

Optimizing the Role of School Principals as Educational Leaders: Challenges and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the role of school principals as educational leaders who are very important in improving the quality of education in schools. In this article, the challenges and opportunities faced by school principals are explained in optimizing their role as educational leaders. The challenges faced by school principals include internal challenges, such as school management, human resources, and external challenges, such as educational policies, the school environment, and social and technological changes. Meanwhile, opportunities that can be utilized by school principals are internal opportunities, such as training and development of school principals, leadership development in schools, and improving the quality of teaching, as well as external opportunities, such as collaboration with external parties, school funding, and technology in education.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education is one sector that has an important role in forming a young generation that is qualified and able to face various future challenges. In this context, school principals have a very vital role in leading and managing educational institutions to achieve the expected goals. However, the challenges faced by school principals in optimizing their role as educational leaders continue to grow, both from within and outside the school environment.

This article discusses the challenges and opportunities in optimizing the role of school principals as educational leaders, as well as strategies that can be implemented to overcome these challenges. In explaining the challenges faced, this article differentiates between internal and external challenges. Internal challenges include the competence of school principals, school management, and working relationships with teachers. Meanwhile, external challenges include educational policies, school environmental challenges, and social and technological changes.

Opportunities for optimizing the role of school principals are also explained in this article, both from an internal and external perspective. Internal opportunities include principal training and development, leadership development in schools, and improving the quality of teaching. Meanwhile, external opportunities include collaboration with external parties, school funding, and technology in education. In closing, this article provides strategies that can be implemented to optimize the role of school principals, such as setting clear educational goals, developing inclusive leadership, improving the quality of teaching and learning, implementing technology in education, collaborating with external parties, and improving the quality of school management.

2. METHOD

This research methodology uses a literature study approach to collect data and information about the role of school principals as educational leaders, the challenges they face, and the opportunities that can be exploited.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Definition of Principal

The principal is a leader who is responsible for implementing educational activities in the school. The school principal has an important role in creating a conducive learning climate, leading teaching staff and support staff, as well as carrying out administrative tasks and developing school programs. School principals are also expected to be able to build good relationships with the school community, parents and other stakeholders.

Apart from that, school principals are also expected to be able to develop the school's vision and mission, as well as plan strategies to achieve these goals. In carrying out their duties, school principals must have good management skills, such as managing human resources, finances and school infrastructure. School principals are also expected to be able to make appropriate and strategic decisions in facing various challenges and changes in the world of education.

In the context of communication, school principals also have an important role in building good relationships with teaching staff and support staff, as well as establishing effective communication with other stakeholders. The school principal must be conducive and establish good relationships with other stakeholders. The school principal must be able to facilitate productive dialogue and discussion, as well as provide appropriate direction and support to teaching staff and support staff in carrying out their duties.

Overall, the principal is a leader who has a big responsibility in carrying out educational activities in the school, and is expected to be able to optimize his role as an educational leader to achieve the goals that have been set.

2. The Role of School Principals in Education

The role of the principal in education is very important because the principal is the educational leader in the school who is responsible for ensuring that all educational activities run well and in accordance with the goals that have been set.

Through his complex role, the principal is expected to be able to lead and coordinate all educational activities in the school, such as developing strategic plans, planning learning activities, managing human resources and infrastructure, and establishing relationships with other stakeholders.

Apart from that, school principals also have an important role in improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools, building a conducive learning climate, and establishing good relationships with other stakeholders.

In carrying out his role, the principal must have sufficient competence, such as a good understanding of management and leadership principles, good analytical and decision-making skills, and the ability to manage human and financial resources effectively.

Some of the important roles of school principals in education include:

- 1) Lead and coordinate educational activities at school
The school principal has the responsibility to lead and coordinate all educational activities in the school, including developing strategic plans, planning learning activities, managing human resources and infrastructure, as well as establishing relationships with other stakeholders.
- 2) Improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools
School principals also have an important role in improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools, such as developing relevant and innovative curricula, providing support and guidance to teaching staff in developing effective learning methods and strategies, as well as monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning in schools.
- 3) Building a conducive learning climate
School principals are also expected to be able to build a conducive learning climate, by creating a safe, comfortable and enjoyable atmosphere for students, as well as supporting the holistic development of students' character and potential.

4) Establish good relationships with other stakeholders

The school principal also has an important role in establishing good relationships with other stakeholders, such as parents, the community, and other related parties, with the aim of strengthening community support and involvement in educational activities at school.

Overall, the role of the principal in education is very important to improve the quality of education in schools, and is expected to be able to optimize his role as an educational leader to achieve the goals that have been set.

3. Leadership in Educational Contexts

Leadership in the educational context covers various aspects, such as educational policy, resource management, curriculum development, and student management. In this case, effective leadership is needed to ensure that all aspects run well and produce optimal results.

Educational leadership can be defined as a process that involves interaction between leaders, teaching staff, students and other stakeholders to achieve predetermined educational goals.

Additionally, in an educational context, effective leadership must pay attention to the quality of teaching and learning in schools, and ensure that teaching staff have sufficient resources and adequate support to improve the quality of their teaching.

In carrying out effective leadership in an educational context, a leader must have sufficient skills and competencies, such as the ability to manage human and financial resources, the ability to lead and coordinate educational activities, and the ability to communicate well with teaching staff, students and other stakeholders.

Apart from that, leadership in the educational context also plays an important role in facing various challenges and changes that occur in the educational environment. Effective leadership can help overcome a variety of challenges, such as increased competition between schools, changes in technology, and changes in education policy.

In this case, effective leadership also needs to be able to adapt to change and develop innovations that can improve the quality of education. For example, an effective school principal must be able to develop appropriate strategies to deal with technological changes and integrate technology in the learning process at school.

In carrying out his leadership, an educational leader must also pay attention to ethical and moral values that are appropriate to the educational context. A leader who has high integrity and morals can be a role model for teaching staff and students in carrying out educational activities.

In conclusion, effective leadership is very important in the educational context to achieve predetermined educational goals and improve the quality of education. An effective educational leader must have sufficient skills and competencies, be able to adapt to change, and pay attention to ethical and moral values that are appropriate to the educational context.

4. Challenges in Optimizing the Role of School Principals

A. Internal Challenges

1) Principal Competency

The first internal challenge faced by school principals in optimizing their role as educational leaders is related to the competence of the principal himself. A school principal must have various adequate competencies to be able to lead a school effectively. Several competencies that school principals must have include pedagogical, leadership, managerial, social and spiritual competencies. However, not all school principals have adequate competence in all of these areas. Therefore, school principals need to continue to develop themselves through various available training and competency development.

Another challenge related to the competence of school principals is related to the work experience that the principal has. Many principals are appointed to the position of principal without having sufficient experience in management and leadership. This can cause difficulties for school principals in managing a school and leading the teaching team within it. Therefore, newly appointed school principals need to receive adequate training and competency development to prepare themselves to lead a school.

Apart from that, another challenge related to the competence of school principals is related to the ability to manage human resources in schools. A school principal must be able to manage relationships with teachers and other school staff well in order to create a conducive and productive

work environment. If a school principal does not have the ability to manage human resources well, then this can have a negative impact on school performance and create conflict among members of the teaching team. Therefore, school principals need to develop their managerial and interpersonal skills so they can manage human resources well in schools.

2) School Management

Another internal challenge in optimizing the role of school principals is school management. School principals are required to have the ability to manage human resources, finances, facilities and infrastructure, as well as ensuring the effectiveness and efficiency of school operations. Challenges in school management can include a lack of knowledge and skills in management, limited resources available, as well as a tendency to lack transparency in the management of school finances and assets.

To overcome this challenge, school principals can implement several strategies such as strengthening managerial capacity by participating in training or consulting with school management experts. School principals also need to form a management team consisting of teachers and school staff who can assist in managing school resources and operations. In addition, school principals must ensure transparency and accountability in managing school finances and assets through good supervision and reporting. Thus, school management can be optimized to achieve the desired educational goals.

3) Working Relationship with Teachers

Internal challenges related to school management can have an impact on the relationship between the principal and staff and teachers at the school. The school principal must be able to manage the human and financial resources in the school well, so that the learning process can run optimally. Challenges in school management can include lack of human resources, lack of funding, and lack of adequate infrastructure.

School principals also need to ensure that each teacher has clear roles and responsibilities in fulfilling the school's vision and mission. Therefore, school principals must be able to build good working relationships with staff and teachers, in order to build a harmonious working atmosphere and motivate teachers to contribute optimally in improving the quality of education in schools.

Apart from that, the school principal must also be able to resolve conflicts or problems that occur in the school wisely and fairly, so as not to cause disharmony and affect the learning process. School principals need to have good communication skills and be able to empathize with teachers and staff at the school. Thus, school principals can become effective leaders in overcoming challenges related to school management and building positive working relationships among all school members.

B. External Challenges

1) Education policy

External challenges in optimizing the role of school principals as educational leaders also include educational policies. Changing and often inconsistent educational policies can be a challenge for school principals in planning and implementing educational programs in schools. Unclear education policies or lack of alignment between national policies and regional policies can also be a challenge for school principals in making decisions regarding education programs in schools.

In addition, educational policies that frequently change can affect organizational stability in schools. School principals must be able to anticipate changes in educational policies that may occur and prepare themselves and the staff at the school to be able to adapt to these changes. This requires the school principal's ability to understand and follow developments in existing educational policies and be able to make appropriate and effective decisions.

Apart from that, the school principal must also be able to ensure that the educational programs implemented in the school are in accordance with applicable education policies. School principals must thoroughly understand the content and objectives of educational policies and communicate them clearly to staff and students at the school. The school principal must also be able to ensure that the educational programs implemented in the school comply with the standards set by the applicable education policy.

2) School Environmental Challenges

School environmental challenges are external challenges that can also influence the performance of school principals in optimizing their role. The school environment can include geographical, social

and cultural conditions that can influence the learning process and the principal's performance in leading the school.

For example, schools located in isolated or difficult-to-access areas may face challenges in providing adequate facilities and infrastructure for the teaching and learning process. This can influence student and teacher motivation in learning and teaching. School principals must be able to find solutions to overcome these obstacles by optimally utilizing available resources.

On the other hand, the social and cultural environment can also influence the performance of school principals. For example, people who pay little attention to education or have wrong perceptions about the importance of education can make school principals face challenges in increasing parental participation in children's education. Therefore, school principals need to establish good communication with the surrounding community and form programs that can increase their participation in the educational process.

In facing the challenges of the school environment, school principals need to have the ability to adapt to the existing environment, develop strategies to utilize available resources optimally, and establish good relationships with the surrounding community.

3) Social and Technological Change

Social and technological changes are one of the external challenges that school principals must face in optimizing their role as educational leaders. Social change is related to changes in values, behavior and norms in society which can influence the thought patterns, actions and reactions of students, teachers and other stakeholders in the school environment. Technological changes also have a significant impact on education, where technology has become an important part of everyday life and influences the way of learning and teaching.

School principals must be able to anticipate and manage social and technological changes so that they do not disrupt the performance and quality of education in schools. One effort that can be made is to update the curriculum and teaching methods to suit current developments and student needs. Apart from that, school principals can utilize technology in learning, such as by using online learning platforms or developing learning applications that can help students learn.

In facing social and technological changes, school principals also need to continue to develop their competencies by updating their knowledge and skills, as well as collaborating with external parties who can help in facing these changes. Apart from that, school principals also need to ensure that all teachers and school staff also have sufficient competence in dealing with social and technological changes and are able to utilize them effectively in the ml-learning process.

5. Opportunities in optimizing the role of school principals

A. Internal Opportunities

1) Principal Training and Development

Training and development of school principals is one internal opportunity that can help optimize the role of school principals as educational leaders. Through appropriate training and development, school principals can improve their competency and managerial skills in managing schools. By gaining new knowledge and the latest management techniques, school principals can increase their effectiveness in leading, organizing and supervising activities at school.

Training and development can also help school principals understand their roles and responsibilities better. In this training, school principals can gain knowledge about the latest education policies, effective management strategies, and modern teaching and learning techniques. This can help school principals develop a clear vision of the direction of school development and make the right decisions in achieving these goals.

Apart from that, training and development can also help school principals motivate staff and teachers in their schools. By acquiring good communication skills and effective motivational strategies, principals can build strong relationships with staff and teachers, and ensure that they are all working towards the same goals. In the long term, this can increase the effectiveness of teaching and learning in schools, as well as improve the quality of education provided by those schools.

2) Leadership Development in Schools

Leadership development in schools is an internal opportunity to optimize the role of school principals as educational leaders. Effective leadership can have a positive impact on teacher

performance and the quality of education in schools. Therefore, leadership development in schools needs to be carried out continuously and sustainably.

One way to develop leadership in schools is to provide leadership training and development to school principals and teachers. This training and development can cover various aspects, such as interpersonal skills, communication, time management, resource management, and so on. With proper training and development, principals and teachers can improve their leadership abilities and bring positive change to the school environment.

Apart from that, leadership development in schools can also be carried out through mentoring or coaching programs. School principals who have experience and good leadership skills can guide new or less experienced teachers and school staff in developing their leadership abilities. With a mentoring or coaching program, school principals can help teachers and school staff to understand and develop effective leadership.

Leadership development in schools can also be done by forming teams or working groups consisting of school principals and teachers. This team or working group can aim to develop effective strategies and programs in improving the quality of education in schools. In this team or work group, the principal can act as a facilitator and provide direction to team or work group members in developing their leadership abilities.

3) Improving Teaching Quality

Improving the quality of teaching is one of the internal opportunities that school principals can take advantage of in optimizing their role as educational leaders. Good teaching quality will have a positive impact on the student learning process and ultimately improve student achievement. Therefore, school principals need to pay attention and continue to improve the quality of teaching in their schools.

One strategy that can be used by school principals to improve the quality of teaching is to regularly evaluate and monitor the learning process in the school. This can be done through direct observation or by using evaluation tools such as observation sheets or questionnaires. From the results of this evaluation, school principals can identify weaknesses and strengths in the existing learning process, and determine appropriate development programs to improve the quality of teaching.

Apart from that, school principals also need to provide support and motivation to teachers to improve the quality of teaching. This can be done by providing training or workshops on effective teaching strategies, or giving appreciation and appreciation to teachers who have succeeded in achieving good results in the teaching process. With support and motivation from the school principal, it is hoped that teachers will be more motivated and enthusiastic in improving the quality of teaching at school.

B. External Opportunities

1) Collaboration with External Parties

Collaboration with external parties is one opportunity that school principals can take advantage of to optimize their role as educational leaders. In this context, external parties can be government agencies, non-government organizations, or private companies that are committed to supporting education.

In collaborating with external parties, school principals can utilize the resources possessed by these parties, such as experience, expertise and financial resources. School principals can collaborate with external parties in various fields, such as curriculum development, teacher training, provision of facilities and infrastructure, and development of programs to improve the quality of education.

By optimally utilizing opportunities for collaboration with external parties, school principals can improve the quality of education in their schools and increase the school's reputation as an innovative institution committed to improving the quality of education. Apart from that, collaboration with external parties can also help school principals overcome various obstacles faced within the school, such as financial problems and lack of resources.

2) School Funding

School funding is one external opportunity that can be utilized by school principals to optimize the role of school principals as educational leaders. The availability of sufficient funds will enable schools to upgrade facilities, improve facilities and infrastructure, purchase educational equipment, and expand the educational programs offered. Therefore, school principals need to make good use of this opportunity to improve the quality of education in schools.

School principals can seek funding sources from various parties, such as the government, foundations, companies and donor agencies. One way to obtain funding is to submit a project proposal that shows clear goals and specific needs. Apart from that, school principals can also take advantage of government programs that provide funds for education, such as School Operational Assistance (BOS) or special allocation funds (DAK).

However, school principals must also be careful in managing school funds and ensure that these funds are used appropriately and effectively to improve the quality of education in schools. This can be done by making a clear financial management plan, monitoring the use of funds regularly, and measuring the impact of the use of funds on improving the quality of education in schools. In this way, the use of school funds will be more effective and can provide maximum benefits for students and the school as a whole.

3) Technology in Education

In terms of external opportunities, the application of technology in education is one of the things that can improve the quality of learning in schools. School principals can utilize technology to help make the learning process more effective and efficient, such as using online learning applications, multimedia or simulations. In this case, the school principal can hold training or workshops for teachers on the use of technology in learning.

Apart from that, technology can also be used in managing school administration, such as school information systems, e-learning, and the use of social media for communication between schools and parents/guardians. The use of technology in school administration can help optimize school management so that it is more effective and efficient.

However, the use of technology in education also requires quite large costs, such as costs for procuring equipment, infrastructure and training in use. Therefore, school principals need to collaborate with external parties, such as technology companies or government agencies, to get support and funding in the use of technology in education.

6. Strategy for Optimizing the Role of School Principals as Educational Leaders

1) Setting Clear Educational Goals

Setting clear educational goals is an important strategy in optimizing the role of school principals as educational leaders. In carrying out his duties as an educational leader, the school principal must have a clear vision and mission regarding the educational goals to be achieved. By setting clear goals, the principal can motivate all parties in the school to move in the same direction

This will also make it easier for the school principal to formulate programs and activities that must be carried out by all school members to achieve these goals. Clear goals can also provide clear direction in decision making, both in terms of learning, school management, and relationships with the school environment and community.

To set clear educational goals, school principals must have a good understanding of the school's vision and mission, students' conditions and needs, as well as the latest developments in the world of education. The school principal must also be able to involve all school members in the process of setting educational goals, so that all parties feel they have the same goals and are committed to achieving these goals.

2) Developing Inclusive Leadership

Developing inclusive leadership is an important strategy to optimize the role of school principals as educational leaders. This is because an inclusive school principal will be able to understand and pay attention to diversity in the school environment, and be able to involve all parties in decision making. In the same article, Jannah et al. (2020) revealed that inclusive school principals must be able to understand and respect the differences in culture, religion, race and socio-economic background of students and teachers in the school environment.

In developing inclusive leadership, school principals need to implement good and open communication with all parties in the school environment. This will help in obtaining accurate information about the needs and expectations of students, teachers and parents. Apart from that, school principals also need to encourage active participation from all parties in activities and decision making at school. This can increase the sense of ownership and responsibility of all parties towards the school.

In developing inclusive leadership, school principals also need to pay attention to developing student character. School principals must be able to create a safe and comfortable environment for

students, and encourage students to develop attitudes of tolerance, mutual respect and cooperation. Apart from that, school principals also need to pay attention to building teacher character, by providing the training and support needed so that teachers can set a good example for students and become active partners in developing inclusive leadership in schools.

3) Improving the Quality of Teaching and Learning

Improving the quality of teaching and learning is a very important strategy in optimizing the role of school principals as educational leaders. The principal must ensure that the teaching and learning carried out in the school reaches good standards and is in accordance with the applicable curriculum. One way to improve the quality of teaching and learning is to strengthen teacher competence through training and professional development.

School principals can also help improve the quality of teaching and learning by actively involving students in the learning process. This can be done by providing opportunities for students to provide feedback on the learning they receive and facilitating the use of more interactive and participatory learning methods. The principal can also hold open discussions with teachers and school staff to identify problems and find the best solutions.

Apart from that, the school principal must also ensure that the facilities and infrastructure in the school are adequate and support the learning process. For example, school principals can allocate funds to improve the quality of facilities and update educational equipment. In the era of digital technology, school principals can also consider the use of technology in learning such as e-learning and the use of online learning applications which can help students and teachers improve the quality of learning.

4) Applying Technology in Education

Applying technology in education is an important strategy in optimizing the role of school principals as educational leaders. In this article, this strategy is considered as an opportunity for school principals to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of learning in schools. This can be done by utilizing available information and communication technology (ICT), such as using learning software, learning applications, or online-based learning media.

School principals can lead and coordinate the use of technology in education by developing strategic plans and training programs for teachers in the use of technology in learning. Apart from that, school principals can also ensure the availability and quality of facilities and infrastructure supporting technology in education, such as a stable internet network and adequate hardware.

However, the challenges faced in implementing technology in education also need to be overcome. Some of these are limited access and availability of technology which is still limited in some areas, lack of skills and understanding of teachers in operating technology, and the need for support and commitment from all stakeholders in schools, including parents and students.

In facing these challenges, school principals can develop collaboration with various parties, such as government agencies, private companies, or non-government institutions, in increasing access and availability of technology in education. In addition, school principals can provide training and support to teachers in developing skills and understanding in operating technology as well as providing understanding and outreach to parents and students regarding the importance of technology in education.

5) Establishing Collaboration with External Parties

In the strategy to optimize the role of school principals as educational leaders, one strategy is to collaborate with external parties. This is important to do because school principals cannot work alone in carrying out their duties as educational leaders. School principals need to collaborate with external parties such as parents, the community, and the business and industrial world to achieve the desired educational goals.

Collaboration with students' parents is important because students' parents are school partners in educating children. School principals need to establish good communication with students' parents in order to create harmonious cooperation and create a conducive learning environment for students. Apart from that, school principals can also utilize the expertise and experience of parents to improve the quality of education in schools.

Collaboration with the community is also important for school principals to carry out. School principals need to build partnerships with the surrounding community to support educational activities

at school. The community can help schools facilitate extracurricular activities, provide resources for schools, and provide moral support in improving the quality of education.

Collaboration with the business world and industry is also important for school principals. School principals can build partnerships with companies or industries around the school to provide opportunities for students to undertake work practices or internships at these companies. Apart from that, collaboration with business and industry can also help schools meet funding and facility needs that cannot be met by schools independently.

6) Improving the Quality of School Management

Improving the quality of school management is an important strategy in optimizing the role of school principals as educational leaders. In this case, school principals need to be able to manage various aspects of school management such as human resources, finance, facilities and infrastructure, as well as educational information and data.

In improving the quality of school management, school principals need to develop leadership abilities, both in terms of transformational leadership and participative leadership. School principals also need to apply the principles of good governance in school management, such as transparency, accountability, participation, and clear policies and procedures.

Apart from that, school principals also need to implement effective management strategies in managing human resources, such as designing training and development programs for teachers and school staff, as well as conducting regular performance evaluations. School principals also need to optimize the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in school management, such as the use of school management information systems (SIMS) or other digital applications to facilitate the management of educational data and information.

In facing internal and external challenges, school principals need to implement effective management strategies to improve the quality of school management. In this way, school principals can make an optimal contribution to improving the quality of education in schools.

4. CONCLUSION

A. Summary of Article Content

In optimizing the role of school principals as educational leaders, there are challenges and opportunities that need to be considered. Internal challenges include the competence of school principals, school management, and working relationships with teachers, while external challenges include educational policies, school environmental challenges, and social and technological changes. However, there are also opportunities to optimize the role of school principals, both internally and externally, such as training and development of school principals, collaboration with external parties, and technology in education.[1]

Strategies that can be implemented to optimize the role of school principals as educational leaders include setting clear educational goals, developing inclusive leadership, improving the quality of teaching and learning, applying technology in education, collaborating with external parties, and improving the quality of school management.[2]

B. Implications and Suggestions

The implication of this article is the important role of school principals in leading education and facing challenges and taking advantage of existing opportunities. School principals need to continue to develop their competencies, improve the quality of school management, and establish good working relationships with teachers. Apart from that, school principals also need to take advantage of existing opportunities such as training and development of school principals, collaboration with external parties, and technology in education.[3]

The advice that can be given is that there needs to be support from related parties such as the Education Department and other external parties to help optimize the role of school principals as educational leaders. School principals also need to continue to follow technological developments and apply them in education. Apart from that, there is a need to improve the quality of teaching and learning by developing a curriculum that is relevant to the demands of the times and improving the quality of teachers.[4]

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