

School principal leadership as a managerial mechanism in enhancing teacher performance

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ABSTRACT

School leadership plays a critical role in shaping school effectiveness and teacher performance, particularly within the framework of educational management. This study aims to examine the role of school principal leadership as a managerial mechanism in enhancing teacher performance through a qualitative literature-based approach. Using a conceptual review design, this article analyzes and synthesizes scholarly literature published between 2021 and 2025 that addresses principal leadership, managerial functions, leadership styles, and teacher performance. The findings indicate that principal leadership operates as an integrated managerial mechanism encompassing planning, organizing, directing, and controlling school resources and instructional processes. Effective leadership is shown to influence teacher performance through organizational structures, instructional supervision, strategic decision-making, and trust-based relationships. Additionally, leadership styles such as instructional, transformational, and integrated leadership contribute significantly to teachers' professional development and instructional effectiveness. This study contributes to educational management literature by clarifying the conceptual position of principal leadership as a managerial mechanism rather than a fragmented leadership construct. The findings emphasize the importance of managerial coherence in leadership practices to support sustainable improvement in teacher performance. Future research is encouraged to empirically examine this conceptual framework across diverse educational contexts.

Keyword: school principal leadership; managerial mechanism; educational management; teacher performance; instructional leadership

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1. INTRODUCTION

Educational institutions are increasingly required to respond to rapid changes in policy, organizational demands, and learning environments. In this context, school leadership has shifted from a purely administrative role toward a strategic managerial function that directly influences school effectiveness and instructional quality. Over the past decades, reforms in educational policy and school management have renewed scholarly interest in understanding how leadership practices shape school culture, organizational performance, and academic outcomes (Torres, 2022).

Within school organizations, the principal plays a pivotal role as the central managerial actor responsible for coordinating resources, guiding instructional processes, and ensuring the alignment of educational goals with institutional practices. Previous studies emphasize that improvements in learning quality can be achieved through the managerial competence of principals who demonstrate creativity and innovation in managing schools (Rostini et al., 2022). This perspective positions school leadership not merely as a symbolic authority, but as an operational mechanism that translates policy and vision into concrete managerial actions.

From a managerial standpoint, principals are required to perform multiple interconnected functions, including effective planning and communication, staff collaboration, instructional program design, resource and financial management, and the creation of a supportive school environment (Pisriwat et al., 2024). These

responsibilities reflect the executive nature of the principal's role, in which leadership is exercised through systematic management of people, programs, and organizational processes. Gaol (2021) further highlights that principals act as executives who direct and supervise school improvement programs while ensuring the quality of teaching and professional development within the institution.

Leadership literature also increasingly recognizes the importance of accountability, adaptability, and forward-looking perspectives in educational management. Effective school leadership is characterized by the ability to anticipate change, understand complex educational systems, and uphold accountability through ethical decision-making and responsible governance (Mallillin, 2022). Such managerial leadership is essential in fostering trust, organizational commitment, and sustainable school improvement.

Beyond organizational outcomes, a substantial body of research demonstrates that principal leadership has a direct and significant impact on teacher performance. Empirical findings indicate that leadership practices, particularly when combined with work motivation, significantly influence teachers' performance and professional effectiveness (Pratiwi & Warlizasusi, 2023). Principals are expected to establish policies that enhance teacher competence, enforce constructive discipline, and support professional growth to optimize instructional performance (Daheri et al., 2023; Alwi & Mumtahana, 2023).

The effectiveness of leadership is also shaped by the style and approach adopted by school principals. Studies reveal that various leadership styles—ranging from autocratic and democratic to laissez-faire—collectively account for a substantial proportion of variance in teacher job performance (Parveen et al., 2022). More recent scholarship emphasizes instructional and integrated leadership models that combine instructional and transformational dimensions, highlighting their positive influence on teacher development and instructional quality (Corrigan & Merry, 2022; He et al., 2024; Shaked, 2024). In the evolving educational landscape, digital and hybrid leadership practices further expand the scope of instructional leadership, reinforcing its relevance in contemporary school management (Berkovich & Hassan, 2024).

Despite extensive research on leadership styles and teacher performance, there remains a need for conceptual clarity in positioning school leadership explicitly as a managerial mechanism within educational management frameworks. Some studies note inconsistencies in the use of managerial leadership terminology, underscoring the importance of aligning leadership concepts with their managerial functions and outcomes (Karim et al., 2023). Therefore, this article aims to synthesize existing literature to examine how principal leadership functions as a managerial mechanism in enhancing teacher performance, with particular attention to its organizational, instructional, and relational dimensions.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

A. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative literature-based approach using a conceptual review design. The research does not involve empirical data collection from participants but instead focuses on synthesizing and analyzing existing scholarly works related to school principal leadership, managerial mechanisms, and teacher performance. This approach is appropriate for examining leadership as a theoretical and managerial construct within educational management frameworks.

B. Data Sources

The data consist of peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly publications indexed in academic databases such as Google Scholar and Scopus-indexed or nationally accredited journals. The literature selected for analysis focuses on three main themes: (1) principal leadership as a managerial mechanism, (2) the impact of school leadership on teacher performance, and (3) leadership styles in educational settings. The reviewed sources include both international and national studies published between 2021 and 2025 to ensure relevance to contemporary educational contexts.

C. Literature Selection Criteria

The literature was selected based on the following inclusion criteria:

1. Articles that explicitly discuss school principal leadership within educational management or organizational frameworks.
2. Studies that examine the relationship between leadership practices and teacher performance or professional development.
3. Publications that address leadership styles, instructional leadership, or managerial leadership in schools.
4. Peer-reviewed articles written in English or Indonesian.

Exclusion criteria included opinion-based articles without theoretical grounding, non-peer-reviewed publications, and studies unrelated to school leadership or teacher performance.

D. Data Analysis Technique

The selected literature was analyzed using thematic content analysis. Each article was systematically reviewed to identify recurring concepts, managerial functions, leadership practices, and reported outcomes related to teacher performance. The analysis process involved categorizing findings into thematic clusters, such as managerial roles of principals, leadership styles, instructional supervision, and organizational support mechanisms. These themes were then synthesized to construct an integrated conceptual understanding of how principal leadership operates as a managerial mechanism in enhancing teacher performance.

E. Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure the trustworthiness of the analysis, this study applied credibility and consistency checks by cross-referencing key themes across multiple sources. The use of diverse scholarly works from different educational contexts strengthens the conceptual validity of the findings. Additionally, transparent inclusion criteria and systematic analysis procedures contribute to the dependability of the study.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Principal Leadership as a Managerial Mechanism in School Management

The analysis of the reviewed literature indicates that school principal leadership functions not merely as an administrative role but as a managerial mechanism that integrates planning, organizing, directing, and controlling within school organizations. Several studies emphasize that improvements in instructional quality are closely linked to the managerial competence of principals who are creative and innovative in managing educational institutions (Rostini et al., 2022). This finding reinforces the view that leadership effectiveness is reflected in the principal's ability to translate vision and policy into operational school practices.

From a managerial perspective, principals are required to perform multiple core functions that sustain organizational effectiveness. Pisiwat et al. (2024) identify key managerial responsibilities, including strategic planning, effective communication, coordination among staff, instructional program design, resource and financial management, and the creation of a supportive school climate. These functions illustrate how leadership operates as a structured managerial process rather than as an individual trait. Similarly, Gaol (2021) highlights the executive role of principals in directing school improvement programs and overseeing instructional quality and professional development.

These findings align with broader leadership theories that emphasize accountability, adaptability, and ethical responsibility as essential components of effective educational management. Mallillin (2022) argues that forward-looking leadership and accountability strengthen organizational trust and commitment, which are critical for sustaining school performance. Collectively, the literature positions principal leadership as an institutional mechanism that ensures coherence between educational goals, managerial actions, and organizational outcomes.

B. Impact of Principal Leadership on Teacher Performance

A dominant theme emerging from the literature is the significant influence of principal leadership on teacher performance. Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that leadership practices have a direct and positive effect on teachers' instructional effectiveness, motivation, and professional behavior. Pratiwi and Warlizasusi (2023) report that principal leadership, both independently and in combination with work motivation, significantly affects teacher performance. This suggests that leadership effectiveness extends beyond formal authority to shaping teachers' attitudes and commitment.

Further studies emphasize the role of principals in establishing policies that enhance teacher competence and discipline. Daheri et al. (2023) note that principals who implement clear qualification standards, performance expectations, and constructive discipline contribute to optimal teacher performance. In a similar vein, Alwi and Mumtahana (2023) argue that strategic leadership is essential for improving instructional quality, as principals act as key drivers of professional growth and pedagogical improvement.

The importance of leadership behavior is also reflected in relational aspects within schools. Pardosi and Utari (2022) underline that higher-quality leadership behavior is associated with improved teacher performance and student achievement. Gómez-Leal et al. (2022) further explain that leadership practices that foster trust-based relationships significantly enhance teacher satisfaction and performance. These findings reinforce the argument that leadership effectiveness is deeply embedded in both managerial structures and interpersonal dynamics within schools.

C. Leadership Styles and Their Influence on Teacher Performance

The reviewed literature also reveals that leadership style plays a crucial role in shaping teacher performance outcomes. Parveen et al. (2022) demonstrate that a substantial proportion of variance in teacher job performance can be explained by the combined influence of autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire leadership styles. This indicates that leadership effectiveness is context-dependent and influenced by how principals balance authority, participation, and autonomy.

More recent studies highlight the growing relevance of instructional and integrated leadership models. Instructional leadership is increasingly recognized as a leadership approach that prioritizes the improvement of teaching and learning processes (Shaked, 2024). He et al. (2024) identify instructional leadership as a significant predictor of teachers' professional development, emphasizing its role in fostering continuous improvement in instructional practice. Corrigan and Merry (2022) further argue that integrated leadership models, which combine instructional and transformational dimensions, are preferred by both teachers and students due to their holistic impact on school culture and learning outcomes.

In the context of educational digitalization, leadership practices are also evolving to incorporate digital and hybrid instructional environments. Berkovich and Hassan (2024) highlight the increasing integration of digital instructional leadership in mainstream school leadership, reflecting the need for principals to adapt managerial practices to contemporary educational challenges. These findings suggest that leadership as a managerial mechanism must remain flexible and responsive to changing educational contexts.

D. Conceptual Implications for Educational Management

Despite extensive research on leadership and teacher performance, the literature reveals conceptual inconsistencies in the use of managerial leadership terminology. Karim et al. (2023) point out variations in how managerial leadership is defined and operationalized across studies, indicating the need for greater conceptual clarity. The findings of this review address this gap by positioning principal leadership explicitly as a managerial mechanism that connects organizational management, instructional leadership, and relational practices.

By synthesizing existing studies, this article contributes to educational management literature by offering an integrated perspective on how principal leadership operates through managerial functions to enhance teacher performance. The results underscore the importance of viewing leadership not as an isolated variable but as a systemic mechanism embedded within school management structures.

4. CONCLUSION

This study highlights that school principal leadership functions as a managerial mechanism that plays a central role in enhancing teacher performance within educational institutions. The reviewed literature demonstrates that effective leadership extends beyond administrative authority and operates through structured managerial functions, including planning, organizing, directing, and controlling school resources and instructional processes. Principals who demonstrate strong managerial competence are better positioned to align organizational goals, instructional practices, and professional development initiatives, thereby fostering a productive learning environment.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that principal leadership significantly influences teacher performance through both organizational and relational pathways. Leadership practices that emphasize instructional supervision, strategic decision-making, accountability, and trust-building contribute positively to teachers' motivation, professional growth, and instructional effectiveness. Variations in leadership style—particularly instructional, transformational, and integrated leadership—reflect the adaptive nature of leadership as a managerial mechanism capable of responding to diverse educational contexts, including digitally mediated learning environments.

This article contributes to educational management literature by clarifying the conceptual position of school principal leadership as an integrated managerial mechanism rather than a fragmented leadership construct. By synthesizing contemporary studies, the findings underscore the importance of managerial coherence in leadership practices to enhance teacher performance. Future research is encouraged to extend this conceptual framework through empirical investigation across different school contexts to further validate and refine the role of principal leadership in educational management.

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