SCHOOL PRINCIPAL MANAGEMENT IN REALIZING FREEDOM FOR DIGITALIZED LEARNING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Article Information

ABSTRACT

This research examines the leadership management of elementary school principals in their efforts to realize Freedom of Learning in the Era of Digitalization. The aim of this research is to describe and analyze the leadership management of the principal in realizing the Freedom of Learning era of digitalization in Elementary Schools. The research method used is qualitative research with descriptive explanation. Research sources include books, journals, websites and magazines. The results of the research show that the Merdeka Belajar curriculum launched by the government, the integration of the two aims to prepare a better generation for the nation. To make this happen requires cooperation from various parties, especially in the school environment, namely through the role of the school principal. The impact of this research is that the principal's leadership management in the era of digitalization is able to develop the vision, mission and goals of the school through the aspect of a visionary leader, creating a digital era learning culture that is able to meet students' needs, is able to improve a condition or problem systematically, is superior in professional practice to able to create a conducive environment for learning and working in this era of digitalization. By fulfilling these five aspects, the school principal's leadership management will be able to be created well so that a synergistic relationship between components in the school will be realized.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The release of the confirmation of COVID-19 as a disease pandemic for the entire world on January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) stated that this episode greatly affected several people (Putra et al., 2020). The current educational space is not immune from the rapid effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, as it has fundamentally affected all levels of school structures worldwide from primary, optional, pre-school to tertiary and has also prompted the elimination or suspension of scientific meetings (AlAjmi, 2022). One of the guidelines or activities followed by the global school environment around the world with the goal of stopping the spread of this disease includes the conclusions of each educational organization, as well as the impact on more than 900 million students worldwide (Andriani et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the exploration of new frontiers in the education sector. Technology has been integrated into almost all classrooms, from elementary school to college. More than 128 million students in more than 190 countries have been affected by school closures during the pandemic (Karakose et al., 2021).

The government and parties involved in the education sector are evaluating continuity to obtain policies that can be applied at various levels and do not cause problems. Increasing access to education is part of the aim of implementing a planned education system. Increasing access to education will be easier if all components of education, especially teachers, students and school principals, are aware of the progress of the times, namely the era of digitalization which is increasingly developing (Riani & Ain, 2022). Currently the government is implementing the Independent Learning curriculum in the education sector. The main principle of implementing the Merdeka Belajar curriculum is freedom and accessibility for schools to carry out educational processes based on resources and referring to educational goals and ideals. The whole principle of Freedom of Learning will only be achieved if every component in the educational environment, especially schools, participates and actively plays a role (Mas & Zulystiawati, 2022).

Apart from the independent learning policy during 2020, the learning model used in class, and which is directed towards the concept of independence must also be considered. Because this model provides a feeling of comfort when learning and has a good impact on the quality of learning. With the independent learning program, it is hoped that class conditions will be better and can have an impact on better learning quality (Muchasan et al., 2022). Technology provides convenience. There are many sites that can be accessed via the internet, but if accessing technology is done incorrectly it can have a bad impact on students. There are many destructive cases, for example ethnic clashes, disputes, brawls, and others. This is an example of a weakened national character. Character education from an early age is a prevention effort and can solve this problem (Arrasyid, 2021).

The principal is a functional teacher and is tasked with leading the school. The learning process is held or a place where interaction occurs between teachers and students. School principals become agents of change who have an active role in improving the quality of education. So, school principals are required to have good leadership (Hikmawati & Hosnan, 2022). A good school principal can manage all educational resources in order to achieve educational goals. The school principal must create a good organizational climate so that all school members can play a role together in achieving the organization's goals and objectives. The principal must have good leadership. The role of the school principal as a learning leader is very important in implementing policies Freedom of Learning launched by the Minister of Education and Culture in 2019 (Ketut & Sunu, 2022). The principal acts as the central force that drives the school. Life (Mulyadi & Mardiana, 2022).

The importance of leadership in organizations plays a major role in creating relationships between individuals and forming organizational values which become the foundation for achieving goals. The impact of leadership on organizational effectiveness is a leadership effect. The school principal is a teacher who could lead the entire school community so that it can be utilized so that goals can be achieved (Taufikurrahman, 2021). Leadership factors determine success in an organization. To achieve success in an organization, a leader will need others. So, leaders must be able to understand the characteristics of their role as leaders. So, teachers must play a role in the development of education, especially in the current era of digitalization (Septiana & Hidayati, 2022). The concept of the independent learning policy is an offer to build a national education system towards change and progress in a country. The independent learning policy is a change for educational success. Change is one of the efforts to improve towards success (Husna Asri, 2021).

The role of school principals in ensuring high-quality education has been widely researched. The study of principals' leadership styles is increasingly popular as a means of improving learning conditions by focusing on the academic aspects of school climate. Recent research has focused on how principals can improve school performance, the impact of culture on their decision making, and their important role in providing teacher support (Wasserman & Yehoshua, 2016). The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has become a major concern, placing a burden on school principals to keep school operations running. To create collaboration among a broad set of stakeholders, such as education authorities, teachers, students, parents and local communities, it is essential to understand their leadership styles. On the one hand, they are the glue that holds everything together (Rizki & Fahkrunisa, 2022). Therefore, studies are needed regarding the leadership management of this school principal. So, the author in this research aims to find out the leadership management of School Principals in realizing Freedom of Learning in the era of digitalization in Elementary Schools.

2.   RESEARCH METHODS

The type of research in the following study is qualitative research with a descriptive research design from various literature materials from accredited journal articles in the Journal of Educational Administration published in 2021. Previous research was by (Afrizal, 2016). Then it is hoped that the following research can contribute both theoretically and methodologically related to the research theme. Descriptive analysis functions to describe phenomena, issues, data and facts developing in society (Arikunto, 2010). The stages in this research include collecting data from reviewing texts and relevant research results. Data analysis is carried out

in the form of classifying data that has been collected according to the problem formulation, analyzing data that has been studied qualitatively, and drawing final conclusions based on the results of data analysis and interpretation. Then the researcher will process and develop the data to obtain information related to the research topic.

3.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
3.1.   Principal Leadership Management in Elementary Schools

Leadership is a key factor that contributes to school effectiveness. Previous studies show that school leadership is the second factor after teachers significantly influences student learning processes and outcomes. It is impossible for a school to succeed in improving student performance without the presence of talented leadership. Leadership functions as a catalyst that releases potential capacity in the organization (Ahmad, 2022). Recent studies show four effective leadership practices which include: establishing a vision and determining direction, understanding and developing people or staff, organizational redesign, and managing learning programs. There are also research results that explain that school management is influenced by context. For example, large schools that have cultural diversity can hinder the principal's ability to create an organization or communicate with the community (Werdiningsih etal., 2022).

Staff development is part of an effective principal's leadership practice. The aim is not only to form the knowledge and skills of teachers and staff in achieving goals but commitment, capacity and resilience when applying their knowledge and skills. So, attitude
leadership that must be implemented is helping and supporting individuals and groups, intellectual stimulation, and examples and models of expected values and behavior (Purnomo & Nurrachmah, 2022). Teachers are part of the main target of staff development in schools. With the main goal of high professionalism. So, it is necessary to have an exemplary attitude from the school principal. He gave the school an example of being a leader who must be able to model good attitudes and behavior for the school community (Supriyoko et al., 2022). Examples of exemplary attitudes include arriving early in the hope that the teacher will feel embarrassed or reluctant when they arrive late. The principal must also monitor the learning of each class so that the learning process can run well. If a teacher is unable to work, the principal can replace him. A good school principal will encourage communication between school members and demand respect and authority (Dewi, 2022). Apart from that, school principals should not hesitate to maintain school cleanliness, for example by picking up rubbish (Malik, 2018).

School principals must motivate teachers to work professionally, by changing motivation into behavior so that they can meet needs to achieve goals. This behavior brings hope that teachers can work consciously, responsibly, and be open to input and updates (Supriyoko et al., 2022). The three motivation models include: 1) The traditional model, namely providing material incentives to high-achieving employees; 2) Interpersonal relationship model, namely recognizing the social needs of all employees and making them feel valued; 3) Human *resource* model, namely providing employee motivation through money and the need for achievement related to responsibility (Ridwanulloh et al., 2022).

Professional school principals when carrying out their duties are accompanied by strategies to improve quality, to obtain quality results. The professionalism of the school principal can describe the quality of performance
school. Achieving the goals of school educational institutions is closely related to the leadership skills and policies of the school principal (Firdaus et al., 2022). The school principal is a professional official who manages the school organization and organizes and manages all resources, organizations and collaborates with the school committee, community, other institutions and related stakeholders. The principal's leadership to develop and manage the school must understand the needs of the school. Professional school principals motivate all school components to increase their competence so that the competence of the school community can increase and develop (Huffman et al., 2016).

3.2.   The Role of School Principals in Realizing Freedom of Learning in the Era of Digitalization

Teachers' lack of understanding of technology will have an impact on learning activities that are still conventional and do not keep up with current developments. As a result, students will experience learning boredom in the long term because they feel they have not had an impressive learning experience. This causes digitalization in learning activities to be very necessary to maximize learning outcomes. The digitalization of the education system is a response to Education 4.0 and is in accordance with the industrial revolution 4.0 which places demands on capable teachers, namely digital competence. Or the role of digitalization
Learning is really needed as an effort to maximize learning outcomes (Hastuti et al., 2020).

To create a technology-based school in the learning process, the school principal plays a big role. The school principal must make maximum use of all resources so that educational goals are achieved. Leadership is related to organizing and motivating other people

implementing new things and increasing the effectiveness of school organizations (Safar et al., 2022). School principals must have skills in providing influence, encouragement, guidance, direction, and mobilizing other people related to the implementation and development of education so that activities
progress well until you can achieve your educational goals. School principals have an important role, namely responsibility for managing input, processes and output based on national education standards (Istaryaningtyas et al., 2021).

Leadership related to the use of technology or digital leadership is the art of directing, influencing, changing with access to information, and forming relationships to anticipate important changes for school success. So, a dynamic combination of thinking, behavior and skills is needed to change or improve school culture by utilizing technology. The digital leadership structure is formed based on a combination of technology, motivation and leadership style (Jahari, 2020). Digital leadership as a way for school leaders to improve student achievement and school competitiveness. Digital leadership as part of a correct, fast, cross, hierarchical approach, orientation to work groups, and collaboration, the focus of which is innovation. Therefore, to make this happen, intense and two-way communication is needed between stakeholders in educational institutions (Pedroso et al., 2021).

Digital leadership has an impact on change because it uses digital tools in all educational management. Digital devices are needed as a learning medium for the planning process
strategic plan that fits the school's vision. The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE-A) standards define five dimensions of digital leadership: visionary leadership, digital age learning culture, excellence in professional practice, systemic improvement, and digital citizenship. This superior leadership is an obligation in integrating technology into learning so that it has easy access. Quality teachers are also important in improving learning outcomes. School principals must carry out continuous training for teachers so that the process of implementing the vision of expanding digital education can run smoothly (Ruloff & Petko, 2021). In this case, the following are the characteristics that school principals must have in the era of digitalization to implement the Independent Learning curriculum.

Table 1. Aspects and Indicators Measured in Principal Leadership in the Digitalization Era

Aspect	Indicator
Visionary Leadership	1. Support and provide digital tools to make changes to optimize the achievement of learning goals 2. Play an active role in all ongoing activities, especially in the development, implementation and communication of technology-based strategic plans 3. Deliver the program and provide funds for implementation of the technology integration plan
Digital Era Learning Culture	1. Increase the implementation of digital learning on an ongoing basis 2. Provide an example and invite all teachers to use technology that has been proven to be effective in improving the quality of learning 3. Ensure the availability of a learning environment that supports the application of technology and technology-based learning resources according to student needs 4. Ensure effective technology is implemented throughout the curriculum 5. Disseminate and play an active role in learning communities that embody digital innovation, creativity and collaboration
Excellence in Professional Practice	1. Provide time, resources and access so that sustainable and professional teachers can be created, who will then be able to implement technology effectively and efficiently 2. Providing facilities and playing an active role in learning communities that initiate technological developments 3. Socialize and set an example in communicating and collaborating according to the wishes of stakeholders by utilizing the latest technology 4. Be aware of trends in the use of appropriate technology and encourage the creation of new technology that can improve the quality of learning implementation and student learning outcomes 5. Ensure that the application of technology always follows developments in the world of education
Systemic Improvement	1. Initiate changes to realize technology-based learning goals and the creation of media-rich resources. 2. Create collaboration in applying metrics, collecting and analyzing data, and finding results to improve teacher performance and student learning outcomes 3. Use human resources who have competence in the application of technology to achieve academic and operational goals 4. Realizing strategic partnerships to improve systemic quality 5. Develop and ensure the maintenance of supporting infrastructure for the application of technology that supports the realization of quality management, operations, teaching and learning
Digitalization Environment	1. Ensure the availability and easy access to obtain the necessary digital tools and resources according to the needs of teachers and all students

	2. Encourage, develop models and formulate policies to realize the availability of safe, legal and ethical digital technology
	3. Socialize and model social responsibility interactions related to the implementation of technology and information
	4. Support the formation of shared cultural understanding and various global issues by using communication and collaboration tools

Source: (Istaryaningtyas et al., 2021)

Schools must implement online learning if it is related to the Covid-19 pandemic. School principals must implement then digital leadership. Especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, many teachers are still experiencing problems in implementing online learning. For this reason, support from the principal as a leader in the school is very much needed to ease the burden on the main teacher in implementing online learning (Syahrani, 2021). The application of digital leadership will reduce teachers' problems in implementing online learning which requires them to use the latest technology in the learning process. Because by implementing digital leadership, teachers will get the support they need to lighten their burden in online learning (Jahari, 2020).

Apart from that, to face the challenges of Industry 4.0 and in implementing "Independent Learning", teachers are needed who have the capacity and competence to realize the implementation of comprehensive education which includes knowledge, character, creativity and innovation of students (Safar et al., 2022). Therefore, teachers in the Education 4.0 era who have this capacity are really needed, because: 1) The Era of Learning Independence requires basic changes in terms of learning so that educational institutions are required to be able to transform in realizing broad-based learning, brand-based education, interactive education patterns and collaborative according to the situation and needs; 2) In supporting the transformation of educational institutions, teacher capacity is needed by realizing a revolution in their roles, duties and responsibilities in preparing students' mentality. Competence and Knowledge) to face the demands of actual events and current circumstances; 3) Educational transformation in the Merdeka Belajar era requires change agents who can change individuals and organizations (Karakose et al., 2021).

In optimizing activities oriented towards the realization of independent learning in order to meet the expectations of quality education, efforts are needed to mobilize members (teachers) (Husna Asri, 2021). From the research results, school principals provide guidance to teachers to become creative and innovative teachers. Teacher coaching carried out in schools can support the improvement and development of teachers' competencies. Coaching is one of the efforts that can be made to improve or improve performance (Mulyasa, 2011). From the research results, it was found that teacher internships had been implemented in schools but were not optimal due to time constraints. The presence of skilled teachers is very strategic in helping to equip students. For this reason, teachers must pay attention to developing their competencies towards industry-based skills competencies that are integrated with the Independent Learning curriculum such as Internships for teachers which cannot be separated from qualification standards that are in accordance with wishes, program implementation as well as assessment and supervision of internship activities.

4. CONCLUSION

Principal leadership management in elementary schools to improve student learning outcomes is the most important element for improving the quality of education. In improving the quality of education, school principals can implement good learning through their leadership. Good school principal leadership management must include several aspects such as being a visionary leader so that he is able to develop the vision, mission and goals of the school, being able to create a supportive learning culture in this era of digitalization, namely being able to develop learning programs that can meet needs, excel in practice. professionals so that they can develop an academic learning climate, make systemic improvements and create a digitalized environment so that a work environment that is conducive to learning can be created. supports and implements comprehensive learning assessments. The principal's leadership management is a multidimensional construct that focuses on how the principal manages and functions in the school. To form good leadership in learning requires a synergistic relationship with the entire school community.

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