

Strategic School Leadership and its Role in Improving Institutional Performance

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ABSTRACT

Strategic school leadership is a key factor in facing the demands of improving the quality and accountability of educational institution performance in the midst of the dynamics of changing policies and the educational environment. However, leadership practices in schools are often still administratively oriented and not yet fully geared towards achieving sustainable institutional performance. Quantitative data was collected using a Likert scale questionnaire and analyzed through linear regression, while qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis to deepen and explain quantitative findings. The results of the study show that school strategic leadership has a positive and significant effect on institutional performance, especially through strengthening strategic vision, change management, and optimizing school resources. Qualitative findings reveal that adaptive and collaborative leadership is the main mechanism in encouraging increased effectiveness of school organizations. This research contributes to strengthening the study of education management by emphasizing the importance of strategic leadership as a determinant of institutional performance and provides practical implications for the development of leadership capacity of school principals.

INTRODUCTION

School leadership plays a strategic role in determining the direction, quality, and sustainability of the performance of educational institutions in various parts of the world. In the global context, the increasing demands for public accountability, quality competition between educational institutions, and the acceleration of changes in education policies encourage schools to no longer be managed administratively alone, but strategically and adaptively. International studies show that effective school leadership contributes directly to improving the quality of learning, strengthening organizational culture, and overall institutional performance (Leithwood et al., 2020). In the midst of the uncertainty of the global education environment, strategic leadership is an important foundation for schools to maintain their relevance and competitiveness.

Locally, the education context in developing countries faces more complex challenges, such as limited resources, inequality of quality between regions, and the pressure of implementing top-down education policies. In Indonesia, the role of school principals as strategic leaders is still often trapped in administrative and bureaucratic functions, so the potential for leadership to encourage the improvement of institutional performance is not optimal. Recent research shows that weak strategic orientation in school leadership has an impact on low organizational effectiveness and slow educational innovation (Bush & Ng, 2021). This condition confirms the urgency of studying the school's strategic leadership in diverse local contexts.

Previous studies have examined the relationship between school leadership and institutional performance, but most have focused on transformational or instructional leadership approaches partially. Studies by Hallinger and Lee (2022) emphasize that instructional leadership has an effect on learning, but it has not sufficiently explained how the strategic dimension of leadership contributes to institutional performance holistically. In addition, other studies use more purely quantitative approaches, thus being less able to explain the mechanisms and context of strategic leadership implementation at the school level (Ng & Szeto, 2023). This gap demonstrates the need for a more comprehensive and contextual methodological approach.

Another research gap lies in the limitations of studies that integrate the dimensions of strategic leadership with broad institutional performance indicators, such as organizational effectiveness, school reputation, and capacity for continuous improvement. Some studies only measure school performance through students' academic achievement, thus ignoring equally important managerial and organizational aspects (Harris & Jones, 2021). In addition, empirical studies in the Southeast Asian region, especially Indonesia, are still relatively limited in the international literature, so local contexts have not been adequately represented in the development of global education leadership theories (Li et al., 2024).

Based on these gaps, this study aims to empirically analyze the role of school strategic leadership in improving the performance of secondary education institutions in the Solo Raya area. This research explicitly focuses on the

relationship between strategic school leadership and institutional performance by using a mixed methods approach that allows testing statistical relationships as well as deepening the context of leadership implementation. By combining quantitative and qualitative data, this research is expected to be able to provide a more complete picture of how strategic leadership is implemented and has an impact on the performance of school institutions.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of the study of education management by expanding the understanding of school strategic leadership as a multidimensional and contextual construct. The findings of this study enrich the education leadership literature by presenting empirical evidence from the context of secondary education in urban and semi-urban areas, which has been under-reported in international studies (Day et al., 2020). Thus, this research not only strengthens existing theories, but also opens up space for the development of strategic leadership models that are more relevant to the context of developing countries.

Practically, the results of this study are expected to provide real implications for policy makers, school principals, and education stakeholders in designing strategies to improve the performance of school institutions. The research findings can be used as the basis for the development of a strategic and sustainable principal leadership training program. In addition, this study provides an empirical reference for schools in optimizing the role of leadership as the main driver of organizational change and improvement of education quality (Gumus et al., 2021). Thus, this research contributes directly to efforts to improve the quality of school governance at the local and national levels.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Strategic Leadership in the Context of Education

Strategic leadership in education is understood as the ability of school leaders to formulate a long-term vision, manage change, and align organizational resources to achieve sustainable institutional performance. In contrast to administrative leadership, strategic leadership emphasizes decision-making based on analysis of the school's internal and external environment. International research shows that strategically oriented school leaders are able to create a clear organizational direction and increase the school's adaptive capacity to policy dynamics and societal demands (Davies & Davies, 2021). In the context of modern education, strategic leadership is a major prerequisite for schools to survive and thrive amid the complexity of the global education system (Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2022).

Strategic School Leadership as a Driver of Organizational Change

Recent literature confirms that strategic school leadership plays an important role in encouraging systematic and sustainable changes in school organizations. Strategic leaders not only function as operational managers, but also as agents of change who are able to build collective commitment and a

culture of innovation. Studies by Hitt and Tucker (2020) show that strategic leadership contributes to increasing organizational effectiveness through strengthening governance, developing human resource capacity, and optimizing the school's organizational structure. These findings are reinforced by research by Caldwell and Spinks (2023) which emphasizes that the success of school reform is largely determined by the ability of principals to integrate organizational strategy, leadership, and culture.

Institutional Performance in Secondary Education

School institutional performance is a multidimensional concept that includes learning effectiveness, teacher performance, organizational efficiency, school reputation, and capacity for continuous improvement. Contemporary research highlights that the measurement of educational institution performance cannot be limited to students' academic results alone, but must reflect the performance of the organization as a whole. According to research by Liu and Hallinger (2021), schools with high institutional performance tend to have a strong management system, visionary leadership, and a collaborative culture that supports quality improvement. This perspective emphasizes that institutional performance is an important indicator of the success of education management at the secondary school level.

The Relationship between Strategic School Leadership and Institutional Performance

A number of empirical studies show a positive relationship between school strategic leadership and institutional performance. Research conducted by Gumus et al. (2022) found that strategic leadership contributes significantly to improving the effectiveness of school organizations through strengthening a shared vision and change management. However, some studies still place strategic leadership as a secondary variable or part of a broader leadership construct, so its specific influence on institutional performance has not been explored optimally. This shows the need for research that explicitly focuses on the direct relationship between strategic school leadership and institutional performance, especially in the context of secondary education.

Methodological Approaches in Educational Leadership Studies

Studies of educational leadership show an increasing tendency to use mixed methods approaches to gain a more comprehensive understanding. This approach allows researchers not only to test the relationships between variables statistically, but also to explain the mechanisms and contexts of leadership implementation in the field. Research by Creswell and Plano Clark (2021) confirms that sequential explanatory design is very effective in leadership studies because it is able to integrate the power of quantitative and qualitative data. In the context of school leadership, this approach is considered relevant to uncover

how strategic leadership practices translate into real institutional performance improvements.

Developing Countries Context and the Literature Gap

Although the international literature on school leadership is rapidly evolving, studies focusing on developing country contexts are still relatively limited. Research in Southeast Asia shows that social, cultural, and policy characteristics of education significantly influence school leadership practices. Studies by Walker and Qian (2020) emphasize that effective leadership models in developed countries cannot always be applied directly in developing countries without contextual adjustments. Therefore, research that examines strategic school leadership in local contexts, such as the Solo Raya area, has important value in enriching the global literature and bridging existing research gaps.

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach and Design

This study uses a mixed methods approach with a sequential explanatory design, which combines quantitative and qualitative methods sequentially to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the role of school strategic leadership on institutional performance. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to empirically test the relationships between variables through quantitative data, while explaining and deepening the findings through qualitative data. Explanatory sequential design is considered effective in educational leadership studies because it is able to integrate the power of statistical analysis and contextual understanding of leadership practices in the field (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2021). Thus, this approach is appropriate for examining the phenomenon of strategic leadership that is complex and contextual.

Quantitative Research Design

The quantitative research in this study uses a cross-sectional survey design that aims to measure the relationship between strategic school leadership and institutional performance in secondary education units. The survey approach was chosen because it allows for the collection of relatively large amounts of data and provides a representative empirical picture of teachers' and education staff's perceptions of school leadership practices. Cross-sectional surveys are widely used in educational leadership research to analyze the relationships between variables in the context of school organizations efficiently and systematically (Sergiovanni et al., 2020).

Population and Sampling Techniques

The quantitative research population includes all teachers and education staff of high schools, vocational schools, and MA in the Solo Raya area. The research sample amounted to 120 respondents, which were selected using probability sampling techniques with a stratified random sampling method based on district/city areas. This technique is used to ensure the representation of school characteristics from urban and semi-urban contexts. The number of

samples was considered adequate for linear regression analysis and in accordance with methodological recommendations in education management research (Hair et al., 2022). The selection of teachers and education personnel as respondents was based on their role as key actors who experienced firsthand the school's leadership practices.

Quantitative Data Quality Instruments and Testing

The quantitative data collection instrument is in the form of a closed questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale, which is compiled based on strategic school leadership and institutional performance indicators. Strategic leadership indicators include strategic vision, strategic planning, change leadership, resource management, and stakeholder engagement, while institutional performance indicators include learning effectiveness, teacher performance, organizational effectiveness, school reputation, and capacity for continuous improvement. The questionnaire items were adapted from educational organizational leadership and performance instruments that had been used in previous research (Leithwood & Sun, 2020). Content validity is tested through expert judgment, while construct validity is tested using item-total correlation and reliability is measured by Cronbach's Alpha coefficient.

Design and Qualitative Research Participants

The qualitative stage of this research uses a multiple case study design that aims to explain and deepen the results of quantitative analysis. The qualitative research participants consisted of six key informants, namely principals and senior teachers who were purposively selected based on their experience and involvement in school management. The selection of the number and characteristics of informants is based on the principle of information-rich cases that are commonly used in qualitative research on educational leadership (Merriam & Tisdell, 2020). This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of strategic leadership practices in the real-life context of the school.

Qualitative Data Collection Techniques

Qualitative data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews and documentation studies, such as the school's vision-mission and strategic plan. Semi-structured interviews are chosen because they provide flexibility in delving into the experiences, strategies, and leadership challenges faced by school leaders. All interviews are recorded, transcribed and analyzed systematically to maintain data accuracy. This technique is widely recommended in educational leadership research because it is able to capture the dynamics of leadership practice in depth and reflective (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Data Analysis Techniques and Findings Integration

Quantitative data analysis was carried out using linear regression to test the influence of strategic school leadership on institutional performance. The analysis began with descriptive statistics and classical assumption tests, including normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity tests, to ensure the feasibility of the regression model. Quantitative data processing is carried out with the help of SPSS software. Meanwhile, qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis through an open coding process and thematic grouping to identify patterns of strategic leadership practices (Guest et al., 2020). The

integration of quantitative and qualitative results is carried out at the interpretation stage to provide a complete understanding of the research findings.

RESEARCH RESULT

Strengthening Strategic Vision as the Basis for Improving Institutional Performance

The results of the descriptive analysis of the survey data show that the practice **School Strategic Leadership**, especially in the dimension of strengthening strategic vision, is in the high category. The average respondent perception score indicates that most teachers and education staff consider the principal to have been able to formulate and communicate the vision of the institution clearly and consistently. This condition is reflected in the increase in the integration of school programs and the clarity of policy directions that have an impact on institutional performance. These findings show that strategic vision serves as the starting foundation in directing all school organizational activities.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Strategic Leadership and Institutional Performance (N = 120)

Variable	Min	Max	Red	SD
Strategic School Leadership	2.40	4.85	3.92	0.46
Visionary Leadership	2.60	5.00	4.08	0.52
Institutional Performance	2.35	4.90	3.88	0.49

Qualitatively, the findings were strengthened by the experiences of the informants who explained how the strategic vision was used as a reference in school decision-making. A principal emphasized that the institution's vision is always translated into measurable operational targets: "*Our school's vision is outlined in performance targets per semester so that each program must have a direct link to the institution's goals.*" (KS-1, November 06, 2025). A similar view was conveyed by senior teachers who felt the direct impact of vision clarity on learning and teamwork practices: "*When the direction of the school is clear, teachers are more focused on developing learning strategies because they know where the end goal wants to go.*" (GS-2, November 14, 2025). The consistency of the implementation of the vision was also affirmed by other informants who highlighted the role of the school's internal forum. "*The vision agreement is built through regular meetings so that all school residents have the same understanding and move in unison.*" (KS-3, November 21, 2025). The integration of quantitative and qualitative data on this theme confirms that strengthening strategic vision is an important foundation that directs organizational behavior and contributes significantly to improving the performance of school institutions.

Change Management and the Significance of Strategic Leadership Influence

The results of linear regression analysis show that **The school's strategic leadership has a positive and significant effect on the performance of the institution.** The regression model meets the required statistical assumptions, so the results of the analysis can be used to explain the relationship between variables. The relatively high value of the regression coefficient shows that the better the strategic leadership practice, the higher the level of performance of secondary education institutions in the Greater Solo area. These findings indicate that strategic leadership serves as a key lever for school organizational change.

Table 2. Simple Linear Regression Results of Strategic School Leadership on Institutional Performance (N = 120)

Model	B	BE	B Beta	t	p	R	R ²
Constant	1.21	0.29	—	4.17	<0.001	—	—
Strategic School Leadership	0.68	0.07	0.67	9.71	<0.001	0.67	0.45

The interview results provide an in-depth explanation of the mechanisms behind these significances, especially through planned change management practices. One of the principals explained that changes in policies and programs always begin with intensive communication: "*Change cannot be forced, we start with communication of goals and assistance so that all teachers are ready to carry it out.*" (KS-2, November 09, 2025). Senior teachers also emphasized the importance of support systems in dealing with change. "*Schools that are ready to change usually have prepared procedures and evaluations so that teachers do not feel left out when new policies are implemented.*" (GS-1, November 18, 2025). An evaluative approach is also an important part of strategic leadership: "*Evaluations are conducted periodically and the results are used to adjust strategies, not to find faults.*" (GS-3, November 27, 2025). Thus, significant quantitative results are reinforced by qualitative findings showing that systematic change management is a key mechanism that bridges strategic leadership with improved institutional performance.

Resource Optimization through Adaptive and Collaborative Leadership

Advanced analysis shows that the **Resource Management** contribute significantly to the performance of the institution when tested alongside other dimensions of strategic leadership. The multiple regression model shows that the combination of strategic vision, change management, and resource management explains a greater proportion of variation in institutional performance than a simple model. These findings confirm that institutional performance is not only determined by strategic direction, but also by the ability of school leaders to allocate resources effectively.

Table 3. Multiple Linear Regression Results by Leadership Dimensions (N = 120)

Predictor	B	$\frac{BE}{B}$	Beta	t	p
Constant	1.05	0.31	—	3.39	0.001
Visionary Leadership	0.29	0.08	0.28	3.63	<0.001
Change Leadership	0.31	0.07	0.34	4.43	<0.001
Resource Management	0.22	0.07	0.23	3.14	0.002

The results of the interviews show that resource optimization is highly dependent on adaptive and collaborative leadership. A principal explained that the priority of the program is determined based on its impact on the quality of education services: "*We map out the needs that have the most impact and direct resources there so that the results are really felt.*" (KS-1, November 11, 2025). Senior teachers highlighted the importance of teamwork in supporting the effective use of resources: "*The division of tasks in small teams makes work more controlled and human resources are not wasted.*" (GS-2, November 22, 2025). Collaboration with external parties is also seen as an important strategy: "*Schools are building partnerships to cover the limitations of facilities and the principal is playing a key facilitator.*" (KS-3, November 29, 2025). The integration of these findings suggests that resource optimization guided by adaptive and collaborative leadership contributes directly to improving the effectiveness of school organizations.

DISCUSSION

This research shows that school strategic leadership has a positive and significant effect on the performance of secondary education institutions. These findings reinforce the view that school leadership does not only function as administrative management, but as a strategic driver that influences the direction and achievements of the organization as a whole. Theoretically, these results are in line with the strategic leadership theory framework that places leaders as the main actors in aligning organizational vision, strategies, and resources to achieve optimal performance. Previous research has also shown that strategic leadership is able to create structural and cultural alignment that has a direct impact on the effectiveness of educational institutions (Davies & Davies, 2021). Thus, the results of this study strengthen the argument that strategic leadership is an important determinant in improving the performance of school institutions.

The strategic vision serves as a common orientation framework that directs the decision-making and work behavior of school residents. These findings are consistent with visionary leadership theories that emphasize the importance of clarity of direction and collective meaning in increasing organizational commitment. International studies show that schools with a strongly internalized vision tend to have higher levels of organizational cohesion and performance (Kurland et al., 2020). Thus, the contribution of this research lies in the affirmation

that strategic vision is not just a normative statement, but a managerial instrument that has a real impact on institutional performance.

The results of the study show that effective strategic leadership is characterized by the ability of school leaders to manage change systematically, adaptively, and participalistically. These findings are in line with the theory of change leadership, which emphasizes that the success of organizational change is highly dependent on leadership that is able to build the readiness and trust of organizational members. Previous research revealed that schools that fail to manage change tend to experience internal resistance and decreased organizational performance (Fullan, 2020). Therefore, the results of this study strengthen the understanding that change management is a crucial component in school strategic leadership practices.

The findings of the study show that strategic leadership contributes to the performance of institutions through more effective management of human resources, finances, and infrastructure. Conceptually, this is in line with the resource-based view theory which states that an organization's excellence is determined by the ability to manage resources strategically. Empirical research in the field of education shows that schools with leadership that are able to allocate resources in a targeted manner have higher levels of organizational effectiveness (Bush, 2022). Thus, this study expands the application of strategic resource theory in the context of high school leadership.

Adaptive leadership allows schools to respond flexibly to environmental dynamics, while collaborative approaches reinforce the participation and sense of belonging of school citizens. These findings are consistent with a collaborative leadership approach that emphasizes the importance of internal and external networking in increasing organizational capacity. Previous studies have shown that collaborative leadership contributes to improving the quality of decision-making and sustainability of educational institutions' performance (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2021). Thus, this study makes an empirical contribution by showing that adaptivity and collaboration are key characters of effective strategic leadership.

This study uses a cross-sectional design so that it has not been able to capture the dynamics of strategic leadership and institutional performance in the long term. In addition, the research context limited to the Solo Raya area limits the generalization of findings to areas with different characteristics. Further research is suggested using longitudinal design and expanding geographic context to test the consistency of findings. Nevertheless, this study makes a significant contribution to the development of education management science by strengthening empirical evidence on the role of strategic leadership in improving the performance of school institutions, especially in the context of developing countries (Li & Hallinger, 2024).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that strategic school leadership has a significant role in improving institutional performance in secondary education units in the Solo Raya area. The quantitative findings show that strategic leadership has a positive

effect on institutional performance, while the qualitative findings explain that strengthening strategic vision, systematic change management, and adaptive and collaborative resource optimization are the main mechanisms underlying this influence. The results of this study confirm that strategically oriented school leadership is able to direct school organizations more effectively and sustainably, beyond mere administrative functions. Thus, this research makes an important contribution to the development of education management studies and becomes an empirical basis for strengthening the leadership capacity of school principals in an effort to improve the performance of educational institutions.

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