



## Principals' Managerial Skills in the Elementary Schools of Southern Papua

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aimed to describe teachers' perceptions on principals' managerial skills in the elementary schools of southern Papua, Indonesia. We used a survey research approach to explore the elementary school teachers' perceptions of school principals' managerial skills. To attain the objective, one survey questionnaire was distributed to 1277 respondents, conveniently picked from amongst the elementary school teachers in Southern Papua, Indonesia. All respondents were asked to give their perceptions on a four-point Likert scale by providing a checking mark (√) on each given item that they value to be the most appropriate to describe the situation. The descriptive statistical analysis technique was performed by generating frequency and mean scores to describe teachers' perceptions of their school principals' managerial skills. The descriptive statistical analysis revealed that the elementary school principals' managerial skills were perceived as moderately low by the respondents as the general mean of the data is 2.6924E3 with a standard deviation of 174.34789 and a general mode of 2. Based on the result of descriptive statistical analysis, it is recommended that educational policymakers in Southern Papua to recruit school principal candidates based on the national standard required for a qualified school principal*



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## INTRODUCTION

One of the most central issues in today's school principal managerial skills is how to communicate, lead, and motivate school members to work hard to achieve success. Indonesian Education Minister Regulation No. 13 of the year 2007 (recognized as Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Nasional No. 13 Tahun 2003) referred to managerial skills as one of the minimum standards, out of five, a school principal must have. This regulation seemed not to be purely implemented within the context of Papua Province. Werang et al. (2017, 2019) reported that the local authorities' policy of appointing school principals has been expensively paid as most of the elementary school principals in the remote area of southern Papua are busy enough to engage with more attractive activities in the central districts than that of managing schools into success.

Given the need to have qualified and devoted school principals, this study focuses on the effort to investigate teachers' perceptions of school principals' managerial skills in the elementary schools of southern Papua. Effective school principals, historically, have needed to possess sound managerial skills (Herrera, 2010). Managerial skills are those knowledge and abilities a principal must have to fulfill all the school activities. As managers of schools, school principals are required to have three basic types of skills in varying proportions, although the importance of each type of skill changes at different management levels (Francis, 2010).

The school principals need to have balanced skills in technical, human, and conceptual aspects of management. The first type of principal's managerial skills is technical skills (Kaifi & Mujtaba, 2009; Samson & Daft, 2009). The technical skill is mostly related to the process and working with physical objects. It requires specialized knowledge and proficiency in methods, processes, procedures, and techniques related to a specific job (Memisoglu, 2015) and, therefore, is primarily used by lower-level managers who follow the process with proficiency and expertise in using tools, procedures, and techniques to solve problems in a specific field (Onchoke et al., 2015).

Technical skill is the amalgamation of education, training, and hands-on experience required to fulfill a specific job role. It involves mastering procedures, techniques, and equipment pertinent to particular functions, such as engineering, manufacturing, or finance. Additionally, it encompasses specialized knowledge, analytical proficiency, and adept utilization of tools and techniques to resolve problems within a specific discipline. These skills are crucial for classroom teachers or subject teachers as well. Okumbe (1999) posited that teachers who occupy the bottom of the hierarchy are highly trained and educated professionals, sometimes even more trained and educated than the head teachers. Therefore, school principals must not only be able to welcome the ideas of teachers but also help and compliment them on their ingenuity (Koontz & Weinhrich, 1998). Most teachers even expect their principals to have a technical skill set above their own so that, when needed, an employee can come to their manager to find out how to do something specific to their individual job.

The second type of skill a school principal must have is human skills. Human skills constitute cooperation in a group that is being managed (Memisoglu, 2015). Human skills are the executive ability to work effectively as a group member and to build cooperative effort within the group he leads (Katz, 1974). Human skills are critical for all school principals because they work with teachers. Principal's human skills refer to the principal's ability to work with and through the school's members and, at the same time, work effectively as an integral part of a school system. This set of skills requires principals to understand, motivate, and lead all the school members individually or in groups to achieve success (Onchoke et al., 2015).

Human skills include the ability to motivate, delegate, facilitate, coordinate, lead, communicate, develop, and resolve conflicts. Human skills help school principals to communicate, lead, and motivate teachers to work hard towards a high level of productivity. Principals with high levels of human skills are aware of their own attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs about other individuals and groups; they are able to see the usefulness and limitations of these feelings; they allow subordinates to express themselves without fear of ridicule but rather encourage to actively participate in the planning and carrying out of those things which directly affect them (Katz, 1994). Katz (1974) further asserted that a principal with a high level of human skills is sufficiently sensitive to the needs and motivations of others in his or her school so that he or she can judge the possible reactions to, and outcomes of, various courses of action he or she may undertake.

The third type of skill a school principal must have is conceptual skills. Katz (1974) views conceptual skills as the executive ability to see the organization as a whole; it includes recognizing how the various function of the organization depend on one another, and how changes in any one part affect all the others; and its extend to visualizing the relationship of the individual activity to the community, and the political, social, and economic forces of the nation as a whole. In this point of view, the success of any decision in the organization depends on the conceptual skills of the people who make the decision and those who put it into action (Katz, 1974).

The Principal's conceptual skills encompass their cognitive ability to strategically envision the school's broader and long-term perspectives. These skills necessitate principals to amalgamate and synchronize the interests and activities within the school. This skill set empowers principals "to comprehend the various factors at play in any given situation and to envision the interconnected pattern of relationships among school members, facilitating the adoption of the most effective course of action in the best interests of the school" (Onchoke et al., 2015, p. 137). Conceptual skills encompass managerial thought, planning, and information processing. Principals possessing a high level of conceptual skill comprehend how each facet of the school system aligns within the larger framework of the educational institution and how the school interfaces with the industry, community, and the broader environment.

There have been numerous existing studies examining principal's managerial skills and their effect on school effectiveness (e.g. Egboka et al., 2013; Kamete, 2014; Memisoglu, 2015; Mukherjee, 2013; Muraini, 2014; Onchoke et al., 2015; Papulová & Mokroš, 2007; Werang, 2018). However, we are interested in exploring more this topic to address the regional demand for qualified and devoted school principals. Besides, this study is also relevant to address the demand of consistently implementing the Indonesian Education Minister Regulation No. 13 year 2007 on the Standards of School Principals. The lack of current empirical studies on this topic within the context of southern Papua makes this study practically robust.

Thus, this study aimed to disclose the gap by examining the elementary school teachers' perceptions of the principal's managerial skills using the elementary school teachers in Southern Papua as the population and samples. One research question guided the study is to what extent the elementary school teachers perceive the managerial skills of the elementary school principals in Southern Papua, Indonesia. To investigate the perceptions, we employed a quantitative approach using a survey research design. Data were analyzed descriptively using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 for Windows.

## METHOD

This study is a quantitative survey as it provides a closer look at how elementary school teachers in southern Papua, Indonesia, perceived their principals' managerial skills. Survey research design was used to ascertain the importance of principals' managerial skills in Southern Papua's elementary schools due to the several current studies (e.g. Habeahan et al., 2022; Sondakh et al., 2023; Wea et al., 2020; Werang et al., 2021; Werang et al., 2023a,b; Yunarti et al., 2020) offered the following benefits: (a) simple data collection; (b) inexpensive; (c) strong statistical significance; and (d) exact outcomes.

The population of this study was all the elementary school teachers in Southern Papua. Samples were determined under the following two considerations: (a) the easiness to reach the school, and (b) the presence of teachers at school during the time of data collection. A total of 1277 teachers were established as samples, drawn conveniently from amongst the teachers working in the elementary schools in Southern Papua.

Teachers' perceptions of their principals' managerial skills were measured by developing Katz's (1974) descriptors into 14 positive statements which are distributed over three types of managerial skills, namely: conceptual skills (4 items); human skills (5 items), and technical (5 items). All respondents were asked to give their perceptions on a four-point Likert scale by providing a checking mark (√) on each given item of which they value to be the most appropriate to describe the situation. All the items of the questionnaire were distributed in Indonesia. The following are the samples of the English version of the items of the questionnaire: "The principal is able to think rationally and critically"; "The principal is able to make plans on school development"; "The principal has a clear vision of the future of school he leads"; "The principal is able to cooperate with both individual and

group teachers”; “The principal understands well the difficulties of the teachers and seeks to find a solution”; “The principal is able to delegate responsibilities to teachers both individually and in groups”; “The principal is able to manage all school resources for school development”; “The principal is able to deal with all issues calmly”; “The principal is able to redesign and enrich the curriculum as the way of deepening and extending school staff engagement”. To assess the instrument's internal reliability, we used Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Because Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.824, the internal consistency estimate of the school principal's managerial skills was deemed adequate.

Data were analyzed quantitatively using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 for Windows. The descriptive data analysis was conducted by calculating mean and standard deviation scores to describe the elementary school teachers' perceptions of their principals' managerial skills.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Most of the empirical research investigate the relationships between strategic leadership and other variables such as organisational change readiness (Mua'azam Mohamad et al., 2016), student aspiration (Hairuddin Mohd Ali & Inas Zulkipli, 2017; Ilminza Zakaria et al., 2021) quality assurance system (Hemathy Kunalan & Hairuddin Mohd Ali, 2020) and quality of teaching (Siti Noor Ismail et al., 2018; Kalaimani Ramakrishnan & Aida Hanim Abd Hamid, 2020).

Only two studies used SEM software to build models for theme development in relation to strategic leadership, notably (Hairuddin Mohd Ali & Inas Zulkipli, 2019; Hemathy Kunalan et al., 2022). In addition, studies have been conducted to identify strategic leadership practises in schools (Hemathy Kunalan et al., 2022; Mua'azam Mohamad et al., 2016). While some research identifies the efficiency of strategic leadership characteristics (Mohamad Johdi Salleh & Alwani Mohamad, 2015; Hairuddin Mohd Ali, 2012)

According to the analysis, there were fewer strategic leadership studies that used qualitative research methodologies and had a more in-depth style of discussion. While analyzing the sample studies, it was discovered that the sample of studies consisted of educational leaders at educational institutions, school leaders, and secondary school teachers.

### Result

This study was aimed at investigating teachers' perceptions of their principal managerial skills in the elementary schools of southern Papua, Indonesia. As previously mentioned, the descriptive data analysis was conducted by calculating frequency and mode scores to describe teachers' perceptions of their principals' managerial skills. The results of data analysis on teachers' perceptions of principals' managerial skills are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Results of data analysis

Aspect of Managerial Skills	Mode	Mean	Std. Deviation
Conceptual Skills	2	2.6218E3	37.64195
Human Skills	3	2.8886E3	36.12894
Technical Skills	2	2.5528E3	137.67062
<b>Overall/General</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2.6924E3</b>	<b>174.34789</b>

The results of the data analysis as it was reflected in Table 1 reveal how teachers perceive their principals' managerial skills in the elementary schools of southern Papua. As seen in Table 1, three different scores of mode, mean, and standard deviation are calculated: conceptual skills, human skills, and technical skills. The highest mean score is human skills, which is 2.8886, with a standard deviation of 36.12894. Whereas, the lowest mean score is for technical skills, which is 2.5528, with a standard deviation of 137.67062. Meanwhile, teachers' response to principals' conceptual skills, which has a mean score of 2.6218 and a standard deviation of 37.64195, is in the second position. The general mean of teachers' response to their principals' managerial skills under consideration in this study is 2.6924, with a standard deviation of 174.34789.

## Discussion

Managerial skills are critical for innovation and the improvement of organizational performance (Mabey & Gooderham, 2003). The success of a school principal depends on his or her ability to discharge his or her managerial functions and make judicious use of his or her managerial skills (Muraina, 2014). When the school principals move further and further from the actual physical operation, this need for technical skills becomes less important, provided he or she has skilled subordinates and helps them to solve their own problems. Human skills seem to become the most important at the level where the number of direct contacts between school principals and staff is greatest. As the number and frequency of personal contact decrease, the need for conceptual skills becomes increasingly more important with the need for policy decisions and broad-scale action. The human skills of dealing with individuals then become subordinate to the conceptual skills of integrating group interests and activities into a whole (Katz, 1974).

Leadership within educational contexts is a multifaceted responsibility that demands a strong foundation of knowledge and skills (Farah, 2013). As communities evolve at an ever-accelerating pace, the role of school principals undergoes a transformation, shifting from simply encouraging teachers' efforts to actively guiding them toward achieving concrete and measurable outcomes (Herrera, 2010, p. 2). This rapid evolution places immense pressure on school principals to continually enhance their managerial skills in pursuit of fostering school success. In the contemporary landscape, school principals face significant expectations, being urged to showcase how their efforts directly contribute to the overall improvement of the school (Day & Samsons, 2014).

Being a school principal is not an easy task as he or she has to take responsibility for the success and failures of the school he leads (Meador, 2019). There are so many groups of people that the principal deals with daily and, therefore, he or she is not only required to perform a job well but is also required to manage, direct, and motivate subordinates to perform the job well. The effective school principal also knows that he or she cannot embrace all the changes alone. Despite being at the top of the organization, effective principals make good use of all the skills and knowledge of the school staff, encouraging those who make up a school community to step into leadership roles and responsibilities (Mendels, 2012). In order for school principals to be able to “embrace uncertain, complex and challenging context and work with others to seek creative and innovative solutions that support quality outcomes for all” (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2015, p. 6), school principals should be well educated and well equipped with all the competencies needed. Results of the study reveal that principals' managerial skills in the elementary schools of southern Papua were perceived as lowly by the majority of teacher respondents as the general mean data is 2.6924E3 with a standard deviation of 174.34789 and the general mode of data is 2. This means that the majority of teacher respondents disagreed with the principals' way of leading the schools. Consequently, the role of school principals as prime in raising standards and promoting school improvement is not so in the southern Papua context. Local authorities' policy of appointing school principals based on their political interest seems to be expensively paid as most of the teachers in the elementary schools of southern Papua are busy enough to engage with more attractive activities in the central districts.

In the elementary schools of southern Papua, the role of school principals holds significant weight in shaping the educational environment. Despite varying perceptions among school principals regarding their capabilities in running schools, the fundamental rights of teachers and students to be overseen by competent and empathetic principals must be prioritized. Alani (2003) highlights a crucial correlation between teachers' negative attitudes and students' poor academic performance, often linked to inadequacies in the managerial skills and competencies of school principals. This connection underscores the critical need for effective leadership within educational institutions, emphasizing the pivotal role principals play in fostering a conducive learning environment.

Wilson's (2005) assertion further accentuates the importance of a qualified and caring principal in educational settings. Wilson suggests that leadership goes beyond simply stating or showing concern; it involves establishing a culture that inspires and motivates individuals from within. Principals who genuinely demonstrate care and competence serve as catalysts for fostering an environment where both educators and students thrive. This implies that a principal's effectiveness extends beyond administrative duties; it encompasses the ability to cultivate a culture of inspiration and support, which is essential for the holistic growth and development of all involved in the educational sphere. Therefore,

the significance of capable, empathetic school principals cannot be overstated in nurturing a conducive and successful learning environment within elementary schools in southern Papua.

## CONCLUSION

This study delves deeply into the perceptions of elementary school teachers in southern Papua, Indonesia, regarding the managerial abilities of their principals. The conclusions drawn from the comprehensive data analysis reveal a striking trend: the teachers' perception of school principals' skills in this region tends to be moderately low, as evidenced by the research data's general mean of 2.6924 and a standard deviation of 174.34789, with a prevalent mode of 2.

The practical implications derived from these findings underscore a crucial need for proactive measures by regional education policymakers. Efforts should be earnestly directed towards mitigating political influence in the selection process of school principals. Furthermore, there's a pressing necessity to develop comprehensive pre-service and in-service training programs tailored to enhance the capabilities of potential and existing school principals. These initiatives are indispensable in addressing the urgent requirement for qualified and empathetic school leaders within the elementary schools of southern Papua, Indonesia.

Given the scarcity of research on this specific topic within the context of Southern Papua, this study's findings hold significant hypothetical value. They contribute a valuable perspective to the existing literature on the managerial skills of school principals. This study could serve as a cornerstone, laying the groundwork for further exploration and discourse in this critical area, potentially guiding future research endeavors and educational reforms aimed at elevating the quality of school leadership in the region.

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