

The Role of Strategic Leadership in Driving Effective School Reform Initiatives

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Article received: April 2024, Revision: June 2024, Approval: November 2024

DOI: 10.17977/um025v9i12024p67

Abstract: This research aims to examine the role of strategic leadership in facilitating school reform and improving educational outcomes. It investigates how effective leadership can contribute to the success of educational change initiatives and their impact on student performance. This research uses a qualitative method approach. These findings suggest that strategic leaders play a critical role in driving educational change by fostering a culture of innovation, collaboration, and continuous improvement. The results also show that strategic leadership can improve the quality of education in the school environment, including increased academic achievement and better student engagement. The strategic leadership carried out by the school principal to realize change is to provide opportunities for teachers to provide educational innovation and assist teachers in facilitating workshop training and mentoring activities. In this way, school principals can help improve the quality of education and increase teachers' awareness of their role in the teaching and learning process, as well as encourage positive change for schools.

Keywords: Strategic Leadership; School Reform

INTRODUCTION

Schools play a crucial role in shaping the future of upcoming generations. In the dynamic context of educational transformation, the role of strategic leadership within school environments has become increasingly essential. Schools bear a significant responsibility to ensure the development of effective, relevant, and inclusive education for all students (Mustika, 2023); (Suhermanto & Anshari, 2018).

SMA Swasta Budi Satrya, located in Medan, possesses unique characteristics in its efforts to address the challenges of modern education. As a private school, SMA Swasta Budi Satrya faces budgetary and resource limitations compared to public schools. This situation demands innovative leadership to optimize resource utilization to maintain high-quality education. (Kurniawati, Arafat, & Puspita, 2020); (Kadarsih, et al 2020). Additionally, the school faces competitive pressure from

other schools in the area, both public and private, in attracting students and *sustaining* its academic reputation.

The local educational culture in Medan also plays a crucial role in shaping policies and teaching approaches at SMA Swasta Budi Satrya. The school principal must balance modern educational practices with local wisdom and community values. Moreover, the school serves a significant role within the surrounding community, not only as an educational institution but also as a center for social and cultural activities. Consequently, the principal is required to adopt leadership strategies that integrate education with the school's social roles, strengthen community relations, and establish the school as a vital part of the community (Akbar & Rukanto, 2017); (Smith & Gillespie, 2023); (Bozkurt., et al 2020).

In addition to these challenges, SMA Swasta Budi Satrya has made efforts to adopt technology and innovation in its learning processes to remain relevant in a rapidly changing era. This underscores the importance of strategic leadership in designing and implementing policies that facilitate the optimal use of technology. Strategic leadership at SMA Swasta Budi Satrya plays a primary role in planning change, driving innovation, enhancing teaching quality, and ensuring the successful implementation of educational reforms. Reform at this school involves not only modifications to the curriculum or organizational structure but also the creation of an inclusive and motivating learning environment. Thus, this research is important in understanding how strategic leadership at SMA Swasta Budi Satrya can drive sustainable reform and contribute to improving the quality of education.

This study aims to provide deeper insights into effective leadership strategies for addressing challenges and leveraging opportunities in schools with similar conditions. This information will be invaluable in developing more effective and successful leadership strategies to drive positive change in the field of education.

METHOD

This research was conducted at SMA Swasta Budi Satrya, located at Jl. Letda Sujono No. 166, Bandar Selamat, Kec. Medan Tembung, Kota Medan. The study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, aiming to describe and explain occurrences based on facts and field data without imposing specific interventions on the research subjects (Arikunto, 2013). This qualitative approach seeks to provide an objective depiction of the conditions and phenomena observed in the research setting, particularly concerning strategic leadership efforts in educational reform.

The stages of qualitative research began with research preparation, where the researcher selected the location and research subjects, namely teachers and the principal at SMA Swasta Budi Satrya. This process was followed by obtaining research permissions and ensuring ethical

compliance, including securing participation consent from the subjects. The researcher also prepared research instruments, such as interview guidelines, observation protocols, and relevant documentation formats.

During the data collection phase, the researcher conducted direct observations to gain a factual overview of leadership practices and interactions within the school. In-depth interviews were carried out with two teachers and the principal to uncover experiences and strategies applied in leadership. Additionally, relevant documents, such as school activity reports and meeting minutes, were collected to support the data. Triangulation was used to enhance data validity by comparing results from observations, interviews, and documentation.

Data analysis was conducted using Miles and Huberman's approach, which involves three main steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction involved filtering the gathered information, selecting relevant information, and discarding less important data. Data presentation was organized in narrative and tabular formats to facilitate analysis. Conclusions were drawn by identifying patterns and themes emerging from the analyzed data, which were then verified to ensure accuracy and consistency.

To ensure data validity, the researcher performed source triangulation, comparing data from teachers, the principal, and collected documents. This process was strengthened by member checking, where informants were given an opportunity to review and provide feedback for final validation. The last stage was the preparation of the research report, where findings and analyses were systematically documented, along with recommendations for developing more effective leadership strategies in the school.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

his research reveals that strategic leadership at SMA Swasta Budi Satrya plays a crucial role in promoting effective school reform. Based on interviews with the principal and two teachers, it was found that the principal's leadership strongly supports the ongoing transformation within the school. The principal demonstrates the ability to develop a clear vision and engage all stakeholders in formulating and implementing school reform strategies. One teacher stated,

"Kepala sekolah kami selalu memotivasi kami untuk berpikir kreatif dan terlibat aktif dalam perencanaan program sekolah yang inovatif," highlighting teacher involvement in educational reform.

School reform at SMA Swasta Budi Satrya not only encompasses curriculum changes but also improves teaching quality and resource management. The principal encourages innovation by providing regular training and workshops for teachers.

“Pelatihan ini membantu kami menerapkan pendekatan baru yang lebih efektif di kelas,” shared a teacher, indicating that the principal’s strategic leadership has a direct impact on the implementation of teaching reforms, which are essential to school reform.

Furthermore, the principal adopts a collaborative approach to reform by involving teachers in decision-making and school program design.

“Kami merasa didengar dan dilibatkan dalam setiap rencana besar yang diambil, dan ini membuat kami lebih termotivasi untuk berkontribusi dalam perubahan,” stated another teacher. This approach aligns with research indicating that strategic leadership involving active participation contributes to successful school reform.

he findings also show that reform driven by strategic leadership at SMA Swasta Budi Satrya has fostered a more positive school culture. This culture is characterized by a high spirit of collaboration among teachers and increased student engagement in learning processes. The principal noted,

“Reformasi yang kami lakukan berfokus pada pengembangan kualitas pengajaran yang berdampak langsung pada hasil belajar siswa,” as reflected in improved academic performance and student engagement.

The study’s findings affirm that school reform at SMA Swasta Budi Satrya is supported by effective strategic leadership, which includes vision formulation, efficient resource management, and stakeholder collaboration. This strategic leadership ensures that changes are sustainable and aligned with the needs of both the school and its students. Therefore, the principal serves as a change agent, guiding the school toward continuous improvement and quality enhancement in education.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that strategic leadership plays a crucial role in driving educational change and enhancing teacher performance at SMA Swasta Budi Satrya. The principal demonstrates an ability to build trust among teachers, empower them with opportunities for innovation, and provide clear direction for achieving school reform objectives. This empowerment, as expressed in teacher interviews, contributes to increased motivation and professionalism among teachers, ultimately positively impacting student learning outcomes.

Additional studies support these findings, showing that leadership strategies focusing on collaboration and participative decision-making improve teacher engagement and teaching quality (Maolana, Darmiyanti, & Abidin, 2024); (Rohman., et al 2024); (Nasir., et al 2023); (Mubarok, Nursalim, & Hasan, 2024). his success is linked to the development of a clear vision by the principal, consistent with literature suggesting that visionary leadership strengthens staff commitment to reform (Musrin, 2022); (Rachman., et al 2023); (Amalia, Maisyaroh, &

Sumarsono, 2021). Teachers at SMA Swasta Budi Satrya reported feeling more motivated and supported in implementing new teaching methods after participating in training and workshops initiated by the principal.

However, challenges in implementing strategic leadership at this school include limited resources and resistance to change, which are also identified in prior literature as common barriers in educational reform (Jannah, 2024); (Anwar & Ridlwan, 2024); (Suhendri, 2024); (Indadihayati & Hariyanto, 2023). Nonetheless, the principal effectively mitigates these challenges through effective communication and a collaborative approach involving all stakeholders, from teachers to the school committee. Interview findings affirm that open discussions and active teacher involvement in decision-making help create a positive work environment that supports sustainable reform.

The implementation of strategic leadership practices at SMA Swasta Budi Satrya aligns with studies emphasizing the importance of the principal's role in efficient and effective school management (Elmanisar., et al 2024); (Ismail, 2008). This study shows that the principal not only acts as an administrative leader but also as a change agent actively guiding reform efforts toward improving educational quality. The principal employs comprehensive planning, organizing, directing, and monitoring strategies to ensure that the school's objectives are achieved efficiently and in line with the school's vision.

The impact of strategic leadership on student achievement is also a key finding. Data reveal that increased teacher involvement and collaboration, resulting from the strategic leadership approach, contribute to better student academic outcomes. This aligns with research by Suwarni (2022); Efendi & Sholeh (2023); Supriatna, Dhuhani, & Ahyani (2024); Faujiah, Gunawan, & Syarifudin (2024) which indicates that effective leadership positively affects the learning environment and student engagement. Teachers at SMA Swasta Budi Satrya reported that students were more enthusiastic and actively participated in learning after implementing new teaching methods, leading to improved academic performance.

Overall, this study confirms that strategic leadership at SMA Swasta Budi Satrya is effective in driving school reform. The principal plays a key role in managing change through careful planning, clear communication, and stakeholder engagement. These findings align with previous research highlighting that effective organizational management within the context of school reform can create a higher-quality educational environment that supports academic achievement (Abdurrahman & Muhammad, 2023); (Sulaeman, 2018); (Fitrah, 2017); (Nadur, 2017); (Handoyo, Mudhofir, & Maslamah, 2021).

By reviewing these findings and referencing relevant literature, it can be concluded that well-implemented strategic leadership has a significant positive impact on school reform, teacher performance, and student learning outcomes. This study contributes to a better understanding of

effective leadership practices and provides recommendations for developing leadership strategies in similar schools.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

CONCLUSION

Strategic leadership plays a crucial role in driving school reform and enhancing overall educational quality. Decisions and actions taken by educational leaders significantly impact the success of reform initiatives and the achievement of educational goals. Effective strategic leadership presents both challenges and opportunities, ultimately determining the direction and success of school reform efforts. The findings indicate that strategic leaders are capable of building trust, empowering teachers, and providing clear direction for reform efforts, thereby enhancing school quality. Developing a clear vision, fostering trust, and empowering teachers are essential elements in advancing reform efforts.

SUGGESTIONS

This research is expected to serve as a reference and benchmark for future researchers to produce newer and improved research findings.

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