

Challenges of Beginner Elementary School Principals in the Buffer Area of Surakarta Municipality

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ABSTRACT

Elementary school (SD) principals play a crucial role in determining the success of education in schools. In the buffer areas of Surakarta Municipality, elementary school principals often face unique challenges that impact their performance. This study aims to identify the challenges faced by novice elementary school principals in the buffer areas of Surakarta Municipality. This study employs a descriptive method with data collection conducted through a survey technique. Respondents consist of 60 novice school principals who have served for less than three years. The collected data are analyzed through three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results show that novice elementary school principals in the buffer areas of Surakarta Municipality face various challenges, such as a lack of experience and knowledge, limited resources, and insufficient community support. To overcome these challenges, principals employ various strategies, such as attending training and seminars, building networks with other schools, and collaborating with the community. This study provides recommendations for enhancing support for novice principals to improve the quality of education in these areas.

Keywords: Beginner Principal, Primary School, Resilience, Adjustment, Conflict.

INTRODUCTION

A school is an educational institution that involves various interrelated dimensions and supports each other (Rudi Nurjaman et al., 2023), where learning activities aim to improve the quality and develop the potential of the learners. As the highest leader in the school, the principal has a very important role in managing all aspects of activities in the school (Minsih et al., 2019). The principal is the individual responsible for leading a school. It can also be said that the principal is a teacher who serves as a leader. According to Permendikbud Ristek No. 40 of 2021 concerning the Assignment of Teachers as School Principals, a principal is a teacher assigned to lead and manage an education unit (Izzah et al., 2023).

As the driving force for school progress and the improvement of student achievement and its programs, the headmaster has a great responsibility to improve school accountability. To achieve this, it is important for principals to have strong and empowered leadership. This allows

the principal to carry out his role well in accordance with his duties, authorities, and responsibilities (Fitrah, 2017).

Principals are faced with enormous role demands. The headmaster must have internal strength and a firm leadership style to motivate all his staff to work optimally in educating his students. In addition, the headmaster must have a clear vision for the school's progress and remain consistent in realizing that vision, but must also be democratic and respect the opinions of all staff. School principals are also expected to have high expectations for the abilities of their students, providing support for the development of their basic skills so that they can succeed in various professions in the future (Karima et al., 2020).

Primary school principals play a key role in determining the direction and success of education in a school. However, in the buffer area of Surakarta Municipality, novice primary school principals are often faced with unique challenges. Novice principals are those who have just entered the principal's leadership position. The novice principal has previous teaching experience but has not had enough experience in leading a school thoroughly.

Beginning principals face diverse challenges, including a lack of experience in school management, adjusting to new duties and responsibilities, and building effective relationships with staff, students, parents, and the surrounding community. Within the buffer area of Surakarta Municipality, these challenges are more complex due to differences in social, economic, and cultural conditions peculiar to the region.

A similar study by (Musa et al., 2022) examines the efforts and challenges of ECCE principals in developing institutions and motivating teachers to join the mobilizer school program. The results show that the challenges in developing ECCE institutions towards mobilizing schools include 12 interrelated things and need to be overcome together with all relevant parties, and the Principal has so far made 7 important efforts in order to foster teacher spirit ECCE to join the Mobilizer School Program.

Another study by As-Tsauri et al. (2021) examined the challenges of elementary school teachers in understanding the achievements of school management components; research showed that the understanding of the PAI teacher group was 3.3 greater than the non-PAI teacher group of 2.8. The existing school management condition, PAI and non-PAI teachers, received the same score, namely 3.3. Several indicators of school management were found to be the lowest such as clean living behavior in the school environment and funding sources other than BOS (School Operational Fund) funds. From these findings, researchers have recommendations to include programs that lack achievement in the vision and mission of the school.

This study aims to identify the challenges faced by the principals of SD Beginner in the buffer area of Surakarta Municipality. Its theoretical implications also provide a basis for advanced research in the field of educational leadership, especially at the primary level, both in the area and elsewhere with similar contexts.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research applies a survey method that uses qualitative technical analysis. Qualitative research is a type of research that is descriptive in nature and often bases its analysis on process and meaning, emphasizing the perspective of the subject involved. The theoretical foundation is used as a direction to direct research in accordance with reality in the field, provide an overview of the research context, and become the basis for discussing research results (Rukajat, 2018). The place of this research is in the buffer area of Surakarta Municipality, namely Sukoharjo Regency, Boyolali Regency, Klaten Regency, and Karanganyar Regency. Respondents of 60 school principals were dug through in-depth interviews of challenges during their first three years in office. Questionnaires and interview lists were prepared based on the research objectives. Data is processed by grouping and analyzed to obtain information that is the basis of research findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The buffer area of Surakarta City means that the city of Surakarta has a central role in supporting the development of the surrounding area. Judging from its geographical location, Surakarta City itself is a buffer city from surrounding areas such as Sukoharjo, Klaten, Boyolali, Sragen, Karanganyar, and Wonogiri, where these areas are indirectly influenced by the activities of Surakarta City (Septiyani & Legowo, 2015). Based on this, it is important to develop Surakarta City, especially regarding educational facilities such as elementary schools. Improving educational facilities will strengthen Surakarta's role as a center that supports the development of surrounding areas.

Education in elementary school is the initial stage in the formal education system, where students begin to develop basic skills and form character that will become the foundation for education at a higher level (Wuryandani et al., 2014). If education in elementary school is quality and effective, then students will be better prepared to face challenges at the next level of education so that their potential can develop optimally. To optimize the effective functioning of the school, there is a very important leadership role in the school, which is reflected in the duties of the principal. Like a ship captain, the headmaster is responsible for controlling and determining the direction of the school. The principal is the controller and determinant of the direction of school development and sets goals that must be achieved (Muspawi, 2020).

Effective principals have several important characteristics. First, they have a clear vision of the future of the school. Second, set high expectations for school achievement. Third, they ensure that the learning process runs effectively. Fourth, I need to be able to manage time efficiently and try to reduce stress and unproductive conflicts. Fifth, it is important to be able to utilize various resources to support learning. Sixth, use the available information to plan learning activities. Finally, they evaluate and improve continuously (Fadhli, 2016). Thus, as a whole, the principal is a critical factor in the school's success.

One method to manage principal success is to implement planned rotation (Fink & Brayman, 2006). The strategy advocates policies aimed at encouraging existing principals to rotate so as to give younger principals the opportunity to assume the role. The aim is to refresh school leadership and bring new spirit and innovative ideas. This approach also supports efficiency in principal turnover by viewing it as a way to stimulate improved quality of education in schools.

The rotation of principals can produce new principals who are basically beginners. Beginning headteachers face the challenging process of transitioning from a teacher to a headmaster. During this phase, new principals may experience significant challenges as they will have to take on greater responsibilities and decisions than when they were just teachers (Kılınç & Gümüş, 2021). Several studies from different countries have shown that beginning principals from diverse backgrounds are faced with similar challenges, indicating that new principals face common difficulties in dealing with leadership tasks in educational settings.

In a UK study Weindling & Dimmock (2006), the main challenges faced by beginning principals include how to deal with the legacy of previous principals, changing school culture and established communication patterns, dealing with underperforming staff, and improve the negative public image towards the school. It signifies that the new headmaster must adapt to the policies and practices left behind by his predecessor, confront and change the existing culture and mode of communication, improve inadequate staff performance, and work hard to change society's negative perception of their school.

In contrast to the United States, beginning school principals face four main types of challenges posed by Shoho & Barnett (2010), such as:

1. Staff conflicts and tensions

New principals often experience conflicts and tensions with staff members. They usually face resistance and tension when working with teachers who are less competent, low morale, or not focused on students, creating a challenging work environment that can hinder their performance.

2. Comparison with predecessors

New principals are often compared to their predecessors, resulting in pressure to match the achievements of previous principals. This pressure to maintain the predecessors' legacy can lead to self-doubt, especially related to their ability to meet personal and professional expectations.

3. High workload

The burden of this job will take much time, so many novice principals feel overwhelmed by the demands of a heavy workload, especially in terms of documentation and time management. These high expectations can create tension and stress, especially for those with family responsibilities.

4. Accountability demands

Some first-time school principals reported that the stress of having to meet accountability demands from their district affected their desire to be more effective in leading. This pressure ultimately hinders their ability to focus on improving educational outcomes.

Meanwhile, in Africa, budding school principals face significant challenges, often working in inadequate buildings and with poorly trained staff. Formal leadership training is very rare, and principals are usually appointed based on their teaching track record, not because of their leadership potential. In addition, orientation and support programs for new principals are usually very limited (Bush & Oduro, 2006).

Relevant to the situation in some of these countries, novice primary school principals in the buffer areas of Surakarta Municipality can also face various challenges, such as they still lack experience and knowledge, where the life experience of novice principals outside the teaching field can influence future career decisions and impact their journey to become competent and experienced practitioners (Du Plessis et al., 2015). Second, in addition to a lack of experience and knowledge, Indonesia's education challenge is faced with a lack of resources (Yansah et al., 2023). Many schools in the Surakarta City area may not have adequate basic facilities, such as proper classrooms, libraries, laboratories, and sports facilities. Limitations in the number and quality of teachers, administrative staff, and other support personnel can also affect the quality of education. These limitations hinder the provision of quality education and increase the burden on novice principals and staff to carry out their duties effectively.

Finally, the challenge for novice school principals is the lack of support from the community. The participation of parents and the community in school education needs to be considered by the school, especially by the leadership of the principal, so that the existence of such participation can be realized and maintained. If community participation is well maintained, schools will not experience significant difficulties in developing various types of programs because all parties understand and feel responsible for the success of the programs developed by the school (Ayudia, 2020). The lack of support from the community results in novice school principals having to work hard to obtain support from various stakeholders, and without adequate support from the community, school initiatives, and programs can be hampered, making it difficult to achieve the desired educational goals.

These emerging challenges need to be overcome so that the leadership of the new generation of novice school principals can effectively improve the quality of schools, especially in elementary schools in the buffer area of Surakarta. School principals use various strategies to overcome these challenges, such as first attending training and seminars to improve their capacity. According to Wiczorek & Manard (2018), the experience of novice principals is described as a distinct transition in various contexts, showing how new principals should apply educational training in principal-preparation programs to new positions. They found that principals were generally prepared to deal with the technical or managerial aspects of the job but often faced challenges in developing and maintaining positive professional relationships.

This training may focus on developing school management skills, including strategic planning, budget management, and administration. Seminars and trainings that focus on teaching methodology, curriculum development, and learning evaluation assist principals in supporting teachers in improving the quality of education. Specialized training in educational technology, conflict management, and school leadership can provide additional useful insights and skills. This means that the training can help novice school principals develop the managerial and technical skills needed to manage the school effectively.

The next strategy is for novice principals to network with other schools to share knowledge and resources. They can form working groups or professional learning communities where principals can share experiences, challenges, and effective solutions. An example is the establishment of the Principals Working Group (KKKS), which aims to create elementary school principals who have competencies in accordance with the main duties and functions of school principals, as stipulated in the Decree of the Minister of National Education Number: 162/U/2003 concerning Guidelines for Assignment of Teachers as Principals (Khodijah, 2021).

In addition, novice principals can conduct study visits to other successful schools to learn best practices that can be applied in their own schools. Thus, the existence of this group network helps novice school principals overcome the difficulties they face by getting help or cooperation from other schools in dealing with existing conflicts. This collaborative activity supports principals in developing their leadership and management skills and helps them find solutions to the challenges they face.

The next strategy for novice school principals is to collaborate with the community to get support and active participation in school activities. To create a harmonious relationship between school administrators and the community, cooperation, and communication from both parties simultaneously and comprehensively is very important (Umar, 2016). One step that can be taken is to establish parent committees or periodic communication forums to involve them in the decision-making process and school activities. School principals can also work with local institutions such as community organizations, NGOs, and companies to obtain financial, material, and volunteer support (Perpétue et al., 2024). In addition, initiating partnership programs with the business sector and local governments can support various school projects and initiatives, such as infrastructure improvement or procurement of Education resources. Through assistance from various parties, novice school principals can feel helped in carrying out their duties. In addition, school programs can also be run more effectively so that the desired educational goals can be achieved faster.

The involvement of these strategies helps novice school principals to be more effective and efficient in carrying out duties and responsibilities. Based on the findings in the study, it can be concluded that challenges for novice school principals do exist, including in the primary schools of the buffer municipality of Surakarta. Therefore, it is important to implement effective strategies to overcome these challenges and improve schools' overall quality. In another sense, by

implementing the right strategies, novice principals can better face challenges and succeed in leading the school.

CONCLUSION

Principals of beginner primary schools in the buffer areas of Surakarta Municipality face various challenges, such as lack of experience and knowledge, lack of resources, and lack of support from the community. In an effort to overcome these challenges, school principals use various strategies, such as attending training and seminars to improve self-capacity, building networks with other schools to share knowledge and resources, and collaborating with the community to gain support and active participation in school activities. These strategies assist principals in carrying out their duties and responsibilities more effectively and efficiently. Future research can be more in-depth in exploring the internal factors (such as motivation, leadership skills, and management) and external factors (such as government policies, socio-economic conditions of the community, and educational infrastructure) that affect the performance of novice principals. In addition, researchers can further examine how teachers and staff are involved in supporting principals and strategies to improve collaboration and cooperation in achieving school goals.

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