

Leadership Competencies: A School Leader Evaluation

Isnada Waris Tasrim

Universitas Muhammadiyah Palu, Indonesia

Email: isnadawt@uho.ac.id

Abstract

This study aimed at examining how teachers evaluate their principal's leadership competencies in terms of principal-staff relation, organization, and building management, student relationship, curriculum and program development, community, and parent relation. This descriptive qualitative research was conducted at elementary and middle schools. The subjects were 30 teachers. The data were gathered using the Performance Evaluation of Education Leader. The data were analyzed qualitatively and descriptively reported. The findings revealed that the principals at the two schools show different results. The principal of elementary school effectively performs in principle-staff relations, students' relationships, and community and parent relations. Meanwhile, the principal of middle school shows effective performance not only in the above three-mentioned aspects but also in organization and building management as well as curriculum and program development.

Keywords: a School Leader Evaluation, Leadership Competencies

INTRODUCTION

Effective leadership within educational settings is crucial for fostering both a high-quality learning environment and the overall success of a school (Abdul Ghani, 2020). Principals, as the central figures in educational leadership, bear the responsibility of managing not only the daily operations of the school but also fostering positive relationships with staff, students, parents, and the larger community. Their leadership competencies extend beyond routine administration; they encompass the strategic management of organizational structures and curriculum development (Aslanargun, 2021). These elements are essential for creating an atmosphere where both teaching and learning can thrive.

In the realm of educational research, leadership competencies have become a significant focus because they directly impact the school's performance (Barber, & Mourshed, 2023). A principal's ability to inspire and guide their staff, support students, and engage parents and the community reflects the broader goals of education. Research continues to emphasize the importance of leadership that nurtures collaboration, trust, and a shared vision for school improvement. As a result, educational systems worldwide increasingly recognize the value of developing leadership programs that enhance these competencies in school leaders.

The current study seeks to understand how teachers perceive their principals' leadership effectiveness, focusing on both elementary and middle school environments. These two educational settings were chosen due to their distinct organizational structures and developmental needs, which can influence how leadership competencies are expressed and

perceived. By exploring these two environments, the research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of leadership dynamics across different educational stages.

The evaluation of principals' leadership is centered on six key areas: the relationship between the principal and staff, the management of the school's physical and organizational structures, the quality of relationships with students, the development and implementation of curriculum and programs, and the engagement with parents and the community. Each of these domains is critical for the smooth operation of a school and its ability to meet educational goals effectively. The study examines these domains individually to assess how leadership competencies are exhibited and perceived in practice.

By focusing on these six areas, the study aims to provide insights into the differences and similarities in leadership styles between principals in elementary and middle schools. The distinct demands of these two educational levels mean that principals may need to prioritize different competencies. For instance, while elementary school principals might focus more on fostering relationships with younger students and engaging parents closely, middle school principals may need to emphasize organizational management and curriculum development to meet the academic needs of older students.

Ultimately, this study contributes to the growing body of research on educational leadership by highlighting how different school environments shape leadership practices. The findings will offer valuable implications for leadership development programs, helping to tailor training and support for principals based on the specific needs of their schools and communities. By doing so, it can inform policy and practice aimed at enhancing school leadership and, consequently, the quality of education.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to explore teachers' evaluations of their principals' leadership competencies (Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 2023). A qualitative methodology was deemed appropriate for this research because it allows for a deep and comprehensive understanding of the participants' subjective experiences and perceptions. Specifically, this approach facilitates a detailed examination of how teachers perceive the effectiveness of their principals' leadership across multiple domains within the school environment, providing rich insights that are not easily captured by quantitative methods. The focus on descriptive analysis enabled the researchers to present the findings in a manner that reflects the participants' lived experiences without imposing predetermined categories or hypotheses.

Subjects

The study involved 30 teachers from both elementary and middle schools, who were chosen as the primary subjects due to their direct experience with school leadership on a daily basis. These teachers were asked to evaluate their respective school principals' leadership competencies, offering valuable perspectives from two distinct educational environments. By including teachers from both elementary and middle schools, the research aimed to capture any variations in leadership evaluation that might arise from the different developmental and organizational contexts of these two educational levels.

Data Collection Instrument

To collect data from the participants, the researchers used the Performance Evaluation of Education Leader (PEEL) instrument. This tool was specifically designed to measure the effectiveness of school leadership across several critical areas, including the relationship between the principal and staff, the management of organizational and physical structures, interactions with students, the development and execution of curriculum and programs, and relations with the community and parents. The PEEL instrument provided a structured yet flexible framework for capturing detailed evaluations of leadership performance across these varied dimensions, ensuring that the data collected would be comprehensive and relevant to the study's objectives.

Data Analysis

The data gathered from the PEEL instrument were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. This method allowed the researchers to systematically identify key themes, patterns, and differences in how teachers evaluated their principals' leadership competencies. By focusing on thematic analysis, the study was able to highlight both the strengths and areas for improvement in the leadership styles of the principals under review. The findings were then reported descriptively, presenting a clear and detailed account of how leadership was perceived by the teachers in each school context. This descriptive reporting was crucial for conveying the nuances of the participants' evaluations, offering insights that can inform future leadership development initiatives.

RESULTS

The analysis of the leadership performance between the elementary and middle school principals revealed notable differences in their effectiveness. The findings suggest that each principal exhibited distinct strengths based on the needs and organizational contexts of their respective schools.

The Elementary School Principal demonstrated strong capabilities in key relational areas, particularly in fostering positive relationships with staff and students. This principal was also highly effective in engaging with the broader school community, including parents. Teachers at the elementary school expressed satisfaction with the principal's ability to build a supportive and collaborative school environment. This focus on relationships was highlighted as a crucial factor in maintaining a conducive learning atmosphere for young students.

On the other hand, the Middle School Principal not only excelled in these same relational domains but also demonstrated a higher level of competency in organizational management and curriculum development. This principal's leadership was particularly effective in managing the school's physical resources and overseeing curriculum and program innovations. Teachers at the middle school recognized the principal's broader leadership skills, which addressed the complex academic and structural demands of middle school students. Compared to the elementary school, the middle school principal's leadership was seen as more comprehensive, encompassing both relational and operational excellence.

DISCUSSION

The findings from the study suggest that both principals demonstrated effective leadership; however, the principal of the middle school displayed a broader range of competencies, especially in organizational and curriculum management. These differences in leadership effectiveness can be attributed to the distinct challenges and expectations presented by elementary and middle school environments. While both principals were successful, the middle school principal had a more expansive leadership scope, addressing the more complex demands of older students and a larger institutional structure.

The middle school principal's strength in curriculum development and organizational management likely reflects the increased complexity of managing a middle school. At this level, students are undergoing a transition into more advanced academic expectations, necessitating a well-structured curriculum and efficient organization. The ability to balance these demands while also maintaining strong relationships with staff and students demonstrates the middle school principal's well-rounded leadership skills, making them highly effective in this more demanding environment.

In contrast, the elementary school principal excelled in relational leadership, focusing primarily on building and maintaining strong relationships with staff, students, and parents. This focus aligns well with the developmental needs of younger students, who require a supportive and nurturing environment as they begin their educational journey. The elementary school principal's approach is well-suited to creating a stable and cohesive learning atmosphere for younger children, where interpersonal relationships are often the foundation of effective leadership.

These findings underscore the critical role that context plays in evaluating school leadership. The distinct developmental needs and operational demands of elementary and middle schools call for different leadership approaches. While both principals were effective, their strengths reflect the specific requirements of their respective educational settings. The middle school principal's broader focus on organizational and curriculum management speaks to the more structured and academically rigorous environment of middle schools, whereas the elementary school principal's emphasis on relationships is essential for fostering early childhood development.

Evaluating leadership competencies in schools, therefore, must take into account the unique challenges and expectations of each educational level. Principals are required to adapt their leadership styles to meet the needs of their students and staff, and the effectiveness of their leadership can vary based on how well their competencies align with these needs. Leadership evaluations should, thus, be tailored to reflect the varying demands of elementary versus middle school environments.

In conclusion, the study highlights that while both principals were competent in their leadership roles, the specific context of their schools played a significant role in shaping their leadership priorities. As such, leadership development programs should focus on equipping school leaders with a diverse set of skills that can be adapted to different educational contexts, ensuring that they can effectively meet the varying challenges of elementary and middle school leadership.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that both principals demonstrated effective leadership, but their specific competencies were closely aligned with the distinct needs of their respective schools. The elementary school principal excelled in areas that required strong interpersonal relationships and community engagement, which are critical in nurturing young learners. On the other hand, the

middle school principal displayed a broader range of leadership skills, particularly in organizational management and curriculum development, addressing the more complex academic and administrative demands of middle school education. These findings emphasize the importance of context in evaluating leadership effectiveness, as different school environments necessitate varying leadership approaches to meet their unique challenges and objectives.

For future research, expanding the sample size could enhance the generalizability of the findings. A larger and more diverse group of participants would allow for a broader understanding of how leadership competencies manifest across different types of schools. Additionally, conducting comparative studies across different regions may provide valuable insights into how school leadership varies in diverse educational contexts. Such research could help identify whether cultural, socio-economic, or regional factors influence the way leadership is enacted and evaluated, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of effective school leadership on a wider scale.

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