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Managing Principal Transfers to Improve Junior High School Performance: Evidence from Siantan District, Anambas Islands Regency

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ABSTRACT

Principal transfers are a common phenomenon in the Indonesian education system and have significant implications for school management and performance. In this study, school performance refers specifically to teacher performance, learning quality, work discipline, and the effectiveness of program implementation. This study aims to analyze the impact of principal transfers on strategic planning, human resource management, and teacher performance at junior high schools in Siantan District, Anambas Islands Regency. This research employed a qualitative case study approach conducted at SMPN 5 Bukit Tambun and SMPN 2 Siantan. Participants consisted of 2 principals, 12 teachers, and 4 administrative staff selected purposively. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, and were analyzed using data reduction, categorization, and thematic analysis techniques. The findings indicate that principal transfers can generate positive changes, including the development of a more adaptive vision and mission, the strengthening of a work-discipline culture, and more systematic teacher performance management. Transfers also enhance teacher motivation through structured supervision, professional development activities, and increased stakeholder participation. These improvements contribute to better instructional quality and more organized program implementation. However, excessively frequent transfers risk disrupting the continuity of long-term school programs. Therefore, principal transfers should be implemented selectively and strategically, with clear planning and minimum tenure policies to ensure leadership stability and protect the sustainability of long-term educational programs while still promoting school improvement.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education is the main pillar of national development because it plays an important role in producing high-quality human resources. Good educational quality determines a

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nation's competitiveness in the challenging era of globalization. Therefore, every aspect of educational implementation must be managed professionally and systematically [1].

One of the key factors influencing the success of education in schools is the leadership of the principal. Principals not only function as administrative managers but also as visionary leaders who determine the direction of school development. The effectiveness of their leadership greatly affects the quality of learning, school culture, and the performance of teachers and staff [2].

In educational management, principal leadership is viewed as the main driving force in planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating all school programs. Principals are expected to serve as role models, motivators, and innovators in creating a conducive learning climate. Without effective leadership, schools may face difficulties in achieving the expected educational goals [3].

However, the dynamics of educational organizations are not always stable. One phenomenon that frequently occurs is the transfer of principals. Transfers, interpreted as reassignment or rotation of positions, are part of human resource management policies within the Indonesian education system. The objectives include organizational renewal, equitable distribution of leadership quality, and individual career development.

Although principal transfers carry positive objectives, this phenomenon also has consequences. Every change of leadership has the potential to cause managerial disruption because new principals must adapt to different work environments, established school cultures, and community expectations. This adaptation process often becomes a significant challenge.

Principal transfers can have dual impacts. On one hand, transfers bring new enthusiasm, management innovations, and increased motivation for teachers. On the other hand, overly frequent leadership changes can disrupt the stability of long-term school programs and reduce consistency in achieving educational goals [4].

From the perspective of change management, principal transfers can be explained through Kurt Lewin's model: unfreezing, changing, and refreezing. New principals need to understand the initial conditions of the school, implement innovations according to contextual needs, and then institutionalize changes so that they become part of the organizational culture. Success at each stage greatly determines whether the transfer produces positive impacts or instead generates resistance [5].

In the context of junior high schools in island regions, such as Siantan District in Anambas Islands Regency, the phenomenon of principal transfers has become increasingly salient. Over the past five years, several public junior high schools in the district have experienced principal changes at least two to three times, with some leadership tenures lasting less than three years. This relatively frequent rotation has drawn attention from teachers and local stakeholders because it directly affects the continuity of strategic programs, teacher supervision patterns, and school development priorities. In geographically remote areas with limited facilities and strong community dependence on school leadership, leadership stability becomes particularly crucial.

Public junior high schools in Siantan District, including SMPN 5 Bukit Tambun and SMPN 2 Siantan, have experienced such principal transfers in recent years. These leadership

changes have brought various impacts on school strategic planning, human resource management, and teacher motivation and performance. This indicates that transfers are not merely administrative rotations, but also instruments of organizational change that can either strengthen or weaken school performance depending on how they are managed.

Based on these conditions, this article aims to analyze in depth the impact of principal transfers on strategic planning, human resource management, and teacher performance in junior high schools in Siantan District. Through this study, it is expected that a more comprehensive understanding can be obtained regarding how principal transfers influence school performance and how such policies can be managed to improve the effectiveness of school management and the quality of education in island regions.

2. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study research design, focusing on two junior high schools in Siantan District, namely SMPN 5 Bukit Tambun and SMPN 2 Siantan. This approach was selected to obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of principal transfers and their impacts on school management. The case study design enabled the researcher to explore rich, contextual, and socially embedded information while examining the dynamics occurring within each school environment [6].

Research Participants and Sampling

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their direct involvement in and experience with the principal transfer process. The criteria included: (1) individuals who had worked at the school before and after the transfer, and (2) individuals directly involved in managerial or instructional processes. A total of 18 participants were involved in this study, consisting of:

- 2 principals (one from each school),
- 12 teachers (6 from each school), and
- 4 administrative staff members (2 from each school).

This composition allowed the researcher to capture leadership, instructional, and administrative perspectives on the impact of principal transfers.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted from March to June 2025, approximately one to two years after the most recent principal transfers in both schools. This timeframe was considered sufficient to observe initial adaptation processes and emerging managerial impacts. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation:

Observation

Observations were conducted to examine managerial practices, teacher supervision processes, staff coordination, and learning activities following the principal transfer. Field notes were systematically recorded to document behavioral patterns and institutional changes.

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In-depth Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview protocol covering key themes:

- changes in strategic planning after the transfer,
- adjustments in human resource management practices,
- supervision and teacher performance evaluation,
- organizational culture and work discipline, and
- perceived benefits and challenges of the transfer.

Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy in data analysis.

Documentation

Documents analyzed included school strategic plans, annual work programs, supervision reports, teacher performance assessments, meeting minutes, and other relevant administrative records. These documents were used to corroborate findings from observations and interviews [7].

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in several stages. First, data reduction was performed by selecting and focusing on information relevant to the research objectives. Second, data were categorized into major themes: (1) strategic planning, (2) human resource management, and (3) teacher performance. Finally, thematic analysis was applied to identify patterns, relationships, and meanings emerging from the data, allowing conclusions to be drawn in alignment with the research questions [8].

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

To ensure trustworthiness, this study employed source and method triangulation by comparing data obtained from different participants and data collection techniques. In addition, member checking was conducted by returning summarized findings to several participants for confirmation of accuracy. An audit trail documenting research procedures, coding decisions, and analytical processes was maintained to enhance transparency. Peer debriefing with fellow researchers was also carried out to minimize researcher bias.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed. Formal permission was obtained from the school authorities prior to data collection. All participants provided informed consent, and confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing names and institutional identifiers in the research report.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings indicate that principal transfers have a direct impact on school strategic planning. The new principal at SMPN 5 Bukit Tambun reformulated the school's vision and mission to be more adaptive to developments in educational technology. This vision was directed toward digital-based learning to improve student literacy. This is in line

with the view of Nor and Suriyansyah [9], who emphasize that principals play an important role in formulating the strategic direction of schools in response to changes in the educational environment. From the perspective of Lewin's change model, this stage reflects unfreezing, where the new leader reassesses existing assumptions, resets institutional expectations, and prepares school members to accept a new strategic direction. Leadership transition becomes the trigger for questioning established routines and opening space for innovation.

At SMPN 2 Siantan, the principal transfer had implications for strengthening a culture of work discipline. The new principal emphasized discipline as the foundation for achieving educational quality. The implementation of discipline in the form of punctuality rules and work ethics had an impact on increasing the orderliness of the teaching and learning process. According to Selvia et al. [10], the success of school management is strongly influenced by the principal's ability to build a culture of discipline and solid cooperation among teachers and staff. In Lewin's framework, this represents the changing stage, where new policies, behavioral expectations, and monitoring systems are actively introduced.

In the aspect of human resource management, the new principal introduced a more systematic teacher performance monitoring system. This system not only evaluates outcomes but also emphasizes the learning process. Teachers are encouraged to prepare periodic reports as a form of accountability. This finding is in line with the research of Widyasari et al. [11], which states that structured supervision and evaluation are able to significantly improve teacher professionalism. Academic supervision practices align with research by Robinson et al. [16], who found that leadership practices directly related to teaching and learning have a significant effect on student outcomes. Such evidence supports the interpretation that principal transfers can strengthen instructional leadership when the new leader prioritizes supervision and feedback mechanisms.

Principal transfers also had an impact on improving teacher performance through more intensive academic supervision activities. This supervision includes direct monitoring of classroom learning processes, the provision of feedback, and reflective discussions with teachers. This supports the opinion of Akhmad and Azzam [12], who emphasize that academic supervision is an effective instrument in improving pedagogical competence and teacher motivation. Similarly, Hallinger and Heck [17] argue that leadership effects on school improvement operate through organizational processes such as supervision, professional dialogue, and collaborative learning cultures.

In addition, there was a strengthening in the development of teacher competencies through training programs and technical guidance. The new principal facilitated training related to the use of digital learning media and innovative learning strategies. This is consistent with the opinion of Sudjana [13] that relevant training can enhance teacher capacity in facing curriculum demands and developments in educational technology. Empirical evidence also shows that sustained professional development contributes to improved instructional quality and student achievement [18]. Therefore, during the changing stage, leadership interventions in supervision and professional development become the core mechanisms of transformation.

Another impact of principal transfers is the occurrence of organizational change within schools. The new principal encouraged coordination among work units and

strengthened communication between teachers, staff, and the school committee. This fostered active participation from stakeholders, including parents and the community. According to Robbins [14], organizational change that is led effectively can create synergy and increase stakeholder trust in educational institutions. Research by Leithwood and Sun [19] further demonstrates that transformational leadership practices—such as building shared vision and fostering collaboration—are positively associated with organizational commitment and teacher motivation.

Leadership changes also influenced teacher motivation. Teachers felt appreciated when principals provided recognition for their performance. This condition created a more conducive work atmosphere. Research conducted by Hasibuan [15] shows that transformational leadership that provides recognition can increase teachers' work enthusiasm and loyalty to the school. International evidence similarly indicates that principal leadership is indirectly linked to student achievement through its impact on teacher motivation and working conditions [20].

However, the success of leadership change depends not only on innovation but also on the refreezing stage, where new routines become institutionalized. Refreezing occurs when new supervision systems, discipline norms, and strategic plans are consistently implemented and accepted as standard organizational practices. Studies on leadership succession warn that instability in leadership can disrupt institutional consolidation processes [21]. Frequent transfers may interrupt refreezing before new norms are fully embedded, thereby reducing long-term effectiveness.

Boundary Conditions of Positive Principal Transfers

The findings suggest that principal transfers become positive catalysts under several boundary conditions. First, a minimum tenure period is necessary to allow leaders to complete the unfreezing–changing–refreezing cycle. Evidence indicates that principal stability is associated with improved organizational performance and student outcomes over time [22]. Second, stakeholder readiness and participatory communication reduce resistance to change. Third, structured onboarding and transition support from the district level help new principals understand contextual challenges more quickly. Finally, continuity planning, including documentation of strategic programs and collaborative leadership teams, ensures that long-term initiatives survive leadership shifts. Research on leadership succession emphasizes the importance of systematic transition planning to maintain program sustainability [23].

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the two-case design limits generalizability beyond similar island or rural contexts. Although case studies provide depth, broader comparative research would strengthen external validity. Second, the reliance on interviews may introduce social desirability bias, as participants might portray leadership changes positively due to hierarchical relationships. Third, improvements observed after transfers cannot be attributed solely to principal leadership. External factors such as district policies, curriculum reforms, or additional funding may also influence school performance. Research

on school effectiveness consistently shows that leadership interacts with contextual and policy variables rather than operating in isolation [24].

Despite these limitations, the findings remain significant in demonstrating how leadership transitions can function as mechanisms of organizational change. When managed strategically, principal transfers align with evidence-based models of instructional and transformational leadership that enhance teacher performance and organizational capacity [25]. However, without stability and structured transition management, frequent transfers risk undermining the consolidation phase necessary for sustainable school improvement.

4. CONCLUSION

From the discussion above, it is evident that principal transfers in Siantan District generate complex and multidimensional impacts on school management and school performance, which in this study refers to teacher performance, instructional quality, work discipline, and the effectiveness of program implementation. Positively, transfers encourage the emergence of more adaptive visions and missions, strengthen a culture of discipline, improve teacher performance through structured supervision, and expand stakeholder participation through more inclusive organizational changes. Leadership transitions also create opportunities for enhancing teacher competencies through professional development and technology-based learning innovations.

However, transfers that occur too frequently may disrupt the consolidation of long-term programs. Sustainable improvement in teacher performance, instructional quality, and program implementation requires leadership consistency, particularly during the institutionalization (refreezing) stage of organizational change. Without sufficient tenure, newly introduced policies and supervision systems may not reach full maturity and risk being replaced before producing measurable outcomes.

To ensure that principal transfers contribute positively to school performance, several policy implications need to be emphasized. Education authorities should establish a minimum tenure period for principals, especially in schools implementing long-term strategic programs, so that leaders have adequate time to complete cycles of planning, implementation, and consolidation. A structured transition mechanism should also be required during leadership handovers, including comprehensive documentation of program roadmaps, supervision records, performance evaluations, and strategic priorities to maintain continuity between outgoing and incoming principals. In addition, district-level monitoring indicators should be developed to guide the timing of transfers, taking into account school stability, program maturity, teacher performance trends, and stakeholder readiness so that transfer decisions are evidence-based rather than purely administrative.

With these measures, principal transfers can move beyond routine bureaucratic rotation and function as strategic instruments for strengthening managerial effectiveness. When implemented selectively, measurably, and in alignment with school needs, leadership transitions can become catalysts for improving teacher performance, enhancing instructional quality, reinforcing discipline culture, and sustaining overall school performance in island and geographically remote regions.

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