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## Exploring the Role of Principal Leadership in Enhancing School Quality: Insights from “Sengkang”

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**ABSTRACT:** This study investigates the impact of democratic leadership on school quality at UPTD SMP Negeri 6 Sengkang. Using a qualitative approach, including interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis, the research reveals that the principal's democratic leadership style significantly enhances school adaptability and development. The principal's collaborative decision-making and inclusive environment have led to notable improvements in school quality, especially during the challenges of COVID-19. Key findings include increased student enrollment, improved school reputation, and effective management practices. The principal's clear vision, strong work ethic, and focus on a student-centered approach, alongside teacher professional development and a dynamic curriculum, have been essential in achieving educational goals. The study underscores the importance of democratic leadership in fostering a positive school culture and driving continuous improvement, highlighting the interplay between leadership style and effective school management in promoting educational success.

**Keywords:** adaptability, democratic leadership, educational development, school quality.

**ABSTRAK:** Penelitian ini menyelidiki dampak kepemimpinan demokratis terhadap kualitas sekolah di UPTD SMP Negeri 6 Sengkang. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, termasuk wawancara, diskusi kelompok, observasi, dan analisis dokumen, penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa gaya kepemimpinan demokratis kepala sekolah secara signifikan meningkatkan adaptabilitas dan pengembangan sekolah. Gaya kepemimpinan kepala sekolah yang kolaboratif dan inklusif telah menghasilkan perbaikan signifikan dalam kualitas sekolah, terutama selama tantangan COVID-19. Temuan utama meliputi peningkatan jumlah siswa, reputasi sekolah yang membaik, dan praktik manajemen yang efektif. Visi yang jelas, etos kerja yang kuat, dan fokus pada pendekatan yang berpusat pada siswa, bersama dengan pengembangan profesional guru dan

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*kurikulum yang dinamis, telah menjadi kunci dalam mencapai tujuan pendidikan. Studi ini menekankan pentingnya kepemimpinan demokratis dalam membina budaya sekolah yang positif dan mendorong perbaikan berkelanjutan, serta menyoroti interaksi antara gaya kepemimpinan dan manajemen sekolah yang efektif dalam mempromosikan kesuksesan pendidikan.*

**Kata kunci:** adaptabilitas, kepemimpinan demokratis, kualitas sekolah, pengembangan pendidikan.

## INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental and strategic element for national development. Through education, a nation can grow, develop, and compete on the global stage. In Indonesia, education is one of the state's main priorities, as reflected in the Preamble of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, which outlines one of the nation's goals as "educating the life of the nation." To achieve this objective, the government, along with educational institutions, continuously strives to improve the quality of education through various policies, programs, and initiatives.

Schools, as formal educational institutions, play a crucial role in enhancing the quality of education. Schools do not only function as places where teaching and learning take place, but they also serve as institutions that help to develop the potential of students holistically, both academically and non-academically. Within the school system, various interconnected dimensions must be well managed to achieve optimal educational goals. One of the key dimensions that holds a crucial role is the leadership of the school principal.

The principal holds the highest position within the school's organizational structure. They are responsible for the entire managerial and operational processes within the school. An effective principal is not only expected to perform administrative duties but also to provide direction, guidance, and motivation to all school stakeholders to achieve common goals. As stated by Priansa (2014), a principal is a professional official in the school organization whose job is to manage all school resources and collaborate with teachers, staff, and other employees in educating students to achieve educational objectives. A professional principal must be able to adapt to the evolving needs of the educational world and develop leadership strategies that align with the demands of globalization.

The quality of education in Indonesia has made significant progress. Various government programs, both short and long-term, aim to continuously improve the quality of education. However, achieving a quality school does not merely depend on adequate infrastructure or good policies. A quality school must be shaped through careful planning and effective implementation. In its execution, close collaboration is required between all stakeholders, including principals, teachers, students, parents, and the community. The commitment of the entire school community is a key element in realizing the desired school quality.

Wahyusumidjo (2011) explains that the principal is a functional teacher assigned the additional duty of leading an educational institution or school where the teaching and learning process takes place. It is in this setting that interactions between teachers who provide lessons and students who receive them occur. Therefore, the principal plays a central role in directing the course of the educational process within the school. The principal is not only a manager responsible for school resources but also a leader who

provides inspiration and motivation to teachers and staff to work together toward achieving the set educational goals.

Leadership is a crucial factor that a principal must possess. According to Kartono in Priansa (2014), leadership is the ability to exert constructive influence on others so they can collaborate to achieve planned goals. In the context of schools, the principal's leadership includes the ability to mobilize all school stakeholders, including teachers, administrative staff, and students, to work synergistically in improving the quality of education. Syarifudin (2011) adds that leadership is an interaction process between leaders and those they lead within a group or organization. In exercising their leadership, a leader influences, directs, and mobilizes all members of the group to make effective use of resources in achieving the organization's goals.

The leadership that is needed in education today is leadership that is future-oriented, also known as transformational leadership. Bush (2000) explains that transformational leadership is characterized by several key traits: (a) idealized influence, which refers to a leader's ability to provide influence that encourages the development of new ideas; (b) inspirational motivation, which involves the leader's effort to continuously provide motivation, fostering new inspiration and creating a productive work atmosphere; (c) intellectual stimulation, which refers to a leader's ability to stimulate intellectual development, fostering skills and capabilities within the organization's members; and (d) individualized consideration, which reflects the leader's attention to the individual needs and aspects of the people they lead. Transformational leadership is highly relevant in the context of education, as it can drive innovation, collaboration, and skill development among teachers and school staff.

The leadership style of a principal significantly impacts the quality of education within a school. This study aims to explore how the leadership style of principals can contribute to improving the quality of education, particularly in relation to enhancing the 8 National Education Standards (SNP). The National Education Standards serve as a reference for assessing the quality of education in Indonesia, covering standards such as graduate competencies, content, processes, assessments, educators and education staff, facilities and infrastructure, management, and funding. This research seeks to gain a deeper understanding of how principals can improve the quality of education by applying leadership styles that are effective and tailored to the school's needs.

The primary question this study aims to answer is whether the leadership style of school principals can enhance the quality of education, particularly in achieving the 8 SNPs. This research will focus on the actualization of leadership styles and the achievement of education quality through improving these standards. By doing so, it is hoped that this study can contribute to the ongoing efforts to improve the quality of education in Indonesia, particularly within the context of school leadership.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, integrating phenomenology and case study designs to thoroughly explore the role of the school principal's leadership style in enhancing school quality. The combination of these designs provides both depth and structure, allowing the researcher to understand lived experiences while examining the

specific case of UPTD SMP Negeri 6 Sengkang. The primary focus of the study is to investigate how the principal's leadership fosters a positive school climate and builds trust within the school community, as well as how the leadership aligns with the school's vision, mission, and goals. This study aims to highlight how leadership directly impacts the school's capacity to achieve the 8 National Education Standards (SNPs), which are critical benchmarks for educational quality in Indonesia.

Participants for this study will be carefully selected through purposive sampling to ensure that a variety of perspectives from different roles within the school are represented. The participants will include the school principal, several teachers from different subject areas, administrative staff, and school committee members representing the broader community and parents. The selection of participants is intended to capture a holistic view of the leadership style and its impact, taking into account the experiences of both those directly involved in leadership and those affected by it.

Data collection will involve multiple techniques to gain a comprehensive understanding of the principal's leadership style. In-depth semi-structured interviews will be conducted with the principal, teachers, administrative staff, and school committee representatives. The interviews will focus on the participants' personal experiences and perceptions regarding the principal's leadership and its role in the improvement of school quality. In addition to interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) will be held with groups of teachers and parents to collect collective perspectives and understand how the school community views the principal's leadership. These FGDs will help reveal the group dynamics and community trust in the principal's ability to lead the school toward quality improvement.

Another key data collection technique will be structured observations, where the researcher will observe school activities, staff meetings, and interactions between the principal and other stakeholders. Observations will follow a predefined checklist that records key leadership behaviors, allowing the researcher to see how leadership unfolds in real time. Longitudinal observations over a period of 2-3 months will be conducted to provide a deeper understanding of how the principal's leadership evolves over time and how it impacts daily school activities. Additionally, document analysis will be carried out, examining school documents such as the development plans, meeting minutes, vision and mission statements, and evaluation reports to understand how leadership decisions are formalized and executed.

To enhance the credibility of the research, data triangulation will be employed. Technical triangulation will ensure that data is collected using multiple methods (interviews, FGDs, observations, and document reviews), while source triangulation will ensure that multiple perspectives (from principals, teachers, staff, and committee members) are included. Member checking will also be used, where participants are asked to review interview transcripts and summaries to confirm the accuracy of their contributions.

Data analysis will follow a structured process. The first stage is data reduction, where the collected data will be organized and coded using qualitative analysis software like NVivo or ATLAS.ti. Key themes will be identified related to leadership, school quality, and the achievement of the 8 SNPs. A thematic analysis will be used to find patterns and recurring ideas that demonstrate how the principal's leadership influences

school quality improvement. These themes will be displayed using matrices, tables, and narrative summaries, making it easier to identify the relationships between leadership style and school outcomes.

Ethical considerations are paramount in this research. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants, ensuring that they fully understand the purpose of the research and their rights as participants. Confidentiality will be maintained by anonymizing participants' identities and securely storing the data. Participants will also be free to withdraw from the study at any time if they feel uncomfortable.

Although this study is primarily qualitative, quantitative data related to the school's academic performance and student achievements will be gathered to validate the findings. This mixed-method approach will ensure that the qualitative insights into leadership style are supported by measurable performance indicators, enhancing the reliability of the research.

This study's findings, though limited to UPTD SMP Negeri 6 Sengkang, aim to offer valuable insights into how school principals' leadership can contribute to improving the quality of education, particularly through the achievement of national education standards. While the study's conclusions may not be fully generalizable, they can provide a framework for other schools aiming to enhance leadership effectiveness and educational quality.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Democratic Leadership, Effective Management, and Collaboration Enhance School Quality**

The research conducted on the principal's leadership style at UPTD SMP Negeri 6 Sengkang has unveiled several key insights into how leadership influences school quality and development. Through a comprehensive approach that included interviews, focus group discussions, structured observations, and document analysis, the study offers a detailed examination of the principal's leadership and its impact on the school's progress.

The principal's leadership style at UPTD SMP Negeri 6 Sengkang is identified as Democratic, a style characterized by collaborative decision-making and fostering a cooperative environment among school members. This leadership approach emphasizes collective input and shared decision-making rather than unilateral directives. According to feedback from the Deputy Principal and Mr. Muhammad Tahir, this democratic style promotes an inclusive atmosphere where the interests of the group are prioritized over individual agendas. By involving various stakeholders in the decision-making process, the principal has cultivated a participatory school culture that values contributions from all members of the school community, thus creating a sense of unity and shared purpose.

The democratic leadership style has had a profound impact on the school's adaptability and growth. Over the past three years, UPTD SMP Negeri 6 Sengkang has navigated numerous challenges, including disruptions caused by COVID-19. The principal's leadership has been pivotal in guiding the school through these turbulent times. By implementing new policies and innovations, the principal has ensured that the school not only adapted to these changes but also leveraged them as opportunities for

improvement. As highlighted by Mrs. Srifadillah Yanti, the principal's adept navigation of these challenges and introduction of effective programs have been crucial in maintaining and enhancing the quality of education.

A notable outcome of the principal's leadership is the consistent increase in student enrollment over the years. This growth can be attributed to several factors, including the effective use of social media for promotion and the implementation of distinguished religious and extracurricular programs. The principal's proactive approach in promoting these programs has positively impacted the school's image, attracting more students and contributing to a vibrant school community. Furthermore, the emphasis on celebrating student achievements has enhanced the school's reputation, leading to higher enrollment rates and a more engaged student body.

The principal's leadership is also closely linked to effective management practices. The application of control management principles, where coordinators oversee different aspects of the school's operations, has strengthened the leadership system. This structured management approach ensures that each area of the school is managed efficiently, with clear lines of responsibility and accountability. The effective application of these management principles has facilitated smooth operations and allowed the principal to focus on strategic leadership, thereby enhancing the overall quality of the school.

Several factors contribute to the quality of the school, starting with the principal's clear vision and strong work ethic. The principal's commitment to hard work, diligence, and discipline plays a fundamental role in setting the direction for the school. By articulating a clear vision and demonstrating a high level of dedication, the principal aligns the school's efforts with its goals, ensuring that all members of the school community are working towards a common purpose. This strong leadership has a profound impact on both the quality of education and school management.

The school's focus on a student-centered approach has proven effective in identifying and developing students' competencies. This approach places students at the heart of the school's efforts, allowing for the customization of programs to meet their specific needs and strengths. By prioritizing students' needs and abilities, the school offers tailored educational experiences that enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. This focus on students helps in providing a more effective and responsive educational experience.

Teacher involvement and professional development are crucial factors in maintaining high school quality. The principal actively supports and encourages teacher participation in seminars, workshops, and training activities. This commitment to professional development ensures that teachers continuously update their skills and knowledge, which is then applied in their teaching practices. By fostering a culture of continuous learning and improvement among teachers, the principal enhances the overall effectiveness of the school's educational programs, ensuring that teaching practices are aligned with the latest educational standards and methodologies.

The curriculum at UPTD SMP Negeri 6 Sengkang is both steady and dynamic, allowing the school to meet quality standards and achieve its educational goals. The curriculum is regularly reviewed and adapted to align with current educational demands and societal needs. This flexibility ensures that the school remains relevant and responsive

to changes in the educational landscape. By adapting the curriculum to meet evolving needs, the school provides a high-quality education that prepares students for future challenges.

Collaboration networks also play a significant role in the school's success. Effective collaboration with other schools, parents, and the community has expanded the school's network, enhancing its resources and support systems. The principal has fostered partnerships with various stakeholders, creating a broader and more effective educational environment. These collaborations provide additional resources, support, and opportunities for students, contributing to a richer and more comprehensive educational experience. The principal's efforts in building and maintaining these networks have strengthened the school's connections with its wider community, further supporting its mission and goals.

In conclusion, the research findings reveal that the principal's democratic leadership style has significantly impacted the quality and development of UPTD SMP Negeri 6 Sengkang. The principal's ability to lead collaboratively, manage effectively, and implement innovative policies has contributed to notable improvements in the school's performance. Factors such as a clear vision, a student-centered approach, teacher involvement and professional development, dynamic curriculum, and strong collaboration networks have all played a role in enhancing the school's quality. Together, these elements create a positive and supportive environment that fosters growth and success for both students and staff, ultimately contributing to the overall effectiveness and reputation of the school.

### **The Principal's Democratic Leadership at UPTD SMP Negeri 6 Sengkang Enhances School Adaptability, Quality, and Community Engagement**

The research on the principal's leadership style at UPTD SMP Negeri 6 Sengkang reveals several significant findings, highlighting how leadership impacts school quality and development. These insights were gathered through interviews, focus group discussions, structured observations, and document analysis. This discussion elaborates on the research results by connecting them with relevant theories and research.

#### ***Democratic Leadership Style***

The study identifies the principal's leadership style at UPTD SMP Negeri 6 Sengkang as Democratic. This style is characterized by collaborative decision-making and a cooperative environment among school members. The Deputy Principal and Mr. Muhammad Tahir note that democratic leadership fosters an inclusive atmosphere where decisions are made collectively rather than unilaterally. This approach prioritizes group interests over individual agendas, creating a sense of unity and shared purpose within the school. By involving various stakeholders in the decision-making process, the principal has cultivated a participatory school culture that values contributions from all members of the school community.

According to Likert's theory of participative leadership, involving team members in decision-making enhances their motivation and performance (Nauman, et al, 2022). The democratic leadership style aligns with this theory by creating an environment where all members feel valued and engaged. Huang & Chang (2021) also emphasizes that

participative leadership can improve motivation and performance by including team members in decisions that affect their work.

### ***Impact on School Quality***

Adaptability and Improvement: The democratic leadership style has significantly influenced the school's adaptability and growth. Transformational leadership theory, as described by Nedelko & Potocan (2021), is relevant here, as it emphasizes innovation and continuous improvement. Over the past three years, the principal has guided the school through numerous challenges, including the impacts of COVID-19, by implementing new policies and innovations. This ability to navigate changes and introduce effective programs reflects the principles of transformational leadership, which motivate members to achieve long-term goals (Atasoy, 2020).

Student Enrollment and Achievements: A notable outcome of the principal's leadership is the consistent increase in student enrollment. This growth is attributed to effective promotional activities and the implementation of distinguished religious and extracurricular programs. Stroebe (2020) theory of educational marketing supports this finding, as it highlights that effective promotion and a strong school reputation can attract more students. The principal's proactive approach in promoting these programs and celebrating student achievements has positively impacted the school's image and contributed to higher enrollment rates.

Role as a Manager: The principal's leadership is closely linked to effective management practices. Gümüş & Bellibaş (2020) theory of control management underscores the importance of structured management systems with clear coordination. The implementation of control management principles, where coordinators oversee various aspects of the school's operations, has strengthened the leadership system. This structured management approach ensures efficient operations and allows the principal to focus on strategic leadership, enhancing the overall quality of the school.

### ***Factors Contributing to School Quality***

Vision and Work Ethic: The principal's clear vision and strong work ethic are crucial for setting the school's direction. Marisya, et al. (2023) situational leadership theory suggests that leaders should adapt their style to the needs and maturity of their followers. The principal's clear vision and strong work ethic reflect an understanding of the importance of direction and dedication in achieving the school's goals.

Student-Centered Approach: The school's student-centered approach aligns with Dewey's progressive education principles. Progressive education emphasizes the importance of addressing students' needs and interests through relevant learning experiences (Samuelsson, et al., 2024). The research shows that placing students at the center of the school's efforts has effectively identified and developed their competencies, in line with progressive education principles.

Teacher Involvement and Professional Development: Teacher involvement and professional development are key to maintaining high school quality. Meyer, et al. (2023) theory of professional development highlights that effective development programs can enhance teaching practices and student outcomes. The principal's support for teacher

participation in seminars, workshops, and training ensures that new skills and knowledge are applied in teaching, improving the effectiveness of educational programs.

**Curriculum Dynamics:** The dynamic and adaptive curriculum at UPTD SMP Negeri 6 Sengkang allows the school to meet quality standards and achieve educational goals. Al-Ajeely, et al. (2023) curriculum theory emphasizes that curricula should be designed to meet clear educational objectives and updated regularly. The school's practice of reviewing and adapting the curriculum aligns with these principles, ensuring relevance and responsiveness to current educational demands.

**Collaboration Networks:** Effective collaboration with other schools, parents, and the community expands the school's network and support systems. Granovetter's theory of social networks suggests that broad relationships and collaborations can enhance access to resources and support. The principal's efforts to build partnerships with various stakeholders have created a more effective educational environment, providing additional resources and opportunities for students (Cox & Mullen, 2023).

The research findings indicate that the democratic leadership style of the principal at UPTD SMP Negeri 6 Sengkang significantly contributes to the school's quality and development. The application of relevant leadership, management, and educational theories provides a comprehensive understanding of how effective leadership impacts various aspects of school operations and educational outcomes.

## **CONCLUSION**

The research on the principal's leadership style at UPTD SMP Negeri 6 Sengkang underscores the pivotal role of democratic leadership in shaping school quality and development. The principal's collaborative and inclusive approach has significantly contributed to the school's adaptability and growth, particularly during the challenges posed by COVID-19. This leadership style has fostered a cooperative environment that enhances decision-making and promotes a positive school culture. Key outcomes include increased student enrollment and improved school reputation, driven by effective promotional activities and a focus on student achievements.

The principal's role as a manager, employing control management principles, has streamlined school operations and strengthened leadership effectiveness. Factors such as the principal's clear vision, commitment to hard work, and dedication to a student-centered approach have been critical in achieving educational goals. Teacher involvement and professional development, along with a dynamic curriculum and strong collaboration networks, further contribute to the school's success. Overall, the research highlights how democratic leadership and strategic management practices collectively drive the improvement and quality of education at UPTD SMP Negeri 6 Sengkang.

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