

Challenges and Opportunities for School Principals in Innovating at SMTK Kanaan Jaya-Jayapura

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Abstract

This research aims to explore the challenges and opportunities faced by the principal's leadership in increasing innovation at SMTK Kanaan Jaya, Jayapura Regency. Using qualitative methods with a phenomenological approach, this study delves into the first-hand experiences of school principals, teachers, and students in facing various obstacles and taking advantage of opportunities to encourage innovation in the educational environment. This phenomenological approach allows for a comprehensive analysis of the principal's leadership transformation through direct observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation of policies implemented in schools. The data collected was analyzed using the Miles and Huberman method, which included the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. The results of the study show that school principals face challenges from within and from outside, but also find opportunities, namely policies that are in line with the demands of development that can support the principal's innovation program.

Keywords: *Challenges, Educational innovation, Opportunities, Phenomenology, School leadership, SMTK Kanaan Jaya.*

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INTRODUCTION

The transformation of the leadership of school principals is a obligation that need to be fullfilled in the 21st century era of education. The principal no longer only acts as an administrator, but also as an agent of change that encourages innovation in the school environment. School principals play a key role in shaping an educational environment that is dynamic, innovative, and aligned with rapid progress in various sectors. The role of the principal is crucial in schools because they not only act as administrators, but also as managers, process drivers, and leaders who support the achievement of high achievement among students (Malere & Ozola, 2019). Therefore, principals who implement transformational leadership styles can form a positive school culture, thereby increasing teacher morale and job satisfaction, which ultimately has a direct impact on student learning outcomes ((Utami, Nelitawati, & Al-Kadri, 2024).

Furthermore, the importance of the role of school principals in creating an innovative learning environment cannot be ignored. By leveraging inclusive and participatory leadership

strategies, principals can encourage collaboration between teachers and students, resulting in more meaningful learning experiences. Recent research shows that this approach not only increases student engagement but also has a positive impact on academic outcomes (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Therefore, leadership transformation is key in facing the challenges of modern education and ensuring the long-term success of educational institutions.

Leadership transformation is also related to the application of innovative practices that can answer today's educational challenges. According to research, school principals who are able to apply a data-driven approach in decision-making tend to produce better learning outcomes for students (Leithwood, Sun, & Schumacker, 2020). This shows that education leaders need to have analytical skills and the ability to adapt to changing societal needs and technological developments. Therefore, it is important for school leaders to continue to develop themselves and implement leadership strategies that are responsive to the dynamics of the current educational environment.

This requires a deep understanding of how principals can inspire and mobilize all elements of the school to adapt and innovate sustainably. Recent literature shows that transformational leadership greatly contributes to improving teacher performance through aspects such as charisma and inspiration, which are crucial in motivating educators and increasing their participation in various school activities (Sugianto, 2024). However, not all principals are adequately prepared to manage these major changes in the ever-evolving education system.

The results of initial observations show that school principals at SMTK Kanaan Jaya Jayapura Regency often face various challenges, ranging from limited resources, changing education policies, to resistance to changes at the internal level of the school. These challenges often slow down the innovation process needed to meet the demands of the times. School leaders must have the right strategies to overcome these obstacles and keep educators and students motivated to innovate. Therefore, it is very important to understand in depth the challenges faced by school principals in this context. The need for leadership transformation refers to an approach that focuses on developing a shared vision, empowering staff, and creating an environment that supports innovation. This is the opposite, with the reality that happened at the school at SMTK Kanaan Jaya, Jayapura Regency. In the development of the vision, the main challenge faced by the school mission is the lack of alignment between the principal's vision and implementation at the operational level, which is often caused by a static work culture among teachers. The absence of a strong synergy between the principal's leadership and a dynamic work culture is a major obstacle in encouraging sustainable educational innovation.

This leadership transformation is important considering the demands of SMTK Kanaan Jaya Jayapura Regency to create a dynamic work culture, which is able to accommodate technological developments, curriculum changes, and increasingly complex student needs. As a leader, the principal of SMTK Kanaan Jaya Jayapura Regency, has made various efforts by conducting effective communication, collaborative decision-making, and setting clear goals according to the vision and mission of SMTK Kanaan Jaya Regency. This is certainly to be able to inspire and motivate teachers and students to be able to create an active culture in the learning process. Thus, it can improve individual performance, but also strengthen the overall organizational culture to run optimally.

Some previous studies that elaborate more about two fundamental aspects namely innovation in education and principle leadership. These studies will bring foresight about phenomenon in school and how the leader acts and take position among the problems;

The first studies are Innovation in education, some publications mention the innovated method can be fulfilled. Fındıkoğlu & İlhan (2016) highlights 5 passions that are important in fulfilling the innovation process in an educational world. These desires are (1) the role of innovation in education which is often called the adoption of technology in education, (2) supporting skills including human resources and collaboration with other parties, (3) the transformation of the role of teachers, namely the tendency of changes made by teachers both in

terms of teaching methods and resources, and teaching media, (4) the need for curriculum in accordance with the context of learning, and (5) and challenges in technology integration.

In line with research conducted by Guan, Mou, & Jiang (2020) that innovation in education has undergone a very significant paradigm change. The paradigm is a change in the approach of pursuit to learning, the use of new technologies, and ethical and ethical challenges. This shows that innovation in education does not only contain technology integration but also contains pedagogical, social, and ethical aspects. Beside aspect of innovation, pedagogy or the real application of learning to students through the role of teachers has povital rule in education.

Seechaliao (2017) provides instructional guidance for designing innovative and creative learning through learning actions that start from studying students' problems and needs, defining problems, setting goals, designing learning innovations, and evaluating success. Purwati & Sukirman (2024) emphasized that the active involvement of educators in encouraging effective and innovative learning is needed to meet the demands of an independent curriculum. By focusing on professional development and addressing challenges, teachers can significantly improve the educational experience for students in the 21st century. The integration of critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration into the learning process will equip students with essential skills for their future endeavors

The second studies are Principals' Leadership; Angga & Iskandar (2022) stated that the role of school principals is not only to behave and carry out their duties as administrators but also to play an important role in change or transformative agents, besides that school principals have the obligation to guide educators to achieve educational excellence in a supportive and innovative way. Specifically, it is stated that school principals have duties as policy direction holders, have achievement targets, facilitators in independent learning, support teachers' freedom in designing learning innovations, and empower students in the form of emphasizing learning autonomy. In the trilogy of education in Indonesia mentioned by Ki Hajar Dewantara, it is implied that there is leadership of school principals in supporting educational innovation. Kertini, Purnami, & Mulyono (2023) explain that the task of school principals in the education trilogy model in Indonesia is to provide examples, provide motivation, and provide encouragement to teachers to improve competence both initially and with support from school principals or institutions where they work. However, along with the rapid communication and information today, school principals are experiencing obstacles in innovating. These problems usually lie in substantial aspects (Nuriati, Azis, & AS, 2021) in the form of busy schedules, lack of communication, and ineffective strategies.

Based on the problems faced by school principle in SMTK Kanaan Jaya-Jayapura, this research aims to explore challenges and opportunities, as well as see opportunities in improving principal leadership innovation. In particular, this study will review how school principals face existing obstacles and evaluate the effectiveness of the approaches used in encouraging innovation in schools. The research questions that will be described in this study are what are the challenges faced by the principal of SMTK Kanaan Jaya in innovating and what forms of opportunities can be used as recommendations for improvement in organizing the school to be better

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. The study of phenomenology is a scientific study that studies and explores the events experienced by individuals, groups of individuals, or groups of other living things (Nasir, Nurjana, Shah, Sirodj, & Afgani, 2023). This approach comprehensively examines and analyzes the leadership transformation of school principals at SMTK Kanaan Jaya, Jayapura Regency. The participants in this study consisted of school principals, several teachers, and students who were actively involved in the teaching and learning process.

This approach uses this observation technique to directly observe the behavior and events of the existing subject. Interviews are intended to search and explore information or data so that in

accordance with the focus of the study, documentation is used to see the policy programs made and relevant data. So that the data collected is in accordance with the reality and needs in the field. The process of data analysis in stages using the Miles & Huberman (1992) namely; data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. Data reduction is carried out by looking at policies, programs, performance and achievements of school principals. The results of the reduction are packaged in a table as presentation material that will be analyzed related to the challenges faced by school principals and opportunities that can encourage innovation as a catalyst for change. Furthermore, make conclusions based on the data that has been presented to analyze the opportunities and challenges faced by the principal at SMTK Kanaan Jaya, Jayapura-Papua Regency.

FINDING AND DISCUSSIONS

In carrying out Leadership, school principals have a very important role to increase innovation in educational institutions. Importantly, the transformation of the principal's leadership in realizing the school's vision and mission so that it is implemented according to expectations is not an easy thing. As a leader, the principal seeks to carry out strategic policies to improve the quality of the school and student learning outcomes as expected. In a study conducted at SMTK Kanaan Jaya in Jayapura Regency, the main concern was on the challenges and opportunities faced by the principal. The results of the research found that the principal of SMTK Kanaan Jaya Sentani, faces challenges both externally and internally in improving school innovation. Beside that, there are also opportunities that can lead school principals to implement innovations to support change in the school they lead. The challenges dan oppurtinities can be see in tabel bellow;

Tabel 1. Challanges and Opprtunities for Innovation

No	The role of the principal in innovating	
	Challenges	Opportunities
1	Externally 1. Financial support 2. Students' background 3. Communication system	1. Partnership with external institution 2. Principle's policy that in line with context a. Digital era b. Collaborative dan innovative culture
2	Internally 1. Passive work and work culture 2. Teachers' motivation and competency 3. Adaptation of technology or integration of technology	

External Challenges of Principal Leadership at SMTK Kanaan Jaya

The external challenges faced by school principals in improving school innovation include; *First*, the limited financial support from the Foundation. This, of course, can hinder various innovation initiative policies that will be carried out by school principals in school development, including infrastructure updates, procurement of educational technology, and others. Therefore, there is a need for good financial support from the Foundation in order to assist the principal in making strategic policies to support the learning process activities in the classroom. Without adequate financial support, it is difficult for school principals to implement the changes and innovations necessary to improve the quality of education in meeting the demands of the times. Hayak, Avidov-Ungar, & Bitton (2024) Identify the need for a robust support system, including financial support, to empower teachers and principals to lead innovative initiatives. Therefore, it is very necessary to improve school management related to finance, so that it can help school principals in making innovative breakthroughs through the policies taken.

Second, the socio-economic background of the students is diverse, most of the students at SMTK Kanaan Jaya come from remote areas with limited access to resources and quality educational experiences. Thus, it is a challenge for school principals and teachers in carrying out science and technology-based learning activities. Teachers in remote areas often use interpersonal and instructional strategies, such as using local languages and forming learning groups, to adapt their teaching methods to the unique challenges they face (Puspitasari, Nurkamto, & Kristina, 2018). Therefore, a more adaptive learning approach is needed and also supported by additional resources to meet the unique needs of students, it is important to develop learning strategies that are inclusive and responsive to students' socio-economic conditions. This is a basic problem of education, especially at SMTK Kanaan Jaya, Jayapura regency. For this reason, the principal strives to collaborate with teachers, so that they can create adaptive and creative learning so as to empower students to reach their maximum potential even though they come from different backgrounds.

Third, the communication system does not run effectively between school principals, foundations, and other stakeholders. This communication gap not only weakens the quality of cooperative relationships but also fosters miscommunication, leading to misunderstandings in identifying and prioritizing school needs. The absence of effective dialogue between these parties further exacerbates this problem by creating an information vacuum, which hinders the alignment of a shared vision to advance the educational institution. On the other hand, Stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and community members, play a crucial role in the success of the school. Principals should actively involve them in the decision-making process to improve Education outcomes (KHADIJA, 2022). As a consequence of suboptimal communication, it hinders the ability of school principals to make the strategic decisions needed to encourage innovation in schools. The lack of timely response to changes and emerging needs leads to stagnation in the development of new programs and initiatives that can improve the quality of education. This condition highlights the major challenges faced by the principal's leadership in achieving and creating a sustainable and innovative education, which should be a top priority in school management. Therefore, building good and effective communication by the principal and the Foundation is one of the keys in strengthening the leadership of the principal to encourage sustainable innovation.

Internal Challenges of Principal Leadership at SMTK Kanaan Jaya

There are several *internal* challenges faced by school principals in developing school innovation, including; *First*, Conventional and Passive Work Culture at SMTK Kanaan Jayapura, Jayapura Regency. In carrying out teaching and learning activities, there are educators who still rely on conventional learning methods so that there is a minimum for teachers in the application of technology and innovation in the teaching process in the classroom. This approach reflects the limitations in responding to the needs of 21st century learning, which further emphasizes the importance of technology integration in student competency development. The lack of innovation in these teaching methods also shows a challenge for the principal's leadership in directing schools to adapt to the ever-evolving global demands in the field of education.

Second, there is still low motivation and competence of teachers in carrying out their duties and responsibilities as educators. Kambu, Rumbino, Rumbiak, & Kabanga (2024) stated that teachers of Christian religious Education in Jayapura reluctant to follow self developing in supprting their comptecy and profesionality. One of the reasons is the lack of opportunities provided to teachers to develop their competencies through relevant and supportive training or workshops. Data shows that in the last three years, teachers have rarely or never been involved in training activities that can support their duties and responsibilities as educators. This situation has a significant impact on teachers' ability to adapt their teaching approach to the demands of modern education.

In line with the above case, Bu'tu & Tasijawa (2022) proved that many teachers of Christian Religious Education (PAK) in State Junior High Schools in Sentani District do not have

enough opportunities for professional development through workshops, seminars, or training activities. This lack of development contributes to their low motivation and competence in fulfilling their educational responsibilities. These results underscore the critical need to increase professional development opportunities to improve teachers' motivation and competence in their roles as educators. In addition, teachers at SMTK Kanaan Jaya face additional challenges in the form of salaries that do not match their workload, caused by a lack of financial support from the Foundation. This condition adds to the burden on school principals, who must work hard to increase motivation and innovation among teachers. This challenge underscores the importance of the role of school principals in facilitating innovative and adaptive learning to current educational changes.

Third, the lack of adaptation by teachers and staff in the application of technology and the use of the Independent Curriculum in supporting learning practices at SMTK Kanaan Jaya. This problem, of course, is an obstacle for school principals in providing innovative programs that suit the needs of the school. Resistance among teachers and staff to technology, caused by a lack of training and support from school and foundation management, has an impact on low digital literacy, thus hindering the integration of technology in learning. As a result, the potential of technology as a tool to enrich the learning experience and develop students' skills has not been utilized optimally. In addition, in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, it has not been able to encourage flexibility and creativity in learning.

In addition, school principals also face challenges in implementing the Independent Curriculum, which requires in-depth understanding and adequate support. The inability to provide the necessary guidance and resources for teachers can result in learning that is less responsive to student needs and the dynamics of change in the education system. A survey showed that not all teachers understand the learning flow required by the Independent Curriculum, which further complicates its implementation (Simanjuntak & Nurhayati, 2024). This problem stems from various challenges faced by educators in implementing the curriculum and utilizing technological tools. This shows that success in overcoming these barriers and improving the quality of learning depends heavily on adaptive and innovative school leadership, which is able to facilitate the process of change and support the achievement of higher educational goals.

Opportunities in Innovation through Principal Leadership

School leadership has been recognized as one of the main factors influencing the quality of education and innovation in teaching and learning. In a dynamic global context, school principals are required to not only manage school operations but also become agents of change who are able to encourage innovation. It is necessary to understand how principal leadership can leverage the potential that exists to strengthen innovation, so that emerging challenges and obstacles can be overcome through the right leadership approach.

As for the opportunities that principals can benefit from in addressing a variety of unique local and cultural challenges, principals need to develop a strategic and visionary mindset that focuses not only on academic achievement, but also on the transformation of a dynamic and sustainable work culture.

First, efforts to develop a Strategic Partnership between the principal and the Foundation and stakeholders at SMTK Kanaan Jaya. This collaboration can not only increase financial support but also strengthen the alliance to create innovative programs for the development of quality schools. Need, the support from the foundation can be focused on the development of educational infrastructure and technology, which is an urgent need in this school. By building stronger and more transparent relationships, principals can be more effective in formulating and implementing innovative policies that align with the school's vision and mission.

Building transparent relationships allows principals to effectively formulate policies that align with the school's vision (Tumangger, Tambunan, & Manullang, 2024). Addressing these issues is critical to maximizing the benefits of the collaboration. Thus, principals can be more

effective in formulating innovative policies through a collaborative and transparent approach built with the foundation.

Second, the principal's policy that is in line with the implementation of the independent curriculum as a driver of independent curriculum learning innovation, which emphasizes the flexibility and creativity of teachers in the learning process, creating an adaptive and student-centered learning approach. It is necessary to evaluate the policies taken by school principals in utilizing this curriculum to develop learning programs that emphasize the skills of teachers and students, such as critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity. By doing so, schools can improve the quality of learning and prepare students to face complex global challenges.

Effective management of the Independent Curriculum involves regular workshops and evaluations, enabling principals to address challenges and improve the quality of teaching (Lestari, Sumual, & Krowin, 2023). In summary, while the Independent Curriculum presents significant opportunities for innovative learning, its success relies heavily on effective principal leadership and comprehensive support for teachers. However, the challenges faced in its implementation demonstrate the need for continuous adjustment and improvement in training and resources.

Third, in the current digital era, the use of technology plays an important role as a catalyst in educational transformation. Principals at SMTK Kanaan Jaya can utilize technology as an innovative instrument to improve the quality of education. The introduction of digital learning platforms allows for more inclusive access to education, reaching students from different socio-economic backgrounds. Additionally, technology provides opportunities for school leaders to create a more interactive and collaborative learning environment, thereby strengthening the leadership role in driving educational innovation. The integration of technology in education serves as an important catalyst for transformation in today's digital era. This shift enhances the learning experience, promotes inclusivity, and prepares students for the rapidly evolving job market. A balanced approach is needed to address these challenges while maximizing the potential of technology in Education (Kingstone, Cutilas, & Domingo, 2023). Furthermore, the integration of technology in the learning process not only improves efficiency, but also supports personalized learning that suits each student's unique needs. This is in line with the challenges faced by school principals in implementing innovation, namely how to utilize technology to support more dynamic and adaptive teaching strategies. Thus, technology is not only a supporting tool, but an integral component that allows school principals at SMTK Kanaan Jaya to play a strategic role in driving sustainable change and innovation in education.

Fourth, One of the strategic opportunities for the leadership of school principals in increasing innovation at SMTK Kanaan Jayapura Regency is to strengthen the innovative and collaborative culture in the school environment. The principal as a leader has a key role in creating an atmosphere that supports initiative and creativity through the active involvement of all components of the school. This can be realized through various programs such as discussions, workshops, and collaborative projects involving teachers, staff, and students. It is necessary that this approach not only strengthens collaboration between parties, but also opens up space for the creation of innovative solutions that are relevant to local needs and challenges. By increasing teacher motivation and creating a supportive work environment, school principals can significantly influence educational outcomes and innovation.

With a culture that supports innovation, school principals are able to increase teacher motivation and involvement in developing new ideas that have a positive impact on the quality of learning. As transformational leaders, school principals can direct this collaboration towards sustainable education improvement. A collaborative culture, characterized by open communication and teacher involvement in decision-making, is essential for innovation (Kibata & Nyakundi, 2023). In the context of SMTK Kanaan Jaya, this is very important considering the dynamics of the work culture that continues to develop and the unique challenges faced in the world of education in Papua. Innovations born from this collaborative culture have the potential to strengthen school competitiveness at the regional and national levels.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this analysis shows that the leadership of the principal of SMTK Kanaan Jaya faces significant challenges, both externally and internally, in encouraging educational innovation. External challenges include limited financial support, diverse socio-economic backgrounds of students, and ineffective communication between principals, foundations, and stakeholders. Meanwhile, internal challenges include a conventional work culture, low motivation and competence of teachers, and resistance to technology and the Independent Curriculum. There are opportunities that can be taken advantage of by school principals, such as strengthening strategic partnerships, improving teacher competence through professional development programs, maximizing the use of the Independent Curriculum, integrating technology in learning, and creating an innovative and collaborative culture in schools. By addressing these challenges through visionary and collaborative leadership, principals can encourage the creation of sustainable innovation and improvement of the quality of education at SMTK Kanaan Jaya.

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