



## School Leaders' Roles in Promoting Early Childhood Health

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### ABSTRACT

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School leadership,  
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Promotion

The purpose of this study was to look at how school leaders play a role in effectively supporting early childhood health, find difficulties in incorporating health programs into educational settings, and develop methods to improve the success of health promotion. The method used is a qualitative approach, which includes interviews with school leaders from different countries and literature studies. The results show that school leadership drives change in improving early childhood health. However, there are difficulties in incorporating health programs into the curriculum. In addition, collaboration between schools and communities, increased training of school leaders, and the implementation of supportive policies are all part of a successful approach. Global and local policies must also assist school leaders in improving health in a sustainable manner. The study encourages school leaders to be more active in incorporating health programs and supporting existing policies to help early childhood health.

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## INTRODUCTION

School leaders in theory have a strategic role to play in creating an educational environment that supports the overall development of early childhood, including health issues (Pitchik et al., 2021; Stodden et al., 2023). However, field data showed significant differences. Inadequate policies, understanding, and resources prevent many schools from prioritizing children's health. (Johnson et al., 2021; Mathiarasan & Hüls, 2021; Arifin, 2024; Zaini & Fahmi, 2023). For example, health programs are often only sporadic campaigns that are not sustainable, while systematic methods of promoting healthy habits are ignored. This is due to the fact that there are no clear practical guidelines for applying health theory in a school setting (Swann et al., 2021; van Gaalen et al., 2021). Because of these limitations, there are questions about how school principals can incorporate health promotion into early childhood education.

Previous studies have shown that school leadership is crucial in creating a positive school culture. School-based health programs can run well with visionary leadership (Haiyan & Allan, 2021; Liu et al., 2021; Faiz et al., 2023). However, most research focuses on physical health or specialized programs, such

as hygiene or nutrition, but does not address holistic strategies that include early childhood emotional and social well-being (Jensen et al., 2021; Mazaheri et al., 2021; Khotimah et al., 2024). By looking at how school leaders can design, implement, and evaluate comprehensive physical, mental, and social health programs to meet early childhood needs, our research can solve this problem.

The novelty of this research lies in its comprehensive approach in linking the role of school leaders with early childhood health promotion, not only as policy implementers but also as agents of change (Garner & Yogman, 2021; Wan et al., 2021; Purwanto & Wafa, 2023; Ridlo & Yanti, 2023). In contrast to previous research that tended to address technical aspects, we will explore the strategic and cultural dimensions of school leadership (Ma & Marion, 2021; Shengnan & Hallinger, 2021; Maulidia, 2023). In addition, by comparing best practices from different countries around the world, the study offers new and relevant recommendations on how good leadership can build an environment that supports early childhood health in a sustainable and future-oriented manner.

The purpose of this study was to find answers to several questions: 1) how school leaders can effectively promote early childhood health, 2) what problems school leaders face when incorporating health programs into educational settings, and 3) what methods can be used to improve the effectiveness of health promotion by school leaders.

As a provisional conclusion from this study, clear policies, adequate resources, and appropriate training can help school leaders improve early childhood health. When it comes to health programs, transformational leadership involving the entire school community has proven to be more effective than a top-down approach. According to this study, school leaders who are able to take innovative approaches and work together can significantly change the school health culture. Empirical studies focusing on best practices, problems, and opportunities in the context of early childhood education around the world will be used to test this argument.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study is designed as a qualitative research and uses a case study and grounded research approach. This design was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of the phenomena happening on the ground, especially related to how school leaders contribute to improving early childhood health in Tarakan City. This study will study the differences in health policy implementation between schools with different socioeconomic backgrounds. Several PAUD schools in Tarakan City were chosen because they have diverse characteristics, both in terms of the level of health program development and available resources.

The study collected data from respondents and informants, including principals, teachers, and education supervisors, who were considered to have first-hand knowledge of health practices and policies implemented in schools. Data collection will be carried out through direct observation at the school, desk review of relevant policy documents, and in-depth interviews in accordance with the interview guidelines that have been prepared. To gain a broader understanding, group discussions (FGDs) will also be used. Data reduction, appearance, and verification are the steps required to perform data analysis. Content analysis is used to review documents policy, and discourse analysis and interpretation are used to gain a deeper understanding of observation and interviews.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### School Leadership as a Catalyst for Change in Early Childhood Health

The ability of school leaders to encourage, lead, and manage collaborative, innovative, and data-driven initiatives to improve early childhood health is called school leadership as a catalyst for change. School leaders are not just administrators; They must also change the world. They are responsible for creating a healthy environment that supports children's growth, including implementing policies, building a healthy culture in schools, and strengthening relationships with the community and other stakeholders. Field results show that this role is implemented through school-based health programs, teacher training, and collaboration with parents to raise awareness of the importance of health from an early age.

The results of the interview with Principal A revealed that the role of leadership is very important in ensuring the success of the school's health program.

"... We try to prioritize health through a healthy breakfast program every week and hygiene education, even though budget constraints are a challenge," (KS1\_01)

Meanwhile, class B teachers emphasized the importance of the principal's support in building team commitment. He said,

"... Our principals are very proactive, often involving us in discussions about how to make children more aware of the importance of personal hygiene. That makes us more enthusiastic about running the program." (GK1\_01)

Direct observation in two schools showed that principals who were actively involved in the health program resulted in major changes in school routines. For example, in one educational institution, every morning students are checked to maintain personal hygiene, including washing hands and maintaining nail hygiene. The principal also regularly monitors the

implementation of the health program and conducts weekly evaluations with staff. However, other schools that do not have proactive leadership show a lack of consistency in program implementation, such as no nutrition education activities and lack of teacher involvement.

Data from interviews and observations show that effective school leadership is a major factor in the success of early childhood health programs. Proactive school leaders tend to be able to work closely with students, employees, and the community to create a healthy school environment. In contrast, health programs run sporadically because school leaders are not involved. This shows that leadership is not just an administrative task; they can also encourage good change.

Data shows that proactive leaders change the school environment to be healthier and more consistent in running health programs. Leaders who have a vision and involve all stakeholders tend to be more successful in bringing about change than leaders who only perform administrative tasks. In addition, there is a strong correlation between collaborative leadership and the number of students and staff involved in health programs. This pattern emphasizes that school leaders need to be trained and supported to improve their ability to support early childhood health.

### **Challenges in Integrating Health Programs into School Curriculum**

School leaders face many challenges when trying to incorporate health programs into the school curriculum. These challenges can be limited resources such as funds, experienced educators, or a limited amount of time in the curriculum. In addition, there is little understanding of the importance of health education for early childhood development. Field results show that, despite increased awareness of the importance of health, the practice is often hampered by academic priorities.

From the interview conducted, Principal A stated,

"... It is difficult for us to insert health programs between very busy lesson schedules. Our focus is more on academics because that's what is assessed in the national education system." (KS1\_02)

Class B teacher added,

"... We want to teach children about healthy habits, but we don't have any special training. So, we only give simple advice such as washing hands or eating vegetables." (GK1\_02)

The observation results show that the health programs in the schools studied tend to be sporadic and unstructured. For example, events such as regular health check-ups or hygiene campaigns are often conducted only before certain events, such as National Health Day. In addition, there is no consistent

relationship between regular classroom lessons and health programs. Teachers discuss health topics briefly, often without adequate guidance or teaching materials.

The above data shows that, while leaders and teachers want to encourage health, structural and operational issues are hindering its implementation. The focus on academic outcomes distracts from health education, while the lack of training causes health programs to not run well. The situation is made worse because there are no guidelines or regulations that support the incorporation of these programs into the curriculum.

There is a consistent pattern in the data collected that shows three main factors that hinder the integration of health programs: (1) academic curricula dominate, (2) teachers and school leaders lack sufficient capacity, and (3) there are no supportive policies or guidelines. As a result, health education has not yet become an important component of lessons in schools.

### **Effective Strategies in Health Promotion in Schools**

The systematic process undertaken by school leaders to plan, implement, and evaluate programs aimed at improving students' physical, mental, and social health is known as an effective strategy in health promotion in schools. This strategy involves working with teachers, parents, local communities, and health institutions. In this study, these strategies include making internal policies, incorporating health education into the curriculum, and conducting supporting activities such as routine health checkups, hygiene programs, and joint exercise. The main focus is on the sustainability of the program and the involvement of the entire school community.

The results of the interviews with the two main informants provided insight into strategic practices, from the interviews conducted, Principal B stated,

"... We involve teachers and parents in the planning of health programs. One of the effective steps is to form a school health team that is tasked with monitoring hygiene and ensuring students get health education." (KS2\_01)

Class B teacher added,

"... Cooperation with the local health center is very helpful. They routinely provide counseling on nutrition, the importance of exercise, and personal hygiene. In addition, we also have a schedule of student health checks twice a year." (GK2\_01)

The results of the interview are supported by the findings of field observations. In one of the schools where the study was conducted, there were posters about health in every classroom, teachers supervised the habit of washing hands before eating, and morning exercises together every Friday. In addition, some areas of the school have handwashing stations and soap. School principals,

teachers, and local health workers support the program consistently.

The above data shows that a successful health promotion strategy involves the implementation of organized programs, cooperation between stakeholders, and careful planning. While the findings of the study show real implementation in the field, the informants emphasized the importance of cross-party cooperation. According to both data sources, the success of school health programs relies heavily on school leaders who are active in regulating all parties involved.



**Figure 1. Health Promotion Flow in Schools**

The data show that three main stages are followed by an effective approach to promoting wellness in schools: 1) Planning and Collaboration: School leaders work closely with parents, teachers, and external agencies to design relevant wellness programs; 2) Integrated Implementation: Health programs are integrated into daily activities, such as handwashing, sports, and health education; and 3) Development: Health programs are integrated into health lessons and other activities.

### **The Role of Global and Local Policies in Supporting School Leaders**

Global and local policies help school leaders by providing guidance, resources, and oversight that enable them to effectively promote early childhood health. Global policies, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), emphasize that quality education must include health. At the local level, policies often focus on specific programs, such as supplemental nutrition, teacher training, or periodic health checkups. However, the implementation of these policies often depends on the ability of school leaders to articulate the guidelines into actions that are appropriate to their school situation.

The results of the interviews with two informants provide a real picture of the challenges and policy support: School B stated that,

"... We have local policies in place that support health programs, such as child nutrition programs. However, implementation is often constrained by a lack of funding and human resources." (KS2\_02)

The school superintendent added,

"... global policies, such as the SDGs, provide important direction. However, many principals feel that they do not have enough training to

understand how to apply it at the school level." (PS\_01)

Observations made in the two schools show that there are differences in the implementation of policies. The health program in the first school is running well thanks to the support of the local government, which includes regular training for teachers and principals. Due to a lack of resources and poor coordination between the school and the health office, similar programs did not work well in the second school. Observations also show that the success of the program is highly dependent on the efforts of school principals to solve policy problems in innovative ways.

Research shows that, although global and local policies provide a strong theoretical basis for promoting health in schools, there are some major problems in implementing them at the school level. Adequate resources, specialized training, or clear operational guidance are not always accompanied by policy support. As a result, policies depend on the initiative and innovation of school principals.

The data pattern shows that three key factors determine the success of school leaders in implementing health policies globally and locally: 1) resources: schools that have access to funding and training tend to implement health policies better; 2) community support: schools that have parent and health agency involvement in policy implementation tend to be more successful; and 3) leadership initiatives: proactive schools take the initiative to implement health policies.

## **Discussion**

This research is in line with previous research that states that school leaders are essential to make changes in improving early childhood health. Lahijani et al., Yulianti et al., (2021) found that by incorporating global and local policies into everyday practice, effective leadership can improve the success of school-based health programs. However, this study also found significant differences with several previous studies that argued that global policies are automatically widely implemented. Lahijani et al., (2021); Sharma et al., (2023) We found that policy implementation is often constrained by a lack of training and resources, which have rarely been thoroughly discussed in the previous literature. Our results suggest that existing theories should pay more attention to the local context and individual abilities of school leaders.

The findings of this study have significant consequences for the health and education policy-making process (Banerjee et al., 2021; Lahijani et al., 2021). The first results suggest that health policies must be accompanied by training and monitoring programs so that school leaders can understand and implement them effectively. The second result shows that health policies must be made

normatively and operationally by taking into account limitations at the school level. For example, in order for the SDGs to be realistically implemented at different levels of education, policy adaptation of the SDGs must be accompanied by relevant local guidance.

The results of this study highlight that policy design, resources, and leadership capabilities in schools must work well together for global and local health policies to function properly (Oe et al., 2022; Sanchez-Carrillo et al., 2021). On the contrary, when there is no synergy of this, policies can malfunction and school leaders will only act as passive implementers who do nothing and do nothing. These results show that school leaders fail to implement health programs well due to unsupportive policy structures. This can happen due to unclear implementation guidance or insufficient allocation of funds (Lambrecht et al., 2022; Shoesmith et al., 2021). This inadequate structure undermines the relationship between international policy goals and the state of local schools.

The interaction between global policies, local adaptations, and the efforts of school leaders determines the success of health promotion in early childhood schools. These results are related to research conducted by (Aubert et al., 2022; Schiff, 2022) which shows that the ability to implement policies is essential for successful educational leadership. These findings, however, also add new insights by suggesting that school leaders must be trained to be flexible people who can overcome the differences between practice and policy. The results show that in global and national education policies, leadership training and local resource support should be a top priority.

## **Discussion**

Digital transformation in teacher career management at MA Nurul Jadid shows a significant paradigm shift from manual administration systems towards data-based and automated digital systems. These changes are not only related to the use of software or information systems, but also involve changes in the way of thinking and the culture of educational organizations. These findings are in line with the concept of digital transformation in education put forward by Selwyn (Selwyn, 2021), which emphasizes that digital transformation requires reorganization of work processes and strengthening the digital capacity of educators to be able to adapt to the demands of the times.

The significance of these findings lies in the change in the role of teachers from policy objects to active subjects in career management. They no longer just follow administrative procedures, but are also directly involved in the process of reflection, planning, and evaluating their careers digitally. This supports the theory of Human Capital Development (Schultz, 1961) which states that investment in human resource development through technology and training

will contribute to improving the overall productivity of the institution. However, challenges arise from the lack of digital literacy among some senior teachers as well as the limitations of network infrastructure in certain regions. This demands a phased training approach and ongoing technical mentoring.

The integration of e-portfolio, Learning Management System (LMS), and Personnel Information System in teacher career management has encouraged the creation of a more accountable, participatory, and sustainable system. E-portfolio has proven to be effective as a means of documenting the teacher's learning process as well as a tool for professional reflection (Maknunah et al., 2023) mentioned that the e-portfolio encourages teachers to construct their learning narratives in a reflective and longitudinal manner, thus facilitating the process of continuous self-evaluation.

The use of LMS supports the principle of collaboration in professional development. Teachers can take part in online training, share best practices, and build a network of professional communities. These findings corroborate the results of a study conducted by the Trust and Prestridge (Trust & Prestridge, 2021), which states that the LMS encourages a culture of lifelong learning for teachers. Meanwhile, the digitization of personnel information systems enables integrated evaluation and career planning based on actual data, as developed in the Data-Driven Decision Making approach (Saleh et al., 2022) However, the study also identified constraints such as resistance to new systems and lack of interoperability between digital platforms.

The use of technology in teachers' career management has a positive impact on improving professionalism, which is reflected in reflective skills, independent career planning, and stronger collaboration between teachers. Teachers are able to access their performance data directly, reflect on learning practices that have been carried out, and design evidence-based competency development. This is relevant to the Reflective Practitioner model (Afendi, 2024), which emphasizes the importance of reflection in building professional expertise through experience.

In addition, the collaboration that occurs through the LMS results in cross-disciplinary synergies that enrich pedagogical insights. The existence of a real-time digital evaluation system strengthens the principles of accountability and transparency, in accordance with the theory of Continuous Professional Development (Mahardika et al., 2023), which states that effective professional development should be contextual, collaborative, and based on actual needs. However, the limitation of internet bandwidth and the lack of technical assistance in managing digital systems are obstacles that need to be overcome systematically (Zam Zam Hariro et al., 2024). This research suggests that educational institutions not only provide technology, but also ensure consistent

technical support and supervision to encourage the sustainability of digital system use.

## CONCLUSION

This study shows the importance of the role of school leaders in maintaining early childhood health, especially in Tarakan City. One of the key findings is that despite strong health policies at the global and local levels, their implementation is often hampered by limited resources and a lack of specialized training provided to school leaders. This research shows that health programs should be incorporated into education policies in a more practical and targeted way. The study offers greater support to school leaders to proactively participate in improving the health of children in their schools. Therefore, more comprehensive follow-up research, such as survey methods, is needed to accommodate these factors. The results of this study will provide a more comprehensive picture, which can be used as a basis for better policy.

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