

Principal's Strategies in Managing Educational Quality at Wonosari 01 State Elementary School Semarang

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Abstract

This study explores the strategies employed by the principal of SD Negeri Wonosari 01, Semarang, in managing educational quality. As the central figure in school leadership, the principal plays a vital role in integrating various components of education curriculum, educators, infrastructure, and community involvement into a comprehensive quality management system. Using a qualitative approach through observations, interviews, and questionnaires, the research reveals that the principal adopts a transformational leadership style and applies principles of Total Quality Management (TQM). Strategic planning is conducted collaboratively, involving teachers, school committees, parents, and students. Programs such as literacy mornings, character-based learning, and extracurricular development are implemented to enhance student competencies holistically. The principal ensures continuous teacher development through supervision and professional training, while promoting a positive school culture and transparent resource management. However, several challenges persist, including limited facilities, funding constraints, and varying teacher competencies, particularly in adapting to technological tools and the new curriculum. Low parental involvement and administrative workload further hinder optimal implementation. Despite these barriers, the principal demonstrates strong commitment and adaptive leadership by fostering partnerships, encouraging innovation, and promoting continuous improvement. This research provides practical insights for school leaders aiming to enhance educational quality in public elementary schools within similar contexts.

Keywords: Educational Quality Management, Transformational Leadership, Total Quality Management



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Introduction

Education serves as the cornerstone of national development, functioning as the primary foundation for producing high-quality human resources with strong character and global competitiveness (Day et al., 2016; Siahaan et al., 2023). Primary education, particularly at the elementary school level, represents a critical juncture for character development, foundational competency strengthening, and comprehensive student potential cultivation (Arif et al., 2023). In this context, educational quality emerges as the key determinant for ensuring learning processes that are effective, efficient, and aligned with contemporary demands (Damanik, 2015).

Contemporary educational leadership research emphasizes that principal's function not merely as administrators but as transformational agents who shape school culture, drive instructional improvement, and foster organizational learning (Hallinger & Chen, 2015). The National Policy Board for Educational Administration's 2015 standards characterize effective leadership as "intentional,

strategic, and moral," highlighting the multifaceted nature of principal responsibilities in today's educational landscape (Robinson & Timperley, 2007).

However, empirical evidence indicates that not all primary schools can manage educational quality effectively (Gultom et al., 2021). Various internal and external challenges frequently impede quality achievement, including resource constraints, technological adaptation difficulties, and evolving pedagogical demands. SD Negeri Wonosari 01 Kota Semarang exemplifies these challenges, presenting concrete indicators such as inconsistent student academic performance, limited parental participation in school activities, and the ongoing need for enhanced teacher professional competencies. This gap between ideal expectations and ground reality necessitates effective and targeted managerial strategies (Rasyid, 2021).

The principal's role becomes paramount in this context. Contemporary leadership theory positions school principals as transformational leaders responsible for designing, implementing, and evaluating educational quality management strategies (Kumala et al., 2018; Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2011). Effective principals must integrate diverse aspects ranging from curriculum management and educator quality improvement to adequate infrastructure provision and positive, collaborative school culture creation (Nurochmah & Basri, 2017).

Various theories support the principal's role in education quality management. Total Quality Management (TQM) emphasizes that quality improvement must be comprehensive and continuous through participation of all school components. The core principles of TQM in education include customer focus (students, parents, community), total employee involvement, process approach to quality improvement, integrated system of data-driven decision making, and commitment to quality culture development (Sila & Ebrahimpour, 2005). Recent research demonstrates that TQM implementation in schools correlates with improved teacher performance, enhanced student satisfaction, and increased organizational effectiveness (Kaiseroglou et al., 2024).

Transformational leadership theory provides a robust framework for understanding how principals can inspire positive organizational change. Bass & Riggio (2006) updated model identifies four key components: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. In educational contexts, transformational leaders demonstrate their ability to create shared vision, foster innovation, and develop capacity across the school community (Day et al., 2016). The school-based management approach also promotes autonomy and accountability in planning and implementing quality improvement programs tailored to local characteristics and needs (Bush & Middlewood, 2013).

The phenomenon occurring at SD Negeri Wonosari 01 reflects broader challenges facing Indonesian elementary education. Despite various improvement efforts, challenges such as limited facilities, disparities in teachers' competencies in dealing with the Merdeka Curriculum, and increasing community demands for quality education services remain major issues (Siahaan et al., 2023). These facts indicate a need to understand more deeply how the principal's strategies are implemented in real-world contexts and how these strategies contribute to educational quality outcomes (Nasir et al., 2023).

Therefore, this study focuses primarily on the principal's strategies for managing educational quality at SD Negeri Wonosari 01 in Semarang City. The study aims to analyse in depth the various strategies implemented by the principal to improve educational quality, including the planning, implementation, and evaluation processes of the programs carried out. This study also aims to identify the supporting and hindering factors in implementing these strategies. The results of this study are expected to contribute in the form of policy recommendations and educational leadership practices, both for the principals themselves and for policymakers at the regional level.

This study stems from the urgency to create an adaptive, responsive, and needs-based education quality management system. The findings from this study are expected to serve as a reference for other schools in designing effective and contextual quality management strategies tailored to the challenges and opportunities faced by each primary education institution.

Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method to gain an in-depth understanding of the principal's strategies for managing educational quality at SD Negeri Wonosari 01 in Semarang City. A qualitative approach was chosen because it can comprehensively describe complex social and educational realities and provides room for interpretation of the phenomena observed in the field (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This methodological choice aligns with the objective of exploring human behaviors, institutional practices, and leadership strategies in their natural context. By using descriptive methods, researchers aim to present accurate and detailed representations of the strategies employed by school principals, especially in addressing challenges and achieving quality improvements (Matthew B. Miles & A. Michael Huberman, 1994).

This research was conducted in January 2025 at SD Negeri Wonosari 01 Semarang City, involving various informants, namely the principal, teachers, school committee, and upper-grade students (grades 4–6). The school was selected through purposive sampling based on its representativeness of typical Indonesian public elementary schools facing quality management challenges. Data collection techniques were carried out through three primary methods, namely:

a. Structured Observations

Observations were conducted directly in the school environment to observe the principal's activities in managing educational quality. The aspects observed included the implementation of academic supervision, learning activities, student participation, infrastructure conditions, and parental involvement in school activities. The observation framework followed Spradley's (2024) ethnographic methodology, emphasizing participant-observer positioning to capture authentic leadership behaviours and organizational dynamics. The objective aim of the observation was to reveal actual behaviour and leadership practices in schools objectively.

b. Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the principal, teachers, and the school committee. This technique aimed to explore perspectives, experiences, strategies, and challenges faced in efforts to improve educational quality. Interview participants included the principal (2 sessions, 60 minutes each), teachers (6 participants, 45 minutes each), and school committee members (3 participants, 30 minutes each). Interview protocols were developed based on contemporary educational leadership literature and pilot-tested for clarity and comprehensiveness. Interviews allowed researchers to understand dynamics and contexts that could not be captured through observation alone.

c. Standardized Questionnaires

Questionnaires were distributed to teachers, students, and the school committee to obtain quantitative data that supports the qualitative findings. The questionnaire instrument uses a 5-point Likert scale with indicators reflecting leadership effectiveness, stakeholder participation levels, learning environment quality, and educational quality perceptions. The questionnaire was validated through expert review and pilot testing. Data from the questionnaire helps strengthen the validity of findings obtained from observation and interviews.

Data analysis followed (Braun & Clarke, 2023) thematic analysis approach, involving data familiarization through repeated reading and preliminary coding, initial code generation using inductive approach, theme identification and pattern recognition, theme review and refinement, and theme definition and narrative construction. Combining these three techniques, this study aims to obtain a comprehensive, in-depth, and valid picture of the principal's strategies for managing educational quality at SD Negeri Wonosari 01.

Results and Discussions

1. Results

The study results indicate that the principal of SD Negeri Wonosari 01 Semarang City has implemented a systematic educational quality management strategy through a transformational approach and Total Quality Management (TQM) principles. This strategy manifests in vision and

mission planning, stakeholder involvement, strengthening teacher competencies, and creating a positive school culture.

Observations reveal that the principal actively supervises the classroom, monitors the learning process, and develops flagship programs such as Morning Literacy and Child-Friendly Classrooms. The principal demonstrates capacity to maximize limited resources through creative partnerships and efficient utilization strategies, reflecting contemporary understanding of effective school resource management (Stronge & Xu, 2021). Interview findings indicate strong principal commitment to encouraging teacher, committee, and parent participation in quality planning and evaluation processes. Meanwhile, the questionnaire shows that most respondents positively evaluate the principal's leadership effectiveness.

Table 1.
Results of the Questionnaire Respondents' Responses to the Quality Management Strategy of
Wonosari 01 Elementary School Semarang

Aspects that are assessed	Percentage of agreement (%)
The school principal has a clear quality vision	92%
Teachers are involved in quality planning	86%
The principal's supervision supports the teachers	88%
The school environment supports learning	91%
Involvement of the committee and parents	75%

The questionnaire results demonstrate predominantly positive stakeholder evaluations across key quality management dimensions, with particularly strong agreement regarding the principal's vision clarity (92%) and learning environment support (91%). However, the relatively lower percentage for committee and parent involvement (75%) indicates areas requiring strategic attention.

2. Discussions

First, regarding quality planning, the principal develops the school's vision and mission in a participatory manner involving teachers, committees, and the community. This participatory approach aligns with contemporary educational leadership theory, which emphasizes that strategic planning in schools must be dynamic and inclusive to foster a collective sense of ownership (Bush & Middlewood, 2013; Hallinger & Chen, 2015). Similarly, Nasir et al. (2023) emphasize that empowering stakeholders in planning enhances commitment and contextual relevance in quality management initiatives.

The implementation of collaborative planning reflects what Antonakis & Day (2017) describe as distributed leadership, where decision-making authority is shared across organizational levels. This approach has been shown to increase organizational capacity and sustainability of improvement efforts in educational settings. The principal's systematic approach to stakeholder engagement demonstrates understanding of educational leadership as a collaborative endeavour rather than individual heroic action.

Second, regarding human resource development, the principal actively conducts teacher training, academic supervision, and supports the development of learning methods based on the Kurikulum Merdeka. This comprehensive approach to professional development reflects current understanding that consistent academic supervision contributes to improving teacher professionalism (Glickman et al., 2001). In line with this, Siahaan et al. (2023) highlight the need for pedagogical and technological competence as foundations of 21st-century teaching effectiveness.

The principal's focus on continuous professional development aligns with what Hargreaves & Fullan (2015) describe as "professional capital" development, encompassing human capital (individual talent and knowledge), social capital (collaborative relationships), and decisional capital (judgment and expertise in complex situations). This multi-dimensional approach to capacity

building reflects sophisticated understanding of teacher development needs in contemporary educational contexts.

Third, the strategy for managing facilities and infrastructure is carried out transparently and efficiently. The principal collaborates with school committees to plan, allocate, and report budgets. This supports Mulyasa (2003) theory, which stresses accountability and effective utilization of resources as essential traits of transformational school leadership. Additionally, Gultom et al. (2021) emphasize that school-based management requires openness and participatory financial practices to sustain educational quality improvements.

Contemporary research on school resource management emphasizes the importance of strategic alignment between resource allocation and educational priorities. The principal's transparent approach to resource management builds stakeholder trust while ensuring optimal utilization of limited resources through creative partnerships and efficient strategies.

Fourth, regarding quality culture, the school implements value-oriented programs such as 5S (Smile, Greeting, Greeting, Polite, Courteous), Morning Literacy, and Clean Friday. These routines reinforce students' character and align with Sergiovanni (1987) notion of symbolic leadership, where culture and values are central to sustaining community-based educational institutions. Developing a school culture rooted in shared values enhances students' engagement and civic growth.

Recent research on school culture emphasizes that intentional culture-building activities significantly impact student engagement, academic achievement, and social-emotional development (Cohen et al., 2009). The principal's systematic approach to culture development reflects understanding of organizational culture as a strategic lever for improvement, not merely an emergent phenomenon.

However, findings also indicate persistent challenges such as limited learning facilities, unequal teacher technology skills, and insufficient parental engagement. This suggests gaps in the consistent implementation of strategic goals. School quality management must include adaptive leadership, capable of transforming limitations into opportunities through contextual innovation.

The principal's response to these challenges demonstrates what Uhl-Bien & Arena (2018), describe as adaptive leadership the capacity to mobilize stakeholders to tackle tough challenges and thrive in changing environments. This includes resource optimization through creative utilization of available resources, capacity building through systematic professional development addressing identified competency gaps, innovative stakeholder engagement approaches to increase parent and community participation, and gradual technology integration aligned with teacher readiness levels.

The principal's strategies at SD Negeri Wonosari 01 demonstrate progressive adherence to modern educational leadership principles. Nevertheless, to strengthen impact, there is a need for enhanced collaboration, the integration of educational technologies, and the use of school-based data to support decision-making accuracy (Arif et al., 2023; Robinson & Timperley, 2007).

The case study illustrates what Leithwood & Seashore-Louis (2011) identify as effective school leadership in challenging contexts—the ability to maintain focus on instructional improvement while managing complex organizational and environmental demands. The principal's multifaceted approach demonstrates integration of contemporary leadership theories with contextual realities, resulting in pragmatic yet principled educational leadership.

Conclusion

This study examines the principal's strategies for managing educational quality at SD Negeri Wonosari 01 in Semarang City. Based on the triangulated data from observations, interviews, and questionnaires conducted with the principal, teachers, school committee, and students, it can be concluded that the principal plays a very important and strategic role in promoting educational quality improvement at the school. The principal has demonstrated proactive and visionary performance in developing and implementing educational quality management strategies. These strategies are not only focused on

academic achievement but also on character development, cultivating 21st-century skills, and creating an inclusive and enjoyable learning environment. In quality planning, the principal involves various stakeholders through a participatory approach, strengthening a sense of ownership and shared responsibility for the success of the school's programs.

The application of Total Quality Management (TQM) principles and transformational leadership is evident in the principal's leadership style, particularly in empowering teachers, conducting academic supervision, developing flagship programs, and managing school facilities transparently and accountably. Additionally, the principal has fostered a quality culture by instilling positive values in the school environment, such as discipline, responsibility, and social awareness. However, there are still some obstacles to its implementation, such as limited infrastructure, minimal budget support for innovative programs, low involvement of some parents, and challenges in mastering learning technology by some teachers. Despite this, the principal shows a strong commitment to continue making improvements through a collaborative approach, continuous reflection, and innovation based on the real conditions of the school.

With a structured, adaptive, and continuous improvement-oriented strategy, the principal of SD Negeri Wonosari 01 has made a tangible contribution to creating a high-quality learning process. This success demonstrates that the role of the principal as an agent of change is crucial in creating an excellent, resilient, and responsive educational ecosystem that adapts to the times. The findings contribute significantly to educational leadership literature by demonstrating how contemporary theories can be effectively implemented in resource-constrained Indonesian elementary school contexts. The study provides practical insights for school leaders aiming to enhance educational quality while navigating complex organizational and environmental challenges.

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