is a relatively limited understanding of these topics in Indonesia (Sumintono et al., 2015). Hence, in Indonesia, the concept of leadership is a subject that warrants deeper exploration. When considering leadership in the broader context of Asian nations, it becomes evident that Indonesia stands out due to a relatively limited understanding of these crucial topics.

The role of educators in shaping the future of a nation is undisputed. In the context of Indonesian primary schools, the role of teachers is central to the nation's educational progress. The professionalism and effectiveness of teachers greatly influence the quality of education and students' overall development. However, the cultivation of teacher professionalism does not occur in isolation; it is fundamentally tied to the leadership provided by school principals.

In this investigation, I will discuss three main points that relate to principals' leadership in creating a culture of professionalism in the Indonesian primary school context. The three core points are effective decision-making, student achievement, and enhancing student engagement. Effective decision-making stands as a cornerstone, guiding the institution toward excellence. It entails judicious choices that prioritize the holistic development of students and the school community. Student achievement serves as another focal point, emphasizing the pursuit of academic excellence and overall growth. Additionally, principals must prioritize enhancing student engagement, ensuring a dynamic learning environment that fosters curiosity and active participation. By addressing these three core aspects, principals can cultivate a culture of professionalism that enriches the educational landscape of Indonesian primary schools.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This article is written using a literature-based qualitative research approach. Literature research focuses on the interpretation of various literary materials, in various forms such as scholarly literature, to obtain a comprehensive and holistic explanation of the researched theme. Moreover, it involves a methodical and well-structured exploration of existing published information to uncover a wide range of high-quality references related to a specific subject (Snyder, 2019). The data sources collected in this research come from a variety of articles, journals, and research findings related to the leadership and professionalism of primary school teachers specifically in Indonesia.

## DISCUSSION

Indonesia, similar to many nations, is shaped by its rich historical, geographical, and sociological background. The educational landscape in Indonesia has experienced notable transformations since 2002, moving towards a system of school-based management. This shift involves the compulsory delegation of authority and power to decision-makers at many school levels. Although research on school leadership has been thorough in developed nations, in Indonesia, there is a limited exploration of school leadership. This study provides three main factors that should be considered for principals, especially those in primary schools, where according to the Central Bureau of Statistics, there are over 146,902 primary school leaders in 2021-2022.

### Effective Decision-Making

The prosperity of an organization, especially schools, predominantly depends on the quality of decisions made by its leaders (Thomas, 2008). Shaked and Schechter (2019) state that one of the school principal's paramount responsibilities is decision-making, as it constitutes one of the most challenging and perilous aspects of their role. This is because poor choices have the potential to harm both the school and one's career, occasionally in a way that cannot be rectified. Therefore, the principals are required to make prompt decisions in response to teachers, students, parents, or the superintendent for the majority of their choices (Calabrese & Zepeda, 1999).

To be able to make good decisions, leaders must implement both transactional and transformational approaches (Hariri et al., 2014). Additionally, the common belief of instructional leadership is that if a follower's job and work environment do not offer the required motivation, guidance, and contentment, the leader can effectively make up for these shortcomings through their actions (Den Hartog et al., 1997). Essentially, the leaders make the performance expectations clear, outlining what they expect from their subordinates and what the subordinates can expect in return. Transformational is a leadership approach where the leaders recognize the necessity for change, formulate an inspiring vision to steer that change, and foster positive behavior to enhance the commitment of organization members (Top et al., 2020) and it also significantly enhances employee outcomes.

Furthermore, knowing various personality preferences and being aware of them can form the foundation for effective leadership, resulting in a high probability of success (Sethuraman & Suresh, 2014) meaning that principals can apply any policies as long as they understand how to enforce and utilize them appropriately. Besides that, the principal needs to swiftly make most of their decisions by promptly responding to teachers, students, or parents which indicates that school leaders can make a good decision based on some suggestions (Calabrese & Zepeda, 1999).

### Student Achievement

Student achievement is a measure of how well a student is doing in their education, often assessed through their academic performance, skills, and knowledge gained in school. In this case, the principal is regarded as crucial to school success as well as student achievement (González-Falcón et al., 2020). Effective principals have a positive impact on student outcomes, while ineffective principals can hinder student success. Schools that are led by principals who have stronger skills in organizational management like supporting new development tend to achieve greater gains in student achievement. Therefore, the role of the principal is essential in shaping the educational experience and success of students, especially in Indonesian primary schools where principals' support is highly needed (Burch, 2007; Juharyanto et al., 2023).

In addition, school leaders can influence student achievement by fostering collaborative organizational learning, shaping curriculum development, allocating resources, and engaging in strategic planning which indirectly impacts student outcomes (Day et al., 2016). Additionally, they play a key role in ensuring the efficient and effective management of all administrative aspects within schools. They carry substantial responsibilities in upholding the internal operations of the school, serving as its community representatives, and meticulously executing educational policies. Principals also serve as exemplars, fostering the ethical and professional development of teachers and other staff members. In the end, principals exert an indirect yet substantial impact on students' learning by meeting their diverse needs and capabilities, as well as shaping school systems and policies through their actions (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008).

The foremost role of a school principal involves shaping an educational environment that offers learning opportunities for every student, leading to their academic success (Dyal et al., 1996). Thus, although school leaders do not teach in the classroom, they still take an entire control and have a crucial role in improving student achievement through various ways, such as promoting collaborative learning, curriculum development, resource allocation, and strategic planning.

Also, principals set an example for teachers and staff and indirectly influence student learning by meeting their needs and shaping school systems and policies to foster academic success. A relatable example of this is an investigation conducted in Indonesia which illustrates that the principal's role can create effective learning and also influence students' academic results (Indra et al., 2020).

### **Enhancing Student Engagement**

The main emphasis in student engagement has been on enhancing academic performance, fostering positive conduct, and cultivating a feeling of belonging among students to encourage their continued presence in school. This is driven by the aspiration of educational institutions that students will ultimately develop into accomplished learners (Taylor & Parsons, 2011).

Student engagement necessitates the experience of emotions and the process of comprehending, encompassing not just the amount of time students invest in tasks but also their eagerness to participate in activities (Gunuc, 2014). Thus, student engagement is crucial because it not only enhances academic performance but also nurtures a love for learning, critical thinking, and the skills needed for future success. It creates a positive cycle where engaged students become motivated, active learners who are better prepared to face the challenges of the modern world.

This last point will discuss further the principal role in developing teachers' capacity to utilize the presence of technology so it can be implemented well by students. Therefore, this part will focus on the implementation of technology in primary school contexts, in particular in Indonesia. In more detail, policymakers have introduced various measures to bolster and oversee primary initiatives geared towards

improving the quality of education and student engagement within schools in East Asia, including Indonesia (Li et al., 2016).

It is important for any school level, including primary to have access to high-tech to gain a good outcome for schools in any sectors such as administration, student achievement and budgeting management. It is because, over the past two decades, there has been a more than one hundredfold increase in the funding allocated to technology in schools around the world. A significant portion of this funding has been directed toward the belief that technology enhanced learning environments offer students the chance to discover and evaluate information, tackle challenges, and engage in communication and collaboration, ultimately empowering them with a skill set to remain competitive in the modern 21st-century era (Lim et al., 2013).

In this case, school principals are required to follow the trend which can result in good long-term outcomes such as the continuation of using technology in the classroom settings, utilizing the automobile in arranging school curriculum and all information related to students and administrative offices. Therefore, principals who are capable of overseeing the introduction of technology in their schools should act as leaders in the realm of technology (Uğur & Koç, 2019).

Digital and interactive ICTs provide teachers with tools and platforms that can significantly enhance student engagement. These ways make learning more interactive, enjoyable, and relevant to students. One study indicates that when teachers integrate ICTs effectively, students exhibit increased motivation and participation. That study underscores that utilizing technology in teaching methods not only elevates the standard of instruction but also empowers students to enhance their skills, increase their motivation, and efficiently augment their knowledge and information (Akram et al., 2022).

Furthermore, implementing technology brings the capacity to serve as a means to transform the learning experience, fostering and promoting stronger connections between teachers and students (Trust, 2018). Insufficient exposure to technology education during childhood could lead to students lacking confidence in their technological abilities. Consequently, this may result in adults who cannot effectively participate in and contribute to a technology-centric society. Moreover, incorporating technology at the primary school level is widely regarded as the most efficient approach (Pappa et al., 2023).

In addition, many teachers all over the world, including Indonesia, cannot implement ICTs in classroom settings due to some factors such as limited knowledge and skills (Pelgrum, 2001). Specifically, many educators in one of the provinces of Indonesia (Aceh) possess limited capability in utilizing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) (Muslem et al., 2018). Hence, principals have a responsibility to enhance teachers' capacity to use technology so that classroom teaching will be easier, more valuable and enjoyable.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, this research underscores the critical role of school principals in shaping the culture of professionalism in Indonesian primary schools. Through effective decision making, principals can navigate the complexities of educational leadership, ensuring optimal outcomes for teachers, students, and the school community. Additionally, principals play a pivotal role in enhancing student achievement by fostering collaborative learning environments, shaping curriculum development, and strategically allocating resources. Moreover, principals are instrumental in enhancing student engagement through the thoughtful integration of technology, which not only empowers students with essential 21st-century skills but

also fosters a positive learning environment. Overall, this study highlights the multifaceted responsibilities of school principals and underscores the importance of investing in their professional development to ensure the continued success and growth of Indonesian primary schools. Moving forward, further research in this area can explore innovative strategies for principal leadership and its impact on educational outcomes in diverse contexts, thereby contributing to the ongoing evolution of educational practices and policies.

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