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School Leadership in TQM: The Role of Principals, Quality Commitment, and Human Resource Empowerment in Schools

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Abstract

Improving educational quality has become one of the primary challenges faced by schools amid the dynamics of globalization and educational transformation. One widely adopted approach to achieving continuous quality improvement in schools is Total Quality Management (TQM), which emphasizes ongoing improvement, stakeholder satisfaction, the involvement of all organizational members, data-driven decision-making, and building a sustainable quality culture. This paper aims to analyze the role of school leadership in TQM implementation, examine how quality commitment is manifested within the organization, and identify strategies for human resource empowerment that support the creation of a quality culture in education. A descriptive-analytical literature review method was used, based on national and international scholarly books and journal articles. The findings indicate that the school principal serves as a vision setter for quality, a change agent, a builder of quality culture, a data-driven decision maker, and a facilitator of teacher professional development. Quality commitment is reflected in improved student learning outcomes, stakeholder (student and parent) satisfaction, an evaluative culture, academic supervision, accreditation processes, and the implementation of the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle. Meanwhile, human resource empowerment is carried out through teacher competency development, continuous professional training, Lesson Study, Professional Learning Communities (PLC), coaching, mentoring, and collaborative learning. By integrating these three aspects, schools can build a quality culture that supports continuous improvement, enhances teacher professionalism, and strengthens the overall effectiveness of school management.

Keywords: Total Quality Management, Principal Leadership, Quality Commitment, Human Resource Empowerment, Educational Quality.

1. INTRODUCTION

The developments of globalization, the Industry 4.0 revolution, and educational transformation have brought significant changes to Indonesia's education system. Schools are no longer expected merely to produce graduates with academic abilities, but also to build character, 21st-century

skills, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and digital literacy. These conditions drive every school to continuously improve the quality of education services to meet societal needs and respond to changing times. Therefore, improving educational quality is a strategic agenda that must be implemented systematically,

sustainably, and with the involvement of all school components. In this context, educational quality is measured not only by student learning outcomes, but also by the effectiveness of the learning process, school governance, professionalism of educational staff, satisfaction of stakeholders, and an organizational culture that supports continuous improvement. Cultivating a quality culture is one important factor in realizing adaptive, innovative, and competitive education in the transformation era.

In efforts to realize this quality improvement, the school principal plays a very strategic role. The principal is not only an administrator but also an instructional leader, a change agent, and a driver of quality culture within the school. Effective leadership can build a shared vision, foster the commitment of all school members, encourage collaboration, and create a work environment that is conducive to improving the quality of education. The principal also guides teachers and educational staff to adopt a quality orientation by setting an example, making data-driven decisions, conducting academic supervision, implementing ongoing professional development, and empowering human resources. Various studies have shown that the success of quality management implementation in schools is greatly influenced by the principal's leadership and commitment to quality education (Hallinger, 2020; Leithwood et al., 2020; Sallis, 2015).

One approach that is widely applied to improve educational quality is Total Quality Management (TQM). TQM is a management approach that emphasizes continuous improvement, customer (stakeholder) satisfaction, involvement of all organizational members, data-based decision making, and the development of an overarching quality culture. In the context of education, TQM implementation is directed at improving the quality of educational services through the involvement of the principal, teachers, educational staff, students, parents, and the community as

stakeholders. Applying TQM in schools is not only aimed at meeting educational standards, but also at forming a quality culture that encourages innovation, continuous evaluation, accountability, and consistent organizational performance improvement. Various research findings indicate that TQM implementation can enhance school management effectiveness, learning quality, stakeholder satisfaction, and the competitiveness of educational institutions if supported by strong leadership and a conducive organizational culture (Oakland, 2014; Sallis, 2015; Amri & Pangestu, 2025).

However, TQM implementation in schools still faces several challenges. Studies report that a quality culture in many schools is not yet optimally established, organizational commitment to quality is variable, and empowerment of teachers and educational staff has not been fully realized. Additional challenges include weak coordination, low participation of school members in decision-making, limited teacher professional development, and insufficient support for innovation and continuous improvement. These conditions often result in TQM implementation being oriented merely to administrative compliance or accreditation requirements, rather than becoming an ingrained organizational culture. Therefore, a school principal is required who can build both quality commitment and human resource empowerment so that all school members share joint responsibility for improving educational quality.

Based on the literature review, many studies have examined TQM implementation in educational institutions and its success factors. Other studies have focused on school leadership as a key factor in improving educational quality. However, most existing research tends to examine these aspects separately. Comprehensive studies that integrate school leadership, quality commitment, and human resource empowerment as an interrelated whole in the implementation of TQM in schools are

still relatively limited. Yet these three aspects are fundamental elements in building a sustainable quality culture. This research aims to fill that gap by analyzing the synergistic relationship between leadership,

2. METHOD

The method used in this research is a literature study. A literature study is a research method that aims to gather various data and information from a wide range of reading materials, such as books, articles, journals, and other sources (Supriyanto, 2021). Furthermore, the literature study method aims to examine and review literature books, as well as analyze both reputable and non-reputable articles in alignment with the discussed theories (Rusmawan, 2019). The main topic of this research is to deepen the study of 'Leadership in TQM: The Role of Leaders, Quality Commitment, and HR Empowerment in Schools.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Role of the School Principal in TQM

The successful implementation of Total Quality Management (TQM) in schools is largely determined by the quality of the school principal's leadership. Within TQM, the principal's role extends beyond administrative duties to being a strategic leader who guides all organizational resources toward a culture of quality through continuous improvement, stakeholder satisfaction, data-driven decision making, and human resource empowerment. Thus, school leadership is a fundamental factor in determining TQM success (Oakland, 2014; Sallis, 2015).

First, the principal acts as a vision setter for quality. In TQM, the principal is responsible for establishing a quality vision that serves as the strategic direction for all educational activities. This vision not only describes the ideal state the school aims to achieve but also forms the foundation for policies, programs, service standards, and performance indicators. A clear vision builds a common understanding among school members regarding the importance of quality as an organizational culture. Sallis

quality commitment, and HR empowerment in supporting successful TQM implementation in schools (Amri & Pangestu, 2025; Hallinger, 2020; Sallis, 2015).

(2015) emphasizes that TQM success starts with leadership commitment in formulating a vision oriented towards customer satisfaction, continuous improvement, and organizational development. In the school context, principals must effectively communicate this vision to teachers, staff, students, and parents, so that all stakeholders share the same commitment to achieving educational quality.

Empirical studies corroborate that principals play a central role in school management through visioning and quality strategy. Hasanah and Sutikno (2023) demonstrate that principals manage, direct, and develop schools by creating a participatory vision and policies to improve educational quality. A collaboratively developed quality vision increases the involvement of school members in reaching organizational goals. Similarly, Sari et al. (2023) find that successful quality improvements in education depend greatly on principals who are quality-oriented and can translate vision into concrete programs. Thus, setting a quality vision is not merely a normative statement but a strategic instrument guiding all school processes toward a sustainable quality culture.

Second, as change agents, principals drive the organization to adapt continuously to environmental changes, which is a core demand of TQM. They identify the need for change, manage resistance, foster collaboration, and innovate teaching and management processes. Transformational leadership is especially relevant because it increases teacher motivation, strengthens organizational commitment, and creates a work environment conducive to innovation. Studies on TQM in education indicate that organizational change success relies on principals who engage all school members in accepting change as part of the quality culture. Principals who build effective

communication, lead by example, and involve teachers in decision-making tend to implement TQM principles more successfully than those with a purely bureaucratic approach (Rahman, 2023; Pratama & Hidayat, 2023). Hence, from the TQM perspective, principals are not just maintainers of existing systems but the driving force behind organizational transformation and quality enhancement.

Third, the principal is a builder of quality culture. Quality culture – manifested through values, habits, norms, and behaviors oriented toward quality – is central to TQM. Principals are responsible for cultivating this culture through modeling, effective communication, recognition of achievements, academic supervision, continuous evaluation, and instilling a reflective mindset. Schools with strong quality culture exhibit collaboration, openness, accountability, innovation, and a collective commitment to improvement among all members. Research indicates a strong link between leadership and the formation of quality culture. Principals who consistently instill quality values increase teacher involvement, strengthen teamwork, and create an organizational climate supportive of TQM (Mulyani, 2023; Fadhillah, 2024). In the TQM framework, quality culture serves as the foundation ensuring that every school activity is not just about meeting standards but always aimed at ongoing refinement of processes.

Fourth, the principal is a data-driven decision-maker. A key principle of TQM is fact-based decision making (*fact-based decision making*), meaning decisions are grounded in objective data. Therefore, principals are expected to utilize a variety of information as a basis for formulating quality improvement policies. Such data include student assessment results, learning evaluations, academic supervision reports, teacher attendance, parent satisfaction surveys, accreditation outcomes, school quality indicators, and compliance with national standards. Analyzing this data allows principals to accurately identify problems, set program priorities, and

evaluate the effectiveness of implemented policies. Oakland (2014) stresses that organizations applying TQM must develop performance measurement systems as a basis for continuous improvement. In education, research shows that principals who use data to guide decisions achieve higher program effectiveness, improve teaching quality, and enhance school accountability (Hasanah & Sutikno, 2023; Putri, 2022). Thus, data-driven decision-making is a hallmark of modern leadership that supports effective TQM implementation.

Fifth, the principal is a facilitator of teacher professional development. Teacher competency is crucial for educational quality, so principals act as facilitators ensuring that teachers have opportunities for continuous competency enhancement. This includes pedagogical, professional, social, and personal competencies developed through professional development programs. Competency-building initiatives can take the form of workshops, seminars, coaching, mentoring, Lesson Study, Professional Learning Communities (PLC), classroom action research, and academic supervision. Such approaches not only upgrade individual teacher capabilities but also foster an organizational learning culture, aligning with a core TQM principle. Research shows that principals catalyze vision development, increase teacher motivation, strengthen collaboration, and enhance teacher professionalism through sustained competency development programs (Wahyudi et al., 2024). Leadership support for professional learning leads to higher instructional quality and reinforces the implementation of a quality culture. Therefore, empowering and developing teacher professionalism is inseparable from TQM, as teachers are the main actors determining educational service quality. Principals who build an ongoing professional development system are more likely to achieve adaptive, innovative, and quality-oriented schools.

The principal's role in TQM implementation is multidimensional. The

principal serves not only as an administrator but also as a vision setter, change agent, cultural leader, data-driven decision-maker, and teacher developer. These roles are interrelated and form a management system focused on *continuous improvement*. Effective leadership enables a school to build a quality culture involving all members, improve education service quality, satisfy stakeholders, and achieve sustainable improvement in educational quality.

School Quality Commitment

Quality commitment is a fundamental principle of TQM, reflecting the dedication of the entire school community to pursue quality improvement continuously. In education, quality commitment is not only evident in achieving academic standards but also in the school's ability to establish systems that guarantee ongoing improvement of student learning outcomes, stakeholder satisfaction, evaluative culture, academic supervision, accreditation, and the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle. This collective commitment forms the basis of a quality culture involving all school members in a systemic quality enhancement process (Sallis, 2015; Oakland, 2014).

From a TQM perspective, a school's success is measured by its ability to enhance both the process and results of student learning. All school programs should be aimed at achieving *student learning outcomes* through effective, innovative, student-centered teaching. TQM implementation encourages schools to plan learning systematically, conduct periodic learning evaluations, and follow up on evaluation findings so that teaching quality continuously improves. A systematic literature review by Amri and Pangestu (2025) indicates that consistent TQM implementation contributes to improving educational service quality and student learning outcomes, provided it is supported by transformational leadership, strong quality culture, and stakeholder involvement.

In TQM, students are viewed as primary customers of educational services. Student satisfaction encompasses not only school

facilities, but also the quality of instruction, administrative services, a conducive learning environment, positive interpersonal relations, and opportunities for holistic development. Schools committed to quality actively seek student feedback through satisfaction surveys, learning reflections, and other feedback mechanisms to improve services. The *customer focus* principle of TQM, when applied to education, has been shown to enhance service quality and the effectiveness of the learning process (Amri & Pangestu, 2025).

Besides students, parents are important external customers with a significant role in educational success. A school's quality commitment is reflected in open communication, transparency in school management, responsive administrative services, and involving parents in strategic decision-making. TQM considers stakeholder satisfaction as an indicator of organizational success because educational quality is not only determined by academic achievements but also by the community's trust in the school. Studies show that involving parents and the community in TQM implementation strengthens school accountability and sustainably improves educational service quality (Mulyani, 2023; Putri, 2022).

An organizational culture that emphasizes evaluation is a hallmark of TQM. Evaluation is not merely an administrative activity but a reflective mechanism to identify strengths, weaknesses, improvement opportunities, and program effectiveness. It should be conducted systematically for teaching processes, teacher performance, administrative services, and achievement of school quality indicators. The results are then used to plan the next quality improvement programs, creating a cycle of continuous improvement. Research on TQM in schools shows that participatory evaluation culture increases organizational accountability, strengthens teacher collaboration, and builds a sustainable quality culture (Rahman, 2023; Susetyarini et al., 2024).

In TQM, academic supervision shifts from mere inspection to professional development through classroom observation, reflective dialogue, constructive feedback, mentoring, and continuous follow-up. Implementing supervision within the PDCA cycle allows principals to plan supervision activities, execute observations, evaluate learning outcomes, and follow up with targeted training and coaching for teachers. This approach has been proven to enhance teacher competency, teaching quality, and foster a reflective school culture (Saepuloh & Nugraha, 2025).

Accreditation is an external quality assurance process indicating a school's compliance with national education standards. Under TQM, accreditation is not the ultimate goal but a tool to ensure all educational processes meet established quality criteria. Schools committed to quality use accreditation results to guide their improvement programs, rather than simply meeting administrative checklists. Thus, accreditation becomes an integral part of a quality culture oriented toward continuous enhancement of educational services (Sari et al., 2023; Wahyudi et al., 2024).

The Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle is the core mechanism for TQM. In the Plan stage, schools set quality objectives, success indicators, and improvement programs. The Do stage involves executing these programs. In Check, schools evaluate the attainment of quality indicators using data (student performance, supervision reports, satisfaction surveys, etc.). Finally, Act entails refining policies, planning next steps, and standardizing successful practices. Consistent PDCA implementation strengthens the internal quality assurance system, improves teaching effectiveness, and builds an organizational culture of continuous improvement (Raihan et al., 2025; Oakland, 2014).

School quality commitment in TQM is a collective dedication of all school members to build a quality assurance system oriented toward improving student learning outcomes, satisfying students and parents, fostering an evaluation culture, sustaining

academic supervision, meeting accreditation standards, and continuously applying the PDCA cycle. The integration of these components forms a quality culture that can elevate school effectiveness and ensure sustainable improvement in educational quality.

Human Resource Empowerment in TQM

Human resource (HR) empowerment is a fundamental principle of TQM that regards people as the main asset for achieving organizational excellence. In education, HR empowerment translates to systematic efforts to enhance the professional capacity of teachers and educational staff so they can actively participate in school quality improvement (*continuous improvement*). TQM posits that the quality of educational services depends not only on policies and management systems but also on the competencies, motivation, collaboration, and commitment of all school members. Thus, schools need to create work environments that support lifelong learning, professional collaboration, and the development of teachers as agents of change (Sallis, 2015; Oakland, 2014). Effective TQM implementation positions teacher empowerment as a key strategy to improve instructional quality through participative leadership, continuous evaluation, and the PDCA cycle of improvement (Hasanah & Sutikno, 2023).

In TQM, teachers are considered strategic partners in creating educational quality, not merely policy implementers. Empowerment involves granting trust, authority, access to decision-making processes, and opportunities to participate in planning and evaluating school programs. Empowered teachers tend to have higher intrinsic motivation, innovate in their teaching, and feel ownership of school quality goals. Research on TQM in schools indicates that participative leadership combined with teacher empowerment enhances instructional quality, strengthens the quality culture, and drives continuous organizational improvement (Rahman, 2023).

Teacher competency is the cornerstone of educational quality. Therefore, competency development must be systematic, planned, and sustainable so that teachers can adapt to advancements in knowledge, technology, curriculum, and student needs. Development covers pedagogical, professional, social, and personal competencies through various capacity-building programs. Continuous competency development has been shown to improve teachers' ability to design innovative lessons, use educational technology effectively, reflect on their teaching practice, and raise student achievement levels (Saepuloh & Nugraha, 2025). By investing in teacher development, schools enhance instructional innovation and outcomes.

The TQM principle of continuous improvement requires schools to provide ongoing professional training for teachers. Such training updates teacher knowledge and skills, and fosters a learning organization culture. Effective training programs are needs-based, practical, and followed by evaluations of classroom impact. Training models that integrate technology, reflective practice, Lesson Study, and Professional Learning Communities have been proven to significantly elevate teacher professionalism (Saepuloh & Nugraha, 2025).

Lesson Study is a professional development approach emphasizing collaborative teacher inquiry through *Plan-Do-See* cycles. Teachers collaboratively plan lessons, observe the teaching process, and then reflect to refine their practice. From a TQM perspective, Lesson Study embodies continuous improvement, as each cycle generates feedback for enhancing future lessons. Numerous studies have found that Lesson Study implementation improves pedagogical skills, reflective abilities, teaching innovation, and professional collaboration among teachers (Susetyarini et al., 2024; Widodo et al., 2023).

A *Professional Learning Community* is a form of empowerment where teachers engage in collective learning through

collaboration, reflection, sharing of best practices, and joint problem-solving. In TQM, PLCs provide a mechanism for teachers to develop continuously, reinforce the quality culture, and enhance instructional quality through shared expertise. Research shows that PLCs positively affect teacher professional competence, teaching quality, and student outcomes by fostering a collaborative, learning-oriented culture (Suphakat, 2026).

Coaching focuses on unlocking an individual's potential through reflective dialogue, constructive feedback, and guidance toward professional goals. Unlike traditional evaluative supervision, coaching empowers teachers to find their own solutions to teaching challenges. When combined with Lesson Study, coaching has been found to further improve teachers' reflective practices, lesson planning, and pedagogical competencies in a sustainable way (Widodo et al., 2023).

Mentoring is a professional relationship between an experienced teacher (mentor) and a newer teacher (mentee) to facilitate knowledge transfer, skills development, and cultural integration. In TQM implementation, mentoring serves as a channel for passing on best practices and quality mindset, ensuring continuous regeneration of teacher competencies. Structured mentoring programs help teachers improve their pedagogical skills, professional identity, and confidence. When paired with coaching and ongoing evaluation, mentoring becomes a powerful instrument in building a quality-focused school culture.

HR empowerment under TQM is inseparable from a culture of *collaborative learning*. Collaboration enables teachers to share experiences, co-design curriculum, analyze student data together, and develop improvement strategies collectively. A collaborative culture strengthens communication, trust, innovation, and the organization's capacity to solve educational problems. Therefore, collaborative learning is a key characteristic of a *learning organization* that supports TQM through enhancing both individual competence and

overall school capacity (Amri & Pangestu, 2025; Susetyarini et al., 2024).

HR empowerment is a pillar of TQM in education. It manifests through initiatives that build teacher capacity, continuous professional development, lesson study, professional learning communities, coaching, mentoring, and collaborative learning. Integrating these strategies creates a professional learning ecosystem that fosters continuous improvement, raises teacher professionalism, strengthens the school's quality culture, and ultimately improves educational services over the long term.

Integration of HR Empowerment Strategies in the TQM Framework

Within the TQM framework, HR empowerment is not a piecemeal program but a systemic approach to professional development. Training, lesson study, PLCs, coaching, mentoring, and collaborative learning complement each other in building a quality-focused school. This integration ensures that teachers not only acquire new knowledge but also develop reflective, collaborative, and innovative capacities for improving learning quality. In this way, HR empowerment is a principal mechanism for realizing the continuous improvement principle at the heart of TQM (Sallis, 2015; Oakland, 2014).

Recent scholarship highlights that PLCs are particularly effective in enhancing teacher professionalism, as they provide space for reflection, sharing best practices, collaborative problem solving, and building an organizational learning culture. Unlike one-time workshops, PLCs support sustained professional growth grounded in real school needs. A narrative review in *Teaching and Teacher Education* found that PLCs contribute to better teaching quality, increased school capacity, and a collaborative culture that fosters innovation (Chiang et al., 2024; Mydin et al., 2024).

In addition to PLCs, coaching and mentoring are increasingly recognized as key strategies for teacher development. Coaching emphasizes individual reflective

growth through professional dialogue, while mentoring emphasizes knowledge transfer from experienced teachers. Research in the *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education* suggests that the combination of coaching and mentoring significantly improves teachers' reflective abilities, solidifies their professional identity, and encourages the development of a quality-focused learning community (Vanblaere & Devos, 2020; Castanheira, 2016).

Moreover, Lesson Study aligns closely with TQM principles by implementing improvement cycles (plan, do, observe, reflect) within actual classroom practice. This cycle allows systematic evaluation of teaching and uses findings to refine future lessons. When Lesson Study is integrated with PLCs, coaching, and mentoring, the school establishes a comprehensive professional development system. This creates a culture of *organizational learning* and continuous educational quality enhancement (Suphakat, 2026).

Collectively, these empirical findings indicate that HR empowerment in TQM is not just about upgrading individual teacher skills, but also about strengthening the entire school's capacity. Schools that consistently foster a collaborative culture through PLCs, lesson study, coaching, mentoring, and collaborative learning tend to have teachers who adapt well to change, innovate in instruction, and demonstrate higher professional performance. Therefore, the success of TQM implementation heavily depends on the principal's ability to build a participatory, sustainable professional learning ecosystem.

4. CONCLUSION

The implementation of Total Quality Management (TQM) in schools is a strategic approach to achieving continuous improvement in educational quality through the synergy of school leadership, quality commitment, and HR empowerment. The school principal plays a central role as the vision setter, change agent, quality culture builder, data-driven decision-maker, and

facilitator of teacher development, enabling all school members to work toward a culture of continuous improvement. Quality commitment is manifested through a focus on improving student learning outcomes, satisfying students and parents, fostering an evaluation culture, sustaining academic supervision, meeting accreditation standards, and consistently applying the PDCA cycle. Meanwhile, HR empowerment is realized through teacher competency development, continuous training, Lesson Study, PLCs, coaching, mentoring, and collaborative learning, which strengthen both individual and organizational capacity. Thus, the success of TQM implementation depends not only on applying quality management principles but also on the school's ability to build a participatory, collaborative quality culture oriented toward continuous improvement. When these elements are effectively integrated, schools can enhance the effectiveness of educational management and sustainably improve education service quality.

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