



From Vision to Impact; A Strategic Model to Improve Student Quality and Competence through Adaptive Educational Practices

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Abstract : *The focus of this study is to analyze the principal's leadership strategy in improving the quality and competence of students at SMK Al Khairiyah, related to leadership practices and their impact on the formation of an educational environment. This study aims to analyze the principal's leadership strategy in improving the quality and competence of students at SMK Al Khairiyah. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with the principal, teachers, and students, as well as analysis of related documents. Through the Miles and Huberman approach, data were analyzed to identify strategies implemented by the principal and their impact on the quality of education. The results of the study indicate that the principal has successfully integrated educational leadership theories, such as transformational leadership, into practice. Strategies such as curriculum development that is relevant to industry needs, intensive teacher training, and community involvement have contributed significantly to improving the quality and competence of students. The implications of this study highlight the importance of visionary and adaptive leadership in creating an educational environment oriented towards Islamic values, as well as providing guidance for Islamic education practitioners in designing effective leadership strategies to achieve broader educational goals. The implication of this study is the importance of the principal's visionary leadership in designing adaptive and effective educational strategies to improve the quality and competence of students, especially in the context of Islamic education.*

Keywords : *Visionary Strategy; Principal Leadership; Quality.*

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INTRODUCTION

The quality of education has become a focus for many educational institutions around the world. Amidst the increasingly intense competition in the job market, Vocational High Schools are required to not only provide theoretical knowledge, but also ensure that students develop practical competencies that are relevant to market needs (Heitner & Jennings, 2016; Husna et al., 2023; Priawasana & Wijaya, 2024). The role of the principal in setting strategies and implementing educational reforms is very significant in creating an environment where students can improve the quality of their competencies. The skills and competencies expected by the world of work continue to evolve in line with technological advances and global economic dynamics (Flynn et al., 2024; Hayati et al., 2023). This encourages schools to continue to revise and adapt their curriculum and teaching methods. School leaders must be able to understand this trend and proactively design educational strategies that not only meet current standards but also instill lifelong learning skills in their students. Therefore, the principal holds an important key in this educational transformation process (Baharun, 2017; Budiyo, 2023; Nazib et al., 2023). One strategy that can be carried out by the principal in improving the quality of student competencies in vocational schools is to collaborate with the market and the world of work.

Collaboration with the market and the world of work allows schools to adjust the curriculum and teaching methods to actual needs in the field (Mundiri & Hasanah, 2018; Rozi & Aminullah, 2021). The principal can meet with companies or related markets to understand their needs and expectations of the competencies that must be possessed by vocational school graduates. In addition, the principal can also hold internship programs or collaborations with companies to provide students with practical experience in a real work environment (Mundiri, 2016; Said & Sharif, 2023). In this way, students can develop practical skills that are relevant to the world of work and improve the quality of their competencies. In addition to collaborating with the market, the principal can also implement learning programs that focus on developing 21st century skills, such as creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, and communication using innovative and interactive approaches. Although SMK Al Khairiyah has a mission to provide quality vocational secondary education, there are challenges in improving the quality of student competencies. These obstacles include the adequacy of the relevance of the curriculum to the demands of the job market, limited access to modern learning resources, lack of student involvement in extracurricular activities that support skills development, and challenges in improving the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. In this context, the strategic role of the principal is an important factor that needs to be explored further to overcome these challenges and significantly improve the quality of student competencies.

A deeper understanding of improving the quality of student competency requires a review of relevant previous studies. Research by Obed-Chukwuka (2020) revealed that educational curricula designed to create independent and skilled students often fail due to deficiencies in teaching and learning materials. This shows the importance of leadership in creating and implementing adequate curricula. In relation to technology integration, research by Obed-Chukwuka (2020) highlights the challenges faced by special education teachers in

integrating technology into classroom instruction. This relates to the need for adequate teacher training to improve student skills through the use of technology (El-Sabagh, 2021).

This study conducted by Ana Uka found that students' academic success is often hampered by a lack of effective study skills, indicating the vital role of organizational and study skills in student competency (Uka, 2013). These studies provide valuable context for evaluating and building robust strategies for developing student competency quality. The conclusions that can be drawn from this previous research indicate that a holistic approach and innovative leadership in curriculum development and the use of technology in learning are essential in preparing students with relevant skills for the future.

The novelty of this research lies in the in-depth analysis of innovative principal practices in integrating the curriculum with the needs of the rapidly changing labor market. This study will reveal the principal's approach to accommodating the latest technological developments and market trends to prepare students with relevant competencies. In addition, the focus on SMK Al Khairiyah provides a specific context that has not been widely studied, so the findings of this study will provide new insights into vocational education adaptation strategies at the school level. The purpose of this study is to understand and assess the effectiveness of educational leadership strategies implemented by principals at SMK Al Khairiyah in improving the quality of student competencies. This study seeks to identify and analyze leadership practices that contribute to the development of students' practical competencies that are in accordance with labor market demands. This objective includes an examination of how educational technology is integrated and the use of partnerships between schools and relevant markets. In addition, this study aims to evaluate the impact of educational leadership initiatives on students' career readiness, as well as provide recommendations for evidence-based vocational education strategy renewal that can be implemented in the school.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study type that aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the educational leadership strategies implemented by the principal at SMK Al Khairiyah. The selection of this approach was carried out to explore the experiences, perceptions, and motivations of various school stakeholders in a natural context and to understand the internal dynamics that influence the development of student competencies. The research was conducted intensively in the school environment, taking into account the social, cultural context, and applicable vocational education policies. The focus of the research was directed at how the principal formulated strategies to improve the quality and competence of students through curriculum integration, teacher training, and cooperation with the business world. This approach allows researchers to comprehensively examine the process, challenges, and results of implementing educational leadership based on the needs of a dynamic and future-oriented world of work. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews with the principal, teachers, students, and relevant industry partners to gain a comprehensive view of leadership and learning practices. Participatory observation techniques were used to directly understand the dynamics of the school, especially in the implementation of the curriculum and

interactions between educational actors. In addition, document analysis was carried out on school planning, syllabus, student achievement reports, and teacher training materials. The collected data were analyzed using an interactive model from Miles and Huberman, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and drawing and verifying conclusions (Karimi-Ghartemani et al., 2022; Miles & Huberman, 1984). Data validity was strengthened through triangulation of sources and techniques, as well as member checking of informants to ensure the accuracy of the researcher's interpretation of the data obtained in the field.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Result

The principal's leadership strategy is one of the key factors in shaping the quality of education and student competency, especially in vocational education institutions that are required to be responsive to the dynamics of the labor market. In this context, the principal does not only act as an administrator, but also as a visionary leader who is able to formulate strategic policies, inspire teachers, and build partnerships with external stakeholders. This study aims to examine how leadership strategies at SMK Al Khairiyah are implemented to improve the quality and competitiveness of graduates. Using a qualitative approach, data were obtained through in-depth interviews and participatory observations of leadership practices that include curriculum development, teacher training, and community involvement. The findings in this study are interpreted through the lens of educational leadership theory, especially the transformative, situational, and participatory models, in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of leadership practices that have a direct impact on improving student quality.

1. Curriculum Development Aligned with Market Needs

An in-depth interview with the principal of SMK Al Khairiyah showed a strong focus on the relevance of the curriculum to the needs of the job market. The principal explained that they routinely evaluate the curriculum content based on input from industry partners. He stated, "We ensure that every curriculum update takes into account the latest industry trends, such as the need for digital skills, technology literacy, and communication competencies." In addition, the school's curriculum document shows annual adjustments to graduate competency standards that are compiled based on the results of alumni tracer studies and meetings with DUDI (Business and Industry World). Observations of curriculum development team meetings showed active participation from productive teachers and industry consultants, who also provided input regarding the integration of technology-based training modules. This shows that the curriculum process is not only administrative, but also based on real field needs.

These findings show that curriculum development at SMK Al Khairiyah is not just an administrative routine, but an adaptive strategy designed to address the challenges of a dynamic world of work. This strategy demonstrates the principal's understanding of the importance of market orientation in vocational education. The curriculum is not only designed by the school internally, but also involves external actors such as industry partners, which makes the process more contextual and responsive. The implementation of this

approach reflects the practice of transformative leadership where leaders are able to direct strategic changes for the long-term goals of the institution. This market-oriented leadership not only improves students' work readiness but also strengthens the school's position as an institution trusted by the community and industry. Thus, the development of a curriculum based on market needs becomes a strategic instrument in improving the quality and competitiveness of graduates.

The results of the observation show that the implementation of an industry-based curriculum has a direct impact on increasing student enthusiasm in the learning process. Teachers deliver material with a project-based approach, such as work simulations, the use of the latest technological equipment, and business case studies. This is observed in learning activities in the computer laboratory, where students not only learn theory but also practice using industrial software. One productive teacher said, "We bring the reality of industry into the classroom so that students are better prepared to face the world of work." In addition, final year students routinely take external competency tests organized by industry partners. This finding strengthens that the adaptive curriculum not only answers market needs but also increases student engagement and motivation to learn.

When viewed from the theoretical framework of vocational education, this strategy emphasizes the important role of the principal in designing learning that is aligned with the principles of relevance and work readiness. Integration of the curriculum with industry needs reflects the application of an open system approach, where schools form a synergistic relationship with their environment. The principal not only acts as a curriculum manager, but also as a mediator between the world of education and the world of work. This approach can be a model that is replicated by other schools that face the challenge of the gap between the world of education and the world of industry. However, the sustainability of this strategy needs to be maintained through structured monitoring and evaluation policies so that curriculum adjustments are not temporary, but sustainable and evidence-based.

2. Professional Development Through Teacher Training

The results of an in-depth interview with the principal of SMK Al Khairiyah revealed that the teacher training program is a top priority in the strategy to improve the quality of learning. The principal stated that routine training is held every semester with a focus on the use of educational technology, active learning approaches, and strengthening the preparation of teaching materials based on industrial curriculum. "We want to ensure that teachers not only deliver material, but also become facilitators who are adaptive to change," said the principal (I\KS\2024). Observations of one of the training sessions showed the enthusiasm of teachers in practicing the use of the Learning Management System (LMS) and project-based learning methods. The training was guided by external speakers from industry and partner universities, who provided new perspectives on modern teaching practices. In addition, teachers were given a post-training reflection sheet to assess their understanding and implementation plans in the classroom.

These findings indicate that teacher training at SMK Al Khairiyah is not ceremonial, but rather structured and needs-based. The focus on learning technology and innovative

methodologies reflects the school's strategic orientation in building contextual and cutting-edge pedagogical capacity. This approach also marks a shift in the learning paradigm from teacher-centered to student-centered, where teachers are encouraged to become facilitators who activate student participation. The principal plays an active role as a director and facilitator of change, making training part of a continuous professional development strategy. This strategy is in line with the principle of *instructional leadership*, which emphasizes that school leaders must be directly involved in improving the quality of instruction. Thus, teacher training at this school is a concrete reflection of transformative educational leadership that is oriented towards the quality of student learning outcomes.

Follow-up observations in productive classes showed significant changes in teaching styles after the training. Teachers no longer only use one-way lectures, but combine collaborative approaches, group discussions, and work simulations. For example, in the computer network engineering subject, teachers invite students to create network installation scenarios based on the needs of fictional clients—a method that was previously not commonly used. Students appear more active and confident in expressing ideas. One student stated that this approach makes learning feel “more real and useful for the world of work.” These data indicate that the teacher training carried out not only updates knowledge, but also changes the mindset and teaching practices directly in the classroom. These changes have an impact on increasing student participation and learning effectiveness. When viewed from the perspective of educational leadership theory, the teacher professional development strategies implemented by the principal reflect the practice of *transformational leadership*, where leaders act as catalysts for change. The principal not only creates a shared vision of the quality of learning, but also facilitates the achievement of that vision through concrete and measurable policies. Continuous, needs-based training that has a direct impact on the classroom shows a deep understanding of the importance of investing in human resources in improving the quality of institutions. In addition, the existence of post-training reflection indicates the implementation of a continuous improvement cycle that is important in the modern education system. This finding provides an important contribution to the practice of vocational school leadership, where teacher quality is key in bridging the curriculum and the evolving competencies of the world of work.

3. Community and Parental Engagement Initiatives

Interviews with the principal of SMK Al Khairiyah showed that parental and community involvement is one of the main strategies in building trust and increasing support for school programs. The principal explained that the school regularly holds activities such as student skills exhibitions, open seminars, and dialogues with parents. “We want the community to see directly the achievements of students and the role of the school, so that this relationship is not one-way,” said the principal (I_KS_2024). Observations of the “Student Work Week” activity showed the enthusiasm of the surrounding community in attending and providing feedback on the products of student work. Several parents also expressed their hopes for the development of programs that are more relevant to the needs of the local industry. This activity becomes a space for interactive dialogue between the

school, students, parents, and community partners in a collaborative and participatory atmosphere.

This finding confirms that SMK Al Khairiyah is developing a model of community involvement that is integrative and dialogical. Not just a ceremonial invitation, the activities held open up space for active participation for parents and residents. This reflects a new paradigm in school management, where the relationship between school and community is seen as a strategic partnership, rather than a hierarchical relationship. This involvement is in line with the community-based education approach, which emphasizes the importance of collaboration between internal and external actors in improving the relevance and effectiveness of education. In the context of vocational schools, this involvement also has added value in strengthening local industry networks and expanding graduate employment opportunities. The principal's leadership in building this social network shows that the school's external relationships can be mobilized as a resource to support the achievement of educational goals more broadly and sustainably.

The involvement of parents and the community in school activities has a direct impact on increasing public trust and student motivation. Based on observations and interviews with teachers and students, it is known that students feel more appreciated when their work is displayed to the public and receives direct appreciation from family and community leaders. Teachers also stated that parental involvement makes communication smoother, especially in discussing students' academic and behavioral development. Several alumni who attended school activities even offered internship opportunities at their workplaces for final year students. This shows that collaboration not only strengthens social relations, but also opens access to professional opportunities. The learning environment becomes more open, dynamic, and future-oriented when the school is positioned as a center for sustainable and inclusive community activities.

The perspective of participatory leadership theory show that the strategy reflects the utilization of social capital as an institutional asset. The principal not only carries out administrative functions, but also actualizes the role as a liaison between the school and the external environment. Community involvement is part of a leadership strategy that prioritizes collaboration, transparency, and collective empowerment. This shows the implementation of distributed leadership theory, where leadership is not only centralized on the principal, but is shared through participatory processes and spaces that involve school residents and the community. In the context of vocational education, this strategy is very relevant because it strengthens the continuous learning ecosystem in the classroom. This finding broadens the meaning of educational success, not only as an academic achievement, but also as a social achievement that arises from the synergy between the school and its community.

4. Integration of Leadership Theory into School Practice

Interviews with the principal of SMK Al Khairiyah revealed that the leadership approach applied was not fixated on one model, but rather adaptive to the situation at hand. The principal said, "I sometimes have to be participatory in decision-making, especially

regarding the curriculum. However, in a crisis or urgent situation, I have to quickly take over as the main director." (I_KS_2024). This is reflected in observations of academic evaluation meetings, where the principal facilitated open discussions between teachers to convey learning problems, but also provided firm direction in determining strategic solutions. In addition, the transformational approach is evident from how the principal motivates teachers with the school's long-term vision that is oriented towards innovation, graduate quality, and cross-sector collaboration. The combination of these practices demonstrates flexibility and sensitivity in applying leadership theory contextually.

These findings indicate that leadership practices at SMK Al Khairiyah represent an integration of various educational leadership theories, including transformational, situational, and participatory theories. The principal plays a role as a visionary who is able to build a long-term institutional direction, as well as a problem solver who is adaptive to daily challenges. The flexibility in the use of this leadership model allows for the creation of a dynamic, innovative and collaborative organizational environment. In the context of vocational education that is facing rapid changes in terms of curriculum and industry needs, this leadership approach is crucial. The principal not only manages resources and regulations, but also drives the values, culture and motivation of the entire school ecosystem. This finding reinforces the importance of leadership skills based on understanding the context and the reflective ability to continuously adjust strategies.

The integration of these various leadership approaches has a positive impact on the work culture in the school. Teachers feel valued because they are involved in the decision-making process, but still receive clear direction from the principal as a strategic leader. The results of observations of routine teacher discussions show an open but directed atmosphere, with the principal acting as a facilitator and sparker of new ideas. Several teachers said that they were more motivated because the school leadership provided space for initiative without losing institutional direction. This attitude fosters trust, collective commitment and a sense of ownership of the school's vision. Such a work culture allows for innovation in teaching, cross-subject teamwork and the courage to try new learning methods that are more in line with the needs of students and the job market.

Based on Tony Bush's theoretical framework and contemporary educational leadership literature, the strategies implemented by the principal of SMK Al Khairiyah can be classified as a form of hybrid leadership. This approach combines the strengths of various leadership theories to respond to organizational needs holistically. On the one hand, the principal functions as a cultural transformer and strategic vision builder; on the other hand, he/she is also pragmatic and responsive to daily operational needs. This approach is not only relevant but also effective in the complex and ever-changing context of vocational high schools. These findings indicate that the implementation of leadership theories is not linear or singular, but rather requires a deep understanding of the context, actors, and dynamics of the organization. Therefore, the integration of theory into practice is a key marker of leadership effectiveness in 21st-century education.

2. Discussion

The findings show that curriculum development at SMK Al Khairiyah is a strategic effort aimed at meeting the needs of industry and the ever-changing job market. The principal actively leads the curriculum development by involving productive teachers and industry partners to formulate contextual and technology-based teaching materials. This approach is in line with the principle of transformational leadership, where leaders act as agents of change who drive all components of the school towards innovation and efficiency (Bush, 2008). The commitment to regular curriculum updates shows that this school is not only oriented towards administrative targets, but focuses on producing graduates who are relevant to global needs. The involvement of the industrial world in curriculum development also emphasizes the importance of partnerships in creating education that is responsive and adaptive to social and economic change. The collaboratively designed curriculum shows that the educational process at SMK Al Khairiyah is open to constructive external intervention. Teachers, as curriculum implementers, are involved from the planning stage to evaluation, which shows that the school's approach is participatory and team-based. This strengthens the professional learning community model in education, where dialogue between educators and external stakeholders is the main foundation for improving the quality of teaching. Observations on the implementation of project-based learning show increased student participation and direct relevance to real work needs. The relevance of curriculum content to industrial practices creates a more meaningful learning space for students and improves their work readiness. This strategy also encourages the growth of a culture of innovation within schools in response to dynamic external challenges.

The partnership between schools and the industrial world in curriculum development shows that the principal does not only play an administrative role, but also as a boundary spanner that connects the institution with the external environment (Muhith et al., 2023). Collaboration with DUDI is an important instrument to anticipate the gap between market needs and graduates (Bahroun et al., 2023). Activities such as FGDs with industrial partners, alumni tracer studies, and the preparation of real competency-based modules are concrete forms of integrating the world of work into the curriculum structure. The principal uses this approach to map the trends in skills needed and adapt them in the learning design (Kafyulilo et al., 2013). This strategy not only improves the academic and vocational quality of students, but also strengthens the school's position as a credible and competitive institution. In this context, vocational education is able to transform into a market-oriented knowledge and skills production institution.

Based on the results of the analysis, it can be concluded that market-based curriculum development is the main pillar of the principal's leadership strategy in encouraging improved student quality. This approach not only improves learning content but also reforms the learning management system as a whole. The use of labor market data as a basis for curriculum decision-making proves that leadership at SMK Al Khairiyah is reflective, data-based, and future-oriented. This strategy is in line with the direction of national policy in the link and match program between education and industry (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2021). Therefore,

this practice is not only locally relevant but also has broader implications as a model for contextual curriculum development in other vocational schools. The principal as a strategic leader has proven to be able to manage complex changes with a collaborative, responsive, and long-term vision-based approach.

Teacher professional development at SMK Al Khairiyah is also a major component in the principal's leadership strategy. Based on the results of interviews and observations, teacher training is carried out in a structured and sustainable manner, including mastery of learning technology, methodological innovation, and strengthening the implementation of industrial curriculum (Baharun et al., 2022; Wolff et al., 2021). The principal directs training not only as a routine obligation, but as an instrument for improving the quality of teaching and teacher professionalism. This is in line with the principle of instructional leadership, where the principal is directly responsible for the quality of the learning process (Hallinger, 2011). Training is facilitated by external speakers from universities and industry partners who enrich teachers' perspectives on contemporary learning practices. The implementation of training is carried out through a workshop and direct practice approach, which not only strengthens theory but also encourages transformation of practice in the classroom. The finding shows that the teacher training strategy at SMK Al Khairiyah has succeeded in creating a learning culture among educators. Teachers are not only recipients of policies, but are also involved in designing professional development programs that suit their needs. This needs-based approach reflects the principles of adult learning theory (Knowles, 1980), which emphasizes that training will be effective when it is relevant and applicable. In addition, teacher involvement in developing training modules creates a sense of ownership and increases their intrinsic motivation. The principal plays a strategic role in building trust and creating a collaborative climate, so that training is not perceived as a burden, but rather as an opportunity to grow. This strategy shows success in aligning the institutional vision with the individual development needs of teachers.

The direct impact of teacher training is seen in changes in the learning approach in the classroom. Teachers apply project-based learning models, simulations, and collaboration, which provide space for students to be active and creative. Observations show that the classroom atmosphere becomes more dynamic, and students show high interest in the material being taught. This improvement not only has an impact on the cognitive quality of students, but also on strengthening work competencies such as communication, cooperation, and problem solving. One student stated that the new method used made it easier for him to understand the context of the world of work. This shows that teacher training has an impact on improving the quality of concrete learning. The training strategy implemented has succeeded in linking teacher professional development with direct improvements in student learning outcomes (Khoirunnisak et al., 2023; Nadya et al., 2023). From an educational leadership perspective, this strategy strengthens the role of the principal as a capacity builder who focuses on improving the quality of human resources at the school level. The principal acts as a visionary, facilitator of teacher learning, and liaison with the external ecosystem (Acton, 2021). This strategy demonstrates how transformative leadership can be applied concretely in managing and developing the professional competence of educators. The implications of this finding indicate that relevant, sustainable, and contextual teacher training not only improves the quality of

teaching, but also increases the competitiveness of institutions. Principals who successfully integrate training into institutional strategies will create a culture of innovation, reflection, and continuous learning that is the foundation of excellent schools in the current era of educational transformation (Pettersson, 2021).

Participation of parents and the community in school activities at SMK Al Khairiyah also shows a real form of participatory leadership. The principal actively creates a space for dialogue and collaboration through various programs such as student skills exhibitions, parent forums, and school social activities. Based on observations and interviews, the community feels involved in the education process and is given access to provide input on the development of school programs. This approach emphasizes that the relationship between schools and the community is not symbolic, but strategic and functional. Epstein (2011) stated that meaningful family and community involvement has a direct impact on student success, both academically and socially. SMK Al Khairiyah has succeeded in translating this principle through a consistent, open, and trust-based two-way communication strategy. The findings also show that the principal has a high sensitivity to the importance of social capital in building a strong educational institution. He not only acts as an internal manager, but also as a catalyst for productive external relations. Collaborative programs involving the community demonstrate the success of the principal in carrying out his role as a boundary leader. Joint activities such as career seminars, industry visits with parents, and public outreach provide authentic experiences for students, while strengthening the bond between the school and its surroundings. This approach reflects distributed leadership, where leadership responsibilities are spread and mobilized in a broad social network, not only focused on formal structural authority.

The impact of parental and community involvement is reflected in the increasing public trust in the school and the expansion of support for student development programs (Rosi et al., 2022; Rozi & Aminullah, 2021; Shodiq & Hefniy, 2022). Parents said that they understood their children's development better after being directly involved in school activities (Diana & Sholehah, 2022; Eleftheriadou & Vlachou, 2023). In addition, the involvement of alumni and community leaders opened up new opportunities, such as internship programs, joint training, and sponsorship of student activities. This interaction creates a learning ecosystem that is not limited to the classroom, but is extended to a wider social context (Khalilah, 2023; Septiany et al., 2024). The principal utilizes this network to strengthen the quality of learning and prepare students to face global challenges contextually and realistically.

Thus, the community and parent involvement strategy implemented by the principal of SMK Al Khairiyah shows that educational institutions can play a role as a center for community empowerment. This strategy not only strengthens the school's internal programs, but also builds social legitimacy, increases external support, and expands access to resources. This leadership model is very relevant in the context of vocational education which requires partnerships with many parties. The principal does not merely act as a manager, but as a social leader who is able to establish, manage, and maintain strategic networks. This finding emphasizes the importance of expanding the role of the principal in the external realm as part

of a strategy to strengthen the quality and competitiveness of schools amidst ever-growing social complexity.

The results of the study indicate that the principal of SMK Al Khairiyah is not fixated on a single approach, but rather combines various situational leadership theories. In situations that require quick decision-making, the principal tends to use an authoritative approach, while in the curriculum development process, he applies a participatory and collaborative style. This approach shows flexibility in applying the principle of situational leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982), which emphasizes the importance of adjusting leadership style to organizational conditions and team member characteristics (Nazib et al., 2023; Yukl et al., 2009). Observations of interactions between the principal and teachers show harmony between direction and empowerment, which is an indication of adaptive and contextual leadership. The principal understands that the dynamics of vocational schools require reflective and responsive abilities to various challenges that arise quickly and complexly.

The leadership of the principal who is able to integrate transformational and participatory theories shows success in creating a shared vision and building a collective spirit among all stakeholders (Ghorbani et al., 2023; Hendriani et al., 2024). The school's vision that focuses on innovation, graduate competitiveness, and learning relevance is a major force in uniting organizational energy. The principal motivates teachers and staff through an inspiring and humanistic approach, reflecting the practice of transformational leadership as stated by Leithwood & Jantzi (2000). The implementation of the vision is not done top-down, but through a deliberative process involving voices from various levels of the school. This strategy creates an open, communicative, and trusting work climate, which is an important foundation for continuous innovation and institutional improvement.

Field findings also indicate that the principal acts as a learning leader who promotes a culture of reflection and evaluation in policy making. He encourages teachers to innovate and is not afraid to take risks in teaching, as long as the steps can be professionally accounted for. This kind of leadership is in line with the distributed leadership approach, where power and responsibility are distributed to individuals who have competence, not merely structural positions (Spillane, 2006). Through this approach, the principal creates a collective leadership space where teachers and staff feel empowered, have a voice, and play an active role in the change process. This has a direct impact on increasing internal initiatives and the quality of decision making at the education unit level.

The integration of various leadership theories carried out by the principal of SMK Al Khairiyah shows sophistication in carrying out the role as an educational leader in a complex era. The principal does not only implement the theory mechanically, but also reflectively and contextually. This hybrid approach is very suitable for the vocational school environment which is required to be agile in facing changes in technology, the job market, and community expectations. By combining responsive, collaborative, and vision-based leadership styles, the principal is able to create synergy among school actors and direct the institution towards sustainable transformation (Acton, 2021; DeMatthews et al., 2021; Norman et al., 2024). This finding provides an important contribution to the development of an applicable and contextual educational leadership theory, especially in the vocational secondary education sector.

This study confirms that the effectiveness of principal leadership in the context of vocational education cannot be fully explained through a single theoretical approach. The findings show that successful leadership practices are born from flexible integration between transformational leadership, situational leadership, and participative leadership models, which are contextually applied according to the challenges and internal dynamics of the school. These findings expand the scope of the conventional educational leadership model as proposed by Bush (2008) by adding empirical evidence from hybrid practices in the field. This approach strengthens the relevance of the adaptive leadership approach in the context of VET (Vocational Education and Training), where the needs of industry and society demand a fast and collaborative response. Thus, the results of the study indicate that effective principal leadership in vocational education is characterized by the ability to integrate various leadership approaches reflectively, contextually, and collaboratively in facing the complexity of changes in 21st century education.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the principal's leadership has a major influence in encouraging the improvement of the quality and competence of students in vocational education institutions. The four main strategies that were successfully identified include: curriculum development based on market needs, ongoing teacher training, active involvement of the community and parents, and integration of leadership theory into school practices. These four strategies do not run separately, but rather complement each other in forming an adaptive, inclusive, and innovative education ecosystem. The principal plays a central role in orchestrating all of these aspects through a flexible, reflective, and participatory leadership approach. These findings provide a real picture of how educational leadership theory can be realized strategically in the field context. The results shows that there is no single leadership theory that can answer all the complex needs of educational institutions. In fact, the integration and adaptation of various theories such as transformational, situational, and participatory are the main strengths in creating an effective leadership style. This approach is very relevant to the context of vocational schools that face external pressures from the labor market and technological developments. Principals who are able to navigate this complexity by combining vision orientation and collective participation demonstrate leadership capacity that is not only effective in management, but also has a direct impact on improving student learning outcomes and graduate competitiveness.

The practical implications of this study are the need for principals to continue to improve their leadership capacity through reflection, collaborative learning, and professional network development. Vocational schools must be encouraged to become learning organizations that integrate input from industry, society, and educational technology in the policy-making process. In addition, it is important to create a teacher development system that is relevant to the needs of the field and provides space for active participation for the education community. Leadership built on trust, dialogue, and collective empowerment has proven to be the main foundation for the success of educational reform at the school level.

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