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The Strategic Role of the Principal as an Administrator in Enhancing the Effectiveness of Administrative Services in Faith-Based Private Schools

Aljuprianus Susar

State University of Malang, Indonesia

Yohanes Laga Payong

State University of Malang, Indonesia

Imron Arifin

State University of Malang, Indonesia

Ali Imron

State University of Malang, Indonesia

Mustiningsih

State University of Malang, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT: This study aims to analyze the strategic role of the principal as an administrator in enhancing the effectiveness of administrative services in Catholic-based private schools. Catholic schools possess a distinctive character in integrating spiritual, moral, and managerial values into institutional governance. In this context, principals are required not only to demonstrate administrative competence but also to uphold spiritual integrity and a strong commitment to the mission of Catholic educational service.

This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study method conducted at a Catholic senior high school in East Nusa Tenggara. Specifically, the study seeks to describe the role of the principal of SMAK Frateran Maumere in improving the effectiveness of administrative services. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation, and subsequently analyzed using data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing techniques. The validity of the data was ensured through triangulation, extended observation, and respondent validation.

The findings indicate that the principal plays an active role as an administrator by: (1) collaboratively formulating administrative service plans with the teaching staff; (2) consistently implementing the established plans; (3) evaluating their implementation through regular meetings, supervision, and monitoring; and (4) viewing challenges as motivation and advantages as responsibilities.

KEYWORDS: principal, administrator, catholic school, administrative services, effectiveness

INTRODUCTION

Catholic-based private schools play a vital role in shaping students' character to become not only intellectually competent but also morally and spiritually mature. Within the Catholic education system, the principal serves not merely as an educational manager but also as a pastoral leader who embodies the spirit of service and Gospel values in the administration of education (Purnama, 2020).

Administrative services in schools constitute an integral part of school management, supporting the implementation of teaching and learning activities, student development, personnel management, and the administration of finances and assets. In Catholic schools, administrative services must reflect a spirit of order, responsibility, transparency, and service to others.

However, not all Catholic schools are able to implement effective administrative systems. Several challenges, such as limited human resources, lack of professional training, and weak coordination, often lead to suboptimal administrative performance. Therefore, the principal's role as an administrator is crucial in determining the direction and quality of school administrative services.

The implementation of regional autonomy through Decree of the People's Consultative Assembly (TAP MPR) No. XV/MPR/1998 and Law No. 25 of 2000 has encouraged positive changes in educational management. Educational autonomy grants schools the flexibility to innovate and create according to their specific needs, while the government functions as a facilitator rather than a controller. Consequently, schools become centers of learning services while still adhering to the quality standards and accreditation requirements set by the government.

In the era of globalization, improving the quality of human resources has become a top priority. Hence, education plays a crucial role in developing intellectual capacity, morality, and individual responsibility. Changes within the education system are evident in the emergence of various elementary school models, such as excellent schools, integrated schools, holistic schools, and international schools.

The delegation of autonomy to schools is based on the assumption that educational institutions possess both internal components (teachers, students, curriculum, facilities) and external linkages (relations with other institutions) that mutually support the achievement of educational goals. Therefore, decision-making and policy formulation must actively involve the school community.

School autonomy implies that schools are granted the freedom to manage resources according to their priorities, while also involving the community in supporting and monitoring the educational process. This effort aims to improve educational quality through the empowerment of each school's potential.

The success of school autonomy largely depends on the leadership of the principal, particularly in managing human and material resources. The principal acts as a key figure in planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating school activities. In the role of an administrator, the principal manages the entire administrative system; while as a supervisor, the principal mentors and guides teachers and staff.

A competent and visionary principal can positively influence teachers' performance, while the absence of effective leadership may hinder the learning process. Therefore, the principal bears a significant responsibility for ensuring that every aspect of school administration and development operates effectively.

This study aims to provide an empirical description of how principals in Catholic schools play their strategic role in enhancing the effectiveness of school administrative services.

POLICY REVIEW

According to the *Congregation for Catholic Education* (Smith & Nuzzi, 2007; Smith, 2007), Catholic school principals are entrusted with three main responsibilities: as witnesses, leaders, and managers. They are expected to serve as models of faith, exercise pastoral leadership, and manage schools with a high degree of professionalism. The principal's role must embody Catholic spirituality across all dimensions of school governance, including administrative management.

Educational administration is defined as the process of planning, organizing, mobilizing, and supervising educational resources to achieve learning objectives and character formation (Yuniarti, 2013). In the Catholic context, administration also emphasizes the values of service, honesty, and justice.

The effectiveness of administrative services is determined by their speed, accuracy, accessibility, and stakeholder satisfaction. According to Robbins et al. (2012), organizational effectiveness is achieved when goals are realized through the efficient and meaningful utilization of resources. Riani and Ain (2022) explain that a strategic principal not only performs administrative functions technically but also designs policies, empowers staff, and cultivates an organizational culture. In Catholic schools, this entails building an administrative system that aligns with the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity.

Principals hold a strategic role in advancing schools, as they are responsible for all aspects of school management—from supervising teachers and staff to maintaining relationships with the community. The success of a school largely depends on the quality of its leadership (Gurr et al., 2006). Educational quality is influenced by multiple factors, including teacher competence, infrastructure, and the learning environment. However, the principal, as the school administrator, is the key determinant of school effectiveness (Hoy, 2008). Scheerens and Bosker even rank principal leadership as the foremost factor among thirteen determinants of educational effectiveness.

Weak administration and leadership make it difficult for schools to achieve their goals. The overall quality of a school can often be traced back to the competence of its principal (Goolamally & Ahmad, 2014; López Rupérez et al., 2022). Consequently, the government defines seven core roles for school principals: as educator, manager, administrator, supervisor, leader, innovator, and motivator (Hale & Moorman, 2003). Each role entails specific responsibilities in character formation, resource management, administrative planning, professional supervision, inspirational leadership, instructional innovation, and work motivation.

As an administrator, the principal is responsible for planning, implementing, and evaluating the entire administrative system of the school, including curriculum, finance, facilities, and community relations. The ability to manage effective administration is vital for ensuring that the school operates efficiently and achieves its educational objectives (Kaufman et al., 2020).

The effectiveness of administrative services depends on the precision of their execution. Principals must possess the competence to understand, manage, and carry out all administrative activities professionally in order to support smooth teaching and learning processes (Díez et al., 2020).

Although national standards for educational management have been established, their implementation in regions such as East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) continues to face challenges. Nevertheless, SMAK Frateran Maumere has demonstrated significant progress, both in national examination results and other achievements. The school has even gained national recognition as a model school, an *Adiwiyata Nasional* (environmentally friendly school), and a *PASCH* partner (German Foreign Ministry initiative), which attests to the principal's effectiveness in managing and advancing the educational institution (Wijayanti et al., 2021; Schneider, 2003).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative method with an intrinsic case study approach, aiming to gain an in-depth understanding of a specific case without testing theories or examining variable relationships. The research object was studied in its natural context, holistically and dynamically.

The study was conducted at SMAK Frateran Maumere, located in Sikka Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, managed by the *Mardi Wiyata* Educational Foundation under the supervision of the Provincial Department of Education. The site was selected due to its unique characteristics, making it an appropriate subject for in-depth exploration.

The primary data sources consisted of words and actions from informants, supported by documents as secondary data. Data collection techniques included observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted systematically with prior notice to informants. Interviews were carried out in a structured manner but evolved as necessary to gather more comprehensive insights regarding the principal's administrative role. Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman model, encompassing three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

To ensure data validity, several validation techniques were employed, including prolonged engagement, triangulation, and member checking with informants. Data were considered valid when the reported findings were consistent with the actual conditions observed in the field.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

As both an administrator and an educational policy leader, the principal plays a central role in designing and managing effective and efficient administrative service planning. Such planning aims to ensure that administrative implementation proceeds in a structured, systematic manner aligned with the school's vision and mission to optimally achieve educational goals (Robbins et al., 2012).

In the context of SMAK Frateran Maumere, the principal carries out the planning of administrative services by considering several key aspects, including:

1. Developing an annual work program that integrates elements of service, spirituality, and professionalism. Every administrative activity is designed to support the school's Catholic mission, emphasizing courteous service, respectful communication, and orderly documentation.
2. Providing administrative staff not only with technical training but also with Catholic character formation through retreats, Masses, and weekly reflections. This fosters discipline, honesty, and a spirit of service.
3. Implementing a computer-based administrative system to manage student, personnel, financial, and assessment data, monitored directly by the principal and vice principals.
4. Conducting quarterly evaluations of administrative services through meetings between the principal and the management team. Feedback from teachers and students is also incorporated into the review process.
5. Positioning administrative services as part of the school's pastoral identity, characterized by polite, responsive, and transparent service. This has become a distinctive strength and competitive advantage of the school.
6. Performing SWOT analysis and needs assessment to identify internal and external factors influencing school administration (Susar et al., 2022), allowing for responsive and context-sensitive planning (Bryson et al., 2018).
7. Implementing participatory planning by involving teachers and staff in decision-making according to their respective roles and responsibilities, in line with participatory management principles that foster commitment and accountability (Yukl, 2012).
8. Establishing specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) administrative objectives to provide clear direction for program implementation (Doran, 1981).
9. Structuring work programs systematically to support administrative goals through detailed and scheduled operational activities (William et al., 1971; Neville, n.d.).
10. Selecting and assigning administrative personnel based on competence and qualifications to ensure optimal performance and adherence to standards (Oz et al., 1990).
11. Considering the adequacy of administrative facilities and infrastructure to support smooth service delivery (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).
12. Developing short-, medium-, and long-term plans to ensure sustainability in administrative management (Bryson et al., 2018).

These findings are supported by interviews with six key informants, consisting of the principal, two vice principals, and three teachers. They confirmed that the principal of SMAK Frateran Maumere has systematically and consistently implemented all stages of administrative planning, resulting in effective administrative services that support the realization of the school's vision.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion of this study, it can be concluded that the role of the principal as an administrator in enhancing the effectiveness of administrative services at SMAK Frateran Maumere encompasses several key aspects:

Planning: The principal has carried out the planning function of administrative services systematically. In this process, the principal involved various school stakeholders, including the teachers' council, and conducted situational analyses through SWOT analysis and needs assessment approaches.

Implementation: The planned administrative programs were implemented consistently by the principal in collaboration with the teachers' council and other school personnel. This demonstrates a strong alignment between the formulated plans and their actual implementation.

Evaluation: The principal conducted continuous evaluations of the implementation of administrative services. Evaluations were carried out through teachers' council meetings, both at the conclusion of activities and during the administrative service process, as a means of reflection and ongoing improvement.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors: In fulfilling these roles, the principal encountered both supporting and inhibiting factors that influenced the effectiveness of administrative services, originating from internal as well as external aspects of the school.

Recommendations:

To further optimize efforts in improving administrative services at SMAK Frateran Maumere, several recommendations are proposed:

For the Principal: It is recommended that the involvement of all school stakeholders—particularly the teachers' council be further strengthened during the planning stage of administrative services, especially in conducting SWOT analyses and needs assessments. Additionally, special

attention should be given to enhancing the pedagogical competence of school personnel. One possible strategy is to increase the frequency of *In-House Training (IHT)* or similar professional development programs to support staff professionalism.

For the Teachers' Council: Teachers are encouraged to play a more active role in contributing to the formulation of administrative plans by developing and sharing innovative and sustainable ideas, thereby continuously improving the quality and effectiveness of administrative services.

For the Foundation: The foundation is expected to be more responsive and attentive to operational needs identified in the field. Providing adequate facilities and infrastructure is essential to support the effectiveness of administrative services within the school.

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