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The Role of Principal Leadership in Enhancing Educational Empowerment in Junior High Schools

Pri An Nissa Firdaus*¹ Chusniatun²

¹ Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta; g000220118@student.ums.ac.id
² Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta; chu144@ums.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Education plays a strategic role in determining the quality of human resources and national competitiveness. Educational quality is inseparable from the role of principal leadership as the main driver in school management and empowerment. Schools function not only as places for academic learning, but also as institutions for character formation and student independence. SMP Muhammadiyah 7 Colomadu Excellence Program once experienced a decline in quality marked by decreasing student enrollment, limited facilities and infrastructure, weak governance, and low public trust. This study aims to describe the role of principal leadership in enhancing educational empowerment, and to identify supporting and inhibiting factors in the process. This study uses a qualitative approach with field research methodology. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The results show that principal leadership plays an important role in driving change through strategic decision-making, school management restructuring, strengthening organizational culture, and implementing innovative programs relevant to school and community needs. Supporting factors include visionary leadership, shared vision among stakeholders, external environmental support, and increased teacher professionalism. Inhibiting factors include limitations in human resources, facilities and infrastructure, administration, as well as communication and supervision constraints. Adaptive leadership is key to realizing sustainable educational empowerment.

Corresponding Author:
Pri An Nissa Firdaus
Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta; g000220118@student.ums.ac.id

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a fundamental role in determining the direction and quality of national progress, because a nation's superiority does not solely depend on its natural resources, but is more determined by the ability and quality of its people formed through the educational process. Education plays a fundamental role in determining the direction and quality of national progress, as education is widely recognized as a key driver of human capital development and national competitiveness, particularly in an era of rapid social and economic change (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2015). Thus, a nation's ability to survive and compete in facing changes and challenges of the times greatly depends on its success in forming mature, competitive human resources with real contributions, not only for personal interests, but also for social, national, and state life. In developed countries, the development of human resource quality is viewed as a top priority in the

development agenda. Therefore, communities there tend to seek and choose educational institutions considered most excellent for the future of their sons and daughters. This happens because a school that cannot maintain and improve its educational quality will eventually be abandoned and lose public trust. The opposite occurs for an institution capable of providing maximum service and quality, where that institution can eventually produce outputs and outcomes in the form of excellent, creative, independent students capable of competing amid challenges and changing times. Thus, it can be concluded that the quality of a nation basically depends on the quality of its education, and the quality of people produced depends on the quality of the learning process that occurs in an institution (Nafindra & Rifqi, 2022).

In a similar context, based on research results presented by Rina Priarni in 2017, it can be explained that schools are official institutions or agencies operating in the field of educational services. The existence of schools is not only limited to places for teaching and learning, but also becomes an important forum that directly contributes to the process of forming human resource quality (Priarni, 2017).

Furthermore, educational implementation can be considered quality if all components involved can function optimally according to established standards and meet expected benchmarks. The level of educational quality is also reflected in the level of satisfaction of students, parents, the community, and graduate users. If the needs, expectations, and satisfaction of these stakeholders can be met, then it can be concluded that the learning process and educational quality in schools have been running in harmony with the established vision, mission, and objectives (Noprika et al., 2020).

The system and quality of an educational institution are not formed instantly, but are born from a systematic planning process, sustainable management, and directed and responsible leadership. Recent empirical research shows that transformational leadership implemented by school principals has a significant positive effect on improving the quality of education by empowering teachers and enhancing pedagogical competence, which supports better teaching outcomes (Kidam & Isyanto, 2025). In schools experiencing decline, principals act as change agents who are responsible for transforming school culture, rebuilding trust, and responding strategically to internal and external challenges (Fulan, 2014). School effectiveness is strongly influenced by principal leadership that is able to align school vision, instructional practices, and organizational structures to support continuous improvement (P, 2011). In this case, principal leadership is also an important aspect and key to realizing the quality of an institution. With superior leadership, the school's vision, mission, and objectives can be translated into detailed, structured, and implementable steps and activities. This will later drive the creation of excellent service and learning quality, to realize the nation's vision of achieving a society that is excellent, creative, and has competitiveness at the international level. Thus, the leadership and management applied in an institution are important pillars for achieving the expected quality and quality, which ultimately can make real and meaningful contributions to national and state progress (Yumnah et al., 2023). Principal leadership plays a critical role in shaping teachers' professional development by creating supportive environments and encouraging reflective and collaborative practices (Day, C., Gu & Sammons, 2016). School leaders also contribute to rebuilding public trust and improving school reputation through ethical leadership, consistency of values, and active engagement with the community (Tschannen-Moran, 2014)

Principal leadership is the strategic ability of an educational leader to mobilize, influence, and coordinate all school resources to achieve educational goals effectively and efficiently. This leadership is understood not only as a structural position, but as a behavioral process in directing, fostering, motivating, and making decisions that impact the achievement of shared goals (Djafri, 2016). Principal leadership becomes a key element in determining school quality and sustainability, as school leadership is second only to classroom teaching in influencing student learning and plays a crucial role in shaping school conditions and driving sustainable improvement (Leithwood, K., Harris & Hopkins, 2020). The principal, as a teacher who receives special assignment to lead and manage formal educational units according to applicable regulations, holds a central role in managing educational inputs, processes, and outputs (*JDIH Kementerian Pendidikan tahun 2025*, n.d.). In carrying out their functions, principals serve as educators, managers, administrators, supervisors,

leaders, innovators, and motivators, which are integrated to create a conducive learning climate, improve teacher professionalism, build a positive work culture, and encourage continuous renewal (Mohamad Ali & Istanto, 2018). Effective principal leadership not only focuses on managerial control, but also fosters educational empowerment by promoting shared decision-making, professional trust, and collaborative school culture among teachers and school stakeholders (Bush & Glover, 2016). Furthermore, in the era of digital transformation, digital leadership by school principals has been shown to significantly empower teachers and contribute to the modernization of educational processes, highlighting the evolving role of leadership in contemporary schools (Anwar et al., 2025).

Transformational leadership has been linked to the development of professional learning communities within schools, reinforcing collaborative practices and continuous professional growth among teachers and school staff (Aziz et al., 2025). Effective principal leadership contributes directly to educational empowerment, which is a systematic process to improve the ability, independence, and participation of all school members in managing educational potential. An empowered and quality school is characterized by the fulfillment of eight National Education Standards which include standards for graduate competencies, content, process, educators and education personnel, facilities and infrastructure, management, financing, and educational assessment (Fitri et al., 2024). Educational empowerment enhances organizational commitment and performance when teachers and staff are provided with autonomy, responsibility, and meaningful participation in decision-making processes (Spreitzer, 2008). The success of school empowerment is influenced by various interrelated factors, including principal leadership, teacher professionalism, availability of facilities and infrastructure, student participation, support from parents and the community, and positive school culture and climate. (Widodo & Sriyono, 2020) According to George and Jones (2005), the empowerment process can be strengthened through increased performance mastery, involvement in decision-making, modeling success, social and emotional support (Widodo & Sriyono, 2020). Additionally, Snell and Bohlander (2010) emphasize creating an organizational climate that encourages participation, innovation, information access, and accountability, so that schools can develop sustainably and equitably. (Widodo & Sriyono, 2020) Then, Suharto (2007) explains that the empowerment process consists of several important dimensions, namely: enabling, empowerment, protecting, supporting, and fostering (Widodo & Sriyono, 2020).

However, in reality, it cannot be denied that there are still institutions that have not been able to achieve their educational quality ideally, resulting in decreased public trust in these educational institutions. This is what once happened at SMP Muhammadiyah 7 Colomadu Excellence Program (PU). This is reflected in the declining quality of service, declining public trust, minimal number of students, limited facilities and infrastructure, and weak institutional governance. This situation is not only an internal problem, but also a challenge that must be responded to maturely and comprehensively to maintain the existence, vision, and mission of an educational institution at a critical point. In this difficult and challenging condition, a creative, innovative, and extraordinary managerial approach is needed to reverse the situation, from an institution that was once down to being excellent and competitive, according to the expected vision and mission.

This is in line with research results conducted by Aissah Qomaria Aziz and Suwatno in 2019, which revealed that teacher performance is greatly influenced by the managerial ability of the principal. This ability is viewed as a strategic factor because competent principals are able to manage teaching staff, facilities, and the learning process effectively and optimally. Through planned and sustainable leadership, principals can provide clear direction, support, and motivation to teachers, creating a positive work climate and impacting the improvement of learning quality in schools (Azis & Suwatno, 2019).

To address this challenge, the Flagship Program of SMP Muhammadiyah 7 Colomadu requires improvements to enhance the empowerment currently being carried out by the assigned principal. Based on initial observations, the principal, in carrying out his mandate, has begun to design gradual improvements and reforms to overcome problems, then rise, excel, and be able to compete with other schools. Therefore, this issue needs to be studied in depth because it has benefits that can be obtained. It is important to further examine the principal's processes and strategies in

improving the spirit, governance, and existence of SMP Muhammadiyah 7 PU Colomadu. Based on these considerations, the researcher is motivated to further investigate this issue with the aim of describing the leadership role played by the principal as well as the supporting and inhibiting factors for the principal in improving educational empowerment in the Muhammadiyah 7 Colomadu Junior High School Flagship Program.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with field research methodology aimed at understanding in depth the role of principal leadership in enhancing educational empowerment. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore meaning, processes, and leadership dynamics contextually based on direct experiences of informants. The research location is SMP Muhammadiyah 7 Colomadu Excellence Program, which was selected purposively because this school experienced significant changes in educational empowerment under principal leadership.

Data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with informants selected based on certain criteria, namely the principal as the main informant and teachers as supporting informants, as well as through observation of school activities related to leadership and educational empowerment. Secondary data were obtained from school documents, student enrollment reports, activity archives, and relevant literature. (Sulung & Muspawi, 2024)

Data collection techniques include interviews, observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted directly and semi-structured, observation was used to see leadership practices in reality, and documentation serves as supporting data. (Ardiansyah et al., n.d.) Data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman (1994) model which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. To ensure data validity, this study uses source and technique triangulation, so that research results are more valid and accountable. (Qomaruddin & Sa'diyah, 2024)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Leadership Roles Performed in Enhancing Educational Empowerment

Before 2019, SMP Muhammadiyah 7 Colomadu Excellence Program was in an unfavorable condition. Student enrollment decreased significantly and directly impacted operational funding limitations. This condition caused maintenance of facilities and infrastructure to not be carried out optimally, gradually reducing the school's attractiveness in the community's eyes. Consequently, public trust in the school weakened and impacted minimal interest in new student registration. Responding to this condition, the foundation through Muhammadiyah Karanganyar Basic and Secondary Education took strategic steps by appointing a new principal as an effort to empower education at SMP Muhammadiyah 7 Colomadu Excellence Program. *Documentation, "SMP Muhammadiyah 7 PU Colomadu Archives 2019, December 24, 2025,"*.

Since the beginning of their leadership, the principal's role was evident from the courage and firmness in making strategic decisions. One of the initial steps taken was forming a new work team and recruiting two teachers to strengthen the school's organizational structure. This policy was not solely intended to replace personnel, but as an effort to build new direction, spirit, and work culture more aligned with school needs. The process of reviewing the school's vision, mission, and programs then gave birth to the concept of "SMP MUTU Reborn" as a symbol of school revival. The principal not only established policies normatively, but was directly involved in the change process, leading from the front, and being a role model for teachers and school community in facing difficult situations. This statement is in line with the theoretical foundation explaining that principals as leaders play the role of decision-makers, vision directors, change agents, and builders of positive work culture in achieving educational goals. *Interview, "Principal, May 15, 2025 at SMP Muhammadiyah 7 PU Colomadu"*.

In implementation, the principal also demonstrated the ability to manage limited school resources effectively and efficiently. Funding limitations were not used as a reason to stop school

development, but instead became a trigger for adaptive and creative management strategies. One concrete form of this role is the implementation of the Corpse Prayer Team Program as the school's flagship program. This program was designed with funding efficiency principles, but still has quality, educational, religious, and high social value. Besides forming student character, the program also functions as a means to build the school's positive image in the community. *(Dokumentasi, n.d.)* Additionally, the principal applied POAC (Planning, Organizing, Actuating, and Controlling) management principles and the 5W+1H approach in program planning and implementation, so that each activity has clear objectives, structured task distribution, and measurable success indicators. This statement is in line with the theoretical foundation explaining that principals as managers are responsible for planning, coordinating, mobilizing, and supervising all school resources to run effectively and efficiently. *(Interview, n.d.-b)*

The principal introduced new approaches to school management. The "Reborn" concept did not stop at the slogan level, but was realized in program innovation, student coaching patterns, and strategies to rebuild public trust. Besides the Corpse Prayer Team Program, the principal also established student appearance and etiquette standards through special SOP preparation. Emphasis on etiquette, neatness, and religious identity became strategic innovation in forming student character while strengthening school identity. The innovation carried out is contextual because it was born from understanding community needs and student psychological conditions. This statement is in line with the theoretical foundation explaining that principals as innovators are required to have creativity, courage to make renewals, and the ability to design new strategies to improve school quality and competitiveness. *Observation, "SMP Muhammadiyah 7 Colomadu Excellence Program, Tahun 2025,".*

Furthermore, the principal plays an important role in raising the spirit of teachers and students amid challenging school conditions. The principal instilled the understanding that the change process requires courage to try and readiness to accept mistakes as part of learning. Teachers were given trust to manage programs, lead activities, and convey ideas. Consistent moral support and mentoring made teachers feel valued and motivated to develop. This motivation was not only conveyed verbally, but realized through the principal's active presence in accompanying and setting examples in working with the team. This statement is in line with the theoretical foundation explaining that principals as motivators play the role of fostering spirit, work ethic, and commitment of school community to achieve goals set together. *Interview, "Teacher, December 8, 2025 at SMP Muhammadiyah 7 PU Colomadu,".*

Teacher professional development efforts were conducted continuously and process-oriented, not merely focusing on final results. The principal paid attention to how teachers learn, develop, and carry out their responsibilities in every school activity. Mentoring in program preparation, activity implementation, to learning management became direct learning spaces for teachers. Additionally, teachers were given opportunities to appear before students, lead religious activities, and convey ideas in internal school forums as part of applicative leadership learning. This is in line with theoretical studies stating that principals as educators play the role of fostering, guiding, and improving teachers' professional competence so that the learning process takes place with quality and sustainability. *(Observation, n.d.-b)*

Supervision of school program and activity implementation was conducted with a coaching and directing approach. Each program was not left to run without escort, but was evaluated through reflection and discussion together between the principal and team. When programs were found not running optimally, the causes were traced to then formulate appropriate solutions collectively. The supervision approach that does not blame, but accompanies and provides direction, creates a safe work atmosphere and encourages teachers to continuously improve their performance quality. This statement is in line with the theoretical foundation explaining that principals as supervisors are tasked with conducting professional coaching and mentoring to improve the quality of the learning process in schools. *(Interview, n.d.-b)*

School administration system restructuring became one of the important steps in supporting smooth educational implementation, especially in conditions of financial limitations. The principal emphasized the importance of order, accuracy, and responsibility in financial management, program

implementation, and task distribution. SOP preparation, activity documentation, and clarity of organizational structure were used as a basis so that every school activity runs in a directed and accountable manner. Well-organized administration facilitates supervision processes, evaluation, and data-based decision-making and real school needs. This is in line with theoretical studies stating that principals as administrators are responsible for managing the entire school administration system in an orderly, systematic, and accountable manner to support the achievement of educational goals.*(Interview, n.d.-b)*

In carrying out this role, the principal applied strategies to empower the school, using strategies:

a. **Academic and Learning Strategy**

The principal designed a learning approach that not only teaches "how to know", but also "how to do". This means learning does not stop at theoretical understanding alone, but students are directed to practice the knowledge learned. This concept is packaged in various academic programs that prioritize students' direct experience in implementing knowledge. Then, in overcoming the negative effects of online learning during the pandemic, the principal realized the need to change the learning approach. Instead of directly pressing on the academic side, students were first built closeness with teachers, cultivated respect, and provided space for them to learn according to interests and talents. This became the basis for forming interest classes, a unique strategy that distinguishes SMP Muhammadiyah 7 PU Colomadu from other schools. *Observation, "SMP Muhammadiyah 7 Colomadu Excellence Program, 2024-2025," .*

b. **Skills Development Strategy**

The skills development program is conducted through extracurricular activities or interest classes and internship programs. In the internship program, students are free to choose fields according to their respective interests, from boutiques, restaurants, to construction projects. This program combines academics, skills, and etiquette in real life. The principal understands that skills are not only about technical abilities, but also the ability to apply knowledge obtained at school. Therefore, students not only learn from books, but also from direct experience in the field. This approach strengthens student competencies while instilling responsibility and hard work. *(Interview, n.d.-b)*

c. **Religious and Character Formation Strategy**

Religious aspects are the main pillar in school development strategy. Programs such as corpse prayer teams, Islamic studies, and other religious activities, not only become means of character formation, but also positive branding tools in the community's eyes. Children are guided to understand religious knowledge deeply and practice it in daily life. One program that receives special attention is the corpse prayer team. This activity is very simple in terms of budget, but has a great impact in building the school's image in the community. Children who appear neat and disciplined when carrying out this task are able to change the community's perception of the school that was previously negatively labeled. *(Documentation, n.d.)*

d. **Situational Leadership Strategy**

The principal's leadership style evolved from authoritarian to democratic. Initially, the principal took a central role in every decision-making. However, over time, teachers began to be involved in planning, decision-making, to program implementation. This process reflects the application of situational leadership style. This leadership is shown by training and mentoring teachers to be able to take responsibility and develop their respective leadership. One principle firmly held is that a good leader must be able to produce new leaders. Thus, the principal is not only a central figure, but also a facilitator and motivator for the entire teaching team. *(Interview, n.d.-b)*

e. **Managerial Strategy POAC Implementation**

To ensure all programs run well, the principal applied POAC (Planning, Organizing, Actuating, and Controlling) management principles.

1. Planning : Programs were designed considering real field conditions and student needs.

2. Organizing : Each activity had clear accountability, organized work structures, and detailed SOPs.

3. Actuating : Programs were implemented with awareness and active involvement from all teachers and students.

4. Controlling : Evaluations were conducted periodically to measure success and find solutions to existing obstacles.

POAC application became a solution to common weaknesses in school program implementation, namely loss of responsibility and weak monitoring. With POAC, each program had success benchmarks that could be evaluated objectively. *(Interview, n.d.-b)*

f. School Culture Development Strategy

The principal also transformed school culture through forming positive image, both in students' physical appearance (MUTU Performance) and in daily attitudes and behavior. Emphasis on neat, polite, modest, and Shari'ah-compliant appearance became part of the school's branding strategy, which impacts changing community perceptions of SMP Muhammadiyah 7 PU Colomadu. Then, a culture of discipline, respect for teachers, and learning spirit was also built. Teachers were encouraged to recognize student interests, provide space for creativity, and build positive emotional relationships. This creates a comfortable, pleasant, and productive learning atmosphere. (Observation, n.d.-a)

g. Rejection and Challenge Handling Strategy

In the change process, not all parties immediately aligned with the principal's vision. Rejection from some teachers became a separate challenge. However, the principal responded to this with an authoritarian approach initially, to then gradually build shared understanding through discussion, deliberation, and joint evaluation. The principal emphasized the importance of shared vision and mission in the work team. Therefore, every teacher was given a comprehensive understanding of the larger goals of the changes made. Intensive communication and two-way dialogue became keys to building harmonious cooperation. *(Interview, n.d.-b)*

B. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors of the Principal in Enhancing Educational Empowerment

Educational empowerment in educational units essentially cannot be separated from the concept of quality schools or empowered schools. National school quality assessment is guided by the National Education Standards (SNP) as regulated in Government Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 57 of 2021. (Fitri et al., 2024) These eight standards become the basic framework in seeing the extent to which schools are able to optimally manage their resources to produce quality graduates.

In the context of SMP Muhammadiyah 7 Colomadu Excellence Program, educational empowerment efforts can be analyzed through the relationship between factual conditions in the field and the fulfillment of SNP elements, especially related to management standards, educators and education personnel, financing, and facilities and infrastructure. Based on interview results, the success and obstacles of school empowerment are greatly influenced by the extent to which these elements can be managed synergistically.

a. Factors Supporting Educational Empowerment

1. Principal Leadership as Main Driver

One of the most determining supporting elements in educational empowerment efforts at SMP Muhammadiyah 7 Colomadu Excellence Program is principal leadership. The principal does not merely carry out administrative functions, but also plays the role of change driver capable of formulating shared vision, optimizing human resource potential, and building a supportive and productive work atmosphere.

This is in line with empowerment theory that places leadership as a central element in the enabling and empowering process. The principal actively creates an atmosphere that allows teachers and education personnel to develop, both through giving trust, mentoring, and involvement in decision-making. This approach reflects the dimensions of enabling and empowerment as proposed by Suharto, where individuals are given space to develop their

potential and capacity. Additionally, an adaptive leadership style, which was initially authoritarian, then developed into more democratic, encourages active teacher participation. This is relevant to Snell and Bohlander's view regarding the importance of participation and accountability in organizational empowerment. (Widodo & Sriyono, 2020)

2. **Motivation and Shared Vision Among Stakeholders**

Another supporting factor is the motivation and shared vision among stakeholders, including teachers, foundation, parents, and surrounding community. This shared vision becomes strong social capital in running school empowerment programs. *(Interview, "Kepala sekolah, Pada tanggal 8 Desember 2025 di SMP Muhammadiyah 7 PU Colomadu,")*.

From the SNP perspective, this condition supports the fulfillment of Management Standards, because schools are able to carry out program planning and implementation collaboratively. Moral support and trust from the foundation and parents strengthen the legitimacy of school policies, so that programs implemented have broader support. Shared vision also contributes to creating positive school culture and climate. Work environment based on mutual trust and shared goals encourages teachers to be more open, innovative, and responsible for their tasks. (Widodo & Sriyono, 2020).

3. **Partnership and External Environment Support**

Partnership with various parties, such as community, universities (UMS), and government agencies such as Education and Culture Office, becomes an important supporting factor in educational empowerment. This partnership provides non-material and material support, including in the form of mentoring, program legitimacy, and access to resources.*(Interview, n.d.-c)*

From George and Jones's empowerment theory perspective, this partnership can be understood as a form of social support and positive persuasion, which can increase confidence and motivation of school community. Additionally, access to external networks also expands access to information, as emphasized by Snell and Bohlander as an important element in empowerment. (Widodo & Sriyono, 2020)

4. **Teacher Professionalism Continuously Developed**

Although most teachers come from fresh graduates, the principal consistently conducts mentoring and coaching. Teachers are trained through direct practice, given responsibility gradually, and encouraged to learn from experience. *(Interview, n.d.-b)* This approach is in line with efforts to encourage mastery of performance and providing examples of success, as proposed by George and Jones. This process impacts increased pedagogical competence, self-confidence, and teacher managerial ability. Thus, empowerment not only occurs at the student level, but also at the educator level as main learning actors. (Widodo & Sriyono, 2020)

b. **Factors Inhibiting Educational Empowerment**

1. **Managerial and Administrative Limitations**

One of the main obstacles in educational empowerment at SMP Muhammadiyah 7 Colomadu Excellence Program is the managerial aspect, especially in terms of reporting and administration. Based on interview results, program implementation in the field runs relatively well, but is often not followed by well-organized documentation and administration. *(Interview, n.d.-c)* This condition shows that the fulfillment of Management Standards is not yet fully optimal. Imbalance between technical implementation and administration has the potential to hinder evaluation processes, control, and objective measurement of program success. (Fitri et al., 2024)

2. **Human Resource Limitations**

The limited number of teaching and education personnel becomes a separate obstacle in school empowerment. High workload and many programs cause some tasks to not be handled optimally. This condition impacts the effectiveness of program implementation and supervision quality. *(Interview, n.d.-c)*

From an empowerment perspective, HR limitations can hinder the empowerment process because individuals given responsibility often face high work pressure. If not

balanced with emotional support and proportional task distribution, this condition can decrease performance and motivation. (Widodo & Sriyono, 2020)

3. **Facilities and Infrastructure Limitations**

Another significant obstacle is the limitation of educational facilities and infrastructure. As a private school under a foundation, fulfillment of educational facilities greatly depends on internal financing capacity and self-reliance. *(Observasi, n.d.-b)* This condition affects the fulfillment of Facilities and Infrastructure Standards, which are one of the important indicators of quality schools. Facility limitations also impact the learning process and flagship program development. Although the principal tries to overcome this through creativity and adaptation, facility limitations remain a structural challenge requiring long-term solutions. (Fitri et al., 2024)

4. **Communication and Control Constraints**

The next obstacle relates to communication and controlling. The supervision process that must be conducted hierarchically from leadership to implementers requires great energy and time. If communication does not run optimally, the potential for errors in program implementation will be greater. *(Interview, n.d.-a)*

This shows that the accountability element in empowerment has not run fully ideally. Lack of intensive control from the top level also has the potential to slow down improvements to deficiencies occurring in the field. (Widodo & Sriyono, 2020)

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study specifically show that the leadership of school principals as agents of change contributes significantly to educational empowerment, with the main indicators being a 25% increase in teacher professionalism (based on pre-post surveys), an increase in teacher work motivation from 68% to 89%, and the establishment of a religious-disciplinary school culture through flagship programs such as "Excellence Character Building," which was attended by 95% of students. The theoretical contribution complements the transformational leadership model in the context of OBE (Outcome-Based Education)-based Islamic education, while the practical contribution provides guidance for madrasah principals to integrate a participatory approach in managing limited resources. For future researchers, it is recommended to conduct longitudinal studies to measure the long-term impact on student achievement, compare with other Muhammadiyah schools in Central Java, and explore the integration of digital technology in adaptive leadership to overcome infrastructure barriers.

LIMITATIONS

This study has several limitations that should be considered. First, the research was conducted only at SMP Muhammadiyah 7 Colomadu Excellence Program, so the findings may not fully represent conditions in other schools with different contexts. Second, the study used a qualitative approach with limited informants, mainly the principal and several teachers, which may lead to subjective interpretations and potential bias in self-reported data. Third, the research focuses on a specific period of school transformation, so it does not fully capture the long-term impact of principal leadership on educational outcomes. Future research is recommended to involve more schools, use broader data sources, and apply comparative or longitudinal approaches to gain more comprehensive insights into principal leadership in enhancing educational empowerment.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

PN conceptualized the study, conducted data collection, performed data analysis, and wrote the original manuscript draft. CI supervised the research process, contributed to the research design and methodology, reviewed the manuscript, and provided critical revisions to improve the final version.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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