



## Principal Leadership at Vocational High School: Center of Excellence (SMK PK) Muhammadiyah 2 Pekanbaru

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## INTRODUCTION

Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan Pusat Keunggulan (SMK-PK: Vocational School for Center of Excellence), which was established based on the Decree of the Minister of Education and Culture Number 17/M/2021, is a vocational school development program with certain expertise competencies in improving quality and performance (MOECRT, 2021). This program is strengthened

through partnerships and alignment with the business world, the industrial world, the world of work, which eventually becomes reference vocational schools that can function as driving schools and centers for improving the quality and performance of other vocational schools (Indra & Novika, 2022; Ahmada, et al., 2022; Nadiya & Andari, 2022; Wibowo, et al., 2022). In addition, there is a mentoring program designed to assist SMK PK in

achieving outcomes (Sholihatinnisa, Nurcahyono, & Fitria, 2021). So, SMK PK has been a breakthrough by the national education authority to improve vocational school quality.

The current development of technology requires the world of education to prepare a reliable and competent workforce in various fields so that a country can survive and play a role in the current era of globalization which is full of competition. In the world of industrialization, if we pay attention to the shift in the production process from *labouring* to *manufacturing*, which in the sense that human labor is replaced by *hard technology* (technology which that creates tangible or hardware-based products that help the work and life of human being), in the sense that the world of industrialization requires a workforce that is not only able to operate the technology, but also capable and reliable in its maintenance (Rojaki, Fitria, & Martha, 2021). Industrialization has the potential to create unemployment if the shift in the process is not carried out in parallel with the change in educational orientation from academic to vocational. Seeing the above conditions, the world of education and the world of work are required to be able to design in an integrated manner by paying attention to the needs and goals in the future world of work, thus it is necessary to design one of the implementations in the world of education that has the potential to be in the world of work (Sholihitinnisa, et al. 2021). So, SMK PK program is expected to be able to move other schools to be able to improve the quality of student learning

outcomes, be able to develop relevant vocational education by looking at the demands of community needs that are constantly changing in accordance with the development of the times or the world of work.

Consequently, school principals are required to be able to balance and adapt their leadership in responding to the presence of SMK PK program (Suyitno, 2021; Ja'far, 2019). The principal is a teacher functional staff who is given additional duties to lead an institution or school where the teaching and learning process is held or a place where there is interaction between teachers and students. Principal leadership is a determining factor in the educational process in the school (Raihani, 2010; Jean, Sari, Giatman & Ernawati, 2021; Nurbaya & Ali, 2015). The principal is a professional official in the school organization, who is tasked with managing all school resources and working with teachers, staff and other employees in educating students to achieve educational goals including knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

The principal has two important roles in achieving school goals from the management side, namely, as a school manager and at the same time as a school leader (Yuningsih & Herawan, 2015; Yulianto & Sutrisno, 2014). As a manager, the duties of a school principal are mainly related to the maintenance of the structure, procedures and objectives of the school. The principal plays an important role in influencing and directing the resources in the school, so that they can work together in achieving school goals. As a leader, the

principal's duties are related to efforts to make changes, achieve vision and growth, and provide inspiration and motivation. The role of the principal as a leader reflects the responsibility of the principal to mobilize the resources in the school, the role of the principal's leadership is also one of the successes of an educational institution, the principal who understands his leadership can bring the school to achieve a desired goal (Riski, Rusdinal & Gistituwati, 2021). In relation with the SMK PK program, school principal is responsible in establishing close connection between school and industry in the forms of curriculum matching, visiting teacher, internship and so forth (Nadiya & Andari, 2022; Wibowo, et al., 2022).

As is known, the SMK PK program is a new program introduced by the Ministry of Education and Culture. There are many new things and adjustments that must be made by a vocational school to respond to this program, including how the principal should adjust. Information on how school principals lead in this new context is still not widely found in scientific literature. Therefore, the authors intend to conduct in-depth research on this topic by exploring the leadership of school principals in the context of vocational education reform as referred to above. The results of this study will be useful for strengthening the narrative about vocational school leadership and as information for policy makers in order to improve the performance of school principals at SMK PK.

## METHODS

This is a qualitative study using a case study method (Merriem, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). This method is chosen because it helps the researchers to explore leadership practices exercised by the principal within the context of the new program, i.e., SMK PK. A case study is a series of scientific activities that are carried out intensively, in detail, and in depth about a program, event, and activity, either at the level of individuals, groups of people, or organizations to gain in-depth knowledge about the event, by targeting the actual (*real-life*) and unique, not something that has passed or the past. The location of this research is on Jl. KH. Ahmad Dahlan No.90, Kampung Melayu, Sukajadi District, Pekanbaru City, Riau, 28122.

Muhammadiyah 2 Pekanbaru Vocational School (SMK) is a school that has implemented or run the Center of Excellence (PK) program) which is the focus of this research. This research was conducted from May to November 2023. by conducting interviews with. The key informant is the school principal, and the additional informant is the head of administration, and the vice principal for curriculum.

Data analysis goes through three stages, namely: data reduction, data display, and conclusion (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In data reduction, we did verification, transcription of interviews, coding and categorizing to develop themes related to the research questions. We displayed data in an Excel program to see how the themes were

spread amongst informants, before we drew conclusion based on the data we have analyzed.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this section, we explain the findings of this research which responded to our research questions, namely: how school leadership is practiced at SMK PK Muhammadiyah 2 Pekanbaru; and what factors influencing school leadership practices at SMK PK 2 Muhammadiyah Pekanbaru. We will present the findings according to the structure of these research questions.

### Leadership of the Principal at SMK PK Muhammadiyah 2 Pekanbaru

The results of this study show that the principal of SMK PK Muhammadiyah 2 Pekanbaru implements efforts to adapt to the Center of Excellence program by displaying leadership practices through 6 dimensions of leadership, namely:

*School principals strive to create effective schools*

An effective school is a school that can provide quality services supported by a quality implementation process and is able to produce quality graduates as well (Raihani, 2010). An effective school can be defined as a school that shows the expected level of performance in organizing its learning process, by showing quality learning outcomes to students in accordance with their main tasks.

Based on the statement from the principal, vice-principal of curriculum and the head of administration that the principal strives to make SMK

Muhammadiyah 2 Pekanbaru an effective school by motivating and appreciating school residents, implementing job descriptions consistently, carrying out learning in accordance with the curriculum set by the government, namely the independent curriculum, having complete infrastructure, and improving student competence by holding competitions. School community welcomed the principal's efforts with enthusiasm and provided support for the smooth implementation of these efforts.

There is, however, a concern by the informants that the efforts would face challenges such as technological development which requires renewals of school and learning facilities. The SMK PK program does not yet help significantly with this issue, according to the principal. *The principal improves the professionalism of teachers and education staff*

Educators spend time to learn not only in the formal university contexts, but also in the workplace contexts to become professional teachers with high knowledge, skills and experience. To get a professional position, it is necessary to go through education and in-service training or for those who have not yet become teachers, pre-service training is carried out. School principals must have the right strategy to improve staff's professionalism in their schools (Ja'far, 2019). To get professional personnel, a person must have knowledge obtained through education, for a long time and carry out continuous training in the position is a life career and permanent membership with the task of

attaching importance to service and sincere devotion guided by the code of ethics of the work itself. Conducting a comparative study with other vocational schools as well as school sisters is expected to provide new experiences and ideas for the development and improvement of the implementation of entrepreneurship programs in schools. By conducting a comparative study with other vocational schools and *School Sister*, it is hoped that it can provide new experiences and ideas for the development and improvement of the implementation of entrepreneurship programs in schools.

According to the school principal, the vice principal of curriculum and head of administration, the current school principal strive to improve the professionalism of teachers and education personnel, namely by holding or participating teachers and education personnel in trainings, carrying out benchmarking study activities of other schools, and bringing in resource persons. This aims to increase the skills of teachers and education personnel in accordance with the development of the needs of the world of work and the times. So that the researchers can conclude that the principal of SMK PK Muhammadiyah 2 Pekanbaru has made efforts to improve the professionalism of teachers and education staff properly.

However, the vice principal explained that it has been very difficult for the principal to deal with teacher professional development especially with regards to the appointment of teacher to join training and the improvement of

senior teacher performance. As he continued, these need careful steps so that they do not become counterproductive towards the achievement that the school leadership want to enhance.

#### *Principals improve student learning outcomes*

Principal in Indonesia is an education worker appointed and given the responsibility and authority by the government to carry out academic supervision and managerial supervision in schools, while also to improve the quality of education implementation in schools and improve student learning outcomes in the learning process (Nurbaya & Ali, 2015; Nasrun, 2016). In this case, a school principal carries out his function as a supervisor, namely knowing the extent to which learning activities in schools take place, supervision is carried out periodically to find out the level of development of education implementation in schools, supervision and control carried out by school principals over their education personnel, especially teachers, called clinical supervision, which aims to improve the quality of learning through effective learning.

According to all respondents, the principal strives to improve the achievement of student learning outcomes by bringing in guest teachers, improving infrastructure, carrying out planning, supervision and evaluation of learning, creating a pleasant learning atmosphere based on the results of the interview "*For accounting, we have Bank Riau, everything here uses the concept of Bank Riau, which means that when children*

*learn it is the same as in banking, when children learn in our production house, there is an industry that accompanies them".* (Principal, June 07, 2023) and develop learning programs.

The principal was also found to have encouraged teachers to implement the new 'Merdeka' Curriculum to improve student learning. While teachers were eager to implement this curriculum, challenges to this implementation hindered it from smooth and effective implementation. These challenges include lack of teachers' understanding of the curriculum, minimum guidelines and examples from the government, and slow adaptation from both teachers and students. The principal as he admitted continued to motivate teachers and provide learning opportunities for them such as through training and teacher sharing.

#### *The principal has entrepreneurial competencies*

Every principal must have an entrepreneurial instinct as a source of learning for students. This means that to produce teachers and students who have an entrepreneurial instinct from an early age, the principal must show an example of an entrepreneurial instinct (Yulianto & Sutrisno, 2014). A school principal, in addition to playing the role of an *educator*, also plays the role of manager, administrator, supervisor, *leader* and *entrepreneur*. As an entrepreneur, the principal must be creative, innovative, is hard-worker, tenacious, and have entrepreneurial skills.

All the respondents said that the principal at SMK Muhammadiyah 2

Pekanbaru has had a high entrepreneurial spirit, especially since the school led is a vocational. Not only school principals, teachers and education staff are indeed required to have a high entrepreneurial spirit so that everything works in accordance with the main mission of the school. The entrepreneurial activities pursued by the principal, such as guiding students to do business both *online* and *offline* producing and selling creative products. The principal also initiates entrepreneurship lessons at school. Students are also guided to create products that can be sold and make money. In so doing, there is a subject called "Entrepreneurship" through which the principal seeks to hold project-based learning (PjBL), which is to teach students of SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Pekanbaru how to market a product. The entrepreneurship program in schools is undertaken to develop the production unit. The informants conclude that the principal of SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Pekanbaru has a high entrepreneurial instinct and acts upon focusing on such spirit. This is of course very much in line with the initiation of the SMK PK program which emphasizes the entrepreneurial aspects of the school curriculum so that students can learn to develop business and business in this increasingly competitive context today.

However, according to the principal, the competitiveness of the market nowadays would make it difficult for school's products to enter the market with confidence. Customers tend to look down at students' produces and are more

inclined to purchase the branded ones. He said that by inviting industries to come to the school, it is expected that students through the teaching factory program could produce and sell competitive materials.

*The principal creates new innovations*

As an innovator, school principals must have the right strategies to establish a harmonious relationship with the environment, seek new ideas, interact with each activity, set an example for all education staff in the school, and develop innovative learning models. He must be able to search, find, and carry out various reforms in schools. An innovative school is a school that constantly responds to environmental changes by making updates. Innovative schools have the ability to develop new ideas in order to improve the abilities of educators, education staff and students. Innovative schools will always innovate and adapt schools to changing times.

This research shows that the principal is trying to create various new innovations at SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Pekanbaru. Among the innovations he made was by accepting this school's PK program. The development that occurred is that this school is the only vocational school in Pekanbaru that teaches tax brevet to students, the school has a business in the form of a teaching factory, has a studio for podcasts, and even now there is a Young TV channel (Muhammadiyah Dua) which is managed directly by teachers and students majoring in visual communication at SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Pekanbaru. Although the principal was

regarded as innovative, the vice principal said that more could be done to improve this school's innovativeness such as by inviting more industries to the school to help in a more meaningful way not only signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). He said that this is a shared responsibility amongst school stakeholders, not only the principal and vice-principals.

*The principal collaborates with external parties*

The principal of a vocational school must be someone who is good at taking advantage of opportunities in establishing cooperation and conducting effective diplomacy with external parties, the principal institutionally can try to propose cooperation and business or work agreements with various external circles to maximize the potential of students (Yulianto & Herawan, 2015). A vocational school principal needs to develop entrepreneurial competence because the relationship between vocational schools and the business/industry world is two parts that cannot be separated. By mastering this competence, it is hoped that the principal will be able to optimize his capacity in establishing cooperative relationships with the school's internal and external environment and developing business/service and production units in the school.

In this study, the principal of SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Pekanbaru actively establishes a lot of cooperation and collaborations, with the industrial world, domestic and foreign companies. The way the principal establishes cooperation

begins through establishing friendships with external parties and resulting in agreements on paper. This is indicated in the interview *"to establish cooperation, of course, there is a friendship first, then there is a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and a written cooperation agreement."* The existence of friendship activities is carried out by the principal with the principal's socialization and communication skills.

### **Influencing Factors**

#### ***Supporting factors***

##### *Communicative and participatory principals*

Participatory leadership is a decision-making process that involves many stakeholders. Ideally, participatory leaders are able to involve more people (school stakeholders) in the decision-making process, as well as manage conflicts that arise in the process. It was found that the Principal of SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Pekanbaru was able to be communicative and participatory. The principal often involves his subordinates when they want to solve a problem that occurs at school, receives suggestions and ideas from various parties, and provides opportunities for opinions to their subordinates. International Findings suggest that participatory (democratic) leadership is generally the most effective leadership style because not only participatory leaders encourage group members to participate, but also maintain the final say over the decision-making process. Group members feel involved in the process, as well as more motivated and creative.

##### *The principal is disciplined, and responsible*

The vice principal of curriculum also said that the school principal is able to set an example in terms of discipline and responsibility. During this study, we saw that the quality of discipline shown by the principal turned out to influence the discipline of teachers and administrative staff. The principal also shows high responsibility in managing school affairs. As stated in Article 12 Paragraph 1 of the Government Regulation 28 of 1990, a principal is responsible for the implementation of educational activities, school administration, development of other educational personnel, and the utilization and maintenance of facilities and infrastructures.

##### *Effective teamwork*

Leadership is the ability to take the initiative in social situations to create new forms and procedures, design and regulate actions, and in doing so arouse cooperation towards the achievement of goals. The cooperation of the school organizational structure team also affects the success of the principal's leadership at SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Pekanbaru. When solving a problem, the teachers also take part in finding a solution and opinion which is then expressed to the principal who later draws conclusions and expresses how to overcome the problems that occur. All components in the school participate in advancing the school together.

##### *Having quality teachers and infrastructure*

SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Pekanbaru also has qualified teachers, certified professionals. This is also supported by the



complete school infrastructure, and the curriculum used is also relevant, namely the latest curriculum set by the government. Improving the quality of facilities and infrastructure that support standard learning in the world of work. The SMK PK program proposes to prioritize facilities and infrastructure improvement to support the school's programs in helping students to develop competencies and skills.

#### *Getting support from the government*

The last supporting factor, SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Pekanbaru, received extraordinary support from the government. The support obtained is because this school has become a legitimate Center of Excellence school in the city. The support from the government includes funds for the school allocated to complete infrastructure facilities. Improving the quality of facilities and infrastructure in the form of physical development is prioritized for vocational schools that have never received government assistance for physical development. Improving the quality of facilities and infrastructure at vocational schools implementing the SMK PK program in accordance with the technical instructions set by the head of the main unit in charge of vocational education.

#### ***Inhibiting factors***

##### *There is a difference of opinion*

The findings of this study show that one of the inhibiting factors in the principal leadership at SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Pekanbaru is the difference of opinions between teachers. Due to the participatory leadership

practices that leave a large space for differences, the principal admits that to a certain point those differences make it difficult for him to make decisions. However, he prefers to prioritize participation even though there are high differences of opinion. The principal believes that he must never give up in finding the best solution in facing the obstacles faced by the school.

#### *Teachers are reluctant to pour out their ideas*

The next inhibiting factor is that there are still teachers who are reluctant to provide their input and smart ideas to build and advance the school. This could be due to a lack of motivation from the principal to his subordinates. To overcome this, the principal at SMK Muhammadiyah implements contingent leadership through which the principal keep motivating teachers to be involved in the school's improvement process. The principal chooses different approaches to motivate individual teachers in accordance with the context. This was found to have been very helpful in overcoming problems of motivation, decision-making, organizational change, organizational culture, and conflict management.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the above findings, we draw the following conclusions: The leadership of the principal at SMK PK Muhammadiyah 2 Pekanbaru can be classified as part of transformative leadership practicing six dimensions. The six dimensions are creating effective schools, developing the professionalism of teachers and education personnel,

improving the achievement of student learning outcomes, having entrepreneurial instincts and developing entrepreneurship programs in schools, creating new innovations, and establishing cooperation with external parties. In creating an effective school, the principal applies a learning process in accordance with the curriculum set by the government, improves school infrastructure and student competences by holding various competitions. He developed teachers' and education personnel's professionalism through trainings, carrying out benchmarking study activities, and bringing in resource persons. He was found to have improved student learning outcomes by bringing in guest teachers, improving learning infrastructure, carrying out planning, supervision and evaluation of learning, as well as creating a pleasant learning atmosphere, and developing learning programs. He was of an entrepreneurial instinct and keen in developing entrepreneurship programs at school by which he guides students to do business, makes products that can be sold and make money, develops project-based learning that teaches students how to market a product. He was diligent in developing school business programs such as tax brevets to students, teaching factory, podcast studio, and even now a Young TV channel (Muhammadiyah Two) which is managed directly by teachers and students majoring in visual communication at SMK PK Muhammadiyah 2 Pekanbaru. He has established various cooperations with the industrial world, domestic and foreign entities. What he has demonstrated

through his leadership reveals an awareness, understanding, commitment and actions to implement the new government program, i.e., a Center of Excellence (PK) school. His leadership tries to adapt in agility towards the demands and requirements of the program and in our observation started to result in outstanding outcomes.

The supporting factors for the principal leadership are: communication and participation. The principal often involves his subordinates, is exemplary and responsible, he also loves discipline. The school's organizational structure team works together. Then, SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Pekanbaru also has qualified teachers supported by complete school infrastructure, and the curriculum used is also relevant. SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Pekanbaru received extraordinary support from the government. Factors that hinder the leadership include: the split of opinion between teachers and the eluctance of some of them to be engaged in school improvement activities.

We would like to recommend that the principal keeps improving himself as a personal and professional school leader by opening eyes to new insights and development related to SMK PK in particular and vocational school affairs in general. The principal needs to listen more to teachers and other staff in order to respond appropriately to their needs, particularly in terms of their professional development. He is also recommended to learn more to become an entrepreneur by closely communicating and actively

interacting with industries. To the government, we recommend that attention should be given more to private schools so that they can compete with public schools and continue paring with current development of knowledge, science, and technology to respond to the demands of industry. The government needs to provide more funding opportunities, closer mentoring and supervision, and give necessary feedback for improvements.

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