

School Principal Leadership Practices in the Implementation of School-Based Management: A Qualitative Case Study at SD Negeri 11 Air Kumbang

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji praktik kepemimpinan kepala sekolah dalam implementasi Manajemen Berbasis Sekolah (MBS) di SD Negeri 11 Air Kumbang. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus untuk memperoleh pemahaman yang komprehensif mengenai peran kepemimpinan dalam konteks sekolah tersebut. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi langsung, wawancara mendalam dengan kepala sekolah, guru, tenaga administrasi, serta komite sekolah, dan analisis dokumen sekolah yang relevan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan empat peran utama kepemimpinan, yaitu kepemimpinan demokratis dan partisipatif dalam pemberdayaan guru, pengelolaan keuangan yang transparan dan akuntabel, penguatan hubungan kemitraan dengan masyarakat, serta strategi adaptif dalam mengoptimalkan sumber daya yang terbatas. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya praktik kepemimpinan kontekstual dalam mendukung implementasi MBS secara efektif di tingkat sekolah.

Kata kunci: Manajemen berbasis sekolah; kepemimpinan kepala sekolah; studi kasus kualitatif; transparansi keuangan; partisipasi masyarakat

Abstract

This study examined the leadership practices of a school principal in implementing School-Based Management (SBM) at SD Negeri 11 Air Kumbang. The research employed a qualitative case study design to obtain a comprehensive understanding of leadership roles within the school context. Data were collected through direct observation, in-depth interviews with the principal, teachers, administrative staff, and school committee members, as well as analysis of relevant school documents. The findings revealed four central leadership roles: democratic and participatory leadership in empowering staff, transparent and accountable financial management, active public relations engagement with the community, and adaptive strategies in optimizing limited resources. The principal demonstrated initiative in addressing local challenges while maintaining alignment with SBM principles. These findings highlight the significance of contextual leadership practices in supporting effective SBM implementation at the school level.

Keywords: School-based management; school leadership; qualitative case study; financial transparency; community participation

1. INTRODUCTION

Educational decentralization has become a dominant reform strategy aimed at improving efficiency, responsiveness, and quality in school systems worldwide. Within this reform landscape, School-Based Management (SBM) has been widely implemented as a governance model that reallocates decision-making authority from central authorities to individual schools. Leaver, Lemos, and Scur (2023) argue that improvements in school management quality are strongly associated with better organizational outcomes, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. Similarly, Bruns, Filmer, and Patrinos (2019) emphasize that granting schools greater control over planning and budgeting can enhance accountability and service delivery when leadership capacity is adequate.

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Despite these expectations, evidence suggests that decentralization does not automatically generate improved student performance. OECD (2020) reports that school autonomy yields positive results only when embedded within coherent accountability frameworks. Complementing this perspective, Malen and Rice (2018) explain that accountability structures must function alongside autonomy to ensure responsible governance, thereby preventing managerial fragmentation.

The theoretical foundation of SBM rests upon the premise that local actors possess contextual knowledge necessary for effective decision-making. Caldwell (2016) contends that meaningful autonomy allows schools to align resources with strategic priorities; however, such autonomy requires skilled leadership to translate discretion into measurable improvement. In parallel, Bjork (2016) notes that decentralization reforms in developing contexts often depend heavily on the interpretive role of school leaders in navigating policy ambiguity.

Within this governance shift, the role of the school principal has evolved significantly. Bush (2018) explains that modern school leadership integrates managerial competence with instructional direction to sustain improvement efforts. Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2017) further demonstrate that leadership practices directly focused on teaching and learning exert stronger effects on student achievement than general administrative coordination.

Instructional leadership research reinforces the centrality of principals in shaping educational outcomes. Liu and Hallinger (2016) show that principal leadership influences teacher professional learning and school climate, which subsequently affect student performance. Extending this analysis, Pietsch, Aydin, and Gümüş (2023) provide meta-analytic evidence that instructional leadership is positively associated with student achievement across diverse cultural contexts.

Beyond instructional dimensions, distributed leadership perspectives offer additional insight into effective school governance. Harris (2017) argues that leadership distributed among teachers and staff strengthens collaborative culture and shared accountability. Supporting this view, Tao, Abdul Kadir, and Kamarudin (2025) conclude in their systematic review that distributed leadership correlates with improved school effectiveness when participatory structures are embedded within organizational routines.

Teacher empowerment and professional collaboration constitute essential mechanisms for sustaining SBM reforms. Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner (2017) emphasize that sustained, collaborative professional development enhances instructional capacity. Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018) describe collaborative professionalism as a critical condition for organizational learning, suggesting that principals who empower teachers cultivate adaptive school cultures.

Community engagement further strengthens decentralized governance models. Epstein (2018) highlights that structured family and community partnerships improve school transparency and shared responsibility. In a complementary analysis, Louis and Murphy (2017) argue that trust-based relationships between leaders and stakeholders enhance institutional legitimacy and learning-oriented environments.

Financial transparency remains a cornerstone of SBM implementation. Transparency International (2019) underscores that clear reporting systems and participatory budgeting reduce governance risks in public institutions. Reinforcing this argument, a study on Indonesian school financial governance (Pradana, 2022) finds that transparent management of operational funds increases stakeholder trust and supports reform sustainability.

Leadership adaptability is particularly relevant in resource-constrained settings. Day, Gu, and Sammons (2016) observe that resilient leaders navigate contextual challenges through flexible strategies. Similarly, Gümüş et al. (2020) conclude that leadership capacity significantly moderates the relationship between policy reform and school-level outcomes in developing countries.

Global education analyses also emphasize leadership quality as a defining feature of high-performing systems. Schleicher (2018) identifies strong school leadership as a common characteristic among top-performing education systems. Pont (2020) further argues that policy frameworks supporting leadership development are essential for sustaining systemic reform.

School improvement literature reinforces the argument that leadership operates as a mediating mechanism between policy and classroom practice. Chapman et al. (2016) assert that improvement efforts succeed when leadership aligns vision, culture, and resource allocation. Printy and Liu (2021) demonstrate that collaborative leadership strengthens teacher commitment and instructional coherence.

Research on school autonomy effects also provides nuanced perspectives. Thien and Adams (2021) find that autonomy produces varied outcomes depending on leadership effectiveness and organizational culture. In addition, Spillane (2017) conceptualizes leadership practice as a socially distributed phenomenon shaped by interactions among actors within specific institutional contexts.

In the Indonesian setting, SBM has been institutionalized to enhance participatory governance and school accountability. Bandur (2018) observes that variations in implementation are closely linked to principal leadership competence. Complementing this finding, Bandur, Hamsal, and Furinto (2022) report that successful SBM practices depend on strategic stakeholder engagement and contextualized management approaches.

Although macro-level research has established statistical associations between leadership and performance, contextualized qualitative insights remain limited. Gümüş and Bellibaş (2020) argue that cross-national studies often overlook the daily enactment of leadership within individual schools. This gap underscores the need for in-depth exploration of leadership roles within specific institutional contexts.

Taken together, the literature indicates that SBM effectiveness is contingent upon leadership practices that integrate autonomy, accountability, collaboration, financial transparency, and stakeholder participation. Leadership emerges not merely as an administrative function but as a strategic driver that shapes how governance reforms are translated into school-level action.

SD Negeri 11 Air Kumbang represents a primary school actively implementing SBM within its local administrative environment. Investigating how the principal mobilizes resources,

empowers teachers, engages stakeholders, and manages financial processes provides an opportunity to illuminate the contextual dynamics of SBM implementation. Therefore, this study aims to explore and describe the school principal's leadership role in implementing School-Based Management at SD Negeri 11 Air Kumbang. The guiding research question is: What is the school principal's leadership role in implementing School-Based Management (SBM) at SD Negeri 11 Air Kumbang?

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to obtain an in-depth and holistic understanding of the school principal's leadership role in implementing School-Based Management (SBM) at SD Negeri 11 Air Kumbang. A qualitative case study is appropriate when a researcher seeks to explore a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context and clearly defined boundaries (Yin, 2018). The research site was SD Negeri 11 Air Kumbang, a public primary school actively implementing SBM. The site was selected purposively because it represents a school engaged in decentralized management practices and provides access to rich contextual data. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, which allows researchers to identify information-rich cases relevant to the research focus (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The school principal served as the key informant, while several teachers, administrative staff, and representatives of the school committee were included as supporting informants to provide multiple perspectives and enable data triangulation.

Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Direct observations were conducted to examine the principal's daily leadership activities, including the facilitation of meetings, coordination with teachers and administrative staff, and management of school programs and facilities (Anufia, 2019). Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with the principal to explore leadership strategies, decision-making processes, and challenges in SBM implementation, while additional interviews with teachers and school committee members were conducted to obtain broader perceptions of leadership practices. Relevant documents, such as the School Budget Work Plan (RKAS), meeting minutes, school self-evaluation reports, and curriculum planning documents, were also analyzed to corroborate observational and interview data.

Data analysis followed an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2019). During data reduction, transcripts and field notes were coded to identify recurring patterns related to leadership roles in SBM implementation. Data display involved organizing coded information into thematic categories and narrative descriptions to facilitate interpretation. Conclusions were developed through iterative comparison across data sources to ensure consistency and coherence. Thematic analysis procedures were applied systematically to enhance transparency and analytical rigor, following guidelines for trustworthy qualitative research (Nowell et al., 2017). To ensure credibility and overall rigor, the study applied trustworthiness criteria including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Triangulation across interviews, observations, and documents strengthened credibility, while detailed contextual descriptions supported transferability of findings.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The data analysis revealed four central leadership roles enacted by the principal in implementing School-Based Management (SBM) at SD Negeri 11 Air Kumbang: participatory leadership and staff empowerment, financial management and transparency, community engagement, and adaptive resource optimization.

First, the principal demonstrated participatory and supportive leadership practices. Observations and interviews indicated that decision-making processes were not conducted unilaterally. Teachers were actively involved in planning and evaluating school programs. Senior teachers were entrusted with responsibilities as coordinators in specific areas such as curriculum and student affairs. They were given discretion to design and implement programs aligned with the school's vision. Informants consistently described the principal as a motivator who encouraged collaboration and professional initiative among staff members.

Second, financial management emerged as a central aspect of leadership practice. Analysis of the School Budget Work Plan (RKAS) and meeting documentation showed that financial planning processes were conducted transparently. Budget allocations, including the use of operational assistance funds (BOS), were openly discussed in meetings involving teachers and the school committee. Priority expenditures were directed toward instructional support, including teacher development activities and procurement of learning materials. Participants emphasized that transparent budgeting increased internal trust and clarity regarding school priorities.

Third, the principal performed a significant role in managing external relations. Observational data showed that communication with the school committee and parents was conducted regularly. Rather than limiting interaction to formal reporting, the principal actively invited stakeholder participation in school activities. For example, during a classroom improvement initiative, parents contributed voluntarily to facility enhancement efforts. This pattern of engagement indicated that the principal positioned the school as a collaborative community institution rather than a closed administrative entity.

Fourth, the findings highlighted adaptive and efficient leadership practices. The principal demonstrated initiative in addressing operational challenges without waiting for directives from higher authorities. When confronted with limited ICT learning resources, the principal organized internal workshops where teachers with higher digital competence supported their colleagues. This strategy optimized existing human resources and reduced financial burdens. Overall, the principal exhibited a proactive orientation toward problem-solving and resource management within existing constraints.

Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the central role of leadership in operationalizing SBM principles at the school level. The participatory leadership practices observed in SD Negeri 11 Air Kumbang reflect distributed leadership characteristics, where authority is shared and teachers are actively involved in organizational processes. This aligns with Harris (2017), who emphasizes that distributed leadership strengthens collaborative cultures and collective responsibility within schools. The delegation of responsibilities to senior teachers further demonstrates how leadership can function as a shared practice rather than a hierarchical directive.

The principal's focus on instructional support and teacher empowerment also resonates with research highlighting the impact of leadership on professional learning. Robinson et al. (2017) argue that leadership actions directly related to teaching and learning exert stronger influence on school effectiveness than purely administrative coordination. The internal workshop initiative identified in this study reflects an instructional orientation that prioritizes capacity-building over short-term procedural compliance.

Financial transparency emerged as a foundational component of SBM implementation in this case. The open discussion of budget allocations and inclusion of the school committee in financial planning processes reflect accountability mechanisms emphasized in decentralized governance frameworks. OECD (2020) notes that school autonomy contributes positively to performance when embedded within transparent accountability systems. The findings of this study suggest that financial openness fosters trust and strengthens stakeholder engagement in school development initiatives.

Community participation practices identified in this research further reinforce the collaborative dimension of SBM. The principal's active engagement with parents and the school committee aligns with Epstein's (2018) framework on school-family partnerships, which highlights the importance of shared responsibility in educational improvement. By inviting stakeholders to participate in decision-making and facility enhancement efforts, the principal translated policy-level expectations of participation into tangible community involvement.

Finally, the adaptive leadership behaviors demonstrated by the principal correspond with broader literature emphasizing leadership resilience in resource-constrained contexts. Day et al. (2016) explain that effective school leaders respond to contextual challenges through flexible and innovative strategies. The internal reallocation of teacher expertise to address ICT limitations illustrates how adaptive leadership can compensate for structural resource shortages. This finding supports the argument that leadership capacity mediates the relationship between policy reform and practical implementation.

Taken together, the results indicate that SBM effectiveness in SD Negeri 11 Air Kumbang is not merely a product of structural autonomy but is shaped by leadership practices that integrate participation, transparency, collaboration, and adaptability. The study contributes to existing literature by providing contextualized insight into how these dimensions are enacted within a specific primary school setting.

4. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to answer the question of how the school principal at SD Negeri 11 Air Kumbang carries out leadership roles in implementing School-Based Management (SBM). Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the principal plays an important role in ensuring that SBM is implemented in daily school practices. The principal shows leadership through involving teachers in decision-making, delegating responsibilities, managing school finances transparently, maintaining communication with parents and the school committee, and finding practical solutions when resources are limited. These actions indicate that SBM in this school is not only a formal policy but is practiced through collaborative and accountable leadership.

The results suggest several practical actions. For school principals, it is important to continue strengthening participatory leadership by consistently involving teachers and stakeholders in planning, budgeting, and evaluation activities. For teachers, active involvement in school programs and professional collaboration should be maintained to support school development. For school committees and parents, regular participation in meetings and school initiatives should be encouraged to strengthen transparency and shared responsibility. For local education authorities, providing regular training for principals on leadership, financial management, and school governance can help support effective SBM implementation.

This study was conducted in one primary school, so the findings are limited to this context. Future research can involve more schools or different regions to compare leadership practices in SBM implementation and to gain broader insights.

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