



A SUCCESS STORY OF SCHOOL PRINCIPAL'S LEADERSHIP IN IMPROVING SCHOOL QUALITY: A SINGLE CASE STUDY AT INDONESIA'S INTEGRATED ISLAMIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CONTEXT

Widia Dwi Lestari¹, Somariah Fitriani^{2*}, Dwi Priyono³

^{1,2,3}Universitas Muhammadiyah Prof. DR. HAMKA

widiadwilestari5218@gmail.com¹ somariah@uhamka.ac.id², dwipriyohantoro@gmail.com³

Article history:	Abstract:
<p>Received: November 28th 2023 Accepted: December 26th 2023 Published: January 30th 2024</p>	<p>In the context of elementary schools, this study attempts to explore how well the principal's leadership contributes to higher educational standards. Because the unit of analysis in this qualitative study is a single school—the integrated Islamic elementary school (SDIT) in Indonesia—a single case study research design was employed. Semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and documentation studies were used to gather data. The principal of the school, teachers, the school committee, parents of the students, and alumni made up the participants. The findings demonstrate the effectiveness of the school principal's efforts to raise the standard of school quality by implementing community-based, teacher-led, and parent-focused programs that support the school's vision and mission. In addition, the study revealed that enhancing the quality of teachers is crucial to improving the standard of schools, as is providing them with the necessary resources and trainings. Both teachers and students are impacted by the result.</p>
<p>Keywords: leadership, school principal, school quality, case study, integrated Islamic elementary school</p>	

INTRODUCTION

Research indicates that school principals generally have a major impact on school effectiveness, even though there is ongoing debate regarding whether they directly or indirectly contribute (Dinham, 2005; Fullan, 2014; Gurr & Drysdale, 2018; Leithwood et al., 2008). Furthermore, the Singaporean government thinks that school principals' efforts can result in changes in education. Therefore, even though a variety of factors affect how well students learn in classrooms, only the principal can establish the framework necessary for each of these factors to work in concert with one another to enhance learning (Ng & Wong, 2019). School leadership is also seen as a critical component in school progress (Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012) and is effective in terms of school success and student achievement (Chen et al., 2022; Coelli & Green, 2012; Hallinger, 2011; Wu et al., 2020). A school principal has a wide range of complex responsibilities. This includes overseeing educators, spearheading change in coordination with interested parties, and modernizing curricula and pedagogy (Ng & Wong, 2019). This statement indicates that the principal's role and his accountability for performing his duties have a significant impact on the success of the school. A successful school principal is defined as someone who provides exceptional services to all teachers and staff and creates enjoyable work environments that enable them to fulfill their obligations and duties (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

Studies on the leadership of school principals have been conducted across multiple nations. Empirical data from studies in Egypt and Oman, two Middle Eastern nations, shows what educators believe about the availability of good educational programs and decentralized leadership in classrooms (Al-Harhi & Al-Mahdy, 2017). In the case of Israeli Arab, the research suggested that principals should select a leadership style that aligns with the values of their teachers and/or their recruitment process (Zibenberg & Da'as, 2022). In Ghana's schools, they emphasized the importance of having leadership abilities with the availability of school leadership preparation programs (Zame et al., 2008). In Indonesia, the study concluded a positive link between the successful learning process and the principal's leadership in the school (Damri, 2023). Here's a crucial lesson: having a clear vision is a must for all leaders in order to lead effectively (Bush, 2008) to improve school quality and to implement educational change (Fitriani & Nasution, 2022). These findings indicated the important factors of being a good leader and its impact to quality of the school as a living organization.

In these situations, the principal's role is crucial to raising the caliber and effectiveness of the school. Therefore, more research on principal leadership is required in order to contribute practically to the advancement of research findings and literature. More significant than the availability of additional resources is the presence of an efficient principal serving as the school's leader (Juharyanto et al., 2023). Effective school principals are the primary determinant factor for the successful management of all school resources (Intxausti et al., 2016), acting as an organic or critical factor (Lunenberg, 2011). Additionally, having a strong principal is necessary to guarantee that all students receive high-quality work from the school by making effective and efficient use of all available resources (Malakolunthu et al., 2014). Thus, the study intends to explore the effectiveness of principal leadership in enhancing school quality in the elementary school context, specifically in integrated Islamic primary schools, based on the aforementioned issues, literature, and prior research findings.

METHODS

Research design

Since this study only focuses on one school, it employs a single case study design and a qualitative methodology design (Yin, 2003, 2011). We employed a case study design because it gave us a more thorough understanding of the different facts and cases that occurred. Aside from that, this case study can be seen as a strategic approach to research that aims to identify incidents and phenomena that take place at the study site in order to elucidate them further.

Research participants

The school was preferred because of the principal's success story within the framework of an integrated Islamic elementary school, and because one of us, who has a good rapport with the principal. Another reason is due to principal's willingness to enhance the school's quality and teachers' performance during his five-year leadership term. After that, we went to the school and discussed the goals of the research. Since the participants freely expressed their opinions, we were able to recruit them. As can be seen in table 1, we protected the participants' and the school's privacy by using initials rather than full names due to ethical concerns.

Table 1. Data demography of the participants

Name	Sex	Age	Employment Status	Profession	Educational Level
SH	L	37	Contract	School principal	Master degree
NV	P	43	Contract	Class teacher in grade 2	Bachelor degree
PIM	P	23	Contract	Class teacher in grade 5	Bachelor degree
SK	P	40	Permanent	Parent's student- Home maker	High school
HT	P	36	Permanent	Parent's student- Home maker	High school
EM	P	40	Permanent	School committee- entrepreneur	High school
IP	P	23	Permanent	Alumni- entrepreneur	Bachelor degree

Data collection and data analysis

Data were collected through non participant observation, semi-structure interviews and documentation study. We observed all activities conducted by principal and teachers such as school activities' planning, learning process, school activities implementation, and regular meetings. From interview activities, we as researchers can explore the effectiveness of the principal's leadership which is focused on improving school quality; the views of teachers, alumni and school committees regarding the effectiveness of the principal's leadership. The interviews include principal's programs, human resource, facilities, teachers' professional development, curriculum, and quality of graduate. For data documentation, we checked annual programs, graduate data, and teachers' data. Data were analyzed using data reduction techniques, data presentation and drawing conclusions (Miles et al., 2014). For data trustworthiness, we conducted source and method triangulation. We also required participants to reread and recheck our data interpretation before drawing a conclusion, which is an imperative process of conducting the research.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The school principal's planning and execution for school quality.

It is crucial to plan for school quality in order to regularly assess all of the activities in the school and determine whether or not the goals are being met. This is a sample from a face-to-face interview with the principal.

"The planning that I have done so far to optimize the quality of the school is by carrying out trainings held by the government, providing programs for school improvement, collaborating with various stakeholders, such as collaborating with the police to carry out anti-bullying activities, collaborating with Airlangga publication in providing books, and collaborating with several ministries and creating *akhlakul kharimah* (the rules or norms of good and praiseworthy morality govern the relationship between humans, God, and the universe) in students." (SH)

In keeping with the principal's statement, grade 2 and grade 5 teachers also express their opinions regarding the principal's plans to raise the caliber of teachers.

"The plans that have been made by the principal went well while I taught here, where the principal gave the mandate to the teachers to be able to recite the Al-Qur'an using the *ummi* method. To improve the quality of teachers, school principals send teachers to take part in training activities/seminars at the sub-district and national levels." (NV, face to face interview).

"There are lots of plans made by the school principal to improve the quality of the school. I think the principal has carried out his role as a leader effectively. There are several programs implemented in schools to strengthen ties, such as the school principal creating "daily speaking program" where this program aims to make students become familiar with Arabic and encourage improvement in Arabic language skills. Every day they also learn English with the support of learning resources from Erlangga, then there is "go green program", "Friday Taqwa program", etc. Apart from that, the principal also gave appreciation to teachers, for example favorite teacher category, and teachers who attended diligently. If the school gives appreciation, the teachers will be more motivated in carrying out learning activities and training." (PIM, face to face interview).

Two of the parents of the students also disclose that in addition to offering trainings, the principal is concerned about environmental issues, working with other parties, and religious activities as seen in the interviews below.

"As a school principal who served for 5 years, he has implemented many programs to improve the quality of schools. From the aspect of environmental change, for example, the school which previously looked barren, is now comfortable because there are lots of plants and trees that decorate the school with "go green program". Apart from that, he emphasized that students must be able to have a certificate of hafiz Al-Qur'an and he also made a schedule for teachers every Saturday to recite the Al-Qur'an with Ustadz Renaldi who has mastered the Ummi method." (SK)

"There have been many changes that have occurred at this school, namely by collaborating with various parties to improve the quality of teacher performance and the quality of the school, such as the school collaborating with student parents and the community to distribute 1,100 Al-Qurans. Apart from that, the school principal collaborates with Erlangga by providing independent curriculum training facilities. (HT)

"The school principal's planning is now very clear, even community leaders are also participating in the principal's planning program, namely by distributing 1,100 Al-Qurans to mosques and majlis which are distributed in various sub-districts. Apart from that, the principal also collaborates with various stakeholders to provide sufficient school facilities and infrastructure so that the infrastructure at SDIT is adequate, even for this year the principal will facilitate each class with a television to support the learning process." (IP, Alumni).

Obstacle, challenges and solution

In achieving school quality, there will definitely be various obstacles and challenges in executing an activity so that it runs in accordance with the school's vision and mission. Interview excerpts explore various obstacles and challenges faced by school principal.

"In terms of academics, the school analyzes the problems of students based on the highest and lowest grades, then I, as the principal will reprimand the home room teachers who are indifferent to students who get the lowest and most backward grades compared to other students. Then, the quality of teachers who have not mastered the material can be an obstacle, because some students complain that there is a teacher who has not really mastered the material and only gives homework to students. This kind of obstacle causes students to get the lowest grades and feel bored in class."

Parents' engagement is also an essential part for students' learning and success. It is also a principal's concern seeing some parents ignore their children's learning. Here are some ways how to deal with it.

"I also invite students' parents to engage with students' learning and encourage them to participate in school activities. Besides that, seeing the problem of parents' indifference, my solution was to hold a meeting and threaten the teachers not to give exam questions if the parents didn't care about their children's learning activities. After giving these threats, the parents routinely took part in various activities held by the school, such as meetings, guidance on taking report cards so that parents had a sense of responsibility for their children and did not just entrust them to school."

"In addition, to cope with the problem, I also monitor the parents and give questioner once a week to check whether their children are learning or not." (SH)

Teachers of grades two and five have opinions on this case that are somewhat similar to the principal's point of view in following excerpts.

"The issue we have is that some students do not engage in teaching and learning activities and complain that they are boring, which is a result of parent and student factors. Conversely, parents who don't care about their kids' education lead to kids who don't comprehend the lesson. The principal of the school provides a solution by assigning creative teachers to the class, which encourages students to stay engaged in the teaching and learning process. Because of the teacher's inventiveness, even the most disengaged students eventually become engaged and reluctant to leave class. Not to be forgotten, the school awarded prizes to pupils in each of the 16 classes according to their top 10 ratings. To assist with current issues, the school works in conjunction with the school committee. In addition, the school fosters partnerships amongst different stakeholders to ensure high-quality instruction." (NV, face to face interview).

"Parents who don't care about their children are the root of the issues or barriers that arise in this classroom, so the teacher needs to go above and beyond in explaining topics. Aside from that, the curriculum that is currently in use is the independent curriculum, which places an emphasis on activities that require students to apply what they have learned through practice or by using visual aids. Parents are the biggest obstacle for students at this school because numerous reports indicate that they don't give their children enough attention when it comes to studying, which causes the children to receive the lowest grades." (PIM, face to face interview).

Students' success in learning is a result of the quality of the teacher. Accordingly, the first step should be to highlight teachers' competence, as the principal's interviews below demonstrate.

"In order to improve the caliber of teacher performance, the school promptly reprimands teachers who have not mastered the material by offering guidance and making it possible for them to participate in training."

Here is the interview with a teacher of grade 2 on principal's efforts to improve the school quality.

"In the academic development of students, the principal, teachers, and school committee must work together synergistically. Curriculum 13 includes three assessments: emotional intelligence, emotional intelligence, and tolerance. To enhance school quality, these three assessments must be administered in a balanced manner. For instance, this year's learning implementation plan makes use of the independent curriculum in its determination. The school notified parents that there will be more hands-on learning activities in this independent curriculum. This affects the attitudes, knowledge, and abilities of the students who graduate. For instance, upon graduation, they possess excellent demeanor and dispositions, the ability to recite and memorize the Al-Qur'an due to their school-issued certificate, and heightened self-assurance, particularly when delivering a seven-minute speech in front of peers and competing in Olympiads.

"In addition, all teachers at this school need to be knowledgeable about the subjects they teach, have at least a bachelor's degree, and be able to recite the Al-Qur'an. Training is another requirement for teachers. As a specific illustration, the principal requests that teachers present on a single subject every Saturday. This presentation is to be streamed on the school's YouTube channel, where it will be seen by other educators and followed by a Q&A period." (NV, face to face interview).

In the interview below, the head of the school committee also discusses how the principal puts in a lot of effort to secure funding for the welfare of the teachers.

"The school's initiatives are a major factor in raising the standard of education there. The school works with a variety of stakeholders to ensure that the plans have been successful. For example, the principal of the school works with the ministry to assist teachers in obtaining funds totaling IDR 20 million to establish a cooperative. Apart from that, male teachers are specifically allocated funds amounting to IDR 28 million to be used in the business of selling goats." (EM-school committee).

Motivating members of an organization to accomplish its objectives is a characteristic of effective leadership (Dubey et al., 2023) as it is reflected in school principal of this research. He establishes several programs to ensure that every component of school quality is fulfilled. For instance, in terms of teachers' professional development, he provided trainings

for teachers' improvement, did collaboration with publication sector and encouraged teachers to present a certain topic among their colleagues to develop teacher's creativity and knowledge. Therefore, it can be concluded that a school's ability to succeed and advance depends on the principal's ability to manage, organize, and mobilize his or her potential in order to help the school achieve its objectives. If the principal is aware of the intricate workings of the school and recognizes his role as the person with the authority and duty to lead it, he will be successful.

The principal of this integrated Islamic primary school implements some of the qualities of a quality school as outlined in Sallis' perspectives, including: (1) being customer-focused; (2) emphasizing efforts to avert problems; (3) investing in human resources; (4) strategizing to accomplish quality; (5) managing complaints as feedback to accomplish quality; (6) implementing policies in planning to achieve quality; (7) working toward a process of development by embracing everyone; (8) encouraging creativity; (9) clearly outlining everyone's roles and responsibilities; (10) having a well-defined evaluation strategy and criteria; (11) using quality for further service quality; (12) viewing quality as an integral part of work culture; and (13) continuous quality improvement (Sallis, 2005). The principal was very concerned about environmental issues and worked hard to create the "Go Green Program" to raise public awareness of the value of a green environment. This program complies with the Adiwiyata program, also known as the eco-school or green school program, which is an initiative of the Indonesian government. All components of this program should come together to create a favorable understanding, particularly in terms of environmental character education (Fasikhi et al., 2023).

In order to enhance the quality of the school, the principal plans by organizing, managing, and communicating the resources of teachers, support staff, school committee and parents. This allows them to fulfill their obligations and responsibilities in an effective and efficient manner, ultimately achieving the desired results. As it is mentioned that principals who lead effectively and efficiently make outstanding contributions to the caliber of schools (Damri et al., 2023). The findings of this study are consistent with those of Krisbiyanto's (2019) research, which demonstrates the value of school principal program planning in assisting members of the school community in developing educational goals, accelerating the process of teaching and learning through the development of more efficient endeavors, forming or constructing a productive organizational unit, fostering an environment that fosters the growth and development of educational leadership, and providing sufficient resources for efficient instruction. Since the principal has a significant impact on raising the standard of the school, he or she works to develop a number of program plans for improvement. Similar research (Waston & Taryanto, 2019; Zibenberg & Da'as, 2022) demonstrates that preparing for school principals' efficacy in raising school standards has a significant impact and that principals are expected to be capable of doing so. In summary, the performance of school principals, the school climate, and their exceptional leadership are all necessary to raise the caliber of education (Brinia et al., 2014; Gibson, 2014). (Brinia et al., 2014)

Similarly, research findings demonstrate that school principals, because of their effectiveness in growing schools, must be able to offer training facilities to enhance teacher performance, which in turn produces the highest caliber of graduates and improves school quality (Andriani, 2019; Hallinger & Heck, 2010).

CONCLUSION

The objective of this study is to explore the effectiveness of principal's leadership, aiming to improve the school quality including teachers' performance, students' achievement and availability of facilities. The results show how successful the principal's efforts have been in raising the bar for instruction by putting in place teacher-led, community-based, and parent-focused programs that align with the school's vision and mission. Furthermore, the study found that raising teacher quality and giving them the required resources and training they need to improve student and teacher outcomes are critical to raising school standards. To help fulfill the school's vision and mission, the community, school committee, and parents must work together in perfect harmony. This result demonstrated the value of having a capable leader to guide and organize a strategic management for school quality. This research has implications for teachers and students. The small number of participants, the methodology, and the data collection are some of the study's shortcomings. Therefore, additional research is required to enhance more thorough findings, not only in a single case, but also to create comparative studies among multiple schools to delve deeper into the tactics employed by the principals.

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