School Leadership Transformation: Improving Teacher Performance through Strategic Decision-Making

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ABSTRACT. This study explores the principal's decision-making practices at SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Kandangan, focusing on the stages of identification, development and decision selection. The findings show that through a structured process involving the participation of all relevant parties, school principals can make adaptive and responsive decisions to environmental changes. Theoretical implications highlight the importance of integrating school leadership theory with effective decision-making practices. This study offers valuable guidance for educational practitioners in developing results-oriented leadership strategies. As a result, this research shows the need for further research in developing new models for more effective principal decision-making and an emphasis on ethical aspects in decision-making. Thus, improving school principals' decision-making practices is expected to impact educational progress in junior high schools positively.

Keywords: *Decision-making, school leadership, teacher performance, adaptation, practical implications.*

INTRODUCTION

The role of school leadership has become the main focus in efforts to improve the quality of education (Farhurohman, 2018; Muhaemin & Umar, 2022; Mustajab et al., 2021; Perez & Banayo, 2023; Ghamrawi, 2023). School leadership not only plays a role in managing administrative and organizational aspects but also plays a key role in motivating and guiding the performance of teachers and school staff (Özdemir et al., 2022; McCutcheon & Haynes, 2022; Reis-Andersson, 2023). However, school leadership is only considered to be related to administrative and organizational management (Sebastian & Park, 2023), even though the role of school leadership is more complex because school leadership can be a catalyst for significant change in overall school performance.

The challenges junior high school principals face in achieving optimal educational quality cannot be underestimated (Rozalina et al., 2020; Solana & Mustika, 2023). Even though it is an important part of shaping students' academic character, the presence of a school principal often faced with various problems that affect the performance of teachers and staff and even student learning outcomes (Sodangi et al., 2022; Urakova et al., 2023). One of the main challenges faced is the lack of effectiveness in managing and empowering teacher and staff performance (Bush, 2022;

Rozi et al., 2022; Khan et al., 2023). Although the role of school leadership is recognized as an important factor in overcoming this problem, there remains a lack of clarity regarding the most effective strategies for motivating and guiding their performance.

Although there has been much research conducted, such as research by Karakose et al. (2022), Dedering and Pietsch (2023), and Nawab and Noor (2023) on the role of school leadership in improving teacher and staff performance, there is a significant gap in the academic literature related to strategic decision approaching in the context of empowering school leadership. The results of this gap analysis highlight the need for more in-depth research to explore how strategic decision-making can effectively improve the performance of teachers and staff in junior high schools. In addition, the current literature has not fully paid attention to this approach's practical implementation and real impact in lower secondary schools.

The role of school leadership has been recognized as a key element in improving teacher and staff performance and achieving quality learning goals (Rozi et al., 2022; Bush, 2022; Karakose et al., 2022; Dedering & Pietsch, 2023). However, the current literature still lacks depth in analyzing how strategic decision-making can effectively deal with the complexity of challenges junior high schools face. This research will not only provide a deeper understanding of the role of strategic decision-making in empowering school leadership but also provide new insights into how this practice can be implemented effectively to improve the performance of teachers and staff in junior high schools. Based on these problems, this research aims to systematically investigate the role of school leadership empowerment in improving the performance of teachers and staff at SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Kandangan.

METHOD

The research was conducted at SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Kandangan in Temanggung Regency, Central Java Province. The research procedure followed includes several structured stages. First, initial observations are carried out to fully understand the school context and determine potential areas that need further investigation. Second, the research problem is formulated clearly and specifically based on findings from initial observations and relevant literature. Third, the research was carried out using the plan that had been prepared, including collecting data through direct observation, interviews with relevant stakeholders, and collecting relevant documentation from schools.

After all the data is collected, the data is then processed and analyzed according to a predetermined approach. The research instruments used include observations to gain an in-depth understanding of school leadership practices, interviews with principals, teachers and school staff to gain their insights and perspectives, and analysis of documents such as school policies and performance records to provide a broader context. Data analysis was carried out based on the method developed by Miles and Huberman, which involves organizing, filtering and interpreting data to produce an in-depth understanding of research findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Among the factors that factor into school progress is the way school leaders make decisions. In making this decision, a school leader must pay attention to input and suggestions from all parties. The principal of SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Kandangan stated: *"For the first decision-making method, identify it first; for example, yesterday there was a problem like Covid, and the school changed completely, including the teaching, so because there is a problem like that, like it or not, we have to follow government regulations, including teachers who also have to can adapt, then yes, it was developed so that teachers can use tools that help teach online because from above they were told to go online, the last time students leave for school is home time, but they are still*

under the supervision of teachers, teachers still check students' homes in turns so that they are still supervised." From these results, it is known that the principal has carried out three stages in making decisions: identification, development, and decision selection.

The principal of SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Kandangan continued: *"So before I decided that this teacher had a dual role, I assessed it first. I have meetings to discuss various things. If I think someone is good at that field, I give them that responsibility. For example, the one who teaches Indonesian is a young teacher, so to keep up with curriculum developments, I think he can be given responsibility. I give him the curriculum management section if he teaches Social Sciences because he has been here for a long time. It has been a long time since I gave him the infrastructure management; he has to understand what the school needs."* This information illustrates that in improving teacher performance, the Principal of Muhammadiyah 5 Kandangan Middle School has taken several steps: motivating teachers and encouraging the exchange of ideas.

Deputy Principal of SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Kandangan stated: *"Actually, there are many ways to improve teacher performance, such as exchanging ideas; if there are suggestions or good ideas, they can be accommodated and most importantly, always motivated to deal with low teacher morale. If there is an MGMP (Subject Teachers' Conference), I also ask the teachers to follow it. Moreover, most importantly, always follow educational developments, like before during COVID-19, you must follow the latest educational models."* This interview provides information that the performance of teachers and staff is very much considered by the principal of SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Kandangan.

Furthermore, an SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Kandangan teacher stated: *"For the teachers themselves, of course, there are considerations, and they are also adjusted to their duties, just like TU staff. The considerations are adaptability, communication, intellectual field, and way of thinking, technological literacy, and ability to work together and most importantly, responsibility."* From the results of this interview, it can be stated that these considerations are based on the suitability between teacher skills and their duties. Teacher skills include ability adaptability, communication skills, intellectual skills, critical thinking, information and media literacy, cooperation and responsibility.

According to information from the deputy principal of SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Kandangan, the principal of SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Kandangan still has problems or constraints in deploying teachers and staff. According to him: *"The problem is often a lack of communication. Sometimes, some people cannot attend every meeting, even if they can get permission first because they are interested, so that is the problem. Sometimes, my desires and the desires of the teachers and staff are not the same. I think it is better like this, but according to my mother, it is better like this, so the best middle way is taken, and evaluations after a program are also rare."* Based on information from this interview, in facing these obstacles, the principal's decision-making is very important to achieve a dynamic school environment, as stated by the *deputy principal:* *"Almost all teachers agree, although there are still some who are lacking for their reasons, yes, like during Covid, if you checked from house to house, they said it would be a lot if done every day, so in one day. Just a few houses until one class was finished for a week; after that, they agreed, and everything went well."*

The results of this research show that the strategic decision-making carried out by the principal of SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Kandangan has a significant impact on school progress, especially in improving the performance of teachers and staff. The stages of identification, development, and decision selection explained by the principal are structured decision-making processes. By paying attention to input from various parties, including teachers, staff, and government regulations, school principals can make the right decisions according to the context and needs of the school. It reinforces the impression that school principals are important in forming a dynamic and progressive school environment. In addition, the results of this research provide valuable insight for educational practitioners regarding strategies for empowering school leadership in improving the performance of teachers and staff.

Discussion

The role of school principals in decision-making is an important and complex topic in educational management (Bröms, 2020; Wijaya et al., 2022; Lipovec et al., 2023; Savitri & Wahyuni, 2023). As the principal, the principal has a big responsibility to lead the school toward achieving the school's vision, mission, and goals. It is in line with the opinion of Dirahman et al. (2023) that to optimize educational personnel, school principals can start by planning, directing and supervising all tasks carried out by all school parties so that it will produce good performance and be able to achieve the vision, mission, and optimal school goals. Planning, implementing and monitoring all tasks organized into programs are the keys to achieving this. However, there is debate about whether school principals should lead the decision-making process alone or involve participation from all school community members (Gazit & Perry-Hazan, 2023).

The principal's leadership role in decision-making has a significant impact on teacher performance at SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Kandangan. Through a responsible and planned decision-making process, the principal is able to direct the school toward achieving the vision, mission and goals that have been set. The steps taken by the school principal, which include identifying problems, developing solutions, and choosing decisions, indicate that the school is responding to environmental changes more adaptively and effectively. The school principal is also actively involved in joint deliberations with staff and teachers to ensure that every decision taken takes into account input from all relevant parties.

Tejeiro (2024) and Volosnikova (2023) emphasize the importance of inclusive and participatory leadership in making decisions in schools. It means that inclusive and participatory leadership in schools is very important to increase student participation and education. This is in line with the opinion of Scaletta and Tejero Hughes (2021), who states that leaders who are able to discuss decisions and invite the school community to implement them tend to make schools more effective. Discussions and deliberations, such as those held by the Principal of SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Kandangan, are important steps in ensuring that all parties are involved in the decision-making process, thereby making the school more effective. However, some views emphasize the need for strong and firm leadership in making decisions in schools (Bush & Glover, 2014; Piehler & Winters, 2017). According to Molla and Gale (2019), a school leader must be able to lead the decision-making process appropriately, which may not always allow for deliberation or consensus in every decision. It raises the question of whether decisions taken by a single principal can reflect the needs and aspirations of all members of the school community.

In the context of decision-making, the principal's role in identifying problems, developing solutions, and making the right decisions becomes very important. The principal of SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Kandangan carries out three stages of decision-making, including the identification, development and decision-selection stages. These stages provide a structured and directed framework for facing challenges at school. This structured framework can be illustrated in Figure 1 below.
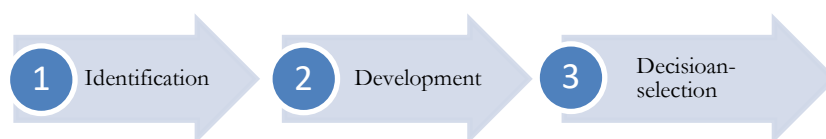

Figure 1. Decision making steps

First, the identification stage is a stage for identifying problems so that they can be more measurable at the next stage. Research findings show that the Principal of Muhammadiyah 5 Kandangan Middle School identified every existing problem, such as a change in teaching and learning activities from offline to online; of course, the teacher's way of teaching has also changed. It is in line with the opinion of Dwikurnaningsih and Paais (2022) that professional school principals have good planning, including identifying problems. A similar thing was also conveyed by Koonce (2018), Riyani et al. (2020), and Santosa (2022). *Second*, the development stage is an

activity to find existing solutions or design new solutions to solve a problem. In taking a solution, the principal has determined the best solution with careful consideration, as has the principal of Muhammadiyah 5 Kandangan Middle School in finding solutions to the problems that occur. *Third*, the decision-selection stage is the decision-making stage because, at this stage, alternative solutions are decided in the development stage to solve the problem. At this stage, the school principal already has the best solution and then implements the solution to overcome the problem, for example, by organizing student learning online.

The decision-making stages carried out by the principal at SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Kandangan consist of several planned and systematic steps. The first stage is problem identification, where the school principal carefully identifies and understands the problems that arise, such as changes in teaching and learning activities from offline to online. After that, the solution development stage is carried out, where the school principal tries to find an appropriate solution or designs a new solution to overcome the problem. For example, school principals develop the best solutions to organize student learning online. These decision-making stages are in accordance with the opinion of Dirahman et al. (2023) that school principals in optimizing educational personnel can start by planning, directing and supervising all tasks carried out by all school parties.

Implementation of decisions taken by the principal in overcoming various problems at SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Kandangan plays an important role in improving teacher performance. The concrete steps taken are to equalize perceptions between school leaders and teachers and staff, create rational programs, and provide evaluations of the performance of teachers and staff. In this way, teachers and staff can be more focused and directed in carrying out their duties, along with the support and direction provided by the school principal. Implementing appropriate decisions also provides a clear understanding of expectations and desired performance standards, thereby providing additional motivation for teachers and staff to achieve better results. It is in line with Ngussa and Gabriel's (2017) findings that participation in decision-making increases teacher commitment, leading to an increase in their performance standards and motivation.

Additionally, it is important to consider individual roles and responsibilities within the school community. As stated by Warman (2022), the performance of teachers and staff is of great concern, and school principals need to ensure that the skills and responsibilities of each individual are in accordance with their duties. It raises questions about how principals can lead and make decisions to ensure the optimal performance of all members of the school community. School leaders must be able to make the right decisions, be able to discuss decisions, and invite the school community to implement these decisions to make what they lead to an effective school (Ziduli & Buka, 2018). It means that decision-making is selecting a solution to be used as a problem-solving technique.

Several obstacles were faced in the decision-making process by the principal at SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Kandangan. One of the main obstacles is limited time and lack of communication between school principals, teachers, and staff. This condition often hampers the consultation and discussion processes needed to reach comprehensive decisions. In addition, there are differences in views and thoughts between school principals, teachers and staff, which can be an obstacle in reaching a mutually acceptable agreement. Lastly, the lack of evaluation after implementing decisions is also an obstacle that hinders the improvements and adjustments needed to implement the decisions that have been taken. However, through interviews, school principals have identified several strategies to overcome these obstacles, such as improving communication, equalizing perceptions, and providing evaluations of teacher and staff performance.

CONCLUSION

Strategic decision-making by school principals has a significant role in improving the performance of teachers and staff in schools. The research results found that structured decision-

making practices involving the participation of all related parties, such as those carried out by the principal at SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Kandangan, contributed positively to the school's progress. The theoretical implications of these findings highlight the importance of integrating school leadership theory with decision-making practices that are adaptive and responsive to environmental change. From a practical perspective, the results of this research provide valuable guidance for educational practitioners in developing effective leadership strategies to improve their school performance.

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