Principal Leadership and Academic Service Management in Indonesian Junior High Schools: Challenges and Opportunities

Muthahharah Thahir[1], Ananda Rachmaniar[2], Cucun Sunaengsih[3], Widiawati[4]
Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Ma'soem, Indonesia[1,2]
Elementary Teacher Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia[3]
Education, Universitas Negeri Padang, Indonesia[4]
Email: muthahharah.thahir@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: This study aims to determine the leadership capacity of school principals in improving the quality of academic service management. A mixed-method approach was employed, involving both public and private junior high schools in Gowa Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, with a total population of 523 teachers. Using Slovin's formula, a sample size of 231 teachers was selected. Data were analyzed descriptively using mean scores to assess various leadership capacity indicators. The findings indicate that school principals in SMP/MTs in Gowa Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia demonstrate strong leadership capacity in enhancing the management of academic service quality, reflected by an achievement level of 80.52%, which falls into the "good" category. This capacity is evidenced by their ability to make participatory decisions, communicate and coordinate effectively, and motivate school members. However, communication remains an area for improvement, as current practices are often top-down, limiting meaningful feedback and engagement from teachers and staff. The study recommends targeted capacity-building programs-such as leadership workshops, peer mentoring, and communication training-facilitated either through self-initiated development or with support from the regional Department of Education.

Keywords: academic services, principal leadership capacity, quality management, society Era 5.0.

ABSTRAK: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui kapasitas kepemimpinan kepala sekolah dalam meningkatkan mutu manajemen layanan akademik. Pendekatan yang digunakan adalah metode campuran, melibatkan SMP/MTs negeri dan swasta di Kabupaten Gowa, Sulawesi Selatan, Indonesia, dengan jumlah populasi 523 guru. Dengan menggunakan rumus Slovin, dipilih sampel sebanyak 231 guru. Data dianalisis secara deskriptif menggunakan nilai rata-rata untuk menilai berbagai indikator kapasitas kepemimpinan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepala sekolah di SMP/MTs di Kabupaten Gowa, Sulawesi Selatan, Indonesia menunjukkan kapasitas kepemimpinan yang kuat dalam meningkatkan manajemen mutu layanan akademik, tercermin dari tingkat pencapaian sebesar 80,52%, yang termasuk dalam kategori "baik". Kapasitas ini dibuktikan dengan kemampuan mereka untuk membuat keputusan partisipatif, berkomunikasi dan berkoordinasi secara efektif, dan memotivasi warga sekolah. Namun, komunikasi masih merupakan area yang perlu ditingkatkan, karena praktik saat ini sering kali bersifat top-down, sehingga membatasi umpan balik dan keterlibatan yang berarti dari guru dan staf. Studi ini merekomendasikan program pengembangan kapasitas yang terarah-seperti lokakarya kepemimpinan, pendampingan sejawat, dan pelatihan komunikasi-yang difasilitasi baik melalui pengembangan yang diinisiasi sendiri atau dengan dukungan dari Dinas Pendidikan.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a service-oriented institution, making the management of education quality essential for improving educational standards (Kuo et al., 2011). High-quality education is critical (Sahney et al., 2004). All schools are challenged to evolve as educational institutions while maintaining the quality necessary to become top-tier institution (Istifadah et al., 2022). As a result, service quality has become one of the critical aspects and prerequisites for building and sustaining satisfactory relationships with educational stakeholders(Ilias et al., 2009). Building quality education services requires active involvement from all school members in carrying out their roles effectively. Each educational institution must be capable of placing the needs of its customers—students, teachers, staff, and the community— proportionally and professionally to achieve the desired quality (Hoque et al., 2017) . The quality of service must accurately address the needs and activities of students, teachers, staff, and the community to ensure everyone is satisfied with the school's services(Thahir & Sa'ud, 2020). Therefore, high-quality service is not just essential but a necessity that requires special attention.

Implementing quality management is a strategic effort to ensure that academic services are delivered at an exceptional and optimal level. Quality management is a method of managing and enhancing an organization's overall effectiveness, efficiency, integration, flexibility, and competitiveness (Asif et al., 2011; Nurcahyo et al., 2019). Quality management relies on core principles and concepts that guide organizations toward high performance (Campatelli et al., 2011). Further, quality management is defined as an approach that prioritizes customer satisfaction, involving the participation of all members of an organization and aimed at long-term sustainability (Wiklund et al., 2003). In educational institutions, this approach must focus on the student learning experience (Zabadi, 2013), particularly in delivering academic services. Therefore, quality management in schools aims to ensure that services meet or exceed the expectations of students and other stakeholders.

Strong leadership is a crucial component of any organization that is, will be, or continues to develop (Bennis, 2010; Dixit, 2011; Soegiarto et al., 2024; Thahir et al., 2023). Today's successful school principals must understand the complexities of the school organization and work deliberately to foster a creative and safe learning environment that positively impacts school improvement (Erdogan & Dönmez, 2022; Hoy, 2012). Leadership is the main driving force behind the advancement of school services. The role of school principals in school improvement is particularly significant as they act as catalysts in creating a conducive learning environment for teachers and students (Harris, 2001). Then, the current education system is affected by the need for better management principles, effective leadership, and good governance (Hussain & Rizivi, 2015) . Effective school leadership, schools will be effective. This points to the need to build leadership and leadership capacity in schools (Daniëls et al., 2019; Dimmock, 2011).

Corresponding author: Muthahharah Thahir (muthahharah.thahir@gmail.com)

Numerous studies have examined the relationship between principal leadership and quality management (Daniëls et al., 2019; Dimmock, 2011; Hallinger & Lu, 2014; Kaiseroglou & Sfakianaki, 2020; Karacabey et al., 2022; Sigurðardóttir & Sigthorsson, 2015; Wiyono et al., 2019). However, despite the breadth of previous research, there remains a significant need for studies specifically examining school principals' leadership capacity in improving the quality management of academic services. Moreover, research suggests a need to improve school principals' skills or capacities in certain areas—precisely (Burkett, 2023; Derrington & Sharratt, 2008; Duncan, 2012; Sigurðardóttir & Sigthorsson, 2015; Spillane et al., 2009; Stewart & Matthews, 2015), the development of leadership capacity in quality management.

Capacity is often understood as an individual's ability to perform a given task (Huggins et al., 2016; Huggins & Hammonds, 2017). Numerous experts have defined capacity either the potential of an individual or a group or as a "habit of mind" (Mayotte et al., 2013; Newmann et al., 2000). Capacity is the quality that enables individuals and groups to learn continually from the world around them and apply these insights to new situations, allowing for pursuing objectives within an ever-changing context (Mitchell & Sackney, 2011; Stoll, 2009). Beyond these perspectives, Newmann et al. (2000) extend the concept of capacity across domains, including personal, interpersonal, and organizational aspects(Mitchell & Sackney, 2011; Sackney et al., 2005).

Leadership capacity involves establishing conditions within the school environment to achieve growth, self-renewal, and the development and distribution of leadership throughout the school organization (Gatelli et al., 2007; Piggot-Irvine et al., 2011). Thus, the leadership capacity of school principals is all the abilities, knowledge, and skills needed to influence all school members to jointly achieve school goals (Thahir et al., 2021). Principals' personal capacity includes integrating values, assumptions, beliefs, and practical knowledge brought by the principal and their professional network, along with the knowledge base with which they are associated (Mitchell & Sackney, 2011). Furthermore, that building the capacity of school leaders is essential to navigating the changing world of education (Stoll et al., 2002, 2006). Sustainable educational reform is achievable only when leadership is closely linked to developing individuals' social and academic capital within the school. Harris further suggests that school improvement leadership should prioritize developing capacities and conditions that enable continuous improvement (Harris, 2001; Harris et al., 2013).

Individual and organizational capacities are interdependent (O'Day et al., 1995). Consequently, a principal's efforts to enhance academic services within the school as an organization are interrelated (Nurmawati et al., 2023; Wirduna et al., 2022). The development of principals' leadership capacity is reflected in distributed leadership and expanding leadership within the school can potentially improve the organization's capacity, which, in turn, can lead to more effective utilization of intellectual and social resources. Leadership capacity is thus understood as an organizational concept involving broad and skilled participation in leadership tasks that contribute to school improvement (Lambert, 2006;

Corresponding author: Muthahharah Thahir (muthahharah.thahir@gmail.com)

Sigurðardóttir & Sigthorsson, 2015). Broad participation means that if the principal, most teachers, and a substantial number of parents and students are all engaged in leadership efforts, the school is likely to achieve a high level of leadership capacity that ultimately supports elevated student performance (Harris, 2001; Harris et al., 2013).

Leadership capacity is an organizational ability to lead and sustain efforts even when key individuals depart, involving specific individuals and role groups (Lambert, 2003). This leadership capacity encompasses several components: (a) engaging members in decision-making, (b) delegating authority, (c) facilitating open lines of communication, (d) developing human resources while considering interpersonal relationship patterns, and (e) focusing on quality (Suryana et al., 2020). A person's leadership role is essential in every organization, including educational institutions, and is also a core component of organizational dynamics, playing a critical role in achieving organizational goals. Furthermore, leadership involves efforts to influence others to participate in something. In the context of quality management implementation, the leadership capacity of a school principal is essential for executing quality management effectively to influence the entire school community so that the implementation of quality management is optimal. This implementation of quality management will be very effective and efficient with a leader with strong leadership capacity, making it highly unlikely to achieve the objectives of quality management, which aim to ensure high-quality educational services. By fostering leadership capacity in implementing quality management, it is expected that every individual within the school will be influenced positively, leading the school organization to realize more effective quality management practices. Additionally, this leadership capacity can inspire all school members to commit to and take responsibility for achieving and maintaining high-quality standards.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research on the leadership capacity of school principals. The population of this research comprises 523 individuals, including principals, teachers, and administrative staff from both public and private secondary schools in Gowa Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The sample for the study was determined using simple random sampling, guided by Slovin's formula, resulting in a total sample size of 231 participants.

This study focuses on a single variable: the leadership capacity of school principals. Quantitative data were collected using a Likert scale questionnaire, which offered four response options: never, sometimes, often, and always. Qualitative data were gathered through interviews that included several open-ended questions directed at the research participants to support the study's findings. Quantitative research data were processed and analyzed through several steps: 1) data tabulation, 2) calculation of average scores, and 3) determination of criteria. Data description was performed by calculating the average score for each question item. The calculation results are then analyzed by comparing them to the

Corresponding author: Muthahharah Thahir (muthahharah.thahir@gmail.com)

criteria guidelines. These criteria guidelines are processed with the following steps:

The highest score for each answer: $231\ x\ 4 = 924$
The lowest score for each answer: $231\ x\ 1 = 231$
The number of answer choices: 5 (becomes the number of interval classes)
Length of interval class

Based on these results, a classification table for the leadership capacity of school principals is obtained as follows:

Table 1. Classification Table for the Leadership Capacity of School Principals

Score Range	Classification Criteria
231 – 369,5	Very poor
369,6 – 508,1	Poor
508,2 – 646,7	Fair
646,8 – 785,3	Good
785,4 – 924	Very good

Qualitative research data were analysed through data reduction, data presentation, and data verification or conclusion drawing.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the data analysis regarding the leadership capacity of school principals indicate that secondary school principals in Gowa Regency, South Sulawesi Indonesia already have good leadership capacity to improve quality management. The research findings reveal that the achievement percentage for the leadership capacity of school principals is 80.52%. The processed data can be viewed in the following table.

Tabel 2. Principal's Leadership Capacity

Leadership	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always	Total	Average	%	Criteria
The principal can make participative decisions in quality management	1,73%	19,48%	31,60%	46,75%	749	3,24	81,06	Good
The principal can determine the direction of the school's quality management	2,16%	18,61%	33,33%	45,02%	746	3,23	80,74	Good
The principal is able to communicate	1,73%	19,91%	30,30%	47,62%	750	3,25	81,17	Good

Corresponding author: Muthahharah Thahir (muthahharah.thahir@gmail.com)

Leadership	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always	Total	Average	%	Criteria
effectively with all school members regarding the implementation of quality management								
The principal can influence school members to implement quality management	3,03 %	18,18%	34,20 %	43,72 %	740	3,20	80,09	Good
The principal motivates all members to maintain quality and provide the best services	1,73 %	19,48%	26,41 %	51,95 %	761	3,29	82,36	Good
The principal guides school members in the implementation of quality management	2,60 %	19,48%	29,44 %	47,62 %	748	3,24	80,95	Good
The principal fosters a culture of quality in the implementation of quality management for optimal outcomes	1,73 %	19,48%	37,23 %	41,13 %	735	3,18	79,55	Good
The principal is innovative in implementing quality management	2,16 %	19,48%	37,23 %	40,26 %	732	3,17	79,22	Good
The principal is willing to bear the risks of quality management decisions	2,16 %	19,48%	38,10 %	39,39 %	730	3,16	79,00	Good
Collaboration in comprehensive quality management	2,16 %	19,05%	31,17 %	46,75 %	749	3,24	81,06	Good

Corresponding author: Muthahharah Thahir (muthahharah.thahir@gmail.com)

Leadership	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always	Total	Average	%	Criteria
efforts to optimize school services								
	2,12 %	19,26%	32,90 %	45,02 %	744,0 0	3,22	80,52	Good

Based on Table 2 above, it can be concluded that the leadership capacity of secondary school principals in Gowa Regency, South Sulawesi Indonesia is well-established, with an achievement percentage of 80.52%. This figure indicates that secondary school principals in the Gowa Regency possess adequate leadership capacity in implementing quality management to enhance school services. A graphical representation of the level of principals' leadership capacity possessed by secondary school principals in Gowa Regency, South Sulawesi Indonesia can be seen in the following chart.
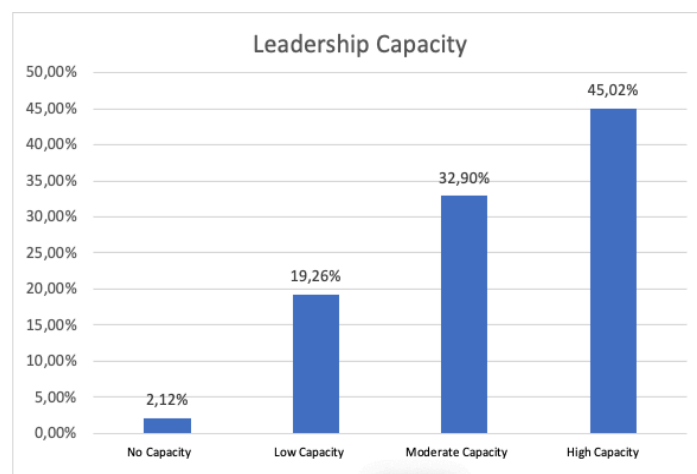

Figure 1. Graph of Leadership Capacity Level

Looking at the graph before, a significant majority of respondents, namely 45.02%, stated that principals possess a high capacity for leadership in this area. Additionally, 32.90% of respondents affirmed that principals exhibit a competent leadership capacity. These responses suggest that secondary school principals in Gowa Regency have the leadership capacity to implement quality management. Conversely, 19.26% of respondents stated that principals need more leadership capacity to implement quality management. Meanwhile, a minority of 2.12% of respondents stated that the principals did not have the leadership capacity to implement quality management properly. These calculations indicate that secondary school principals in Gowa Regency have the leadership capacity to implement quality management well. This means that when viewed from the leadership capacity of the principal, it can be concluded that the principal has the ability in terms of leadership to implement quality management well.

Quality management requires leadership that can guide school members toward achieving educational goals. In this context, principals must be capable of making decisions participatory. This requirement stems from the understanding

Corresponding author: Muthahharah Thahir (muthahharah.thahir@gmail.com)

that quality is a collective responsibility achieved through collaborative efforts. Responses from teachers and principals in the study indicate that principals can engage in participatory decision-making. Insights gathered from interviews with principals, teachers, and school committee members reveal that those efforts to foster participatory decision-making are evident through collaborative discussions involving all stakeholders. Decision-making occurs not only through deliberation but also by considering majority votes. In this process, principals invite all educational and non-educational staff and members of the foundation and committee to participate in meetings. Furthermore, principals emphasize that participatory decision-making is facilitated through meetings with the school development team. Each decision made by the principal is guided by the considerations outlined in the Teacher and Principal Management Professional Standards (TPMPS), as highlighted in the interviews.

In addition to the ability to make participatory decisions, the principal, as the driving force behind the school's organization, must be capable of determining the direction of quality management. Respondents, on average, indicate that principals, as leaders of educational organizations, are competent in determining the direction of quality management. According to statements made by the principals, they establish this direction through comprehensive planning, articulated in the school's Budget Work Plan or School Medium – Term Work Plan. This direction-setting also involves assessing the needs and circumstances of the school and its stakeholders. Furthermore, principals formulate policies that delegate responsibilities among teachers and staff, ensuring that quality management objectives are clearly defined. They also develop a series of implementation steps for quality management tailored to the school's resources and infrastructure in coordination with supervisory authorities and relevant institutions, such as school committees and community leaders involved in education, as highlighted in the interview results. Principals engage in coordination and communication with stakeholders to guide quality management effectively, demonstrating strong leadership qualities essential for managing a high-quality educational environment.

Practical communication skills are essential for principals responsible for maintaining school quality. As noted by teacher respondents, encouraging good communication with all stakeholders is a fundamental obligation of the principal. One effective strategy for facilitating this communication is the activation of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Additionally, the principal adopts a collegial approach to engage school members, which enhances overall participation. This communication is crucial for the principal to coordinate the implementation of quality management with all school personnel and to monitor its execution systematically. The principal conducts regular meetings, including monthly evaluation sessions, to facilitate communication. By maintaining effective communication, the principal can address and follow up on ideas, suggestions, and concerns raised by school members.

As we know, the essence of leadership lies in the ability to influence. For effective quality management to be implemented in schools, principals must be

capable of influencing all members of their school community. According to statements from research informants, including teachers and principals, the principals possess this capacity to influence. The efforts made by principals to exert their influence are primarily through effective communication and collaboration. Insights gathered from respondents, specifically teachers from the reference schools, indicate that influencing school members to implement quality management is achieved by leading by example, providing motivation, and offering rewards to those within the school community. Rewards and motivation are extended to the school's quality assurance team as part of these efforts

Influencing school members to both implement and embrace quality management is a challenging endeavor. To achieve this, principals employ various of strategies to motivate personnel, fostering a sense of ownership and passion for their work while ensuring rigorous internal and external oversight. Furthermore, principals communicate the implementation of quality management to all school community members, emphasizing its benefits and advantages as a means of exerting influence. Additionally, they provide guidance and encouragement to enhance their effectiveness as leaders in quality assurance.

Moreover, the principal's influence can be enhanced by increasing the involvement of school members in various activities. This includes engaging them in understanding school programs, participating in implementation activities, and monitoring and follow-up actions. Additionally, fulfilling the roles of educator, manager, administrator, leader, innovator, and motivator is essential for optimizing the principal's influence as a leader. School members, with their diverse characteristics, abilities, knowledge, and motivations, require encouragement from the principal to consistently uphold quality and deliver services that meet the school community's expectations. Therefore, motivating all school members is crucial for a principal. A straightforward form of motivation provided by the principal is leading by example. As expressed by one principal, motivating school members can be achieved by demonstrating the best practices and consistently reminding them of the importance of enhancing school services.

Overall, research participants indicated that the motivation provided by the principal is predominantly in the form of rewards. This includes recognizing teachers and students who excel, offering appreciation for activities that support quality programs, and providing comprehensive support for their implementation. One example of a simple reward is practiced by a reference school, where all members share a meal upon achieving a specific accomplishment or goal. Additionally, rewards or accolades are given by the principal to outstanding teachers and students as a form of appreciation, which motivates both themselves and other school members to demonstrate and attain their best performance, ultimately contributing to the realization of school quality.

In addition to motivating school members to implement quality management, the principal's critical responsibility is to guide the school community in executing quality management to ensure that high-quality services are delivered to the school's stakeholders. A fundamental aspect of practical guidance is communication skills. This was emphasized by an informant, the head of the

madrasah, who noted that a communication system is essential for providing direction. Similarly, the deputy principal highlighted that the principal consistently coordinates and maintains communication to ensure teachers and educational staff can promptly fulfil their responsibilities. When offering guidance, the principal communicates the advantages or benefits the school can gain if the quality program is successfully implemented and achieves optimal results.

The principal provides formal guidance through monthly meetings with the deputy principal, head of administration, and the treasurer to evaluate the program. Additionally, the principal directs all school members to adhere to school regulations, arrive on time, and effectively execute administrative tasks related to learning. This includes providing work instructions, ensuring workplace safety, facilitating quality management, and encouraging all school community members to enhance their competencies continuously. Overall, the form of guidance involves effectively implementing the eight competency standards, supporting activities such as regular and appropriate extracurricular programs and maintaining orderly administration as part of the school's quality culture.

Quality will be deeply rooted in every school member when it becomes built into their values, essentially becoming a shared culture. However, establishing a culture of quality is a challenging task. On average, principals have tried to ensure that quality becomes an integral part of the school culture. According to information provided by both principals and teachers, these efforts include: 1) performing tasks professionally; 2) adhering to discipline, striving to execute the teaching and learning process effectively, including its administration; 3) continuously improving work ethics and enforcing discipline among school members. These efforts are further supported by the statements of the madrasah principal, who emphasized that a culture of quality can be established through disciplined execution of tasks and professional conduct. The internalization of quality among teachers and principals is fundamentally built through programs oriented toward quality within the school. One of the principals emphasized that activities to build a quality culture are carried out by accustoming teachers to complete their tasks not because of orders but because it has become necessary for every teacher.

Implementing quality management in schools necessitates the principal's ability to execute innovations. Innovation positively influences the school's image, as it entails continuous improvements within the institution. Research informants indicated that while principals can foster innovations to enhance school quality, their innovative capacities still need to be improved and require further development. Despite the need to improve their innovation skills related to quality management, principals have tried to implement innovations within this framework. They provide support for quality programs and conduct activities that enhance quality initiatives. Based on information gathered from principals and teachers, the school has implemented several forms of innovation, including 1) establishing time discipline for teachers through the use of a check-in system and implementing a numbered attendance system for students; 2) creating an educational stage and art performances while activating guidance for specific

Corresponding author: Muthahharah Thahir (muthahharah.thahir@gmail.com)

subjects; 3) developing educational centers and conducting religious activities every Friday; and 4) administering online examinations and evaluations digitally. Regarding this innovative capacity, the informant, the vice principal, stated that the principal fosters innovation by modifying and enhancing facilities by contemporary standards, motivating school members to feel comfortable in the school environment. One of the initiatives currently being designed is the construction of a technology-enabled learning classroom. However, a challenge faced in this IT-based classroom initiative is that some parents cannot provide the necessary facilities.

As the leader of an educational institution, the principal must be willing to assume the risks associated with decisions made regarding implementing quality management. Even when decisions are made collaboratively, the principal must take responsibility for those choices. According to information obtained from teachers and principals, principals are willing to bear the risks of their decisions. A teacher from a reference school explained that the principal is accountable for all decisions taken and, thus, must be prepared to accept the associated risks. Furthermore, the principal must be able to collaborate with all members of the school community to implement comprehensive quality management. As expressed by the teachers and the vice principal, the principal has effectively demonstrated this collaborative capacity. A teacher from a reference school noted that the cooperation between the principal and the teachers is vital, enabling the realization of high-quality school services

Discussion

Leadership is the most crucial capacity when implementing a quality management system. Adequate leadership capacity can enable a school to achieve optimal service quality, even if several other capacities are not fully developed. As we know, leadership serves as the driving force in every organization, and the progress or decline of an organization, including educational institutions, heavily depends on the leadership capacity of that organization. Leadership is one of the essential capacities needed to improve school performance. Strong leadership in organizing programs is vital for every school organization (Asri et al., 2021). This view is further supported by a reseacrher that organizational leadership is a significant force in managing a school (Strukan et al., 2014). Therefore, a principal's ability to lead effectively is critical to an effective school manager and leader.

As a leader, the principal serves as a motivator and plays a vital role in organizing school events and determining the policy direction of the school. In fulfilling these roles, the principal significantly influences the realization of educational objectives aligned with established targets. Adequate leadership capacity is essential for achieving these outcomes and is characterized by the following criteria:

a. Ability to empower all teachers to conduct teaching and learning processes that are optimal, effective, smooth, and productive.
b. Ability to complete tasks and responsibilities within the specified timeframe.

Corresponding author: Muthahharah Thahir (muthahharah.thahir@gmail.com)

c. Ability to establish harmonious relationships with the community, ensuring active involvement in achieving school objectives.
d. Successful implementation of leadership principles that align with the maturity levels of teachers and educational staff at the school.
e. Ability to collaborate effectively with the management team.
f. Ability to achieve the school's objectives productively in accordance with established guidelines (Anarisa, 2020)

The research findings indicate that the leadership capacity of principals in junior high schools (SMP) and madrasahs (MTs) in Gowa Regency falls within the good criteria, with an average percentage achievement of 80.52%. Specifically, 45.02% of respondents reported that principals possess a high leadership capacity to implement quality management. In contrast, 19.26% indicated that the principals have a lower capacity in this area. Meanwhile, the remaining 2.12% stated that principals do not possess sufficient leadership capacity to implement quality management effectively. These results suggest that only a small portion of principals may require additional support to develop the leadership skills necessary for effective quality management. Furthermore, the results from open-ended questions given to principals and teachers reveal that each principal in the junior high schools (SMP) and madrasahs (MTs) of Gowa Regency possesses leadership capacity. This includes communicating and coordinating effectively, making participatory decisions, providing motivation, and serving as a role model for the school community.

Firstly, the school principals generally possess good communication skills. Their verbal and written interactions demonstrate their communication abilities, utilizing various media such as mobile phones, emails, and others. However, in many cases, communication within schools remains one-way mainly. In some schools, principals' ability to influence the community through effective communication requires further improvement. Effective communication between principals and the school community is essential for quality management in school services. As stated that principals must possess and continually refine their communication skills to ensure the successful implementation of school policies (Prananosa et al., 2018). One-way communication, which limits feedback and community participation, often leads to ineffective communication. Therefore, improvements in this area must be addressed by each school. Various efforts are being made to enhance the effectiveness of communication. For instance, one reference school has introduced focus group discussions to foster better communication among school community members.

Secondly, school principals can make participatory decisions in implementing quality management. This approach aims to deepen the school community's involvement in quality management, encouraging collective efforts to achieve high standards in school services. Principals facilitate this inclusive process through regular discussions and collaborations with teachers and by actively considering input from Teaching and Learning Support Personnel (TPMPS). The success of an organization, such as a school, largely depends on the quality of the

decisions made by its leaders (Allen & Robbins, 2008; Eberlin & Tatum, 2008) with effective principals actively engaging teachers in decision-making (Barnett & McCormick, 2003), and leadership styles are primarily associated with decision-making approaches(Bwalya, 2023; Lin & Sun, 2018). Participatory decision-making is a process that creates an open and democratic environment, allowing all members of the school community to be involved in decision-making (Somech, 2010). It is believed that participatory decision-making fosters a sense of ownership among those involved, leading them to actively engage and take responsibility for the decisions, thereby fully dedicating themselves to achieving the outcomes of those decisions.

Thirdly, effective quality management demands high motivation, making the principal's role as a source of motivation essential. Serving as the lifeblood of the school, the principal directs the institution toward continuous improvement by inspiring the school community—particularly teachers—to uphold quality standards. Principals in SMP/MTs in Gowa Regency have demonstrated this ability to motivate. Based on information gathered from research informants, it was found that the forms of motivation provided by principals include giving awards or appreciation for every activity that supports quality programs, including recognition for teachers. For instance, a reference school shows appreciation to teachers in simple forms, such as sharing a meal with the entire school community and building a positive school environment. Additionally, principals motivate by setting a positive example and consistently emphasizing the importance of improving school services. Principals encourage teachers to maintain high performance and sustain their teaching enthusiasm, knowing that motivation is a critical driver of commitment, collaboration, and effectiveness in achieving shared goals (Prananosa et al., 2018)

Some researchers further emphasizes that a leader must possess several capabilities: (1) give direction, (2) provide inspiration, (3) build teams, (4) set an example, and (5) be accepted (Aliekperova & Aliekperov, 2023; Bush, 2008; Dhiman, 2023). Additionally, a leader is someone who possesses the knowledge and skills to lead a group or organization toward achieving the ultimate goals of that organization, which is called as the quality and function of leadership (Ali, 2012; Surji, 2015). Personality and character are inseparable from leadership; thus, a leader must be able to guide their organization to achieve its ultimate objectives, not just temporary goals. To realize this, organizations need quality leaders. As quality leaders, school principals are expected to foster an educational environment that meets the demands of today's fast-evolving world, addressing changes promptly to satisfy stakeholders and cultivate top-performing graduates. As noted that there is great interest in educational leadership in the early part of the twenty-first century (Bush, 2008). This is due to the widespread belief that the quality of leadership significantly impacts school and student outcomes. In many parts of the world, including both developed and developing countries, there is recognition that schools require effective leaders and managers to provide the best possible education for their students and learners.

Corresponding author: Muthahharah Thahir (muthahharah.thahir@gmail.com)

In addition, an educational leader focused on quality, strives to optimize the performance of each school community member and fully utilize organizational resources. Effective and consistent quality improvement requires principals who are committed to quality, inspire, and motivate staff toward high standards, and empower school resources for continuous enhancement. Such leadership practices ultimately lead to greater satisfaction with the school's services (Herawan, 2016)

CONCLUSION

The leadership capacity of school principals comprises a set of essential competencies required to effectively fulfill their roles. These competencies are particularly critical in improving the management and delivery of academic services. In junior high schools (SMP/MTs) across Gowa Regency, each principal has demonstrated a leadership capacity with an overall achievement rate of 80.52%, which is categorized as "good." The findings highlight that key leadership competencies - such as participatory decision-making, effective communication and coordination, and the ability to motivate school members – are vital for enhancing the quality of academic services. When these competencies are fully utilized, principals can help ensure that academic services are delivered at a high standard. However, communication practices in many schools remain predominantly one-way, which limits feedback and engagement from teachers and other stakeholders. Additionally, some principals still face challenges in effectively influencing and involving stakeholders in school improvement efforts.

These findings suggest that while the overall leadership capacity is strong, targeted professional development is still necessary. Future efforts should focus on strengthening principals' communication and stakeholder engagement skills through structured programs such as leadership coaching, communication workshops, and collaborative leadership training.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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