



THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL IN IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF 9-YEAR EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY AT ENSINO BASICO 3º CICLO JOSE MARIA BEADILA, CAILACO

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ABSTRACT

Education serves as the primary medium for human development, encompassing both formal and nonformal pathways. Central to all forms of education is quality, which directly determines graduates' competitiveness in the labor market. This study investigates the role of the school principal in improving educational quality at *Ensino Basico 3º Ciclo José Maria Beadila Cailaco*. Using qualitative methods, data were collected through interviews with seven informants, supplemented by secondary institutional documents. Findings reveal seven principal roles: (1) controlling educator competence, (2) managerial decision-making, (3) performance supervision and auditing, (4) periodic monitoring and evaluation, (5) fostering community relations, (6) overseeing administrative systems, and (7) enforcing institutional discipline. These roles collectively ensure educational quality aligned with community expectations. The study concludes that the school principal is a decisive figure in deciding institutional progress and the overall quality of education delivered.

INTRODUCTION

Educational quality is the fundamental struggle of human life, as education serves as the foundation, pillar, and benchmark for the future. Education is a means to determine each individual's future. The quality of a person's future life largely depends

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on the education they receive today (Sugiarto, 2019). We cannot live properly without paying attention to education.

In real life, education functions as a determinant of every person's future. Wherever we live, education is a priority that must be taken seriously. Well-educated individuals tend to have better life opportunities and a higher social position, whereas those without adequate education face significant hardships and find it difficult to make new breakthroughs. Therefore, education is a key and foundational aspect of human life (Roodbali et al., 2022).

Every educational institution needs certain qualifications, including quality standards that can ensure the implementation of a high-quality education system. Education that lacks quality will never be desired or expected by society, and such institutions will lose their footing in the future. In human life, we always seek educational institutions that guarantee quality, because everyone aspires to a bright future that meets daily needs (Alfaiz et al., 2024). However, these aspirations can only be realized if education serves as a benchmark that fulfills our hopes in life (Sy, 2022; Lestari, 2024).

Educational quality can only be properly implemented if it is led by a leader with broad insight, a positive outlook, high aspirations for education, and an orientation toward quality education. Leaders are responsible for managing shared expectations within an organization, particularly regarding its progress or decline. The basic task of a leader is to manage collective expectations to achieve success (Ramadani et al., 2024).

In education, the school principal is the key to ensuring educational quality. The principal manages, organizes, supervises, and develops the entire educational system to achieve the vision and mission of delivering quality education (Gusmão et al., 2020). When the principal neglects their role as a guarantor of educational quality, society's aspirations for high-quality education will instantly disappear. Quality education contributes positively to the future of the nation and the state (Kholdarova et al., 2023).

The principal provides ideas and designs the progress of the education system that we aspire to achieve. We rely on the principal's positive thinking as the leader who guides the aspirations of all educational stakeholders. The principal lays the foundation of education, ensuring that quality education is delivered. They are the

leader in an educational institution who consistently provides concrete foundations for institutional advancement (Latifah, 2022).

The nine-year education program is a government program aimed at improving educational quality and reducing school dropout rates in Timor-Leste. This program represents the government's efforts to educate the nation's children in line with the national vision to enhance human resources. Based on these considerations, the author has chosen the thesis title: *The Role of the School Principal in Improving the Quality of 9-Year Education (A Case Study at Ensino Basico 30 Ciclo Jose Maria Beadila Cailaco)*.

The objective of this research is to analyze and describe the role of the school principal in improving the quality of 9-year education at Ensino Basico 30 Ciclo Jose Maria Beadila Cailaco, particularly in relation to managerial functions, academic supervision, monitoring and evaluation, administrative management, discipline reinforcement, and the development of social relations with the community.

METHOD

This research was conducted at Ensino Básico 3º Ciclo José Maria Beadila Cailaco, located in Bobonaro Municipality. The purpose of selecting this school as the research site was to gain a deeper understanding of the educational institution through scientific writing, as the researcher is a member of the teaching staff currently serving at the school. Furthermore, the researcher intends to contribute academically to this institution through this study.

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach. According to Erciyas (2020) Qualitative research is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words derived from observable individuals and behaviors. Additionally, Sitasari (2022) describes qualitative research as a specific tradition in the social sciences that fundamentally relies on human observation in natural settings and on interactions with people in their own language. Therefore, qualitative descriptive research aims to comprehensively explain human social realities.

To obtain research data, the researcher gathered information from several informants who were relevant to the research topic. Interviews were conducted with seven informants: four teachers, one student, and two community leaders/parents. In

collecting the data, the researcher used several methods, namely interviews and direct observation. The collected data were analyzed using qualitative descriptive methods.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

This research was conducted at Cristal Private Senior High School. The population of this study is 200 grade 11 students of the Natural Science of Cristal Senior High School. Purposive sampling was utilized to determine the classroom. The class is composed of 22 students 12 females and 10 males.

To understand the role of the school principal in improving the quality of education, the author outlines it in the following section. This section presents the main points that address the issues and objectives of this thesis. There are several roles carried out by the school principal in enhancing the quality of 9-year education at Ensino Basico 30 Ciclo Jose Maria Beadila Cailaco, as follows:

Controlling, Monitoring, and Supervising the Competence of Educators

One of the important roles of the school principal is to monitor, observe, and assess educators' competence (Saman & Hasanah, 2024). Competence essentially reflects the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that learners must master and that are demonstrated through habitual ways of thinking and acting. Competence is also understood as a statement that describes the overall performance of a particular ability, representing a combination of knowledge and skills that can be observed and measured (Salman et al., 2019). In addition, competence encompasses fundamental knowledge, skills, and values that are reflected in consistent and continuous patterns of thinking and acting (Arifin, 2021). Thus, competence is the ability to act on knowledge, and the outcomes of such actions benefit both oneself and others.

The same point was expressed by Mr. [AdCF] (48 years old), a teacher at Ensino Basico 30 Ciclo Jose Maria Beadila Cailaco. He stated that:

The principal's primary role in an educational institution is to monitor, assess, and supervise teachers' competence and quality. He emphasized that this is crucial

because if teachers' competence is not controlled, monitored, and supervised, achieving the expected quality of education will be very difficult. Educational quality, he explained, begins with the teaching staff. When teachers are competent and professional, he is confident that they will teach effectively and their students will achieve good learning outcomes. Therefore, the principal has significant responsibility for ensuring teachers' academic standing so that the institution can produce competent, high-quality learners.

Decision Maker in Managerial Affairs

The second role of the school principal is as a decision-maker in managerial affairs, namely the individual responsible for decisions within the educational institution, particularly those related to the school's management system. The school principal can also be understood as a manager (Daud, 2023). The principal's managerial competence is reflected in the ability to develop school planning at various levels, grounded in national education policies. This includes preparing strategic, operational, and annual plans, as well as the school's revenue and expenditure budget.

In addition, the principal must be able to formulate the school's strategic development plan, or School Work Plan, that fully aligns with national education policies (Palah et al., 2022). The principal is also required to prepare the school's operational development plan (Rohmadiyah et al., 2024), which is derived from the strategic plan through appropriate approaches, strategies, and planning processes that follow sound principles of strategic planning.

The ideas mentioned above were also expressed by Mr. [FBM] (45 years old), one of the teaching staff at Ensino Basico 30 Ciclo Jose Maria Beadila Cailaco. In the interview, he explained that:

One of the principal's roles is to serve as the decision maker in school management. This means that the principal has the authority to make various decisions related to the operation of the school, such as matters concerning the human resources of the teaching staff, school facilities, school planning and future development, as well as the establishment of system units that facilitate supervision within the educational

institution. Thus, the role of the school principal is broad and covers many aspects, especially those related to educational policy.

Conducting Supervision (Reviewing and Auditing Performance)

To achieve the planned outcomes, the school principal needs to provide guidance and conduct evaluations for all teaching staff at the institution (Komalasari et al., 2020). This guidance is intended to help teachers fulfill their teaching duties in accordance with established requirements and guidelines. Meanwhile, the evaluation focuses on measurement through quality audits.

Such audits may include questions such as whether work procedures and work instructions have been jointly formulated and agreed upon, whether they are being followed, and whether predetermined goals have been achieved. Activities of this kind are referred to as supervision.

To ensure proper school management, it is necessary to conduct document and compliance audits of all documents mutually agreed upon.

The ideas above were also conveyed by Mr. [VS] (35 years old), a teacher at Ensino Basico 30 Ciclo Jose Maria Beadila Cailaco. He explained that:

One of the principal's roles is to supervise, which involves reviewing and evaluating the academic processes within the educational institution he leads. Through supervision, the principal can audit the performance of teachers and other school personnel. This includes observing how a teacher provides instructional services during classroom instruction, prepares their teaching materials, and conducts the learning process. Thus, the principal serves as the school's internal supervisor, ensuring the quality of education is maintained.

Conducting Regular Periodic Monitoring and Evaluation in the School

In this context, monitoring refers to observing the implementation of educational activities within the institution led by the school principal (Hamka, 2023). The results of this observation are later presented in routine periodic evaluations, enabling teachers to understand both the strengths and weaknesses in the educational institution's

development. One of the principal's roles is to monitor the teaching and learning process in the school (Amelia et al., 2021), which includes recording ongoing conditions (Vienty et al., 2022), noting reactions, comments, and other developments related to all activities within the institution (Amien et al., 2021; Nilda et al., 2021; Basri et al., 2024).

In this regard, the school principal is someone ready to listen to and sense the dynamics within the school environment. Based on monitoring information, the principal then conducts evaluations to ensure that positive aspects can be further developed and that negative aspects are minimized as much as possible.

This was also conveyed by Mr. [RLA] (42 years old) during an interview with the researcher at Ensino Basico 30 Ciclo Jose Maria Beadila Cailaco. He explained that:

One of the roles of the school principal is to carry out periodic monitoring and evaluation of the institution he leads. Monitoring is conducted by gathering and observing various conditions within the school environment, both positive and negative, and then using these findings as the basis for evaluation. The purpose of evaluation is to ensure that all components within the educational institution are aware of the ongoing developments. Through evaluation, positive and negative aspects can be identified. Information or conditions that are positive can be further developed, while negative aspects are minimized or addressed.

Establishing Permanent Social Relations with the Community

The school principal must not isolate himself or distance himself from the community (Mansir, 2021). He must remain open and be able to build harmonious relationships with all parties, including teachers and the surrounding community. Such harmonious relationships have a tangible impact on learning development in the school, as the community is likely to make positive contributions to the educational institution.

As the leader of an educational institution, the principal must present himself maturely in public (Karim et al., 2025), as he relies on community support, including constructive input that can contribute to educational development and the professional growth of teachers. Through harmonious and continuous engagement with the community, the school principal can foster teachers' work spirit (Tamunoemi, 2025) and enhance their motivation to the fullest (Sanjani, 2024).

A similar view was also expressed by Mr. [JM] (38 years old), a community leader in Cailako. He stated that:

The role of the school principal is to build harmonious cooperation with all parties, both inside and outside the school. The purpose is to ensure the institution has a positive influence in the community's eyes. A school principal is a symbolic figure who must elegantly present themselves before the public. Therefore, their role is to maintain harmonious collaboration with teachers and the surrounding community. He further explained that a principal who is unable to establish cooperation with all parties will fail to carry out their daily responsibilities, as principals inevitably need others to help them fulfill their duties. For this reason, as leaders, they must promote harmonious cooperation and remain open in all matters related to educational activities.

Supervising the school's administrative system

Administration is a fundamental element of an educational institution (Fatoni et al., 2024). It can also be understood as the gateway through which outsiders assess the quality or standards of education within a school. The normative criteria used to judge whether an institution is high- or low-quality depend largely on how its administrative system is managed. High-quality institutions typically demonstrate orderly, well-structured, and systematic administrative practices.

Therefore, the school principal's role is to supervise and ensure the proper functioning of the institution's administrative system (Hamka, 2023). Administration serves as the primary gateway to improving educational quality. The quality of a school cannot be assessed solely on the basis of teachers' professionalism or the discipline of its members; it must also consider how non-movable assets and facilities are managed to effectively support the institution's components. Proper management of these facilities can motivate all members of the educational community to work more productively and efficiently.

A similar view was expressed by Mr. [JF], a community leader in Cailako. In an interview with the author, he stated that:

The role of the school principal is to supervise the administrative system within the educational institution. According to him, when administration is well managed, there is a strong guarantee that the institution will progress and develop.

Maintaining and supervising the level of discipline among teachers and students within the educational institution

The quality of education begins with an individual's level of discipline. This means that educational quality starts from a person's ability to manage and regulate themselves, particularly their capacity to maintain discipline in carrying out any task or responsibility, an idea consistently emphasized in educational leadership literature (Savvidou et al., 2023). For this reason, discipline is essential for every teacher. A person who lacks discipline is not suitable to be a teacher, since teacher behavior directly shapes institutional performance and student outcomes, as also noted by Ibrahimova (2025). When a teacher is undisciplined, it negatively affects the institution's future development, and student achievement cannot be assured. Therefore, the school principal must be able to assess teachers who are not disciplined, monitor their conduct, and address any issues they encounter.

A similar view was expressed by [JdC], a student at Ensino Basico 30 Ciclo Jose Maria Beadila Cailaco. He stated that:

The role of the school principal is to monitor and oversee the challenges faced by teachers and students within the institution, particularly those related to discipline. According to him, discipline is a key factor that determines the progress or decline of an educational institution. When teachers are disciplined, education advances; however, when teachers lack discipline, the quality of education declines. Given the various challenges teachers face, the principal's role is to provide appropriate solutions to achieve the shared goals.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the research conducted at Ensino Basico 30 Ciclo Jose Maria Beadila Cailaco, it can be concluded that the role of the school principal is crucial in improving the quality of 9-year basic education. This role encompasses managerial leadership, supervision, social engagement, administrative management,

and the reinforcement of discipline among teachers and students. From the overall data and interviews, several key conclusions can be drawn.

First, the school principal plays an essential role in overseeing, monitoring, and evaluating teachers' competencies. The quality of education is largely determined by the quality of its educators; therefore, systematic supervision and professional development are fundamental responsibilities of the school principal. Without proper monitoring of teacher competencies, achieving educational quality becomes difficult.

Second, the principal serves as a decision-maker in managerial affairs. This includes responsibility for strategic policies, program planning, human resource management, facility development, and long-term school improvement. The principal's ability to make well-informed and effective decisions significantly influences the implementation of educational programs.

Third, the principal serves as an internal supervisor, conducting evaluations, performance audits, and academic monitoring. Through supervision, the principal ensures that teaching and learning processes are carried out in accordance with established guidelines and quality standards.

Fourth, the principal regularly monitors and periodically evaluates all educational activities within the school. Monitoring enables the principal to identify progress, challenges, and ongoing dynamics, while evaluation provides direction for enhancement, allowing positive aspects to be strengthened and negative aspects to be addressed.

Fifth, the principal has a responsibility to establish permanent and harmonious social relations with the community. Positive collaboration with the community supports school development, strengthens external support, and enhances the institution's public image.

Sixth, the principal is responsible for overseeing the school's administrative system. Effective administration is a key indicator of institutional quality. A school with organized, systematic, and well-managed administration possesses a strong foundation for growth and educational effectiveness.

Seventh, the principal plays a vital role in maintaining and supervising the discipline of teachers and students. Discipline is a decisive factor in educational

quality. A disciplined teacher establishes a conducive learning environment, whereas poor teacher discipline negatively affects school development and student achievement. Therefore, the principal must provide solutions and take appropriate measures to address various disciplinary issues.

Overall, this study reinforces the conclusion that improving the quality of 9-year basic education at Ensino Basico 30 Ciclo Jose Maria Beadila Cailaco relies heavily on the effectiveness of the school principal in fulfilling these roles. The school principal is not only an administrative leader but also an academic leader, quality guardian, decision maker, discipline builder, and mediator between the school and the community. It is through this integrated leadership that the continuity and advancement of educational quality can be achieved.

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